



# Unconventional luxury: The reappropriation of time and substance

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## ABSTRACT

This study addresses the transformational role time and substance play in an unconventional luxury experience. Adopting a giving, as opposed to having, perspective of unconventional luxury, in-depth interviews were carried out with tourists in a luxury Ecocamp in Kenya. We demonstrate how the reappropriation of time is central to the transformational effects of unconventional luxury experiences. Time and substance are interlinked whereby an emphasis on substance promotes a reconsideration of time and vice versa. Time is reappropriated through a process of appreciation, learning and (re)discovery resulting in inner (self), outward (self in relation to others) and onward (non-related distant others) transformations. We present the bidirectional relationship of giving experiences and a blending of inner and outward transformations resulting in an unintended 'matcher' experience. We reposition unconventional luxury as grounded in ethicality and its associated positive impacts on one's wellbeing, reflecting higher levels of personal meaning and relevance in the consumption experience.

## 1. Introduction

A contemporary view of luxury from a consumer-centric perspective is gaining recognition. Termed 'unconventional luxury' and defined as fluid, temporal and context specific (Thomsen, Holmqvist, von Wallpach, Hemetsberger & Belk, 2020), it is based on a call to move beyond a purely materialistic understanding. Furthermore, a consumer-centric perspective of luxury facilitates "deeply personal understandings" embedded in consumers' experiences (p.464) by focusing on individuals' "performed, constructed, enacted meanings" (Thomsen et al., 2020, p.443). It reflects "how consumers themselves shape luxury meanings" that are "subjective, personal and contestable understandings shaped by practice" (Banister, Roper & Potavanich, 2020, p.458). Contrasted with Veblen's theory of luxury, underlined by one's desire to 'vertically signal' class, wealth, taste and social ranking (see Turunen, 2017), unconventional luxury stresses the need to understand the luxury concept as driven by consumers' psychological and emotional requirements (see Kapferer, 1997).

Building on the Journal of Business Research's Special Issue on Unconventional Luxury in 2020, the current paper advances our knowledge of this social construct by demonstrating its transformational impact. First, by adopting a consumer-centric perspective based on the works of

Banister et al. (2020), we extend unconventional luxury representations by presenting value in the experience of time as luxury. We interpret time as experienced, a limited resource to spend in a meaningful way. Building on Cristini and Kauppinen-Räsänen's (2020) representation of how unconventional luxury addresses consumers' needs rather than desires alone, we present time as a basic need in today's accelerated pace of living (see Bellezza, Paharia & Keinan, 2017). An understanding of the value of time as luxury facilitates an investigation of "how consumers experience, give, produce, or share - rather than own and display - luxury" (Thomsen et al., 2020, p.443) - in other words, its experiential content. Second, we build upon the works of those who allude to the transformational impact of unconventional luxury (e.g., Banister et al., 2020; Cristini & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2020; Thomsen et al., 2020; Hemetsberger, von Wallpach & Bauer, 2012). Llamas and Thomsen (2016) position luxury as transforming the self and others through giving (as opposed to having). We extend such understandings by demonstrating the transformational role time and substance play in unconventional luxury experiences. Specifically, it is the reappropriation of time that presents as a space within which the experiential content of unconventional luxury emerges resulting in wider transformational effects due to its reciprocal nature. In doing so, we concentrate on construing experiences from a temporal perspective, and how

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unconventional luxury accentuates the reappropriation of time through a process of appreciation, learning and (re)discovery.

Time is a perishable commodity and the importance of *having* time to enjoy, to experience and to connect emotionally is fundamental to its transformational ability. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, our perception of time has changed dramatically presenting a shift from a neoliberal representation of time as locked and framed by everyday demands e.g., the working day, towards a greater appreciation of free time (Ringel, 2020). Firat's musings on modernism and its emphasis on speed and time-filled activities as part of our daily lives calls attention to the need for "finding meaning and substance in the present moments lived" (2005, p.216) instead of focusing on the future. It reflects a changing importance towards meaning, which is often reflected in the consumer deceleration movement, and "the perception of a slowed-down temporal experience ... to experience a respite from their [consumers'] quick-paced, hectic everyday life" (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019, p.1142). This perspective of time highlights the importance of substance. Substance represents an experiential quality that is beyond value alone (Heilbrunn, 2007). Substance is grounded in deeper personal meanings embedded in the consumption experience and takes priority over time-saturation or busyness and a felt need to fill our time with things to do (Bellezza et al., 2017). Thus, time and substance are interlinked whereby an emphasis on substance, its experiential quality, promotes a reconsideration of time - how we consume our time - and vice versa.

The current study addresses the following research aim: to understand the transformational role of time and substance in an unconventional luxury experience. The paper proceeds by reviewing the literature and explaining the research method employed, after which the findings are presented and discussed, along with their implications and limitations.

## 2. Literature review

The luxury construct has evolved from a concentration on "having-to-being and from owning-to-experiencing" (Cristini, Kauppinen-Räsänen, Barthod-Prothade & Woodside, 2017, p.101). Unconventional luxury emphasises the subjective and consumer-centric nature of luxury experiences as an individually defined construct that varies greatly depending on one's reference point. As a fluid construct that is context dependent, unconventional luxury signifies luxury for oneself. Thomsen et al. (2020) refer to epistemological scarcity as "the rareness of the luxury encounter" (p.443) and wherein luxury experiences are hindered or realised based on one's *perceptual* (in)ability or mindfulness towards them. The perceived rareness of luxury consumption can evoke *feelings* of specialness, exclusivity (Phau & Prendergast, 2000) or authenticity (Beverland, 2006) for some, however, this is not the case for all. Unconventional luxury reflects Wiedmann & Hennigs' (2012) reference to an experiential luxury sensibility based on how consumers define luxury. As our understanding of the luxury concept deepens, questions arise about luxury as universally recognised or socially determined. Thomsen et al. (2020) refer to such considerations as a move from "consumers as being receptive to luxury" towards the "agentic notion of luxury experiences" (p.443). The unconventional luxury concept repositions luxury as consumer-centric and individually defined - luxury for oneself (Roper, Caruana, Medway & Murphy, 2013).

