**SOCIAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN
INTERNATIONAL VISITORS IN
NEW ZEALAND:
CONTACTS, PROCESSES, AND IMPACTS**

By

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Abstract

The importance of the social aspect of travelling in general and contacts between visitors in particular has been acknowledged in several publications. Based on sociological and social psychological approaches, literature on social interactions in service and tourism settings as well as several areas of outdoor recreation research provide some insight into the phenomenon. However, little is known about how visitor-visitor interactions manifest themselves and what personal meaning they hold for individuals. This thesis examines social interactions between previously unacquainted international visitors in New Zealand. In doing so, it addresses the reasons why visitors interact with each other, what the dimensions and natures of these interactions are, how they are perceived and evaluated, and how they can impact the visitor experience.

A two-stage exploratory qualitative research approach was applied. The first phase of data collection consisted of 40 personal semi-structured in-depth exploratory interviews with international visitors to achieve an initial insight into the occurrence of the phenomenon within New Zealand. Based upon these results, a second round of 76 personal semi-structured interviews with international tourists was conducted in Wellington and Rotorua to collect detailed and contextual information on specific social interactions that visitors had experienced. Data were then analysed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to determine relationships between interaction-related factors.

The analysis focussed on why social interactions occur and proceed in certain ways, how visitors perceive them and what types of interactions can influence the visitor experience. Occurrence, process, perception, and impact of visitor-visitor interactions were found to strongly depend upon the visitor type (i.e. travel behaviour) and personality of interviewees, as well as on the environmental settings within which their interactions take place and the characteristics of New Zealand as the destination. The majority of social interactions occurred or proceeded simply due to the pleasure visitors gained from interacting with others, although certain environmental contexts and therefore personal circumstances have been found to encourage interactions more than others. The length, duration, and conversation topics are also dependent upon these contexts, as well as on the relationship between

interaction participants and on the dominance of independent travel in New Zealand. While no social interactions were perceived as negative, their perceived depth was found to strongly contribute to the impacts these interactions have on the visitor experience. Profound interactions were often longer and more personal and thus more likely to positively impact satisfaction with the current experience within which the respective interactions occurred than brief and superficial interactions. It was also found that the impact of cumulative social interactions throughout the whole holiday is not necessarily the same as the impact of specific social interactions on the current situation, as even superficial and trivial interactions contribute to a positive and friendly atmosphere. Depending on the visitors' travel behaviour, social interactions with other tourists positively affected their visitor experience in a variety of ways. For single long-term travellers, this frequently occurred on an emotional level by contributing to psychological well-being and providing social contact and support. Interactions also often affected the travels of visitors by enhancing destination knowledge and understanding, and contributing to travel itineraries and activities and attractions that visitors participated in. This outcome is especially relevant for visitors travelling with their partner who do not benefit on an emotional level to the same extent. Visitor-visitor interactions have thus been found to directly impact other parts of the visitor experience, such as the products and services that are consumed, due to the relevance of word-of-mouth recommendations during these interactions. The complexity of the phenomenon of visitor-visitor interactions however requires further research, especially in identifying the applicability of this study to other forms of tourism or other destinations.

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1 Introducing the study

1.1 Introduction

“By our own presence, we have an influence on others, on their space and on their practice of that space, and vice versa, often considered as negative, as a source of conflict, but such a position overlooks other potential. We may be in this way open to each other, and so things we are doing, places we wander across, feel different” (Crouch, Aronsson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 285).

This quote clearly illustrates the reasons why, although tourism is often considered “an individualistic practice, sometimes solitary, even self-centred, it is frequently not so” (Crouch et al., 2004, p. 284). Even if not *with*, tourism often occurs *alongside* other people, which results in constant encounters, and even their simple presence provides people with the ability to influence others and to significantly alter an experience (Crouch et al., 2004). P. L. Pearce (2005b) argues that tourists are not passive elements in the tourism setting but active participants who organise and construct their social world and the experiences within, thus making contacts between visitors a core part of the visitor experience. Yet not much is known about how and why these contacts between tourists occur and in which ways they can contribute to and possibly change their experience.

In order to add new knowledge to this research gap, this PhD thesis is concerned with social interactions between previously unacquainted international visitors in New Zealand. It aims to determine both the circumstances during which and the original reasons why tourists interact with other visitors. By examining the detailed process and subsequent perception of these interactions, the potential impacts of the social aspect of travelling on the visitor experience will be explored. Due to a significant lack of previous research on this phenomenon, this study employs a post positivist research paradigm to account for its exploratory nature and for the need to understand not only occurrences and their patterns but also the individual meanings and impacts social interactions have for visitors and their experiences.

The introductory chapter will first outline the reasoning behind and importance of the issue of visitor-visitor social interactions. The research questions guiding this study will be identified and New Zealand and its tourism industry as the research context will be illustrated, followed by an outline of the thesis.

1.2 Background to the study

It is acknowledged that contacts with other visitors do play a role within their individual visitor experiences (e.g. Mossberg, 2007; P. L. Pearce, 2005a, 2005b; Walls & Wang, 2011), and several studies have discovered direct connections between the social aspect of a tourism related experience and the subsequent satisfaction with it (e.g. Huang & Hsu, 2010; Levy & Getz, 2012). Although the visitor experience is a widely researched construct that has received much attention (see Ryan, 2010 for an overview), its social aspect in particular has been consistently neglected – frequently “on the ground that this factor often is beyond control of the organizations” (Mossberg, 2007, p. 68). But without further knowledge about the social aspect, this statement remains simply an assumption and, as stated in the opening citation, overlooks other potential.

Especially in light of the consistently increasing number of visitors, it is crucial to develop an understanding not only of the ways in which visitors can influence each other but also of the circumstances and types of social interactions that occur between them within tourism settings. In 2009, 880 million international visitor arrivals worldwide were recorded, and forecasts predict an increase to 1.6 billion international tourist arrivals by 2020 – excluding domestic tourism (World Tourism Organization, 2010). This change in demand can be expected to lead to higher usage of tourism infrastructure and also contribute to higher user densities within tourism related settings. Some settings (especially environmental) can often not be altered or extended to adapt to higher demand in the same way that others (for example accommodation or transport settings) can. This in turn might increase not only the possibility but also the necessity for social contact between visitors in these settings as their proximity within the shared space increases. But not only tourists are affected by the rise in global visitor arrivals. Other tourism stakeholders also have to adapt to the changing circumstances within the industry. Site managers have to deal

with additional usage of their attractions, while still having to provide an ideally improving high quality experience to customers. Without more knowledge about visitor-visitor interactions, an increasingly important factor with still largely unknown effects will remain unconsidered and potentially uncontrolled. This in turn strongly diminishes the ability to utilize the dynamics between visitors in positive and beneficial ways.

Apart from the practical contributions that this thesis will provide, there are also several gaps in the academic literature that will be addressed. As the core products of tourism are experiences (Prentice, Witt, & Hamer, 1998), it is crucial to understand the individual perceptions and meanings of these. Insight into why and how visitors interact with each other and what personal and subjective effects emerge from this will provide a better understanding of both the social and the individual role of tourists in the context of a rapidly changing and increasingly important experience-oriented industry. It will also expand the understanding of the visitor experience, which can be influenced by the physical environment, the actual products and services available and by social aspects (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Mossberg, 2007). The interplay between these different components cannot be determined without possessing sufficient information on every influential factor.

Some research has been undertaken on visitor-visitor relationships and whether or not social contact between visitors impacts satisfaction levels (discussed in Section 2.3), but this has been restrictive in methods, research settings and/or research subjects. Although it has been established that visitors can indeed impact each other's experiences and satisfaction levels, there has been little discussion about why and when this is the case and how these impacts are manifested. It is not yet clear how interactions with other visitors are perceived on an emotional level and what factors these perceptions depend upon. Subsequently, nothing is known about the specific ways in which these social interactions might impact visitors – what exactly are the positive or negative effects that can evolve from interacting with other visitors and what are the research implications for the literature on the social aspects of tourism?

1.3 The research questions

In order to fill the research gap on these issues, a deeper understanding of social interactions between visitors is needed. The literature review in Chapter 2 will examine current research related to this issue in greater depth; however such research is limited in terms of the level of detail used to examine social aspects of tourism. Current research frequently only reports on selected aspects of visitor-visitor interactions and their overall potential effects without being concerned with the underlying reasons that lead to specific impacts. The emotional component of visitor-visitor interactions and their meanings for individuals have not yet been addressed – these however can only be understood if details of the respective social interactions are taken into consideration. The phenomenon of social interactions between visitors can therefore not be comprehended when limited to only a few selected components of these interactions. It is thus essential to be concerned with the reasons why these interactions occur, what they comprise, how they are perceived and how the relationships and interdependencies between all these aspects finally contribute to potential impacts on the visitor experience. Therefore, this research addresses the question

What is the nature of social interactions between visitors and what is their potential impact on the visitor experience?

The nature of social interactions refers to the reasons why they occur, during which circumstances this happens, and what they comprise in terms of, for example, content and duration. To examine potential impacts on the visitor experience, it is also necessary to gather information on how visitors perceive and possibly evaluate their respective interactions. This provides the foundation for determining whether or not impacts on the visitor experience exist, and if so, what these are and what prior factors they depend upon. Therefore, four sub-questions need to be considered to answer the main research question.

1. Why do social interactions between visitors occur?

The antecedents of social interactions are to be explored. Throughout this thesis, antecedents will refer to the underlying reasons and original motivations for entering social interactions in the first place. More specifically, the foci of sub-question 1 are the goals, rewards or outcomes that individuals hope or expect to achieve from an

interaction. It aims to examine whether these antecedents are static throughout the course of an interaction or if they are variable in nature and can be replaced by other, subsequent motivations. Knowing why visitors interact with each other provides a first insight into the perceived potential value of these interactions. The possible importance of additional factors (such as the environmental setting or the personal circumstances) is taken into account to evaluate aspects that can both encourage and discourage visitor-visitor interactions.

2. What are the dimensions and processes of these social interactions?

Sub-question 2 is aimed towards exploring the content of social interactions between visitors. It encompasses the full process from a first contact to the final termination. Dimensions refer to certain interaction characteristics such as duration, conversation topics, or the perceived level of formality between interaction participants. This information contributes to an understanding of how visitors interact with each other and if dimensions and processes are connected to their respective antecedents. It also provides a foundation for analysing aspects that might contribute to certain impacts on the visitor experience.

3. How are social interactions between visitors perceived and evaluated?

The individual perception of social interactions is the focus of sub-question 3. It seeks to identify the potential impacts of both antecedents and dimensions as considered during sub-questions 1 and 2 and examines what exactly it is that contributes to a certain interaction perception. In addition, it explores if and how interactions are evaluated, if these evaluations are impacted by interaction-related factors or also by further aspects and, if so, what the directions and effects of these influential factors are.

4. How do social interactions impact the visitor experience?

Drawing upon the information resulting from the previous three sub-questions, sub-question 4 examines how social interactions between visitors can contribute to the visitor experience. This includes the variety of ways in which visitor-visitor interactions can affect this experience as well as the personal meaning and value this holds for visitors.

This research will focus solely on interactions where the interacting visitors have not known each other prior to their encounter. It is thus concerned with previously non-

acquainted visitors of different travel groups, as opposed to interactions within travel groups formed prior to arriving in New Zealand. Although the individual travel group constellation – be it with friends, family or a partner – is a crucial component of how holidays are experienced, the issue of interactions between unacquainted visitors is a more relevant and unexplored one. The composition of their own travel group is based upon conscious decisions and desires, whereas interactions with other visitors can be assumed to provide interaction participants with a far lower level of control. In addition, both domestic and tour group travellers are not part of the focus of this research. The situation of domestic travellers can be expected to differ significantly from those of international visitors, as they are familiar with their destination and the culture, habits, lifestyles and attractions within. International travellers on the other hand can be assumed to not to possess the particular destination knowledge to the same extent as domestic visitors. It can thus be expected that they experience their travels in very different ways and focus on potentially different aspects of their visitor experience. In addition, domestic travellers were found to be harder to approach during the exploratory research phase, which led to them being excluded from the main research phase (Section 3.5.1). Tour group participants on the other hand are commonly under certain time restraints and have to adhere to a strict schedule. This leaves them less flexibility to interact with visitors who are not members of what can be considered their in-group. Tour group travellers occupy a unique social environment that has already been the focus of much research (see Table 2.1 in Section 2.3.2 for an overview), and can be expected to contribute less knowledge to fill the gap that is the focus of this research.

1.4 New Zealand as the research context

New Zealand as the research setting has a strong influence on the methodological approach and the findings of this study as discussed in Sections 3.7 and 7.2. It determines the types of visitors represented in the sample and their travel behaviour, as well as the types of experiences they can find while travelling the country. The country's attractions contribute not only to the settings within which visitors are able to interact with each other but may also influence why they interact and what the contents of their interactions are. In addition, many of the research findings display strong connections to the travel style chosen by interviewees. It is thus necessary to introduce both New Zealand's attractions and activities and the travel behaviour of international visitors in the following sections.

1.4.1 Attractions and activities

The internationally used marketing slogan '100% Pure New Zealand' has been used since 1999 and focuses on presenting an unspoilt, pure, clean and authentic landscape and scenery to the country's potential visitors (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2002). Tourism New Zealand, the official tourism board, combines this with adventure experiences and cultural aspects, while expressing an additional focus on people and the social aspect of travelling in New Zealand throughout the visual aids incorporated in its promotional materials (Tourism New Zealand, 2009, 2014b).

The country's natural assets have been its major attraction since tourism first developed in the 19th century (McClure, 2004), and have continued to remain the biggest draw card with a heavy emphasis placed on marketing environmental features (Tourism New Zealand, 2014b). These include coastlines, fiords, sounds, beaches, alpine ranges, volcanoes, rivers, lakes, geothermal areas, and islands, found in a variety of climates (Hall & Kearsley, 2001). A number of potential activities and attractions as listed on the official international website www.newzealand.com relate to the natural environment. Land-based activities include, naming a few, walking, hiking, skiing, volcanic and geothermal encounters, horse riding, and cycling. Diving, swimming, rafting, kayaking, sailing, fishing, and surfing are amongst the water-based activities promoted by Tourism New Zealand (Tourism New Zealand, 2014b). Not surprisingly, visitors continue to name landscape and scenery as the

most influential factor in their decision to visit New Zealand (Tourism New Zealand, 2013c) while undertaking a large number of outdoor and nature-related activities during their holiday (Ministry of Economic Development, 2013a). In addition, adventure related activities have become increasingly popular, adding bungy jumping or sky diving to the list of nature-related activities that visitors can participate in. New Zealand's cultural attractions on the other hand focus strongly on its Māori heritage, allowing visitors insight into their traditions, legends, language, and arts. This is complemented by a number of museums, galleries, and heritage attractions, with film tourism becoming increasingly important. Due to the interest stemming from 'The Lord of the Rings' and 'The Hobbit', special marketing campaigns branding the country as the 'Home of Middle-Earth' have been developed (Tourism New Zealand, 2014b). The activities that international visitors with the main purpose of a holiday most frequently participate in are displayed in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Activities and attractions undertaken by international visitors

	Activities and attractions* undertaken by international holiday makers in the year ended March 2013
	%
Dining	91
Walking and trekking	87
Shopping	79
Other scenic/natural attractions	73
Sightseeing (land)	69
Lookouts and viewing platforms	52
Volcanic/Geothermal attractions	46
Boating	42
Gardens	37
Other attractions	34
Heritage attractions	31
Museums and galleries	31
Visiting friends and relatives	30
Entertainment	26
Cultural (Māori) attractions	24
Farms	23

* Multiple responses possible

(Ministry of Economic Development, 2013a)

Nature-related activities are clearly amongst the most popular ones – the vast majority of international visitors participated in walking or trekking during their holiday in New Zealand, as well as in other scenic or natural attractions, specifically boating. Lookouts, volcanic and geothermal attractions, and gardens were also frequently visited. Most visitors also dined out, shopped, and participated in various sightseeing activities, while culturally related activities such as heritage attractions, museums, galleries, and Māori culture were each undertaken by about a third of all international visitors. A strong interest in nature and, to a somewhat lesser extent, culture thus provides the foundation for international holidaymaking in New Zealand.

This short overview of New Zealand's attractions and activities already suggests that the country would appeal more to active visitors as opposed to resort and beach tourists, as extensive travel within the country can be seen as a crucial part of visiting New Zealand. The following section will thus look closer at the international visitors and their travel behaviour.

1.4.2 International visitors

International visitor arrivals to New Zealand in 2013 amounted to 2.7 million (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2013a), compared to only 1.6 million in 1999 (Ministry of Tourism, 2009). The expected increase by 2018 is currently estimated to be 3.3 million (Ministry of Economic Development, 2013f). In the year ended March 2013, 46% of these visitors came to New Zealand for the purpose of a holiday, followed by 33% who visited friends and relatives in the country. For the same time period, the main target markets for New Zealand consisted of visitors from Australia (45%), China (8%), the UK and USA (7% each), and Japan and Germany (3% each) (Tourism New Zealand, 2013a).

Due to its widespread attractions and the geographical layout of the country, most international travel in New Zealand is circuit-based (Cloke & Perkins, 1998; Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Stuart, Pearce, & Weaver, 2005), as travellers visit either one or both islands by following the major road networks that facilitate transport-based travel to allow for a spatially widespread visitor experience (Hall & Kearsley, 2001). This differs significantly from other holiday types such as resort tourism that come with

less movement and therefore a less dominant exposure to changing sceneries, other unknown visitors, and varying attractions and experiences. It also means that travellers in New Zealand are heavily reliant on transport to follow their often flexible travel itineraries. Transport is therefore a major component of the products that international visitors purchase in New Zealand. Rental cars and vans were by far the most popular mode of transport for international tourists in 2012 – 72% of visitors used these at least partly throughout their stay. This is followed by scheduled coach services (37%) and air transport (33%), while organized coach tours (packaged group tours) were used by 20% of all visitors during their holiday (Ministry of Economic Development, 2013c). This suggests that the majority of visitors in New Zealand are somewhat independent travellers, relying less on pre-packaged group tours but creating their own, often flexible and adaptable, schedule (Becken & Gnoth, 2004).

Tourism New Zealand thus classifies visitors by their chosen travel style, assigning them to the categories of ‘free independent traveller’ or ‘package traveller’ (Collier, 2006; Collier & Harraway, 2006). Package travellers (that have been excluded from this study) are visitors that come to New Zealand as part of a tour group or have purchased every component of their holiday before leaving their home country. Free independent travellers on the other hand show greater flexibility in their travel behaviour and are sub-divided in the two categories of ‘fully independent traveller’ (purchased nothing but their airfares before arriving in New Zealand) and ‘semi-independent traveller’ (purchased at least one further component of their holiday before arrival). Although youth or backpacker travellers can technically be assigned to either of those two sub-categories, Tourism New Zealand regards them as a third, distinctive visitor segment due to their above average length of stay and budget oriented purchase behaviour (Collier & Harraway, 2006). The large majority (89%) of all international visitors are considered free independent travellers, with only 11% assigned to the package traveller category (Ministry of Economic Development, 2013b).

Free independent travellers show a great variety in both accommodation and transport choices. They most frequently use hotels as their main accommodation type (62%), yet also stay in motels (22%), youth hostels (18%), and campsites (13%) (Tourism New Zealand, 2013a). Their average length of stay is dependent upon their

country of origin: while visitors from the UK, Germany and Japan show an above-average length of stay of 26 to 37 nights, visitors from other countries stay on average between 11 and 20 nights (Ministry of Economic Development, 2013d). This again illustrates the importance of transport-based travel in New Zealand, as the large majority of international visitors visit more than one destination within New Zealand (Hyde & Lawson, 2003). True to their desire for greater flexibility and limited available time, they prefer private rented transport (76%) over public transport modes (37%) (Ministry of Economic Development, 2013c). The activity preferences of free independent travellers correspond well to Table 1.1 and strongly focus on outdoor and nature related experiences as well as cultural activities.

Backpacker travellers, also identified as youth travellers, distinguish themselves in various aspects from the free independent travellers. Due to the combination of their age between 18 and 29 (Tourism New Zealand, 2013d) and a comparatively long length of stay, they prefer budget accommodation such as youth hostels (44%) or campsites (23%), while also frequently staying with friends or relatives (35%) (Tourism New Zealand, 2013b). Often visited as part of a gap year or with a working holiday visa, these visitors sometimes stay in New Zealand for up to one full year, which is reflected in their transport choices. Although a rental car or campervan is still the most popular choice for 42% of youth travellers, they also frequently acquire their own vehicle (36%) and rely on more affordable public transport (30%). Perhaps due to their longer stay, they are known to participate in a wider variety of activities than other visitor types and are the visitors most likely to participate in adventure activities (Tourism New Zealand, 2013b).

In summary, it can be said that international visitors in New Zealand – and therefore the subjects of this study – show a strong interest especially in environmental activities and attractions, followed by cultural aspects and – in the case of youth travellers – adventure related activities. They are self-reliant when it comes to planning and booking their holiday and prefer the freedom of private transport to explore the country, following often flexible itineraries.

1.5 Chapter outline

This thesis is presented in eight chapters. Chapter One identified the research gap in the academic literature on social interactions between visitors, and has provided the foundation for this study by outlining the relevance of the topic. It has introduced the main research question and its sub-questions, establishing what needs to be known to contribute to a better understanding of visitor-visitor interactions. New Zealand as the research context has been presented, including overviews of the tourism experiences available within the country and its visitor types.

The literature review in Chapter Two begins by identifying the visitor experience to define the experiential context within which social interactions are investigated. This is followed by determining what social interactions are, what is known about the social situations within which they happen and why they can occur. Research on social interactions in service and tourism settings is then discussed, as well as further research on social carrying capacity and outdoor recreation conflict. This is concerned with the impact that the presence of other visitors can have on individual experiences and perceptions. The concept of satisfaction is also touched upon. The literature is then integrated in a conceptual framework, which serves as a foundation for the methodological approach.

The methodology is described in Chapter Three and presents the design of the study. Since no comprehensive and validated data were available to use as a foundation, it was necessary to develop the research process step by step, each part based and building upon the results of the previous data collection phase. Preliminary field research was undertaken to observe social interaction behaviour between visitors in a variety of tourism related settings. Based upon these findings, 40 personal exploratory in-depth interviews were conducted with international visitors in a variety of transport-, information- and activity-related settings to acquire insight into the phenomenon upon which further methodological decisions were to be made. The second and main research phase then built upon the findings of the exploratory phase and consisted of 76 personal in-depth interviews that were conducted in the visitor information centres (i-SITEs) of both Wellington and Rotorua. These interviews collected detailed information on recent social interactions that interviewees had had with other visitors in order to compile comprehensive information that would allow for the four research objectives to be answered. In addition, Chapter Three discusses

the strengths and weaknesses of the study and the analytical framework guiding both data analysis and the presentation of the findings.

Chapters Four to Six are based on the previously introduced analytical framework and display the key findings of this research. Sub-question 1 is addressed in Chapter Four, which presents the environmental and personal context of social interactions between visitors and their respective antecedents. Chapter Five relates directly to sub-question 2 and is concerned with the process and dimensions of social interactions, while Chapter Six then combines the remaining sub-questions 3 and 4 and evaluates both the perception of social interactions with other visitors and the variety of impacts they can have on individual visitor experiences.

Chapters Seven and Eight then draw the findings of this study together and revisit the original research question. Contributions to theory and practice are given, as well as recommendations for further research.

1.6 Conclusion

In summary, this thesis addresses the lack of information and knowledge available on the social aspect of travelling. More specifically, it aims to explore social interactions between previously unacquainted international visitors and the potential impact of these on the experience visitors have while travelling in New Zealand. It is generally acknowledged that the visitor experience is influenced by the physical environment, the products and services and by the social aspect – however not much is known about the latter. This has several implications for both theory and practice. For one, the visitor experience in itself cannot be fully understood without also taking the interplay between its influential factors into consideration. Thus, apart from filling the research gap on visitor-visitor interactions, this thesis also contributes to an extended understanding of how the experience of products, services and the environment can potentially be influenced by other visitors. Additionally, increasing visitor numbers and higher demand make this issue highly relevant, and practical contributions can be gained from achieving a better and more detailed insight into the dynamics between visitors and their possible effects. The main contribution of this research is therefore to add knowledge to an important but hitherto neglected area of tourism. Without knowing more about why social

interactions among visitors occur, what they consist of and how they are perceived, no further progress in this field can be made and potentially important effects on visitors and their experiences will remain unknown.

This thesis therefore considers the phenomenon from two different, yet interconnected angles. It first aims to identify patterns in visitor-visitor interactions and their influential factors to not only establish occurrences but also to determine the underlying reasons and subsequent effects on the natures and processes of visitor-visitor interactions. This analytical approach is then complemented by a more individualistic perspective. The personal perceptions of visitors are taken into account to understand why certain interactions might have a specific impact on the visitor experience of different individuals or visitor types. This adds an additional emotional component to the research, whose final aim it is to shed light on the ways in which interactions with other visitors can potentially change a personal and therefore subjective experience.

2 Literature Review

The previous chapter has identified the potential importance of social interactions between visitors and has outlined the questions that need to be addressed in order to explore this issue further. Several areas of academic literature provide information that facilitates a deeper understanding of the influences on and nature and dimensions of social interactions. The majority of these stem from, or are based upon the approaches of, the disciplines sociology and social psychology. While sociological approaches aim to enhance the understanding of the role that social interactions play within and for a wider societal context (e.g. Goffman, 1967; Parsons, 1968, see especially Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.3), social psychology and its often positivist approach to social interactions is frequently concerned with behavioural patterns and the complexity of social interactions (e.g. Argyle, Furnham, & Graham, 1981; Gahagan, 1984, see Section 2.2.2). As this post-positivist research is concerned with the more general structure of visitor-visitor interaction and patterns within while also considering individual perspectives and implications, a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach to the social interaction literature is required. The purpose of this chapter is to bring this varied information together to identify the underlying definitions of this research and provide the basis for a conceptual framework, as described in Section 2.5, which functions as a guideline for and foundation of the research methodology.

First, the context within which these social interactions will be explored will be set – the visitor experience. A definition of social interactions and what they consist of will be provided, followed by theories that shed light on potential reasons for and underlying motives of the occurrence of social interactions. Literature that examines customer-customer and visitor-visitor contacts will be then reviewed, and the known influences on and effects of social interactions in service and tourism settings will be illustrated. Although not specifically incorporated in the research questions introduced in Section 1.3, the concept of satisfaction and especially visitor satisfaction and how it is conceptualized will be explored. A high level of satisfaction with the visitor experience is desired by all tourism stakeholders, and an understanding of the concept is required to appropriately contextualize potential

impacts on the experience. The conceptual framework, incorporating the information provided throughout this chapter, is then introduced.

2.1 The visitor experience

To begin with, the visitor experience as the context in which social interactions will be examined will be defined. As this research aims to explore the impact of social interactions between visitors on the visitor experience, it is crucial to not only gain a full understanding of the concept but also to determine how it will be interpreted within this study.

A large number of researchers have examined the visitor or tourist experience (Li, 2000), yet no generally accepted definition of it exists (Murray, Lynch, & Foley, 2010). There is no agreement as to what components a visitor experience consists of (Quan & Wang, 2004), and therefore research on the topic is very diverse in regards to what is investigated and how it is conceptualized. Studies differ strongly in the way the visitor experience is approached, ranging from the factors determining certain types of travel styles and the decision making process to the way tourists see, experience, and evaluate their destinations and activities (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). Other studies are concerned with the variables influencing the above, and while some include both prior considerations and the evaluation after returning from holiday, others limit their focus by looking only at occurrences during travelling, often specializing in certain traveller types, interests, or activities. Ryan (2010) provides a thorough review of the literature on the tourist experience and outlines several previous conceptualizations that include theories such as confirmation-disconfirmation or importance-evaluation in terms of how tourist experiences can be evaluated, gaze theory or back stage/authenticity in terms of what is experienced, or liminality and flow theory to examine how experiences are perceived.

Considering the number of possibilities that are available for defining the context of this research, the fact that no study has yet focused extensively on the social aspect of travelling determines the way the literature on visitor experience is approached. The only agreement so far is that social interactions between visitors are potentially important (e.g. Mossberg, 2007; P. L. Pearce, 2005b; Walls & Wang, 2011). However, nothing is known as to what role they play for the individual travellers,

what importance they hold, how they proceed and whether the visitor experience literature relating to decisions, experiences and evaluations is applicable to this particular issue. It is therefore more useful to determine personality related factors influencing the visitor experience as well as the temporal dimensions that are to be of relevance of this study. The first can be expected to potentially impact anything happening within the visitor experience, while the latter will contribute to methodological issues when deciding upon the research process and instruments.

Although most studies refer to an experience at the actual destination (e.g. Herrick & McDonald, 1992; Quan & Wang, 2004), some see the visitor experience in the context of the motivations underlying travel (e.g. E. Cohen, 1996; MacCannell, 1973). Indeed, Clawson and Knetsch (1966) argue that it begins long before the holiday during the planning phase and continues after the event through recollection. Cutler and Carmichael (2010) developed a conceptual model that expresses the complexity of the phenomenon when focusing on influential factors and temporal characteristics (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 The tourist experience conceptual model of influences and outcomes (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010, p. 8)

Their model is divided into three parts, namely the influential realm, the personal realm and the actual tourist experience, which consists of travel to the site, the on-site activity and return travel. The influential realm includes aspects not related to the individual which can impact on the experience, whereas the personal realm encompasses elements within the individual. Within the influential realm, physical and social aspects as well as the consumed product and services can factor into the visitor experience. Social aspects include social settings, personal relationships, and interactions with hosts, personnel, the respective travel group, and other tourists. The personal realm encompasses underlying travel motivation and expectations regarding the experience, which are based on factors such as perception, self-identity, and emotions, and, in combination with the tourist experience, leads to the final rating of the tourist experience as satisfactory or unsatisfactory (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010).

Putting this into the context of a hypothetical tourism setting, the actual tourist experience can have several dimensions. The holiday as a whole can be regarded as the comprehensive experience, being framed by travel to and from the destination and containing every aspect of what occurred during a particular trip. The different activities undertaken during the holiday would represent several smaller experiences within the overall tourist experience – those include travel to and from the activity site as well as the on-site activity, and might differ in anticipation and recollection from the overall visitor experience. Motivations and expectations stemming from the personal realm towards the whole holiday will also differ from those towards a certain activity – the main motivation for a specific trip might be relaxation, whereas a certain activity within the same holiday can be undertaken due to an interest in culture. Expectations towards both can therefore differ significantly, and so can the impact of the influential realm. This in turn means that the importance assigned to and evaluation of social interactions experienced within a certain activity can differ greatly from those experienced throughout the whole holiday and vice versa. When determining the impact of social interactions on the visitor experience, it is therefore necessary to make a clear distinction between specific activities or situations and the overall travel experience as a sum of the first, while still including both dimensions of the tourist experience to examine potential connections.

Several authors (Crouch et al., 2004; Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Maunier & Camelis, 2013; Walls & Wang, 2011) acknowledge the importance of the social

aspect, including contacts with other visitors, for the visitor experience and claim that tourists' interactions with place, locals, and fellow tourists constitute a great part of the visitor experience. Using time-geography to shed light on the tourist dimensions of time and space and the encounters within, Crouch et al. (2004) connect the tourists' sense-making inextricably to the space they occupy and the actions and interactions within. Maunier and Camelis (2013) identified that what they call the 'human factor' (including interactions with other visitors) amounts for over 20% of critical incidents reported to impact the satisfaction with a tourist experience, thus calling – as do Walls and Wang (2011) – for a more comprehensive view of the concept of visitor experience and the role played by a variety of human interaction elements.

However, the tourist experience is not something that simply 'happens' to visitors but is, partially, a product of their behaviours, actions, and perceptions (P. L. Pearce, 2005b), and Mossberg (2007) describes fellow tourists as co-producers of the experience. This argument increases the importance of further research on visitor-visitor interactions on a more detailed level, as it is not simply an element that travellers are exposed to but one that can be actively influenced and therefore shaped.

2.2 Social interactions

Having established both the relevance and the context of this study, the main focus will now be addressed – namely what social interactions are and what types of social interactions are relevant for this research. This section will analyse the wider literature on social interactions including their content, influential factors, underlying motives and structures, and will provide an understanding of the exact focus of this study and what it comprises.

2.2.1 Definitions and contents of social interactions

The majority of the literature on social interaction definitions stems from the field of sociology, often describing social interactions as “the basic process through which two or more people use language and gestures to affect each other's thoughts,

expectations, and behaviour” (Doob, 1994, p. 110). Goffman (1967, p. 1) defines them as the “class of events which occurs during co-presence and by virtue of co-presence. The ultimate behavioural materials are the glances, gestures, positionings, and verbal statements that people continuously feed into the situation, whether intended or not”. This widely used definition already addresses the fact that social interactions, or parts thereof, can be subconscious as well as conscious, meaning that interaction participants are not necessarily aware of all elements included in a social interaction. In fact, some social interactions are fully subconscious and unintended, as explained by a further distinction between co-present and focused interaction (Goffman, 1967). Co-present interaction does not include any co-operative action or a common focus, whereas focused interaction is defined by a co-operation of two or more people based on a single focus of attention (Gahagan, 1984). While a focused social interaction is an interaction that participants are aware of, an interaction simply based upon co-presence can in some cases be considered ‘automatic’ when monitoring and adjusting one’s behaviour to the presence of others – something that would not be done when in private (Gahagan, 1984). The interest of this particular study lies within conscious and focused social interactions. In a tourism context, these can be expected to differ strongly from those interactions experienced within everyday life and to have the highest impact upon the visitor experience. Co-present interactions are less dependent upon a certain situation (such as travelling) but often occur subconsciously and can be regarded as generally applicable social behaviour. Therefore, social interactions as referred to from hereon will comprise co-present, intentional, focused, face-to-face interaction. Focused social interactions of course do not necessarily require a co-presence if carried out via information and communication technologies, however these will not be dealt with in this research.

As it is not possible to identify relevant academic literature and methodological approaches without a clear understanding of both the scope and boundaries of the phenomenon to be examined, the content and elements of social interaction need to be defined. The disciplines of psychology and especially social psychology offer more thorough insight into the details of social interactions. Darley and Fazio (1980) developed a commonly accepted sequence of social interactions. The initiator of the social interaction first forms expectations regarding the target person, based upon prior experiences or assumptions. These experiences or assumptions then determine

the first specific act towards that target, carried out by the initiator. The target then interprets the initiator's action in accordance with his or her own expectations and impressions and responds. This response is then in turn interpreted by the original initiator. This can be seen as the first 'loop' of a social interaction, which is then repeated by the initiator again acting towards the target, at which point the second loop is entered. Each act is therefore preceded and also influenced by the expectations towards the interaction participants, which are re-assessed and re-evaluated after each received action. This may also lead to a decision to avoid or end an interaction. Although this social interaction sequence begins with the formation of expectations, this can only be seen as the beginning of a social interaction when there is an act following these expectations. Without this second step of taking action towards a target person, no social interaction would occur. When recalling the research questions of Section 1.3, it is therefore necessary to not only include information relating to the actual process but also information preceding it.

In summary, a social interaction exists when two or more participants act towards and respond to each other and choose these actions based on their expectations towards the other interaction participant(s). Since social interactions are irrevocably connected to social situations, it is important to understand what factors influence a social situation and thus a social interaction. The next section is concerned with social situations and elaborates on various factors that are influential.

2.2.2 Social situations as the context of social interactions

Although a social situation does not necessarily include a social interaction, every social interaction occurs within a social situation. It is thus necessary to know what a social situation is and what factors influence a social situation and therefore a social interaction. Goffman (1964, p. 135) describes a social situation as “an environment of mutual monitoring possibilities, anywhere within which an individual will find himself accessible to the naked senses of all others who are present, and similarly find them accessible to him”, therefore beginning as soon as two or more people come together and ending by the time only one person is left. Social psychologists Argyle et al. (1981, p. 3) look closer at the details of these environments and discuss social situations as the circumstances of social interactions and what features they

possess. In this context, they define a social situation as “the sum of features of the behaviour system, for the duration of a social encounter” (encounter being used interchangeably with interactions as just defined by Goffman), therefore strongly emphasising not only co-presence but also the implications that it has for the individuals within this situation. These situations are said to possess nine distinct yet interconnected features, namely goals, rules, roles, repertoire of elements, sequences of behaviour, concepts and cognitive structures, environmental settings, language/speech, and difficulties/skills. Their combination structures and determines social situations and the social interactions occurring within. This section will summarize those features and illustrate their impacts on social situations and therefore interactions based upon Argyle et al. (1981).

The individual goals of people entering social situations provide context and direction for the social behaviour that is displayed, thereby making it a feature of a social situation. People enter social situations motivated by the desire to satisfy certain needs or goals – this underlying motivation therefore determines the situation individuals have chosen to enter as well as the actions used to attain this goal. In this context, Argyle et al. (1981) refer to social exchange theory, which states that individuals engage in interactions when they expect a certain reward outweighing the costs. This will further be elaborated on in Section 2.2.3 when the potential goals are considered in more detail.

The second feature of social situations consists of rules as “shared beliefs which dictate which behaviour is permitted, not permitted or required” (Argyle et al., 1981, p. 7). These rules regulate the behaviour used to attain the goals which motivated individuals to enter social situations in the first place. Different situations and different goals come with a different set of rules that also varies according to the cultural context and regulate situations so as to avoid conflict between participants.

Roles provide individuals within social situations with a framework as to how to behave and interact, depending on their social position within this situation. To a certain extent roles also determine the rules of a situation, as the roles that an individual assumes come with a certain set of expectations which in turn affect the beliefs about what behaviour is deemed appropriate. While formal situations such as courtrooms or job interviews come with clearly discernible roles and therefore

behavioural rules, informal situations such as those often encountered with other visitors when on holiday may come with less obvious and more flexible roles.

The repertoire of elements of behaviour within a specific social situation is the “sum of behaviors which are appropriate to that situation” (P. L. Pearce, 1990, p. 342), including verbal categories, verbal contents, nonverbal communication and bodily actions. This repertoire of elements is determined by the goals that are sought, the rules that determine which elements can be considered in general, and the roles which state the elements expected from certain individuals, therefore further narrowing down the available actions or messages for each person within a social interaction.

Sequences of behaviour then structure the order in which the chosen behaviours from the repertoire of elements are displayed by arranging the order of the behavioural materials by all participants. These sequences provide the way to achieve the participants’ original goals, and can be either fixed with relatively little room for aberration or fluid with less predictability and structure. Not only the repertoire but also the sequence of elements differs, depending on the situational and cultural context.

Other features of social situations are concepts and cognitive structures, which can be described as universally shared understandings of situations that provide individuals in it to act accordingly and enable them to achieve their original goals. These concepts and structures can also be viewed as categories and allow for the classification of persons, social structures or roles, and elements of interactions while also serving as a foundation for an appropriate recognition of rules and available elements of behaviour. Without commonly accepted and therefore shared concepts and cognitive structures, the contextually appropriate interpretation of behaviour and meaning would not be possible, and individuals would not be able to successfully operate within a social situation.

A social situation is defined not only by factors between situation participants but also by the environmental setting in which the situation occurs. This setting provides geographical boundaries of a situation as well as props, while so-called modifiers such as light or noise can also impact the situation within the setting. Some environmental settings also come with a specific set of rules, resulting in

expectations and therefore certain behavioural elements, while spatial aspects in terms of distance or space between individuals impacts perceptions of crowding or can affect personal space. The relationship between the environment and the behaviour occurring within is often strong and comes with a direct connection to previously mentioned situational features that relate to behavioural rules.

Language and speech then refer to specific linguistic features associated with situations. These can include vocabulary, grammar, or tone of voice, and depending on the social situation of individuals, they might not only draw from a specific repertoire of elements of behaviour but also from a range of language and speech related possibilities. Difficulties and skills finally refer to stressful situations that come with a certain pressure for individuals within which can only be dealt with by applying certain skills. This often relates to occupational situations where specific requirements are necessary for individuals to fulfil their allocated tasks.

To summarize, this study is concerned with focused social interactions, where two or more people have one common focus of attention and affect each other's thoughts and behaviour by sending out verbal and bodily signals. These social interactions happen within social situations, which in turn are strongly influenced by their circumstances as well as the roles, goals, beliefs and understandings of the interaction participants. Although several patterns and interdependencies in regards to these situational features have been outlined in the literature, it has been acknowledged that different situations show different characteristics. It is highly likely that these features for social situations are also relevant for situations in which visitors interact with each other. The relationships and specific contents as applicable to a tourism related context however cannot be drawn from the literature.

2.2.3 Goals of social interactions

Argyle et al. (1981) repeatedly emphasized the importance of original goals or motivations for social situations and therefore social interactions, as they are highly influential for other behaviour-related situation features. However, no clear conceptualization of possible goals has been developed and it is necessary to include the potential antecedents for social interactions to fully understand the phenomenon.

So far, no specific underlying reasons for the initiation of social interactions have been given, but several theories give an indication as to what those could be.

Social exchange theory, as mentioned previously, is a concept based on the exchange of resources during an interaction between two individuals or groups (Ekeh, 1974; Waitt, 2003), and has its roots in both sociology and social psychology with an economic focus. According to Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, and Vogt (2005, p. 1061), individuals “engage in an interaction process where they seek something of value, be it material, social, or psychological. Individuals choose to engage in an exchange once they have judged the rewards and the costs of such an exchange. Perceptions of the exchange can be differential in that an individual who perceives a positive outcome will evaluate the exchange in a different way than an individual who perceives it negatively”. This theory has been used in a tourism context to examine the perception of host communities towards tourism and its development (Andereck et al., 2005; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Jurowski, Uysal, & Williams, 1997; McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1987), but was frequently found to be too narrow to acknowledge the complexity of attitudes towards a multi-faceted industry and its far reaching implications. Yet when applying it to specific social interactions between previously unacquainted visitors, the level of influential factors is reduced and a closer look at the potential exchangeable resources is warranted. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) specify the resources that can be exchanged as love, status, information, money, goods, and services. Research on situational goals, influenced by social exchange theory, has identified three main goals that repeatedly occur in a variety of situations, namely social goals (acceptance, relationship development), personal (own well-being), and specific (achieving situational goals) (Argyle et al., 1981). However, the distinction between social and personal goals can often overlap, as personal psychological wellbeing may be achieved by relationship development or vice versa, and specific situational goals might also overlap with either social or personal ones. But what both Cropanzano and Mitchell’s (2005) and Argyle et al.’s (1981) approaches have in common is the distinction between goals or rewards that would contribute on a personal level and those that are more tangible and therefore externally oriented. A basic distinction can thus be drawn between intrinsic and extrinsic goals, where intrinsic goals originate from the individual’s own personal desire holding solely emotional benefits and

extrinsic goals come from a desire for an outside reward in form of, for example, goods or information.

Although not sufficient to explain visitor-visitor interactions on its own, when applying social exchange theory to this issue, it could be assumed that focused and interpersonal interactions are only entered into when both participants expect an intrinsic or extrinsic reward in return – if this is not the case, no direct interaction would take place. It would also mean that in the cases where visitors explicitly choose to establish contact, these contacts will be rated more favourably than those that materialize without the preceding intention of gaining a reward, meaning that the initiators of interactions would perceive them as more positive than the targets.

Goals have been determined to influence not only the rules but also the available and chosen elements of behaviour that are displayed within a social interaction. Behaviour is often mentioned to be dependent upon the cultural context as well, thus establishing again a connection between the social psychological focus on the details of social interactions and the sociological aim to understand the wider societal context. Parsons' (1968) action theory of structural functionalism can contribute further to an understanding of the interdependencies between these factors and shed light on the role of culture within social situation. Action theory is concerned with the functionality of social actions which are compared to an organism whose parts are either considered to be functional or dysfunctional – in the context of social interaction actions, the question thus is if it is justifiable or desired. Parsons regarded an act as a system, and orientations and projections can either be functional or dysfunctional, depending on the cultural, social and personality system. Every action displayed by an individual is dependent on his or her norms. Norms in their general form can be regarded as commonly shared expectations about behaviour (Gibbs, 1965), therefore being collective norms within a social system that rely on people's understanding and correct interpretation (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). Norms thus provide the social system context, while the personal system consisting of the individuals' motivational orientations and the cultural system determines value judgements. In combination, they determine which means will be selected to reach a certain goal. They also determine which forms of interpersonal relationships are legitimate and functional, thus assuring the functionality of actions and therefore social interactions (Parsons, 1968; Savage, 1981; Werlen, 1993). Each action

undertaken by an individual can therefore be regarded as a product originating from these three subsystems (Parsons, 1968). When actions are carried out, the social order in which context the actions take place can only be upheld as long as agents accept and follow the normative rules voluntarily. As a result of all these assumptions, individuals (or agents) can have justified expectations about other individual's actions, which are based on their own needs, social norms and cultural values (Werlen, 1993). The actions chosen to reach a certain goal are thus dependent on the three subsystems whose rules individuals need to conform to, as well as on the specific situation at hand. Conformity can therefore be another potential reason to enter social interactions, due to certain circumstances corresponding to what the subsystems and therefore norms require from an individual.

In summary, individuals only initiate or enter into social interactions due to conformity (when social and cultural norms and values require them to) or when they expect either an intrinsic or extrinsic reward, with the actions taken to fulfil these goals being dependent upon the current situation, the personality of interaction participants and their cultural background.

2.3 Research on social interactions in service and tourism settings

Having provided the clear context of this study by defining what social interactions are and in what context they will be examined, previous research on visitor-visitor contacts will now be reviewed. Several studies are concerned with consumer-to-consumer interactions in service settings. These, combined with the few studies exploring social interactions among visitors in tourism settings, will provide insight into a range of factors that can affect the occurrences and processes of these interactions as well as their evaluations. Although the research areas of social carrying capacity and outdoor recreation conflict have not dealt with focused social interactions between visitors as defined in Section 2.2, they may examine how visitors can influence each other's experience and what determines their mutual perception. Research in these areas can thus contribute by identifying factors that influence both the occurrence and impact of social interactions.

The following sections will provide an overview of research concerned with both consumer-to-consumer and visitor-to-visitor interactions in different settings and

how these can contribute to a further understanding of the issue on hand by drawing out several factors that can factor into the social aspect of tourism. Most of this research is oriented towards or based upon a social psychological approach and examines social interactions in particular settings, between specific groups or with a focus on the implications for particular stakeholders.

2.3.1 Social interactions in service settings

A number of studies consider social interactions between previously unacquainted interaction participants in service settings, more frequently in retail settings. This research is based upon literature looking at service encounters from a managerial perspective, focusing on interactions between customers and service employees (Levy, Getz, & Hudson, 2011) that can be regarded as front-stage interactions and are heavily structured (Baron, Harris, & Davies, 1996). Due to the significant differences in regards to the nine features of social situations, such service based encounters will not be included in this literature review. The environmental setting as well as goals, rules, roles, elements, and sequences of behaviour deviate greatly from those that would apply to social interactions between travellers and therefore cannot contribute applicable knowledge to the research aims at the required level of both breadth and depth.

