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**Author(s):** Besson, Anu

**Title:** Everyday aesthetics on staycation as a pathway to restoration

**Year:** 2017

**Version:**

**Please cite the original version:**

Besson, A. (2017). Everyday aesthetics on staycation as a pathway to restoration. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 4(2), 34-52.  
<http://www.ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/article/view/3085>

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## Everyday aesthetics on staycation as a pathway to restoration

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### Abstract

*This multidisciplinary study enforces a suggested link between everyday aesthetic experiences and restoration. The studied phenomenon is staycation, a short-term holiday spent at home or at one's home region, to identify how people use a (culturally) familiar environment for everyday aesthetic enjoyment and how that influences restoration. This focus minimises the potential effect of long-distance travel, novelty and escapism to restoration. Staycation has not been studied before from the perspective of everyday aesthetics and restoration. I explore staycation through a lens of qualitative media analysis; history and empirical research of holiday-making; and theories in everyday aesthetics.*

**Keywords:** Staycation, everyday aesthetics, restoration, subjective well-being, aesthesis.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Why study staycation?

Holidays are undertaken for the purposes of restoration and replenishment;<sup>1</sup> and sustaining or improving subjective well-being.<sup>2</sup> By *restoration*, I mean Stephen Kaplan's definition: recovery from mental fatigue.<sup>3</sup> Many typical holiday activities, such as sightseeing, photographing and sampling cuisine are aesthetic pastimes; and holidays are typically taken in aesthetically appealing locations. Is there, then, a connection or causation between (everyday) aesthetic experiences, restoration and wellbeing?

In this paper, by *aesthetic* I mean sensory, pleasing, fascinating and valued qualities of an object or the environment as a whole. An aesthetic experience comprises the aspects of sensuousness, sensitivity, imagination and evaluation.<sup>4</sup> For millennia, philosophers have understood beauty and aesthetic experience as sources of pleasure.<sup>5</sup> David Hume said: "[p]leasure and pain... are not only necessary attendants of beauty and deformity but constitute their very essence".<sup>6</sup> Alexander Nehamas has argued that "shared beauty [experienced or shared with others] is a particularly intense form of communication".<sup>7</sup> Beauty is often associated with "high arts" (painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry),<sup>8</sup> whereas everyday aesthetics studies "non-art-related" aesthetic experiences, aesthetic enjoyment drawn from ordinary, familiar or everyday objects, sights and activities via all senses.<sup>9</sup> Currently, empirical studies in everyday aesthetics are scarce:<sup>10</sup> more research is called for to understand, what aesthetic elements or qualities people enjoy (or dislike) in their environment and why; and what is the significance of everyday aesthetic experiences to well-being and the human condition in general.

Not everyone engages in artistic or cultural activities on a holiday, but everyone is a recipient of constant flow of sensory cues, whether conscious of this or not.<sup>11</sup> Positive and negative sensory data can determine the restorative or depleting effects of the environment.<sup>12</sup> A series of interviews (N=60) and a survey (N=1,043) conducted by Ipsos Mori for the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment in the UK in 2010 found that people feel deeply about beauty in their environment, but many refrain from talking about it due to the fear of their taste being judged. Feeling comfortable at one's settings emerged as a prerequisite for being able to enjoy beauty; implying that being relaxed can open a person to aesthetic experiences. Ipsos Mori found a shared view that beauty is an instinctive need and the question "why should we have more beauty?" was treated equal to "why have more happiness?" – non-sensical - due to the strong association between beauty and well-being.<sup>13</sup>

The term staycation became popular in the US and the UK at the beginning of the global financial crisis in 2007 and it has spread around the world since.<sup>14</sup> The Oxford dictionary defines staycation as a domestic holiday, or more narrowly, a break spent at home, involving day trips to local attractions. VisitEngland has surveyed staycationers from 2008 and found that staycation is popular, because holidaymakers wish to have a safe, easy break, utilise last-minute deals, experience their home region in a novel manner (as tourists) and have frequent breaks in between of "real" vacations.<sup>15</sup> In the UK, staycation trend has grown year on year since 2009: for example in 2013, one- to three-day trips were the fastest growing holiday

type.<sup>16</sup> A global survey in 2016 found that of 1,000 respondents, half had had at least one staycation.<sup>17</sup> In Australia, the spending on local daytrips rose by 7% in 2016.<sup>18</sup>

