



## Inscrutable Nature-based Spatial Experience

The challenges and opportunities for studying contemporary accommodation architecture of tourism destinations in the Arctic

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### **Abstract**

The main emphasis in this article is on detecting the knowledge gaps for architecture to support nature-based environmentally sensitive tourism, especially from the point of view of elaborating the accommodation concepts. Experiencing nature as part of the accommodation is highly appreciated by tourists (Tyrväinen et al 2014). Though, unfortunately the current hotel-like lodging concepts are not any more satisfactory for the tourists, especially now when the demand has shifted on the self-catering units. The notion of servicescape used in tourism research to emphasize spatial qualities among other things turned out to be rewarding also for architecture. In the context of second-homes and wilderness tourism exertion is affiliated to the experience of being on vacation. We see here an interesting knowledge gap for architecture to contribute for the discussion of future lodging concepts through the research by design approach.

Keywords: nature-based spatial experience, tourist destination accommodation architecture, space, place, wilderness servicescape, nature servicescape, human-made servicescape, northernness, Arctic, Lapland

### **Introduction**

Experiencing nature as part of the accommodation is highly appreciated by tourists (Tyrväinen et al 2014), but unfortunately in the current hotel-like lodging concepts the spatial experience is often diminished to more diverse use of natural materials. Or, the spatial experience is based mainly on the visual senses, such as a view through the window to the wilderness. Sustainability and energy efficiency are topical themes for studying and setting the standards for tourism destination architecture (for example Staffans et al 2011), but unfortunately the qualitative contents of these buildings often remain on the side lines. The aim of this article is to make review of present stage of contemporary

tourism destination architecture research, especially studies of lodging concepts in the Arctic exploiting nature-based spatial experience as the main content of the architecture. In the mapping process of the studies we pay attention to what are the architectonic means to support nature-based environmentally sensitive tourism and further, how architecture may enhance the nature-based spatial experience in the accommodation concepts designed for tourism destinations.

Currently the nature-based tourism in the Arctic is aiming towards more unique and authentic experience of nature alongside the major tourist resorts. The wilderness tourism have spatial needs for lodging, catering and programme service purposes where the main aim is on emphasizing the tourists' relationship to nature and to support the environmentally sensitive experience. Tourism research in the Arctic has well established position main emphasis being on the nature-based tourism. In architectural research wilderness tourism has mainly been studied through the principles of urban planning and landscape design in mass tourism centres. In the field of architecture there exist some historical studies (Hautajärvi 2014) and surveys about tourist resort architecture in Lapland. Hautajärvi's historical research of Lapland tourism architecture brings out the change from professionally designed smaller scale tourism buildings that respect the surrounding nature to the present-day larger scale mass tourism urban villages where the surrounding nature has been modified and partly destroyed. But of our knowledge studies about contemporary nature-based tourism destination architecture in Lapland or more broadly in the Arctic are quite rare. Despite of the paucity of architectural research, we find it extremely important to map the existing studies and find the missing knowledge gaps in question setting in order to build a solid base for the future contemporary nature-based tourism destination architectural research.

### **Human-made servicescape vs natural servicescape**

Space and place are core concepts in architecture generally, as well as when discussing about spatial experience in nature based tourism destination architecture. Space is often considered to be objective or neutral by nature of course including the function, materials and technical equipment and facilities, but space becomes a meaningful lived place, a social construction, through one's own personal experience. In tourism research, especially when discussing about nature-based tourism architecture the concept of servicescape (Booms & Biner 1981) is useful in expressing the versatile contents of the space, better familiar for marketing studies, to emphasize the impact of the physical environment in which a service process takes place. The servicescape includes the facility's exterior: landscape, exterior design, signage, parking, surrounding environment, and interior: interior design and decor, equipment, signage, layout, air quality, temperature and ambiance (Bitner 1991).