Research on consumer-to-consumer interactions on the other hand can be regarded as more similar to this study, as these are interactions that are not strictly necessary, are entered into for a variety of reasons not limited to originally extrinsic motivations and are expected to be more fluid and diverse in their situational features. Consumer-to-consumer interactions (C2C) in service settings have gained increased attention in recent years (see Harris & Baron, 2004; Nicholls, 2010 for overviews). The majority of these studies have also been conducted within service settings, most frequently various types of stores (e.g. Baron et al., 1996; McGrath & Otnes, 1995; Parker & Ward, 2000), where the impact of social interactions between customers was evaluated in terms of how it contributes to the service experience. Figure 2.2 outlines the stimuli (influential factors), manifestations and consequences of observable oral participation between strangers (OOP2, with OOP1 being observable oral participation between customers and employees) in service settings.

Figure 2.2 Framework for observable oral participation between strangers in service settings (Harris & Baron, 2004, p. 288)

A desire to exchange information regarding a (potential) purchase was most frequently the main purpose and content of C2C interactions, with an additional intrinsic dimension relating to the enjoyment gained from interacting with other customers (e.g. Davies, Baron, & Harris, 1999; Moore, Moore, & Capella, 2005). The environmental setting, service employees, and individual characteristics and needs all impact the occurrence of social interactions between customers in service settings (Harris & Baron, 2004). Although the individual value of these interactions and how they contribute to the personal experience have not been examined in detail, an impact on purchase behaviour and/or on the level of satisfaction with the retail experience has been confirmed in nearly all of the above referenced studies. However, since the main focus was put on the managerial implications that these C2C interactions have on the firm, consumer satisfaction, and consumer loyalty, more specific details regarding the social interactions as required by this study were not collected and the exact reasons for a positive perception and impact are not known. Frequently data were collected by observation or by using standardized quantitative survey instruments which eliminated a more detailed approach that

would have allowed for sufficient inclusion of individual perspectives, meanings, and impacting factors.

Consumer-to-consumer interaction research by itself can thus not solely be used to explain visitor-to-visitor interactions, since the settings, preconditions, and influential factors in service environments differ strongly from those in tourism environments – the initial antecedents of interactions to avoid purchase-related disappointment or replacing service personnel by providing information are not applicable. Therefore, information from these studies is incorporated into this literature review only succinctly, with a stronger focus on the studies conducted in tourism-related settings to gain more specific and transferable insight into the stimuli and consequences of interactions between visitors.

2.3.2 Social interactions in tourism settings

A number of studies have touched upon or incorporated aspects of importance to this research – either through their research settings, their sample characteristics or their methodological approach by using the situational features defined by Argyle et al. (1981) to examine the social aspect of certain situations. Table 2.1 provides an overview of the research examined within this literature review, and gives a first insight into which findings may be relevant when exploring visitor-visitor interactions.

As Table 2.1 shows, a number of studies have been conducted about the social aspect within tour group settings (e.g. Heimtun, 2011; Holloway, 1981; Levy & Getz, 2012; Schuchat, 1983; Tucker, 2005; Wu, 2007). These are mostly concerned with the relationships between travellers participating in organized travel as well as with their guides. The importance of socializing with other travellers in the context of organized travel has long since been identified (e.g. Fisher & Price, 1991; Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991), and research on it differs significantly in its scenarios, settings, or samples. Nevertheless, tour groups in themselves share a number of characteristics which, in their combination, are unique to this form of travel:

“These include the setting within which they form and develop (bus, plane, hotel); the physical proximity of their members; the amount of shared leisure-time; the brief existence of these groups; their heterogeneity (age, sex, nationality, motivation, culture); their shared circumstances (a strange environment with different customs and languages, which will encourage group affiliation); and the realization of sharing a new experience, which for most of them has meant a great deal of work, and is quite unrepeatabe” (Quiroga, 1990, p. 187).

All these aspects highly impact the overarching social situation of the tour group holiday in itself, as well as the individual social situations occurring within. Although the information relating to social interactions between tour group travellers is therefore highly dependent upon these specific circumstances, they still provide insight into the effects of the environmental setting, group dynamics and individual characteristics on interactions within a tourism context.

Table 2.1 Literature on social interactions in tourism related settings

Authors	Setting	Focus	Methods	Implications
Holloway (1981)	Group tour	Relationship between tour guides and participants	Participant observation Personal interviews	Tour guide stimulates interactions between participants Participants develop a sense of group identity
Schuchat (1983)	Group tour	Role of the group in travel experiences	Participant observation Personal interviews	Ritualized conversation patterns
P. L. Pearce (1984)	Group tour	The nature of tourist-guide interactions	Personal interviews Questionnaires Observation	Applicability of Argyle's situational features on interactions in tourism settings Constrained environmental settings limit group interactions
Quiroga (1990)	Group tour	Group process, formation and development	Questionnaires Observation	Social aspect as decision factor Physical proximity, nationality as group determinants Shared group experiences as satisfaction impact
Ross and Iso-Ahola (1991)	Group tour	Motivations and satisfaction of sightseeing tourists	Questionnaires	Social aspect as a decision factor Social interactions as satisfaction impact
Tucker (2005)	Group tour	Self-narrative through group tours	Participant observation Personal interviews	Social aspect as decision factor Sense of group identity facilitated by guide Self-enhancement through socializing

Authors	Setting	Focus	Methods	Implications
Wu (2007)	Group tour	Impact of social interactions on satisfaction	Questionnaires	Perception of behaviour in direct correlation with satisfaction Marital homogeneity as commonality positively impacts satisfaction
Heimtun (2011)	Group tour	Single women's perceptions of the social aspect of group tours	Diaries Focus groups	New friends and companionship as advantage Lack of freedom, forced sociability, impact of other's behaviour as disadvantage Extroverted, sociable personalities enjoy the social aspect, introverted personalities actively withdraw
Levy et al. (2011)	Group tour	Impact of managerially induced interactions	Field experiment	Managerially facilitated interactions increase enjoyment and satisfaction
Levy and Getz (2012)	Group tour	Social stimuli of sightseeing tours	Focus groups Personal interviews Questionnaires	Factors that contribute positively to social aspect: Commonalities between participants, outgoing personalities, proximity, smaller group size, shared experiences, tour guide actions
P. L. Pearce (1990)	Farm tourism/Home stays	The form of host-guest interactions	Personal interviews	Applicability of Argyle's situational features on interactions in tourism settings Social rules are culturally dependent and can lead to conflict

Authors	Setting	Focus	Methods	Implications
Grove and Fisk (1997)	Theme parks	Other customers' effect on service experience	Critical incident technique Personal interviews	Presence of others significantly impacts satisfaction Positive incidents often stem from sociability Negative incidents often stem from social protocol Single customers are more open towards socializing
Murphy (2001)	Backpackers	Role of social interactions in word-of-mouth promotion	Personal interviews	Applicability of Argyle's situational features on interactions between tourists Social aspect as decision factor for travel type Environmental setting/atmosphere impact interactions Predictable initial conversation patterns Sociability during holiday more extroverted
Harris and Baron (2004)	Railway travel	Consumer-to-consumer conversations during railway travel	Participant observation Unstructured personal interviews	C2C interaction replaces service-related employee interaction Predictable conversation patterns Longer interactions are perceived as more enjoyable
Baron and Harris (2010)	Gap-Year	Gap-year related interactions and their personal value	Personal interviews conducted by students	Interactions during the gap year with previously unacquainted individuals lead to exposure to different cultures/lifestyles Experience exchange, making new friends, building interpersonal skills and confidence

Authors	Setting	Focus	Methods	Implications
Huang and Hsu (2010)	Cruise ships	Impact of social interactions on satisfaction	Online survey	Interaction quality more important than quantity Social aspect has direct impacts on experience, indirect impacts on satisfaction

The overall social layout of tour groups is often a factor in tourist motivation when it comes to choosing this type or form of holiday. Participants in group tours frequently refer to contact and expected sociability as one of the reasons influencing their decision, which in turn can be assumed to be reflected in their extroverted and positive attitude towards other participants, a high assigned importance to the social aspect, and therefore frequent and positively perceived social interactions with other travellers (Heimtun, 2011; Levy & Getz, 2012; Quiroga, 1990; Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991; Tucker, 2005). The environmentally confined setting of tour groups, often combined with coaches as transport modes and tour guides as interaction facilitators, has also been found to foster sociability between participants (Holloway, 1981; Levy & Getz, 2012; Tucker, 2005). Physical proximity has been named as one of the most important factors when it comes to facilitating and continuing social interactions and relationships (Quiroga, 1990). However the narrow and inflexible layout of buses and seating arrangements can also function as an interaction barrier between individuals that are not already in direct proximity of each other (Holloway, 1981; P. L. Pearce, 1984) as it restricts movement of and between individuals.

Schuchat (1983) determined a ritualized conversation pattern between tour group members – a phenomenon that is not unique to this specific context but one that has also been confirmed by other studies looking at encounters between previously unacquainted individuals, both in a backpacker context (Murphy, 2001) and in transport settings (Harris & Baron, 2004). Conversation patterns can lead towards an increasing level of familiarity, and the positive perception of these interactions has been found to also depend on commonalities between interaction participants (Levy & Getz, 2012; Quiroga, 1990; Wu, 2007) as well as the individual characteristics in terms of sociability. Extroverted and sociable tourists have been found to enjoy social interactions to a greater degree (Heimtun, 2011; Levy & Getz, 2012), relating back to their original decision to participate in tour groups due to the social element and the fact that the enjoyment of social interactions and/or positively perceived behaviour by other group members frequently correlated with satisfaction levels (Quiroga, 1990; Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991; Wu, 2007).

Although the environmental ‘bubble’ of tour groups provides a unique interaction setting (E. Cohen, 1972), the personal attitude of visitors towards the social aspect of their travels as well as the circumstances during which they interact – situational,

environmental and temporal – can be assumed to also impact interactions in different tourism contexts.

Further studies have been conducted in a variety of tourism-related settings, such as home stays (P. L. Pearce, 1990), theme parks (Grove & Fisk, 1997), backpacker hostels (Murphy, 2001), railway settings (Harris & Baron, 2004), and cruise ships (Huang & Hsu, 2010). Although these studies do not provide the level of detail that this thesis aims to explore, several findings are relevant here.

The relevance of and application to tourism settings of Argyle et al.'s (1981) situational features has been confirmed in several studies (Murphy, 2001; P. L. Pearce, 1984, 1990), and especially the impact of the environmental setting and its atmosphere on both encouraging and discouraging social interactions between tourists has been verified. In addition, the rules structuring behaviour are often culturally dependent and can hold potential for conflict (P. L. Pearce, 1990), as behaviour that is not regarded as adhering to social protocol can be perceived negatively and may lead to dissatisfaction with the experience (Grove & Fisk, 1997; Murphy, 2001).

Although not much attention has been paid to the detailed contents and processes of social interactions, Harris and Baron (2004) observed passenger conversations on trains and discovered a predictable pattern – similar to those on tour groups – as to how conversations start and how the topics and the level of formality and personal information provided develops throughout the course. It is also suggested that longer conversations increase the enjoyment of the encounter and thus of the service experience, describing these longer encounters as “a special form of commercial friendship between consumers” (Harris & Baron, 2004, pp. 299-300). It can be assumed that the length of social interactions between visitors increases the importance they hold for the participants as well as the satisfaction with the visitor experience when perceived as positive. In addition, it is likely that, depending on environmental settings and visitor types, initial conversations will follow a certain pattern consisting of elements of behaviour, following the socially acceptable rules applicable to the situation as previously illustrated by Argyle et al. (1981).

The personal meaning of and ways in which social interactions contribute to individual experiences and perceptions is one of the main research questions this

study seeks to address, as previous research does not foster an in-depth understanding of these interrelationships. Social interactions were found to contribute to the individuals' personal development by enhancing confidence and interpersonal skills (Baron & Harris, 2010) and by contributing to self-enhancement (Tucker, 2005); but details about those encounters were not collected and it is unclear what an interaction needs to contain and how it has to develop to actively induce personal meaning on this level.

A wider range of details of social interactions between visitors is still unknown, and studies have not yet attempted to provide a more generalizable overview as opposed to including only specific settings or travel styles. Nevertheless, several studies have been conducted on the social aspect in tourism and travel settings. Visitors choosing organized travel forms often value the social aspect that comes with it, therefore their interactions contribute highly to their experience and seem to be mostly influenced by interpersonal aspects as well as a fixed-term shared experience. Interactions that were examined in less socially predetermined settings also rely on time and proximity, but seem depend more on the environmental setting and the specific social situations in which they occur. It is not yet known how exactly these factors can impact certain parts of social interactions between visitors, but their relevance to this study can be assumed.

2.3.3 Social carrying capacity and perceived crowding

Carrying capacity and especially the sub-concept of social carrying capacity can add valuable knowledge to the issue of social interactions between visitors. Although not concerned with it directly, increasing use levels and therefore user density have been heavily researched – especially in terms of how the presence of other visitors is perceived in certain settings.

The potentially problematic issue of increasing use levels has been recognized as early as the 1960s (Butler, 1996; Graefe, Vaske, & Kuss, 1984; Manning, 1999; McCool & Lime, 2001), when the concept of carrying capacity first included only environmental impacts and ecological limits, and since then evolved to include social and economic aspects (Coccossis & Mexa, 2004). Social carrying capacity in particular addresses issues on interpersonal levels such as the impact of user density

on the visitor experience (Lime & Stankey, 1971). The majority of studies focuses on the perception of crowding amongst visitors to a specific site (Cessford, 1995; Corbett, 2001; Ditton, Fedler, & Graefe, 1983; Doorne, 2000; Kearsley & Coughlan, 1999; Shelby, 1980), while others are concerned with how other visitors are perceived (e.g. P. L. Pearce, 2005b; Yagi & Pearce, 2007). Perceived crowding is regarded as an important factor determining the quality of the on-site visitor experience, and therefore social carrying capacity. The original idea of negatively perceived crowding being solely caused by high user density has been disproven long ago (Absher & Lee, 1981) – increasing use does not necessarily lead to lower satisfaction levels. According to further research, perceived crowding depends on a variety of factors such as usual social environments (Baum, Harpin, & Valins, 1975), nationality or origin (Doorne, 2000; Yagi & Pearce, 2007), visitor type (Manning, Valliere, Minter, Wang, & Jacobi, 2000), the type of desired activity (J. L. Cohen, Sladen, & Bennett, 1975), previous experience (Absher & Lee, 1981; Grieser, Dawson, & Schuster, 2005; Kearsley & Coughlan, 1999; Manning et al., 2000), expectations (Absher & Lee, 1981; Ditton et al., 1983; Doorne, 2000; Schreyer & Roggenbuck, 1978), motivations (Ditton et al., 1983; Manning et al., 2000), the number of expected and actual encounters (Manning et al., 2000; Shelby, 1980), coping techniques (Kearsley & Coughlan, 1999; Schneider & Hammitt, 1995), and other aspects regarding the quality of the experience (Ditton et al., 1983; Glasson, Godfrey, & Goodey, 1995; Shelby, 1980). However, the main factor in determining the perception of other visitors is the environment itself and the particular gaze that it encourages in individuals. While some settings depend on the collective gaze and thus higher numbers of people are perceived as positive, others emphasise the romantic gaze of solitude and privacy (Urry & Larsen, 2011).

An increasing number of visitors therefore does not necessarily result in a negative impact on the visitor experience and the satisfaction with it. The environmental setting, type of activity, previous experience, motivations, expectations and demographic factors seem to influence whether the presence of others is regarded as positive or negative. Research on social carrying capacity has identified aspects that can determine the perception of other visitors present, which in turn can be assumed to also affect the willingness to initiate or participate in social interactions. If the presence of other visitors is perceived as positive and regarded as an enhancement of

the experience, visitors might be more willing to interact with each other based on intrinsic goals as opposed to conformity, therefore impacting the occurrence and possibly the process and evaluation of social interactions between visitors.

2.3.4 Outdoor recreation conflict

Another approach that has been used to examine visitor-visitor relationships is the concept of outdoor recreation conflict, which is based upon the assumption that visitors with different values and goals compete for limited and shared resources. This competition can negatively impact the outcome of an experience, which in turn will lead to dissatisfaction (Owens, 1985). Research on recreation conflict mostly focuses on the compatibility of non-acquainted users from different groups participating in different kinds of activities (Bury, Holland, & McEwen, 1983; Gibbons & Ruddell, 1995; Ramthun, 1995; Vaske, Carothers, Donnelly, & Baird, 2000; Watson, Niccolucci, & Williams, 1994). This concept identifies several aspects that have been shown to impact the perception of other visitors and their subsequent impact on the visitor experience.

A theoretical model by Jacob and Schreyer (1980) identified four factors relevant to this issue. Activity related factors include the importance and meaning the activity holds for the participant, the intensity of participation, and the range of experiences. Resource related factors include the importance assigned to the selected resource, which varies with level of experience and relationship with the resource. The mode (speed) of experience and the willingness to share space with other users from different lifestyle groups also impact conflict. The model has been tested – either fully or in parts – by several studies (Blahna, Smith, & Anderson, 1995; Gibbons & Ruddell, 1995; Ramthun, 1995; Vaske, Needham, & Cline Jr, 2007) and proved to be especially useful when explaining conflicts between different types of activities. This type of inter-personal conflict happens when the presence of users interferes with the goals of other individuals (Carothers, Vaske, & Donnelly, 2001). This goal interference stems from the expectancy-value theory (Feather, 1982; Gibbons & Ruddell, 1995), which provides a psychological theory as to how people's behaviour is influenced not only by their desired outcome but also by the subjective value they place on the outcome of their actions (Feather, 1982). Gibbons and Ruddell (1995)

stress the point that, although goal interference often stems from incompatible activities, it is not necessarily the activities that cause the conflict but the different values and motivations that lead to the decision to participate in those.

Research on outdoor recreation conflict distinguishes clearly between different activity types and different values held by visitors, which, combined with a variety of other factors, can potentially lead to a conflict between users. These factors affect the tolerance towards other users and whether other visitors are perceived as either a positive or negative enhancement of the on-site visitor experience. It can thus be assumed that the elements contained in Jacob and Schreyer's (1980) model also play a role when it comes to the occurrence and perception of direct, interpersonal interaction.

2.4 Visitor satisfaction

Several of the studies mentioned in the previous sections found evidence that social interactions with other visitors impact the overall satisfaction level with the visitor experience. As the scope of this study does not allow for collecting all relevant data, a full picture of the aspects factoring into a final satisfaction with the visitor experience cannot be compiled. It is thus not a research aim to clearly identify the links between social interactions with other visitors and satisfaction with the holiday. However, this research does aim to identify ways in which interactions can impact the visitor experience, and prior research indicates that either a higher or lower satisfaction can be a potential impact. To conclude this literature review, it is therefore necessary to consider the concept of satisfaction from a consumer psychology perspective and what elements it can consist of.

Many definitions of satisfaction from several academic areas can be found. In management, Bassi and Guidi (2006, p. 78) for example define customer satisfaction as "the result of a comparison between expectancies (expectations plus desires) and the perceived performance of consumers' relevant aspects in all stages of the consumption experience". In a tourism context, Pizam, Neumann, and Reichel (1978, p. 315) first proposed to define tourist satisfaction as "the result of the interaction between a tourist's experience at the destination area and the expectations he had about that destination". Nearly all definitions of satisfaction include the

influential aspect of prior expectations against which the actual experience is to be measured, which has consistently been found to be an important factor in determining satisfaction (Yi, 1990). Visitor satisfaction after participation in a certain activity can depend on various key factors, such as expectations, the perceived product performance, the level of discrepancy between those two and prior attitudes. An expectation can be defined as an “anticipation of future consequences based on prior experience, current circumstances, or other sources of information” (Oliver, 2010: 63). Expectations towards a holiday, site of interest or activity are related to the visitors’ motivations, needs, desires, previous experiences and their knowledge and perceived image of the destination (Fluker & Turner, 2000) and can be negative as well as positive. However, research on importance-performance analysis shows that not all expectations carry the same importance to visitors. A discrepancy between expectation and satisfaction in one factor might not significantly influence the overall satisfaction (Tarrant & Smith, 2002).

Visitor satisfaction with an activity or experience is thus highly dependent upon prior expectations and the perceived margin between expected and actual experience. Depending on the extent of the discrepancy between expected and perceived social aspects, and therefore the discrepancy between expected and perceived social interactions with other visitors, the social aspect of the visitor experience will influence the visitor satisfaction in either a positive or negative way, differing in its strengths. This means that, in order to determine the impact of social interactions between visitors on the visitor experience, it is necessary to evaluate whether prior expectations existed towards the social aspect in general and towards potential specific social interactions.

2.5 A framework for social interactions in tourism settings

In the reviewed literature, sociological theories give an indication as to why social interactions can happen, while social psychology sheds light on their components and impacts. Research on social carrying capacity and outdoor recreation conflict suggests various social, individual, and environmental factors that can influence their occurrence and perception as well as evaluation. Consumer-to-consumer interaction research supports the assumption that social interactions do have an impact upon the

visitor experience and provides indications as to what can contribute to a certain perception or evaluation of social interactions between visitors. However, none of these studies have attempted to include more aspects of the phenomenon and have been restricted either in their locations, their focus, or their methods. It is not yet clear how and why social interactions between visitors occur, what they consist of, how different types of interaction are perceived by their participants, and what range of external factors and interdependencies are influential.

The purpose of the conceptual framework as presented in this section is to draw the reviewed literature together, provide a structured overview of the possible process and linkages of how social interactions between visitors in tourism settings can occur, and what steps are involved in order for them to impact the visitor experience.

The framework as displayed in Figure 2.3 consists of four parts, namely antecedents, process, evaluation and satisfaction. The first part of the framework refers to the antecedents of social interactions, namely the factors that lead to their occurrence, including initial motivations. This is followed by the second part containing the process that those social interactions can follow – including the dimensions and dynamic motivations of social interactions. The third part examines the evaluation of the social interactions after they have been completed, while the last section of the framework (satisfaction) refers to how the perception and subsequent evaluation of social interactions with other visitors can affect the level of satisfaction with the visitor experience.

The following sections will explain each part of the framework in detail by connecting them to the relevant literature as reviewed in this chapter and providing several examples as to how the assumed interrelationships can be manifested. A crucial aspect of social interactions however is that they are frequently conducted ‘automatically’, without participants being consciously aware of why they behave in certain ways (Gahagan, 1984) – although certain parts of the interaction process can and will happen on a conscious level, it can be assumed that several scenarios that will be outlined in this section underlie behavioural patterns or reactions that cannot be regarded as purposive.

Figure 2.3 Conceptual framework for social interactions between previously unacquainted visitors in tourism settings

2.5.1 Antecedents

The literature implies that the precondition for social face-to-face interactions is a detected co-presence (Goffman, 1967). For the initiator to direct a primary action towards a target and initiate a social interaction and for the target to respond to it, both require an original motivation or antecedent to enter into this potential interaction – either the desire for an intrinsic or extrinsic reward (e.g. Andereck et al., 2005; Ekeh, 1974; Waitt, 2003), or a need for conformity, often expressed by an inability to avoid said interaction (e.g. Parsons, 1968; Werlen, 1993). These antecedents are in turn influenced by various social factors (e.g. cultural and social norms and values, group constellation), individual factors (e.g. expectations, personality type, individual motivations), and environmental factors (e.g. setting layout, user density) that in turn can influence or determine each other. For example, the individual factor of prior expectations can influence the social factor of roles, or the environmental factor of user density can impact the individual factor of expectations.

In a tourism context, initiating a social interaction due to an extrinsic reward could include asking someone for directions or information, while an intrinsic reward would be participating in a social interaction due to the pleasure of talking to someone or getting to know fellow visitors. Conformity as an antecedent is mainly determined by social and cultural norms and values – it might be rude to ignore another visitor's request for help or could be considered impolite not to establish contact under certain circumstances. Other social interactions seem to occur accidentally, such as stepping on someone's foot and starting a social interaction with an apology. Although the initial action of stepping on another visitor's foot appears to be the origin of the social interaction, it only then becomes a social interaction as relevant for this study when behaviour is directly and consciously targeted and focused towards another person (Gahagan, 1984). In this case, the apology rather than the accidental contact is the first action directed at the target and the interaction is thus not based on chance but on conformity.

2.5.2 Processes and dimensions

This section, concerned with the processes and dimensions of the conceptual framework, illustrates a large number of detailed influential factors. As the methodological approach needs to account for a wide range of interaction-related information, it is crucial to identify potentially important aspects of the interaction process beforehand. This process follows several steps for all participants that lead to the delivery of actions and responses (Darley & Fazio, 1980). Each interaction can be seen from two different perspectives: the perspective of the person who initiates an interaction (the initiator) and the person who decides to respond to an interaction proposal (the target). Although both interaction participants experience the same interaction, they might have entered it based on different antecedents, therefore expecting different rewards and outcomes. Once begun, their interaction process then continues until one or both parties decide to terminate the interaction, or when an interaction is interrupted by external factors. The actions and responses (or messages) that are delivered, received and evaluated by all participants will consist of certain sequences, drawn from a repertoire of elements of behaviour regarded as appropriate for the situation by the participants. These are defined by their concepts and cognitive structures, which are the definitions and understandings required to successfully navigate through the situation (Argyle et al., 1981). Interactions will also differ in their interdependent dimensions, for example in regards to their length, topics or perceived formality. The previously identified social, individual, and environmental factors also influence the process, dimensions, and contents of social interactions, as well as the concepts, cognitive structures, and repertoires of behaviour. During the course of actions and responses, the antecedent of the interaction may or may not be fulfilled. The antecedents and subsequent motivations of a social interaction are dynamic and can change several times during the process, and the original antecedent does not necessarily have to be accomplished.

In regards to the behavioural elements of a social interaction, what is determined appropriate behaviour can largely be attributed to the socio-cultural background of the participants, since different norms and values result in different behaviour in different situations that might not always be in accordance with each other. Whereas it might be polite for an American tourist to offer a handshake during an introduction, a Japanese tourist might not find this behaviour in his immediate

repertoire. Under certain circumstances, this could prevent individuals from entering into a social interaction, or might lead to a decision to terminate the interaction.

Interactions will also differ in regards to their dimensions. They may differ in length and formality: people in the same age group might be approached in a less formal manner than visitors of another age group, tourists of different nationalities might interact in a more formal way to avoid a potential misunderstanding arising from cultural differences. If a conversation occurs, the topics may differ, as well as the course that the topics take during this conversation. These dimensions are also interdependent – depending on the topic, the number of messages sent and received can differ between interactions or, depending on the perceived formality, certain topics might or might not be addressed.

The motivations of a social interaction are also dynamic. What begins due to conformity might change to be an intrinsically rewarding social interaction between visitors, when a polite introduction that is required due to a very small number of participants during an organized activity turns into a conversation with more personal topics that all parties regard as intrinsically rewarding. What starts as a desire for an intrinsic reward might result in an interaction that only proceeds out of politeness and thus conformity, when expectations towards the chosen interaction participant are not fulfilled.

This range of characteristics and factors is again influenced by various social, individual, and environmental factors. Social roles and group constellation can contribute to someone sending or receiving a different amount of messages. A parent accompanied by a young child can initiate a social interaction with a single potential interaction participant of similar demographic characteristics. Since the interaction has been initiated by and targeted towards adults, the child's social role can result in it receiving fewer messages, thus also decreasing the messages the child will send during the interaction or increasing them to be reintegrated into the interaction. Nationality and language can, for example, not only determine conversation topics by interaction participants enquiring as to where others are from, but also affect the length of interaction (in case communication is difficult due to a lack in language skills, or by providing reasons for extending the conversation due to interest in each other's background). The activity undertaken while an interaction occurs, as well as

expectations, motivations, and goals relating to this activity, might influence the cognitive structures determining appropriate behaviour, or might increase or decrease the willingness for people to either initiate or enter social interactions. If a visitor's main expectation from an activity is gathering as much information on the surroundings as possible, with the goal being personal education, this person might – consciously or subconsciously – keep social interactions to a minimum, since the social aspect of the activity has been assigned a lesser importance. In this case, no intrinsic or extrinsic reward is to gain from it without compromising the most important and original intrinsic reward of education.

Demographic factors can also not only influence the selection of a target person, as outlined before, but determine the conversation topic, the level of formality, and the messages sent. If a younger traveller approaches a person of the same demographic characteristics, he or she may send different messages or talk about different topics than when approaching a senior – the other interaction participants therefore may influence the repertoire of elements suitable for the situation. Environmental factors also affect the contents and dimensions of social interactions. Firstly, the environmental setting has a significant part in defining the situation the members of a tour group, for example, find themselves in. Behaviour that is appropriate during a music festival might be less acceptable during a nature-based activity. If the environment is very loud and noisy, the length of the interactions might be shorter than in settings where verbal messages are easier to understand.

Social and individual factors are interdependent, with environmental factors influencing both of them. Certain social and individual factors are also dynamic and can change throughout the course of an interaction – for example, group constellations and social roles can be re-adjusted and formed anew, or the mode of activity can change when a choice has been made to assign more importance to social aspects of the on-site visitor experience.

2.5.3 Perception and evaluation

After an interaction has been terminated, interaction participants may then evaluate it. Participants might evaluate the interaction in terms of how they have perceived it as opposed to what they originally expected from it. Yet again, this process might

occur consciously or subconsciously. Moreover, there might be no evaluation at all, for example when interactions were very short such as simply apologizing or asking to pass. If evaluation occurs, a mechanism often used when the actual experience does not match the expectations is the application of coping techniques in order to decrease negative effects of the experience, for example re-adjusting expectations (Schneider & Hammitt, 1995). After these techniques have been applied subconsciously, the interaction is then re-evaluated – at the same time the expectations towards further social aspects of the experience are re-adjusted.

Participants may also evaluate the interaction in terms of antecedents being fulfilled or not. Coping techniques can be applied, for example when an individual re-adjusts prior expectations towards the activity to be more in accordance with reality so as to remain satisfied. As previously mentioned, if the original reward to be gained through an interaction is not achieved, the interaction is not necessarily to be considered negative, due to a change in the expectations that are held toward the interaction. After a subconscious application of coping techniques and alterations, the interaction is then re-evaluated, while at the same time the expectations towards further social aspects or social interactions during the experience are re-evaluated as well. For example, if a visitor did not expect or desire any social interaction before participating in a certain activity, but is continuously approached by other participants, the initial expectations might be adjusted to fit a more social experience.

2.5.4 Satisfaction

The final section of the framework related to satisfaction includes the components of the visitor experience as physical aspects, social aspects and products/services (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010), while the satisfaction with these three elements stems from a comparison between the expected and perceived outcome (Oliver, 1980). Physical and social aspects and products/services will thus be evaluated against expectations, with the social interactions between visitors being part of the social aspect. The satisfaction with each of these aspects and parts thereof will depend on the level of discrepancy between prior expectations and perceived performance, this in turn being affected by the importance assigned to these aspects, the perceived product image, and the personal motivations and goals (Fluker & Turner, 2000). The

satisfaction with the different parts of the on-site experience will then together form an overall satisfaction with the on-site experience, the satisfaction with interactions with other visitors being part of it.

Physical aspects can, in the case of a walking tour for example, include the features along the route taken for the tour, and also weather, noise, or other environmental stimuli. Social aspects include social interactions with other participants, the tour guide and other individuals that have been interacted with during the activity, and the product performance could consist of the tour guide performance, the selected walking route and the form and quality of information provided, to name only a few examples. However, although all three visitor experience aspects factor into the overall satisfaction level, only the social aspect will be examined in more detail within the scope of this study. To complete the cycle of the conceptual framework, the experience and outcomes of a particular social interaction might then in turn impact both future occurrences and their influential factors.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has drawn together literature from a variety of disciplines to first define the visitor experience as the context of this study, which is concerned with focused social interactions between previously unacquainted visitors. Consumer-to-consumer interactions served as a foundation for further research on social interactions in tourism related settings, however none of the discussed studies provided detailed and generally applicable information that could serve as a solid foundation for this study. A conceptual framework was therefore developed that incorporates a wide variety of academic literature from the domains of tourism, sociology, social psychology, and economics as reviewed prior in this chapter. It provides a structured and sequential overview of how social interactions between visitors can occur, proceed, and finally impact the visitor experience. In developing this framework, information from unrelated studies has been brought together to enable a more comprehensive understanding of visitor-visitor interactions. Instead of only focusing on selected aspects of social interactions, a conceptualization of the full process has been provided.

However, although these prior studies give several indications as to why and how these interactions can occur and proceed, and have established their impact on the satisfaction with the visitor experience, this information is not based upon similar research foci, assumptions, theories, or concepts. Instead it stems from sources of different disciplines that used varied approaches to examine a number of different aspects from often unrelated perspectives. Their methodological approaches, samples, and research settings are frequently very distinct, which clearly illustrates the research gap on social interactions between visitors. It can thus be assumed that previously unknown or unconsidered aspects will also play a role within the complex issue of social interactions between visitors. These can include the choice of other interaction participants, the potential differences between initiated and responded interactions, the variety of possible settings and circumstances and their impacts, as well as the importance of interaction participants' individual personalities and their attitude towards the social aspect of their travels. However, no information was available that enabled an incorporation of these factors into the conceptual framework, leading to a generalized display of social interactions whose refined elements will need to emerge throughout this study.

The conceptual framework has guided the methodological approach used for this research in several ways. Firstly, it defined a wide range of information that plays a role within visitor-visitor interactions and thus needed to be explored during data collection. This in turn influenced the choice of research instruments, as these were required to not only comprise the full range of information but also adapt to newly emerging information and relationships that could not yet be determined. Finally, the conceptual framework provided the foundation for the analytical framework (presented in Section 3.6), which guided both data analysis and the presentation of the findings of this study.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of relevant literature, introduced the conceptual framework that emerged from this review and outlines the possible sequential process of social interactions between previously unacquainted international visitors in tourism settings. The original research questions are now discussed in greater detail (Section 3.2), clearly outlining which information is required to successfully address visitor-visitor social interactions. Section 3.3 begins by identifying a post positivist approach as the chosen research paradigm, followed by outlining the research design and its process. Subsequently, this chapter then details the research methods, and how and in which order the information required to address the research questions was collected. The first exploratory research phase consisting of semi-structured personal interviews is explained in Section 3.4. Based upon the results gathered throughout the exploratory phase, the main interviews as illustrated in Section 3.5 were then conducted. Section 3.6 introduces the analytical framework that guides both data analysis and presentation, while Section 3.7 then discusses both strengths and limitations of this study.

3.2 Research questions

The main challenge of this topic is the fact that little literature has focused on social interactions between visitors. Not only does this have strong implications for the methodology, but also for the basis of the study. Previous research has only focused on social interactions in very specific settings, without looking at the details of social interactions and its influential factors and patterns (see Table 2.1). Since this study seeks to go beyond these restrictions with the aim to provide broader information which will enable a better understanding of the issue of social interactions between visitors, it is crucial to use a more comprehensive approach. The conceptual framework presented in Section 2.5 provides a structured overview of social interactions between visitors developed from the literature, and thus serves as the foundation to determine what types of information need to be collected in order to successfully address the research question of

What is the nature of social interactions between visitors and what is their potential impact on the visitor experience?

The following sections will now establish the connection between the research sub-questions as introduced in Section 1.3 and applicable literature to draw out what aspects and factors need to be considered when creating the research design.

3.2.1 Sub-question 1 – Why do social interactions between visitors occur?

Sub-question 1 is concerned with the initial occurrence of social interactions between visitors and their antecedents, more specifically:

- What are the antecedents of the social interactions, i.e. what are the interaction initiators' and targets' reasons for interacting with each other in the first place?
- How do social, individual and environmental factors contribute to the occurrence of social interactions between visitors?

This question thus considers the reasons for the occurrence, namely the antecedents of social interactions between visitors. Social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) suggests several exchangeable 'resources' which can act as an

incentive to engage in social interactions that can be broken down into intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, with Parsons' (1968) action theory contributing a desire for conformity. Research on C2C interactions (Harris & Baron, 2004), social carrying capacity (e.g. Graefe et al., 1984) and outdoor recreation conflict (e.g. Jacob & Schreyer, 1980) proposes additional individual, social and environmental factors influencing the perception of other visitors, which can be assumed to in turn impact the occurrence of social interactions. To address sub-question 1, the original antecedents need to be explored, and the context within which these occur has to be examined to determine what factors can either encourage or discourage the occurrence of social interactions.

Regarding the antecedents of social interactions between visitors, it needs to be established why travellers start and/or respond to a social interaction in the first place. Are they simply enjoying encounters with other travellers, are they looking for help or for information or are they forced into an interaction due to social or cultural norms and values dictating them to be polite? Did they initiate an interaction or did they respond to a message sent from another participant? And how and why does a social interaction between these particular participants occur – why between these individuals, why not between others? In a tourism context, Murphy (2001) determined information exchange (extrinsic) as a main motivator for backpackers, while Harris and Baron (2004) used a combination of participant observation and unstructured interviews as their method while looking at social interactions between train passengers. They discovered two main antecedents, namely boredom (intrinsic) and help-related (extrinsic). However, this research did not specify if antecedents related to initiators or targets and the question remains whether interaction participants interact for different motivations based on their role within the interaction process. Both studies also illustrated examples where interactions continued even after the initial reason was completed, e.g. the extrinsic desire for help was fulfilled. The reasons that lead to the start of an interaction may not necessarily remain the ones that contribute to its continuation. The remaining studies on visitor-visitor relationships have not addressed the reason why contacts are established in the first place, and also neglected factors influencing these occurrences.

The second part of sub-question 1, namely the impact of social, individual and environmental factors on social interactions, is also important. As previously illustrated in the literature review, social factors could include language skills, cultural norms and values or nationality. Individual factors could include the assigned importance to the social aspect of travelling, demographics or appearance, or more situational factors such as the current mood or an individual's energy levels. Environmental factors such as user density or proximity can also have an influence on the occurrence of social interactions between visitors. Since interaction participants may not be consciously aware of effects that factors like these may have on their encounters, using only unstructured interviews or observation as research methods in this context will not be sufficient. Regarding influential factors, previous studies were limited by their method and setting, and it is thus necessary to avoid these particular limitations for this research to gain a deeper and broader understanding of the complexity of social interactions.

3.2.2 Sub-question 2 – What are the dimensions and processes of these social interactions?

Sub-question 2 then aims to explore the content of social interactions between visitors that emerged from the interplay of antecedents and influential factors as discussed in sub-question 1. The dimensions and processes of social interactions can be expected to differ, depending on why and in which contexts they happen. Due to the complex nature of social interactions, it is necessary to examine a wide range of detailed factors. These will contribute not only to a better understanding of how the actual social interactions are manifested but also how their process differs depending on whether the respective interviewees were the initiator or the target of an interaction, which influential factors they were exposed to, and why they entered into their respective interactions. Thus, the following issues need to be considered:

- What are the dimensions of social interactions between visitors, in particular duration, formality and conversational contents?
- What are the sequences and repertoires of elements of behaviour as well as the rules displayed during social interactions between visitors?
- Do antecedents change throughout the course of the interaction?

- How do social, individual and environmental factors influence the process of social interactions between visitors?

Regarding the processes and dimensions of social interactions between visitors, Argyle et al. (1981) provide several factors such as rules, roles, sequences and repertoires of elements of behaviour, and aspects relating to the environmental setting that influence what happens during interactions. Parsons (1968) also highlights the importance of social norms and cultural values. The existence of specific patterns and elements of behaviour has also been confirmed in several consumer and visitor related interaction studies (see Harris & Baron, 2004; Levy et al., 2011 for overviews). To address sub-question 2, it is therefore necessary to collect information relating to what is happening during social interactions and how they are structured, as well as how and to what extent social and environmental factors influence their course and contents.

This requires data that relate to actual social interactions, as displayed in the second part of the framework labelled 'process'. It includes information on the participants of social interactions and the actions and responses that they receive, such as types of signals, conversational topics, the duration of the interaction and the level of formality between participants. This information will also provide a first insight into the rules and roles, the sequences, and the repertoires of elements of behaviour by looking at certain patterns that occur throughout different social interactions between visitors. In combination with sub-question 3 (perception and evaluation of interactions), it will then be possible to determine the effect and importance of some of Argyle et al.'s (1981) features of social interactions.

Previous research that considered dimensions and processes of interactions is mostly limited to Harris and Baron (2004) and Murphy (2001). As mentioned in the previous section, Harris and Baron's (2004) study was concerned with social interactions on trains and determined duration as a factor impacting enjoyment while also discovering predictable patterns in conversation topics. However, this study was strongly limited by the research setting. In addition, even though the existence of certain behavioural patterns and a positive perception and impact of social interactions was confirmed, the study includes no further information on potential interdependencies between influencing aspects. Due to the nature of the research, the

effect of social, individual and different environmental factors was not included. The same gap applies to Murphy's (2001) study examining Argyle et al.'s (1981) features of social situations in a backpacker context. Even though all nine features have been confirmed using in-depth interviews, the target group and research setting is strongly characterised by the social nature of backpacking and youth hostel environments, leaving no possibility to explore social interactions between travellers in a context that would be more generally applicable and allow for a variety of other potentially influential factors to be examined. It is therefore an essential part of this research to collect data with a strong focus on breadth and depth in order to be able to not only illustrate what is happening during social interactions but also the underlying reasons and influential factors that contribute to and determine them. Without being aware of why the process of interactions develops in a particular way, research on social interactions in tourism settings cannot develop further.

The range of social, environmental and individual factors as summarized in the previous section can influence not only the initial occurrence but also the interaction process and therefore needs to be taken into consideration when exploring sub-question 2.

3.2.3 Sub-question 3 – How are social interactions between visitors perceived and evaluated?

The third sub-question then considers the individual perception of social interactions between visitors. This is expected to be strongly connected to sub-questions 1 and 2. The antecedents as original goals have been suggested to impact not only the processes and dimensions of social interactions but also their subsequent perception and evaluation. The previously collected information on occurrence and interaction details will thus provide the foundation for the following additional information that will need to be collected:

- How do visitors perceive interactions with other visitors and do these differ in regards to their respective dimensions and antecedents?
- What determines the evaluation of a social interaction with other visitors as being either positive or negative?

Social exchange theory establishes the importance of antecedents for the evaluation (Andereck et al., 2005), while literature on visitor satisfaction suggests expectations as a major factor, as well as the importance assigned to specific aspects (e.g. Oliver, 2010). The length of the encounter has also been suggested to impact the evaluation of a social interaction, as well as the behaviour of participants according to social rules (e.g. Grove & Fisk, 1997; Harris & Baron, 2004). To be able to understand why certain interactions are perceived and evaluated in certain ways, it is thus necessary to complement the data collected to address sub-questions 1 and 2 with information on prior expectations towards the social aspect of a visitor experience. The literature indicates that the evaluation of a social interaction depends on at least some aspects of its dimensions and processes. Grove and Fisk (1997) used the critical incident technique to examine the impact of other customers on the service experience and looked at the differences between experiences that were evaluated as either positive or negative. Although this provides a good overview of the perceptions of different types of behaviour, examples are located on extreme ends of the scale and, again, do not include any aspects or details of the interaction apart from the essential action leading towards the final evaluation.

Interactions can differ widely, be it in their locations, antecedents, participants, dimensions, processes, durations, or any other characteristics. So far, the only aspects that have been found to influence the final evaluation relate to selected dimensions and rules, and given the range of aspects involved it seems unlikely that other factors have no impact on how visitors perceive various social interactions with each other. Sub-question 3 can therefore only be addressed if all information outlined during sub-questions 1 and 2 is fully available to provide a broad and solid foundation for assessing perceptions and final evaluations. This will be complemented by information on the interviewees' expectations towards their visitor experience as well as the social aspect of it.

3.2.4 Sub-question 4 – How do social interactions impact the visitor experience?

The contribution and impact of social interactions between visitors on the visitor experience is the subject of sub-question 4. After examining the antecedents, process, perception and evaluation of visitor-visitor interactions, it is then crucial to address what meaning these interactions hold for visitors. Different types of social interactions can be expected to impact the individual visitor experiences in different ways, and it will be examined what contributes to or even determines certain types of impacts. Sub-question 4 thus looks at the following issues:

- In which ways can social interactions influence the visitor experience – both during specific situations or attractions and over the course of the full holiday?
- What factors do these types of impact depend upon?

This addresses the effect of social interactions on the visitor experience. Interactions with other visitors are part of the social aspect of a visitor experience, yet the exact ways in which they contribute to this experience has yet to be determined. It can also be assumed that antecedents, process and perception influence the ways in which these impacts are manifested, yet their interdependencies and relationships remain unknown. Prior studies have established one form of impact, namely connections between the social aspect of an experience and subsequent satisfaction levels (see Table 2.1) without elaborating in more detail on the factors that determined these impacts. The assigned importance and the level of discrepancy between expected and perceived performance have been shown to contribute to the level of satisfaction with an experience, and also with social interactions. In addition to information related to sub-questions 1, 2 and 3, an evaluation of satisfaction and the part that social interactions play within this needs to be examined to address sub-question 4.

Although a number of studies (i.e. Grove & Fisk, 1997; Heimtun, 2011; Wu, 2007) found a direct link between interactions with other customers or visitors and the evaluation of their overall experience and satisfaction with it, none have looked at the overall process of these interactions from occurrence to evaluation. It is known that there is a connection, the influencing factors and directions of the impact are, however, still unknown.

3.3 Overview of the methodology

Before going into more detail regarding the actual methods of data collection, this section will address the research paradigm upon which this research is built, followed by the process of the final research approach.

3.3.1 Research paradigm

The literature as examined in Section 2.2 has identified several aspects of social situations and interactions that are assumed to be interconnected and universally applicable, yet also implies that interaction participants do not necessarily experience the same interaction in the same way. They may hold different values, act upon different motivations, and therefore may perceive social interactions and their outcomes differently. As outlined in Chapter 1, this research is concerned with both the nature of and patterns in visitor-visitor social interactions and the personal meaning these interactions hold for participants, which in turn can significantly differ depending on the individuals and their subjective experiences.

The research paradigm adopted for this study consists of a post positivist approach, which accommodates the need for an in-depth understanding of the patterns of social interactions between visitors without neglecting the individual interpretations and impacts of the phenomenon. Pearce's (2005b) assessment that visitor-visitor interactions are a core part of the visitor experience as they are actively constructed by the visitors themselves, is in accordance with the chosen research paradigm. Post positivism is based on the assumption that reality is socially constructed by the individuals who inhabit it and therefore contains multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2007; Noor, 2008). In discovering these perspectives, post positivist researchers often "maintain 'positivist' elements such as quantification and the search for causal factors, while incorporating interpretivist concerns with subjectivity and meaning (...), or advocates of pragmatic combinations of quantitative and qualitative methods" (Seale, 1999, p. 22). Additionally, post positivism does not advocate a particular methodology but assumes that the research instruments are chosen solely based upon whether or not they are suitable for answering the research questions (Wildemuth, 1993).