### 2.1. Luxury for oneself

#### 2.1.1. The role of time

Time is an important part of a luxury experience. Time is often associated with the production of luxury goods and the need for expert craftsmanship, the sourcing of rare materials, as well as in terms of information sourcing and customising luxury products. Luxury items are also considered timeless. However, the *role* of time in the luxury consumption experience has been overlooked even though "to enjoy luxury you have to devote time to it" (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012, p.22). This is

an important omission as "time is laden with great personal meaning and inherently central to consumers' lives" (Rudd, Catapano & Aaker, 2019, p.681).

Time is crucial to framing unconventional luxury, and rather than offering a hallmark in terms of timelessness, it is the reappropriation of time - how we spend and consume our time - that is essential to understanding luxury from a consumer-centric perspective. Featherstone (2014, p.61) refers to immaterial luxuries as "the absolute freedom of those who have nothing [referring to material goods] yet can still appreciate the beauty around them in nature and the world". Such experiences are defined by time and the importance of choosing mindful encounters that are meaningful on a personal level (see Aaker, Rudd & Mogilner, 2011). It relates to Thomsen et al.'s (2020, p.443) notion of epistemological scarcity and the need for a fluid understanding of luxury which can be defined by a reappropriation of time and one that supports individuals' perceptual abilities in terms of determining what constitutes luxury.

Several authors frame time and luxury as ephemeral temporal units that are limited and context-specific e.g., "luxury moments" (von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, Thomsen & Belk, 2020), "moments of luxury" (Holmqvist, Ruiz, & Peñaloza, 2020), "moments of care" (Kreuzer, Cado, & Raies, 2020), or special moments and experiences (Cristini & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2020). Bauer, von Wallpach and Hemetsberger (2011) position time and luxury as situation-specific e.g., on a date or day off, or as having a transformational impact related to filling the gap between an actual and ideal self. There are two limitations to these representations of time: 1) they echo a "having" perspective of luxury i.e., to *have* a specific time in which luxury connotations are felt/implicit, and 2) they define time based on duration/length (ephemerality) rather than the experience of time as a luxury in and of itself. Others touch upon the notion of time as luxury - in an *experiential sense* - through concepts such as freedom, liberation, escape and being (see Holmqvist et al., 2020; von Wallpach et al., 2020; Hemetsberger et al., 2012; Bauer et al., 2011). Here, time acts as a facilitator to experience luxury, however, it is a limited representation of time as a defined entity in which luxury emerges *rather* than time (as experienced) as a source of luxury - time as luxury. These are important limitations as they do not consider time as lived - its experiential content - and how it contributes to unconventional luxury. Llamas and Thomsen (2016) identify the importance of investing and spending time as having a potential transformative effect on recipients e.g., children.

In today's world "time is a scarce resource", a precious commodity (Rudd et al., 2019, p.682) and free time (leisure) is an absolute luxury (Lee & Ferber, 1977). Time deficiency is caused by two phenomena *saturation* and *acceleration*. First, saturation is the tendency to fill every moment with something to do and with "several things to do at the same time" (Carù & Cova, 2007, p.10). Heilbrunn (2007 cited in Carù & Cova, 2007, p.81) stresses the importance of overcoming the fixation with, and saturation of the "emphatic", the spectacular and the grandiose; to see the extraordinary of the ordinary. It is represented in the call to "to give back appeal to time and space" (Le Breton, 2000, p.19). Space, according to Carù and Cova (2003), is set in opposition to saturation or saturated experiences and a felt need to fill each moment with activities. It is understood and realised in the process of choosing the right experience (see Aaker et al., 2011) as one "that gives back time to think" (Carù & Cova, 2003, p.280). Second, time deficiency is often caused by *acceleration* which is defined as the tendency to do everything at a faster pace to have the potential (or the illusion) to do more or to live more intensively resulting in consumers trading time for money (acceleration) (de Langhe & Puntoni, 2016), and in some cases, substituting money for time (e.g., convenience goods). These phenomena have brought with them various issues related to wellbeing and health (Carù & Cova, 2003) and prompted a need for consumers to decelerate through "a slowed-down experience of time through consumption" (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019, p.1142).

The importance of time and the luxury to consume time in an

unrestricted manner is essential for restorative purposes and for building human capital (Kalenkoski & Hamrick, 2013). The Covid-19 restrictions facilitated an unexpected easing of everyday time pressures (and time poverty) due to more flexible working arrangements. It resulted in positive benefits for many due to having more time to engage in enjoyable activities, greater engagement with nature, local communities, and others (see Banks, Fancourt & Xu, 2021). It placed emphasis on the importance of time as lived – its experiential content. Given the time pressures of modern life, time plays a central role in our lives yet unlike other resources such as money it cannot be replenished (Rudd et al., 2019). In this regard, time is a luxury that has the potential to contribute positively to an individual's health and wellbeing. It reflects the need to appreciate the deep personal meanings which luxury experiences can offer and how consumers shape such meanings (see Banister et al., 2020). The need for time and space to enjoy our lives and activities where time is an experiential anchor, emphasises the importance of substance i.e., its experiential quality. Heilbrunn (2007) stresses the need to replace “everything that is original about a substance” and to take the time needed to understand the meanings imbued in consumption practices rather than, as is the case with many luxury experiences, “hanging it out for all to see” (p.90).

### 2.1.2. The importance of substance

Kapferer and Bastien (2012) define substance as part of luxury for oneself grounded in the qualitative and felt aspects of the experience. Substance refers to an experiential quality captured in the embedded meanings in unconventional luxury experiences that results in transformational effects. It moves beyond representations of luxury as “something more than just the product quality” (Thomsen et al., 2020, p.441) towards the intersections between luxury consumption and the self. In doing so, substance plays an important role in contributing to consumers' self-transformations as it is “imbued with value that supersedes its function alone” through “rich meaning and emotion” (Heilbrunn, 2007 cited in Carù & Cova, 2007, p.81). Okonkwo (2007) defines substance as grounded in deeper meaning based on two concepts: originality and relevance. Although both concepts represent traditional dimensions of luxury (e.g., abundant rarity and exclusivity respectively, see Kapferer & Florence, 2016), substance promotes a wider consideration of the meanings embedded in the experiential and emotional aspects of the experience as defined by the consumer (see Kim, Park, Lee & Choi, 2016). For instance, originality refers to the meanings imbued in unconventional luxury experiences that offer novelty, learning and discovery. Relevance relates to those experiences that provide rich meaning and emotional engagement on a personal level linked to self-identity and hedonism.