The rise of staycation can be attributed to many roots, such as the emergence of experience economy, commodification, nostalgia (re-creating childhood experiences) or instability in the job markets. Nonetheless, staycation is used as a strategy to experience the familiar (non-exotic or non-foreign) environment through the eyes of a visitor.<sup>19</sup> On staycation, the change from the everyday to holiday occurs more in the subject's attitude and mood than in the environment and activities. Staycationers are simultaneously residents and visitors; hence, studying staycation can offer information to a range of parties, from resident groups to policy makers, urban planners, local businesses and travel industry.

## 1.2 Data and analysis method

The analysis consisted of a detailed review of 20 recent lifestyle articles to establish, how staycation is understood and discussed in the society, on a platform accessible and meaningful to staycationers; and of a review of 200 Instagram photos to establish, how staycation is portrayed by staycationers themselves - what elements or features staycationers find worth sharing with others. The photos indicate what is seen as pleasing, aesthetic or restorative; or, what the contributors presume other people view as such. The analysis method with both data sets was grounded theory (GT), informed by sociological discourse analysis (DA), both qualitative analysis tools. The purpose was to elicit quantitative data with GT to make statistical inferences; and examine the deeper cultural and semantic meanings with DA. The articles were published in English-speaking countries since 2015 and the photographs were uploaded on Instagram around the world in October 2016.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 The connection of beauty and pleasure

Linking beauty and pleasure is an age-old notion, and holidays, also staycation, are usually taken for reasons of pleasure (e.g. relaxation, enjoyment and entertainment). Intuitively, pleasure appears restorative, but pleasure can also be a momentary distraction or relief that does not lead to a more stable state of restoration. Is it possible to establish a connection – or further, causation - between aesthetic experiences and restoration or revitalisation? If becoming restored is understood as increasing or sustaining one's longer-term wellbeing, theory in everyday aesthetics indicates that the answer may be positive.

Kevin Melchionne proposes that everyday aesthetic activities such as grooming, cooking and creativity can increase subjective well-being (SWB) by creating a “hedonic high”, pleasure that can be re-obtained by repeating or intensifying what caused it.<sup>21</sup> Melchionne notes that high(er) SWB is obtainable from two main sources: a) life circumstances; and b) mindset, habits and activities. Everyday aesthetic activities are a potential pathway to increased SWB, because we have more agency over our activities than circumstances. Melchionne mainly associates SWB with the ability to regulate one's hedonic high. Another viewpoint is *eudemonia*, pleasure obtained from having a sense of purpose in life, social connections with others and avenues for self-expression and self-actualisation.<sup>22</sup>

Happiness research suggests that well-being does not only rise from hedonic sources, but also and perhaps more potently from eudemonia. Melchionne proposes that the point of everyday aesthetics is to widen one's scope for sources of pleasure.<sup>23</sup> Staycation is an attempt to experience something different or new in one's every day, hence, it can be a strategy to expand one's range or frequency of everyday aesthetic experiences. Melchionne's proposal is supported by indirect empirical evidence: today, creative activities such as (mobile phone) photography, street fashion and make-up, crafting, gourmet cooking and "homing", ongoing home beautifying, are immensely popular and enjoyed by many, as indicated by, for instance, vast and global social media content.<sup>24</sup>

Social media is not just about fun. In a recent study, Instagram was found to cause anxiety, negative body image and mental health issues to young people due to its appearances-focus. But, Instagram was also appreciated as a platform for self-expression and identity-building.<sup>25</sup> A recent study found that (mobile phone) photographing makes the photographer look at the world more attentively – presumably with an aesthetic disposition. The act of planning a photo or looking for things to capture makes the photographer more deeply engaged in the experience, which, according to the study, tends to lead to deeper enjoyment.<sup>26</sup> Despite the potential negative effects, sharing photos on social media can also increase hedonic and eudemonic high by enabling a creative outlet, social connection and positive self-identity. The Ipsos Mori study identified that a part of the appeal of beauty is its ability to connect like-minded people - draw deep enjoyment of a shared taste, as theorised by Alexander Nehamas.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.2 Can social media prove an aesthetic experience?