*We see that the lack of awareness of ambient factors in human-made servicescape may be due to the build environment lacking experiential features supporting the nature-based spatial experience.*

In the field of tourism research features of human-made servicescapes have been studied in comparison to natural servicespaces. In a human-made servicescape, background conditions (or ambient factors) such as temperature, noise and cleanness are usually below the level of immediate awareness of customers, while design factors, architecture and comfort exist at the forefront of our awareness (Baker 1987, Ezeh & Harris 2007, Fredman et al 2012). However, in the natural servicescape, the physical environment, or the ambient factors, is in the foreground rather than being in the background of the service delivery (Arnould et al 1998a, 1998b, Fredman et al 2012). We see that the lack of awareness of ambient factors in human-made servicescape may be due to the build environment lacking experiential features supporting the nature-based spatial experience. However, Fredman et al (2012) notes that natural and built conditions coexist in many sites (Arnould et al 1998a, 1998b, Hall & Boyd 2005) and therefore, in the natural servicescape it seems like the ambient factors and the designed factors interact more clearly with each other and that the ambient factors affect customers' experiences and behaviours to a greater extent than in human-made servicescapes.

Arnould et al (1998a) deploy the concept of wilderness servicescape that is referring to servicescape of more pristine nature, rather than on the broader concept of nature servicescape. Haanpää et al (2006) emphasize the

significance of experiencing the silence of nature by more thoughtful designing of the interior and exterior structures or buildings in contact to the wilderness. We see here a weighty challenge for architectural design research to study the quality and content of architecture-nature-relationship in the process of affecting and supporting customers' nature experiences. Of course there exists also the notion of experiencescape (for example O'Dell & Billing 2005) through which the experiential aspects may be discussed in the tourism context. But in the experiencescape the main emphasis seems to be on experiences that are artificial of their origin and deliberately distant from nature-based experiences.

## **Shift from hotel and lodge accommodation to second-homes and other self-catering units**

To approach accommodation solutions in which nature experience is well facilitated, it is important to clarify the present stage and development in the market. To focus on the Arctic area, in Scandinavia the mountain region winter tourism has been reported of growing demand for self-catering accommodation instead of hotel rooms (Komppula et al 2008, Flognfeldt & Tjørve 2013). The hotels and lodges seem to be losing customers both to the market for self-owned second homes and to the rental market for camping cabins, chalets, apartments, and other types of self-catering units. Also, foreign tourists seem to have abandoned the traditional hotels and increasingly prefer such commercial self-catering units as chalets and apartments. According to Flognfeldt & Tjørve (2013) the importance of private-owned second-homes compared with the traditional accommodation industry is not at all or only partly recognized, since it has been studied so little and thus not well understood because of the lack of verifiable statistics. However, the change for second-homes is progressing steadily, though accommodation industry is more conspicuous, and the view that revenues from the second-home industry are considered to be low (Flognfeldt & Tjørve 2013).

Especially in the Nordic countries second homes has a well-established position. Conventionally, second homes are detached and non-mobile, privately owned dwellings used for recreational and secondary purposes which are different from primary residences (Ragatz 1977, Shucksmith 1983), but for example Noutza et al (2013) defines "second homes" as private recreational dwellings which differ from primary residences. The Nordic countries have a long and distinct tradition of second home tourism, because more than 50% of the population has access to them. Second homes together with the tradition of outdoor recreation form the true mass tourism. (Müller 2007.) But despite of the popularity of second homes they are still not self-evidently included into accounts of tourism since they do not fit into more recent business-oriented research on tourism development (Müller 2013; Flognfeldt & Tjørve 2013). According to Flognfeldt & Tjørve (2013) they give four main drivers for the increasing interest of second homes: access to modern amenities, the preference for independence from hotel routines and forced togetherness, an economy with greater affluence, and more spare time.

Contradictory to the findings of Flognfeldt & Tjørve (2013) that also the amenities would be one of the main drivers for increasing of second-homes, Pitkänen et al (2014) claim that in Finland second-homes are preferred without modern amenities also among young people. The recurrent explanation for the popularity of second-homes is the idea of post-war baby-boom generation's return to their roots in the countryside, but Pitkänen et al (2014) point out that also people under 30 years tend to agree with the statements about the desirability of simple cottage life without modern conveniences. According to Alasuutari & Alasuutari (2010) the fascination or spell of second-home living lies on the dissimilarity from the everyday living. Also more broadly this dissimilarity also raises the sense of being on vacation. Simple things as nature observation, especially the intensity of monitoring the cyclicity of the nature is fascinating. Exertion has also an important role in the second home living, for example fetching water from the well, chopping the wood for fireplace and warming up the sauna. If life is too easy at the second-home then the spell faints away representing the other reality. (Alasuutari & Alasuutari 2010.)