The transformational effects of luxury experiences are presented by Llamas and Thomsen's work (2016) in the context of *giving* (as opposed to having) philanthropic gifts. The authors identify different ways of transforming the self and others resulting in feelings of “pleasure, purpose, and connection with humankind” (p.166). Through various transformations based on oneself (inner), the self in relation to others (onward) or non-related others (outward) and an elevated sense of self (upward), the authors demonstrate the importance of recognising deep personal meanings as “transforming the life of distant others by giving them valuable philanthropic gifts and thereby ultimately transforming the self of the giver” (p.166). However, the act of giving often produces not only benefits to the recipient, but it can also offer immaterial benefits to the giver such as positive feelings, thus transforming the self and the receiver (e.g., charitable giving). It is important to note that philanthropic giving does not usually take place between close social relations as such. It is more often between those with greater social distance, or distant relations and non-related others (Wang, Wang & Jiang, 2023). Arguably, substance is reflected in Kreuzer et al.'s (2020) representation of unconventional luxury and “authentic presence” (i.e., being fully in the here and now), however, its essence is based on its transformational impact on consumer wellbeing. Recent studies present

a consideration of substance moving away from the traditional view of focusing on the extraordinary, spectacular, or exclusive experiences evidenced in the growing trend to celebrate the hidden luxuries in mundane, everyday experiences (see Banister et al., 2020). Although somewhat familiar, an everyday experience can continue to be spectacular and delight us through a process of rediscovery and renewal, thereby creating epistemic value. While epistemic value is generally related to *new* experiences, an alternative experience or one that provides a simple change of pace can also result in feelings of novelty, curiosity, and knowledge (Sheth, Newman & Gross, 1991). Okonkwo (2007, p.238) supports the need for “simplicity, time, wellbeing, destressing services, freedom, space and peace of mind”. To do so, preference must be given to space. Addressing such needs can have a transformational impact by providing greater “meaning, value and happiness” (p.238). Thus, a reconsideration of what constitutes luxury in view of deeper personal meanings and understandings within the context of unconventional luxury generally, and the role of time and substance specifically in contributing to consumers' transformations is needed. Table 1 below depicts how the interconnection between time and substance is interlinked through space.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Research context: A luxury Ecocamp safari

The Kambi Ecocamp offers a safari experience based near the Great Rift Valley Escarpment on the periphery of the Maasai Mara Nature Reserve overlooking the East African Savanna in Kenya. The camp is run by a Maasai tribe in a cooperative style, with a local orientation (Malone, 2017) and they are the sole villagers in the area. All profits from the camp are redistributed within the local community. Everyone's contributions help towards achieving a common goal. The host aims to enrich each visitor mentally, emotionally, and spiritually based on arousing curiosity, novelty and learning through educating their guests about their way of life, survival, the flora and fauna and building a sense of appreciation as it is situated in an area of natural beauty, an uninterrupted space untouched by mass commercialisation. The camp is not designed to attract safari tourists wanting to see the Big Five animals (i.e., lions, leopards, rhinos, African buffalos and elephants).

Safari is a Swahili term meaning journey. In its traditional form, it is a journey into a way of life that is unfamiliar, yet one can relate to similar patterns and rhythms of life and a celebration of traditional industries. Such journeys are abundant in terms of immaterial luxuries and the “impressive emotional facet that refers to extraordinary aesthetic aspects” (Hudders, Pandelaere & Vyncke, 2013, p.391). Rather than seeking an inversion of the everyday (Gottlieb, 1982), the safari offers tourists a rediscovery of the everyday. Emphasis is placed on appreciating that although the journey is different, it is familiar in many respects, yet it is far away from the hectic-ness of their daily lives. The eco credentials of the camp are evident in its sensitivity to the location's surroundings, the use of local skills and materials and the remote geographical positioning.

## 4. Research approach and design

Adopting an interpretivist framework, this study addresses a call to investigate the meaning of unconventional luxury as felt and experienced from a consumer perspective (see Banister et al., 2020; Thomsen et al. 2020). It was not intended to provide a universal definition of luxury, but to understand how consumers experience unconventional luxury and its transformational impact particularly with respect to time and substance. Fourteen participants took part in the study including the Chief of the Maasai camp (see Table 2). The participant number exceeds McCracken's (1988) suggested eight qualitative interviews and Guest, Bunce and Johnson's (2006) recommendation of twelve to deem a study worthwhile. However, more importantly, the interviews were carried

**Table 1**  
Unconventional luxury: The role of time and substance.

<u>Time:</u>	<u>Space</u>	<u>Substance</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key to the luxury concept and “from which a luxury experience is anchored and appreciated” (von Wallpach et al., 2020, 493).</li> <li>• Time as experienced, a limited resource to spend in a meaningful way and as key to unravelling the transformational impact of unconventional luxury experiences.</li> <li>• The importance of time to enjoy, to experience and to connect emotionally with the consumption experience is central to its transformational ability.</li> <li>• Imbued with personal meaning and provides the basis from which substance is realised/felt.</li> <li>• An alternative consideration of time promotes the need to decelerate (see Husemann &amp; Eckhardt, 2019) or “to give back appeal to time and space” (Le Breton, 2000, 19). However, the reappropriation of time is based on a mindset stemming from value in the experience of time as luxury.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports a reappropriation of time moving away from the need to fill each moment with activities or “several things to do at the same time” (Carù &amp; Cova, 2003, 10) towards a greater consideration towards the substance of the experience.</li> <li>• Is understood and realised in process of choosing the right experience (see Aaker et al. 2011) as one “that gives back time to think” (Carù &amp; Cova, 2003, 280).</li> <li>• Facilitates a process of rediscovery and renewal (epistemic value) resulting in feelings of novelty, curiosity, and knowledge (Sheth, Newman &amp; Gross, 1991)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Represents an experiential quality and is “imbued with value that supersedes its function alone” (Heilburn, 2007, 81) resulting in transformational effects –             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substance is based on originality and relevance (Okonkwo, 2007).</li> <li>• Substance is reflected in a perceived presentation of originality as rare related to consumption practices that offer novelty, learning and (re)discovery.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Relates to those experiences that provide rich meaning and emotional engagement on a personal level.</li> <li>• Takes priority over time-saturation or busyness driven by a felt need to fill our time with things to do (see Bellezza, Paharia &amp; Keinan, 2017).</li> <li>• Emphasises a move away from luxury as rooted in symbols alone and promotes a wider consideration of the experiential and emotional aspects of the experience (see Kim et al., 2016).</li> </ul>