Instagram is a mobile photo-sharing app and social network created in 2010. It has approximately 300 million daily active users and 500 million monthly users.<sup>28</sup> Social and urban studies researchers use Instagram as a source to study, for example, cultural geography, subculture formation and identity.<sup>29</sup> Instagram is not just a platform to share experiences and build identity, but it affects decision-making and behaviour. Two recent surveys found that many holidaymakers rank "Instagrammability", the chance to take appealing photos, a main driver in destination selection. Of people aged 18-33 surveyed in the UK, 40.1% ranked Instagrammability the number one motivator for a holiday location.<sup>30</sup> A study in Australia by mobile operator Telstra found that a quarter of respondents select holiday locations based on its social media prestige factor.<sup>31</sup> The reason is two-fold: beautiful locations are used to enhance one's social media appearances, but attractive photos also indicate the location is worth the visit.

Sharing aesthetically appealing, prestigious or "enviable" photos on social media can be seen as a substitute or cultural continuum for sending postcards. In the turn of the 18-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, some travellers carried a *Claude glass*, a small, tinted convex mirror, to frame, focus and "image manipulate" the landscape to be portrayed with watercolours more artistically and dramatically. Postcards have been among the most popular souvenirs since their invention in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>32</sup> Orvar Löfgren analyses that postcards "filled a void", a hunger for pictorial expression still scarce in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; for instance, five million Swedish people sent 48 million postcards in 1904. According to Löfgren, and

parallel to the popularity of photos shared in social media, postcards became depictees of not just locations, but moods and feelings that many found difficult to express verbally.<sup>33</sup>

This study seeks to uncover, is there a connection between aesthetic experiences and restoration. Can photos on Instagram prove that a staycationer had an aesthetic experience? The Telstra survey on Instagrammability found that sharing photos on social media often indicates a wish to boost one's social status. But, according to another study, photographing enhances the enjoyment drawn from the experience.<sup>34</sup> Prevalence of one motivation (boosting self-image) does not automatically exclude the other (aesthetic enjoyment). Thomas Leddy argues that a photo can be many things simultaneously. Photographers, amateurs and professionals alike, usually seek to: 1) capture the identified aesthetic qualities of the subject-matter; 2) enhance those qualities; and 3) create new aesthetic qualities via means of composition, framing or image-manipulation.<sup>35</sup> But, is photo a proof of an aesthetic experience? It depends on the content. Yuriko Saito discusses aesthetic reactions, such as an impulse to tidy a messy room, as an indicator of (or search for) an aesthetic experience.<sup>36</sup> A wish to make something more aesthetic according to one's taste, or a wish to capture or communicate something because it looks good, can be seen as aesthetic reactions; if not "full" aesthetic experience, then its prerequisite or pre-step.

### 2.3 Everyday aesthetic experiences on a holiday

If holidays exist for restorative purposes and aesthetic experiences have the ability to increase SWB, are holidays usually more aesthetic than the everyday life, indirectly supporting the theory that aesthetic experiences have a revitalising effect? That depends on what is meant by aesthetic. The traditional understanding of an aesthetic experience is based on Immanuel Kant's concept of disinterested contemplation:<sup>37</sup> objects can be said to be beautiful (aesthetic)<sup>38</sup> - instead of mere "agreeable" or subjectively pleasing - *only* when they evoke sensuous pleasure without any utilitarian purpose. In light of the traditional take, it is always debatable whether for example a meal can be beautiful, if it is also eaten and hence, utilised for bodily pleasure and sustenance.