This study adopts the post positivist paradigm in a number of ways, which are inextricably connected with the sub-questions outlined in the previous section. Sub-questions 1 and 2 are concerned with the patterns of social interactions between visitors and aim to make statements that will be applicable to not only particular individuals but a wider population. In this sense, the positivist element of objectivity and generalizability remains (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004), represented by the way in which data analysis was approached (analysis of qualitative data using quantitative methods, see Section 3.5.5) and how a visitor typology was used to contextualize the findings (see Section 4.2). When looking at sub-questions 3 and 4 however, the focus on perception, evaluation and impacts on a subjective experience goes beyond a solely positivist approach and touches upon an interpretivist one. Interest here lies in what these interactions mean to individuals, how visitors feel about them, and what the phenomenon comprises from a more individualistic perspective. This goes beyond the realms of positivist research, and by including verbatim quotations from interviewees it is ensured that their individual voices are heard.

In addition, the position of the researcher within the research process adheres to the post positivist view that pure objectivity cannot be achieved. Reality is regarded as a social construct, which in turn means that the reality of the research process is, to a certain extent, affected by the researcher. What distinguishes the researcher's positionality within this study from paradigms such as constructivism or interpretivism is the conscious attempt not to be or become part of the phenomenon to be researched but to be an observer as opposed to an active participant (Jennings, 2010; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). However, a number of individual factors require acknowledgment to provide an accurate picture of the epistemological context. Firstly, a background in sociology and strong personal interest into human behaviour and group dynamics in a tourism context strongly determined the overarching research question and thus the focus of this study. Furthermore, the researcher shared a number of characteristics with some of the interviewees, namely being a female in her late twenties from Europe, having travelled around New Zealand both as a backpacker and a free independent traveller (see Section 1.4.2), and thus sharing interests such as living and travelling abroad and experiencing new environments. Due to this, as well as extensive personal experience with the

phenomenon to be studied, particular attention was paid to the objectivity of the research process to avoid individual meanings, opinions, and emotions influencing data collection.

Section 1.4 already implied that New Zealand as the research context strongly impacts the sample and therefore the findings of this study, thus implying that they may not necessarily be applicable to other settings or visitor types. A post positivist approach acknowledges these limitations (as further outlined in Section 3.7) by accepting that research findings are inherently connected to their research context. Although internal generalizability of data can be achieved, this does not necessarily result in universal generalizability (Clark, 1998), as findings can never be fully objective but always contain a subjective element (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

In summary, the post positivist research paradigm supports both the focus of this study as well as the methodological approach taken to answer the research questions by acknowledging the subjective impacts of individual experiences, yet also being concerned with the underlying logical interdependencies and patterns. The steps undertaken to collect data will now be described in the following section.

3.3.2 Research approach

Due to the limitations of the literature upon which the conceptual framework as introduced in Section 2.5 is based, it was necessary to pursue the research question as outlined in Section 3.2 in a series of steps to ensure data quality and make informed decisions on further research instruments and foci. This also includes the selection of potential interviewees and the settings in which they should be approached. The lack of comprehensive data also made it likely that aspects that factor into the nature, process, and evaluation of social interactions between visitors had not yet been considered. This made it necessary to first gain an initial understanding and knowledge of the issue, with a certain amount of flexibility and adaptability in the methods to react to the emergence of hitherto unknown factors. Due to the particular characteristics of this research, the research process needed to evolve during different steps of the methods, with data evaluation and method adjustment preceding each step, which is in accordance with the post positivist view that the issue on hand should determine the research tools.

Figure 3.1 Multi-stage research process for examining social interactions between international visitors in New Zealand

The research process as outlined in Figure 3.1 thus consisted of a multi-step approach. After identifying the research gap in Part 1, a qualitative exploratory phase (Part 2) followed. Only after the results of the exploratory phase were analysed, were the methods for Part 3 developed.

Part 1 consisted of identifying the research gap and aims and objectives of this study based upon the literature review, as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. This was followed by the development of the research design of the exploratory phase as depicted in Part 2. It was necessary to first gain insight into the settings and circumstances in which visitors to New Zealand interact with and talk to each other (sub-question 1), how they perceive and evaluate different types of interaction (sub-question 3) and what possible impact these might have on their visitor experience and satisfaction with it (sub-question 4). Without this knowledge, neither an informed selection of interviewees nor of appropriate research settings would have been possible. It was essential to ensure that the phenomenon to be studied actually occurred in the chosen research settings and that the interactions to be studied in this context would not be overly specific but could provide a general overview of how visitors interact with each other during their overall travels, not just during one specific activity or situation. This knowledge then enabled an informed decision about the methodological approach employed in Part 3, during which the processes and dimensions of social interactions could be examined more closely with minimal recall and selective perception issues (sub-question 2). Therefore, Part 2 of the research design consisted of exploratory semi-structured in-depth interviews with international visitors in New Zealand.

After analysing the information originating from these interviews, the use of further personal semi-structured in-depth interviews was determined. Had a certain pattern relating to the interviewees' experiences and perceptions (settings, circumstances, influencing factors, importance, impacts) emerged throughout the interviews, the methodology would have been adapted to account for the possibility of using more quantitatively oriented research instruments in possible combination with participant observation. As the exploratory interviews did not reveal sufficient information to select specific sites, the process as displayed in Part 3 of Figure 3.1 was chosen to continue qualitative data collection not at specific sites or during particular activities but within a wider and more generalized approach. It was thus necessary to first

define the major differences in the data and the detailed factors or issues that did not allow for a more targeted investigation. After identifying the issues that needed further attention, the research methods were refined. In this case, further qualitative research was advisable.

Data collected during the exploratory interviews of Part 2 did not highlight any situations, circumstances or locations in which social interactions with other visitors seemed either more frequent or more significant, and the importance and evaluation of interactions that interviewees have had so far did not depend on geographical or circumstantial factors. In addition, a wide array of social interactions was described during Part 2 that differed not only in the circumstances of their occurrence but also in regards to their processes, dimensions, and their assigned importance. It was therefore not possible to identify specific locations that would have provided the researcher with a large number and representative variety of social interactions. Neither was it possible to collect enough information on specific social interactions to regard those as representative. Therefore, further data was collected using personal in-depth interview. Interview guidelines were developed by putting a particular focus on further investigating these differences, aided by two pilot tests to explore the feasible interview length, the timeframe within which the interviewees' specific social interactions had to be located, and how the research interests and the whole range of potential social interactions could effectively be communicated to interviewees.

In Part 4, the data gained during the main interviews was then analysed in a way appropriate to the nature of data collection and research questions using a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches (see Section 3.5.5), followed by its discussion as related to the original research question and its sub-questions, the underlying theoretical framework and the literature review.

3.4 Exploratory interviews – Research process Part 2

3.4.1 Methodological approach

The main purpose of this exploratory research phase was to gain an initial insight into the phenomenon of visitor-visitor interactions. Before developing a research instrument that collects all information as illustrated in Section 3.2, it was crucial to first have an understanding of when, where, why, and how social interactions between visitors in New Zealand occur. It is only possible to explore the phenomenon in more detail when its manifestation is understood. Thus, personal, semi-structured in-depth interviews as used by Murphy (2001) in her study of social interactions of backpackers have been determined as the most suitable research instrument for Step 2 of the research process. Previous studies looking at visitor-to-visitor or consumer-to-consumer interactions have also used non-participant observation (Harris & Baron, 2004), experiments (Levy et al., 2011) and quantitative surveys (Huang & Hsu, 2010). However, these instruments fail to address the research question of the present study in an appropriate manner, since they are either unable to collect underlying and non-observable data or do not provide the possibility to further explore individual experiences in detail. This includes for example changing antecedents, the variety of influential factors (social, environmental, individual) that interviewees might not remember unless specifically prompted, and personal perceptions as well as meanings. The chosen method ensured that certain key questions would be addressed, as well as providing interviewees with the opportunity to raise further items or issues as they deemed applicable and important. An additional emphasis was put on discussing situations in a broader context, not only focusing on the pre-defined aspects but looking for additional, yet unknown factors that might also play a role in social interactions between visitors. Therefore, the final content of the interview was to a certain extent based on the emergence of issues that were relevant for interviewees.

3.4.2 Research locations and participants

After determining the research instrument, it had to be decided who should be interviewed and where, as well as whether the interviews should focus on social interactions with other visitors in a more general context or on interactions during a specific activity or timeframe.

When it comes to the settings or types of visitors that should be targeted during exploratory interviews, it was decided early on not to limit the research to a certain visitor type. Murphy's (2001) research on social interactions amongst backpackers, for example, consisted of personal interviews solely undertaken in backpacker accommodation and thus constrained the applicability of the findings to this specific type of traveller without the potential of adding insight into other forms of tourism. Backpackers, although a convenient and easy-to-reach traveller segment, are known to assign a high importance to the social aspect of their travels (e.g. Binder, 2004; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; O'Reilly, 2006), whereas the goal of this thesis is to provide information about a wider group of visitors that functions as a stepping stone for further research. Therefore, settings had to be identified that were not restricted to certain visitor types, activities or personal interests. Contacting potential interviewees in their chosen accommodation was also eliminated – even though travellers staying at backpacker hostels or motorhome parks would be easily approachable, interviewing at hotels or motels would come with limitations (i.e. time restraints of potential participants, management cooperation, covering a number of accommodation styles and budgets) that would extend the scope of this research.

In order to evaluate potential research settings, preliminary field research was undertaken in November 2011 to observe the behaviour of and social interactions between visitors in different tourist related situations. The researcher participated in two guided tours in and around Wellington, a three hour seal colony tour and a Lord of the Rings themed tour visiting filming locations. In addition, the Wellington Zoo was visited and a guided city walk around Wellington was undertaken. However, relatively few interactions between unacquainted visitors were observed during all four trips, and the environmental setting, group constellation, personality type, and tour guides appeared to have a strong impact without the researcher being able to determine influential connections simply by observation. Due to the structure of these activities and the time constraints that came with it, it was also not possible to

conduct prolonged interviews in these settings. The nature of organized activities would not have allowed participants to focus solely on the interview process, while the focus and monetary cost of these activities would result in a sample restricted by personal interests and budget. Therefore a wider approach was selected that would not be limited to specific settings and interactions that occurred in these settings.

It was decided next to focus on settings that are accessible to and used by a wide variety of visitors. One of the chosen locations was the Interislander ferry travelling between Wellington and Picton. Apart from domestic flights, ferries are the only way to travel between New Zealand's North and South island, and are used by most types of visitors. Potential interviewees also had little distraction during the 3.5 hour journey, therefore a high response rate was expected. Further interviews were conducted in Te Papa Tongarewa, the National Museum of New Zealand and the cable car station at the botanic gardens. Two of the main free attractions in Wellington, they are visited by a wide variety of tourists and are less dependent on certain demographic characteristics, group constellations, budgets, or travel styles than, for example, themed special interest activities or paid organised tours. The final research setting was the i-SITE (visitor information centre) in central Wellington, offering yet another opportunity to access a wide variety of visitors in a setting that is also not dependent on weather.

3.4.3 Data collection

Domestic and international visitors aged 18 and over to New Zealand were personally approached by the researcher, as domestic visitors were only excluded later throughout the study (see Section 3.5.1). Interviewees had to be fluent in either English or German, as these were the two languages in which the researcher was able to conduct interviews in such depth. On the Interislander ferry, participants were chosen solely on their accessibility, meaning that they had to have chosen a seat that would allow for sufficient space to conduct the interview as well as enough privacy so fellow passengers would not be able to overhear the conversation. At Te Papa, the botanic garden and the i-SITE, every person passing the interviewer was approached. When user density did not allow for this, the next person passing closest to the interviewer was chosen. Interviews were digitally recorded and handwritten notes

were taken during the interviews. In accordance with the Human Ethics Committee guidelines, the purpose of the interview and the information covered on the information sheet was clearly stated and participants were required to sign a consent form in order to continue with the interview (Appendix A).

During the interview, an interview guideline was used (Appendix B). First the suitability of interviewees was established by confirming that they have had contact with other visitors during their stay. Since all those approached had contact with other travellers, no interviews had to be terminated. After determining common locations of contacts with other travellers and their circumstances, the critical incident technique (Chell, 2004; Flanagan, 1954) was used to determine a maximum of three social interactions that were memorable to interviewees. These were then explored in more detail, covering locations, antecedents, processes and dimensions of the encounters as well as the reasons why they were memorable and what impact they had on the interviewees' satisfaction. Although the critical incident technique as used by Grove and Fisk (1997) leads to certain interactions receiving more attention and thus being overrepresented in the initial data, they were chosen to be the most likely to expose aspects that are critical for determining importance, perception and evaluation of social interactions and the resulting impact on their experience. Questions about these specific social interactions were then followed by asking about locations or circumstances where social interactions with other travellers were not desired. At the end of the interview, interviewees were asked if there was anything else they would like to add or regard as meaningful for the study, before providing demographic data and information about their travel style and being thanked for their participation. Interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes each, and were conducted between December 2011 and March 2012.

3.4.4 Data analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend early analysis while data collection is still in progress in order to recognize gaps and new or unexpected findings as soon as possible. After completing an initial round of 25 interviews during December 2011 and January 2012, data were analysed using a combination of manual coding techniques and electronic analysis using the software NVivo 9. This allowed emerging patterns and constructs to be identified early in the process. Apart from focussing on yet unconsidered aspects, the data analysis aimed at determining the following specific aspects which were aimed towards identifying preliminary patterns within social interactions and what individual meaning these held for interviewees:

- Initial overview of selected dimensions of social interactions
- Possible contributions of social, individual and environmental factors
- Common antecedents of social interactions between visitors
- Aspects making interactions memorable and important
- Perception and evaluation of different types of social interactions between visitors
- Importance of social interactions with other visitors for the visitor experience
- Impact of social interactions on the visitor experience
- Settings or circumstances where social interactions are less desirable
- Potentially suitable settings for further research.

Based on the wide range of information that emerged throughout the analysis, it was decided to expand the exploratory phase by another 15 interviews during February and March 2012 at Wellington's i-SITE, increasing the total number to 40. By extending the sample size, more value was added to the data, therefore strengthening their reliability and validity. While no new aspects arose during the additional interviews, several issues that had been mentioned by only few interviewees were strengthened and confirmed, therefore providing a more solid foundation for the development of the further research process.

3.5 Main interviews – Research process Part 3

3.5.1 Methodological approach

As mentioned in Section 3.2.2, the results from the exploratory interviews did not reveal sufficient information to select specific research settings. Interviewees were asked about where they most often meet and have social interactions with other travellers, to give examples of social interactions that they found to be particularly memorable and also to describe the impact that social interactions in general and specific interactions in particular have on their visitor experience. The most important patterns in responses need to be illustrated at this stage to understand the steps that led to the selection of the second and final stage of data collection.

There was no distinguishable pattern regarding the locations in which or circumstances under which interviewees most often meet other visitors. In addition, even though the large majority of them assigned a relatively high importance to social interactions with other visitors, claiming that these have a strong positive impact on their experience, most of them only had short and superficial encounters that they would not classify as particularly memorable or significant. It did not become clear during the exploratory interviews which types of social interactions were perceived in which way, and no pattern could be established that determined what made an interaction memorable or significant. Due to the large variety of social interactions mentioned, it was also not possible to clearly determine influencing factors such as environmental setting, interaction participants, or other aspects. However, the constellation of the visitors' travel group, their personality types, and travel style seemed to have a strong impact on the frequency and length of social interactions, although it was again not possible to see whether perception and impacts of interactions were also influenced by these factors.

An approach that would look at social interactions in general instead of specific encounters would thus not provide the details and interdependencies required to gain a fuller and more comprehensive picture of social interactions between visitors. A quantitative research instrument was found to be unsuitable due to its lack of flexibility and potential to uncover yet unknown information and its limitations in unearthing individual meanings and perspectives as required by the post positivist research paradigm. The main problems that arose during exploratory interviews –

namely recall issues and generalizations without being able to identify the exact context and influencing factors – could only be avoided by choosing further semi-structured personal in-depth interviews. This method would allow for specific interactions to be covered in greater detail, thus enabling the researcher to collect information relevant to the conceptual framework and to achieve a highly detailed and comprehensive picture of aspects factoring into social interactions in tourism settings.

In addition, domestic travellers were found to be hard to approach and often declined to participate on the grounds of them being accompanied by friends and/or not having sufficient time due to other commitments. Only one domestic interviewee was included in the exploratory research phase, which subsequently led to the elimination of domestic visitors from the main research phase. The lack of information on their situation, preferences, and experiences would have added another dimension to this research, and due to its exploratory nature and the reasons outlined in Section 1.3 it was decided to avoid a complexity of the sample.

3.5.2 Determining interview contents

Interview guidelines were developed based on the exploratory interviews and how the findings of these related to the conceptual framework (Figure 2.3). This comparison highlighted several aspects of the framework on which information had not yet been collected, as well as a number of potential interdependencies that could not be determined during previous interviews. It was decided that for Part 3 of the research process as outlined in Figure 3.1, several recent social interactions would be explored in detail by including all aspects from the framework in a specific context. During the exploratory interviews, social interactions were referred to by the researcher as contacts, encounters, and social interactions without giving any specific definitions as to what these might comprise. The exploratory phase aimed to compile a comprehensive picture of possible types of contacts between visitors, and the provision of additional information might have led to interviewees eliminating experiences they might otherwise consider as relevant. For the main interviews however, it was necessary to communicate the whole range of potential interactions to participants to ensure they were aware of the types of experiences that were of

interest for this study. The explanation of the abstract concept of social interactions was a major challenge for the main research phase, and two different pilot studies were conducted to address this.

A small pilot test was conducted with six international visitors at Wellington's waterfront. They were asked what, in their opinion, social interactions were, what types of contact they have had with other travellers, and how they would classify them. The aim of those interviews was to develop a preliminary classification of social interactions that was not dependent solely on the academic literature but on experiences and actual occurrences. However, none of the interviewees were able to answer the questions without further input from the researcher but required some examples as to what was meant by social interactions and what different forms these could take. The results of this pilot test were therefore again heavily influenced by the researcher's knowledge of the literature and the framework and the emerging classification was based on potential antecedents such as asking for help, offering help, or showing interest. Based on these results, a description of the range of social interactions was created which was then assessed during a second pilot test of six interviews in Wellington's i-SITE. Another purpose of the second pilot study was to confirm an acceptable length of the interview and to make a final decision as to how many recent social interactions to include and what the definition of 'recent' in this context would be.

It was necessary to capture not only personally important but a wider range of potential interactions with other visitors. Recall issues – one of the main problems during the exploratory interviews – had to be minimised as well, so the social interactions to be examined in the main interviews had to be relatively fresh in the interviewees' minds. During exploratory interviews it was found that even interactions that occurred only four or five days earlier could not be illustrated in as much detail as necessary, and a number of important factors such as who initiated the interaction or the exact conversation topics and their sequence could not always be identified. Interviewees sometimes explained this with reference to the constant stimuli that occur during travelling and the large amount of new information and experiences that need to be processed. Three options were thus considered, namely to ask for the very last interactions that occurred, interactions that occurred during the last 24 hours, or to cover interactions that happened over the last two days. The

second pilot study showed that, when asking for the last interactions that occurred, a disproportionately high number of interactions in the i-SITE happening just before the interview was included. The 24 hour window was in some cases found to be very narrow, depending on what interviewees had done over this time period. Based on these results, it was decided to cover social interactions that happened either during the day of interviewing or during the previous day. It was also determined that two social interactions (one where interviewees were initiators, one where they were the target) would be examined in greater detail. Additionally, the exact explanation to be used to illustrate the concept of social interactions to interviewees as developed based on the first pilot test was tested and finalised and, based on these decisions, the final interview guidelines were developed (Appendix D) and English- and German-speaking international visitors aged 18 and over remained the target group. Although for reasons outlined in Section 3.5.1 domestic travellers were excluded from this study, social interactions with domestic travellers from the point of view of international visitors remained part of the original research focus. However, as only two specific social interactions with domestic visitors were reported by interviewees, the findings of this research relate solely to interactions of and between international visitors in New Zealand.

The interview contents and questions were influenced not only by the academic literature as reviewed in Chapter 2 but also by the results of the exploratory interviews. This includes both content and the specific way in which questions were phrased. While this occurred in a number of places, it is perhaps most relevant for the perceived depth of social interactions, a concept that plays an important role for sub-questions 3 and 4 (see Sections 3.2.3 and 3.2.4). Interviewees who participated in the exploratory interviews were asked how interactions with other visitors usually proceeded and how they felt about them. Without prompting, the word ‘superficial’ was frequently used by a wide variety of visitors as a characteristic to describe relatively brief social interactions that did not include much personal information. This term thus emerged from the data rather than from the literature or researcher, and due to its continuous appearance throughout Part 2 of the research process this usage was transferred to Part 3. Interviewees of the main interviews were thus asked to assess their two recent specific social interactions by perceived depth. ‘Superficial’ as a term stemming from the research was provided in combination

with ‘profound’, a term chosen by the researcher to provide interviewees with a contextual frame spanning two polar opposites (to be discussed further in Section 6.2.2).

The interview guidelines first covered travel related and demographic information, followed by an initial assessment of the importance of contacts with other visitors during their current travels throughout New Zealand. Interviewees were then asked to provide details on two recent interactions they had had with other travellers, one that they initiated and one that they had responded to. This distinction between two different types of interaction was made based upon the academic literature as presented in Section 2.2. Argyle et al. (1981) clearly illustrate the impact of individual goals on social situations and therefore social interactions, and Parsons (1968) as well as Andereck et al. (2005) all identified goals and the related expected outcomes as being highly influential for the process and the evaluation of social interactions. As mentioned in Section 2.5.2, it can be assumed that the goals of travellers who initiate interactions differ from the goals of those who are the targets of approaches and did not make a conscious decision to enter into a co-operative interaction with other individuals. Therefore it was seen as crucial to collect information on both types of interactions to create a comprehensive picture that includes both the perspectives of initiators and targets.

As it was not possible to examine the two different perspectives of initiator and target on the same social interaction, the method had to be adapted to gather information from one visitor on two different roles within two interactions. In the case of the interviewee reporting an interaction with someone they had met previously, the details to be collected then referred to the first encounter between the individuals. The full range of details relating to occurrence, antecedents, process, and perception of specific social interactions that was covered is displayed in Table 3.1. These questions were then followed by those relating to any negative experiences visitors might have had during contacts with other travellers during their travels in New Zealand, as well as to situations during which social interactions were less desired and possible reasons for not entering into social interactions even though the opportunity was available. Interviewees were then asked to think about specific situations during which other travellers had an impact on their satisfaction with either a particular situation or with their overall visitor experience. These situations

were not restricted by the timeframe applicable to specific social interactions. Although this information lacked the detailed context of the respective social interactions that led to the reported impacts, it did provide additional information on the different ways in which other visitors can impact the visitor experience, thus adding information to strengthen and support findings on sub-question 4 concerned with impacts on the visitor experience.

A high level of detail was required to cover as many aspects as possible that are known to factor into social interactions. Although the scope of this study did not allow for the compilation of a comprehensive list of all potential behavioural elements, and thus does not include aspects such as the exact movements and gestures of interaction participants or their tone of voice, an extensive list of interaction-related details was collected. This led to the interview containing both semi-structured and structured sections. Questions referring to non-specific and more general experiences were conducted in a semi-structured fashion, whereas those questions relating to the two specific recent social interactions (see Table 3.1) were based on a more structured approach. The focus was therefore put both on the more personal and perception-based aspect of the visitors' interactions and on gathering specific and highly detailed information such as times, durations, and topics and their sequences.

Table 3.1 Interaction details collected during main interviews

Circumstances of Social Interactions	Time and location
	Surroundings
	Activity at location
	Company at location
	Time spent at location
	Current mood
Process of Social Interactions	Interaction participants
	How was interaction started
	Reasons for approaching/responding to interaction participants
	Duration
	Topics
	Determinant of topics
	Level of formality
	Depth of interaction
	Actions/Movements during interaction
	Change of antecedents during interaction
	Level of participation
	Factors influencing interaction
	Previous Expectations
	Contribution to interaction
	Ending of encounter
Perception of Social Interactions	Emotional response to encounter
	Unusualness
	Impact on current situation
	Impact on satisfaction with current situation
	Comparison to previous experiences
	Previous expectations
	Further contact

3.5.3 Research locations

One of the main goals of this thesis is to examine a wide range of social interactions between visitors instead of focusing on specific environmental settings or visitor types. This also had implications for the chosen research locations, since they had to not only provide a wide variety of tourist activities but also cover a range of visitor types, regardless of travel style, special interests or purpose of visit. Therefore it was essential to conduct interviews in at least two different settings to ensure that neither certain visitors nor potentially important interaction situations were eliminated prematurely.

A number of different locations were considered, but due to financial and time restraints, only two could be selected. Wellington was chosen due to its ferry connection to the South Island and offering a wide range of special interest activities such as food, culture, movie themed activities, and providing a cosmopolitan setting easily accessible to the researcher. As a contrast, Rotorua as a still urban but less city-focused setting was chosen. Rotorua is the fourth most visited city in New Zealand (Tourism New Zealand, 2013a) and appeals to the majority of visitors due to its wide range of cultural, geothermal, nature-based, and sports related activities. Since the social interactions to be covered also included the previous day, the circuit-based nature of travel in New Zealand meant that the experiences of interviewees could also relate to activities in other parts of the North and South Island.

Instead of focusing on specific attraction sites or locations, it was decided to conduct interviews at the respective i-SITEs. Experience from the exploratory interviews showed a very good response rate and a wide variety of visitor types, while also providing an appropriate environment including cafes in which participants could be offered refreshments and snacks while providing enough seating space and offering a relatively private setting without being overheard. Package tourists are less likely to visit i-SITEs, however their exclusion from the study has been clarified in Section 1.3. The managers of both i-SITEs agreed to permit the researcher to conduct interviews on their premises.

3.5.4 Data collection

Overall, 76 interviews, lasting between 30 and 60 minutes each, were conducted during 2012 and 2013. These resulted in details on 121 specific social interactions, as not all interviewees had experienced both an initiated and a responded interaction with other visitors during the current or previous day. The first round of 36 interviews took place in Rotorua during April 2012. After returning to Wellington, several interviews were conducted in May. However, due to the change within tourist seasons (from mid-season to off-season) between the interviews in Rotorua and Wellington, it was found that the visitor profile had changed significantly, as well as the experiences that interviewees had had with other travellers. Several visitors specifically mentioned the impact of travelling off-season on their interactions with other travellers:

“This trip, which is really kind of a surprise, that there haven’t been that much interactions with people, whether from New Zealand or other countries, at the hostel. But it is off season, so the opportunities are less.”

Male interviewee, USA

“We haven’t talked to that many people from other countries. (...) We just really haven’t had very much exposure to other people from other countries. I think maybe being off season has something to do with it.”

Female interviewee, USA

It was therefore decided to postpone the second round of interviews in Wellington until December 2012. If interviews had been collected during the off-season, their lack of comparability and differences in visitor profile and experiences with the previous interviews may have had an impact on the findings of the study. Although this would have been a potentially enriching factor, it was necessary to consider the exploratory nature of this research. Adding yet another variable in the form of seasonality would have led to a partitioning of the sample by interview date, which in turn would have decreased the number of cases available for an analysis that aims to provide more generalizable information. The second round of 40 interviews was thus conducted in Wellington between December 2012 and March 2013. The 10 interviews conducted in Wellington before the postponement were not included in the data analysis.

For both rounds of interviews, potential interviewees were chosen by structured sampling and personally approached by the researcher. In Wellington, visitors were only approached when leaving the premises, so as not to interrupt them during their search for information or booking process. The researcher was located at one of two possible exits and, at quieter times, approached every visitor leaving the premises. At busier times with an increase in user density, the next available visitor was approached. The i-SITE in Rotorua also functions as the main bus terminal for the city. Therefore, a large number of travellers were present on-site without actively using the services the information centre has to offer. In this case, potential participants were usually approached using the previously described method – when leaving the premises through one of four possible exits. At quieter times when visitor flow through the exits decreased, visitors were approached who were sitting in the waiting areas (inside and outside), in the cafe or who were browsing the available information material for a longer time without proceeding to the information counter.

Interviews were again digitally recorded and handwritten notes were taken during the interviews. In accordance with the Human Ethics Committee guidelines, the purpose of the interview and the information covered on the information sheet was clearly stated and participants were required to sign a consent form (Appendix C) in order to proceed with the interview.

3.5.5 Data analysis

Data analysis as outlined in Part 4 of the research process (Figure 3.1) was started after the completion and transcription of the interviews. These verbatim transcripts were first read several times to gain a thorough understanding of the data and information within (Miles & Huberman, 1994), followed by manual coding. The information contained within the transcripts could be divided into two parts – one part referred to the social aspect of travelling in more general terms and the second part elaborated on the two specific social interactions with other visitors as discussed in the previous Section 3.5.2. This was to examine both patterns and personal experiences in accordance with the post positivist paradigm, while the remaining questions referred to experiences with social interactions in particular and other travellers in general. Two sets of codes were therefore necessary in order to build a

foundation that would enable the emergence of interdependencies, interrelationships and patterns within particular social interactions while still maintaining the flexibility to incorporate individual experiences and personal perceptions. These included information that illustrated the interviewees' personal attitude towards the social aspect of their holiday as well as other experiences that did not fit within the criteria of selecting specific interactions, but were still considered relevant enough to be mentioned during the interview.

When it came to the coding process, each interview was therefore read and coded twice. Since the sections of the interviews looking at specific social interactions were structured and followed a predetermined and relatively inflexible set of questions as outlined in Table 3.1, the coding process was straightforward and highly oriented towards the original interview guidelines with only minor variations and adjustments. A code referring to the circumstances of social interactions for example was labelled 'Activity at location', with sub-codes consisting of 'Accommodation', 'Transport' or 'Organized tourist activities'. The codes referring to the semi-structured part of the interviews underwent several stages before being finalized. After coding ten interviews, the current coding list was examined and adjusted. This list was then used to code a further ten interviews, after which it was again examined and adjusted where necessary. These adjustments most frequently consisted of combining certain categories, dividing them or creating sub-categories when appropriate. Interviewees were, for example, asked about any negative experiences they have had with other visitors, resulting in a code named 'Negative experiences'. Initially, this code included sub-codes such as 'Noise' and 'Lack of cleanliness. Due to the relatively small number of answers that were included in these categories, they were eventually combined in the sub-code of 'Inconsiderate behaviour'. After 40 interviews had been coded in this manner, no further changes within the coding list occurred and the data were then transferred into NVivo 9. Here, the final coding lists were entered and interviews were again re-coded accordingly. The reduction of physical material led to a clearer understanding of the information and, subsequently, several smaller readjustments of the final coding list.

Although exploratory interviews had already been coded and analysed during Part 2 of the research process (see Figure 3.1), the focus at the time was to determine the further methodological approach. A second analysis based on the coding list

developed from the main interviews was therefore conducted. After all interviews from the main research phase were coded, the transcripts of exploratory interviews were added to NVivo and transcripts were then coded based on the coding list stemming from the main interviews. During this process, no existing codes were changed and only one additional code had to be created to accommodate the previously collected data. This enabled a more reliable incorporation of the exploratory interviews in the findings of the study as further illustrated in Section 3.6.

While both the structured and the semi-structured part of the main interviews were included in the qualitative data analysis supported by NVivo, the comparatively rigid approach to specific social interactions also allowed for some quantitative analysis. As the post positivist research paradigm accommodates this possibility, a transformative approach was used to quantitize the data stemming from the structured part of the main interviews as detailed in Table 3.1. “Quantitizing refers to a process by which qualitative data are treated with quantitative techniques to transform them into quantitative data” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 253), and frequently consists of the reduction of qualitative verbal data into unambiguous items or variables that can then be analysed and presented numerically (e.g. Abeyasekera, 2005; Sandelowski, 2000; Young, 1981). It has been found to be especially useful when dealing with large amounts of qualitative data that contain a high number of individual factors, as a reduction of material by quantifying components allows for a more targeted analysis and provides the possibility to identify first the common and then the more individual aspects (Abeyasekera, 2005). Maxwell (2010) argues that the incorporation of quantitative numbers in qualitative research can contribute to an internal generalizability by identifying characteristics and connections that are applicable to a specific set of findings. In addition, the diversity of data can be identified and characterised and common patterns are more easily discovered. More importantly however, quantitizing data can help to “identify patterns that are not apparent simply from the unquantitized qualitative data (...) or even to participants (...). Individuals are often unaware of larger patterns beyond their immediate experience, and quantitative data can thus complement the participants’ perspectives in providing a clearer and more in-depth understanding of what’s going on in a particular setting” (Maxwell, 2010, p. 479).

This research is partly concerned with identifying underlying patterns and relationships within the interaction process and its influential factors. The data consist of a large amount of information referring to 121 specific social interactions as provided by interviewees, who – as suggested by Goffman (1967) and illustrated in Section 2.2.1 – are not necessarily aware of all interdependencies within their social interactions. The structured approach taken during the parts of the interview that related to specific recent social interactions and the commonalities in responses that existed within this data provided the basis for considering this transformative approach. The fact that the answers to each of the details as displayed in Table 3.1 could be broken down and assigned to a limited number of specific categories enabled a conversion of the qualitative data into a quantitative dataset. Quantitizing the data from the main interview was thus deemed appropriate as the first step in approaching data analysis. As mentioned previously, the conceptual framework on which methodology and data collection were based stemmed from a variety of different sources and disciplines, with no clear knowledge as to how the specific aspects of the framework were related to and interconnected with each other. Quantitizing the collected information on specific social interactions provided a first overview of the main interdependencies and influential factors, and allowed for a more structured and targeted investigation by first identifying independent variables and commonalities upon which the subsequent qualitative in-depth approach could be based.

As a first step, all information from the transcripts referring to one detail collected during the structured parts of the interviews was combined and, using quantitative coding techniques, assigned to specific categories that encompassed the information given by interviewees. Based upon these codes, variables within an SPSS dataset were created and the codes were transformed into their respective categories. For example, the question referring to the location of the social interaction resulted in a variable with categories labelled ‘accommodation’, ‘transport’, ‘organized tourist activity’ and ‘independent tourist activity’. A second related variable then included the specific location within these categories, such as ‘dormitory’, ‘common area’, ‘bus stop’ or ‘parking lot’. In addition, the demographic and travel related information provided was also incorporated into the dataset. After dataset completion, cross tabulations amongst the variables were conducted. Due to often

small sample sizes within specific categories, the rich information contained in the qualitative transcripts was then used to confirm the indications provided by cross tabulations. After connections between individual variables were determined, they were then identified as either dependent or independent variables. Variables that were shown to be independent were then examined in terms of the connections they displayed with the three parts of the specific social interactions (circumstances, process, perception, Table 3.1). Those that influenced all parts of the conceptual framework were then identified and served as a structure for further data analysis. The two factors identified as being highly influential for the occurrence, process and evaluation of social interactions between visitors were found to be the interaction type (were interviewees the initiators or targets) and a range of demographic and travel related characteristics. This initial approach to data analysis thus confirmed the already assumed importance of interaction type (Sections 2.2.3 and 2.5.2), while the demographic and travel related factors will be explained in detail in Section 4.2 which provides a typology of the visitors represented within the sample.

The two influential factors of interaction and visitor type were incorporated when analysing antecedents, process, perception, and impact of social interactions by not only looking at the overall information but also at the differences that existed between these factors. The main part of the data analysis consisted of an initial quantitative analysis of frequencies and cross tabulations between variables relating to specific social interactions and influential factors. Cross tabulations were conducted for demographic and travel related characteristics in combination with variables that related to the antecedents, process and perception of social interaction, for example whether there was a possible connection between the visitor type of interviewees and the locations in which they interacted. Based upon this, the qualitative analysis was undertaken to confirm potential relationships. If cross tabulations indicated that certain visitor types did indeed seem to interact more in one specific setting than in others, the transcripts from interviewees who belonged to this visitor type were examined more closely to confirm if this was indeed the case for the majority and whether or not they showed similarities in their answers. The patterns and connections developed through this approach then provided the structure for a purely qualitative in-depth analysis to determine the reasons underlying these relationships and their individual impact on the interviewees –

attention was thus paid to the explanations that interviewees had provided, namely why they interacted most frequently in these locations and not in others. At this point, exploratory interviews were incorporated in the data analysis. These were more general and less specific in nature, and thus contained a wealth of information that provided further insight into and support for these patterns and connections. They shed light on whether these patterns were only applicable to their respective contexts or if they were a more frequent and generalizable occurrence less dependent upon situational factors. If one visitor type reported to interact mostly in accommodation settings for certain reasons, exploratory interview transcripts were then analysed. This was to see if interviewees who had illustrated their social interactions with other visitors in more general terms (i.e. without referring to one specific interaction) also preferred these settings, and if their general explanations for this were in accordance with those factors that determined these choices for specific social interactions.

The main interviews as conducted during Step 3 thus provided the initial overview of interdependencies, whereas the exploratory interviews from Step 2 occupied a supporting role and provided information on the extent to which these interdependencies were dependent upon their specific social interaction.

3.5.6 Sample characteristics

Before discussing strengths and limitations of the methodological approach and its resulting findings, a brief overview of the sample of the main interviews will be provided. Table 3.2 includes the demographic and personal characteristics of interviewees. Female visitors accounted for nearly two thirds of the sample, and the large majority was under 40 years of age and of European descent. About two thirds also considered themselves more extroverted as opposed to introverted (only 19%) during their travels in New Zealand. Over half of the visitors regarded contacts with other travellers for this trip as either ‘important’ or ‘very important’, whereas for about a quarter, the social aspect of their travels was either ‘less important’ or ‘not important at all’.

Table 3.2 Sample characteristics – demographic and personal

	%	n
Location of Interview		
Wellington	53	40
Rotorua	47	36
Gender		
Female	68	52
Male	32	24
Age Group		
18-29	58	44
30-39	21	16
40-49	5	4
50 and over	16	12
Area of Origin		
Europe	72	55
USA/Canada	20	15
Australia/Oceania	7	5
Other	1	1
Sociability (self-classified)		
Very extroverted	6	3
Extroverted	54	26
Neutral	21	10
Introverted	19	9
Very introverted	0	0
Importance of contacts		
very important	15	7
important	38	18
neutral	21	10
less important	21	10
not important at all	6	3

In terms of travel characteristics, over three quarters of interviewees stayed in New Zealand for four weeks or longer, with about two thirds being single travellers. Rental cars or campervans were used by about half, public bus networks by about 40% and organised backpacker buses were the most popular form of transport used in New Zealand for 16%. In terms of accommodation, the most frequently chosen main types of accommodation were youth hostels (two thirds) and campsites (a quarter), followed by a variety of private and catered accommodation types. ‘Nature’ as the main focus of their holiday was named by nearly half of the interviewees, followed by culture (18%) and general sightseeing (15%), which corresponds to the overall interests of international visitors to New Zealand (see Section 1.4.1).

Younger, single and long-term travellers seem to be overrepresented within this sample. These correspond to Tourism New Zealand’s youth traveller segment as described in Section 1.4.2 – overall these visitors account for up to 25% of all international tourists (Tourism New Zealand, 2013d), yet they provide over half of the sample of this study. In addition, the number of interviewees corresponding to certain categories is often very small. The reasons for and implications of this will be further discussed in Section 3.7, which outlines the strengths and limitations of this study.

Table 3.3 Sample characteristics – travel behaviour

	%	n
Length of Stay		
Less than 4 weeks	24	18
4 weeks or longer	76	58
Travel Group Constellation		
Single	64	41
Partner	36	27
Friends	12	9
Family	4	3
Transport Types		
Public bus network	39	30
Rental car	30	23
Campervan	21	16
Backpacker bus	16	12
Own car	5	4
Hitchhiking	5	4
Plane	4	3
Train	3	2
Cruise ship	1	1
Accommodation Types		
Hostels	66	50
Campsites	26	20
Motels	9	7
Hotels	9	7
Friends/Family	9	7
Flatsharing	5	4
B&B	4	3
Huts	4	3
Apartments	3	2
Couchsurfing	1	1
Focus of Holiday		
Nature	48	34
Culture	18	13
Sightseeing	15	11
VFR	6	4
Work	4	3
Language Improvement	3	2
Other	6	4

3.6 Analytical framework for data analysis and presentation

The analytical framework that has guided both data analysis and presentation is now to be introduced. Section 3.5.5 already provided insight into how the data were approached to gain an initial overview of the information available for targeted analysis. Based upon this, the analytical framework was created.

By reflecting upon the conceptual framework in light of the results acquired through data analysis, a decision had to be made as to how the findings were to be analysed and presented in a structured and coherent way. Although the conceptual framework (Figure 2.3) has been created based upon an extensive review of the academic literature, and has strongly contributed towards the chosen methodology, its limitations mean that neither data analysis nor presentation should rigidly follow its structure. Instead, the individual sections of the conceptual framework have been used as guidance on how to approach the data and how to communicate its contents and implications in a clear and structured way that allows for an appropriate adaptation to newly emerging interdependencies.

The analytical framework as presented in Figure 3.2 therefore sequentially follows the course of a social interaction, starting with a description of the environmental setting as well as the interviewees' personal situation. Based upon these contexts, the original antecedents to enter into a social interaction will be described, followed by the actual process of the interaction. This process begins with the choice of an interaction participant and finishes with the termination of an interaction while encompassing both situational features as determined by Argyle et al. (1981), dimensions and dynamic motivations and the perceived depth of the respective social interaction. Factors influencing occurrence as well as process will then be described before examining how social interactions are perceived and evaluated by participants and what their impact on specific situations and the overall visitor experience is. The main influential factors previously identified as interaction and visitor type are not only overarching factors but will also be used to structure the individual parts when appropriate.

Figure 3.2 Analytical framework for data analysis and presentation

Without having a thorough knowledge of the context in which a social interaction occurs, its process and therefore the actions of interaction participants cannot be fully understood. The presentation of findings will thus begin with the visitor typology as indicated in Section 3.5.5, followed by a description of the environmental and personal context in which interviewees reported specific social interactions. This context is represented in Part 1 of the analytical framework. Included will be information such as the time of the respective social interaction and the location in which it occurred. Interviewees were also asked what they were doing at the location, by whom they were accompanied and how much time they were initially planning on spending within this environment. This will provide a first insight into the situations during and circumstances under which social interactions between visitors occur.

Following the analytical framework, the antecedents as represented in Part 2 are then to be discussed. These are the reasons or motivations why interviewees decided to enter into the social interactions whose contexts were examined in Part 1. Although the place of antecedents in the sequence of social interactions can be fluid at times, as will be discussed later in Section 4.4, it is necessary to have an awareness of these motivations before looking closer at the processes of social interactions. According to the literature, personal goals are one of the main factors determining social situations (e.g. Argyle et al., 1981; Parsons, 1968) and without examining these, the process of interactions occurring within these situations cannot be understood.

The analysis and presentation of findings will then proceed to the process of these interactions as represented in Part 3 of the analytical framework. Knowing their contexts and antecedents, the characteristics of the respective interaction participants as well as the reasons for choosing them will be discussed, and the different dimensions as well as dynamic motivations of social interactions between visitors will be presented. These include aspects relating to the duration, topics and formality of the interactions. After examining how and why social interactions were terminated, all findings related to the process will be drawn together to provide an overview of the existing rules, structures, behavioural elements and sequences as displayed during the social interactions reported by interviewees.

Part 4 will then provide a summary of various factors that influenced the preceding three parts. Although the majority of these factors will already have been mentioned throughout the previous parts of the findings chapters, it is necessary to clearly outline their relationships and interdependencies with each other as well as with Parts 1, 2 and 3.

Part 5 relates to the perception of these social interactions. An understanding of this can be reached only when a social interaction is terminated and completed and its components as outlined in Parts 1 to 4 are comprehended. The literature provides several suggestions as to what factors influence satisfaction levels, but it cannot be assumed that a positive perception and evaluation automatically results in a high satisfaction with either the interaction or visitor experience or vice versa. Therefore, it is not the satisfaction with the reported interaction that is of interest for this segment but simply the emotional response towards it.

In the final part of the analytical framework, the findings relating to Parts 1 to 5 are drawn together and the impact that these social interactions are perceived to have on the interviewees' visitor experience are explored. Section 2.1 illustrated the different dimensions that a visitor experience can have, ranging from the narrow context of a specific situation or activity to the overall travel experience in New Zealand. Therefore, the impact of social interactions had to be assessed for both dimensions, and in Part 6 of the analytical framework it will be investigated how interactions impacted these dimensions in terms of how they were experienced.

To summarize, although a large part of this research focuses on the actual process of social interactions as represented within Part 3, it is necessary to use a sequential approach when presenting the findings of the study to appropriately display the interdependencies between and influences on the particular parts. Chapter 4 is concerned with the context of social interactions as well as their antecedents, while Chapter 5 examines the interaction process from interaction participant approach to termination. Having achieved an overview of what is happening why and where, Chapter 6 then explores the impacts of these social interactions on the individual participants and how and why these contribute towards their visitor experience. The perception of and emotional response to interactions will first be illustrated, followed

by the ways they influence the more abstract concept of visitor experience in different dimensions.

These chapters include data from both the exploratory and the main interviews. The information on specific social interactions as summarized in Table 3.1 was collected during the 76 main interviews of Part 3 of the research process (Figure 3.1). Every interviewee was asked to provide detailed information on an interaction that they had initiated and on an interaction where they were the target and therefore responded to the interaction proposal of another visitor. Details on 121 social interactions were collected, which means that not every interviewee had experienced both an initiated and a responded interaction during the previous and current day. Initiated social interactions amounted to 58 and a further 52 responded interactions were reported. In the remaining 11 cases, interviewees were unable to determine which interaction participant functioned as the initiator due to situational circumstances. These data were evaluated using a transformative approach where initial quantitative analysis provided the foundation and directions for further in-depth qualitative analysis.

The key findings as illustrated during Chapters 4 to 6 are specifically concerned with the full picture of social interactions, meaning that all information unless otherwise indicated relates solely to these 121 specific social interactions stemming from Part 3 of the research process. The information from exploratory interviews (Part 2) is, as stated in Section 3.5.5, used to further support and strengthen these findings. Their presence within the findings is clearly identified – both general information and specific quotes that originated from exploratory interviews are labelled in a way that allow for easy distinction between the origins of the data. It is also necessary to emphasize the fact that all but two reported social interactions were first and foremost conversation based as opposed to activity based. Several interactions included a simultaneous activity-related element such as the participation in an organized activity (e.g. wine tastings), playing cards or preparing meals, however the main focus of the interaction as clearly expressed by interviewees was the conversational aspect. Those two interactions that did not include a conversation consisted of the interaction participants' mutual acknowledgement throughout independent, full-day activities but did not go beyond gestures such as smiles and nods to include an actual verbal exchange.

3.7 Strengths and limitations

The methodological approach used in this study comes not only with significant strengths but also several limitations that will now be discussed. It is the aim of this study to contribute to the existing knowledge by taking an in-depth look at a previously neglected issue within tourism and the visitor experience, therefore providing a solid stepping stone for further research that can then explore further implications. The approach illustrated during this chapter is very well suited to fulfil this aim, since it recognized and – as far as possible – addressed the limitations of previous research undertaken in this or similar areas. As described in Section 2.3, studies that have been concerned with the social aspect of travelling were limited in a variety of ways. Firstly, they researched the phenomenon in very specific settings which resulted in data that was continuously subject to specific environmental and situational influences. In addition, the characteristics of their samples were always somewhat homogenous, especially when it comes to the travel style, which has been found to not only influence the attitude towards the social aspect of travelling but also the circumstances during which this social aspect manifests itself (e.g. Heimtun, 2011; Huang & Hsu, 2010; Murphy, 2001). However, without being able to compare between certain settings, situations, or individuals, previous findings are non-transferable and lack insight in individual and external aspects that factor into social interactions, their attitude towards them and their impact. Distinctions between cause and effect and conclusions about relationships can thus not be made. The main strength of this research lies therefore in its comprehensiveness.