**Table 2**  
Participant profiles.

Name	Age	Status	Nationality
Aine	22	Single	American
Anna	60	Married and retired	Australian
Bernard	56	Married	South African
Charlotte	25	Single	American
David	58	Married	South African
Deborah	54	Single with 1 son	American
Liam	22	Single	British
Lisa	47	Married	British
Natasha	40	Married	Dutch
Peter	64	Married and retired	Australian
Ruth	44	Single	British
Sarah	45	Married with 2 children	British
Tim	65	Separated	British
Vilo (Maasai Chief)	52	Married	African

out until a point of thematic saturation was reached wherein no new insights are evident in the data. The study adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological approach that concentrates on the lived experiences of individuals and sought to unfold meanings and understandings that are idiosyncratic, thus asking “What is this experience like?” (Laverty, 2003, p.22). We used the “Tell me about it” approach (Gilmore, Carson & Grant, 2001) to gain detailed insights into the customers’ experiences with the aid of an interview guide. The aim was to create situated meaning and achieve a sense of understanding (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Central to this endeavour is how understandings materialise in the process of interpretation and interactions between the interviewee and interviewer.

Permission was gained from the camp Chief to conduct the study and to observe the workings of the camp (i.e., day-to-day running of the camp by the villagers). The lead researcher visited the camp twice in a four-year period (2014–2017). Each visit consisted of a three-night stay in a tent as part of the eco-luxury experience and participation in the visitor activities. The other camp visitors were made aware of the researcher’s intentions and consent was gained by all who participated in the interview process. The Chief agreed for the lead researcher to access

past client details to send out an email request for participation in the study. It is important to note that the unit of analysis for this study was not the community as such, but the experiences of the individual visitors within a community context. The study was also not concerned with any socio-economic forces at play with respect to affordability of luxury or safari experiences, but on individuals’ subjective encounters as part of a chosen leisure-time experience.

The data analysis process followed the guidelines of Braun and Clarke’s (2022) thematic approach. The authors focused on an inductive way of identifying themes or patterns of meaning that represents the data wherein coding and theme development are directed by the content of the data. Developing themes is an iterative process as it evolves from the data and is “shaped, polished, and systematically evidenced” (Finlay, 2021, p.108). The approach consisted of familiarisation with the data. Each author read the transcripts many times taking detailed notes. The authors collated their notes to compare the patterns evident in the data and to code the data in a meaningful and digestible manner and to elucidate the themes identified. When necessary, the authors reverted to the interviews to clarify their interpretations. The final stage centred on confirming the themes which consisted of an iterative process of many rounds of revision and going and back and forth to the transcripts.

### 5. Findings and analysis

Using Llamas and Thomsen’s (2016) positioning of luxury as giving (as opposed to having), we demonstrate three transformational effects of unconventional luxury experiences not only for oneself (inner), and the self in relation to others (onward), but also transformation of non-related others defined by proximal distance such as communities, nature and the natural environment representing a wider ripple effect (outward). We further present the bidirectional relationship of giving and a blending of inner and outward transformations resulting in an *unintended* “matcher” experience (see Grant, 2013). The transformational effects of unconventional luxury materialise through a process of appreciation, learning and (re)discovery. There was no evidence in the data of the fourth transformational effect identified by Llamas and Thomsen (2016) related to an elevated self-conceptualisation (upward).



### 5.1. Originality and time

The participants portrayed an alternative perspective of time in their narratives highlighting its immaterial quality thus reflecting a greater sense of *space*. From this perspective, time is reappropriated as non-concomitant in contrast to the everyday nature of time, and as vacant rather than full (or saturated). The concept of space offers a *perceived* presentation of the original defined by its apparent rarity in today's time-pressured world. Here, space and time are interlinked based on the desire to appreciate and immerse oneself in the experience unreservedly resulting in the transformation of the self (inner), as well as those of others (outward) and the self in relation to others (onward) (see [Llamas & Thomsen, 2016](#)). For instance, Bernard talks about his experience with local tribespeople and how this led to a concomitant sense of interconnectedness:

*"The Chief's son and I bonded. We became soul mates in the few days that we were there. When I left, I gave him my precious Swiss Army knife and little holster because I had really got close to him. I wanted to leave him a token. ... His son and his team looked after us incredibly well. They took us on a walk into the bush for a couple of hours and taught us about all the plants that you could eat. They told us some stories about the animals and so on. He was incredibly well informed. He was so friendly. ... They also showed us how to throw spears and fight with sticks. We had a big stick fight, which was play, of course, where we threw at each other. I am surprised that nobody got killed."*

Bernard describes an experience that is underpinned by a bond between two people who are non-related but who share a space in time thus demonstrating onward transformations through "linking the self to the lives of others" ([Llamas & Thomsen, 2016](#), p.167). Bernard's act of presenting the Chief's son with a precious personal item is returned multi-fold and not only demonstrated by his positive feelings (inner transformation), but also it represents a *perceived* outward transformation to the receiver, the Chief's son. Central to Bernard's experience is originality in terms of a perceived authentic presence ([Kreuzer et al., 2020](#)) based on a shared understanding, experience and feeling a sense of connection. It is important to recognise that Bernard perceives the Chief's son as presenting him with original, non-material wealth through a novel experience that provides new skills and knowledge (epistemic value). Although Bernard appears to assume the role of the giver initially, he is also the receiver when bestowed with the opportunity to learn about the lifeworld and culture of another in such a personal manner. Bernard is reflecting luxury meanings as grounded in his shared experience and sense of connection with the other. In this case, the bidirectional role of giving is evident representing a blending of inner and outward transformations wherein the giver is not always the self as such, but, in this case, it is the anticipated receiver who adopts the role of giver. This experience repositions the giver and receiver and it is the *non-related distant other* who is the unexpected giver in this regard. Such reflections represent [Llamas and Thomsen's \(2016\)](#) transformational effects of luxury based on giving, however, its dyadic and reciprocal nature reflects how the recipients of transformations are often both the giver and the receiver thus presenting an unexpected "matcher" experience (see [Grant, 2013](#)).