Everyday aesthetics adopts a different viewpoint: disinterested, unemotional contemplation is not the (only) key to an aesthetic experience. Aligning with Arnold Berleant's engaged aesthetics,<sup>39</sup> I suggest that (mental, bodily or emotional) distance is not a prerequisite for having an aesthetic experience: it is possible to enjoy a nicely served breakfast, a decorated cocktail, a dip in a swimming pool or sunbathing at the beach both aesthetically and "merely" bodily. On holiday, people often (seek to) engage in pleasurable whole-of-body experiences, seeds of aesthetic experience, such as listed above. Also, holidays often take place in tranquil, warm or beautiful locations; similarly, staycationers prefer the countryside, beach or park.<sup>40</sup> Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has shown that "paradise island" (symbolically expressed in resorts and palm beaches) as an idealised environment has been persistently popular in the collective imagination of the humankind as a safe haven, insulated from the worries of the world.<sup>41</sup> Escapism and isolationism are not the only reasons why people seek idyllic or scenic locations to recharge: findings in environmental psychology<sup>42</sup> and neuroscience<sup>43</sup> (nature boosts restoration and art may aid the release dopamine, the pleasure hormone, in the brain), indicate that aesthetic experiences are important for SWB.



Beach is the most popular holiday destination according to two recent surveys in the US and the UK.<sup>44</sup> Seaside resorts in the UK have attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors every year since the early 1800s, when mass tourism first emerged.<sup>45</sup> The long-term appeal of beaches and pools aligns with a recent study that linked lower psychological distress (or higher SWB) with the proximity of the sea: looking at the “blue space” helps reduce stress.<sup>46</sup> The appeal of water appears to be both visual and haptic-kinaesthetic: the multisensory contact with the warmth of the sun, sand and water are perceived as sources of deep satisfaction and enjoyment.<sup>47</sup> In general, nature appears to have a restorative effect and greenery is perceived as calming and revitalising.<sup>48</sup> Tuan suggests that people enjoy beach or pool holidays, because we understand time based on heartbeat and breathing – the slow rhythm of the lapping water means relaxation.<sup>49</sup>

## **2.4 Aesthetic play**

Staycation is commonly understood as imitation of a “real” holiday. Consequently, it can be seen as make-believe: a performance played with and for oneself, or for one’s social circles through social media.<sup>50</sup> Katya Mandoki has identified two aesthetic attitudes: poetics, or attention to art and the artistic; and prosaics, attention to everyday aesthetics: how ordinary things look, feel and are performed.<sup>51</sup> Thomas Leddy has suggested that everyday aesthetic experiences rise from the ordinary extraordinarily experienced: (momentarily) perceiving the world like an artist.<sup>52</sup> Sharing photos on social media implies a “tourist’s gaze”, capturing interesting, novel or socially pertinent objects and events (e.g. portraits of the location and undertaken activities); but they can also indicate aesthetic reactions, prosaics or poetics, depending on the content.

The theory of play, first developed by Johan Huizinga and further evolved by Mandoki, can in part explain the appeal of staycation. Play is a form of enjoyment deriving from mental and physical freedom (play by definition is voluntary and hence, also following rules of play is freedom).<sup>53</sup> Poetics and prosaics can be understood as play: one can engage in them, for example, by creating a narrative, or being open to sensory experiences. Mandoki builds on Huizinga’s and Roger Caillois’ categories of play by identifying five basic play types, of which three are essential for staycation: Peripatos, Mimesis and Ilinx (adventure, playful curiosity; make-believe and imitation; and momentary destruction of predictability and normalcy) are building blocks of staycation, an activity whose purpose is to enable a novel experience within the familiar. Staycation can also involve the two remaining types of play, Agon and Alea, chance-taking and competition: exploring one’s home region is a gamble that may or may not deliver (restoration, entertainment, thrill), and competition takes place in and out of social media about the depth and wealth of the experience.<sup>54</sup>

## **3. Analysis of data**

### **3.1 Analysis method**

The analysis method for both sets of data, articles (N=20) and photos (N=200) was grounded theory (GT); the analysis process is described in the endnote.<sup>55</sup> Sociological discourse analysis (DA) was used to interpret the texts and photos in cultural context (e.g. intentions of the writers and photographers). GT is a qualitative research tool to conceptualise latent

patterns in text and images. The analysis comprised three main steps: coding (labelling of findings), categorising (forming label groups and themes) and interpretation (analysing themes). GT requires constant comparative analysis to capture all instances of variation: categories are created as the analysis progresses instead of working on a pre-set hypothesis or classes.