The limitations of specific settings were addressed by giving interviewees the opportunity to recall any interaction with other travellers as long as it fell within the specified two day timeframe, rather than researching social interactions in certain locations or situations. Due to the chosen research locations of Rotorua and Wellington, combined with the two day limitation, the environmental context of possible interactions encompassed both urban and rural areas, all available transport modes and a large variety of activities that visitors could undertake either at the location or in the surrounding areas. Sample limitations existing in previous studies were minimized by interviewing at locations that did not appeal to or favour only a specific visitor type, activity, or personal interest but were frequented by a variety of visitor types travelling New Zealand independently without being part of a group

tour. This resulted in information about social interactions that occurred in a number of different places and were subject to very different external impacts.

However, some limitations originate from the time and financial restraints that accompany a PhD thesis. Due to both, interviews had to be conducted during the main seasons to ensure that interviewees could report sufficient information. It was only possible to collect data within New Zealand's North Island, namely in Rotorua and Wellington. While the focus on the main season means that the findings of this study are not necessarily applicable to visitors in the off-season (see Section 3.5.4), the restriction in locations affects the overall sample in a different way, as not all travellers visit both or either of these destinations. New Zealand received 2.7 million international visitors in 2013 (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2013a), of which about 440,000 visited Wellington and nearly 500,000 visited Rotorua (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2013b). The interviews of the main research phase were only conducted in visitor information centres (i-SITEs), which were visited by 41% of all international visitors in 2011, with visitors from Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States using them most frequently (Tourism New Zealand, 2012); a distribution which is represented within the sample.

Further implications arise not only from the specific research settings within New Zealand but also from the ways in which international visitors travel within the destination. The circuit-based nature of travel in New Zealand as outlined in Section 1.4 differs strongly from other forms of holidays such as relaxation-oriented resort holidays. The continuous movement of visitors and the need to independently create and adapt flexible itineraries can be expected to be reflected in the dimensions and processes of social interactions, including for example the interaction duration or the conversation topics. The post positivist perspective of data not possessing universal generalizability is therefore applicable to this research as well, as the findings of this study may not necessarily be transferable to tourism settings which differ significantly from the research context.

This also applies to the sometimes small number of social interactions that this research is based upon. By differentiating between both interaction and visitor type, the findings as presented during the following Chapters 4 to 6 often correspond to

only a small number of specific social interactions; a fact that further decreases the potential for universal generalizability. However, the nature of a post positivist qualitative approach is not to collect information applicable to wide scenarios, settings or individuals but to gain insight into how a phenomenon manifests itself within a specific sample.

In addition, the methodological approach meant that participants had to be able and willing to spend between 30 and 60 minutes of their time on these interviews. Families with children and package group travellers were especially hard to approach, and none were in a situation in which they could have participated in an interview of this length, which led to these two traveller types being not represented in the overall sample. However, Section 2.3.2 clearly outlined the particular circumstances of tour groups especially in terms of the social aspect. This visitor segment could therefore be expected to contribute substantially different information that would not have adhered to the aim of this study – namely examining visitor-visitor interactions in a wider and generally applicable context. Although a more systematic comparison would have been highly valuable, it is beyond the scope of this research to do so in the detail it would require. While visitors with children would have added a valuable dimension to this research, their visitor experience can be expected to differ strongly from those who travel without children, due to their circumstances, priorities, foci and available time. For the same time-related reasons, long-term travellers who stayed in New Zealand for four weeks or longer are overrepresented, as they were less under time pressure and found it easier to adapt their schedule for participation. Since long-term travellers are frequently young visitors travelling as backpackers, this is the visitor type most overrepresented within the sample, as they were the ones that most frequently agreed to participate and often expressed enjoyment in talking about their travel experiences.

In terms of the group constellation of interviewees, the maximum number of people travelling together was two, as members of larger groups found it hard to participate without leaving their fellow travellers waiting. When interviewing visitors accompanied by their partner, it was often the females that decided to function as the main interviewee and took the lead in the interviews while the men tended to only listen instead of actively participating, leading to a relatively large number of female perspectives within the dataset. In addition, the sample consists only of visitors with

a Western cultural background. When approaching travellers from other cultures, participation was not possible due to either insufficient language skills hindering communication, tight or inflexible schedules, or due to a larger group constellation of travellers.

However, considering the New Zealand context of this study, the sample includes a variety of age groups and visitors from all of the main Western target markets as identified by Tourism New Zealand. In addition, a large percentage (over 80%, Ministry of Tourism, 2009) of visitors to New Zealand travel as either fully or semi-independent travellers (i.e. not as part of an organized tour, see Section 1.4.2), as did all of the participants in this study. The lack of variety within the sample is also counterbalanced by including the fellow interaction participants of interviewees, which frequently include visitors with different travel styles and cultural backgrounds. The academic literature that served as a foundation for the conceptual framework, and therefore the methodology, was also largely based upon research in Western cultures. Argyle et al.'s (1981) nine features of situation which heavily influenced the methodology were based solely upon Western cultures and it was often stated that they might not necessarily be transferable to other cultures in the same way. Although the results of this research may not be applicable to group travellers or other destinations that focus on different target markets, they are expected to provide a solid foundation for independent travellers with an interest in natural and cultural experiences.

The strengths of the methodological approach also include the way in which data were collected. During the structured part of the main interviews, the time frame restricting specific interactions to the current or previous day minimized recall issues and led to detailed information. As a strong focus was put on the perception of social interactions, impressions of the interactions were still fresh in the interviewees' minds and were not strongly overshadowed by unrelated experiences. The semi-structured part that included questions relating to experiences encompassing evaluations of and attitudes towards the social aspect of the whole holiday in New Zealand was often perceived as challenging, and frequently resulted in long pauses during which interviewees reflected upon the question. A common first remark was the request for some time to think about possible answers, as they had not thought about these issues before. Questions about the overall importance and impact of

contacts with other travellers during their holiday and the way in which these contribute to their visitor experience therefore often resulted in very detailed answers, with interviewees also drawing comparisons to previous travel experiences while making an effort to clearly explain and illustrate the reasons behind their assessments and opinions. The reflectiveness and engagement of participants often added another dimension to the data, by not only referring to their current situation but also establishing a connection with their individual personality, life stages, goals, values, travel styles, and travel history.

While the complexity of social interactions required a certain depth of the information collected during this study, it also came with several limitations. It is impossible to achieve a thorough, authentic, and complete situational assessment of social interactions only by participant-based oral recall, which led to some weaknesses. Although recall issues were minimized by limiting the timeframe within which interactions had occurred, this did not eliminate selective perception. The chosen methods relied on the accuracy and completeness of the interviewees' memories, and was therefore incapable of capturing every aspect and every detail of a social interaction. It can be expected that there are several factors that impact interactions on a more subliminal and indirect level that individuals are often unaware of, and gathering information on factors such as tone of voice, exact gestures, or facial expressions was outside the scope of this study. It is also unlikely that the reflectiveness of participants was sufficient to unearth previously subconscious factors, as will be pointed out in several instances over the following chapters.

Another limitation arises from the differentiation between initiated and responded interactions as described in Section 3.5.2. Theoretically it could be expected that there would be no significant differences between these two interaction types, as both interaction parties experienced the respective interactions in the same environmental settings and would report the same interaction process. Individual perceptions can of course vary, however simply occurrence-related information could be expected to be similar. Chapters 4 to 6 however will illustrate that this is not the case, and that both perceptions and occurrences differ depending on whether an initiated or a responded interaction was described. This can be traced back to both the characteristics of the sample and the methodological approach that allowed

interviewees to choose which interactions they would describe during the course of the interview. It was already suggested previously that visitors value initiated interactions differently than responded interactions (see Section 2.2.3), which led to visitors often selecting initiated interactions with a higher personal impact as examples. The fact that personal interviews of this duration do not appeal to every personality type also resulted in participants frequently being more extroverted personalities that readily initiate interactions and sometimes struggled to find examples where they had not been the ones to initiate. Those interviewees that considered themselves more introverted were often less interested in social interactions with other visitors in general and agreed to participate in this research not because they simply enjoyed conversations about their experiences but because the academic focus appealed to them. This also meant that, when they initiated interactions, they did so for specific reasons, which did not exist when they were approached – therefore leading to strong differences between initiated and responded interactions.

The sample characteristics as well as the reliance on interviewees' memories by oral recall are the main limitations of this research but are counterbalanced by the comprehensive in-depth approach taken to not only describe but also contribute to an understanding of the way in which social interactions with other visitors occur and proceed as well as impact they have on the visitor experience.

3.8 Conclusion

As outlined several times throughout this chapter, the main challenge for this research was choosing an appropriate methodology that would not only minimize the limitations of previous studies but also encompass the breadth and depth of information that needed to be collected. Section 3.2 highlighted the need for an understanding of the occurrence and antecedents of social interactions as well as the importance of dimensions and processes of social interactions. To understand the interdependencies and relationships within these social interactions, it was also necessary to gain insight into the social, individual and environmental factors influencing interactions between visitors. Great detail was required to then establish

the links between how social interactions were perceived and evaluated and what role they eventually played within the different dimensions of the visitor experience.

A post positivist research approach was found to be the most appropriate one, as the combined focus on pattern and relationships as well as on individual meanings and understandings is at the forefront of this research. Due to the lack of detailed research, a multi-staged explorative qualitative methodology had to be developed that allowed for a certain degree of flexibility to adapt to the emergence of previously unknown factors. This resulted in two rounds of personal interviews. First a semi-structured exploratory round was conducted to gain a first insight into the social situation for visitors in New Zealand and contributing information to determine the further research steps. Then, the main interviews were split into semi-structured and structured parts to enable a more detailed understanding of specific social interactions. Overall, 40 exploratory and 76 main interviews were conducted, with the final sample excluding some potential visitor types due to methodological limitations. However, the extensive and unique data that were collected, in combination with a transformative data analysis approach, provide deep and insightful results that fulfil the main aim of this research – namely to provide a first encompassing insight into a previously neglected phenomenon within tourism. Based upon the analytical framework as displayed in Section 3.6, the following three chapters will now present the findings of this research.

4 Context and antecedents of social interactions

4.1 Introduction

Parts 1 and 2 of the analytical framework (Figure 3.2) are concerned both with the environmental and personal context of social interactions between visitors, as well as with their antecedents. Their potential importance for the subsequent interaction process has been clearly identified throughout Chapters 2 and 3. It is crucial to know in which social situations the reported interactions occurred, as it is otherwise not possible to understand the variety of relationships within the phenomenon of visitor-visitor interactions. A sound knowledge of contexts and antecedents is required to appropriately contextualize further findings.

Sections 1.4 and 3.5.5 indicated that the travel behaviour of interviewees displays strong connections to the research findings – it determines for example the locations in which these social interactions take place. This travel behaviour can therefore be regarded as the foundation for the environmental and personal contexts within which visitor-visitor interactions occur, and thus also play an important role for further aspects of social interactions. As international visitors to New Zealand are classified on the basis of their travel behaviour (Section 1.4.2), this approach has been adopted for this study. Although not only travel behaviour distinguishes visitors from each other, it accurately reflects New Zealand as the research context. Section 4.2 will therefore first present a visitor typology of interviewees. Based upon this typology, the environmental and personal contexts of different visitor types will be explored in Section 4.3 before examining the variety of antecedents that has been reported by interviewees (Section 4.4). In doing so, this chapter contributes information to sub-question 1 as presented in Section 3.2.1, namely why visitors interact with each other and how this is connected to external factors such as the environmental characteristics. By identifying reasons for social interactions and a range of influential factors on interaction occurrence, this chapter will provide the foundation for the following Chapter 5, which will look at the processes of the interactions that have emerged from the contexts which are about to be examined.

4.2 Visitor typology

The profiles of international visitors in New Zealand as outlined in Section 1.4.2 have already indicated some differences in their travel behaviour. Research on social interactions in tourism settings frequently studied only one type of visitor (e.g. backpackers, group tour members, cruise travellers) and highlighted the unique characteristics of these respective travel styles (e.g. Murphy, 2001; Quiroga, 1990). In addition, data collection also suggested that the sample of visitors represented within this research consisted of not one homogenous group but of different visitor types. During both exploratory and main research interviews, a large number of interviewees also self-identified with a particular travel style, most notably referring to themselves as backpackers. This occurred when a certain combination of preferred accommodation and transport types and length of stay was given, and was complemented by a comparatively high assigned importance to contacts with other visitors. As not all visitors seem to display the same travel and behavioural patterns, it can thus be assumed that they will also show variations when it comes to the social aspect of their travels.

Visitor-visitor social interactions can to a certain extent be expected to be connected to the chosen travel style. Transport and accommodation preferences as well as the personal interests and activity selections may determine the locations and therefore social situations within which visitors have the opportunity to interact with other tourists. The features of these social interactions have been suggested to impact the overall process of social interactions (Section 2.2.2), and interviewees themselves often established direct connections between their chosen travel style and the social interactions they had experienced with other visitors. Both the literature and the collected data indicate that a more nuanced approach to the sample is warranted, and the post positivist approach with a need to understand patterns of different groups complements these arguments. It is therefore necessary to closely examine the sample of interviewees as introduced in Section 3.5.6 and consider the differences in their travel behaviour so as to account for the potential implications of travel-based visitor types on social interactions.

As tour group travellers have been excluded from this study, the sample consisted solely of visitors who travelled independently and self-organized. Interviewees frequently referred to themselves as either independent travellers or backpackers,

already indicating a potential first typology. Some statistical testing using cross tabulations and chi-square was conducted. However, as the sample size of 76 did not fulfil the basic requirements for these calculations, qualitative analysis was undertaken to determine whether a visitor typology could be applied to this research. The existence of both the youth traveller segment as represented by backpackers, and of free independent travellers was confirmed. Tourism New Zealand's research (see Section 1.4.2) indicates that youth travellers in New Zealand show a longer length of stay, have a preference for budget and therefore shared accommodation and are interested in a wide variety of activities. Free independent travellers on the other hand, who do not fall within the youth traveller segment, spend a shorter time in New Zealand, often stay in catered and more private accommodation types and focus predominantly on natural and environmental attractions and activities.

Over half of the interviewees were classified as backpackers, based on choosing more inexpensive youth hostels as their main choice of accommodation in combination with public transport, with the majority explicitly describing themselves as backpackers. The characteristics found in this sample correspond to Tourism New Zealand's youth traveller segment as outlined in Section 1.4.2 (Tourism New Zealand, 2013b, 2013d) and Becken and Gnoth's (2004) consumption patterns of backpackers in New Zealand. Loker-Murphy and Pearce's (1995, pp. 830-831) widely accepted definition of backpackers as "travelers who exhibit a preference for budget accommodation; an emphasis on meeting other people (locals and travelers); an independently organized and flexible travel schedule; longer rather than brief holidays; and an emphasis on informal and participatory recreation activities" also reflects the characteristics of this part of the sample. Backpackers were both the largest and youngest segment with the large majority being younger than 30 years. They were mostly Europeans and spent more than four weeks in New Zealand; nearly two thirds held a working holiday visa and stayed for up to one full year. Most backpackers were single travellers, only a few travelled in the company of friends. In terms of transport and accommodation modes, half of them preferred to use public transport such as bus networks and a third used backpacker buses, and virtually all chose youth hostels as their only accommodation while travelling through New Zealand. About two thirds of these visitors often described themselves

as extroverted personalities during this holiday and even more regarded the contacts with other visitors as important to them.

Free independent travellers (FITs) as identified by Tourism New Zealand are visitors who arrive in the country without previously having purchased all of the components of their holiday (Collier & Harraway, 2006; Ministry of Economic Development, 2013e). However, Hyde and Lawson (2003) proposed to take this definition further by including tourist behaviour at the destination and found that a flexible and evolving itinerary is a particular characteristic of this visitor type. Although backpackers fall within this definition as well, their travel behaviour differs in other ways (e.g. accommodation, transport, group constellation) and therefore justifies a separation from the FIT category not only for New Zealand's visitor types (see Section 1.4.2) but also for this study. All those interviewees eventually assigned to the FIT category indicated during the interviews that they were somewhat flexible in their travel behaviour, did not follow a strict itinerary determined by prior arrangements and did not have exact and pre-booked plans for the remainder of their holiday in New Zealand. A distinction was made between young and mature free independent travellers, based on their age. Interviewees under 40 were assigned to the young FIT segment (over a quarter of the sample) and those aged 40 years or over to the mature FIT category (the remaining 14 interviewees).

The young free independent travellers (FITs) differed from backpackers less in their demographic characteristics than in their travel behaviour and sociability. Less than a quarter of young FITs travelled alone as they were generally accompanied by their partner, and they chose private transport such as rental cars or hired campervans over public transport modes. Although over a quarter sometimes stayed in youth hostels, their accommodation choices were often determined by their mode of transport, making campsites the most popular accommodation for nearly two thirds of young FITs. Whereas the majority of backpackers classified themselves as extroverted, this traveller type had a more even distribution in regards to their personality type, with over half considering themselves as either introverted or in between the two ends of the scale. As only few travelled alone, they also rated the importance of contacts with other travellers as far less important than backpackers. A number of interviewees highlighted the fact that they placed a higher importance on spending time with their travel partner as opposed to with other visitors. While the travel style

of both young and mature FITs was similar in terms of group constellation and a strong preference for private transport, their responses towards social interactions with other travellers were very different. All interviewees were asked to provide details for one initiated and one responded recent social interaction, but not all of them could do so within the given time frame of either the same or the previous day. Both backpackers and mature FITs were always able to provide an initiated interaction but were not always approached by another visitor during the specified time period, whereas all young FITs could only provide details on one social interaction – mostly one that they had responded to. Mature FITs described themselves as more extroverted than their younger counterparts and placed a higher importance on the contacts with other travellers during their holiday in New Zealand. Although both visitor types frequently travelled with their partner, the mature segment appeared to be more interested in extending their social circle while on holiday. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the characteristics of the three established visitor types as represented within the sample.

While the lines between backpackers and free independent travellers may appear somewhat blurred when considering their similarities in demographic characteristics and sometimes also travel behaviour (see Table 4.1), it is the combination of the full variety of factors that makes it possible to separate them in this particular context. This research is concerned with social aspects, experiences, meanings, and impacts, and it is thus not only justifiable but necessary to acknowledge how variations in individual attitudes and travel style can affect the visitor experience in New Zealand and what it contains. The differences between these three visitor types have been found to strongly influence the results relating to large parts of both the conceptual and analytical framework and will therefore be used to structure several sections of Chapters 4 to 6 to facilitate a deeper understanding of the implications of the chosen travel style for social interactions between visitors. Due to the small sample sizes, especially of young and mature FITs, these findings are indicative rather than generalizable.

Table 4.1 Characteristics of visitor types

	Backpackers		Young FITs		Mature FITs	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Overall number	53	40	29	22	18	14
Age Group						
18-29	83	33	50	11	-	-
30-39	12	5	50	11	-	-
40-49	5	2	-	-	14	2
50 and over	-	-	-	--	86	12
Area of Origin						
Europe	87	35	68	15	36	5
USA/Canada	10	4	27	6	36	5
Australia/Oceania	3	1	5	1	21	3
Other	-	-	-	-	7	1
Length of Stay						
Less than 4 weeks	12	5	23	5	57	8
4 weeks or longer	88	35	77	17	43	6
Travel Group Constellation*						
Single	81	31	22	5	21	3
Partner	8	3	61	14	71	10
Friends	16	6	6	1	14	2
Family	-	-	11	2	7	1
Transport Types*						
Public bus network	50	20	22	5	43	6
Rental car	30	12	11	2	71	10
Campervan	5	2	56	12	7	1
Backpacker bus	32	13	-	-	-	-
Accommodation Types*						
Hostels	97	39	28	6	36	5
Campsites	11	4	61	13	14	2
Motels	-	-	5	1	43	6
Hotels	3	1	5	1	36	5
Friends/Family	3	1	22	5	14	2
Sociability						
Very extroverted	4	2	15	3	-	-
Extroverted	60	24	31	7	72	10
Neutral	20	8	23	5	14	2
Introverted	16	6	31	7	14	2
Very introverted	-	-	-	-	-	-
Importance of contacts						
very important	18	7	15	3	14	2
important	55	22	8	2	29	4
neutral	23	9	23	5	14	2
less important	-	-	46	10	29	4
not important at all	4	2	8	2	14	2

* Multiple responses possible, totals higher than 100%

4.3 Environmental and personal context of social interactions

As displayed in the analytical framework (Figure 3.2), the environmental and personal context of the specific social interactions as reported by interviewees corresponds to a number of factors. These include the location and time at which the social interactions occurred and the purpose for which the interviewees were within this location. Current company and the overall time spent at the location were also included. This information can be expected to strongly impact the social situation within which the interaction occurred. Section 2.2.2 clearly identified the characteristics of the environmental setting as influential, while the individual circumstances of interaction participants contribute towards their antecedents. In addition, the environmental and personal context will provide a first overview of the circumstances during which interactions occur more frequently, thus identifying initial factors that can either encourage or discourage visitor-visitor interactions.

Figure 4.1 introduces the structure of this section, which is influenced strongly by the previously introduced visitor types represented within the sample. Backpackers (see Box A) and young FITs (see Box B) preferred public transport and shared accommodation types such as hostels or campsites while mature FITs (see Box C) often chose more private transport and accommodation types like hotels or motels – choices which are represented in the locations of their reported social interactions. The personal context of these interactions however shows similarities across all visitor types, namely a preference to initiate interactions when not under time pressure and less preoccupied by other tasks or activities (see Boxes D and E). This section will now follow sequentially through Figure 4.1 by examining the environmental and personal contexts for each of the three visitor types. Then the differences between interaction type (initiated or responded), identified as the second influential factor in Section 3.5.5, will be explored.

Figure 4.1 Environmental and personal context of social interactions

4.3.1 Environmental and personal context of backpackers

This section is based upon 67 individual specific social interactions reported by backpackers during the main interviews, including both initiated and responded interactions. As seen in Box A (Figure 4.1), the previously outlined travel style characteristics strongly contribute towards both the personal and the environmental context in which their reported social interactions with other visitors happened. Backpackers showed a tendency towards social interactions in both accommodation and transport settings, while interacting comparatively less in more public settings or within organized tourist activities. These circumstances also contributed to the time that they spent at the location and thus the time that was available for social interactions. Interactions in accommodation settings often occurred in the evening without further plans for the day, while interactions on transport modes took place within an environment that was more restricted and often existed for several hours.

Most backpackers were single travellers, therefore the large majority of their interactions occurred when they were alone; only a few interactions were conducted while in company. The strong preference for youth hostel accommodation was reflected in the fact that over half of their interactions with other visitors occurred in these settings – most frequently in common areas and shared dormitories. The reliance on public transport was also strongly represented, as a further quarter of interactions took place either on or while waiting for transport. Most of the few remaining reported social interactions occurred during independent tourist activities such as city walks or sightseeing. Only two interactions took place during organized tourist activities as backpackers often highlighted the high cost associated with organized activities and their preference to participate less in these.

“In hostels. And on buses. Yeah, that’s probably where I meet most of them. I think all backpackers do. (...) Not so much when I go out, go somewhere, because I go with the people I meet in the hostel or on the bus.”

Female backpacker (USA, exploratory interviews)

As the most frequently reported location for social interactions with other visitors, accommodation and transport settings then determined both the activity or purpose at the location and the amount of time that interviewees spent there. In terms of accommodation settings, over three quarters of these interactions took place when

interviewees had at least one overnight stay ahead of them at the time of the reported interaction, while the remaining cases consisted of situations where visitors planned to leave their accommodation within the next two hours. Half of the backpackers reported doing nothing specific at the time of the social interaction, or simply ‘relaxing’. About a quarter were unpacking as they had just entered their shared dormitory, and most of the remaining visitors were involved in the preparation or consumption of meals when the interaction occurred. These activities already indicate that over half of accommodation interactions were conducted in the evenings, followed by over a third of afternoon interactions.

“In the hostels, the people you share the room with, or in the kitchen. Always in the kitchen, classic example, you have so much time in the evenings.”

Male backpacker (Germany)

Over half of backpacker interactions in transport settings occurred while being on transport – most frequently a bus, in some cases a ferry or a domestic flight. In these cases, visitors spent between one hour and a full day on their respective transport, with most interviewees reporting a timeframe of two to six hours. The remaining transport interactions took place while visitors were waiting for public transport to arrive and thus come with a significantly shorter stay at the location – half had a window of less than 30 minutes to conduct their interaction, and half spent between 30 minutes and one hour at the location. Due to the fact that most public transport services leave early in the day, transport interactions occurred both in the morning and in the afternoon.

“When you’re on a tour or when you’re on the Magic Bus, then you kind of just meet, you know, as part of your transport. It’s a long trip and there’s really not much to do.”

Female backpacker (UK)

4.3.2 Environmental and personal context for young FITs

Young free independent travellers provided a total of 22 social interactions with other visitors. As 22 interviewees were assigned to this visitor type, it means that none of them were able to provide details on two recent social interactions but could only elaborate on one interaction with other visitors. Young FITs mostly interacted with other visitors in both accommodation settings and during independently undertaken tourist activities, regardless of whether these interactions were initiated or responded to (see Box B, Figure 4.1).

Most young FITs were travelling with company – most frequently the partner, sometimes family members or friends. The majority of their reported social interactions thus occurred while they were in the company of their respective travel partners. Private transport such as rental cars and campervans were preferred by about two thirds, and although over a quarter of young FITs sometimes stayed in youth hostels, the majority used campsites throughout their holiday. Over half of their social interactions occurred in accommodation settings (campsite kitchens, vehicle parking lot), while the preference for private transport contributed to only one interaction being reported in transport settings. A further quarter of interactions took place during independently organized tourist activities, often including walks, hikes or specific sights.

“We hired a campervan, so probably campsites, and all these attractions, when sightseeing around town, the glow worm caves, that kind of thing.”

Male young FIT (UK, exploratory interviews)

The personal context within accommodation settings (i.e. campsites) as reported by young FITs shows similar characteristics to those reported by backpackers, with the large majority occurring in the evening where interviewees had at least one overnight stay ahead of them. The tasks or activities that young FITs were involved in at the time a social interaction occurred were limited to the preparation or consumption of meals, doing nothing or relaxing or, referring to the few morning interactions, while moving between campsite facilities.

“The holiday parks, yes, in the kitchens. People come together and cook, for dinner, for breakfast, and you talk.”

Female young FIT (Switzerland)

While accommodation settings provided young FITs with an environment in which social interactions could be conducted without time pressure, this was not the case during independent tourist activities or attractions. Those interactions most frequently took place in the afternoon or, to a lesser extent, in the evening. As this setting lacks the permanence of an accommodation environment, interviewees spent a significantly smaller timeframe at the location at which the reported interaction happened. For most of these interactions, young FITs stayed for up to one hour at the location, sometimes less than 30 minutes altogether. In addition, they were not only involved in their respective activity such as walking or sightseeing, but were also accompanied by their travel partner.

“Oh, when we’re out, when we see the sights, yesterday for example we talked to people while we were on a walk, but you don’t have much time, do you? You have plans and they have plans.”

Male young FIT (Finland, exploratory)

4.3.3 Environmental and personal context for mature FITs

Of the 76 interviewees, 14 were classified as mature free independent travellers. This group reported on a total of 26 specific social interactions. The travel characteristics of mature free independent travellers are in some respects very similar to those of their younger counterparts; however Box C (Figure 4.1) displays several differences in their interaction contexts. The main environmental settings in which mature FITs interacted with other visitors were both independently undertaken and, to a lesser extent, organized tourist activities or attractions. Their participation in organized activities and relatively extensive independent activities also led to a longer stay at the location and therefore more available time for social interactions.

Mature FITs were most frequently travelling with either their partner or other company. Although the overall travel company of other visitor types was reflected in their company at the time of the social interactions, mature FITs reported to be alone during over a third of their interactions with other visitors and accompanied by their travel partners during the remaining ones. Their accommodation choices were more varied and showed a lesser focus on shared accommodation types, thus less than a third of their social interactions occurred in the accommodation settings preferred by

the other two visitor types. Private rented transport was the most popular transport choice for mature FITs, and the three interactions that were reported in transport settings were restricted to hotel shuttles and regional public transport.

Organized tourist activities included wine tours, guided day tours, and cultural events and led to interviewees spending either a half day or sometimes a full day with their group. In these instances, the additional presence of the tour guide or organizer as well as the activities to be undertaken during the course of the tour meant that every interaction participant was involved in other tasks and activities at the time of the reported social interaction. Independently organized tourist activities on the other hand showed a greater variety in terms of the time that visitors spent at their location and what additional activities or tasks they were undertaking. These independent activities were exclusively outdoor activities such as city walks, hikes and treks. While nearly a third of mature FITs spent less than 30 minutes at their respective location when the interaction occurred, half of them stayed for one to two hours and, in the case of interactions occurring on treks, for the majority of the day. Tourist activities, whether organized or independent, were therefore the main setting in which mature FITs interacted with other travellers, both in the mornings and afternoons. They were also the setting in which they spent the longest periods of time.

“We talked to people everywhere we went to. We went to the hot springs at Hanmer, so we talked to people there, Shotover Jet, we went on the cable car in Queenstown... Everywhere.”

Female mature FIT (Australia, exploratory)

“You always meet new people. When you’re on organized tours, or do things by yourself, wherever you go the others who are there have similar interests, so you always talk.”

Female mature FIT (Germany)

4.3.4 Contextual variations by interaction type

While there are several differences between visitor types when it comes to the environmental and personal context during which their reported social interactions with other visitors occurred, strong similarities were found when establishing a connection between these contexts and the interaction type. When functioning as the initiator of a social interaction, all visitor types favoured certain circumstances regardless of their current location. When they were approached by someone else and were therefore responding to a social interaction, they did not have this level of control – therefore the circumstances of their responded interactions exhibited a far higher contextual variation.

As summarized in Box D of Figure 4.1, all visitor types initiated interactions with other travellers when they were less constrained by time and were less distracted by additional tasks or activities that would demand their attention. In the case of both backpackers and young FITs, not only did they prefer accommodation settings as the main environment in which to approach other visitors, but they also favoured certain situations within this environment. Interactions were often initiated in the evenings with at least one overnight stay ahead of them – either during meals or afterwards when interviewees were relaxing and not pursuing other activities. In the case of transport interactions, they were more frequently initiated while on transport rather than during a wait for the transport to arrive, again two situations which vary greatly in their time restrictions. Mature FITs often did not access these social accommodation settings, but initiated interactions during independent tourist activities, preferably when they were spending more time at the location. This resulted in them being able to invest more time in the respective interaction and also implies that, although they were involved in another activity at the time, they were under less time pressure and thus able to adjust their focus as well as their priorities without compromising their activity.

Box E (Figure 4.1) however shows that, when responding to interactions initiated by other visitors, interviewees were not able to control the interaction context in the way that they did when they were initiating. Both the environmental and personal context therefore showed much greater variety, leading to social interactions that occurred under time pressure and during situations where the respondents' focus was often preoccupied by tasks such as cooking or unpacking or simply by experiencing sights,

attractions, or environmental features. In addition, young FITs reported that they responded to more interactions than they initiated, whereas both backpackers and mature FITs seemed to initiate more readily and sometimes struggled to find examples of responded interactions. Although this may suggest that young FITs were more often approached by other visitor types, no such pattern can be established within the small sample sizes.

4.4 The antecedents of social interactions

The previous sections explored the circumstances during and contexts in which social interactions between visitors frequently occur. Now the antecedents or original motivations of these interactions will be examined. By drawing out the differences between both environmental and personal contexts as well as visitor and interaction types, the connections between the different sections of this chapter will be outlined sequentially.

Potential antecedents of social interactions have been identified in Section 2.2.3 and further illustrated in Section 2.5.1. Intrinsic antecedents were assumed to relate to pleasures that visitors would gain from interacting with other travellers. Extrinsic antecedents would be connected to a specific goal that interaction participants desire to achieve, for example information or directions. Conformity on the other hand can be regarded less as a specific goal or motivation but simply stems from the current situational features which, in combination with culturally dependent norms and values, require visitors to participate in a social interaction to be polite. The interviewees' statements as to why they decided to either initiate or respond to a social interaction with other visitors are consistent with these three previously identified antecedents. However, some overlaps emerged between intrinsic antecedents and conformity.

Figure 4.2 Antecedents of social interactions

Figure 4.2 outlines the structure of this section. Examples of the three antecedents will be given and the limitations in regards to distinguishing between them will be discussed. Based upon this knowledge, the antecedents within the sample will be explored by visitor type. At first glance, they seem to interact with other visitors for different reasons – backpackers for example interact more frequently due to an intrinsic antecedent whereas mature FITs often stated that their interactions were based upon conformity. This, however, is due to the previously examined environmental and personal contexts. Situations where visitors have more available time and fewer distractions, or restricted settings such as transport modes or accommodation common areas, encourage intrinsically motivated interactions. In contrast, situations that come with opposite characteristics often result in social interactions that are more frequently entered into for conformity.

4.4.1 Antecedent details and limitations

During the main interviews, interviewees were asked why they decided to participate in their specific reported social interactions. The three antecedents will now be examined closer as displayed in Box A (Figure 4.2). Two thirds of all interactions were entered for primarily intrinsic reasons, including both initiated and responded interactions. During the exploratory interviews, intrinsic goals were nearly always the first reason provided when explaining the reasons for interacting with other travellers in general. The personal value and enjoyment achieved through meeting people, exchanging experiences and gaining insight into other cultures and backgrounds was equally mentioned by all visitor types:

“I really like to be, ah, yes, to also get to know much about other cultures, so to meet different people from different countries.”

Female backpacker (Netherlands, exploratory)

“Yeah, we like meeting people and enjoy mixing with others, it’s an experience in itself.”

Female young FIT (Australia, exploratory)

“Just out of curiosity really, we couldn’t place the accent, and because it’s nice to chat, we always enjoy it.”

Male mature FIT (USA)

When extrinsic antecedents were the original reason to interact with other visitors, the interaction initiators required either help or information – asking for directions, information about certain activities or transport related requests fell within this category. Although only 11 specific social interactions were entered into for such reasons, this antecedent was frequently mentioned by interviewees during the exploratory interviews:

“Just bus timetables, when people ask you is this bus so and so because they didn’t know, and they just assume that some other tourist does. That does happen quite a lot.”

Male backpacker (UK, exploratory)

“We were just asking them if they knew if we could buy laundry powder here.”

Female young FIT (Switzerland)

“Basically to get information. Yes. It can be with regards to the location, it can be with regard to the experiences with, ahm, let’s say restaurants, with certain types of accommodation, giving opinions on something.”

Female mature FIT (Canada, exploratory)

Conformity as the third antecedent for interactions with other travellers was the original reason for about a fifth of reported social interactions, and most frequently occurred during situations where interviewees found themselves in restricted settings where they engaged in interaction simply to be polite.

“All my lifts, one of them was a tourist, no, two were tourists, and six were locals. And you talk to them too, but that’s really just utter politeness.”

Male backpacker (UK, exploratory) about interactions as a hitchhiker

“I think we introduced ourselves first, I guess just to be friendly. Sounds strange, but that awkward element, if you go too long without saying hello it just gets weirder.”

Female backpacker (USA) about an interaction in a hostel dormitory

“It was certainly coincidental that we were sitting down and struck up a conversation, but it would have been extremely rude not to have a conversation.”

Female mature FIT (UK) about an interaction at an organized tourist activity

The above quotes are representative examples of antecedents where the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic antecedents and conformity has been illustrated clearly. The antecedent of conformity was described during situations in which interviewees were in close proximity to others within a spatially limited area. However, very similar contexts and situations have been reported while referring to solely intrinsic antecedents as the initial reason for their interaction participation. Although in these cases intrinsic reasons were reported to be the only motivator, it can be suggested that conformity does play an additional role – the distinction between the two however was not clear in many interviews and interviewees might not have analysed their situations in the depth required to identify conformity as another possible reason due to an overarching intrinsic desire for interaction. The findings presented within the following sections are therefore conditioned by the methodological approach that relied solely on the interviewees’ perceptions, recollections and their willingness to reflect. The large number of specific social interactions claiming to have originated from only intrinsic antecedents may not necessarily represent an encompassing picture of the complexity of social situations. However, it does reflect individual experiences and perceptions, therefore not compromising the main purpose of this study. Additionally, it has been shown that not all interactions with other visitors can be regarded as purposive. Especially in the case of conformity-based interactions, interviewees often added that the participation in an interaction is ‘just what you do’. They did not consciously enter these interactions with the motivation to be polite but often acted in what Gahagan (1984, Section 2.2.1) called an automatic manner.

4.4.2 Antecedents for visitor and interaction types

Sections 4.2 and 4.3 already outlined several crucial differences between visitors. Not only does their travel style impact the contextual situations for interactions with other visitors, but their individual sociability and attitude towards the social aspect of their holiday also showed a connection to the occurrence of social interactions. These initial findings are supported by, and also contribute to an understanding of, the occurrence of antecedents amongst these visitor types, which show similar patterns. The highest amount of intrinsically motivated interactions was reported to occur in accommodation settings (and therefore by backpackers and young FITs), whereas especially organized tourist activities and, to a lesser extent, independent tourist activities often relevant for mature FITs provide situations within which conformity is required more frequently. In addition, accommodation interactions provide a greater time span and less distraction, whereas the initial desire for contacts with other visitors might not be as present during other circumstances.

Backpacker travellers (Box B, Figure 4.2), the majority of whom were single long-term travellers, strongly emphasized the personal importance of contacts with other visitors and the intrinsic rewards they hope to gain from them. Not surprisingly, over two thirds of their reported specific interactions were entered into for intrinsic reasons, with the remaining third divided between a desire to conform and, to a far lesser extent, extrinsic antecedents. Due to the nature of their interaction settings, extrinsically motivated interactions originated for the most part in accommodations from the need to locate either facilities, kitchen utensils or travel information. Only four interactions were reported to have occurred during organized activities, in which cases intrinsic antecedents and conformity are equally represented. The personal context on the other hand provides further support for the findings that showed a preference to interact in situations without time restraints – the longer visitors spent at their respective location, the higher the amount of intrinsically motivated interactions.

Young FITs (Box C, Figure 4.2) placed a lower importance on contacts with other visitors and were found to initiate less readily than other visitors. However, they still reported that over two thirds of their interactions were intrinsically motivated, but a further quarter of their interactions were entered into for conformity. Conformity based interactions occurred most frequently during both organized and

independently undertaken tourist activities, while only one interaction was entered into for extrinsic reasons. Their personal context (i.e. time spent at the location and purpose/activities) shows no relation to their antecedents. This supports the assumption that young FITs generally have fewer interactions than other visitors, therefore leading to less variety within their reported interactions.

Mature FITs (Box D, Figure 4.2), who have shown more socially oriented individual characteristics than their younger counterparts, provide the greatest variety and distribution amongst possible antecedents. While nearly half of their reported social interactions were entered into for intrinsic reasons, a third originated from a desire for conformity and the remaining five interactions resulted from an extrinsic need. Nearly all their interactions in accommodation settings were entered into for intrinsic reasons, whereas both transport interactions (limited to regional public transport) and interactions during organized activities were based more upon conformity. Interactions during independently undertaken tourist activities include the whole range of possible antecedents, with a tendency towards conformity. It can thus be suggested that the high proportion of conformity-related interactions is not necessarily due to the sociability of this visitor type but due to the variations in their environmental and personal contexts.

When looking at the differences in antecedents depending on the type of interaction as summarized in Box E (Figure 4.2), these are again relevant for all visitor types, whose preferred contexts for initiating interactions were those with more available time and fewer distractions. Social interactions were therefore more readily initiated for intrinsic reasons when they occurred within these preferred contexts. Accommodation interactions in combination with a longer timeframe spent within this setting were more likely to originate from intrinsic antecedents for all visitor types, and social interactions on transport modes that went beyond short regional travels were also frequently initiated for intrinsic reasons. When looking at responded interactions, these showed a higher proportion of conformity-related antecedents. This can be traced back to the previously established contexts of responded interactions, which are more likely to take place in combination with time restraints and other commitments which negatively impact intrinsic antecedents. This applies mostly to young and mature FITs, who experience a significant number of

their social interactions within both organized and independent tourist activity settings that show the largest number of conformity-related responded interactions.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has classified the interviewees within the sample into the three visitor types of backpackers, young and mature FITs and clearly identified several external factors that influence the occurrence of social interactions between visitors as well as confirming the reasons for which visitors enter into interactions with others. The impact that the chosen travel style has on both the environmental and personal contexts within which interviewees experienced social interactions with other visitors has been illustrated. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 provide a summary of both the situations during which interactions have occurred and how the main reasons for entering them differ by both visitor type and setting. The distinction by visitor type has been found to be a useful indicator of contexts, as travel style determines the settings within which visitors have the opportunity to interact with others. Within these settings, specific personal contexts are preferred to allow for sufficient time to conduct these interactions – especially when they are intrinsically motivated. As indicated in Section 3.5.5, the importance of both visitor and interaction type has been found to be especially applicable to the occurrence of social interactions, as they determine where and under which circumstances social interactions with other visitors occur – it can therefore be assumed that they impact the interaction process as well.

Chapter 5 will now look closely at the process of social interactions and will examine what happens during these occurrences. Section 3.2.2 suggested that the previously illustrated factors of both environmental and personal context as well as the original antecedents are influential for the interaction process. They will thus be taken into account when presenting the findings, and interrelationships as well as impacts will be illustrated.

5 Processes of social interactions

5.1 Introduction

After outlining the contexts and antecedents of social interactions between visitors in New Zealand, this chapter will now examine the process of these interactions as represented by Part 3 of the analytical framework (Figure 3.2). It will include a number of aspects of the social interaction that involve the physical presence of the other visitors that interviewees were interacting with and corresponds to research sub-question 2 (Section 3.2.2). The conceptual framework (Figure 2.3) incorporated Darley and Fazio's (1980) interaction loop, which begins when a target responds to the interaction proposal of the initiator and ends when one or all participants decide not to interact further but bring the interaction to an end. The behavioural elements that are exchanged are characterised by their dimensions (e.g. duration and topics) and are influenced by the dynamic motivations. These are not necessarily the same as the original antecedents but can change throughout the course of an interaction. All of this, in turn, is impacted by external factors as well as by concepts, structures, and rules that apply to this specific social interaction and therefore determine what types of behaviour are considered appropriate and in what sequence they are displayed. First, the criteria upon which visitors choose their potential interaction participants will be determined. This will be followed by a discussion of the dimensions and dynamic motivations of interactions – factors such as duration and conversation topics will be illustrated, as well as potential changes in antecedents. The reasons why these social interactions were ended will then be outlined, and based upon all previously discussed information, the underlying rules, structures, behavioural elements and their sequences will be drawn out.

Whereas both interaction context and antecedents were investigated in regards to their applicability to and relevance for different visitor types, the process of social interactions does not depend upon the personal characteristics as directly or to the same extent. The large number of different variables relating to the interaction process and their interrelationships as well as the variety of settings, the differences within individual characteristics and travel style, and the diversity of findings between interaction types all contribute to a complex and multi-layered construct

that cannot be adequately displayed, examined, and understood by limiting both analysis and presentation to the two differentiating variables (interaction and visitor type). Therefore, each of the following sections will be approached individually and its respective structure will depend upon the contents' relations with previously illustrated aspects of social interactions. First, the interaction participant selection will be discussed, taking into account visitor type, original antecedents and the type of interaction. The dimensions and dynamic motivations – namely duration, conversation topics, changes in antecedents, and perceived formality – will be examined, followed by how and why social interactions were ended. Based upon this information, the rules, elements, and sequences of behaviour will then be drawn out.

5.2 Interaction target selection

Although the selection of a potential interaction participant is not strictly part of the actual interaction process – it only begins when an interaction proposal is responded to – this choice can be considered the first contact between the interaction initiator and his or her selected target. The findings will be presented according to the visitor typology, as different traveller types displayed different criteria that factored into their interaction participant choice. Due to the similarities in patterns, the section on young and mature FITs will, in this instance, be combined. Only data stemming from social interactions initiated by interviewees will be included here, as visitors were frequently not able to provide reliable information on why they were selected as interaction participants during their responded interactions. A short overview of the connection between interaction target choice and antecedents will be provided, combined with an examination of the differences in interaction participants between initiated and responded interactions.

Figure 5.1 outlines both the structure and the main findings of this section. Backpackers displayed the greatest variety of factors influencing their interaction target choice, due to their travel style and subsequent potential long-term expectations towards social interactions. Free independent travellers on the other hand based their selection solely on proximity and a personal interest stemming from overhearing certain conversations or accents, and were therefore less selective about whom they interacted with. The significance of the environmental setting emerges

when comparing the interaction respondents of initiated and responded interactions – the latter occur in more varied environmental contexts which also lead to the presence of a greater variety of other visitors. Therefore those visitors that initiated interactions with interviewees show a slightly greater variation in their personal characteristics. In addition, the original antecedents also impact the selection of interaction participants, as for all interactions initiated due to extrinsic antecedents and conformity interaction participants were selected solely based upon proximity, while only intrinsically motivated interactions include more specific criteria.

Figure 5.1 Factors impacting interaction participant selection

5.2.1 Interaction target selection for backpackers

Due to their status as long-term single travellers, backpackers frequently emphasized the possibility of spending several days or even weeks with other visitors they have met during their holiday. This visitor segment thus displayed the widest variety of target selection criteria, including the proximity and appearance of interaction participants as well as factors such as overhearing something or having seen them previously (see Box A, Figure 5.1).

Proximity was the key factor in the selection of interaction participants for half of all reported backpacker interactions. Interviewees frequently mentioned the impact of shared spaces within accommodation and transport settings as the main factor determining whom they approached. On transport modes this would often be the person sitting next to them, whereas in youth hostels especially kitchens and

common areas were environmental contexts within which proximity dominated. Although proximity is also a prerequisite for other motivators such as overhearing something of interest, in many cases it has been reported to be the sole reason.

“Well, you just sit next to each other... At breakfast, in the evening, when you’re making, cooking dinner in the kitchen and you’re in a small space and do the same stuff, so it just goes from there...”

Male backpacker (UK, exploratory)

Having previously seen them during their travels was the reason why a further fifth of interaction targets were chosen. Common accommodation and transport preferences combined with similar itineraries and a long-term stay frequently led to re-encounters and therefore to social interactions, mostly in accommodation settings and during independent tourist activities. As mentioned in Section 3.5.2, only interactions with visitors that interviewees had not previously talked to could be included, as otherwise participants would have known each other prior to the reported interaction – circumstances that are not the focus of this research.

“Well, I came here on the bus, yesterday, and on the bus I realized that three girls behind me were talking Swedish, and I met them later, in the evening, at the lakefront and said hi.”