Sarah, who was travelling with her husband and two sons, depicts the important interlink between space and time as materialising through her *choice* of experience as it allows her to not only connect with nature and its associated learnings (onward transformations), "*we spent a huge amount of time looking at an incredible lizard that was on a rock. You know, just making connections with smaller animals, insects*", but also spending time in this way is transformational (inner transformation), "*to just slow down and have time to really think about where you are*". Although her narrative somewhat represents consumer deceleration ([Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019](#), p.114), "a perception of a slowed-down temporal experience", for Sarah, slowing down is not a triggered response due to excess or indulgence that warranted a need to "decrease in certain

quantities" related to consumption, it is a frame of mind, a mental state. Sarah stresses the importance of the gift she receives *from* the experience itself because of its location and natural surroundings. It is quite different to her previous experiences which were deficient in terms of space and time:

*"...before we got there [the camp], we were absolutely saturated with experiences and images of Kenya. To arrive somewhere that immediately felt very quiet, a little set apart, we could just all feel ourselves taking a breath and relaxing. ... you have to make connections with communities otherwise what is your travelling about? You're just looking, and to me, that's not a valuable way to be in the world, you need to be there for a reason. I think to have connections with the community, the things that they put on to do with Maasai culture were, for us, definitely one of the highlights of the whole holiday. You're just learning about other cultures and having a chance of being able to discuss things. Just find things out and make a connection with people. You're only there for a few days, but that's what I felt was important there. ... instead of us versus them you got to become them for 24 h. That's so rare on this type of trip"*.

Sarah's narrative demonstrates a shared space in time, a shared connection and a presentation of originality emanating from a perceived felt authenticity ([Beverland, 2009](#)). She is the receiver of the luxury experience in term of gifts bestowed – the epistemic value – as it is a novel, learning experience (onward transformation). Sarah also reflects how the surrounding landscape plays a central role in the "giving" of an unconventional luxury experience through connecting with nature and the world (see [Rudd et al., 2019](#)). Epistemic value in terms of education and knowledge is important for social transformations thus advancing society – the ripple effect – (see [Llamas & Thomsen, 2016](#)) through greater insights into the lives of others, their culture, and the environment. Space is represented through time in the immaterial luxuries of being able to take "a breath" and relax which is set in contrast to a saturated experience ([Carù & Cova, 2007](#)). As the conversation continues, Sarah talks about the pressures of everyday life highlighting the location and nature as the gift giver. Here, nature offers the gift of space and the freedom to "rejuvenate" and "recharge" (inner transformation). Central to Sarah's narrative is how space and time augment her sense of wellbeing:

*"Part of the luxury, for me, was being in that space. It's just such an incredible place to be, what could be better than that? ... it helps to rejuvenate and just recharge people, to be able to have that [through being at the camp]. ... (It) is the sense that people get of a connection to the earth, and it's impossible to monitor, but it's a major factor for people making steps forward. That's the sort of sense that I had there, that you would be able to have time... whatever it is, it gives you just as valuable experience as chasing the big five."*

Sarah's experience reflects "a shift away from the pleasures of immediate consumption of luxuries, the immersion in the immediate sensory experiences they bring, to the savouring, recollection and reflection" ([Featherstone, 2014](#), p.2). Space provides the participants with the prospect of escapism and avoidance of saturated experiences thus affording the possibilities of a presentation of substance in terms of originality (see [Okonkwo, 2007](#)). [Banister et al. \(2020\)](#), p.4 talk about how luxury experiences represent a sense of escape and "the time consumers dedicate to their own thoughts reflects permission for imaginative activities, enabling self-transformation during consumption and its associated performances". Central to their argument is how such practices are facilitated by ordinary experiences and "changing something very ordinary into something altogether more special" (p.5). This reflection is evident in the participants' interviews. Space presents the opportunity to "transcend the saturation of the effects on our senses as well as the tyranny of symbolism [that has] imprisoned objects in a register that tends to empty them of their meaning and emotionality" through a process of appreciation and rediscovery of oneself and of the natural beauty ([Heilbrunn, 2007](#) cited in [Carù & Cova, 2007](#), p.79).

Originality also materialises in the aesthetic qualities and a *felt authenticity* - both of which are recognised dimensions of luxury (e.g., Beverland, 2006; Kapferer & Florence, 2016).

Many participants talked about that role aesthetic value plays in offering transformational effects. Lisa, among others, highlights the importance of not only the physical environment but how that space gifted her and her family everyday necessary values that are lacking or that “we don’t get in a society”, and the need to reflect and “to make conversation ... to go back to basics” representing both inner and onward transformations. Traditionally, luxury consumption has been considered detrimental to an individual’s wellbeing as higher levels of materialism are associated with lower levels of wellbeing (Kashdan & Breen, 2007). However, the participants demonstrated that space, as a more perceptible representation of luxury and how time is spent, is key to their and others’ sense of wellbeing. For instance, she states:

*“You go back to nature; you go back to a sense of community. ... The pleasure within the whole process was just being out in nature. ... The underlying reason why I decided to go that kind of route was because I wanted to do something that would be life changing enough and different enough to motivate him (referring to her husband) to look at the way he worked on a day-to-day basis and gives him some sort of excitement. Something he could grasp onto and say, “Okay, this is going to be a change for me.” Life change stuff and change the way he looked at the world, really. So, it’s quite a big reason why we went there. ... It was amazing. It just ticked every box. It transformed us and it’s made us do things differently and take time out. It has transformed us as a couple..... it’s profound”.*

According to Llamas and Thomsen’s (2016) conceptualisation of luxury, giving provides onward transformations in a growing sense of community, meaningfulness, and interconnection. The recipients of such transformations are often both the giver and the receiver reflecting a bidirectional relationship stemming from an unintended “matcher experience” (see Grant, 2013). Although many issues surrounding the notion of experiential luxury and “how consumers experience luxury represents a challenge” (Holmqvist et al., 2020, p.1), it is evident from the participants’ narratives that the interlink between space and time is fundamental to advancing our understanding of luxury based on the perception of originality, and how time contributes to individuals’ and others’ transformations on many levels.