The concurrent DA contained three levels of analysis: 1) textual, 2) contextual and 3) interpretive level. Textual level focused on elements (choices of words or subject-matter of photos etc.), contextual level focused on the discourse as an act in its cultural etc. background, and interpretation provided an explanation to the discourse. In sociological DA inductive inferences are made of a small number of samples, because the presumption is that cultural, societal information is always intertwined and overlapping: information from one subject can be treated as interchangeable with information from others in a similar social position.<sup>56</sup> With DA, the base argument is that communication constructs the social world by, for example, normalising certain practices and values.<sup>57</sup> My analysis aimed to reveal what is understood as normal, common or typical about staycation.

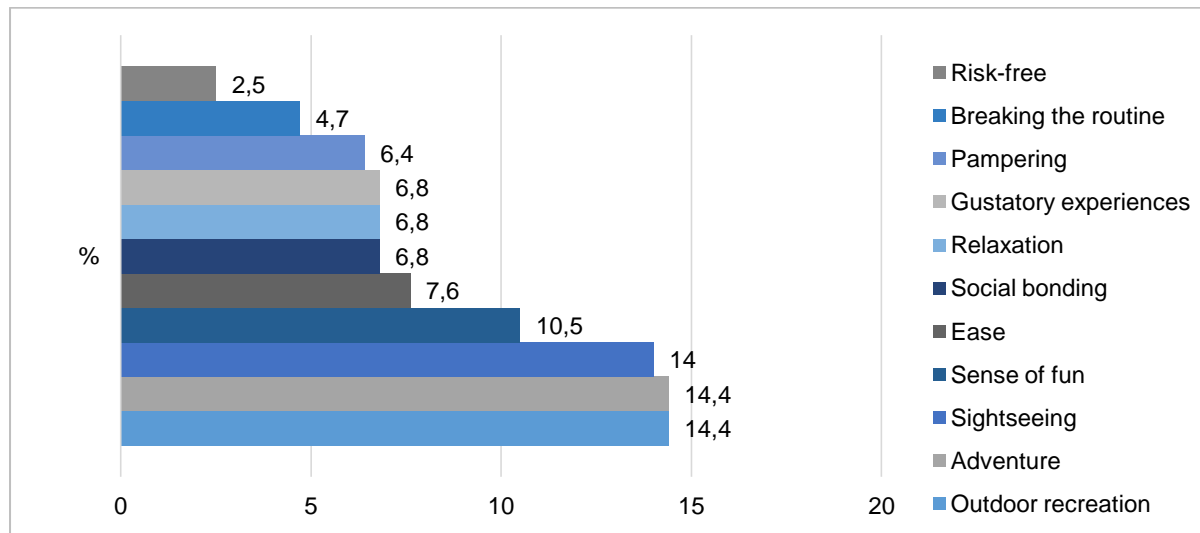
### 3.3 Review of lifestyle articles

The majority of the lifestyle articles were written in the format of a “tip list” for a successful staycation.<sup>58</sup> The recommended activities or presumed objectives were relaxation, excitement, social bonding and entertainment, including self-expression and creativity, to recharge. As an example of typical article, Steve Odland’s text is a prime sample. It is a self-help stress-management guide to navigate the rut of the everyday. The article *16 Things To Do On A "Staycation"* (Forbes, 31 May 2012) sums up staycation:

“[...] an increasingly popular and fun vacation is the stay-at-home-vacation, or the “staycation.” [...] visit your local museums: art, natural or American history, botanical gardens [...]. Every area also has its architectural gems [...]. Pretend you’re a tourist and go visit them. [...] Do we ever take time to explore the [local] area as we would if we were tourists? [...] Let’s admit it, we probably have spent more time exploring places far away from home than we have sites of our own area or region.”

The lifestyle articles contained 485 statements that could be labelled and categorised. The category titles were based on the expressions used in the text [refer to Figure 1].