*The theme of exertion and even discomfort is not only privilege of second-home spell, but it is also included to tourist's nature-based experience.*

The theme of exertion and even discomfort is not only privilege of second home spell, but it is also included to tourist's nature-based experience. The positive feelings; like warmness, rest, ease and peace in the end of the experience are usually consequences of physically heavy feelings; like coldness, physical burdens and even pain (Angeria, Moilanen & Seppinen 2006). Exertions and hardships of the nature-based tourist experience rewards in the end and often becomes highlights of the journey (Tuulentie 2004). Seppo Valjus, the emeritus professor of contemporary architecture once said in his lecture on year 1978 that a wilderness cottage should fulfil reasonable requirements of discomfort.

## How to study and elaborate natural servicescapes in architecture

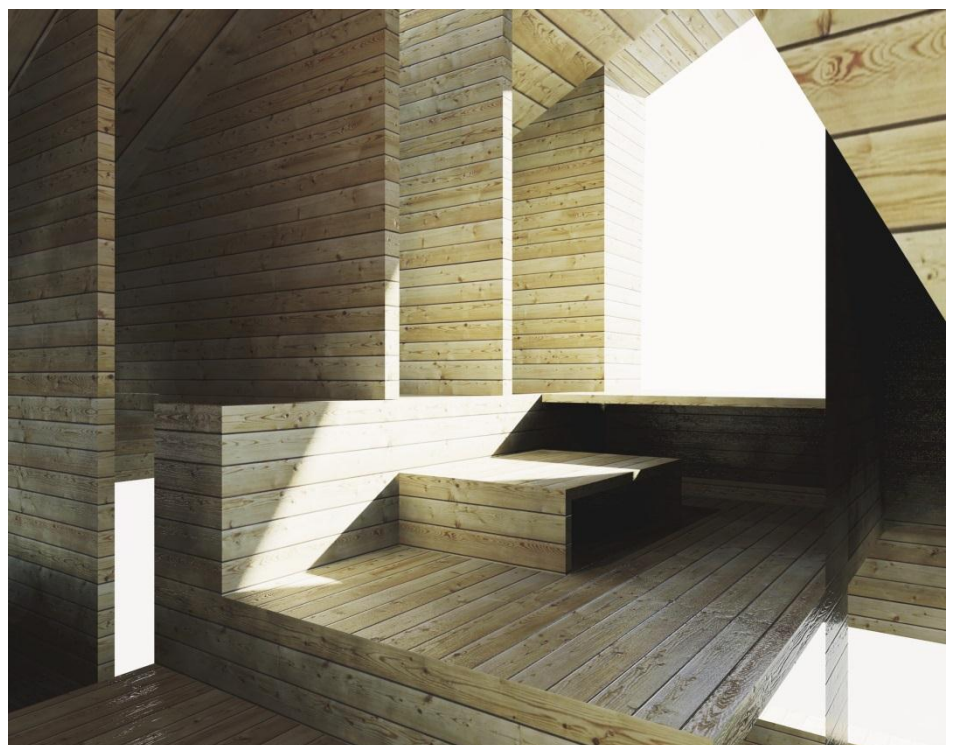
The shift in the accommodation preferences seems to give space for alternative self-catering units having less amenities than for example chalet concepts, but offering possibilities for exertion as modest second-homes but lacking for the burden of keeping it up continuously. Exertion could follow the chores carried out in both the second-home and wilderness experience and support the relationship to the nature: chopping the wood or at least setting the fire and waiting for the room to warm up and at the same time feeling the heat coming from the direction of fireplace and gradually making the space warm enough for living. Also the inner spatial concept could support better the dissimilarity from the everyday living. At the moment the spatial arrangement in chalets-concepts are fairly close to conventional apartment and cottages resembling single-family houses.