Male backpacker (Sweden)

Overhearing something other visitors had said was another recurring factor in choosing interaction targets, applicable to some of their initiated interactions. In these cases, interviewees were either interested in the experiences that others were talking about, could not place a particular accent, or had something to contribute. This was most often the case in both accommodation and transport settings.

“Or you hear someone talking and can’t quite place their accent, or they talk about something that you know something about, and you, you just say yeah, I’ve been there, or yeah, I’ve heard from someone.”

Female backpacker (UK, exploratory)

The final influence on interaction target selection reported during the main interviews was appearance, a criterion only mentioned by backpackers. The exploratory interviews in particular emphasized the (sometimes subconscious) effect

of this, as many interviewees used this visual impression to assess potential commonalities between themselves and their prospective interaction participants.

“And how they are clothed, I also think that is a good sign to see if they travel in the same way you do. (...) I think, at the clothes you see how they want to travel, if they just want to have party.”

Female backpacker (Germany, exploratory)

“You pick people that you think have something in common, people that remind you of...you I think. “

Male backpacker (Sweden, exploratory)

“A guy wearing a football shirt from Poole was there, and I spoke to him about his shirt.”

Male backpacker (UK)

As a certain similarity in age and variety in nationality amongst guests can be assumed especially within youth hostel settings, two thirds of initiated backpacker interactions were conducted with partners within the same age group (i.e. in their twenties or thirties), and over one third with visitors of the same nationality. Group constellation was frequently mentioned during exploratory interviews as an important factor in determining whom to target, as single travellers felt more comfortable in approaching other single travellers instead of larger groups – this is represented by the fact that two thirds of approached interaction participants had either the same or a smaller group size as the initiator, while the remaining third was initiated with either couples or informal groups of travellers that also had just met.

“I rather sit with somebody who’s on their own than speak to a group. I would sit alone and maybe speak with somebody who is not in that group. I think it’s, ahm, because this exists already and they know each other and I don’t want to just interrupt. It’s a bit weird too...”

Female backpacker (Austria)

5.2.2 Interaction target selection for FITs

Both young and mature FITs exhibit similar and less varied preferences when they choose their interaction targets (see Box B, Figure 5.1). Their group constellation and shorter length of stay means that they place less emphasis on potential long-term interactions and therefore make the majority of their choices, regardless of the environmental context, based upon proximity. The interactions of these two visitor types frequently occur in tourist activity related public settings where the main focus is not on meeting other visitors but on the respective activity, therefore making approaches either less targeted and more coincidental, or required due to an organized group activity. Interactions in accommodation settings and during organized activities were initiated solely based upon proximity, whereas the remaining interactions originated from interviewees overhearing something and therefore deciding to approach someone – this was mostly a factor during independent tourist activities.

While backpackers reported to interact with visitors who were relatively similar in demographic characteristics as well as group constellation, free independent travellers did not display these preferences to the same extent. The preferred interaction settings for FITs can be assumed to come with a wider variety of visitors, and although they also prefer to approach visitors with the same group constellation, they have fewer interactions with travellers of the same age and nationality than their backpacker counterparts – variations that can be explained when recalling the environmental settings they interact in and the fact that they do not appear to choose their potential interaction participants based upon personal characteristics.

5.2.3 Interaction target selection, antecedents and interaction types

During all interactions based upon conformity and extrinsic antecedents, interaction participants were selected solely due to their proximity (see Box C, Figure 5.1), whereas intrinsically motivated interactions showed a greater variety in selection criteria. For both young and mature FITs, these included both proximity and the fact that they overheard something, whereas backpackers reported the additional impacts of appearance and having seen someone at an earlier stage during their travels.

All visitor types tended to approach visitors with a group constellation similar to their own. When responding to interaction proposals by other visitors on the other hand, their interaction participants showed a greater variety in both group constellation and demographic characteristics. This pattern is especially clear for backpackers (whose sample size also allows for better distinctions), due to the fact that they were approached more in public settings where the population characteristics vary while initiating most frequently in accommodation settings with more selective and therefore narrow criteria as to whom to target. However, there were no differences between age and nationality of interaction participants and interaction type. When asked to suggest why they were the ones being approached by other visitors, the large majority of all interviewees assumed that they were targeted simply based on proximity, sometimes with the additional criteria of interaction initiators having overheard something they had said or having seen them before.

5.3 Dimensions and dynamic motivations of social interactions

This section will now look at the dimensions and dynamic motivations of social interactions as displayed in Part 3 of the analytical framework (Figure 3.2) – namely at what happens after a decision to interact with a specific person has been made. The details collected during the main interviews (see Table 3.1) include the duration of the interaction, conversation topics, their determination, the participation level of each participant (i.e. to what extent they contributed to the interaction), and the perceived level of formality. In addition, a potential change in original antecedents, namely the dynamic motivations, was evaluated. Although these factors vary in regards to the original antecedents, the traveller types involved and the type of interaction, the environmental and personal context determines the time that participants are able to spend on their interactions, which in turn impacts the further process. Therefore, this section will firstly outline the patterns in interaction duration in connection with both contexts as outlined in Section 4.3 and interaction type, followed by their applicability for the three visitor types. Based upon this, the remaining factors will be examined in relation to the specific context within which they occur. Variations between visitor types and interaction types will be investigated after displaying the overall patterns, as the main influential factors

frequently do not stem from individual characteristics or interaction type but from the circumstances that come with particular settings. Figure 5.2 provides an overview of the main findings of this section and their relationships with environmental and personal contexts.

Throughout this analysis, the importance and impact of the environmental setting has emerged repeatedly, as it determines not only the original antecedents and subsequent changes in motivations but also the personal context, which in turn strongly impacts the interaction process in terms of duration and topic variety. The different interaction settings that come with certain travel styles therefore lead to backpacker visitors having mostly intrinsically motivated and longer social interactions, including a comparatively high amount of personal topics, encouraged by the more constant environmental context of accommodation and transport. Both young and mature FITs have shorter and less personal interactions that are also less likely to contain intrinsic motivations. This variety stems from the fact that they interact in both constant (accommodation, organized activities) and fluid (independent activities) settings. However, regardless of motivation, setting, process or visitor type, nearly all reported interactions were perceived as informal, highlighting the friendly and casual atmosphere in New Zealand and between its visitors.

Figure 5.2 Dimensions and dynamic motivations of social interactions

5.3.1 Duration

As discussed in Section 4.3, the combined impact of both environmental and personal aspects determines the time available for interviewees to engage in their specific reported interactions, which in turn can be assumed to be reflected in the duration of the interaction. Table 5.1 provides an overview of the duration of interactions first by environmental context and then by interaction type (initiated versus responded) in percentages. The small sample sizes however do not support generalizable statements but are only able to give indications to patterns within this study.

Table 5.1 Duration of interaction by environmental context and interaction type

	Accommodation				Waiting for transport				On transport			
	Initiated		Responded		Initiated		Responded		Initiated		Responded	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Overall	100	30	100	24	100	3	100	5	100	8	100	3
< 10 min.	23	7	29	7	67	2	60	3	13	1	-	-
10-30 min.	23	7	33	8	33	1	40	2	13	1	-	-
>30min – 1hr	13	4	8	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
>1-5hrs	20	6	13	3	-	-	-	-	50	4	-	-
>5hrs	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	1	67	2
> = 1 day	17	5	17	4	-	-	-	-	12	1	33	1

	Organized activities				Independent activities			
	Initiated		Responded		Initiated		Responded	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Overall	100	6	100	2	100	10	100	15
< 10 min.	-	-	-	-	20	2	80	12
10-30 min.	17	1	-	-	80	8	13	2
>30min – 1hr	33	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
>1-5hrs	50	3	100	2	-	-	-	-
>5hrs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
> = 1 day	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	1

Not surprisingly, interactions lasted longer when taking place within an environment where visitors spent more time. On average, interactions in accommodation settings, on transport, and during organized activities lasted the longest, as those were either

situations during which visitors had a relatively large amount of time available or were not able to exit the setting earlier.

“All evening. The whole thing lasted about 3 hours I think, I mean, what else is there to do in the middle of nowhere after dinner.”

Male backpacker (UK) about an interaction in a hostel

“We spent a few hours with them, we were a group of four, spent about three hours on and off the bus, during the tour.”

Female young FIT (USA) about an interaction during an organized tour

The implied time pressure that came with interactions occurring while interviewees were waiting for public transport led, predictably, to the shortest interactions with other visitors. In addition, settings that allow for a greater flexibility in movements such as accommodation and independently undertaken tourist activities also came with shorter responded than initiated interactions, again supporting the assumption that the lack of control over responded interactions leads to them occurring in less favoured circumstances and therefore not lasting as long. Shorter responded interactions in accommodation settings occurred when the interviewees were otherwise occupied and/or did not feel the desire to continue interacting with the person who approached them, while responded interactions during independent activities were often cut short due to other commitments. Section 5.4 however will look at the termination of interactions and contribute more to the understanding of the reasons for the differences in duration.

In connection to the original antecedents as outlined in Section 4.4, interactions that were entered into for conformity lasted either for less than 30 minutes or, when occurring during organized activities, for the duration of the tour. Although extrinsically motivated interactions on average exhibit a shorter duration than those entered into for intrinsic reasons, over a third of those also led to interactions that lasted for several days when interaction participants decided to continue part of their travels together – a fact that will be further examined in Section 5.3.3 where a potential change in motivations throughout interactions will be explored. Interactions that lasted for one or more days were nearly always reported by backpackers, who often decided to spend the full day with other visitors or even travelled together for a longer period of time. Due to them frequently interacting in accommodation and on-

transport settings, backpackers reported the majority of long social interactions (one day or more) with other visitors. Conversely, mature FITs who frequently interact during independent tourist activities reported more comparatively short interactions as displayed in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Duration of interaction by visitor type

	Backpackers		Young FITs		Mature FITs	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Overall	100	72	100	22	100	26
< 10 min.	28	20	27	6	35	9
10-30 min.	19	14	32	7	38	10
>30min – 1hr	4	3	18	4	8	2
>1-5hrs	19	14	18	4	12	3
>5hrs	3	2	-	-	4	1
one or several days	26	19	5	1	4	1

By illustrating the durations of different types of interactions in different settings and for different visitor types, the impacts of environmental and personal context on this part of the interaction process have been confirmed in this section – the longer visitors spent at their location and the less distraction they had, the longer the interactions tended to last. This provides a foundation for understanding the remaining dimensions of social interactions, with the following section looking at social interaction topics.

5.3.2 Conversation topics, determination and participation

All but two reported interactions included a verbal exchange between interaction participants, and virtually all interviewees described a routine-like initial topic sequence that they reported to be applicable to not only their reported interactions but also to other interactions they have had with other visitors during their holiday. Intrinsically motivated interactions and those resulting from conformity – regardless of interaction type – began with an initial greeting, an enquiry about the interaction participants' country of origin and an exchange about the respective travel patterns. These initial questions were often referred to as 'chit chat' or ice-breakers to establish a first level of familiarity with interaction participants that would later

allow for the introduction of further topics. These patterns emerged not only throughout the main interviews but were also frequently described in more general terms during exploratory interviews:

“First, especially in the beginning, everyone just talks about what they’ve done and what to do, cause that’s very easy to talk about. How long have you been in New Zealand. Just so you get to know each other a bit, then you can talk about other things.”

Female backpacker (Netherlands, exploratory)

“I just asked her what state she was from. So she said New York, and we said we were from Wisconsin. And then just where we were going, and our travel plans.”

Female young FIT (USA)

“If it’s international travellers it’s perhaps a bit more of a pattern, where are you from, why are you here, how long have you been here, what are you seeing, what are you doing. And, and then, you may get down to, can you recommend anything.”

Female mature FIT (Canada, exploratory)

While extrinsically motivated interactions began with a greeting and the original request underlying this initial approach, it was frequently reported as polite to then continue on to the pattern described above if the situation allowed doing so. The conversation topic of travels within both New Zealand and other countries was the most popular conversation theme covered by the large majority of social interactions. In addition, all interviewees were able to name the country of origin of their interaction participants. Environmental and circumstantial topics were included in over half of all reported interactions, mostly referring to the current situation and the experiences that interaction participants had at the time. The exact nature was thus strongly dependent upon the environmental context, but topics ranged from weather and scenery to wine tastings and other current activities. During some interactions, participants also drew comparisons between New Zealand and their respective home countries. After following the initial social protocol by asking non-personal questions and exchanging travel information, nearly half of all interactions proceeded to a more personal level. Most commonly, these included information

about occupation, reasons for travelling or family background. However, only a few of all interactions went beyond these superficial personal topics and included personal preferences or more private, personal topics.

“I’d say the usual first question is where are you from, how long do you stay, what have you done, when do you leave. It’s always the same really, but you need to get that out of the way first, you have to talk about this. And then, if there’s some interest, it’s about, well a bit more about the people, what they do at home, and why they’re here.”

Female backpacker (Germany, exploratory)

“Where are you from, how long have you been here, we talked about University a bit. He’s from the UK, and we had studied in the UK for a bit, at the same university. So we exchanged stories, and talked about our experiences there.”

Female young FIT (USA)

“It was mainly where they’ve been and what they have been doing in New Zealand, and, sort of, home experiences. We moved around in the UK and they were thinking of relocating in the UK, so we talked about those things, and the partner, her husband was semi-retired and she was working towards that, so we were in places of our lives that were similar.”

Female mature FIT (UK)

In about two thirds of all interactions, topics were determined by all participants equally, while the remaining cases showed a slight tendency that those who initiated the interaction were also those who influenced the selection of interaction topics. The participation level shows a similar pattern, with all interaction participants contributing equally in two thirds of all reported interactions. In some cases the participation level depended upon language skills. During the remaining interactions, participation level was directly related to topic determination when one interaction participant showed a specific interest in something and therefore determined the topic and, through questioning, re-distributing the participation level towards his or her counterpart.

While topic determination and participation level show no difference in direct relation with visitor types, interaction type, or the duration of the interaction, the actual conversation topics are part of a pattern between several previously illustrated variables that can again be traced back to the context and the visitor type. Table 5.3 shows the distribution of conversation topics by setting context and interaction type (multiple responses possible), which will then lead to a comparison between visitor types. These patterns are again only indicative due to the sample size.

Table 5.3 Conversation topics by environmental context and interaction type*

	Accommodation				Waiting for transport				On transport			
	Initiated		Responded		Initiated		Responded		Initiated		Responded	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Overall	100	30	100	24	100	3	100	5	100	8	100	3
Travel talk	83	25	83	20	100	3	100	5	100	8	100	3
Circumstantial	47	14	46	11	100	3	60	3	50	4	33	1
Personal background	70	21	58	14	33	1	20	1	75	6	100	3
Country comparisons	10	3	13	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Personal preferences/ Private topics	7	2	8	2	-	-	-	-	38	3	-	-

	Organized activities				Independent activities			
	Initiated		Responded		Initiated		Responded	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Overall	100	6	100	2	100	10	100	15
Travel talk	100	6	100	2	100	10	67	10
Circumstantial	50	3	100	2	50	5	67	10
Personal background	50	3	50	1	50	5	33	5
Country comparisons	33	2	50	1	-	-	7	1
Personal preferences/ Private topics	-	-	50	1	-	-	7	1

* Multiple responses possible, totals higher than 100%

Comparing Table 5.3 to Table 5.1 (duration by environmental context and interaction type), it is clear that longer social interactions included a larger range of conversation topics. In particular accommodation interactions, those on transport, and during organized activities often covered the whole variety. On the other hand, interactions during independently undertaken tourist activities and while waiting for transport frequently did not proceed past the previously illustrated initial topics, coming with considerable time constraints that might not allow for a greater familiarity to be established.

Only backpackers and one young FIT proceeded to even more personal and private topics, a function perhaps of the environmental settings. Mature FITs tended to focus more heavily on circumstantial instead of personal topics – this can also be assumed to be connected to their interaction settings, which are activity-related and therefore encourage an exchange about this. Table 5.4 provides a summary of the conversation topics by visitor types to illustrate these patterns.

Table 5.4 Conversation topics by visitor type*

	Backpackers		Young FITs		Mature FITs	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Overall	100	72	100	22	100	26
Travel talk	89	64	86	19	81	21
Circumstantial	60	43	46	10	54	14
Personal background	64	46	64	14	46	12
Country comparisons	-	-	32	7	12	3
Personal preferences/ Private topics	18	13	5	1	-	-

* Multiple responses possible, totals higher than 100%

Overall, backpackers, as single travellers, are most likely to reach a more intimate personal level during their interactions, whereas young FITs frequently only proceed to a comparatively superficial personal level. This, as well as the shorter duration of young FIT interactions, relates back to Section 4.3, where it was found that the environmental and personal context for backpackers and young FITs in

accommodation settings was very similar – however, both group constellation and individual attitudes as examined in more detail in Section 5.6.1 lead to different interaction processes regardless of the contextual similarities. Mature FITs, who mostly interact during independent activities, show the least variety of topics and are most likely to focus on circumstantial topics and less on personal aspects. The impact of the environmental context of these interactions on duration has been illustrated in the previous section, and the ensuing results on interaction contents in form of conversation topics have now been demonstrated.

5.3.3 Dynamic motivations and changes in original antecedents

The original antecedents – motivations that underlie the initial engagement in a social interaction – have been illustrated in Section 4.4. While examining the duration of social interactions, it was shown that interactions that were originally extrinsically motivated sometimes lasted for several days as backpackers decided to spend a greater portion of their travels together. This implies that an extrinsic antecedent does not mean that the interaction will be terminated as soon as this initial goal is reached, but that a subsequent intrinsic motivation can contribute to a longer interaction than originally required. Therefore, a change of original antecedents has been investigated. The large majority of intrinsically motivated interactions kept this particular intrinsic desire throughout the course of the interaction, while only very few were continued due to a desire for conformity. Of those interactions that were entered into for extrinsic reasons, less than a fifth were conducted solely due to this original extrinsic goal; the remaining interactions progressed further for intrinsic reasons after the initial extrinsic goal was fulfilled. Conformity as the third antecedent was prominent throughout the whole interaction in over a quarter of all cases, with the remaining interactions then showing a change from conformity to an intrinsic motivation. This clearly illustrates the dominant role of intrinsic motivations, as the majority of all reported interactions were either entered into or continued for this particular reason.

The main differences in motivational changes can be found between interaction types. When interviewees initiated interactions, they displayed a strong tendency to switch to an intrinsic motivation regardless of their antecedent. When responding to

interactions however, they tended to interact based on their original antecedent with fewer intrinsic components. The majority of initiated interactions were therefore carried out due to an intrinsic motivation – only in a few cases was the rationale of extrinsic rewards or conformity not replaced by intrinsic enjoyment, and only in a few cases was the intrinsic motivation not fulfilled and replaced by conformity. During responded interactions on the other hand there was found to be less flexibility in motivational changes, which is in accordance with the previously made observations that interviewees had less control over being approached and therefore could not choose their preferred circumstances. Longer interactions on transport modes showed a change from conformity to intrinsic motivations, while some interactions during independent tourist activities that were entered into for conformity also proceeded due to an intrinsic motivation. No changes in motivations occurred in accommodation settings, during organized activities and while waiting for transport. Interactions that did not change to an intrinsic motivation during their process showed a significantly shorter duration than those which did – only a few lasted for longer than 10 minutes, and only then when the environmental context of an organized activity would not allow for an earlier termination.

Based upon the impact of the environmental setting on original antecedents and duration, it is not surprising that the large majority of backpacker interactions proceeded due to an intrinsic motivation, whereas both young and mature FITs reported that nearly a fifth of their reported interactions did not include an intrinsic element. In these cases, however, the interactions frequently occurred during independently undertaken tourist activities – settings that have been shown to not to provide opportunities or encourage the desire for long and personal interactions.

5.4 Ending of social interactions

The final part of a social interaction process is its termination, which will now be examined in more detail. This will provide information on how and why interviewees exited their reported interactions, illustrate the effects that motivations and environmental contexts can have on the interaction process and contribute to a better understanding of the reasons behind duration as discussed in Section 5.3.1. Building upon the findings of the previous sections, reasons for interaction termination will be illustrated based on their environmental context, followed by drawing out the resulting differences between visitor types. Figure 5.3 provides an overview of the structure and findings of this section.

The main factor influencing the ending of social interactions was the environmental setting within which they were taking place. Specific environmental contexts led to or encouraged certain personal contexts which in turn contributed to reasons for termination. In the case of accommodation settings (mostly applicable to backpackers and young FITs), interactions were ended due to participants being tired, having to leave, or being interrupted by meals.

“I think it was kind of late, so we ended up going to bed, feeling tired. Yeah, it was just the time were people were feeling ready for bed.”

Female backpacker (USA)

“Our dinner was getting cold, we met in the kitchen and talked while cooking, and we had to eat then.”

Male young FIT (Denmark)

A lack of time was the sole reported reason for ending interactions while waiting for transport. Different travel plans were the predominant factor for interactions on transport – a setting mostly relevant for backpackers.

“My bus arrived, so we had to end that conversation fairly quickly.”

Male backpacker (UK)

“She wanted to go to Kaikoura but I went straight on to Picton, so that’s where we left each other.”

Female backpacker (Germany)

Figure 5.3 Reasons for ending social interactions

Activity related settings were used by free independent travellers, and circumstantial reasons such as the end of the tour were common for ending interactions during organized activities. Social interactions during independent activities on the other hand were ended due to different plans and a variety of other reasons ranging from a lack of interest to interruptions by others.

“It just ended because the tour was over. The Australian couple, they were dropped off first and then me.”

Female young FIT (Netherlands)

“We took photographs and they kept on walking, it was a very noncommittal conversation.”

Male mature FIT (Australia)

While there is no apparent connection between the antecedents of interactions and the reasons for their termination, the dynamic motivations of the interaction process contribute more information (see Box A, Figure 5.3). Consistently extrinsically motivated interactions (extrinsic antecedents combined with extrinsic dynamic motivations) were always terminated due to a lack of interest after the extrinsic goal was achieved. Those interactions that proceeded due to conformity were ended both for a lack of interest and circumstantial reasons. As conformity-based interactions frequently occur in activity settings, circumstantial reasons are often related to a termination of the (often organized) activity. Intrinsically motivated interactions on the other hand are those that were least frequently ended out of choice but out of necessity. These reasons include a lack of time, different travel plans, circumstantial factors or the interaction participants being tired. The reasons for ending social interactions with other visitors very often depended upon the restrictions that come with the environmental context and the dynamic motivations underlying the interaction process.

Although the sample shows no clearly distinguishable patterns between termination reasons and interaction type, Figure 5.3 displays various differences between visitor types and the ending of social interactions. As illustrated in Box B (Figure 5.3), interactions in accommodation settings showed the least time restraints and lasted the longest, reflected in the fact that only a few of these interactions were terminated due to a lack of time but over a quarter ended because participants were tired at the

end of the day. A further fifth of accommodation interactions were interrupted by meals – most frequently dinner – and another fifth were terminated due to different travel plans. These were interactions that lasted for one or several days where participants had different itineraries to follow and were exclusively reported by backpackers. Lack of interest was named as a reason for termination in relatively few accommodation interactions.

Social interactions on transport (Box C, Figure 5.3) were mostly ended due to travel plans, either because the destination was reached and interaction participants parted ways or in the case of waiting for transport, because the mode of transport that an interaction participant was waiting for had arrived, therefore leading to a lack of time to continue the interaction further. Interactions that occurred during organized activities also showed less variety in their reasons, with nearly all interactions being ended due to circumstantial reasons – namely when participants were exiting the vehicle at their respective accommodation or drop-off location.

As summarized in Figure 5.3, Box D, interactions that occurred during independently undertaken tourist activities showed the greatest variety of termination reasons after accommodation interactions. Nearly half were ended due to activity speeds or plans, which most frequently referred to different walking speeds or different destinations. The remaining ones were drawn to a close either because participants were unable to invest more time, had no more interest in the interaction, were interrupted by the movements or actions of other people, or continued their interaction with someone other than their original interaction participant.

Box E (Figure 5.3) shows that backpackers, interacting frequently on transport and in accommodation settings, often terminate their interactions consensually (in nearly half of all cases), with the remaining cases split equally between the interviewee or their fellow interaction participants encouraging the termination. On the other hand, few interactions reported by young and mature FIT interactions were ended by both parties mutually. Young FITs in particular frequently determined the interaction termination themselves. This appears to be applicable to mature FITs as well, although not to the same extent. This emphasizes the previously illustrated findings on backpackers having the longest and most personal interactions in settings with less disruption, placing a high importance on contacts with other visitors and ending

the majority of their interactions out of choice as opposed to involuntarily. Free independent travellers on the other hand rate the importance of visitor interactions lower, often interact in activity settings and therefore show a greater variety not only in termination reasons (voluntarily versus forced) but also in their distribution.

5.5 Rules, elements and sequences of social interactions

The elements of social situations as summarized in Section 2.2.2 included several factors that regulate social interactions. Rules are shared beliefs that identify which elements of behaviour are not only permitted but are also appropriate for the specific situation and the goal to be achieved. The chosen elements of behaviour are then displayed in certain sequences (Argyle et al., 1981). These features of social situations were represented within all reported social interactions; emphasizing the fact that social rules are valid for all situations, age groups, travel styles, and also individual personalities within this survey. Three different rules became apparent that structure the content and evolution of interactions and what is deemed to be appropriate behaviour. Figure 5.4 outlines the main findings of this section, namely the existence of a particular sequence of conversation topics that clearly determine how and when it is considered appropriate to move on to a more familiar and personal level. First, factual information such as travel details or circumstantial information is exchanged, after which it is possible to cover more personal topics. Certain types of behaviour also emerged as being regarded as particularly negative. These included inconsiderate behaviour, a negative attitude and a disregard for the appropriate conversation topic sequence.

Figure 5.4 Rules, sequences and negatively perceived elements of social interactions

The reported specific interactions show strong patterns in terms of recurring aspects – the most frequently reported one being the sequence of elements in terms of conversation topics as detailed in Section 5.3.2. After the initial greeting, the country of origin was first determined for both intrinsically motivated interactions and those based upon conformity. This was usually followed by outlining past and future travel itineraries within New Zealand. In the case of interactions with extrinsic antecedents, the greeting would be followed by the original request, and, if time allowed it, it was then considered to be polite to continue the conversation pattern at the country of origin. In the case of interactions in public settings, these topics would frequently be complemented by circumstantial topics referring to the current environment and experiences within it. These first sequences were regarded as a phase to assess the other interaction participants and decide if – or if not avoidable, how – the interaction was to be continued, and was sometimes specifically referred to as a social protocol that needed to be followed when meeting other visitors.

If interaction participants then decided to continue the social interaction on a less personal level, they would often exchange more detailed information about their

travel experiences in New Zealand, draw comparisons between New Zealand and their respective home countries, or continue to focus on circumstantial topics. In these instances, personal conversation topics would frequently be limited to the occupation or not be touched upon at all. Interactions with original antecedents that did not change to an intrinsic motivation but were solely based upon either conformity or extrinsic reasons did not cover personal topics but only focused on travel related and circumstantial topics.

In cases where interaction participants discovered commonalities, similar personal interests or simply a mutual likeability (as further discussed in Section 5.6.3), their interaction topics would then proceed to be more personal, such as the inclusion of family background, personal situations or life stages, while travel talk would be extended by more extensive personal experiences. In cases where social interactions lasted for several days, these elements regarded as appropriate would be extended by topics that were consistently described as ‘random’, such as current affairs, music or movie preferences, or past experiences that did not necessarily relate to travel and included more emotional components. However, the majority of all reported specific interactions did not proceed past these elements, often due to time constraints.

The rules determining behavioural elements and their sequence seemed to have been shared by all interviewees and their fellow interaction participants. No specific interactions were reported that included topics or behaviour that were felt not to be appropriate. However, the need for an initial personal distance before proceeding to a more familiar level was emphasized, especially by backpackers during the exploratory interviews, where these matters were discussed in more general terms:

“Sometimes you meet people who want to do then everything with you (...). And I’m like, I don’t even know what you’re doing, I don’t even know who you are!”

Female backpacker (Austria, exploratory)

“If it’s somehow getting so personal soon, somehow I don’t like that. You should get to know each other better before you tell someone quite private, yes, things.”

Female backpacker (Germany, exploratory)

Further behaviour during social interactions that negatively impacted their process included a consistently negative attitude of interaction participants towards either specific situations or the overall holiday. In these cases, the respective interaction was often terminated by interviewees if the situation allowed them to do so.

“There were some we didn’t get on with, but, you know, one particular older lady who was very difficult, nothing was good enough and, ahm, you just try to ignore them and make fun of them.”

Male mature FIT (Australia) about an interaction during an organized activity

“There was this girl, (...) everything she talked about was negative! It was all saying this bad thing happened, and this bad thing happened and I was kind of like... And I was, I tried so hard not to, but she said, every other word was ‘I hated it’, oh my God, I couldn’t take it anymore, I had to leave.”

Female backpacker (USA) about an interaction in accommodation settings

Although not relating to specific social interactions, inconsiderate behaviour in accommodation settings that visitors were exposed to (such as noisiness) was also often perceived as negative. The impact of this behaviour on social interactions becomes more apparent however during organized activities where a group interaction occurs and cannot be exited.

“People who are always late. People who are talking through someone who’s trying to give you information. People who go out in the wrong direction. Who are more interested in themselves than what they’re seeing or more interested in taking pictures than listening, and therefore interrupting other people’s experience, so things like that.”

Female mature FIT (Canada, exploratory)

“Only that there was, ah, a young boy on one of the tours. He at times was very loud and disruptive and you couldn’t hear what the guide was telling. (...) The parents did not seem to make an effort, which I found quite inconsiderate.”

Female young FIT (UK, exploratory)

In summary, social interactions between visitors as reported by interviewees showed very distinct sequences of behaviour and, depending on the attitude of interaction

participants towards each other, also had clearly distinguishable rules as to what topics were appropriate and to which level of detail they would proceed. If these sequences were not followed, interviewees sometimes felt uncomfortable in their situations. Inconsiderate behaviour occurring outside social interactions was perceived as negative, and would therefore negatively impact and discourage potential social interactions. Although there were no differences between both visitor and interaction types, backpackers who place a higher importance on social contacts with other visitors and spend a considerable amount of time in shared settings were highly perceptive towards the impact of behaviour they were exposed to. Social interactions between visitors therefore display very clear and universal rules as to how familiarity is to be achieved and what steps must be undertaken in order to be able to proceed to a more personal level if so desired. In addition, both a positive attitude and mutual consideration are regarded as rules that should be adhered to in order to provide a positive social interaction experience. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, where the perceptions of social interactions will be examined.

5.6 Factors influencing social interactions

The previous sections within this chapter have evaluated descriptive information that was collected in regards to specific social interactions between visitors, supported by more general statements relating to the sum of experiences that emerged during the exploratory research phase. Before proceeding to the next chapter, which will deal explicitly with emotional responses to and perceptions and impacts of these interactions, the factors influencing occurrence and process as represented by Part 4 of the analytical framework (Figure 3.2) will first be summarized. A variety of these have already been illustrated before, such as the travel style or the environmental and personal contexts. Although already elaborated on in detail, their impacts will be briefly summarized in order to create a more comprehensive picture of influential factors. This section will also outline factors that have not yet been examined in appropriate depth, and will continue on to provide a summary of these factors and the directions of their impacts on respective parts of the social interaction occurrences and processes. As illustrated in Figure 5.5, this section will begin with a short illustration of how visitor types show differences in both travel style and individual characteristics. Based upon this, the personal context determined by the environmental context will be looked at, followed by the impacts that stem from the relationship between interaction participants. Interaction participant relationship is connected to the contexts, as only certain contexts allow for the detection of commonalities or likeability.

This analysis draws upon both the main and exploratory interviews, and quotes will again be identified as exploratory when appropriate, to distinguish between statements relating to specific social interactions and statements relating to social interactions with other visitors in general.

Figure 5.5 Factors influencing the occurrence and process of social interactions

5.6.1 Travel style, individual attitudes and visitor types

As illustrated in Section 4.3, the chosen travel style and resulting visitor typology of interviewees provides not only a foundation for data analysis but is also one of the main determining factors when it comes to the contexts of social interactions with other visitors. Travel behaviour, in combination with individual attitudes towards the social aspect of travelling can thus be seen as the most influential factor. Group constellation impacts the preferred accommodation and transport choices – for financial reasons, the vast majority of single travellers prefer cheaper options such as shared accommodation and public transport, while interviewees travelling with company often found that a rental car or campervan was a similarly affordable option. However, in some cases these decisions were also made based on the opportunities they provide for social interactions.

“I would say if budget wasn’t a concern I think that we’d still travel as backpackers. Even maybe more so, like, last night the hostel was more expensive, so we did go with the cheaper option, a motel. But we were kind of, like, it would be so nice to be in a hostel, with company and other people.”

Female backpacker (USA)

The importance assigned to social interactions with other visitors and the individual sociability of interviewees also contributed to a distinction between young and mature free independent travellers, as their attitudes towards the social aspect of their travels was often quite different. Individual attitudes also determine whether or not visitors are interested in participating in organized activities, which have been shown to encourage visitor-visitor interactions to a stronger extent than independently undertaken activities. Figure 5.5 illustrates the interdependencies between these influential factors, which together provide the foundation of the social interactions experienced by interviewees.

These factors impact both the occurrence and the process of social interactions. Group constellation as a factor impacting social interactions has already been identified in Section 5.2. While young and mature FITs spent the majority of their travels with company, backpackers were usually single long-term travellers who frequently reported social interactions lasting for several days. This often encourages

social interactions based upon a desire for long-term company. However, it can also discourage the occurrence depending on the travel stage. The frequency of social interactions was often reported to decrease the closer visitors came to departure.

“Yeah, maybe when you know you travel with them for a couple of days you invest in that, but when you just travel with them for a couple of hours then not. It’s the same with the other travellers I think, because there was less interaction than at other times, when you compare it to the beginning of the trip.”

Female backpacker (Netherlands)

The majority of these interactions could only occur due to the length of stay, group constellation and overall flexible travel patterns of backpackers. This enabled them to engage in this specific type of social interaction. Both young and mature FITs however were more constrained through their company, shorter travel duration and the less flexible itinerary resulting from this. Free independent travellers therefore had less time at their disposal and, sometimes consciously, decided to invest more time and energy in their holiday experience and travel partner as opposed to spending more time with other travellers.

“I mean, this week’s been tough, we’ve tried to cover a lot of territory in seven days and you’ve gotta be very very selective about what you do, where you go. You only have a certain amount of time, but also only a certain amount of energy, so you gotta direct that energy to where you think you’re going to get the most benefit from. And in our case, that’s just not people.”

Male mature FIT (Australia)

This not only led to FITs not reporting any long-term social interactions, but shorter interactions overall. The presence of a travel companion sometimes also required a compromise between two different interaction-related needs and prematurely terminated social interactions enjoyed by part of the group, or simply led to a decreased desire to interact with other visitors.

“It depends on what type of couple you are, when I see ok, I’m meeting some girls and he’s someone who doesn’t connect easily to girls, at least he thinks he doesn’t, he’s automatically out, and then I don’t want to spend too much time with it because I know he’s waiting and he’s bored.”

Female young FIT (Germany)

“Yes, sometimes in the hostel, but since I’m travelling with my girlfriend, we’re a couple, we mostly stay in during the night usually, so we don’t talk to others as much.”

Male young FIT (Canada, exploratory)

“Well, when you’re with a friend, you don’t really need, we didn’t really speak with other people. (...) You just live your life and do your thing, and... But now I’m alone so I have more time for myself and it’s nice to be able to talk to people and meet people from other countries.”

Female backpacker (France, exploratory)

The travel style of interviewees therefore had a direct impact upon both the initial occurrence of and desire for interactions and the subsequent process. If the travel group constellation includes more than one person, this also frequently discourages not only the occurrence of social interactions with other visitors in general but also limits the possibility of social interactions proceeding for longer. However, this is also to some extent dependent upon individual personality types – selected interviewees also reported that their travel companion functioned as a multiplier effect and they assumed that they interacted with more visitors than they would have when travelling alone.

“When I was travelling with my friend, we met people faster, because we were both there and were both talking to people, on the other hand the encounters were more superficial because you just didn’t spend so much time with them but more with the friend.”

Female backpacker (Germany)

5.6.2 Environmental and personal context

Previous sections have repeatedly outlined that the travel style, which in turn determines the visitor type, showed a strong connection to the environmental settings within which they interact. Travel related factors such as transport and accommodation choice as well as activity preferences all determine the environmental contexts in which interviewees were able to interact with other visitors. Different visitor types therefore find themselves in different environmental settings, which in turn influence the availability and characteristics of potential interaction participants as well as the process of interactions. A graphic representation (Figure 5.6) is provided to summarize this information and emphasize the interrelationships with other, non-environmental factors, showing how the environmental and therefore personal context contributes towards the occurrence of social interactions as well as certain interaction characteristics.

The characteristics of different interaction settings determine opportunities for potential social interactions as well as the possible antecedents that cause them. While accommodation and independent tourist activity settings allow the people within to move around, change location and be involved in other activities, this is less applicable to both organized activities and when on transport. In these cases, the environment is either physically restricted or determined by the group location, and the individuals available for social interactions are therefore limited. Confined shared spaces however lead to proximity, which has been reported to frequently be a main factor in interaction participant selection.

“Sometimes the kitchens are so small that there’s only one table, I’ve experienced that before too, you then sit together and cook together, yes.”

Male backpacker (Germany, exploratory) about interactions in youth hostels

“Or you just sit next to each other, and the guide, the bus driver, when someone new came, they made them introduce them to us, and so you get to know people very fast.”

Male backpacker (Canada, exploratory) about interactions on backpacker buses

“You meet a lot of people if you do, like, organized trips, so with the bus when they pick you up at your hostel and then you go together instead of doing your own trip.”

Female young FIT (Germany, exploratory) about interactions during organized activities

Certain settings provide an atmosphere that not only encourages but also sometimes demands social interactions, and the level of control that interaction participants have in terms of entering, continuing or terminating interactions with other visitors varies with it. The following Figure 5.6 (divided into two parts) provides a summary of the contextual factors influencing social interactions. The characteristics of specific environmental and therefore personal contexts contribute to certain interaction characteristics by impacting a number of factors. These begin with original antecedents and interaction target selection, and extend to duration, conversation topics, and their termination, followed by providing the reasons behind these impacts.

Figure 5.6 Contextual factors influencing social interactions – Part 1

Figure 5.6 Contextual factors influencing social interactions – Part 2

5.6.3 Relationship between interaction participants

As the chosen travel style reflects the individual characteristics, preferences, and situations of interviewees, individual factors have already been shown to indirectly impact social interactions with other visitors. Several other aspects such as individual attitude, nationality, or language can impact both the occurrence and the process of social interactions between visitors more directly. In addition, commonalities between interaction participants and a mutual likeability also directly impact the interaction process. This section corresponds to the influential factors labelled ‘individual characteristics’ and ‘interaction participant relationship’ as included in Figure 5.5 and looks first at individual attitudes and sociability, followed by the impacts of nationality and language and finally the role that likeability and commonalities play for the interaction process.

Individual attitudes and sociability

The personal attitude towards social interactions with other visitors and the importance placed upon them often aligned with the sociability of interviewees. Those that described themselves as more extroverted personalities during this holiday frequently emphasized the importance of social interactions with other visitors as well as the high number of interactions that had occurred so far – the majority of these were backpackers.

“Oh, very important. Of course. I mean, what’s travelling without meeting people, right? That’s the whole reason I’ve been doing this, meeting new people, and every day I meet new people and it’s fantastic!”

Female backpacker (Netherlands)

On the other hand, many free independent travellers assigned a lower importance to interactions with other visitors, sometimes while classifying themselves as more introverted personalities and sometimes by referring back to their group constellation.

“It’s just the natural way we are. At home we’re not people who have lots of friends, we’re quite content with our own company. But sometimes if you develop, talk to someone, it’s quite enjoyable but other times it’s, it’s quite...a pain, having to speak to other people.”

Female mature FIT (UK)

“I won’t say it’s too important, just what we found, with other people, we haven’t had much interaction with them. Ahm, just because we’re together, it’s mostly just us, having a few short conversations but nothing, nothing more.”

Female young FIT (USA, exploratory)

Young FITs especially showed less interest in contacts with other visitors, while – as mentioned in Section 4.2 – mature FITs were more open towards social interactions with other visitors even though they too frequently travelled with company. Although the process of social interactions did not differ strongly between these two visitor segments, Chapter 6 (perception, evaluation and impact of interactions) will refer to this in greater detail.

“I do enjoy it, because it can heighten the experience. (..). I look at, ah, enjoyable interactions with humans as, ahm, sort of...positive add-ons rather than what I’m looking for. If it happens it happens, if it doesn’t happen I’m still enjoying the moment, so it’s not an essential but it’s a nice treat.”

Female mature FIT (Canada)

“I love talking to people and meeting new people, it’s interesting and fun and I always get recommendations. (...) I’m travelling with my husband and it’s always fun to have someone else to talk to, not always the same person for such long time.”

Female mature FIT (Germany, exploratory)

“It’s not very important to us, we travel together and we talk to each other, and, and we don’t need to talk to other people, other people who travel.”

Male young FIT (Switzerland)

“I can meet people everywhere, but since we’re only here for a short time I want to use the things the country can offer me, or the locals, or the specific experiences, this is what is important.”

Female young FIT (Germany, exploratory)

Specific reference to sociability during this particular holiday proved to be of great importance. Single travellers often reported that their sociability while travelling was not necessarily representative of their usual behaviour.

“What I seen a bit more that is, if you’re travelling on your own you become very social, you become much social than if you’re at home and... (...) When you’re alone you start talking very fast and to a person you don’t know, and if I’d do that in Germany or in Belgium, I would never do that.”

Male backpacker (Belgium)

Another aspect most frequently mentioned by backpackers is the impact of the current mood or energy level. Single travellers especially reported that, due to their high number of social interactions that comes with continuous stays in shared settings, they often welcomed a period with less sociability.

“Sometimes it’s nice to just have a few days on your own. Not always, yeah, I really thought I wouldn’t be, because I really like to talk to people, but (...) at home, you have that already, you’re alone at home, and here you have people talking to you all day.”

Female backpacker (Netherlands, exploratory)

The impact of individual attitudes and sociability is especially applicable to visitors travelling as backpackers. Interactions with other visitors are seen as a core aspect of the visitor experience of this often extroverted visitor segment, however the demands that come with these continuous interactions also sometimes lead to periods when a more introverted approach is taken towards other visitors. Free independent travellers assign a lower importance to contacts with other travellers, due to them frequently travelling in company and classifying themselves as less extroverted. This contributes to them not only experiencing fewer but also shorter interactions.

Nationality and language

Nationality was a factor repeatedly mentioned, especially by younger long-term visitors, both as encouraging and discouraging social interactions. Interviewees with a longer travel duration mentioned that they often entered into interactions with other visitors when realizing that they were speaking the same language or were from the same country, whereas those with a shorter length of stay sometimes actively avoided travellers from their home country.

“But it’s fun to meet someone from home and talk Swedish; you want to speak your home language as well a little bit.”

Female backpacker (Sweden)

“I do. It’s kind of silly, I don’t know why, I just... You don’t want to be at home when you’re away, right?”

Male backpacker (Sweden) about why he actively avoids other Swedish travellers

Apart from impacting the actual occurrence of interactions, nationality in connection with language and language skills has been reported to contribute to the interaction process both positively and negatively, depending on whether it enhances understanding or not.

“Yeah, it’s easier to explain yourself in Danish, so maybe the conversation goes a bit deeper. (...) We talked more about home, so it was more personal, and it’s also easier to say what you think and how you feel. So this was more personal than conversations in English.”

Male young FIT (Denmark)

“Unfortunately, the challenge I’m finding here is there’s a lot more, we’re finding more Germans or Dutch or Belgians who don’t speak any English, and they’re uncomfortable having a conversation, so very often these conversations are quite short.”

Female young FIT (USA, exploratory)

Nationality and therefore language, as well as language skills, can strongly affect the process of social interactions. If the communication process is hindered by language related difficulties, interviewees reported that their interactions were short and

lacked in topic variety. Language skills can therefore be regarded as basic requirements that form the foundation of a social interaction. If this requirement is fulfilled, a number of other factors can then contribute to the process of an interaction. The lack of language skills however was not reported very frequently by interviewees, as the large majority of them spoke fluent English. Language skills can thus be assumed to impact the interactions of non-English speakers more severely.

Likeability and commonalities

So far, this chapter has looked at a number of variables that contribute to interactions in terms of duration and conversation topics; however a mutual likeability is an underlying basic requirement for any interaction whose process is intrinsically motivated. This has already been touched upon in Section 5.5, and without this likeability, there is often no motivation to continue further with an interaction.

“Yeah, if there is a certain sympathy you would talk more than if you think, yeah, okay (laughs). It’s not worth going on with the conversation, yeah, I think it’s about sympathy, liking each other.”

Female young FIT (Austria, exploratory)

“Oh, mostly it’s really just, ahm, having a connection? And liking each other? When talking is easy and interesting, yeah.”

Female backpacker (Netherlands, exploratory)

This likeability or connection frequently depends upon commonalities between interaction participants. These can be limited to the commonality of being travellers in the same country, but more often extend to a personal level. The lack of commonalities on the other hand can negatively impact the interaction process by providing no common grounds on which a conversation can be based.

“So sometimes you meet people and they like to talk about the same thing or they have the same interest, and then you have good conversations.”

Female young FIT (Germany, exploratory)

“You’re sort of all in the same boat, you’re all really interested in travelling, just a big interest to have in common, especially for an American. (...) And, so, that’s already something in common, so there’s no one that you’re really gonna hate.”

Female young FIT (USA)

“The difference is that I’m a little bit older (...) because a lot of people travelling alone, they, ah, are in a life changing situation, so, ah, and I’m, I don’t, I’m not so interested in these discussions or conversations, we don’t have much in common.”

Female backpacker (Germany)

Although commonalities often contribute to a more personal interaction, a lack of commonalities can, under certain circumstances, function in much the same way. Many interviewees emphasized the value they place upon meeting people from different cultures (see Section 4.4.1), therefore showing interest in unfamiliar aspects of other travellers’ experiences.

“I always find, when people talk about themselves, I always ask when I’m interested, (...) for example they do something completely different, and say something interesting about something that I would never do like this, then I like to ask more.”

Male backpacker (Germany, exploratory)

These examples all refer to the relationship between interaction participants and whether or not it is perceived similarly by all individuals. Depending on likeability, commonalities or interest, interactions can last longer, become more personal and show a high intrinsic motivation.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has identified a variety of previously unknown or unconfirmed relationships within visitor-visitor social interactions by illustrating their processes as well as the connections to their respective contexts. The chosen travel style and individual attitude of visitors towards contacts with other travellers have been found to be the main determining factors when it comes to social interaction occurrence and process. They initially contribute to the environmental and therefore personal interaction contexts and antecedents. These two factors in turn strongly impact the interaction participant selection, the duration of social interactions, as well as the conversation topics – aspects that are again interconnected, as the possible duration determines the conversation topics that can be brought up during a particular timeframe. Reasons for terminating interactions are again connected to environmental and personal context. Individual circumstances such as interaction participants being tired are part of voluntary reasons for ending an interaction, while the termination of others is forced, for example when an organized activity comes to an end. At the core of the interaction process however stands the relationship between interaction participants. Without an intrinsic interest in each other, based upon likeability, commonalities, or interests, interactions often do not proceed to a more personal level and are sometimes terminated earlier than necessary. These factors, in combination with the language skills required to successfully navigate the interaction process, therefore are crucial requirements for positively perceived social interactions with other visitors. Chapter 6 will now look closer at the perception and evaluation of these reported social interactions, followed by the impacts they can have on the visitor experience.