**Figure 1. The most discussed activities and objectives for a staycation.**

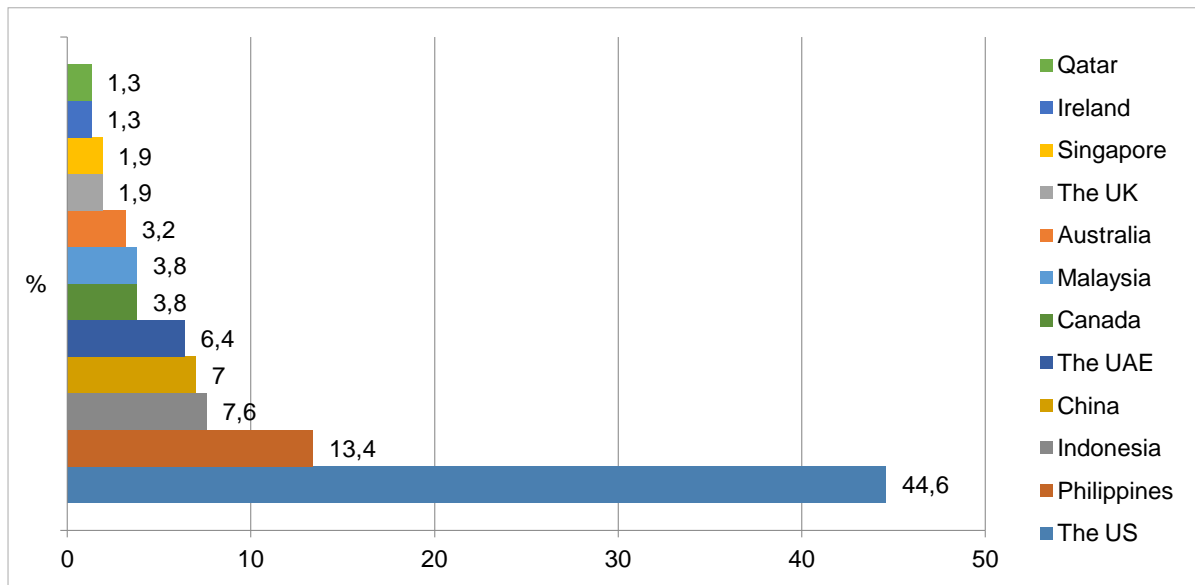
The three most discussed or recommended activities were *outdoor recreation* (at a beach, pool, yard, park or wilderness); *adventure* or exploration; and *sightseeing* (incl. local landmarks, attractions and culture venues). Sightseeing links to exploration, but it was categorised separately, because not all adventure is sightseeing and vice versa. The fourth popular theme was the *sense of fun*: discussion covered play- and fairgrounds and movies, but also DIY, art and craft projects as self-expression. All of the categories overlapped and interlinked: for instance, outdoor recreation was commonly understood as exploration, and one of the main purposes of exploration was to have fun.

Typically, staycation was seen as a pale cousin of a “real” holiday. Every writer felt the need to sell staycation via potential benefits such as saving money, time or both. The *ease* of a home holiday was mentioned in 7.6% of the statements. Other important elements or benefits were *social bonding*, *relaxation* and *gustatory experiences* (e.g. trying out new restaurants or indulging in one’s favourite café). Rarer, but relatively often mentioned activities or justifications for staycation were *pampering* and *breaking the routine* for the purposes of revitalisation. Safety featured in 2.5% of the comments: staycation was perceived as *risk-free*. Typically, the articles discussed free or low-cost, family-centred activities, such as camping at one’s backyard or experimenting with arts or crafts. Concurrently, indulging in pampering (e.g. hotel or spa night in one’s own home city) was justified by the savings made in travel costs. Only one article was critical about unrealistic expectations by criticising a niche trend to buy a holiday home within one’s home city.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.3 Analysis of Instagram photographs