## 5.2. Relevance and time

Relevance relates to the deep personal meanings and emotional connections bestowed in the consumption experience, which have transformation effects on many levels, and are core to unconventional luxury. The importance of granting space to our emotions as part of the consumption experience is well-known (Carù & Cova, 2007) and the participants’ narratives reflected a desire to (re-) connect and engage with the consumption experience on a deeper level. Rudd et al. (2019) emphasise the connection between time and meaning as demonstrated in three ways: mattering, comprehension and purpose, all of which are evident in the participants’ narratives.

For instance, Charlotte epitomises the traditional understanding of a safari as one that is a journey and an experience. For her, relevance relates to the deeper meanings imparted in the consumption experience based on the connections made with others, the local tribespeople, thus demonstrating a sense of mattering through “the feelings that one matters to the social world” (Rudd et al., 2019, p.682), feeling important “to become them” and being “a part of it”. Of central importance here is the link between time and meaningfulness, which has a transformational effect on Charlotte (inner transformation):

*“I think a huge part of travelling to me is not only seeing places but meeting people. ... the people are what make it more unique. ... I think that’s what makes Kambi EcoCamp different, or that’s the definition of*

*the difference, is that you’re not just a guest in Kambi, you’re a part of it ... Although the Maasai have, I guess, have been in contact with Westerners for a very long time, I think the closeness that they have to their traditions has remained, unlike other places. ... I think that there is an attachment because you got to know someone there. You got to learn about what makes them tick or understand the differences between yourself and someone a little bit better, that you didn’t quite get before. Or instead of us versus them you got to become them for 24 h. That’s so rare on this type of trip”.*

Charlotte presents a deeply immersive and unique experience that allows her the luxury of engaging unconditionally, thus demonstrating the importance of her choice in terms of social activities (onward transformation). She is the recipient of the transformation due to the gifts bestowed in the experience, of which, referring to Thomsen’s et al. (2020) epistemological scarcity, Charlotte is disposed to (while another tourist may not). Further to a sense of mattering, Rudd et al. (2019) highlight the need to understand how time spent in nature facilitates greater feelings of comprehension and meaning in life which can “strengthen a special type of connection with the world: a sense of oneness with the natural world” (p.22/23), which also contributes to our sense of wellbeing (onward transformation). Charlotte elaborates:

*“There is something more to it because not only is Vilo (Chief) knowledgeable about every animal and apparently fish and all forms of wildlife, but he also has his own dreams and aspirations and that’s much more personal. He’s open to sharing that with you. I think you get to know not only Namunyak (tribe member), the guide and the driver, but Namunyak the person, which I think goes back to why I like Kambi so much because it’s not just Vilo, the owner, it’s Vilo, ambassador to the Maasai, expert of all flora and fauna, political scientist, x, y and z”.*

Aaker et al. (2011) discuss the interlinkage between personal meaning and social connection as central to one’s wellbeing. However, for such ‘giving’ experiences to be represented as a luxury, a genuine passion from the host grounded in a sense of place is necessary for an experience to be considered sincere (Beverland, 2006). It must present an accurate depiction of the host’s lives and culture (Prince & Ioannides, 2017) and requires a host who wants to interact and share the reality of their lives with tourists, who offer “‘sincere social interaction’ and ‘sincere emotional response’” (Taheri, Gannon, Cordina & Lochrie, 2018, p.2752) which, in Charlotte’s case, underpin her sense of mattering as evidence in her perception of an exclusive and special experience. Such characteristics are intrinsically linked to luxury experiences and help “redefine what quality means” (Kapferer & Florence, 2016, p.121). In a similar vein, Liam demonstrates relevance in terms of a sense of mattering due to the openness and welcoming nature of his hosts and how he was made feel like a welcomed guest rather than a tourist:

*“They are all very, very friendly [the Maasai community] and they make you feel so welcome, they make you feel that you’re part of a family to them. You are not just a tourist that you paid to come to this place; you actually are someone who has visited them. You are like a visitor to their house rather than a paying customer, which I think there is a massive difference between the two of them.”*

For others, such as Deborah, she demonstrates relevance in terms of purpose, “a sense of direction, goals or a mission in life”, personal growth and ambitions (see Rudd et al., 2019, p.682). Deborah talks about travelling with her son as she highlights the importance of an experience that offers her solitude and a sense of exclusivity when contrasted with everyday disturbances, to allow her the time and space to reflect on her life and how she might become a better person (inner transformation):

*“Our experience of Kambi was so serene, it gave me a chance to sit and reflect upon my life and I truly believe that my stay at Kambi has really helped me gain focus into my life and make changes in my life since, to*

discover what's really important in life, as opposed to the monetary part. ... You know what, since I've been back, I've been changing. I'm trying to get into meditation and learning more, trying to reach a more spiritual place within myself. I was talking to the Maasai and I realised how deeply spiritual and steeped in tradition they are. I miss that in my life. Now, I think I'm searching for something spiritual. ... It was just an amazing experience for me. I like to say it was Kambi was medicine for my soul ... I can remember sitting there during the day and hearing nothing but a fly buzzing in my ear and the cowbells, nothing else. ... I was like, "Oh my gosh, I never, ever take the opportunity to sit in solitude like this." There's always the television in the background, or music playing, or something, so just to take that time to enjoy nature and look and just soak it all in".