6 Perception, evaluation, and impact of social interactions

6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have examined the occurrences and processes of social interactions, identifying several patterns that illustrate why social interactions can develop in certain ways as well as the environmental and personal contexts that can encourage and discourage contacts between visitors. Chapter 1, when introducing the study, clearly outlined the importance of gaining an understanding of the impact that social interactions with other visitors can have on the visitor experience. By knowing more about how visitors perceive these interactions and how they potentially contribute to or change their visitor experience, further depth is added to the previously collected information and its contribution to the research gap. Only by gaining an understanding of the individual meanings of these interactions, and by exploring how interaction participants perceive and evaluate them, is it possible to identify the role that other visitors can play within visitor experiences.

This chapter thus examines the phenomenon of visitor-visitor interactions from a more individualistic perspective to illustrate how interviewees experienced the interactions described during Chapters 4 and 5 and how these contributed to their personal visitor experience. As mentioned in Section 2.1, this includes their experience relating to their current activity or situation within which the interaction occurred as well as their overall holiday in New Zealand. Following the analytical framework (Part 5, Figure 3.2), the perceptions of social interactions are examined first. Part 6 of the analytical framework is then discussed. The impacts of social interactions on both the situational and overall visitor experience are illustrated, as well as potential connections to satisfaction levels and how these impacts relate to prior experiences and the expectations that interviewees had before their reported social interactions occurred.

6.2 Perception and evaluation of social interactions

Corresponding to Part 5 of the analytical framework (Figure 3.2) and sub-question 3 (Section 3.2.3), the perception and subsequent evaluation of social interactions with other visitors takes several factors into account. First, the perceived formality of social interactions will be examined, namely whether interviewees found their specific reported social interactions to be either informal and relaxed or if they were conducted in a more formal manner. In addition, the perceived depth of interactions will be evaluated as well as the factors that contribute to either a superficial or more profound interaction perception. Based upon this, the subsequent emotional response is to be illustrated – did interviewees evaluate the interactions they reported as positive or negative? By elaborating on these aspects, an overview of how interviewees feel about certain social interactions will be provided, which in turn will provide the foundation for the subsequent analysis of various types of impact on the visitor experience as illustrated in Sections 6.3 and 6.4.

6.2.1 Perceived formality of social interactions

Interviewees were asked to assess the perceived formality of their specific reported social interactions. Commonalities and familiarity between interaction participants do seem to contribute to a more informal atmosphere while a lack of those can encourage more formal interactions. However, the large majority of reported social interactions were perceived to be solely informal. In this context, the casual and friendly atmosphere of New Zealand as a travel destination was frequently mentioned, as well as commonalities between interaction participants.

“It’s always very relaxed in a backpacker kind of atmosphere, you’re sharing the same space, you’re doing the same thing, so that was pretty relaxed.”

Female backpacker (USA)

“It was very informal and relaxed, I mean we were both the same age, and everything in New Zealand, every time you talk to people, it is very casual and relaxed.”

Male young FIT (Germany)

“It was very relaxed, very informal, it always is. People are on holiday, they’re happy and friendly, and it’s New Zealand, isn’t it? Even when you’re having a more formal conversation it doesn’t seem formal, I mean, no one calls you Mrs so-and-so, it’s always the first name.”

Female mature FIT (Netherlands)

Only four interactions were regarded as formal – these were short, extrinsically motivated interactions by mature FITs and in one case a responded interaction reported by a young backpacker with an older couple. Although the small number of formal interactions does not allow for patterns to be established, it seems that commonalities (often reported to contribute to informal interactions) can also encourage a more formal manner when not existent or detected.

“It was more formal. I didn’t understand his accent very well and always had to ask, and of course they were like my parents’ age and you act differently than with people you meet in the hostel.”

Female backpacker (Germany)

“It was very short and only about the directions, the information she gave us. There was no time for the conversation to become more informal, I mean, you don’t joke with a stranger that you only talk to for two minutes, do you?”

Male mature FIT (UK)

A further three interactions were reported to have started in a formal manner before then becoming informal. These cases were interactions initiated by backpackers in non-accommodation settings and were originally motivated either by extrinsic goals or conformity, switching to an intrinsic motivation during the process. The rapport between interaction participants was again mentioned in these cases, as a relaxed interaction atmosphere was only then established when greater familiarity was reached and participants felt more comfortable with each other.

“It got more relaxed. You know each other better, you know your humour, it’s more comfortable.”

Female backpacker (Germany)

“In the beginning a bit more formal, but then, when we knew each other and had some wine, it was very relaxed.”

Female backpacker (Netherlands)

Although all other interactions were reported to be informal throughout, they too might have exhibited a change in formality over the course of the interaction, due to an increasing familiarity of participants. The perception of a more formal beginning might shed more light on the impact of personality types (as none of those interviewees considered themselves as extroverted) as opposed to a contribution towards the understanding of social interactions between visitors in general.

6.2.2 Perceived depth of social interactions

Interviewees were also asked to assess the perceived depth of their specific reported social interactions as either superficial or profound. They were not provided with any criteria clarifying when an interaction would qualify as either but offered their individual interpretations and explanations as to why they had perceived their interactions a certain way. This led to the distinction between three different perceived depths: ‘superficial’, ‘profound’ and ‘neutral’ as being somewhere in between the two extremes. In this context, both duration and conversation topics in connection with the interaction participant relationship were frequently mentioned to explain the distinctions between superficial and profound – factors that have been found to be dependent upon the environmental and personal context of interactions. In addition, individual attitudes and the relationship between interaction participants strongly contribute to the interaction process and subsequently to its perception. Interaction depth perception is thus a multi-layered construct. Conversation topics and interaction duration are dimensions of superficial and profound interactions, yet are dependent upon a variety of other influential factors. Figure 6.1 provides a conceptualization of interaction depth perception, illustrating the impact of these factors and how these, in combination or separately, can contribute to a certain depth.

Figure 6.1 Factors impacting interaction depth perception

At the core of interaction depth perception are the dimensions of social interactions that were used by interviewees to illustrate how they would distinguish between a superficial and profound social interaction.

“Probably the topics you talk about, ‘cause you can disagree about profound things maybe? Yeah, it’s the topics, but there’s also the element of personal interaction, who you’re talking to. If it’s interesting people, you talk about different things, about their lives, their attitudes maybe. Superficial, that’s just travel talk. Where have you been, where are you going, what do you do.”

Female backpacker (USA)

“I would say that superficial conversations are about travelling. That’s where I’m from, that’s why I’m here, that’s how I’m travelling, that’s where I’m going. When you talk longer, about more personal things, then it gets more profound for me.”

Male young FIT (Germany)

“It’s more superficial, I think it’s also because of the time pressure. We don’t have much time here, so our conversations with others are mostly short, we talk about our travels, about recommendations, but there’s no time to really get to know people.”

Female mature FIT (Netherlands)

Those interactions that were perceived as superficial were frequently reported to not exceed the initial conversation topics identified in Section 5.3.2. They were thus shorter and less personal in nature.

“Ah it was just tourist chat, really, just friendly chit chat. As I said, we only talked about where we were from and our travels, so I’d definitely say that was superficial.”

Male backpacker (UK)

“I think superficial, yes. We didn’t talk about personal things, mostly about travel.”

Male young FIT (Denmark)

“No, not so deep, very superficial. Just friendly small talk, the small talk you always have.”

Female mature FIT (Netherlands)

Profound interactions on the other hand lasted longer and included a more personal conversational element. Interviewees often reported that these conversations went beyond just superficial personal information to include a variety of topics that allowed them a deeper insight into the personality of their interaction participants, based upon commonalities, mutual interest, and likeability.

“I met a French girl, and that was more profound, because we were talking about where she was living, she was living in Japan, and I now live in Canada, so we had kind of the same living abroad thing, and more things in common. The same age too, the English girl was younger and sometimes it’s hard to relate.”

Female backpacker (France)

“It was really profound actually. Yeah, because we talked about all our experiences, at home and travelling, and why they really do it and what they’ve seen. How they see things, how it changes them.”

Female young FIT (Australia)

“It was profound. This couple was kind of like a little bit of an older version of my husband and myself, like ten years older. And they were going in retirement, doing what we’re doing now, wishing they had done it our age. And so it was just a common bond of lifestyle and sense of adventure.”

Female mature FIT (USA)

Perceived depth thus results from the combination of interaction dimensions and interaction participant relationship, which are in turn dependent upon travel behaviour, individual attitudes, and the environmental and personal context (see Figure 6.1). As these factors also influence the occurrence of interactions (as illustrated in Figure 5.5), differences could be found between initiated and responded interactions. Over half of the initiated interactions were perceived as superficial, a third as more profound and the remaining ones as neutral or between the two ends of

the scale. This most commonly occurred when social interactions touched upon but did not elaborate on topics that, in the interviewees' opinion, were personal and would therefore contribute to a profound perception. In contrast, only eight of the responded interactions were regarded as profound, while the majority were perceived as superficial. Initiated interactions that often occurred in contexts that allowed for longer interactions were thus far more likely to reach a profound depth. Table 6.1 provides an overview of the depth distribution by environmental setting and interaction type. Due to the often small sample sizes, these are again only indicative.

Table 6.1 Perceived depth by environmental setting and interaction type

	Accommodation				Waiting for transport				On transport			
	Initiated		Responded		Initiated		Responded		Initiated		Responded	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Overall	100	30	100	24	100	3	100	5	100	8	100	3
Superficial	53	16	79	19	100	3	100	5	38	3	-	-
Profound	27	8	21	5	-	-	-	-	63	5	67	2
Neutral	20	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	33	1

	Organized activities				Independent activities			
	Initiated		Responded		Initiated		Responded	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Overall	100	6	100	2	100	10	100	15
Superficial	67	4	100	2	70	7	93	14
Profound	33	2	-	-	30	3	7	1
Neutral	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Interactions on transport and in accommodation settings were frequently rated as profound or neutral. This supports the previous findings emphasizing the relevance of restricted settings combined with a longer length of stay and less additional tasks/activities (see Figure 5.6). Interactions in less constant settings such as waiting for transport or during independent tourist activities on the other hand showed shorter interactions due to their time restrictions. Only a few interactions in these settings were perceived as profound, most commonly when they were initiated by interviewees who could choose favourable circumstances. Interactions during

organized activities are more likely to be superficial, although the contextual circumstances are similar to those on transport settings. This was found to be due to the impact of both the tour guide and the activities and sights, these being factors that often prohibit a more personal connection between interaction participants. Although personal conversation topics are included in these interactions, they do not go into much detail as both the tour-related distractions and the group size did not allow for this to happen. Group size and constellation was also repeatedly mentioned as a factor, with larger groups, regardless of the setting, sometimes discouraging more profound interactions.

“It’s hard to say, but no, it wasn’t actually personal, but I think there were too many people for that. Because we were quite a large group, sitting at the table, and then, yes, I think it’s superficial with that many people.”

Female young FIT (Germany)

“When I was travelling with my friend (...) the encounters were more superficial because you just didn’t spend so much time with them but more with the friend.”

Female backpacker (Germany)

The impact of interaction context suggests that backpackers would show the highest percentage of profound interactions, while mature FITs appear to have less opportunity to reach this level of depth when interacting with other visitors. Table 6.2 however shows that mature FITs not only reported more profound interactions than their younger counterparts; they also considered more interactions as neutral, therefore reporting fewer superficial interactions.

Table 6.2 Perceived depth by visitor type

	Backpackers		Young FITs		Mature FITs	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Overall	100	72	100	22	100	26
Superficial	63	46	85	19	68	18
Profound	31	22	10	2	18	5
Neutral	6	4	5	1	14	3

This illustrates the importance of individual attitudes towards social contacts with other visitors, as well as the interviewees' sociability and confirms the segmentation of the sample into two age-based FIT groups. Section 4.2 justified a separation of the FIT segment based upon the differences within these two variables, as young FITs classified themselves as more introverted and placed lesser importance on the social aspect of their holiday. Although the interactions reported by mature FITs tend to be shorter (Table 5.2), their conversation topics less personal (Table 5.4) and they interact less based upon intrinsic antecedents (Figure 4.2), their perceptions of these interactions differ strongly as they were more readily regarded as profound. Although young FITs could be expected to perceive their interactions as more profound due to the characteristics of their process, they often regard them as superficial – an evaluation that might be assumed to be connected to their lower importance assigned to contacts with other visitors. Additionally, the literature (Section 2.5.4) suggested that prior expectations and experiences would influence the perception and evaluation of social interactions. The majority of interviewees had no expectation towards interacting with other visitors before participating in a superficially perceived interaction, which also barely differed from interactions with other visitors that interviewees had experienced previously throughout their travels. When looking at profound interactions, nearly a quarter of the visitors mentioned that they did expect some kind of interaction to occur within their respective situation. This can be due to the personal and environmental contexts of profound interactions, as they mostly occurred during their preferred interaction circumstances which enable them to spend more time on visitor-visitor interactions. About a fifth of profound interactions were also regarded as different to other previous interactions, as this level of depth and the corresponding interaction dimensions seems to only be achievable under certain circumstances.

In summary, the perception of the depth of interactions depends upon similar factors to those that encourage or discourage longer and more personal social interactions between visitors as outlined in Figure 5.5. However, the individual attitudes of interviewees appear to play a greater role in how these interactions were perceived. Perceived depth is thus not solely dependent upon the respective interaction dimensions.

6.2.3 Emotional response to social interactions

Having gained insight into how interviewees have perceived interactions with other visitors, this section will now look at their evaluation of these in terms of the emotional responses experienced. Overall, the large majority of all reported social interactions were evaluated as solely positive by interviewees, while no interaction was perceived as explicitly negative. The remaining few interactions however were classified as ‘neutral’ or ‘neither’, as interviewees reported that these did not provide enough content to allow for a more precise evaluation.

“Well, not positive and not negative, it was one of these normal, they happen all the time, but they’re not big enough to leave an impression.”

Female backpacker (Germany)

“Oh neither way really, it was just one of those things that just happen but don’t have enough meaning if you want. A minute can’t hold enough content to provide meaning.”

Female mature FIT (UK)

These interactions consisted only of very short social interactions such as a greeting, a request to take a photograph or asking for directions. Not surprisingly, these interactions did not contain an intrinsic motivational element (either as an antecedent or as a dynamic motivation) but were based upon conformity or extrinsic needs only.

All other interactions have been perceived as positive by interviewees. While several of them appear to be more trivial in nature when looking at their durations, conversation topics and tendency to be repeated in a similar manner throughout the holiday, even what was commonly referred to as ‘chit chat’ or ‘small talk’ (Section 5.3.2) appears to leave positive impressions.

“Definitely positive, because I learned about things to do at the West Coast when I go down.”

Male backpacker (UK) about a superficially perceived interaction

“Yes, definitely, very positive. Just that she was a very warm, genuine person really.”

Female young FIT (USA) about a superficially perceived interaction

“Oh it was very good, very good, I really loved it, yeah. We got along really well, and we’ll meet up again while I’m here, definitely.”

Female backpacker (Netherlands) about a profoundly perceived interaction

“It was very positive, yes. They were very enthusiastic about their travels, and this excitement was contagious, the way they described it, with such a passion. Happy people make you happy, don’t they?”

Female mature FIT (Netherlands) about a profoundly perceived interaction

The effects of these impressions will now be explored in more detail in the following sections concerned with the impact of visitor-visitor interactions.

6.3 Impact of social interactions on the current situation

The impact of visitor-visitor interactions on the visitor experience corresponds to sub-question 4 as illustrated in Section 3.2.4. The importance of this has been illustrated several times throughout the thesis – without knowing how exactly interactions with other travellers influence the visitor experience, the relevance of these cannot be understood. In addition, other factors (physical environment, products and services) that constitute the visitor experience cannot be fully comprehended without taking into account the role that the social aspect plays within the visitor experience. Section 2.1 identified two dimensions of the visitor experience, namely the overall holiday in New Zealand and the specific situations or activities that occur during this holiday. So far only one possible impact on the visitor experience has emerged through previous studies, namely an increase or decrease in satisfaction levels. However, the whole range of potential impacts still remains unknown, and it is also not clear if different types of interactions (for example superficial and profound interactions or initiated and responded interactions) contribute to the visitor experience in the same or different ways. Before examining the role that visitor-visitor interactions play within the overall visitor experience, their situational impact will first be explored. The previous chapters have clearly illustrated how and why these interactions occur, how they proceed, and what factors determine their perceptions and evaluations. This

information will now provide the foundation for an analysis of what these interactions actually meant for interviewees and how they contributed to and potentially changed the situations they were in at the time the interaction occurred. This will allow insight in the more immediate effects of these interactions.

Figure 6.2 provides an overview of this section. First, the different types of situational impacts will be examined. In summary, the specific social interactions have been reported to impact the interviewees' respective situations and experience within them in a number of different ways. Interviewees highlighted the entertainment value they gained from these interactions and the fun they had by interacting with other travellers. Emotional fulfilment was another frequently mentioned impact, often reported to lead to a better mood and general well-being. The benefits that come from sharing an experience with other visitors was another recurring theme, as interviewees perceived their current situation as enhanced by the excitement and viewpoints of other visitors. The remaining two situational impacts were mentioned less frequently, namely the need for compromise by having to take the needs and wants of other individuals into account and a feeling of increased safety through the presence of others. After providing examples to better understand how these impacts are manifested, the possible combinations of situational impacts will be explored. Depending on the number of situational impacts, the dimensions and perceptions of these interactions differ – the longer interactions lasted and the more profound they were, the more impacts they were reported to have. Interactions with single, dual, and triple situational impacts will be examined in terms of their dimensions and contexts. The way in which these interactions change an experience will be outlined, as well as the relevance of visitor types for situational impacts.

Single situational impacts		
	Fun and entertainment	Emotional fulfilment
Dimension/ contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorter duration • Superficial perception • Less personal conversation topics • Less permanent environmental settings • Infrequent impact on satisfaction 	
Impacts for visitor types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoyable addition, yet not necessary to enjoy the experience • More likely to be reported by mature FITs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to positive and friendly atmosphere • More likely to be reported by female backpackers
Dual situational impacts		
	Fun and entertainment & Shared experience	Fun and entertainment & Emotional fulfilment
Dimension/contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer duration • Superficial perception • Less personal conversation topics • More permanent environmental settings • Frequent impact on satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer duration • Profound perception • More personal conversation topics • More permanent environmental settings • Frequent impact on satisfaction
Impacts for visitor types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoyable addition, enhanced through longer duration and mutual activity participation. • More likely to be reported by mature FITs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoyable addition, enhanced through social contact necessary for wellbeing. • More likely to be reported by backpackers
Triple situational impacts		
	Fun and entertainment & Shared experience & Emotional fulfilment	
Dimension/ contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long duration • Profound perception • Very personal conversation topics • First permanent, then changing environmental settings • Constant impact on satisfaction 	
Impacts for visitor types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term social contact contributes to emotional satisfaction and wellbeing, enhanced through entertainment and sharing (often several) experiences. • Only reported by backpackers 	

Figure 6.2 **Situational impacts of social interactions**

6.3.1 Types of situational impacts

To begin with, interviewees were asked whether or not their specific social interaction somehow impacted their current situation and how they experienced it. The current situation refers to the overall time spent at the location at which the interaction occurred, for example the duration of an organized activity or the evening in a shared accommodation setting. Interviewees reported that all but three of their initiated interactions impacted their current situation. This however was only the case for nearly two thirds of responded interactions. A positive emotional response alone (Section 6.2.3) was thus not sufficient to actually change the way in which the situation was experienced.

While the three initiated interactions without impact consisted only of a short greeting without further in-depth conversation, responded interactions can provide further insight into what characteristics an interaction needs to possess to influence the current situation. Although stemming from different visitor types and different environmental contexts, these interactions all show common dimensions such as a focus on purely travel related and circumstantial topics, a duration of less than 10 minutes, being perceived as superficial and most frequently based upon conformity. Interviewees were also often involved in other tasks or activities and explained the lack of situational impact by the briefness of the interaction, the absence of interesting or remarkable content, or by the subordinate role an interaction played within the situation.

“I didn’t leave and go, oh I’m disappointed that happened, they were nice. But, if they walked past now I wouldn’t recognize them, I wouldn’t know what they look like. It was quite unremarkable and didn’t leave an impression.”

Male backpacker (UK)

“Not at all, it was just too short for that. I mean, we only said hello and have a nice day, I mean, a minute doesn’t change my stay there. At least this one didn’t.”

Female backpacker (Germany)

“We had nothing in common, we could not relate, but it did not impact our experience in a negative way because we spent a lot of time talking to the, the coach driver, the guide. So no, I would not say it had an impact.”

Female mature FIT (UK)

When social interactions were perceived as having a situational impact, five different ways in which they could influence the situation emerged from the interviews. The majority of social interactions had more than one specific impact and displayed a combination of impacts, which will be discussed in the following Section 6.3.2.

A focus on fun and entertainment was apparent in the majority of all reported social interactions. In these cases, interviewees enjoyed the interaction and the informal exchange that came with it, adding some additional diverting components to the situation.

“It was just much more fun to do it with others instead of being alone all the time.”

Female backpacker (Germany)

“It was fun, because we shared and laughed about jokes.”

Male young FIT (Finland)

“Yes we did enjoy it, and it made the experience more pleasant.”

Female mature FIT (UK)

Achieving emotional fulfilment and a positive impact on the current mood was the second most frequent situational impact as reported by interviewees and applied to half of their interactions. This includes the effects of social contact on both general and current wellbeing.

“Especially since it is Easter, we celebrate at home, with the family, and spending the day with them made me feel less lonely.”

Female backpacker (Netherlands)

“It was a nice feeling, to have that contact, you’re not feeling so isolated.”

Female young FIT (UK)

“Travelling with my husband, we need conversational changes from ourselves. So it’s nice to have a conversation with someone else and keep it fresh, and that’s what this did. It’s good for us.”

Female mature FIT (USA)

The positive impact of a shared and thus often enhanced experience was an impacting factor for over a third of all reported social interactions. Visitors often highlighted that their enjoyment was increased by sharing the experience (most frequently an activity) with other visitors, as well as being enhanced by the opportunity to see how others experienced the same situation.

“If a larger group of people appreciate it, you definitely get more out of a buzz out there, slightly more excitement than if you were just appreciating it on your own.”

Male backpacker (UK)

“How people act definitely makes a difference to how you’re feeling and to the quality of your experience. In regards to this movie tour, (...) we had a whole group of people who were quite big into it, that’s a very different experience than if you have people there that kind of look wormed. The attitude, the wanting to be there.”

Female young FIT (USA)

“That was interesting, to see things through their eyes, and to learn a little bit from them. So that was an enhancement.”

Female young FIT (UK)

The need for compromise that results from sharing a situation with other visitors was mentioned for very few reported social interactions. Especially backpackers, who often spent several days travelling with other visitors they had met during their stay in New Zealand, were not able to act solely based upon their own preferences. Interactions that occurred during organized tourist activities were also sometimes reported to come with the need to take other visitors into account, as well as being not able to focus solely on their current situation.

“We were five people in a campervan, so of course there were little fights because we didn’t always agree, but you just have to deal with that.”

Male backpacker (Germany)

“It was a great experience, sharing it with them, but on the other hand, I think it also distracts you from the experience in a way, because you see more when you’re on your own I think.”

Female young FIT (Austria)

“I wasn’t able to go off and do what I want, you’re with other people and that’s pretty intense. They dictate what you do and how you do it.”

Female mature FIT (Canada)

Safety and security as the final situational impact was only reported for three specific social interactions. It was more apparent during exploratory interviews however, when interviewees were reporting on their travel experience in more general terms. For activities with a perceived risk such as longer hiking trips or activities in remote areas, company was sometimes preferred as it decreased a potential accident-related risk.

“Yes, so I talked to him because I wanted to hike with someone the next day, just because it’s safer. We had fun, yes, but it also made me feel safer.”

Male backpacker (Germany)

“I’m glad I had him with me for that, it would have been kind of, a bit more of a panic or a bit more concerning if I had been alone.”

Female young FIT (Australia) about a car accident

In addition, some interviewees acknowledged the fact that even though the specific social interactions they have had with other visitors did not directly impact their experience, the simple presence of other people especially in settings such as organized activities provides these other individuals with the ability to influence the situation. While positively perceived or generally acceptable behaviour often did not directly and consciously contribute to their experience, they were aware of the fact that negatively perceived behaviour could alter their current situation significantly. This in turn means that the positive impact of other visitors on the situational

experience was often indirect and not clearly recognizable, but would only then become apparent to visitors when replaced by a negative impact.

“Loud and rude people, screaming kids, that can ruin an experience for you. Whereas when everyone is nice and respectful, you probably don’t see the effect very often, or very clearly: So yeah, I think the other travellers always affect you, it’s just that it’s not an active influence maybe? Other people always have the chance to turn your experience into something negative, and if they don’t, I think they affect the positive aspect of something. Just not in ways that are obvious.”

Female backpacker (Germany)

“Whenever you’re in an area with people, there’s a certain feeling there that any one person could choose to control, if they wanted to, in a negative way. So definitely, how the people act that you talk to definitely makes a difference to how you’re feeling and to the quality of your experience, even if it might not seem like it at the time.”

Female young FIT (USA)

“I don’t think it changed our experience, I guess because we didn’t have a bad experience, even... The only way it would have been different, if there was somebody being obnoxious or ruining the experience. (...) So maybe in a way it did change our experience after all? Because, I mean, it could go either way. By not making it worse, they made it good, you know?”

Female mature FIT (USA)

6.3.2 Situational impacts by interaction dimensions and visitor type

These five types of situational impacts occurred in a variety of combinations, as a number of social interactions influenced the situational visitor experience in more than only one way. Interactions that were perceived as profound (and therefore lasted longer while including more personal conversation topics) were more likely to impact the interviewees’ experiences in more than one way by contributing not only to the fun they had but also enhancing their situation by sharing the experience and

contributing to an emotional fulfilment, which in turn resulted in a positive impact on the satisfaction with the current experience. Shorter and more superficial interactions on the other hand focused either strongly on the entertainment-related contribution or simply provided interviewees with general social contact that contributed to their emotional wellbeing, without necessarily leading to an increased situation-related satisfaction. This section will now outline the interaction dimensions by their impact combinations – the impacts of ‘compromise’ and ‘safety and security’ are not included, as the very small number of interactions corresponding to these does not allow for conclusions to be drawn.

Single situational impacts

Only the impacts of ‘fun and entertainment’ and ‘emotional fulfilment’ occurred alone and were applicable to about a third of all reported social interactions. As mentioned previously, those interactions that were perceived as contributing to the current situation in only one way were more likely to be short and superficial, and only about a third of interactions with a single impact were reported to positively influence the satisfaction with the current experience. These interactions occurred often in less constant environmental contexts such as independently undertaken tourist activities or transport settings, although a number of them also took place in accommodation settings. However, they relied heavily on travel talk, circumstantial topics, and superficial personal information, and only few lasted for more than 30 minutes. The reasons for the relatively low impact on satisfaction levels with the current situation can be assumed to be connected to the interaction characteristics. Although all these interactions were perceived as positive, they were regarded only as enjoyable additions that were not required to enjoy the current situation. The impact of ‘emotional fulfilment’ may seem more profound, however when it is the sole perceived impact of a social interaction it only contributes to the atmosphere in a situation that is already perceived as friendly. Nearly all the single impact interactions showed no connection to prior expectations and experiences – interviewees generally reported that they did not expect to interact with other visitors in this specific situation and their reported social interactions did not differ from

other interactions they have had with other visitors during their travels in New Zealand.

“There wasn’t much, I mean, nothing personal, it’s just people being friendly, they always are here. It does make me feel good, but it didn’t change anything really.”

Female backpacker (USA)

“It was fun, yes, but there wasn’t much to it, these conversations always happen, you talk and joke a bit. It’s nice when it happens, but it doesn’t change what we see and do, how we feel about it.”

Mature male FIT (Switzerland)

Fun and entertainment related interactions were most likely to be reported by extroverted mature free independent travellers. They have been shown to lack the time to participate in longer and more personal interactions as they most often interact during independent tourist activities, yet emphasized the intrinsic enjoyment they gain from interacting with other visitors. Those interactions that were reported to have a solely emotional impact on the other hand were more likely to come from female backpackers, who repeatedly highlighted the necessity for social contact due to their status as single long-term travellers.

Dual situational impacts

A further third of social interactions were perceived to have a combination of two types of impacts. All included an entertainment-related impact, which was complemented either by the benefit of a shared experience or additional emotional fulfilment. Interviewees reported that the majority of these interactions positively impacted their satisfaction with the current experience. Nearly all included personal conversation topics as well as travel talk, with a lesser yet still prominent focus on circumstantial topics that have been shown to often be part of superficially perceived interactions. Interactions reported to have an impact combination of ‘entertainment’ and ‘shared experience’ were still mostly perceived as superficial. However, they frequently occurred during organized activities or on transport, settings that

contribute to a longer duration and stronger situational impact. Those interactions that included an emotional aspect mostly occurred in accommodation settings, often lasted for several hours and included a wider variety of personal conversation topics, contributing to them being more often perceived as profound. Again, interviewees did not report any specific expectations towards other visitors they might meet in this situation, although interactions in general were expected when participating in organized activities. The majority of dual impact interactions were also reported to not to contain any unusual elements, but proceeded in much the same way as their previously experienced interactions did.

“You’re very lucky when you meet some nice people, and they really made the day even more special, although I’d still say it was superficial. You’re sort of stuck with them for like five hours, and you just share the day, the wine, the scenery.”

Female young FIT (Netherlands)

“It was a nice evening, very relaxed and fun, with nice people, and if I had to spend the evening alone I wouldn’t have enjoyed it very much. (...) We talked a lot, about so many different things, and it was nice to have contact, and be social, I think it would have been a bit of a lonely evening otherwise.”

Male backpacker (UK)

Interactions with the dual impact of ‘entertainment’ and ‘shared experience’ were most often reported by free independent travellers, both young and mature. These are the visitors that participate most in organized tourist activities, which provide a setting that allows for an experience and activity to be shared yet discourages more personal conversation topics that are often required for a profound perception. The impact combination of ‘entertainment’ and ‘emotional fulfilment’ was again frequently highlighted by single long-term backpackers – while shorter and superficial interactions can also contribute to their emotional well-being, a more profound interaction is more influential. While the single emotional impacts were reported to relate to a friendly atmosphere, dual impact interactions were based on a positive relationship between interaction participants and thus fulfilled a need for social contact and involvement.

Triple situational impacts

Fifteen social interactions were reported to impact the current situation in three ways, thus including the three most frequently mentioned impact types of ‘fun and entertainment’, ‘shared experience’ and ‘emotional fulfilment’. All of these interactions were reported to increase satisfaction with the current situation. Since this combination of impacts applied mostly to long-term social interactions that lasted for one or even several full days, the higher satisfaction rating thus refers to the overall time spent with the respective interaction participants. The majority of these interactions were perceived as profound, and over half of them originated in accommodation settings. The whole range of conversation topics was included, and nearly half of these interactions proceeded to more personal and private topics. Although there were again no expectations towards interacting with other visitors in the situation in which the first contact was established, over a quarter of them were regarded as somewhat unusual, due to their long duration and profound perception.

“It was awesome! We got along so well, we had so much in common, I mean, otherwise we wouldn’t have spent so much time together. It’s much more fun if you can do things together, you see more, you laugh more, you enjoy it more, (...) and what’s also important is that you get some kind of stability I guess. Like friends at home. Because usually, you meet people one day and the next they’re gone. And it gets tiring.”

Female backpacker (Netherlands)

As illustrated in Section 5.3.1, interviewees reporting this type of long-term interactions were nearly always backpackers. They sometimes select their interaction participants based on the long-term potential that these interactions hold (Section 5.2.1) and therefore have interactions that provide sufficient possibility to impact their experiences in multifaceted ways that invariably lead to higher satisfaction levels.

In summary, it can be said that backpackers especially benefit from the situational impact that their social interactions have. For them, interactions increase the satisfaction with the current experience more frequently and contribute to it in a number of often combined ways. The situations of young FITs are impacted in

similar yet less distinctive ways, due to the fact that they spend less time with their interaction participants, talk about less personal topics and overall place a lesser importance on the contacts with other visitors. Mature FITs on the other hand have been shown to rate shorter and less personal interactions as more profound, yet assign a lower situational impact to them. Most interactions did not impact the satisfaction with the current experience of mature FITs and did not impact it in as many ways as the interactions of other visitor types did. This, however, may also be due to the activity-related contexts within which mature FITs interact, as the social interactions may play a subordinate role to the activity in question. It can thus be said that interaction contexts and dimensions provide the foundations for situational impacts. However, the visitor type in combination with the individual attitude towards the social aspect of travelling also determines how situational impacts are perceived. Although the literature suggested that expectations based on prior experience would influence how people perceive the impact of their respective social situations (e.g. Oliver, 2010), no similar connection was made by interviewees.

6.4 Impact on social interactions on the full visitor experience

The previous section has identified several ways in which social interactions with other visitors can impact the situational visitor experience. Satisfaction as a possible impact emerged throughout the literature review in Chapter 2. However, it has been found to not necessarily be an impact in itself but rather a result of certain, more direct impacts whose combination then contributes to a possible increase in satisfaction levels. Due to the complexity of the overall visitor experience and its influential factors as outlined in Section 2.1, it was not possible for interviewees to provide detailed information on the extent to which specific social interactions contributed to their overall visitor experience in New Zealand and the satisfaction with it. Nevertheless, a number of ways emerged in which the sum of social interactions with other visitors influenced the interviewees' holiday in New Zealand.

As Figure 6.3 shows, this section will now first examine how these impacts manifest themselves and how they contribute towards the overall visitor experience. They can be divided into atmosphere related, entertainment related, practical, experience

related and emotional impacts. Impacts relating to the atmosphere often include otherwise trivial, short and superficial interactions that, by themselves, have no immediate impact but in summary contribute to a friendly travel environment. Entertainment related impacts referred to the fun and enjoyment interviewees gained from interacting with other visitors. Practical impacts referred to the fact that travel itineraries or certain activities were often adjusted according to other visitors' recommendations. Experience related impacts include the effects that exposure to other lifestyles had on how interviewees experienced not only their travels but also themselves. Emotional impacts finally referred to the need for contact, support and friendship during often long travels – a role usually fulfilled by friends and family and now transferred to other visitors with similar circumstances. This will be followed by an analysis of how different visitor types were impacted by their social interactions with other visitors. For backpackers, the most important impact of their interactions could be found in terms of emotional and experience related impacts, whereas young FITs, showing similar age-related characteristics as backpackers, also report experience related impacts, as well as emphasizing the practical impacts. Mature FITs frequently highlighted the value they place on the practical effects of visitor-visitor interactions while enjoying these less on an emotional but on an entertainment related level.

Comparing the impacts on the overall visitor experience to situational impacts, it becomes clear that entertainment-related impacts, the benefit of a shared experience and those contributing to emotional fulfilment are prominent for both levels of the visitor experience. The impacts of interactions on a positive atmosphere and on travel-related aspects however only then become obvious when looking at cumulative as opposed to specific social interactions. Safety and compromise on the other hand were found to be only relevant for specific situations. Since these two situational impacts were not mentioned by many interviewees, their impact does not appear to be strong enough to also influence the overall visitor experience.

Figure 6.3 Impacts of social interactions on the visitor experience

6.4.1 Types of impacts on the visitor experience

In many cases, it was often not immediately clear to interviewees how the interactions with other visitors contributed to their holiday. During both the exploratory and main interviews, interviewees were asked to elaborate on the impact of social interactions with other visitors on their visitor experience in New Zealand. A common occurrence during interviews was that visitors – often free independent travellers – would state that contacts with other travellers did contribute to a positive visitor experience. However, when asked for specific examples it was often said that their social interactions with other travellers were restricted to short, superficial conversations as described in Section 5.3.2 that did not have any particular impact on both their current situation and overall experience. When probed further, they agreed that it was not the specific interactions they had with certain people, but the overall positive atmosphere that these interactions created over a longer period of time.

“Well, on their own they’re not that important, but now that you mention it, I guess it would be just a bit more boring. They’re definitely a nice thing to happen on your day, and it adds up I guess, the little bits and pieces of nice things contributing to a bigger picture.”

Male young FIT (UK)

“We’ve been travelling for three months now, and it’s just nice to have someone else to talk to once in a while. It’s a nice change, and that does impact my mood. It’s not about the people themselves, wow that sounds awful, they’re great, but really, it’s just about social contact in general.”

Female young FIT (Germany)

“Possibly just like, you know, a smile or a friendly conversation means that you can head off with, kind of, a more positive view. And, even when you’re travelling in an English speaking country, there’s still a lot of things that are difficult cause you don’t know how to, you don’t know where the tourist information is, where to get your prescriptions from, all those silly things, so that makes it easier when other people kind of support that.”

Female mature FIT (UK)

“I think it’s the, how to say it, the overall atmosphere that comes with these conversations, you know? People are so nice and friendly here, and it happens again and again, we haven’t met one single person who was rude or unhelpful, so it creates a certain type of positive atmosphere that contributes to your feelings about the place.”

Male mature FIT (USA)

Similarly, the overall friendly and positive atmosphere in New Zealand was highlighted by many visitors. Although these statements most frequently referred to locals as opposed to other visitors, it was an overarching theme that positively affected not only the perception of their holiday but also the perception of New Zealand as a destination, and also contributed to the way in which visitors interacted with each other.

“We were impressed with the New Zealand people, the friendliness and the hospitality that they offered unsolicited, I think that was my biggest impression of my interaction with people here. I know that’s not what you’re interested in, but in our case, I feel that this friendliness also translated to the other tourists we met. They seem to adopt this positive and welcoming attitude.”

Female mature FIT (USA)

“Actually, the people of New Zealand and tourists of New Zealand are very nice people and very pleasant people. I don’t know if it’s because it’s New Zealand. We didn’t meet anybody that wasn’t nice or didn’t help us, and we were in a lot of places in the world. Everyone is nicer here, the tourists too.”

Male mature FIT (Israel)

Entertainment related impacts were the most frequently mentioned type of benefit that nearly all interviewees gained from interacting with other visitors – regardless of their travel style. A simple friendly exchange with other travellers provided visitors with variety, enjoyment and fun, therefore adding to their experience by making it more enjoyable and adding another positive component to it.

“I think I just need people to talk to, to have fun with. It’s always nice when it happens, and it happens a lot, it’s a lot of fun just to say hi, where you’re from, and what you’re doing here, talk a bit about New Zealand and your trip.”

Female backpacker (Germany)

“It’s just the company really, everyone’s so friendly and it’s always fun when you talk to others. Your campsite neighbours, people on a tour, anyone really, it’s always enjoyable!”

Male young FIT (UK)

“No, we like to be social, we like to be friendly. We like people, we enjoy meeting them, it’s great fun and part of why we love travelling. It’s part of it, it wouldn’t be the same without, it would be less, yes, less – well, fun.”

Female mature FIT (Netherlands)

Practical impacts often relate to the travel talk that has been found to be an essential part of visitor-visitor interactions (see Sections 5.3.2 and 5.5). The majority of interviewees highlighted the value they place upon recommendations and information they get from talking to other travellers, which in turn impacts their visitor experience in the long term by changing or determining travel schedules and attractions and activities to be undertaken. Not necessarily being dependent upon interaction and visitor characteristics, this type of impact on the visitor experience was mentioned most frequently in combination with shorter and more superficial interactions that did not provide more personal ways of impacting an experience. The strong focus on travel talk of these interactions might be related to the independent circuit-based travel style of international visitors in New Zealand (see Section 1.4), which in turn means that decisions on where to travel to and what attractions to visit need to be continuously made not only before but also throughout the holiday. Gathering information and recommendations on sights or activities that might otherwise have remained unknown may in turn lead to a more satisfying visitor experience.

“I talked to them for about ten minutes, and even if you don’t do more stuff together, they have an impact on what else you do. It doesn’t matter how short they are, if they’re so enthusiastic about something then I’m like, oh yeah, I’ll do that. And that makes my holiday something different.”

Female backpacker (Netherlands)

“Oh yes, he told us about the penguins at a special place, and we will go there, and which way we should take, which coast he liked better and so we decided to drive this coast along. So, we think about him a lot, and he changed our visit.”

Female young FIT (Switzerland)

“Actually yes, I think it did. Not because it was such a memorable conversation, but because they gave us advice about where to go, where to eat, these little things that will eventually make a part of our stay different to what it would have been otherwise.”

Female mature FIT (UK)

Experience-related impacts on the overall holiday within New Zealand were most frequently mentioned by backpacker travellers and young FITs. For some interviewees the benefits of a shared experience changed not only the way they experienced their current situation, but had a more lasting impact on their encompassing visitor experience. This was often explained by insights and perspectives that they remembered for longer, and that sometimes even changed the way they were looking at certain things in general. This phenomenon also emerged in a study of New Zealand backpacker travellers (Tucker, 2005), stating that young visitors to New Zealand often used their experiences to develop their sense of identity and self (to be discussed further in Section 8.4).

“At home, everybody is similar in terms of, of their, kind of perspective on the world. And so when you come travelling, you meet people from different backgrounds, and they sort of say something and you think, oh. Just taken that for granted, you know? And she was a prime example, talking to her made me see aspects of not only this trip but also my life differently, and, yeah, it’s something I’ll remember. For a long time I think.”

Female backpacker (UK)

“He was really interesting, and I’m thinking about now how I can make my business in another country. You know, sometimes you meet strange people, but they’re really interesting because you have never met somebody like this before. I can learn, I can learn off his behaviour, I can use his experience for myself a bit. I can learn.”

Female backpacker (Germany)

“This is the first time we travelled outside of Europe, and meeting all these people from different places – you realize how much of you is, well, you and how much comes from, I don’t know, where, how you grow up, where you live. Talking to him, about his experiences and what he did, it made me see things, it made me see me in another way. And, yeah, in a way, that also changes the holiday and what it means, because it changes me.”

Female young FIT (Germany)

The interviewees most likely to refer to the emotional impact of social interactions were backpackers, who, as single long-term travellers, often relied on contacts with other visitors for their mental well-being. This becomes apparent not only in the impact their social interactions have on the current situation but also on their overall visitor experience.

“Definitely, the people I met had a huge part, role, in, well, whether or not I felt comfortable. If I had been there on my own, for four days without knowing anyone or talking to anyone, I wouldn’t have had that much fun. I would have felt lonely, and I wouldn’t have stayed for that long. And all these fun bits, they make up your trip, and every person you meet makes it better.”

Female backpacker (Germany)

“Yes, any socialising I’d say is positive and makes the holiday better. This one too. You need people, after all, especially when travelling for longer, you need them to feel good about everything, and about yourself.”

Male backpacker (Canada)

“It’s not always good in New Zealand of course. Sometimes you get homesick and those things, and if you have social contact, if you have longer contact, you can...yeah, talk about it. It makes the difficult parts easier. And we spent a week together, a week is long when travelling, so there was some kind of, yeah, social support I guess that you usually don’t have but that’s good to have sometimes.”

Male backpacker (Belgium)

In summary, the impacts of social interactions with other visitors on the full visitor experience are sometimes not obvious but occur on a more indirect and subtle level. Nevertheless, all interviewees reported that their interactions with other visitors over the course of their holiday did have a positive impact on their experience in New Zealand. However, as already indicated in this section, the ways in which these impacts manifest themselves can differ by visitor type, not only in terms of the current situation (Section 6.3.2), but also with regard to the overall visitor experience in New Zealand.

6.4.2 Impacts on the visitor experience by visitor type

When asked why they perceive these contacts as important, backpackers most frequently referred to both the enjoyment resulting from meeting new people and the need for social contact that came with their status as single long-term travellers. Due to the younger age of backpackers, the benefit of meeting other travellers was often mentioned in connection with experience-related impacts relating to their identity, such as learning more about oneself and getting new perspectives on life.

Since interaction duration was found to be a main determinant of perceived depth and a personal connection between interaction participants (see Sections 5.6 and 6.2.2), it is not surprising that backpackers experienced these particular impacts on

their visitor experience by interacting with other travellers. The length of interactions was frequently mentioned to be a main contributor to emotional fulfilment, which is consistent with the fact that backpackers' interactions lasted the longest and over a quarter of them continued over several days when interaction participants decided to continue their travels together, therefore increasing the impact of a shared experience due to changing surroundings and activities as well as the impact of emotional fulfilment due to a stronger familiarity between participants. By having the majority of their interactions in accommodation settings, they were simultaneously exposed to different personalities as well as potential travel partners who shared similar expectations towards their interactions, making the process of achieving the required social contact easier. As interaction participants who were also travelling as backpackers similarly required social contact for their wellbeing, it is no surprise that interactions reported by backpackers were less likely to be perceived as superficial but most likely to proceed to more personal conversation topics. Backpackers therefore heavily relied on social interactions with other visitors to re-create the stability and support that is usually provided by friends and family at home, while also addressing their needs for fun, enjoyment and self-actualisation. For backpackers too it is often the sum of interactions and social contact in general that, over the course of the holiday, contributes positively to the full experience had in New Zealand.

While backpackers see social interactions with other visitors as an integral part of their visitor experience, for young free independent travellers this is not the case. As illustrated in Section 4.2, they mostly travel with company and have claimed to be less interested in contacts with other visitors – 77% regarded these as less important or neither/nor, while also considering themselves more introverted than any other traveller type. As mentioned in Section 5.6.1, their travel group constellation often meant that these interviewees had less interest in interacting with other visitors but preferred to focus on their respective travel group, especially when this is the partner.

Young FITs also most frequently referred to the entertainment they achieved especially during the evenings in their accommodation and additionally highlighted the value they place on information and recommendations from other travellers. However, they often mentioned that they are not particularly interested in the personal background of other travellers but prefer to have the majority of their interactions with New Zealanders. Talking to locals provides them with authentic information about the country and life in it that goes beyond the knowledge that other tourists are able to offer. The majority of their interactions thus occurred in accommodation settings or during independent tourist activities where they interacted with other visitors without specifically seeking these interactions. Due to the comparatively low level of interest in other travellers, the majority of their interactions were relatively short and superficial, focusing less on personal background but more on travels, the current situation, and how their destination differs from their usual environment at home. The latter contributed to a combination of practical and experience-related impacts – whereas backpackers were interested in the exposure to different cultures and lifestyles, young FITs benefitted from a shared experience with a more destination-related focus to enhance their understanding and knowledge of New Zealand and how it compares to other places. Interactions with other visitors on campsites or during activities were therefore regarded as a positive addition to their current situation and frequently provided entertainment during the evenings. However the personal focus of young FITs was generally on New Zealand as their destination and their travel group's experience here. Due to this, these interviewees were those that most frequently reported to plan their travels according to recommendations they had received, therefore changing their visitor experience in New Zealand on a more practical and extrinsic than emotional and intrinsic level.