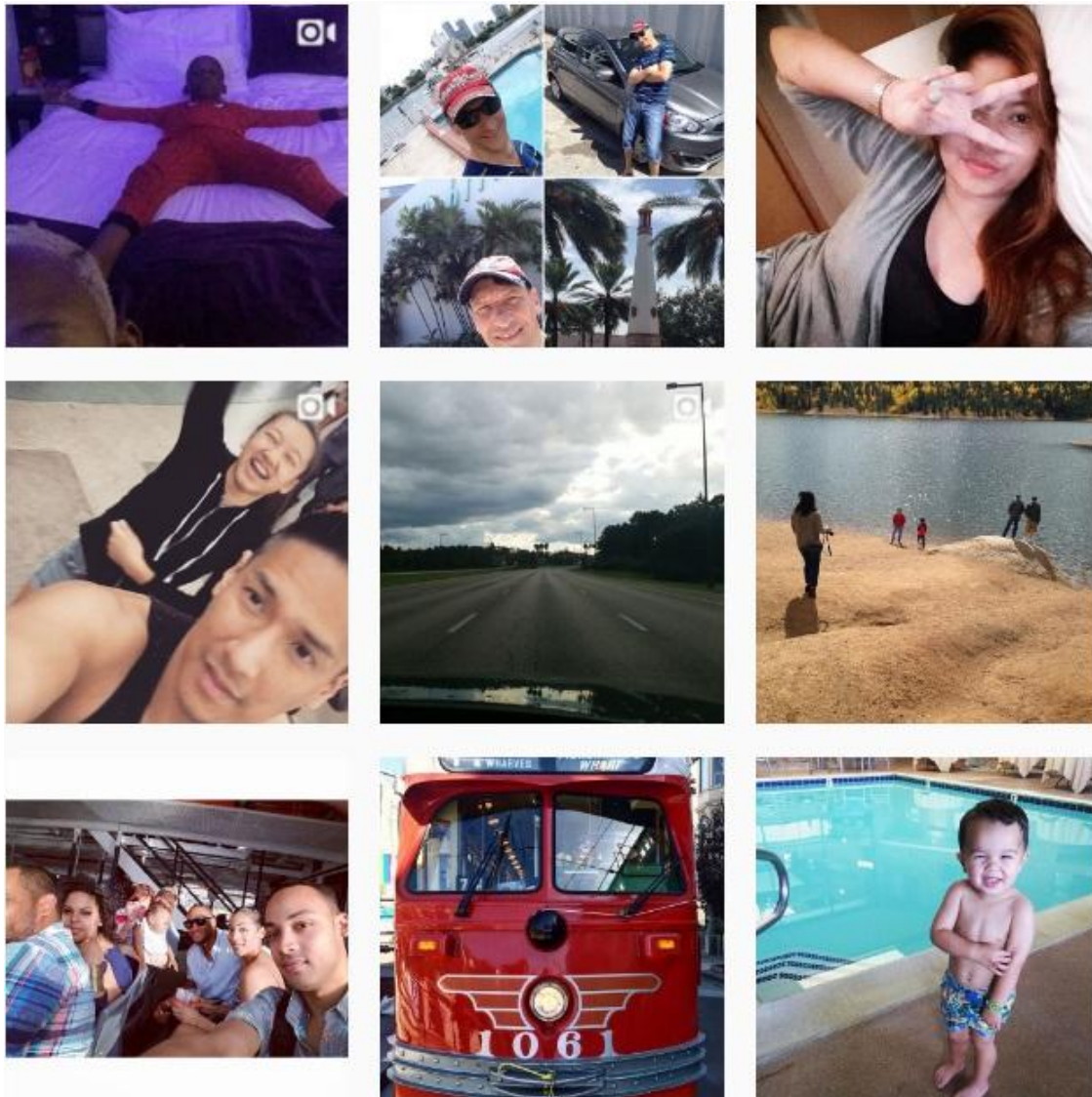
True to the birthplace of the term staycation, close to half of the photographs were taken in the US, but English-speaking countries did not otherwise dominate the data [refer to figure 2].<sup>60</sup> This implies that staycation as a phenomenon is global, or at least globally known.