Deborah's narrative demonstrates inner transformations of the self. Relevance is evident in how the experience offers her the time for reflection, solitude and reconsideration in terms of what is important, thus providing her with a sense of purpose. Deborah is instigating changes in her life in a spiritual way (inner) reflecting Okonkwo's (2007) notion of relevance as a "bridge between the past and the present; quality is inspired by history" and the need to "resist the deleterious effects of time" (p.125). The participants' perceptions of luxury defined by relevance reflects a "qualitative rarity" expressed through felt emotional connections (Kapferer, 2012, p.457), or virtual rarity stemming from the immaterial aspects of luxury as characterized by "feelings of exclusivity" and uniqueness more than actual exclusivity itself (Kapferer & Florence, 2016, p.121).

Aine demonstrates relevance in terms of a sense of mattering, feeling valued and having a contribution to offer (Rudd et al., 2019). In this case, she is referring to the self as giver and non-related others or communities as the perceived recipients of transformations (outward transformations). She states:

"I think it's worthwhile if you're ... since you're there already to try and make a positive impact. If you're paying for accommodation, that it would go towards the community and help them, I think that would be the responsible thing to do to try and benefit the community. ... I think the experience in knowing that you did something correct and that you are helping the people who are providing you with that service, it benefits them as much as it benefits you".

Aine's perception of being able to make a contribution and have the potential to build social connections through interactions with local people "enab(ed) them [her] to connect with others who are beyond their inner circle and engender a sense of mattering" (Rudd et al., 2019, p.687), which is underpinned by the importance of developing social connections as a perceived contribution to their sense of wellbeing (Liu & Aaker, 2008) self and other transformations (outward transformations). As the conversation develops, Aine demonstrates the luxury of giving to a host community as beyond financial measures alone, which has often been the main contributing factor in tourism. The luxury of being able to be a part of the experience compels her to offer something in return for the experience she is receiving:

"I did a bit of research before I came to Kenya, and I think it's a respectful thing to do, to know where you're going. I mean you would have an interest in going to a place because you decide you're going to go there, but I think you need to express your interest and show that you respect their culture or how they live, so it's not just giving back financially. ... I mean I'm coming here as an outsider, I'm not from here and if I'm going to come here, I can't just take everything as an advantage and I feel like I have to give back something ... I think it's more than financial (giving), it's just interest in their lives, their environment and being accepting of their culture. I think it's a lot of things. Just showing an interest in what I'm coming to see."

Relevance plays a key role in unconventional luxury experiences underpinned by an interconnection between time and meaningfulness as part of the consumption experience. Luxury goods are often marketed on

heritage and history (Kapferer & Florence, 2016), and although this may seem a palpable strategy for products, the intemporal and intangible nature of tourism experiences makes it difficult to capture. For instance, there is a risk of tourists feeling like victims of staged authenticity (Chhabra, Healy & Sills, 2003), although this is possible in all service encounters. Grayson and Martinec (2004, p.310) state that the "constructed and imagined nature of authenticity allows for some latitude in the development and marketing of authentic market offerings". Therefore, it is important to understand that what is perceived as authentic by an individual is often grounded in a phenomenological experience and is reflected in a closeness and believability that satisfies their expectations (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Indeed, a fixation with product or ingredient rarity has been challenged and is somewhat unsustainable and not reflective of modern-day, unconventional luxury consumption experiences (see Kapferer, 2012). As such, qualitative rarity, a felt experience, gives rise to feelings of exclusivity, which are reflected in Catry's (2003, p.11) assertion that luxury is a process of performing "an illusion where actual scarcity is replaced by a perceived rarity".

## 6. Discussion

This paper contributes to a critical understanding of the transformational effects of unconventional luxury experiences. First, by adopting a consumer-centric perspective of unconventional luxury (Banister et al., 2020) in a giving context (Llamas and Thomsen, 2016), we extend unconventional luxury representations by presenting value in the experience of time as luxury. Second, we build on the works of those who allude to the transformational impact of unconventional luxury (e.g., Banister et al., 2020; Cristini et al., 2020; Thomsen et al., 2020; Hemetsberger et al., 2020). A consumer-centric perspective centralises how consumers shape luxury meanings. We demonstrate how the reappropriation of time - how we consume our time - as the basis on which inner, outward and bidirectional transformations occur (see Table 3) through processes of appreciation (to spend time in this way and an appreciation for the surrounding area), learning (epistemic value) and re(discovery) (of self, others and the environment). Here, the representation of time is beyond ephemerality alone, and wherein time is reconsidered and set in comparison to the previously desired, yet destructive, need for saturation and acceleration (see Carù & Cova 2003). Saturation and acceleration both represent base ideologies of a neoliberal economy resulting in little or no free time to live, to feel, to experience or to be idle, thus resulting in many consequential and detrimental effects to peoples' wellbeing (Pavón-Cuellar, 2021). Arguably, Covid-19 and the strictures of a neoliberal market have prompted a shift in individuals' perceptions of time based on a desire for space - an immaterial aspect of time - which contributes greatly to our sense of wellbeing.

A reappropriation of time casts light on the importance of understanding substance. For the purposes of this paper, we defined substance as representing an experiential quality that is beyond value alone (Heilbrunn, 2007), underpinned by originality and relevance (Okonkwo, 2007), both of which are hallmarks of any luxury experience. Originality is arguably represented in the luxury literature as abundant rarity and feelings of exclusivity (see Kapferer & Florence, 2016). It relates to a perceived authentic presence and a felt presentation of originality resulting in feelings of authenticity (see iconic authenticity by Grayson & Martinec, 2004) not only because of a connection to a place, but also because of an accurate representation of the local culture and customs, which exists irrespective of tourist presence and has transformational effects (Taylor, 2001). Such feelings contribute to a greater sense of felt authenticity, and although exclusivity is positioned in the literature as something that complements the desire to escape commercialisation (Grayson & Martinec, 2004) and a search for meaning and for experiences that feel real, it is also founded on "a continued commitment to traditions and the place of origin" (Beverland, Lindgreen & Vink, 2008, p.7). Relevance materialised in the deep personal