Mature FITs often highlighted the enjoyment and fun they gained through interacting with other visitors, as they regard other visitors as a welcome addition to the social contact they already have with their existing travel partner – an attitude that led to the division of the FIT category in Section 4.2. While young FITs preferred to focus to a greater extent on their partner, their mature counterparts were more open towards interacting with other visitors and reported that these encounters provided them with new conversation topics and a change in the 'routine' of their own

relationship, therefore positively contributing to their emotional fulfilment. The higher extroversion of these visitors also meant that even short and superficial interactions were perceived as more enjoyable, contributing to the high number of entertainment-related interactions. Mature FITs experienced the majority of their interactions during activities and in their accommodation settings – depending on the type of activity, their interactions were either quite short or lasted for the duration of the respective activity. Their conversation topics related mostly to their travels and the setting they were in at the time, while covering less personal topics than any other visitor type. Nevertheless, mature FITs perceived interactions with similar characteristics as more profound than young FITs which expresses the higher importance they place upon them due to both their extroversion and the familiarity with their partners. Although the benefit of experience related impacts was least applicable to this traveller type, they often expressed interest in talking to people from different cultures and backgrounds. While for backpackers this contributed to their learning and young FITs gained destination knowledge, mature FITs reported to have more extensive travel experiences than other interviewees and therefore gained either a more entertainment-related benefit from these interactions or a positive contribution to the emotional aspect due to the good mood these often short encounters put them in. Interacting more with other travellers than young FITs and with more locals than backpackers, especially mature FITs highlighted the friendly people they encountered in New Zealand. Its local population, tourism industry employees, and tourists were continuously referred to as being exceptionally welcoming, friendly, and helpful, which led to an overall positive social atmosphere throughout the whole visitor experience. Many of them explained that the sum of short but enjoyable interactions with other visitors amounted to an overarching positive perception of the social aspect of their visitor experience in New Zealand. Their interactions thus contributed more indirectly on an emotional and therefore intrinsic level, however playing a less important role than for backpackers.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the impacts of social interactions between visitors are not always obvious and direct, and do not always contribute to the visitor experience in a way that is perceived as particularly important by interviewees. It has however become clear that other visitors can change the experiences that visitors have in New Zealand, and in the case of this study, always did so in a positive and experience-enhancing way.

This chapter has identified a range of different impacts that interactions with other visitors can have on both dimensions of the visitor experience. Not all interactions have been reported to impact how visitors perceived and experienced their current situation, mostly due to a lack of remarkable content. However, the large majority of all specific interactions did indeed change the way that interviewees experienced their situation, and did so exclusively in positive ways while often also contributing to higher satisfaction levels. The most common benefits that were achieved through visitor-visitor interactions were fun and entertainment, a certain level of emotional fulfilment and wellbeing and a variety of effects that stem from sharing an experience together – including increased joy and access to a variety of perspectives. It has also been shown that the cumulative effect of social interactions experienced throughout the holiday is not necessarily equal to the effect these interactions have on their own. When examining impacts on the overall visitor experience, it has been found that even interactions that might appear trivial and without much content or meaning do positively contribute to an atmosphere that is perceived as friendly and helpful. Other impacts of visitor-visitor interactions include the intrinsic benefits of social contact in terms of entertainment and emotional wellbeing, access to information and recommendations and resulting changes in travel behaviour, additional destination knowledge and therefore altered experience of the country, and for younger travellers an opportunity for learning and identity development.

Depending on the visitor type and interaction dimensions, visitor-visitor interactions thus can and do positively influence an experience in a number of different ways, none of which had been clearly identified prior to this research. The following chapter will now discuss and contextualize the findings from this research by

providing an enhanced conceptual framework of social interactions between visitors, summarizing the answers to the research question and its sub-questions and drawing out both academic and practical contributions.

7 The nature of social interactions between visitors

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the implications of the findings as examined throughout Chapters 4 to 6. The conceptual framework (Figure 2.3) has guided the methodological approach and has served as a foundation for the analytical framework (Figure 3.2), on which data analysis and the presentation of findings were based. Section 2.6 discussed the limitations of the conceptual framework, which contains information from often unrelated sources. It was thus limited in the range of visitor-visitor interaction aspects that could be included, and it was expected that previously unknown or unconsidered factors and relationships would emerge throughout this research. Therefore, a revised version of the original conceptual framework is first presented. By incorporating this new found knowledge, a more thorough and detailed overview of the antecedents, processes, perceptions, and impacts of social interactions between visitors will be drawn out. In doing so, the contribution to the academic literature will be illustrated by referring back to the original research question of

What is the nature of social interactions between visitors and what is their potential impact on the visitor experience?

and its sub-questions as detailed in Section 3.2. However, in order to fully interpret the research findings it is first necessary to consider the implications of New Zealand as the research context. The impact that the destination has on this study will thus first be discussed to provide a solid foundation for the following interpretation of the findings.

7.2 The impact of New Zealand as the research context

The differences between visitor types and their social interactions with other visitors have been illustrated repeatedly throughout the previous chapters. Chapter 1 provided a short overview of travel behaviour and attractions in New Zealand, outlining that nature and culture serve as the main attractions for international visitors who prefer independent, flexible and transport reliant travel. This of course differs significantly from other holiday forms. Resort holidays come with less movement and potentially less exposure to unknown and frequently changing visitors while possibly resulting in a more constant exposure to the same visitors. Group tour holidays have been the focus of much previous research, and although they are also often based on movement and transport, their social setting is very different due to the long duration participants spend together and the group dynamics that can develop. Before continuing on to an in-depth discussion of the findings presented previously, it is thus necessary to appropriately contextualize them to clearly outline how they can be influenced by New Zealand as the research context and what implications this has for their potential generalizability.

The travel behaviour of international visitors to New Zealand is to a certain extent determined by the circuit-based and thus transport reliant nature of tourism in New Zealand. The majority of visitors and all interviewees were travelling independently, relying on both rented and public transport to follow their frequently flexible itineraries. Especially in the case of young and mature FITs who prefer private over public transport, this means that they can be assumed to spend less time in the proximity of other visitors than for example resort or group tourists who continuously share facilities and activity space with others. In addition, the frequent location changes also imply that the other visitors in New Zealand with which they share spaces are seldom the same. Although it has been reported that similar itineraries can lead to reencounters, the visitors available for potential social interactions can be assumed to be more varied than those when participating in more static or organized forms of holiday. These factors can be expected to influence the conversation topics and their commonly accepted sequence. Interviewees reported very few social interactions with visitors they had seen or met before, and thus had to introduce and get to know each other at the beginning of every new social

interaction. While a greater familiarity was reported to contribute to more personal and more varied conversation topics, this familiarity could only be achieved after a certain duration and after following a strict sequence of conversation topics so as to adhere to the rules applicable to their status as international visitors. This meant that a large number of specific reported social interactions showed strong similarities in their dimensions, which might not necessarily be the case for other visitor types. Group tour participants are able to establish this familiarity earlier during their travels, with their interactions then possibly developing quite different dimensions. Resort tourists may be seated at the same tables or occupy the same beach sections, thus putting them in the proximity of visitors with which they had interacted before, which would lead to a change in interaction dimensions.

Although the exchange of travel related information was an important aspect of visitor-visitor interactions during this study, this might be due to the independent and flexible nature of visiting New Zealand. Without the continuous need to make travel-related decisions, select activities or attractions, and having the freedom to adjust itineraries, travel talk might not be as prominent during visitor-visitor interactions. Interaction duration would be another factor impacted by the travel style dominant in New Zealand. The continuous movement and participation in varying activities implies a certain time pressure, and some interviewees explicitly mentioned that their travels require a certain amount of time and energy that cannot always be directed towards the social aspect of their visitor experience. Visitors who are less active but focus more on relaxation may have more time, energy, and also desire to interact with others. While the interactions dimensions found in this study are assumed to be applicable to interactions between flexible, independent, transport-reliant visitors, other contexts might thus display different patterns.

This in turn has also several implications for the impacts of visitor-visitor interactions. While perception and evaluation do not appear to be dependent upon the New Zealand context, the impacts of these interactions are connected to the independent travel style of visitors. Although situational impacts of fun and entertainment, shared experiences, emotional fulfilment, safety, and compromise may be relevant for any form of visitor type and travel style, this is not necessarily the case for the overall impacts on the visitor experience. Personal impacts such as

the social support and stability that backpacker visitors gained from interacting with other visitors have been shown to be clearly connected to their status as long-term single travellers and can thus be expected to not be as relevant for other visitor types or simply other group constellations. This may also be true for travel related impacts that led to changes in travel itineraries and in-depth destination knowledge. Visitors to New Zealand in general and interviewees in particular were interested in natural and cultural attractions and activities and welcomed opportunities to increase their knowledge about the destination. It can be assumed that both relaxation-focused holiday makers and domestic travellers might not benefit from visitor-visitor interactions the same way, as they may value other aspects of their travels more.

Another factor that emerged throughout this research was the friendly, positive, and welcoming atmosphere that visitors encountered in New Zealand, which was reported to contribute to an overarching feeling of safety. The majority of interviewees reported how safe they felt while travelling the country, and how their interactions in New Zealand were thus not necessarily representative of the interactions they had during previous travels or with strangers in their home country. Atmosphere and perceived risk and safety may thus also impact how visitors interact with each other, with potential impacts on interaction occurrence, process, perception, and impact. However, further research is needed to determine these connections.

Culture was suggested repeatedly as a factor impacting social interactions (see Section 2.2), however no information has emerged throughout this study that allows for a closer investigation of the role of culture. The vast majority of interviewees as well as their interaction participants shared similar cultural backgrounds (i.e. Western), and were visiting a country that, in this respect, showed certain similarities to their respective home countries. It can be expected that social interactions between visitors of different cultures or within different cultures differ from those interactions that were reported throughout this study. It is however not possible to suggest potential differences, as no comparative information is available.

New Zealand as the research context thus clearly impacts the findings of this study. Since the general connections between visitor-visitor interactions and their

influential factors are possibly applicable to other contexts, they do provide sound information that can be used as a stepping stone for further research. However, the exact relationships, effects, and characteristics are to a certain extent dependent upon the research context. The findings of this study as well as the following interpretation of results can thus be assumed to be applicable to independent, flexible, active, and transport-reliant travellers with an interest in nature and culture who interact with other visitors with similar characteristics.

7.3 A revised framework for social interactions in tourism settings

The lack of research on social interactions between visitors is reflected within the original conceptual framework (Figure 2.3), as it was not possible to provide a confirmed and comprehensive overview of visitor-visitor interactions and to clearly establish the relationships between different influential factors. However, the framework provided sufficient structure and information to determine a two-staged exploratory research approach which allowed for a more thorough and comprehensive empirical investigation of the phenomenon. While several aspects of the original framework have been found to be applicable to the information collected during this research, other additional factors have emerged and the relationships within this complex phenomenon have become clearer. The original conceptual framework providing a less detailed display of visitor-visitor interactions has thus been revised and extended to accommodate and incorporate the findings of this study.

Figure 7.1 presents the revised conceptual framework for social interactions between previously unacquainted in tourism settings in New Zealand. It now incorporates interaction type as an overarching factor, giving importance to whether an interaction is one that the individual has initiated or an interaction where the individual has been the target and thus responded to it. The interaction type thus influences the antecedents for their interaction participation, while specific criteria for interaction participant selection are applicable to initiators only. These factors contribute to the occurrence of social interactions, which are in turn impacted by a number of individual and environmental factors. The interaction process then begins by

entering and continuing the interaction loop, during which the original antecedents change to dynamic motivations that continue to motivate the participants' reasons for interacting. Conversation topics and their determination, participation in the interaction, as well as duration and a perceived formality constitute the dimensions or characteristics of the interaction until its termination. The ending can either be forced (i.e. participants have no option to continue interacting) or voluntary (i.e. participants could continue interacting but at least one prefers not to). The interaction process is structured by certain rules that determine the sequence of conversation topics and the behaviour and attitude of interaction participants. Apart from individual and environmental factors influencing the interaction process, the interaction participant relationship also plays an important role in how the interaction dimensions develop. After their termination, interactions can then be perceived as either more superficial or more profound, depending on their dimensions and the full range of influential factors including the interaction participant relationship. Superficial interactions tend to impact the current situation in fewer ways, while those that were regarded as more profound often display multiple situational impacts. The impact of single social interactions as well as their sum (i.e. all social interactions of the holiday) then determines the way in which they impact the overall visitor experience. Visitor-visitor interactions have been found to contribute on either a personal level (e.g. social support, enjoyment) or by impacting the visitors' travels in terms of itinerary, knowledge and atmosphere.

The following sections will now examine the changes that have been made, based on the additional aspects that have emerged throughout the previous chapters. These include the importance of the interaction type, the complexity of the interplay between environmental and individual/travel related factors, interaction participant selection, and interaction participant relationship. In addition, the role of perceived depth, the variety of situational impacts, and the different ways in which social interactions can influence the full visitor experience will be explored. By doing so, the four research sub-questions will be addressed and the contributions to the literature will be outlined.

Figure 7.1 Revised conceptual framework for social interactions between previously unacquainted international visitors in New Zealand tourism settings

7.3.1 Antecedents

The first section of the original framework refers to the antecedents of social interactions between visitors. The literature indicated that an individual would have an original antecedent or motivation to enter into a social interaction with another visitor (Argyle et al., 1981). Three main antecedents were suggested, namely the desire for intrinsic or extrinsic rewards and conformity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Parsons, 1968). Their applicability to tourism settings had not previously been examined, and the factors which influenced these were unknown. Although social carrying capacity and outdoor recreation conflict research (Section 2.3) provided a variety of aspects that can contribute towards a certain perception of the presence of other visitors, it was unknown to what extent these would be applicable to the actual occurrence of social interactions. The original conceptual framework could thus only provide the three potential antecedents as well as the suggestion that these might be influenced by a variety of external factors. Sub-question 1 (Section 3.2.1) therefore addressed the following issues:

- What are the antecedents of the social interactions, i.e. what are the interaction initiators' and targets' reasons for interacting with each other in the first place?
- How do social, individual and environmental factors contribute to the occurrence of social interactions between visitors?

Although different interaction types (initiated or responded) were expected to display different antecedents, it was not previously known what the place of interaction types within the conceptual framework would be. This thesis thus contributes further knowledge that enhances the understanding of the complexity of interaction occurrence in tourism settings. The interaction type has therefore been included into the revised conceptual framework. Both the environmental and personal contexts either encourage or discourage the initiation of interactions (see Figure 5.5), as do individual characteristics such as sociability (as suggested by Heimtun, 2011). Sociability in combination with the overall importance placed on contacts with other visitors contributed to a certain desire to interact with other visitors in general. The interplay of personality and current context thus determines whether an individual is

willing to initiate an interaction, or is more likely to play an initially passive role by only responding to social interaction proposals by other visitors. This of course determines their respective antecedents. As Section 4.4 illustrated, the existence of all three potential antecedents was confirmed during this research. Intrinsic antecedents referred to the pleasure visitors gained from interacting with each other, extrinsic antecedents included asking for directions or information, and conformity was based upon a desire to be polite. Initiated interactions were more likely to be based on a desire for intrinsic or extrinsic rewards, while responded interactions were more often based on conformity. Overall, however, it was found that interviewees interacted most frequently based on intrinsic motivations and generally welcomed and enjoyed the exchange with other visitors. A certain overlap between intrinsic motivations and a desire to conform was discovered, as an overarching intrinsic desire to interact sometimes overshadowed conformity-related impacts that could otherwise be applicable to the situation (Section 4.4.1). This intrinsic desire, connected to the overall desire to interact with other visitors, is also expected to impact the overall number of interactions experienced throughout a holiday. Young FITs especially struggled to provide examples for two recent interactions. Other individual influential factors such as travel behaviour and thus visitor type then determined the environmental settings within which social interactions occurred. For a tourism context, these settings have been identified as accommodation settings, transport settings and activity settings (independent and organized). While Argyle et al. (1981) emphasized the relevance of the physical features of environmental settings, the personal context that occurs within them had not been explicitly considered. Yet, personal context such as the available time impacted on whether or not interactions occurred for intrinsic, extrinsic or conformity-related reasons. The environmental and personal context also determined if visitors preferred to initiate interactions. Initiated intrinsically motivated interactions were reported to happen within certain contexts that would allow for longer duration, whereas other settings came with tasks or activities that discouraged visitors from proposing interactions to other travellers. In these contexts, the reported social interactions were more often those that interviewees responded to.

In addition, it was suggested in Section 2.6 that the ways in which potential interaction participants are selected would also play a role in visitor-visitor interactions. However, previous research did not allow for an inclusion of this aspect in the original conceptual framework. The findings of this study have however shed further light on this issue, and it has been found that the place that antecedents hold within the revised framework is sometimes interchangeable with interaction participant selection. The original conceptual framework expected that the first step within interaction occurrence would be the emergence of an antecedent, based upon which an initiator would select a potential target. Section 5.2 however illustrated that an original antecedent might not necessarily be the first step within the interaction sequence. It has been shown that the majority of interviewees generally enjoyed interacting with other visitors. This intrinsic antecedent can be present throughout the whole holiday, and the awareness of a potential interaction participant might enable visitors to act upon it. This is also the case for interactions based on conformity, where the detection of other visitors can be seen as the first step of interaction occurrence. As the current situation requires an interaction with these visitors to be polite, the detection of other visitors and thus interaction participant selection is the first step within the framework. It thus not only precedes but at the same time determines the need for conformity. While proximity has been found to be the main reason for interaction participant selection in conformity and extrinsically based interactions, this was not always the case when interacting for intrinsic reasons. Other impacts on interaction target selection include overhearing conversations or accents of other visitors, the fact that they had seen them before during their travels, or their appearance. These criteria have again been found to be dependent upon individual characteristics of visitors, as single long-term travellers were more selective about their potential interaction participants.

The importance of the visitor type has also not yet received attention in the literature, as the majority of studies have examined one specific visitor segment without taking potential differences into account. The preferred choices of accommodation, transport, and activity types highly impact the environmental settings within which visitors have the opportunity to interact with others, and not all provide circumstances that encourage these interactions. While extroversion and thus a high

level of sociability have been found to positively influence interactions between visitors in tour group settings (e.g. Heimtun, 2011), their relevance for social interaction occurrence outside of this travel form had not been confirmed previously. This study however showed that these individual characteristics not only impact the occurrence of social interactions but also their subsequent process, perception, and impact.

7.3.2 Processes and dimensions

Once an interaction target has been selected and a decision to initiate has been made, the actual process of social interactions begins. A certain sequence was proposed in the literature review (Darley & Fazio, 1980), namely the interaction loop. Interaction participants send, receive, and interpret messages which then contribute to the dimensions or characteristics of their specific interaction. These dimensions can include duration, perceived formality, conversation topics, and the determination of these topics. It has also been suggested that the original antecedents can change to dynamic motivations throughout the process. This process was again expected to be influenced by a variety of external factors, as well as by the concepts, cognitive structures, and rules that come with the social situation within which the interaction occurs (Argyle et al., 1981). No study however had examined the detailed social interaction process, and it was not known how certain external factors would impact this process, how the dimensions depend on the original antecedents, and how flexible these original motivations are. Sub-question 2 thus considered the following aspects:

- What are the dimensions of social interactions between visitors, in particular duration, formality and conversational contents?
- What are the sequences and repertoires of elements of behaviour as well as the rules displayed during social interactions between visitors?
- Do antecedents change throughout the course of the interaction?
- How do social, individual and environmental factors influence the process of social interactions between visitors?

Chapter 5 presented the findings relating to the interaction process. While nearly all interactions were perceived as informal, a lack of familiarity or (detected) commonalities can be suggested to sometimes contribute to a more formal exchange. A variety of interaction lengths have been reported, ranging from only a few minutes to several days, while the conversational contents or conversation topics consisted of travel talk, circumstantial topics, country comparisons, and personal information both on superficial and more private levels. These conversation topics represent the repertoires of elements that were found to be appropriate for visitor-visitor interactions and underlie a relatively strict sequence that applied to all interviewees and all environmental and personal contexts (as suggested by Argyle et al., 1981; Harris & Baron, 2004; Murphy, 2001). Only after exchanging basic personal information and travel plans was it found to be acceptable to establish a greater familiarity with interaction participants by including more personal conversational elements. In addition, the interviewees of this study reported that they regarded inconsiderate behaviour, a negative attitude, and a non-adherence to the sequence of topics as negative which sometimes led to a premature termination of the interaction, thus confirming findings by Grove and Fisk (1997) and Wu (2007).

Original antecedents as described in the previous section do not necessarily motivate the full interaction process. While antecedents determine why an interaction is entered into, dynamic motivations then contribute to its continuation. Interactions with extrinsic antecedents and those originally entered into for conformity often continued based on an intrinsic dynamic motivation, as interviewees enjoyed their interactions regardless of the reasons why they entered them in the first place. While the original antecedents help explain interaction occurrence, the dynamic motivations are those that have the highest influence on the subsequent interaction process. Factors influencing this interaction process (Figure 5.5) have been found to be similar to those impacting interaction occurrences. The desire to interact with other visitors as well as the environmental and personal context stemming from travel behaviour determined the time that interviewees were willing or able to spend on their interactions and how personal the conversations became in regards to their topics, thus making the visitor type not only the main influence on interaction occurrence but also on its subsequent process.

The literature did not provide any suggestions as to why social interactions between visitors might be terminated, and so far the relationship between interaction participants has only been considered marginally (Levy & Getz, 2012; Wu, 2007). Interaction participant relationship however has been found to be one of the main determinants of the interaction process – without a mutual likeability or interest, no intrinsic dynamic motivation would occur and interactions would be shorter and less personal in nature. Commonalities were often reported to contribute to longer and more personal interactions, as interaction participants found it easier to develop a rapport. However, a lack of commonalities could, under certain circumstances, also contribute to a longer interaction process if interaction participants showed interest in an issue that was unfamiliar to them. Although there appeared to be a tendency to discover these commonalities with interaction participants of similar demographic characteristics, this was not always the case and this study could therefore not determine more detailed interpersonal factors that positively contribute to interaction participant relationship.

Certain differences between the perspectives of interaction initiators and targets also emerged throughout the process. Initiators acted more frequently based upon intrinsic antecedents, which have been shown to be more likely to continue on throughout the interaction process (Section 5.3.3). Targets, on the other hand, often reported responding to interactions in less preferred circumstances that sometimes did not allow them to proceed to greater familiarity but were ended comparatively less out of choice than circumstantial reasons. Interviewees who initiated the interactions thus had a better chance to experience interactions with certain dimensions (longer duration, personal topics, informality, intrinsic dynamic motivation, voluntary termination) than those who were targets. When interviewees were responding to an interaction, it was often not possible for these dimensions to develop due to the restraints of the respective environmental and personal contexts.

The ending of social interactions was also dependent upon environmental and personal contexts as well as on the dynamic motivations. In some situations such as organized activities, terminations were induced by circumstantial reasons, for example the end of the tour. Intrinsically motivated interactions with longer durations were often ended when interaction participants lacked further energy or

had meals. Only interactions based solely on conformity or extrinsic rewards were ended explicitly due to a lack of interest regardless of external or contextual factors. The combination of personal and environmental context and interaction participant relationship thus all contribute to the ending of social interactions.

7.3.3 Perception and evaluation

Since no encompassing research has been done on social interactions between visitors, the literature did not include any specific information as to how they might be perceived and evaluated after their termination. The original conceptual framework therefore included only a possible evaluation of social interactions, which was expected to be dependent upon the preceding interaction process and its dimensions as well as on the antecedents. In addition, it was suggested that coping techniques and a subsequent adjustment of expectations would play a role during the evaluation (Section 2.5.3). Sub-question 3 was therefore formulated more broadly to address the following issues:

- How do visitors perceive interactions with other visitors and do these differ in regards to their respective dimensions and antecedents?
- What determines the evaluation of a social interaction with other visitors as being either positive or negative?

Section 6.2 was concerned with the perception and evaluation of visitor-visitor interactions. Interviewees perceived nearly all specific reported social interactions with other visitors as informal and positive, but indicated that they would perceive interactions as negative if any of the previously mentioned factors were included (negative attitude, inconsiderate behaviour, disregard of interaction rules). A distinction was made between superficial and profound interactions. This perceived depth was originally labelled ‘intensity’ and was expected to be a dimension of the interaction process. However, depth perception has been found to result from the process, as it depends especially upon the dimensions of conversation topics and duration as well as the individual factors such as the desire to interact with other visitors and also the visitor type. As the interaction process, which led to specific

dimensions, was directly impacted by environmental factors, these also play a role when it comes to perceived depth. Environmental and personal context provide possibilities for an interaction to develop in such a way that it might be perceived as profound. The original antecedents however were found to have less impact on the interaction process and its subsequent evaluation and perception than the dynamic motivations that emerged throughout the interaction process. Although no reported interaction was perceived negatively, profound and thus particularly enjoyable interactions were solely associated with an intrinsic dynamic motivation. If interactions were fully based on conformity or extrinsic motivations, they were still regarded as positive but were often seen as unremarkable and lacking in content. In these cases, it was not possible to develop a more positive interaction participant relationship due to either time restraints or a lack of mutual likeability.

The distinction between superficially and profoundly perceived social interactions has found to be a useful indicator between two types of social interactions with different dimensions as well as impacts (to be discussed further in the following section). While initiated and responded interactions differ strongly in terms of their environmental and personal contexts and antecedents, once an interaction has begun its perceived depth contributes more to an understanding of its process and subsequent evaluation. Although more initiated than responded interactions reach a profound depth, this may be due to the contextual impacts that can discourage dimensions that lead to profound interactions. When looking at the meaning that these interactions hold for interaction participants, these relate less to the original occurrence and whether they were initiators or targets but to the process and thus perception of the interaction. However, it was not possible to gather information on the perspectives of both initiator and respondent of the same interaction. It is thus not known whether interaction participants perceive the same interaction differently based on their role within interaction occurrence.

Section 6.2.2 also outlined the differences amongst visitor types when it comes to the perceived depth of their interactions. The individual characteristics and the desire to interact with other visitors indirectly contributed to interaction dimensions through influencing the contexts within which they happened, and also play an important role in how interactions are perceived. Young FITs often evaluated longer interactions

with more personal topics as superficial, whereas mature FITs perceived their comparatively shorter and less personal interactions more readily as profound. Although the interaction dimensions appear to be highly influential when determining how interactions are perceived, results of this study indicate that this occurs in combination with individual characteristics and the general importance placed on visitor-visitor interactions.

7.3.4 Impacts

The literature had identified one possible impact of visitor-visitor interactions on the visitor experience, namely an influence on satisfaction levels (e.g. Levy et al., 2011) based on a comparison between expected and perceived outcomes (Oliver, 1980). Social interactions with other visitors impact the social aspect of the visitor experience, which is connected to the other components of products, services and physical aspects – all in combination contributing to an overall satisfaction rating with both the situational and the overall visitor experience. However, no other potential impacts of social interactions between visitors had been suggested and it was unknown how exactly other visitors contribute to the visitor experience. Sub-question 4 thus addressed the following issues:

- In which ways can social interactions influence the visitor experience – both during specific situations or attractions and over the course of the full holiday?
- What factors do these types of impact depend upon?

As suggested in Section 2.1, the impacts of visitor-visitor interactions differed between situational and overall effects on the visitor experience. Situational impacts of specific social interactions influence the current situation within which the interaction occurs and have been found to include fun and entertainment, a positive impact on emotional fulfilment, and the benefits of a shared experience. The need for compromise that comes with interacting with others and a feeling of perceived safety through company emerged as well, although less dominantly. The more profound interactions were perceived, the greater the number of different situational impacts.

Interactions with multi-layered impacts nearly always led to a more positively perceived situational visitor experience with higher satisfaction levels, whereas those with only single impacts were reported to affect the satisfaction with the current situation far less often. This in turn again depends upon factors that have been shown to influence occurrence, process, and evaluation of social interactions, including visitor types – the combination of travel style, sociability, and interaction dimensions meant that backpackers had a comparatively high number of triple impact interactions that strongly influenced their current situations and the satisfaction with it, while free independent travellers reported more single or dual impact interactions that increased satisfaction levels less frequently.

The cumulative impacts of social interactions with other visitors on the full visitor experience and therefore overall holiday on the other hand could be divided into personal and travel related impacts. This was again dependent upon the range of external factors including visitor types. Visitors staying for a shorter duration while travelling with a partner reported to benefit less on personal, emotional levels. While backpackers especially benefitted from visitor-visitor interactions in terms of social support and learning, free independent travellers did not report the same. They often enhanced their destination knowledge and thus their understanding and experience of the destination by interacting with other visitors, with interactions thus impacting their travels and relationship with New Zealand. In addition, all visitor-visitor interactions contributed positively to the overall visitor experience by providing a positive and friendly atmosphere.

An additional factor that emerged throughout this study relates to the impacts of specific social interactions. These did not necessarily represent the cumulative impact of all interactions that were had with other visitors. Very short interactions, for example, were often reported to not even provide enough content for a positive emotional response towards them (Section 6.2.3), and many visitors highlighted the frequent reoccurrence of repetitive superficial interactions as described in Section 5.5 that did not contribute to their current situations. The cumulative impact of these often unremarkable interactions however led to a positively perceived friendly atmosphere between visitors in New Zealand, thus impacting the overall visitor experience by influencing the way the destination was perceived.

It was suggested earlier that the different components of the visitor experience might impact each other, meaning that the social aspect, products and services, and the physical environment can stand in connection with each other. The relevance of travel-related impacts on the visitor experience suggests that interactions with other visitors can also determine which products and services are consumed and which physical environments are entered, thus setting the context for further elements of the experience. Recommendations from other visitors frequently led to adjustments in itineraries, and increased destination knowledge gathered through visitor-visitor interactions provided additional context by offering a better and more comprehensive understanding of New Zealand as the destination. Further implications of this effect however will be discussed in Section 8.2.

7.3.5 Contributions of the revised conceptual framework

Although the original conceptual framework was validated by the findings of this study, additional information has emerged that contributes to a more in-depth understanding of social interactions between visitors. The visitor type of interviewees has been found to be a main determining factor in interaction occurrence. The antecedents of visitor-visitor interactions as reported by interviewees have been identified, as well as a range of influential factors that can either encourage or discourage the occurrence of social interactions. In addition, it has been shown that interviewees participated in visitor-visitor interactions for different reasons, depending on whether they were the initiators or the targets of these interactions – a distinction that had not yet been made.

The social interaction process of the original conceptual framework has been revised to accommodate the newly emerged knowledge on the relationships between interaction participants and the termination of interactions. It has been shown that the interplay between individual and environmental factors determined the desire and opportunities to interact with other visitors, relationships that had not been identified previously. The process of these interactions and how they were terminated was additionally impacted by the interaction participant relationship, a factor that, although crucial, has so far been mostly neglected. Additionally, dimensions and

dynamic motivations of visitor-visitor interactions were identified, and the concepts and rules guiding these interactions have emerged, thus confirming the applicability of Argyle et al.'s (1981) features of social situations to visitor-visitor interactions.

When it comes to the perception and evaluation of social interactions between visitors, the original conceptual framework included several steps that, as suggested by the literature (Section 2.5.3), often occur subconsciously, such as the application of coping techniques and a re-evaluation of future expectations. Due to the limitations of this study (Section 3.7), it was however not possible to evaluate the applicability of these subconscious processes to visitor-visitor interactions within this study. As the revised framework presents the interaction process that emerged throughout this research, it thus excludes these factors and instead highlights the newly identified importance of interaction depth perception as well as the emotional response towards interactions. As expected, perception and evaluation depend both on the interaction process as well as on a range of external factors, however the importance of individual attitudes and sociability has only emerged through this research. Further contributions are made by the range of influential factors that has been identified.

Based on the findings illustrated above, the original conceptual framework was then revised to acknowledge the different types of impacts and their combinations that visitor-visitor interactions can have on both dimensions of the visitor experience. This study identified a range of ways in which visitor-visitor interactions can impact both the current situation and the overall visitor experience – one of the main contributions, as it was previously not known how visitors can affect each other's holidays. Although the literature suggested that changes in satisfaction levels could be one of these impacts, it has been found that an influence on satisfaction with the current situation is a result stemming from more specific situational impacts. Factors that determine situational impacts frequently relate to interaction dimensions and perceptions as well as to the individual characteristics of interviewees. The impacts on the full visitor experience often depend on the chosen travel style and therefore visitor type, as especially travel duration and group constellation can influence whether or not a high intrinsic value is attached to from visitor-visitor interactions.

7.4 The research question revisited

By addressing the four sub-questions, it has become clear that the overarching research question of

What is the nature of social interactions between visitors and what is their potential impact on the visitor experience?

cannot be answered in a succinct and universally applicable way. Visitor-visitor interactions have been found to be a complex phenomenon, impacted by a wide range of factors relating to the environment and the individuals involved. In addition, the destination within which these interactions occur sets the context by influencing what types of visitors might be involved in interactions, how they travel, and what they focus on during their holiday. Section 7.2 has shown that, due to the overarching destination impact, the interdependencies of influential factors and thus the characteristics and impacts of social interactions are not necessarily applicable to other contexts. Figure 7.2 therefore provides a more generalizable overview of the nature of social interactions between visitors by excluding specific characteristics and findings. Instead, it focuses on the hierarchy of and connections between factors to outline what, in essence, contributes to the occurrence, process, impacts and thus the nature of social interactions between visitors.

It has been found that the characteristics of the destination and the individual personality traits of interaction participants are the two overarching influential factors. The destination attracts certain types of visitors and provides possibilities for them to travel in specific ways and fulfil their personal interests. The personality of the visitors themselves is especially influential in terms of their sociability and their overall desire to interact with other visitors in general. The combination of these two factors then contributes to the determination of certain visitor types. In the case of this research, these were based upon their travel behaviour and their desire to interact with other visitors, while other destination management organizations might categorize their visitors by other factors such as personal interests (e.g. culture, relaxation).

Figure 7.2 The nature of social interactions between visitors

The visitor type then determines the environmental contexts that visitors enter during their travels, which in turn influence certain personal contexts. These circumstances can then provide a possibility to interact with other visitors, either out of a desire to do so or because of a specific need or requirement. The resulting social interaction is then impacted by both the effects of environmental and personal contexts, as well as by the destination itself. The transport reliant flexible travel style in New Zealand determined conversation topics as well as the rules that were followed during interactions, and the interaction characteristics can be expected to vary depending on the destination providing the overall context. In addition, the interaction participant relationship based on the individual personalities of visitors also strongly impacts the social interaction and contributes to its perceived depth. Perceived depth, in connection with travel behaviour, personality and therefore visitor type has then been found to determine the ways a social interaction impacts the situation within which it occurs. The cumulative impact of social interactions however cannot solely be deduced from the situational impacts that specific social interactions have. However, it can be expected that both situational and cumulative impacts on the visitor experience can be personal and more intrinsic or travel related and thus more contributing to the actual travels and attractions than the emotional fulfilment during travels.

7.5 Conclusion

The previous sections have illustrated the main contributions to the academic literature on visitor-visitor interactions by incorporating the findings of this study into a revised conceptual framework. This provides a sequential overview of social interactions in tourism settings while outlining the factors which exert influence on them. However, due to the impacts of New Zealand as the research context, the specifics of this revised framework may only be applicable to independent, flexible, active, and transport-reliant visitors with interests in nature and culture. Although previous research as discussed in Chapter 2 contributed interesting insights into specific aspects or circumstances of contacts between consumers and contacts between visitors, this research aimed to go beyond this by providing a more

generalizable overview of the factors influencing visitor-visitor interactions, as introduced when addressing the main research question relating to the nature of visitor-visitor interactions. While this overview is not able to make predictions about how the phenomenon is manifested in different contexts, it provides a structured summary of the linkages and interdependencies within this complex issue. This study thus fulfils the aim of providing a solid foundation for further research on social interactions between visitors, as the comprehensive approach taken allowed for the identification of underlying factors contributing to and determining social interactions between visitors.

8 An exploration of social interactions of international visitors

8.1 Introduction

The importance of social interactions between visitors has been illustrated clearly in the first chapter. Tourists find themselves nearly always in the proximity of other tourists, which gives them the possibility to alter not only their own but also other's experiences (Crouch et al., 2004). This possible influence is most frequently regarded as a negative effect (Sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.4), but as the opening citation of this thesis states, "such a position overlooks other potential" (Crouch et al., 2004, p. 285). Indeed, the vast majority of all visitor-visitor interactions were perceived positively by interviewees in this study. Instead of negatively impacting their experience, every visitor expressed the intrinsic enjoyment they gained from interacting with other visitors and the positive way in which they contribute to their holiday in New Zealand.

Through the revision of the original conceptual framework, the previous chapter has already summarized the main findings of this study. The research question and its sub-questions were elaborated upon, and the contribution to the literature on visitor-visitor interactions was outlined. However, this research was expected to also contribute to a variety of other areas. Chapter 1 suggested that the interplay between factors constituting the visitor experience cannot be fully understood without taking interactions between visitors into account. Several aspects have emerged throughout this research that shed light on how these factors can influence each other, and will be discussed in Section 8.2. One of these aspects is that interactions between visitors have been found to often influence the subsequent travel behaviour, the social aspect thus determining both future physical settings and products or services to be consumed. Due to its particular relevance to word-of-mouth marketing, further attention will be paid to this in Section 8.3. The large number of backpacker interviewees has also shed additional light on their travel behaviour and how the social aspect manifests itself. Inconsistencies have been found in terms of backpackers' contact with the host community. Although large parts of the literature imply that this contact is extensive, this research indicates differently and reasons for this will be examined in Section 8.4. The underlying literature on social interactions

as reviewed in Section 2.2 will be revisited in Section 8.5, drawing upon the contributions of this study to the more generalizable literature. Research on visitor-visitor relationships has often been neglected as it seemed to be a factor outside of the industry's control (Mossberg, 2007). This however is not necessarily the case, and implications for the tourism industry will be outlined in Section 8.6. Section 8.7 will then revisit the methodological approach and examine it in light of the findings, before giving directions for future research in Section 8.8.

8.2 The role of social interactions with visitors in the visitor experience

The previous chapters clearly outlined the ways in which other visitors can impact each other's experiences, both on a situational level and when looking at the full visitor experience in New Zealand. However, the visitor experience is a far more complex construct. According to Cutler and Carmichael (2010, Figure 2.1), its influential realm consists of physical aspects, products and services, and the social aspect, of which visitor-visitor interactions are a part of. This is complemented by the personal realm, which includes knowledge, memory, perception, emotion, and self-identity. These factors in combination then lead to certain motivations and expectations, which influence the visitor experience, in turn impacted by the influential realm. Section 1.2 already suggested that the interplay between these different components cannot be understood without taking every influential factor into account. Although this study did not gather comprehensive information on all of these components, it contributed several possibilities in which interactions between visitors can not only impact the perception of other components but sometimes even determine their selection. This will provide an initial insight into the potential connections between the components of the influential realm, as well as how these can be connected to the personal realm.

It has become clear that the impacts of social interactions with other visitors differ significantly between their impact on the current situation and their impact on the overall visitor experience – a distinction that, in the academic literature, has not yet been explicitly made but is critical in understanding the role of social interactions for the visitor experience. Section 7.3.4 outlined that situational effects were more

immediate and could be summarized by fun, emotional fulfilment, and the benefit of a shared experience. Impacts on the overall visitor experience could be divided into more profound personal impacts (social support and stability, learning and identity development, enjoyment, broadening horizons) and travel related impacts (itinerary changes, activities and attractions visited, destination knowledge, atmosphere). When talking about the impact of the social aspect on the visitor experience, it is thus essential to first identify what dimension of the visitor experience one is referring to, while taking both into account. Within this study, it was possible to identify impacts on the overall visitor experience without looking at the underlying detailed social interactions. It is however not possible to identify the impacts of specific social interactions by only looking at the current situation within which they occur. Certain interactions alone may seem negligible due to their apparent lack of content and situational impact. Their value and contribution to the holiday becomes clear only when looking at their place within the overall visitor experience, as even short and superficial encounters can impact travel behaviour and contribute to a positive and friendly atmosphere.

Looking closer at the other influential components of the visitor experience, it has been found that visitor-visitor interactions are connected to both the physical aspects and the products and services. The way in which the environmental setting (and therefore physical aspects) can encourage or discourage social interactions has been examined in depth during the previous chapters. Certain products such as organized activities or backpacker buses are also sometimes designed in a way to actively encourage visitor-visitor interaction, as tour guides introduce participants and involve them in activities as well as conversations. In addition, positive visitor-visitor interactions can, under certain circumstances, even enhance an experience in a way that reduces negative effects stemming from poor product or service quality, whereas negatively perceived social interactions can contribute to a poorer perceived product or service quality. Backpackers sometimes reported that the overall positive impact of their social interactions reduced negative impacts of inadequate accommodation facilities or organization – the intrinsic benefit of interacting thus overshadowing the negative aspects of other parts of the current situation. Mature free independent travellers on the other hand participated in more organized

activities, and stated that negative influences from other participants could undermine the otherwise positively delivered product or service by reducing their ability to enjoy the experience.

When looking at the overall visitor experience, it has been found that visitor-visitor interactions can also contribute to the overall perception of the destination. Section 6.4.1 reported the contribution of even minor interactions to an overall friendly and positive atmosphere. This was highlighted by many interviewees, who reported that this atmosphere contributed strongly to how they felt about their destination and its residents and visitors. Additionally, the strong focus on travel talk and the transport reliant nature of international tourism in New Zealand also meant that visitor-visitor interactions often contributed to, and sometimes determined, the environmental (physical) settings that visitors entered and the products and services they consumed (see Section 6.4.1).

Apart from the influential realm, the personal realm of the visitor experience also deserves further attention. It has been made clear that factors within the individual influence the way their social aspect is manifested, which implies that both realms can impact each other directly. For example, visitor-visitor interactions contribute to the perception of New Zealand as a friendly and welcoming destination, while a desire to further develop self-identity can contribute to certain interaction processes. Additionally, interviewees did not report having any specific expectations towards the social aspect of their travels or the other visitors they might meet. Although certain environmental settings such as shared accommodation and organized activities were expected to put them in proximity to other visitors, interviewees did not seem to give much thought to these visitors in advance. In the case of free independent travellers, their anticipatory focus appeared to be on the respective activity, attraction, or tasks at hand without additionally considering a potential social element. Backpackers on the other hand, who rely heavily on visitor-visitor interactions, consistently reported the ease with which these interactions occurred especially in shared settings and seemed to regard their interactions as normal behaviour that did not involve conscious prior consideration. Although this already indicates a certain expectation towards the social aspect (namely that it would exist), interviewees did not report such expectations. Further investigation into underlying

expectations is thus needed to develop a clearer connection between influential and personal realm.

The relationships between visitor-visitor interactions, travel patterns, and perceived product performance have so far not been outlined, which has implications for how aspects of the visitor experience will have to be approached in the future. In particular, the effects of social interactions that occur while visitors consume products or services have so far only been considered in very specific settings (most frequently retail, see Section 2.3.1); however the relevance of this for the wider tourism industry cannot be underestimated and adds another dimension that needs to be considered for further research within this area.

8.3 Visitor-visitor interactions and word of mouth

One of the main impacts of social interactions between visitors was directly related to their travel behaviour. Nearly all reported social interactions included conversations about the interaction participants' travels within New Zealand. Not only was this considered a polite and appropriate conversation starter (Section 5.5), it also enhanced visitors' understanding and knowledge of their destination and often led to adjustments within their travel itinerary. Visitors frequently reported making travel- and activity-related decisions based on information gained during social interactions with other visitors as mentioned in the previous section, which is particularly relevant for the literature on marketing and especially word of mouth promotion.

Word of mouth can be defined as "informal communications between private parties concerning evaluations of goods and services" (Anderson, 1998, p. 6), and although current tourism-related research focuses mainly on electronic communication channels (e.g. Jeong & Jang, 2011; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008) there are still severe research gaps when it comes to face-to-face word of mouth. Murphy (2001, p. 51) argues that "while word-of-mouth promotion is consistently identified in tourism research as an important source of information used in decision making, there has been little or no research done to investigate this phenomenon in detail". First-time

long-term visitors as represented within this study have been shown to rely more heavily on recommendations from other travellers (Murphy, Moscardo, & Benckendorff, 2007). Although word of mouth was not the focus of this research, several related aspects have emerged that illustrate not only the role of word of mouth for international visitors in New Zealand but also shed light on the circumstances under which word of mouth promotion is especially prominent. It must however be noted that the prominence of independent and transport reliant tourism in New Zealand represents a context which can be assumed to encourage word of mouth. D. G. Pearce and Schott (2005) identified word of mouth as one of the three most important sources that travellers in New Zealand use to gather information. They also found that, due to the independent travel style of visitors, there is relatively little advance booking, which makes the relevance of word of mouth for purchase decisions highly relevant within this particular research context. The findings of this section are thus not necessarily applicable to other visitor types or destinations.

While word of mouth and recommendations for their travels were important for nearly all interviewees, it has emerged that they place a far greater value on recommendations that come from New Zealanders. Domestic travellers as well as locals were nearly always considered a more trustworthy source of information than other visitors. Although interviewees always welcomed the recommendations from other visitors, they explicitly sought out local advice due to their wider knowledge and possibility to compare options that visitors might not be aware of. This however does not mean that recommendations from other visitors were disregarded, as quite often they were the first and most frequent source of information. Free independent travellers however regarded them with far more caution, whereas backpackers often lacked the contact with locals (to be discussed further in the next section) and therefore had to rely more heavily on word of mouth delivered by other visitors. Backpacker interactions also proceeded more frequently to a more personal level, meaning that more insight into the personality and preferences of interaction partners was achieved. This in turn could lead to an increase in trust and the recommendations that they provide, whereas free independent travellers would often not know enough about the visitors providing recommendations to assess whether or

not they would share similar opinions. They would thus gather additional information to confirm the validity of recommendations from other visitors, and would ask locals or tourism industry employees specifically about their opinions on sites or activities that other visitors brought to their attention.

Word of mouth originating from other travellers has therefore found to be of far greater importance and value to backpackers, whereas FITs preferred the contact with locals and domestic travellers when making travel-related decisions. If independent travellers did make decisions based upon recommendations from other visitors, this was therefore often based upon longer and more personal social interactions that were mostly had in self-catered accommodation settings such as campsites, whereas those that stayed in catered and more private accommodation types did not have the possibility to conduct interactions of that type. These visitors were therefore those who placed less value on word of mouth during their contacts with other travellers and in turn reported to rely heavily on New Zealand's official tourist information centres, the i-SITEs. It must however be noted that interviewees did not enter into specific social interactions with other visitors for the explicit reason of gathering travel related information. Instead, they interacted most frequently based on intrinsic motivations and the exchange of travel related information functioned as an ice breaker and provided means of getting to know each other better.