Instead of standard rooms the accommodation spaces could consist of several places of different scales with various atmospheres enabling necessary functions and furthermore emphasizing the multisensory experiencing of the surrounding nature. New standpoints could be found by studying the nature experiences and architectonic spatial experiences side by side together as a continuous experience. Typically, the building walls, floor and ceiling are defining clearly the borders of the space. In the nature there are no strict borders between different spaces, and the transitions are happening gradually and almost unnoticed when moving around from a place to another. The

**Figure 2. Spatial concept from diploma thesis Experiential Tourism Destination (2011) by Miia Mäkinen .** The interior spatial concept together with the use of natural materials and light support the dissimilarity from the everyday living. © Miia Mäkinen



**Figure 1. Spatial concept from diploma thesis Experiential Tourism Destination (2011) by Miia Mäkinen .** The lodging spaces consist of several different scale places with various atmospheres. © Miia Mäkinen



intermediate spaces between inside and outside could fade the borders and continue smoothly in between the servicescapes. The direct view from inside to outside is obvious and typical way of bring surrounding nature present to the interior space. The presence of surrounding nature is self-evident in letting the natural light to enter the interior spaces through window openings. The natural light could present in interior also indirectly for example through the filtering layers in the window openings. Accordingly, without the visual connection to the outside the daylight rhythm and the chances in the weather conditions would affect to the spatial experience by creating the various kinds of atmosphere to the space. By using of natural materials like wood and stone in nature-based tourism architecture is already quite well-established. In addition to these conventional solutions, the more versatile approach of utilizing in a creative way textures and structures of various materials together with sensitive lighting concepts, would emphasize the multisensory aspects of architecture and bring more thoughtful value added to the servicescape spatial content.

Despite of lacking the architectural research concerning building design and spatial experience and more specifically, the studies concerning nature-based experience in the context of tourist destinations' accommodation architecture, there exist architectural projects published in high quality professional periodicals that are valued by profession, where the main emphasis is on evoking the nature-based experience through architecture. In spite of the lack of the academic studies the design interest and knowledge of expressing the nature-based experience in architecture exists. As such the capacity of evoking immaterial contents has an essential role in architecture as one of the features separating architecture from ordinary building. For that reason it is worth introducing in practice through examples some of the aspects evoking the experience in nature-based architecture.



**Figure 3. Juvet Landscape Hotel (2008) by Jensen & Skodvin.** The interior architecture of the cabins is designed in minimalistic and well detailed way using simple massive wooden elements to emphasize the presence of nature experience. © Jensen & Skodvin

**Figure 4. Juvet Landscape Hotel (2008) by Jensen & Skodvin.** One or two walls of wooden cabins are entirely built in glass offering an exclusive view to the landscape and simultaneously giving an experience of being present in the surrounding nature. © Jensen & Skodvin



The Juvet Landscape Hotel (2008) in Norway along the National Tourist Route of Geiranger-Trollstigen is designed by Jensen & Skodvin. Instead of conventional guest rooms stacked together in one large building the hotel rooms are designed on seven highly-detailed and compact self-contained cabins distributed around the thickly wooded site. In these concepts the main emphasis has been on orientation, preventing the damage of existing topography and vegetation and ensuring the fine views through the window openings. The theme of dissimilarity of everyday life is present through the nature of the concept, but the aspect of exertion does not exist because of the



**Figure 5 and 6. Høse bridge (2013) by Rintala Eggertson Arkitekter.** Simple things as observing the nature, is here underlined by enclosing the view and targeting the concentration on the natural phenomena. Seen from a distance the linear and sharp shape of the bridge as a contrast element in the landscape emphasizes the organic shapes in the surrounding bedrock.  
© Rintala Eggertsson Arkitekter

easy access and availability of all contemporary amenities available in the hotel rooms.