**Table 3**  
 Recipients of transformations: giver-receiver relationships Developed from Llamas and Thomsen (2016).

Transformational effect	Giver	Receiver(s) of transformation	Wider considerations
<b>Inner</b> Giving “transforms the self.”Self-transformation, “a fulfilled and whole self” (p.167)	Self	The Self through positive feelings of pleasure from giving as well as any new skills and knowledge learned through shared experiences and connections made.	Others (epistemic value) knowledge, also as recipients of gifts, connections made, shared encounters).
<b>Onward</b> Giving “transforms the sense of self in relation to others” (p.167) Others based on proximal distance such as other non-related others, nature, landscapes, natural environments, and communities.	Self The experience (others/ hosts, nature, and natural landscape)	The Self evidenced through a learning experience in relation to others and their lifeworld.“By linking the self to the lives of others, the relationship between non-related givers and receivers is strengthened and the membership to humankind as the first and foremost community is upgraded, yielding onward transformations of the philanthropic giver via a gregarious sense of self.” (p.171)	Onward transformations are evidenced in how one is transformed in relation to others. In this case, others can refer to the experience itself as offering onward transformations through epistemic value in relation to others’ culture or the natural environment/ landscape.
<b>Outward</b> “Giving triggers significant transformations. of non-related others” (p.167).	Self	Others through “substantive contributions to the lives of distant others lead to outward transformations and, ultimately, due to a ripple effect, to societal transformations.” (p.171)	Outward transformations are often “perceived” as the intended recipient of such transformations but are not always known, and the effects are not always evident.
<b>Bidirectional</b> Giving stems from the experience itself often represented in epistemic value, and others (re) discovery and greater appreciation of the environment.	Others: The experience (nature and the natural landscape) and others /hosts	Self and others (people, nature and the environment) As giving can be a dyadic and reciprocal process, therefore, the recipients of transformations are often both the giver and the receiver. It represents a “matcher” as one who is a giver and a receiver simultaneously.	Transformational effects of unconventional luxury are based on giving but it has a dyadic and reciprocal nature, thus, the recipients of transformations are often both the giver and the receiver reflecting an <i>unintended</i> matcher experience. It reflects the bidirectional relationship of transformations blending inner and outward transformations thus resulting in wider ripple effects.

meanings embedded in the consumption experience evident in a sense of mattering (i.e., significance), purpose (i.e., personal growth) and comprehension (i.e., one’s place in the world). Both originality and relevance resulted in self- and other transformations and building connections with others is crucial for the participants’ wellbeing as meaningfulness “involves making important contributions that will extend beyond one’s personal existence” (Rudd et al. 2019, p.682).

We extend the transformational effects of luxury consumption to demonstrate an alternative viewpoint in terms of giving based on the work of Llamas and Thomsen (2016). We assumed a wider consideration of giving beyond a philanthropic understanding alone and the self-as-giver approach (see Llamas & Thomsen, 2016), which is narrow in its orientation. We showed that the self is not always the giver and is often the intended recipient of transformations, yet they often assume the role of the giver in an unconventional luxury context. Our findings support Llamas and Thomsen’s (2016) representation of inner and onward transformations based on the self-as-giver, however, although onward transformations are based on how giving transforms the self in relation to others, our data supports the important role that the experience and others (hosts) play in a giving context. In this case, it is the *experience* (i.e., the experience offered by the host or the experience in the natural landscape) that bestows the gift thus having a transformational effect on the individual (see Table 3). To this end, we introduce the bidirectional relationship of giving that demonstrates the self and others (including others such as the host as well as the experience itself such as being in nature) as both the giver and receiver resulting in various levels of transformation. Defined as an *inadvertent* matcher and an *unintended* matcher experience (see Grant, 2013), we suggest that, in many cases, it is the experience itself or the host that presents the giving experience, and the transformations stem from such encounters e.g., being in nature and the space to think, rejuvenate or to rediscover a sense of self. Thus, the giver is often the *unexpected* recipient of such transformations. The *unintended* matcher experience reflects a blending of inner and outward transformations thus resulting in wider ripple effects.

In terms of implications for practice, the findings support the need for luxury providers both within and outside of the tourism industry to understand the role time and substance play in customers’ experiences. Customers seek experiences that support an immaterial quality of time, -a value in the experience of time- as offering transformational effects and greater epistemic value based on (re) discovery, learning and connections not only with ourselves and others, but with the experience (e.g., nature). The transformational effects of such experiences are grounded in perceived originality and the importance of relevance as demonstrated through meaningfulness for the customers. It is important for luxury experience providers to consider an alternative perspective to luxury consumption premised on an unorthodox approach to the consumption of time, - how we use time, how we value time, how we measure time - it highlights a slower pace of consumption resulting in “a more acute consciousness of a sense of place” (Parkins & Craig, 2010, p.314). From a practical perspective, this requires service providers to adopt, support and promote a slower-paced mindset as part of their market offering. Therefore, instead of linking luxury with high levels of materiality which can result in the deterioration of one’s wellbeing (see Kashdan & Breen, 2007) due to an insatiable appetite for more, the findings of this study support a repositioning of luxury as grounded in ethicality and its associated positive impacts on one’s wellbeing. Despite such considerations, it is important to note that consumption “is marked by a somewhat inconsistent negotiation of everyday practices, arising from a desire for a different experience of time as well as an ethical impulse to live sustainably” (p.191). Therefore, seeing the extraordinary in ordinary life practices requires a shift in the mindset of the customer that is driven by a more considered use of time and the desire for rediscovery of what is already somewhat familiar. It is fertile ground for a rebirth for tourism providers to (re)consider how tourism experiences are framed and developed.

Finally, some limitations to the study exist. First, the study is based



individuals' idiosyncratic accounts of luxury and are therefore not representative of collective understandings or macro level representations of luxury. While it was beyond the scope of the current study, future studies should consider wider societal implications with respect to unconventional luxury experiences. Second, the context for the study is arguably limited and cannot provide more generalised understandings of the link between time and luxury across all tourism experiences or service encounters. Future studies should consider the transformational effects of consuming time in other service contexts or may adopt a different approach to data collection such as in-situ photo elicitation and diaries to capture more detailed and nuanced articulations of an individual's experience of unconventional luxury.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Sheila Malone:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Caroline Tynan:** Writing – original draft. **Sally McKechnie:** Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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