8.4 The social aspect of backpacking

Backpackers were the visitor type most represented within the sample, due to the fact that their long-term and flexible travel style and the frequent absence of travel companions allowed them to participate in these often long interviews (Section 3.7). Although the patterns and impacts of their social interactions with other travellers have been presented in the previous chapters, their relevance and implications for the backpacker-related academic literature goes even further. The social aspect is especially applicable to and relevant for the travel form of backpacking (e.g. Binder, 2004; O'Reilly, 1986), yet only one study has explicitly considered social interactions between backpackers by looking at the role of word of mouth promotion

for this visitor type (Murphy, 2001). The previous section already indicated that backpackers appeared to seek fewer interactions with locals but more with other travellers, which does not correlate with the frequent emphasis of backpackers wanting to get to know other cultures and interact with the local host community (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995). Wilson and Richards (2008) reported a gap between the often strongly perceived contact of backpackers with the host community and the apparent lack of this contact, as backpackers have frequently been shown to gather in so-called backpacker enclaves and interact more with each other than with their respective hosts. This study has confirmed this pattern of behaviour, and offered explanations as to why this was the case.

The little contact with the host community relates directly to the impact that social interactions with other travellers have on the overall visitor experience of backpackers, especially the intrinsic impacts in terms of social support and stability. Those travelling with company are usually self-sufficient in their social needs, whereas single travellers need to rely on social interactions with others (P. L. Pearce, 2005b). Travelling for months and sometimes years, the permanent and reliable support system that is usually provided by friends and family does not exist. Thus, backpackers in similar situations and with similar needs often contribute to their respective visitor experience by functioning as a replacement for this system. When asked directly why there was less contact with locals than with other travellers, interviewees frequently referred to both the structure of their travels and the fact that locals have different social needs that are not necessarily compatible with their own.

The travel style of backpackers means that they rely on hostels and public transport. Organized backpacker bus systems are frequently seen as an affordable and flexible transport option that allows for sufficient interaction with other visitors and provides easy opportunities to meet people. Public transport networks are also heavily used, and therefore bring travellers with the same destination together. In combination with their self-catered travel style, it means that backpackers have fewer opportunities to interact with locals while travelling from place to place, as their infrastructure is heavily used by fellow backpackers and less by locals or domestic travellers. Other backpackers use private transport such as rental cars or campervans when travelling either with a travel partner or with other travellers they had met,

leading to a larger group size which has been shown to often discourage contacts with others in general. The circumstances of their travel behaviour in combination with their personal needs therefore means that backpackers often put themselves less in the path of locals, with whom they would not be able to build the relationship they desire or require for their mental well-being. Even interviewees on working holiday visas, often staying in one place for longer durations, reported that they begin to build up a network with other backpackers as opposed to one within the local community. Many working holiday occupations are popular with other backpackers as well (e.g. fruit picking, working in hostels), which again are situations within which they are more likely to meet more backpackers than locals. When not being long-term hostel dwellers, they frequently flat with other backpackers in similar semi-permanent situations, due to the flexibility in rental agreements – all of these factors contribute to a very high social interaction rate with other travellers and a comparatively low interaction rate with locals. As mentioned in Section 6.4, the emotional component especially was an important way in which interactions with other travellers contributed to the experience, and the longer an interaction lasted, the stronger was this benefit. This contributed to the large amount of unusually long social interactions reported by backpackers, as they frequently spent part of their holiday together – interactions with locals or domestic travellers on the other hand did not provide the opportunity to spend prolonged periods of time together, therefore making interactions with other travellers more beneficial to backpackers than interactions with the host community.

In addition, Richards and Wilson (2004) as well as Binder (2004) state that learning about oneself is a crucial component of backpacker travel. P. L. Pearce (2005b) emphasizes the impact that travel can have on an individual level, by changing minds, spirits, and characters and leading to higher self-reflection. However, he looks at this as the relationship that visitors have with themselves only, whereas this study has shown that the relationships with other travellers strongly contribute to and often induce this effect. Backpackers' desire for identity development and learning by comparing one's own experiences and viewpoints to those of others also contributes to a strong desire to interact more with other international travellers. Other travellers seem to provide more opportunity to broaden the interviewees'

horizons and offer higher benefits of a shared experience than interactions with locals. The commonalities of age, life stage, and travel interest provide sufficient common ground to reach a more personal interaction partner relationship, yet the individual differences provided ample opportunity to be exposed to other cultures.

However, social interactions with other travellers were not always perceived as a positive experience. The literature suggests that social interactions are a crucial part of backpacker experiences (e.g. Binder, 2004; Murphy, 2001), and often implies that these are always welcome and always a positive addition. This study however found that the longer interviewees were travelling, the stronger they emphasized an increased need for privacy and expressed boredom with the continuous social interactions that always cover the same conversation topics and frequently stay on superficial levels. Often referred to as ‘backpacker talk’, these interactions would be comparatively short and include travel talk and some personal background as to the life stages interaction participants were currently in. Depending on personal and environmental context as well as whether or not a mutual sympathy emerged, interactions of this type would frequently be terminated early, however they were considered a necessity to proceed to a more personal level that would allow for emotional needs to be satisfied. Further on in their travels, backpackers sometimes reported to make conscious decisions as to whether or not to invest energy in a social interaction when it held relatively little promise to proceed to a more profound and therefore more beneficial level. In addition, the continuously shared space that comes with their preferred accommodation and transport modes also sometimes came with an increased desire for privacy and personal space, which in turn would impact the occurrence of social interactions as the proximity of other travellers in general could, at times, be perceived as negative. However, no specific social interactions as reported by backpackers were perceived as negative, supporting their statements that these effects were always short-term effects and did not affect the attitude towards other visitors in general but only during specific circumstances where travellers felt the need for space.

While social interactions are indeed crucial for backpackers, this relies heavily on the circumstances in which they happen. The social aspect of this travel form is multi-layered and multi-dimensional, and on the micro level sometimes has less

impact than the literature might suggest. Social interactions are not always perceived as a positive enhancement of the current situation and visitor experience. Especially situational impacts depend strongly on the current situation, the travel stages and whether or not backpackers are willing and able to invest energy in social interactions that might only contribute positively on a superficial level.

8.5 Revisiting the social interaction literature

The general literature on social interactions as reviewed in Chapter 2 has contributed much to a better understanding of social interactions in tourism settings. However, the findings of this study in turn have several implications for the wider applicability of interaction related literature.

Section 2.2.2 introduced Argyle et al.'s (1981) nine features of social situations, whose applicability to tourism settings has been confirmed throughout previous studies (e.g. Murphy, 2001; P. L. Pearce, 1990), namely goals, rules, roles, repertoire of elements, sequence of behaviour, concepts and cognitive structures, environmental setting, language and speech, and difficulties and skills. Goals were suggested to be the most important feature of social situations and thus interactions, as "all the other features of situations can be explained functionally in terms of their contribution to the attainment of goals" (Argyle et al., 1981, p. 68). However, a potential change in goals had not been considered. While antecedents as the initial goals contributed to the understanding of interaction occurrence and process, their relevance was then replaced by the importance of subsequent dynamic motivations. The sequences of behaviour (i.e. the strict sequence of conversation topics, Section 5.5) on the other hand were found to be relevant for nearly all reported social interactions, regardless of their antecedents and dynamic motivations. In this case, the social rules that appear to be applicable to their role as international independent travellers in New Zealand determine their concepts and cognitive structures, which in turn dictate how the interaction proceeds. Although goals impact the repertoire of elements of behaviour (e.g. how personal conversation topics are), they were found to neither influence the rules nor the general sequence of behaviour.

Most importantly however, the role of the individuals within social interactions and their relationship with each other had not yet been acknowledged in the social interaction literature to the extent that it deserves. While the situational features provide context and structure content, their relative importance within a social interaction, its perception and subsequent meaning had not yet been questioned. This research identified interaction participant relationship as a crucial underlying concept that influences processes, dimensions and also impacts, thus illustrating that the social psychological approach to interactions needs to be extended to fully understand the complexities of the phenomenon.

The environmental setting on the other hand has been found to be of far greater importance than originally suggested. Argyle et al. (1981) focus on the physical aspects and how they influence social situations, and also consider personal space, privacy, or the effect of certain environmentally applicable expectations and rules. What appears to have been neglected however is the impact of the environment on the individuals within. This research has shown that people enter an environmental setting for specific reasons and with certain purposes, and might do so to undertake an activity. The environment can thus determine not only for what reasons (goals) people enter into a social interaction, but also for what reasons it will be continued, how much time can be spent on this interaction, and what elements of behaviour in which sequence are considered appropriate.

Social exchange theory, which contributed to the identification of intrinsic and extrinsic antecedents, suggested that individuals perceive interactions as more positive when they expect a positive outcome (Andereck et al., 2005). It was thus assumed that the initiators of social interactions would perceive their interactions as more positive than their respective targets. It has emerged during this research that nearly all social interactions were considered positive, regardless of the role the respective interviewees occupied. Perceived depth on the other hand has been found to be a more useful indicator of the meaning that these interactions hold for visitors, and initiated interactions were indeed more frequently perceived as profound as opposed to superficial. However, the interaction type of initiated or responded was not the main influential factor in determining perceived depth. Instead, the differences in depth perception by interaction type can be traced back to the

environmental and personal contexts of the social interactions. Interviewees preferred a certain type of context when initiating interactions, whereas they could not exert that level of control when being approached and thus responding to an interaction. This led to responded interactions more frequently being shorter and less personal in nature, simply because the current circumstances did not allow for it to develop in another way. Social exchange theory is thus only to a certain extent applicable to visitor-visitor interactions, and it can be assumed that its relevance for other contexts might show similar patterns.

While the underlying background theories have contributed much to the development of this research, the final findings suggest that the originally implied relationships and interdependencies might not be applicable to all contexts to the same extent. The roles of goals and environmental settings and their impact on other situational features in a visitor-visitor context seem to differ from their general applicability, and although the foundations of social exchange theory were found to be applicable to this study, more detailed assumptions were not.

8.6 Implications for the tourism industry

Not only are the visitors themselves affected by these social interactions, but also other stakeholders of the tourism industry. Increasing international visitor numbers as described in Section 1.2 can be expected to place higher pressure on certain parts of the tourism infrastructure. A better understanding of how visitors can affect each other's experiences (especially their current situations or activities) thus comes with strong implications for the tourism industry. Although the dynamics between visitors cannot be fully controlled by managerial practices, this research has provided insight into the circumstances that often lead to visitor-visitor interactions. They can contribute to a more positive perception of the current experience and also to the satisfaction with it (see Section 6.3). These circumstances can, to an extent, be encouraged to facilitate these positive experiences within sites of tourist consumption. In order to do this, visitor compatibility needs to be considered. The interaction participant relationship has been found to be a crucial influential factor on interaction process, perception and final impacts. Visitor compatibility is therefore a

crucial component of visitor-visitor interactions that has mostly been neglected in the literature – if this compatibility is not present, interactions tend to be shorter, more superficial, and generally less influential on the situational visitor experience and, in some cases, may even lead to dissatisfaction with it.

The relevance of visitor compatibility was acknowledged by Huang and Hsu (2010), who incorporated marketing related literature on customer compatibility management (CCM) in their research. Martin and Pranter (1989) first identified CCM as a managerial approach to increase customer satisfaction. Although not referring to specific social interactions but focusing on behaviour that customers are simply exposed to, they identify that negatively perceived behaviour is often based upon the individual characteristics of the observer, and that perceived commonalities between customers can contribute to more positively perceived behaviour. Several authors look at the overall relevance of CCM and what types of behaviour are considered positive or negative (e.g. Jones, 1995; Martin, 1996), which eventually led to C2C research as examined in Section 2.3.1. The common focus of CCM is however on the negative impacts they can have without considering the potential of enhancing positive impacts by looking further into not only why certain customers seem compatible but what it is that makes them perceive a compatibility that eventually positively contributes to satisfaction. This is especially important for tourism, as visitors often spend several hours at attractions or during organized activities without being able to exit a social situation. Positively perceived behaviour does indirectly contribute towards a positive experience and therefore depicts a basic level of visitor compatibility. However, by having a better understanding of how visitor-visitor interactions directly and positively contribute to satisfaction levels, a higher level of compatibility can be achieved. As discussed in Section 5.6.3, mutual likeability and common interests are a requirement for positively perceived social interactions between visitors that also impact satisfaction levels. To a certain extent, a common interest already exists by participating in the same activity and may be enhanced by taking into account life stages, experiences, or viewpoints. It is also important to recognize that common interests do not necessarily mean that interaction partners share commonalities, as a lack of those strongly contributes to

the value of a shared experience and the opportunity to see things through different eyes and expand the personal horizon by considering alternative viewpoints.

As backpackers place more importance on visitor-visitor contacts and rely heavily on these during their travels, it can be assumed that this is also the visitor type whose on-site visitor experience can benefit the most from successful interactions with other visitors. Due to the similarities in accommodation and transport choices, they most frequently interact with travellers of the same visitor type, and their similar circumstances and goals contribute to a positive perception and impact on satisfaction. Backpackers have been found to particularly enjoy interacting with travellers in similar life stages but from different backgrounds, as this provides them with the opportunity to spend more time together and fulfil their emotional needs while at the same time contributing to identity development through exposure to other perspectives. Although they also perceive interactions with travellers of other characteristics as positive, these have been found to not to have the same positive impact on their satisfaction. For accommodation providers, it is crucial to notice that not all backpackers are similar simply due to their choice of accommodation. Younger backpackers often were in a period of transition between school and university or professional life, and those that were older and had already completed university or took a break from professional life found that they could relate less to the younger segment due to the differences in life stages. Keeping this in mind when assigning visitors to shared dormitories or activities can contribute to the creation of groups that have been shown to interact in ways that are more profound and thus more beneficial to positive satisfaction ratings. In addition, it must be noted that social interactions with other visitors are not always welcome. Accommodation providers catering for backpackers should both foster the exchange between their guests by providing environmental settings that encourage interaction (Figure 5.5) while at the same time respecting and catering to an increased need for privacy especially apparent in long-term backpackers. Interviewees in similar travel stages reported similar experiences and showed less desire for short and superficial interactions that were consistently found enjoyable by those that were in the earlier stages of travelling – considering this factor when assigning backpacker visitors to

shared spaces or groups can also be expected to highly contribute to their satisfaction as their needs and requirements are less dispersed.

It has already been shown that managerially facilitated interactions in a group tour context increases both enjoyment of and satisfaction with the on-site visitor experience (Levy & Getz, 2012; Levy et al., 2011). The majority of all social interactions reported during organized activities had a positive impact on the interviewees' satisfaction levels, regardless of visitor type, sociability or the importance they assign to other visitors. When interactions did not have an impact, this was explained by a lack of commonalities and rapport between interaction participants or by a large group size that did not allow for more focused and personal interactions. The importance of the tour guide in encouraging interactions between visitors is therefore crucial, as interviewees often reported that their introductions were facilitated and already provided some information such as country of origin that would allow for a seamless beginning of the subsequent interaction process. Depending on the rapport between participants, the focus of the organized activity could then contribute positively by benefitting participants through a shared experience based on intrinsic motivations. Should such a rapport exist, however, the activity would also discourage interaction participants to proceed to more personal topics and therefore experiencing more profound interactions that have been shown to have a stronger and more positive impact on both the experience and the satisfaction with it. Smaller and therefore more intimate group sizes that encourage social interactions could therefore be recommended especially for organized special interest activities, as the commonalities of sharing this similar interest can be expected to positively contribute to beneficial interactions between the participants. Activities that are more generally themed however attract a wider variety of visitor and personality types. In these cases, larger groups would reduce the potential for conflict, while smaller groups would require more effort to ensure visitor compatibility not only on a minimum level but in a way that enhances the experience for participants. The two factors that can positively contribute towards organized activities while being pre-determinable have been found to be age and nationality. Similar life stages (i.e. age groups) have frequently been mentioned as a factor that positively contributes towards more personal and therefore more enjoyable social

interactions. In addition, the benefit of a shared experience was especially prominent during organized activities, as the different viewpoints would positively contribute to how the activity was experienced. This effect also frequently appeared in combination with interaction partners that were of different nationalities and could thus offer a wider variety of perspectives and contributions. As many organized activities involve the use of private transport, whose layout has been shown to discourage interactions across this particular space, activity participants that appear to show some degree of visitor compatibility can also be assigned to similar parts of the vehicle to encourage contact with those in their proximity.

Although not specifically related to visitor-visitor interactions and visitor compatibility, Section 8.3 outlined that free independent travellers, who reported to be more likely to participate in organised activities, highly value recommendations from locals. Locals employed within the tourism industry (e.g. i-SITEs, hotels, restaurants) were frequently consulted, but many interviewees also referred to members of the host community that they interacted with in coincidental circumstances. These were often asked about specific activities or attractions they could recommend, or whether they had comparative knowledge to contribute to a decision between two or more possible sights that visitors were planning to visit. The advice given by these individuals was perceived as highly trustworthy and often directly influenced purchase decision behaviour. It is therefore crucial that the local community is not only aware of the sights, attractions, and activities that are relevant for tourists, but is also sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to provide reliable information and recommendations. Offering discounted rates for locals or having special community events such as the Wellington Open Day which provides entry to all major visitor attractions in the city for a gold coin donation (Positively Wellington Tourism, 2013) can therefore be seen as indispensable tools to provide residents with a first-hand experience, thereby contributing to positive word of mouth and increased recommendations to visitors.

8.7 Methodological considerations

This section now reviews the methodological approach chosen to answer the research question and to what extent it proved useful in exploring a phenomenon about which not much was previously known. Due to the lack of research on visitor-visitor interactions, a post positivist exploratory approach was applied to examine both patterns and personal meanings step by step. This approach had to consider several aspects. Firstly, it was expected that social interactions between visitors are a complex issue, influenced by a variety of external factors in a number of different ways. While several relationships were anticipated, their whole range, directions and impacts were unknown and the research instrument thus had to be able to not only capture these unknown factors but also react to their emergence. It was also necessary to first gain insight into visitor-visitor interactions within a New Zealand context before collecting in-depth data as represented within the original conceptual framework (Figure 2.3). Apart from first impressions on motivations, circumstances, processes and meanings of these interactions, this also contributed information on potential settings and interviewees for further research.

The research process (Figure 3.1) was thus divided into two data collection parts. First, exploratory personal in-depth interviews were conducted. Based on these results, the second and main research step was developed, and a further round of qualitative interviews was deemed appropriate. Deciding only on the first phase of the process, while waiting with decisions about further steps until initial results were known, was found to be an appropriate and helpful approach. As mentioned before, the conceptual framework upon which the methodology was based consisted of often unrelated information and could thus not be used to develop and test a hypothesis. The exploratory interviews (Part 2, Figure 3.1) provided the researcher with a first insight into the manifestation of visitor-visitor interactions in New Zealand and were found to support the framework, thus strengthening its position within the further process. In addition, they contributed valuable information on future research settings and samples. Data analysis was undertaken throughout data collection, which allowed for the early recognition of patterns and the possibility to deepen the understanding of these throughout further interviews. These exploratory interviews yielded such rich data that data collection was extended to increase the value of their

contributions. However, the rich data were also one of the main challenges during the exploratory interviews. Questions were deliberately formulated more broadly to encompass the whole spectrum of factors relating to visitor-visitor interactions. Constant attention by the researcher was thus necessary to focus on the research objectives, to not eliminate interesting and applicable information, and to not be distracted by other interesting information. As it was not yet known where exactly this line could be drawn, exploratory interviews resulted in far more data that could be used within this research. Although exploratory interviews were conducted to only inform the second research phase, they were incorporated into the findings of this research to a greater extent than originally planned.

Based on the exploratory findings, it was then decided that the main research phase (Part 3, Figure 3.1) should consist of further qualitative in-depth interviews. More was known about visitor-visitor interactions, and first insight into the variety of relationships between factors was available. As focusing on relevant information was a challenge during the exploratory phase, the main interviews were thus partly structured to reduce the risk of distraction and to allow for sufficient focus on the wide range of interaction-related details that had to be collected. Due to the high engagement of interviewees, the main interviews too contained far more data than could be incorporated in this thesis. An unforeseen problem however was the fact that not all interviewees could provide both an initiated and a responded social interaction with other visitors within the specified timeframe, which led to fewer interactions within the sample than originally anticipated. On the other hand, the reasons for the lack of interactions provided additional insight into how travel behaviour and personality traits can affect visitor-visitor interactions. Although the interview duration was expected to occasionally lead to fatigue on the interviewees' side, this was not the case. Interviewees often emphasized how much they enjoyed the interview and that they found it interesting to look at aspects of their travels from perspectives they had not considered before.

In summary, the chosen approach to data collection has been found highly suitable in exploring a previously under-researched phenomenon from a post positivist perspective. It is however time consuming and unsuitable for research assistants, as a profound knowledge of the literature as well as previous interviews is required by

the interviewer to focus on potential patterns or aspects that interviewees might not deem important enough to elaborate upon.

The richness and amount of data obtained through interviews, in combination with a lack of previous applicable research, led to a challenging data analysis (Part 4, Figure 3.1). The literature already suggested that a number of interdependencies within visitor-visitor interactions might not be obvious, and often not consciously recognized by interviewees, which required a different approach than simply relying on the statements provided during interviews. The structured way in which parts of the main interviews were conducted allowed for the quantitizing of originally qualitatively collected data. Through an initial quantitized analysis, potential patterns and linkages were identified that were then analysed and confirmed with a qualitative approach. Although this approach came with certain risks (e.g. neglecting the richness of qualitative data, overestimating the importance of numerical values), it has been found to be invaluable in approaching and conducting data analysis in an organized, structured and timely manner. No other example for quantitizing tourism-related data has been found in the literature, and it is thus crucial to emphasize the fact that a quantitizing of the data must not lead to an elimination of qualitative data analysis but should only provide initial directions for it.

The methodological approach to data collection and analysis was both time intensive and challenging, yet the benefits outweigh the costs. The qualitative exploratory two-staged approach led to vast amounts of rich data, and the fact that all interviews were conducted by the same researcher contributed to data depth and consistency. In addition, the interviewees' involvement and willingness to reflect provided an insight into the phenomenon and its influential factors that could not have been achieved with less complex and elaborate approaches. However, due to the limitations and as a result of the findings of this research, there are still a number of aspects on visitor-visitor interactions that need to be addressed.

8.8 Directions for future research

The main limitations of this research were discussed in Section 3.7 and included the following aspects:

- The relatively small sample size that resulted from assigning interviewees to three different visitor types means that the findings of this study are indicators of potential patterns within the sample rather than generalizable ones. The fact that not every interviewee could provide examples of two recent specific social interactions adds further weight to the argument that the results of young and mature FITs in particular need to be interpreted carefully.
- The focus on international independent travellers without children stems from a combination of both destination and methodological approach, as most of New Zealand's international visitors are independent travellers. While more organized forms of tourism exist, these visitors, as well as domestic visitors and those with children, were found to be hard to approach due to the time requirements of the main interviews. Thus, no interviewees with more organized travel behaviour and no interviewees with children are represented within the sample.
- Although the role of culture was expected to play an important role in visitor-visitor interactions, this could not be determined due to the fact that all interviewees had a Western cultural background. Travel group constellation and language skills were the two main factors that led to the involuntary exclusion of other cultures.

Further research is therefore needed to address these three main gaps that have emerged throughout this study.

- To strengthen the findings examined throughout the previous chapters, more information on free independent travellers that are not backpackers is required. Additional data on the interactions of young and mature FITs will shed more light on the extent to which the patterns indicated in this study are indeed applicable to these visitor types. More interactions especially within

different environmental and personal contexts should be examined to provide a clearer picture of the effects these have on free independent travellers.

- The sampling technique in terms of location and interview duration can be adjusted to enable participation for other visitors. This would include domestic travellers, who were hard to approach due to their time requirements. Although international visitors highly valued interactions with domestic visitors due to their destination knowledge, it is not known how domestic visitors perceive interactions with other travellers. Visitors with children were also not included in this study, and it can be expected that the interactions of families would differ strongly from those visitors as represented within this study, based on their group constellation, travel behaviour and focus. More organized forms of travel such as group tours were already the focus of much research, however the specific interactions and the ways in which these develop over a longer period of time remains unknown and also deserves further attention.
- Interviewers fluent in a variety of other languages would enable participation of visitors especially from other cultural backgrounds – Tourism New Zealand (2014a) lists for example China, Japan, South Korea and India as other large target markets whose experiences might differ strongly from other nationalities and need to be addressed. This will shed additional light on the ways in and extent to which cultural aspects can impact occurrence, processes, perceptions and impacts of social interactions – not only between visitors of similar but also between visitors of different cultures. This would also allow an examination of the extent to which the results of this study are transferable to visitors from other cultures. For example, do Chinese visitors as an emerging market experience similar social interactions and impacts and place similar value upon them?

Data collection also relied heavily on the memory and recall ability of interviewees, and therefore had to focus on relatively recent social interactions visitors had experienced. Depending on the time of the interview in relation to the overall length of stay, visitors might undergo changes in attitudes or sociability (see Section 5.6.1), or might perceive the impact of their social interactions with other visitors differently

when exposed to a higher number of them. A longitudinal study comparing the role of interactions with other visitors over the course of the full holiday would provide further insight especially in the experiences of long-term travellers. Such a study, possibly using diaries that are completed throughout the full holiday, might also lend itself to further exploration of the impact of visitor-visitor interactions on satisfaction. While this research shows that visitor-visitor interactions positively affect the overall visitor experience, it remains unknown if and to what extent interactions with other visitors also influence the final satisfaction level with the full visitor experience - an issue that might be better explored at the end of the stay. The relative importance of visitor-visitor interactions as compared to visitor-host or visitor-personnel interactions, as well as their place within the overall visitor experience and all of its components can also be explored further by using diaries as a longitudinal research instrument.

In addition, Section 7.2 has outlined the impact that New Zealand as the research context may have on the findings of this data. Social interactions between visitors in other destinations, with other forms of travel, and with different interests, may exhibit different patterns and impacts than independent, transport based travellers in New Zealand. Other forms of travel may appeal to different personalities and can be assumed to provide visitors with different environmental and personal contexts. The high perceived safety and positive atmosphere has also been reported to be applicable especially to New Zealand. Destinations that do not contribute to this in the same way may also exhibit different visitor-visitor interaction patterns. The applicability of the findings of this research outside of New Zealand thus requires further attention. A similar case can be made for seasonality. Seasonality and thus a lower overall number of visitors within the country reduces the number of visitors available for interaction and, it appears, the number of interactions visitors have (Section 3.5.4). While this research was conducted during the main and shoulder seasons, the experiences of tourists visiting during the off-season remain unknown. It may also be that the off-season also attracts visitors with different personalities, interests, or personal circumstances, therefore changing important influential factors.

In particular, Figure 7.2 in combination with the revised conceptual framework (Figure 7.1) can contribute strongly to similar research in different settings and

contexts. The overview of the nature of social interactions can provide an initial framework for factors that need to be considered during future data collection. The conceptual framework can serve as a foundation for future comparisons, helping to identify aspects that are commonly applicable to social interactions in tourism settings as opposed to those that are context-dependent. While this research has identified the dimensions and constructs of social interactions between visitors, further research with larger sample sizes or in a variety of contexts will contribute to establishing the relative importance of these and the strength of the relationships among them.

The relevance of this research for the tourism industry can also be strengthened through additional research on the impact of atmosphere and environmental contexts on visitor-visitor interactions. The layout of communal spaces in youth hostels (e.g. large shared tables, open spaces) or seating arrangements during organized activities have frequently been mentioned to encourage positively perceived interactions with other visitors initially based upon proximity, thus indicating that the physical setup of an environment and how individuals are encouraged to move within it can contribute to the occurrence of social interactions. This was often connected to a certain atmosphere within this environment as an enhancement and also the result of the physical layout. Further research on how different environments can encourage or discourage different types of social interactions and atmospheres would provide industry stakeholders with additional information on how the dynamics within their respective attractions can be shaped to contribute to a positive visitor experience.

In addition to contributing to understanding social interactions in general and visitor-visitor interactions in particular, this study also raises questions about the conceptualization of tourism as an extraordinary experience. Tourism is generally regarded as an escape from the everyday (Mossberg, 2008). If daily routines are regarded as ordinary, are non-routine activities and actions as occurring throughout tourism necessarily extraordinary (Arnould & Price, 1993)? Throughout this research, interviewees indicated that the social interactions they experienced throughout their travels differed strongly from those they would have at home, in their usual environment. Nevertheless, they did describe routine-like patterns in the structure of these interactions and superficially perceived interactions in particular

were regarded as somewhat ordinary due to their repetitive nature. This then raises the question of what makes an extraordinary experience, and when does the extraordinary become ordinary? While the social psychological concepts of flow, peak performance, and peak experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Privette, 1983) all contribute to an understanding of what makes an experience memorable or important, they do not provide insight into how the cumulative impact of otherwise ordinary interactions can lead to extraordinary impacts – namely an overall atmosphere and also destination perception that was anything but ordinary. The findings of this study thus encourage further research into the meanings of the ordinary versus the extraordinary in a tourism context.

8.9 Conclusion

The preceding discussion has shown that social interactions between visitors can indeed play an important role for the visitor experience of individuals and, in the case of New Zealand, this role is nearly always a positive one. As stated in the introductory chapter, this research has examined visitor-visitor interactions from two angles. The patterns within the occurrence and process of phenomenon have been drawn out, as well as the emotional aspect that comes with subjective perceptions and experiences.

The application of a qualitative two-staged exploratory approach in combination with quantitative data analysis components has been proven exceptionally useful in addressing the challenges of this previously mostly unexplored phenomenon, and provided information beyond what this research aimed to address. Many possibilities for future research have been opened up, both in regards to visitor-visitor interactions within New Zealand and the application of these results to other research contexts.

The comprehensive, analytical approach taken in examining social interactions between visitors has led to a comprehensive conceptualization of the phenomenon. Although the detailed findings of this study reflect to a certain extent the research context of New Zealand, the underlying relationships between influential factors and

interaction occurrence and process provide a solid foundation for further research. The complexity of visitor-visitor interactions has been illustrated by the revised conceptual framework, which answered the research question as detailed in Section 3.2 while also outlining further contributions to the literature on visitor-visitor interactions. However, a wealth of information has emerged through this study that went beyond the originally formulated research question. The complex interplay between a variety of visitor experience related factors provides additional support for the importance of visitor-visitor interactions, as they can influence and sometimes even determine aspects that originally appeared to be only complemented by this social aspect. Additionally, light has been shed on the importance of and value placed on word of mouth recommendations from other visitors as well as residents, while the high number of backpacker interviewees provided further insight into how the social aspect of their travels is manifested and why.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the results of this study, especially in terms of its applicability to a wider tourism context.

Firstly, due to its exploratory nature, this research raises a number of additional questions. The majority of these questions of course relate to the applicability of the findings outside of the New Zealand research context, as the relevance of the destination had not previously been considered when looking at the social aspect of travelling in general. However, the foundation of visitor-visitor interactions can be found in the interplay between destination and individual characteristics and their resulting consequences. This knowledge enables further research to be conducted in more targeted ways, and the detailed findings of this study will provide comparative material that will allow for the future identification of generalizable versus research specific impacts.

Secondly, it has indeed been shown that interactions between visitors are not necessarily factors that cannot be influenced or utilized by the tourism industry. Although a complex and time intensive endeavour, this research has unearthed a number of ways in which visitor-visitor interactions can change experiences for the better, contribute to greater enjoyment, and often determine not only the perception but also usage of sites and attractions within the destination. In the light of increasing

visitor numbers and a competitive market, efforts should be undertaken to positively utilize these dynamics between visitors in order to provide high quality and enjoyable experiences. This research has provided a first insight into what these efforts could be and how visitors might benefit from them.

Thirdly, and most importantly, this research has emphasized the importance of and need for further research when it comes to visitor-visitor interactions in particular and the social aspect of travelling in general. It has been shown that social contact is a consistent and often important part of travelling – not only the social contact with visitors, but also with locals and employees within the tourism industry. In the case of New Zealand, these overall contacts contributed to an atmosphere which, compared to previous travels in other countries, was reported to be unusually friendly, welcoming, and positive and strongly impacted the favourable impression visitors had of the country. Considering that the impacts of social contacts on the visitor experience can reflect so profoundly not only upon individual aspects of a holiday but upon the overall destination, it is clear that the visitor experience is still a concept that requires further insight. It is thus necessary to focus on the social aspect of travelling in more detail, regardless of the challenges that come with new explorations.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Exploratory interviews – information sheet and consent form

Appendix B: Exploratory interviews – interview guidelines

Appendix C: Main interviews – information sheet and consent form

Appendix D: Main interviews – interview guidelines

Appendix A

Exploratory interviews – information sheet and consent form

“Social Interactions Among Visitors” **Information Sheet**

Hello!

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate I thank you. If you decide not to take part, I thank you for considering my request.

The project:

For my PhD degree at Victoria University’s Management School, I am looking at social interactions between visitors and what influence these have on visitor satisfaction. Basically I want to find out why and under which circumstances visitors to New Zealand interact, meet and talk to each other. I want to find out how different types of interactions are perceived and evaluated, and what possible impact these might have on the visitor’s satisfaction.

The task:

In order to conduct further in-depth research, I first need to build up a knowledge base which I can later use as a foundation. For this, I would like to know more about where visitors interact, what they talk to each other about, and how important these encounters are for their visitor satisfaction. I would also like to talk about some experiences with other tourists that visitors considered important or memorable, and find out why this is and what happened during those interactions.

Participation in the project:

Should you agree to take part in this project and sign the attached consent form, you will be asked to complete an informal personal interview of circa 20-30 minutes on your experience with other visitors here in New Zealand. The interview will be recorded and completed by handwritten notes. Please be aware that you may decline to answer any particular questions and that you may withdraw from participation in the project at any time, for example if the interview develops in a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable – in this case the information provided will be destroyed. You also have the opportunity to withdraw your contribution to the project until Sunday, 11th March 2012, either by phone, email or mail – in both cases the information provided will be destroyed.

Processing of data and confidentiality:

The interview notes and electronic copies will be securely stored in such a way that only myself and my supervisor will be able to gain access to it and will be destroyed two years after completion of this project. Data from the interviews will be analysed and final findings will be discussed in my thesis. After completion of the degree, the thesis or parts thereof might be published in journal articles or at conferences. I assure confidentiality of all participants. Participants will only be revealed by their age and travel style.

Output of the project:

If requested, you will be provided with a summary copy of the project findings after completion of the project (2014) as indicated on the consent form.

Contact:

If you have any questions about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or my assigned supervisor.

Ina Reichenberger, PhD in Tourism Management, Victoria University of Wellington

ina.reichenberger@vuw.ac.nz, 0064 4 463 5730

Douglas Pearce, Professor in Tourism Management, Victoria University of Wellington

douglas.pearce@vuw.ac.nz, 0064 4 463 5715

Victoria University of Wellington, Victoria Management School, PO Box 600, Wellington, New Zealand

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Victoria University of Wellington, Pipitea Human Ethics Committee.

“Social Interactions Among Visitors”

Consent Form

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this student project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I know that:

- My participation in this project is entirely voluntary.
- In the event that the line of questioning during the interview develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project immediately. As a consequence, my contribution to the study will immediately be destroyed.
- I may withdraw my contribution to the project until Sunday, 11th March 2012 either by phone, email or mail. As a consequence, my contribution to the study will immediately be destroyed.
- The interview is expected to last circa 20-30 minutes and it is being electronically recorded.
- All recordings, notes and transcripts will be destroyed two years after the completion of this project in 2014.

I would like (please tick box as required)

- ☐ A summary copy of the project findings to be sent to my email address

Email:

- ☐ A summary copy of the project findings to be sent to my postal address

Postal Address:

I agree to take part in this project.

.....
(Name of Participant)

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

Appendix B

Exploratory interviews – interview guidelines

“Social Interactions Among Visitors”
Interview Guidelines

Q1. To get a bit of context, can I first ask some information about your travels here?

Preferred transport/accommodation
Length of stay in NZ/Time spent so far
Age/Nationality

Q2. Looking back on your current travels in New Zealand, where have you most often spend time with other visitors?

Anywhere else? Activities?

Q3. When you talk to other visitors, how does this usually happen?

Why
Where
Which areas
Who approaches who
Why do you choose especially these persons
Why do you choose to respond when others start a conversation
How do you feel about these contacts? Do you enjoy them? Any difference between initiator/respondent?

Q4. What do you usually talk about?

Topics
Anything longer, more significant – how, why and when do these happen?

Q5. Can you tell me about some memorable encounters that you had with other travellers here in New Zealand?

Why
Which areas
Who approached who
Why these persons or why did you respond
Topics and involvement
Why memorable
Anything else?

Q6. Can you recall any experiences that you didn't perceive in such a positive way?

Who (nationality, age, traveller type...)

Why

Impact on experience

Q7. Are there any situations where you would prefer not to spend time with other visitors?

Any situations, times, locations, activities

Q8. How would you describe or categorize the different types of contacts you had with other visitors here in New Zealand?

Q9. How important are contacts with other visitors for your overall experience here in New Zealand?

Q10. How important are contacts with other visitors for specific activities?

Q11. Are there any other experiences you would like to share that you think would fit within this topic?

Appendix C

Main interviews – information sheet and consent form

“Social Interactions Among Visitors” **Information Sheet**

Hello!

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate I thank you. If you decide not to take part, I thank you for considering my request.

The project:

For my PhD degree at Victoria University’s Management School, I am looking at social interactions among visitors in New Zealand and what influence these have on visitor satisfaction. Basically I want to find out why and under which circumstances visitors to New Zealand talk to each other. I want to find out how different types of interactions are perceived and evaluated, and what possible impact these might have on the visitors’ satisfaction.

The task:

Previous exploratory interviews have identified a wide range of factors and aspects that are influential for not only the occurrence but also the process and perception of social interactions, or rather conversations, between visitors. The main objective of these interviews is to put these factors into the context of actual interactions. Apart from demographic and travel related information, I am looking at the details of conversations, including the surroundings and circumstances in which they happen, the reasons for their occurrence, the contribution of all interaction partners to and their behaviour during the conversation and identify aspects that influence for example the topics or length of a conversation. Finally, the perception of the conversations by the participants will be evaluated, together with the potential impact this contact with other visitors might have on the visitor experience.

Participation in the project:

Should you agree to take part in this project and sign the attached consent form, you will be asked to complete an informal personal interview of circa 30-40 minutes on your recent interactions with other visitors here in New Zealand. The interview will be recorded and completed by handwritten notes. Please be aware that you may decline to answer any particular questions and that you may withdraw from participation in the project at any time, for example if the interview develops in a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable – in this case the information provided will be destroyed. You also have the opportunity to withdraw your contribution to the project until Monday 18th March 2013, either by phone, email or mail – in this case the information provided will be destroyed.

Processing of data and confidentiality:

The interview notes and electronic copies will be securely stored in such a way that only myself and my supervisors will be able to gain access to it and will be destroyed two years after completion of this project. Data from the interviews will be analysed and final findings will be discussed in my thesis. After completion of the degree or earlier, the thesis or parts thereof might be published in journal articles or at conferences. I assure confidentiality of all participants involved. Participants will only be revealed by their age, nationality, gender, travel style or group constellation.

Output of the project:

If requested, you will be provided with a summary copy of the project findings after completion of the project (2014) as indicated on the consent form.

Contact:

If you have any questions about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or my assigned supervisor.

Ina Reichenberger, PhD in Tourism Management, Victoria University of Wellington

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Victoria University of Wellington, Victoria Management School, PO Box 600, Wellington, New Zealand

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Victoria University of Wellington, Pipitea Human Ethics Committee.

“Social Interactions Among Visitors”
Consent Form

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this student project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I know that:

- My participation in this project is entirely voluntary.
- In the event that the line of questioning during the interview develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project immediately. As a consequence, my contribution to the study will immediately be destroyed.
- I may withdraw my contribution to the project until Monday, 18th March 2013 either by phone, email or mail. As a consequence, my contribution to the study will immediately be destroyed.
- The interview is expected to last circa 30 – 40 minutes and it is being electronically recorded.
- All recordings, notes and transcripts will be destroyed two years after the completion of this project in 2014.

I would like (please tick box as required)

- ☐ A summary copy of the project findings to be sent to my email address

Email:

- ☐ A summary copy of the project findings to be sent to my postal address

Postal Address:

I agree to take part in this project.

.....
(Name of Participant)

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

Appendix D

Main interviews – interview guidelines

Interview Guidelines

I've mentioned before that I'm looking at social interactions between visitors. There are really no specific types of interactions or encounters that I'm interested in, actually I want to get an idea of the whole range of encounters that visitors have experienced here.

Although actual conversations are an important part of this, please remember that encounters can happen in a lot of different forms. They can consist of conversations or they can consist of actions, for example if you have a chat with someone during an activity or if you pick up something someone has dropped. They can be long and extensive, for example when you spend several days with others on a hiking trip, and also short and fleeting, where you might just pass by and acknowledge each other. They can be very straight forward and happen between only two people, or they can happen within a larger group where it's hard to say what is happening between which people – for example if ten people are sitting around a dinner table and a lot of things are going on at once. There really are no limitations at all. Of course these are just examples, basically I'm interested in any kind of mutual contact that you have had with other visitors here. I know that this is a bit of an abstract concept, so if you're unsure at any time during the interview, please just ask.

To get a bit of context, can you give me some information about how you and your travels here in New Zealand?

- Where are you from
- With whom are you travelling – permanently or temporarily
- What types of accommodation do you use
- What types of transport do you use
- How long are you staying in New Zealand
- How much time have you spent in New Zealand so far
- What is the main focus or main interest of your holiday here in New Zealand
- How old are you

As you know, I'm looking at the contacts that visitors to New Zealand have here with other travellers. For you personally, how important are the contacts with other visitors here for your travel experience?

(if not mentioned by respondent, check if they would describe themselves as more sociable/chatty or quiet/introverted)

On a scale from 1 = not important at all to 5 = very important, how would you rate the importance of contacts with other visitors for your holiday here?

On a scale from 1 = very sociable/extroverted to 5 = very quiet/introverted, how would you rate your personality type during your holiday here?

I mentioned before that I am interested in the details of a few recent encounters you have had with other visitors so far. I'll be asking quite a lot of questions about those and you might feel that some of them are really not important at all. You're probably right about this, but not only do I have to determine factors that have an influence on these encounters, but I also need to eliminate factors that are completely unrelated.

Can you tell me about an encounter with one or several other visitors that you remember well, for whatever reason? An encounter that you have started and that took place during yesterday or today.

(As soon as the respondent has decided on an encounter continue)

Can you just talk me through this specific encounter? You can start with whom you have had it and the circumstances, for example when and where it happened.

(If they have met these persons before: Oh that's really interesting! Would you mind if we spend a few minutes more on that? Can you describe to me the first time you met them?)

The circumstances of the encounter

- When and where did the encounter take place
- How would you describe your surroundings at the time (for example noise, user density or other aspects)
- What did you do at the location, why did you go there
- With whom were you there
- How much time did you spend at the location, were you in a hurry
- How did you feel at the time, in which mood were you

The beginning and course of the encounter

- Who were the other participants – nationality, group constellation, language, age
- How did you initiate/start the encounter, and why
- Why did you choose these people and not someone else
- What topics did you talk about, and in what order
- How or by whom were the topics brought up
- What did everyone do during the encounter, what happened in terms of non-verbal actions
- How long did the encounter last, and why
- You mentioned your initial reason for starting this encounter was *(as mentioned before)* – was that reason fulfilled and did it change throughout your conversation
- How formal would you say the encounter was, and did that change during the course of it
- Would you say the encounter was superficial or profound

- Where was everyone situated at the beginning of the encounter, and did that change
- Did everyone participate/talk the same amount or were there differences
- Was there something in your surroundings, for example noise, weather, other people, that somehow affected this encounter
- Can you think of anything else that had an impact on this encounter

The end of the encounter

- Who ended the encounter, and do you know why
- How did you feel about the encounter and why
- Was there anything unusual or uncommon about this encounter
- Did the encounter have any impact on how you experienced your activity/the current situation there
- If yes – did this encounter also influence how satisfied you were with your activity/the current situation
- Have you done a similar activity/been in a similar situation before – if yes, how did this experience compare to the previous ones
- Did you have any expectations towards the people you might meet at that location – if yes, what were they and were they fulfilled
- Is there any chance you will meet again or stay in contact – if yes, why
- If it was an encounter with someone they met previously: From this first encounter on, how often, when, where and under which circumstances did you meet again? How were further encounters different from this first one? Did the following encounters become more important to you?

Can you also tell me about another encounter with one or several other visitors that you remember well, for whatever reason? An encounter that was started by them and not yourself and took place during yesterday or today?

(As soon as the respondent has decided on an encounter continue)

Can you just talk me through this specific encounter? You can start with whom you have had it and the circumstances, for example when and where it happened.

(If they have met these persons before: Oh that's really interesting! Would you mind if we spend a few minutes more on that? Can you describe to me the first time you met them?)

The circumstances of the encounter

- When and where did the encounter take place
- How would you describe your surroundings at the time (for example noise, user density or other aspects)
- What did you do at the location, why did you go there
- With whom were you there
- How much time did you spend at the location, were you in a hurry
- How did you feel at the time, in which mood were you

The beginning and course of the encounter

- Who were the other participants – nationality, group constellation, language, age
- How and by whom (if group) was the encounter initiated, how did it start
- Do you know why they chose you and not someone else
- Why did you decide to respond
- What topics did you talk about, and in what order
- How or by whom were the topics brought up
- What did everyone do during the encounter, what happened in terms of non-verbal actions
- How long did the encounter last, and why
- You mentioned your initial reason for responding was (*as mentioned before*) – was that reason fulfilled and did it change throughout your conversation
- How formal would you say the encounter was, and did that change during the course of it
- Would you say the encounter was superficial or profound
- Where was everyone situated at the beginning of the encounter, and did that change
- Did everyone participate/talk the same amount or were there differences
- Was there something in your surroundings, for example noise, weather, other people, that somehow affected this encounter
- Can you think of anything else that had an impact on this encounter

The end of the encounter

- Who ended the encounter, and do you know why
- How did you feel about the encounter and why
- Was there anything unusual or uncommon about this encounter
- Did the encounter have any impact on how you experienced your activity/the current situation there
- If yes – did this encounter also influence how satisfied you were with your activity/the current situation
- Have you done a similar activity/been in a similar situation before – if yes, how did this experience compare to the previous ones
- Did you have any expectations towards the people you might meet at that location – if yes, what were they and were they fulfilled
- Is there any chance you will meet again or stay in contact – if yes, why
- If it was an encounter with someone they met previously: From this first encounter on, how often, when, where and under which circumstances did you meet again? How were further encounters different from this first one? Did the following encounters become more important to you?

Is there anything that you would consider inappropriate during an encounter with other visitors, for example specific topics or certain types of behaviour?

Were there any situations during the last 24 hours where you could have engaged in an encounter with other visitors but chose not to?

- Why is that – related to persons, activity, mood, energy, time, focus...?

Can encounters with other visitors also somehow affect your satisfaction, either with your travels or with a specific situation?

- If yes, how
- Has this happened during your travels here