In the other hand the Juvet Landscape hotel could be looked at as one of the many designed architectural sights along the National Tourist Routes of the 1850 km (Dahlman 2009, Herre & Lysholm 2010, Frang Hoyum & Kampevold Larsen 2012) where the main aim has been enlightening the nature, the landscape and the spectacular views of the sites to the visitors through all the seven senses. The experience of the Juvet Landscape hotel could be considered of being part of the same continuum with the other sights along the National Tourist Route and the feeling of exertion could be considered more distant or metaphoric. For example near the town Sand along the National Tourist Route of Ryfylke is situated the Høse bridge (2013) by Rintala Eggertson Arkitekter, where besides enabling the visit to the other side of the river the bridge complements the visitor's pathway with sensory rich and powerful experiences which are a combined result of architectural features and surrounding nature elements. The architectural structure encloses the fine view to the river landscape offering the opportunity to observe the nature and to view the flow through a steel grate. But it also ensures the positive and safe crossing of the river even the running water is directly underneath the feet. The sound of the running water fostered with acoustical materials and the resonance of the bridge structure by the power of the river might also cause slight sense of fear. In the other example the Stegastein viewing platform (2006) situated along the National Tourist Route of Aurlandsfjellet designed by Todd Saunders and Tommie Wilhelmsen leads visitors 30 meters out into the air and 650 meters above the fjord. The wooden ramp extends into space before dramatically curving downward towards the fjord. The experience at end of the ramp is startling and at the same time a bit frightening when the path is leading to the void.

**Figure 7. Stegastein viewing platform (2006) by Todd Saunders and Tommie Wilhelmsen.** The concept of Stegastein is expressive and iconic but still minimalistic and respecting the surrounding nature. © Nils Vik





**Figure 8 and 9. Mirrorcube in Treehotel (2010) by Tham and Videgård architects.** The Mirrorcube is clad in mirrored glass that reflects the surrounding nature and the sky creating a camouflage refuge. The interior made of plywood contains all the needed contemporary amenities.  
© Åke E:son Lindman

Like the Juvet Landscape hotel the Treehotel in Harads in Sweden (Detail 2011, Domus 2011, Architecture Today 2011) is an example in architecture evoking nature-based experiences. All the six hotel room concepts differ from the standard since the hotel rooms are not located in one building, but each one of them is lifted up to a separate tree-top and designed by a different architect. The hotel concept of climbing and staying night up in the tree offers a unique experience that is totally dissimilar to the everyday life. The climbing to the three could be considered as a theme of exertion, but any other discomfort does not exist because the rooms have all the contemporary amenities. The Treehotel has been brought out in tourism research as an example of forward-looking product development (Haanpää et al 2013), where the ecology, unique architecture, modern design and high-technology are all combined in its business concept. The main aim in the architecture as well as in all the whole concept of the Treehotel has been the genuine experience of nature leaning to the sustainability and ecological values. The aim of the Treehotel hasn't been just to operate sustainably and ecologically but also convey and transfer those values for the customers.

**Figure 10. Dragonfly in Treehotel (2013) by Rintala Eggertsson Arkitekter.** The Dragonfly is the biggest space of the Treehotel and is functioning as a conference space as well as a private living quarters where the big panoramic windows give a view over the valley and the rustic corten steel facades blend the building to the surrounding pine-tree forest.  
© Rintala Eggertsson Arkitekter





**Figure 11. Dragonfly in Treehotel (2013) by Rintala Eggertsson Arkitekter.** The interior servicescape is harmoniously designed and meticulously conceived by using various wooden materials with different textures including all the needed modern facilities for the conference use. © Rintala Eggertsson Arkitekter

## Conclusion

The lack of academic research in the discipline of architecture concerning contemporary nature-based architecture of tourist destinations indicates well the overall present situation of academic studies conducted about contemporary architecture in general. In the process of getting acquainted with the tourist research question setting and the use of concepts we found rewarding the notion of *servicescape*, because it includes, among the other contents, the essential concepts in architecture, the notion of *space* together with its function and ambience and the notion of *place* as one's own experience of a space. However, the way how space and its aspects were discussed and problematized through human-made or nature servicescapes or their hybrids was of its content fairly one-sided and remains distant for architecture. We see here a great opportunity but also a challenge for architecture to contribute to the discussion of spatial contents of servicescapes.

The shift from hotel and lodge accommodation to second-homes and other self-catering units unfold interesting question setting also for architecture in studying the future lodging concepts. Through the tourism research the essential features needed for creating nature-based experience and the sense of being on vacation was clarified. The contents of fairly unexplored second-home tourism brought up interesting similarities with wilderness servicescapes on nature-based experience in the context of architecture. We see here an interesting knowledge gap for architecture to contribute to the discussion of future lodging concepts through the research by design approach.

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## Figures

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