**Figure 2. The countries of origin of Instagram photos.**



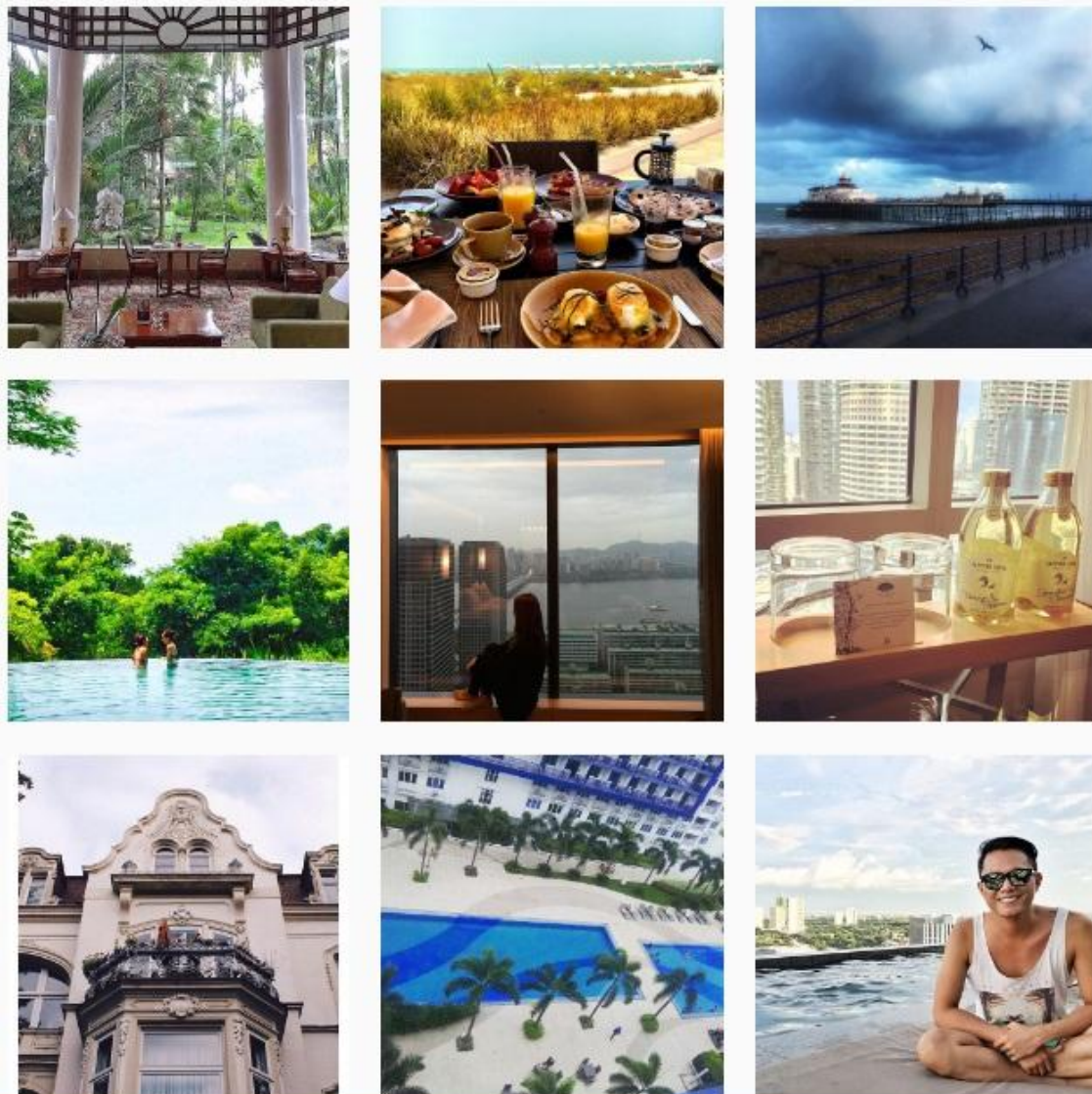
The 200 photos could be classified into two style streams: composed images (56%) and snapshots (44%). Composed images were framed, arranged or otherwise made more artistic (the object positioned in a certain manner or the image afterwards manipulated) to draw the attention to the aesthetic qualities of the subject-matter (e.g. a decorated breakfast table, a row of pretty bottles at a bathroom sink, or a scenic view).<sup>61</sup> To determine, whether a photo was intended as aesthetic (composed), a classification method was developed based on the classical aesthetic qualities of unity, harmony and balance (incl. colours, rhythm and composition).<sup>62</sup> For example, photos that reflected the visual style of landscape painting or postcard were classified as “composed”. Snapshots were action photos, such as a dog running into water, or people casually posing [refer to figures 3 and 4, sample photos].

**Figure 3. Example of snapshots.**





**Figure 4. Example of composed images.**

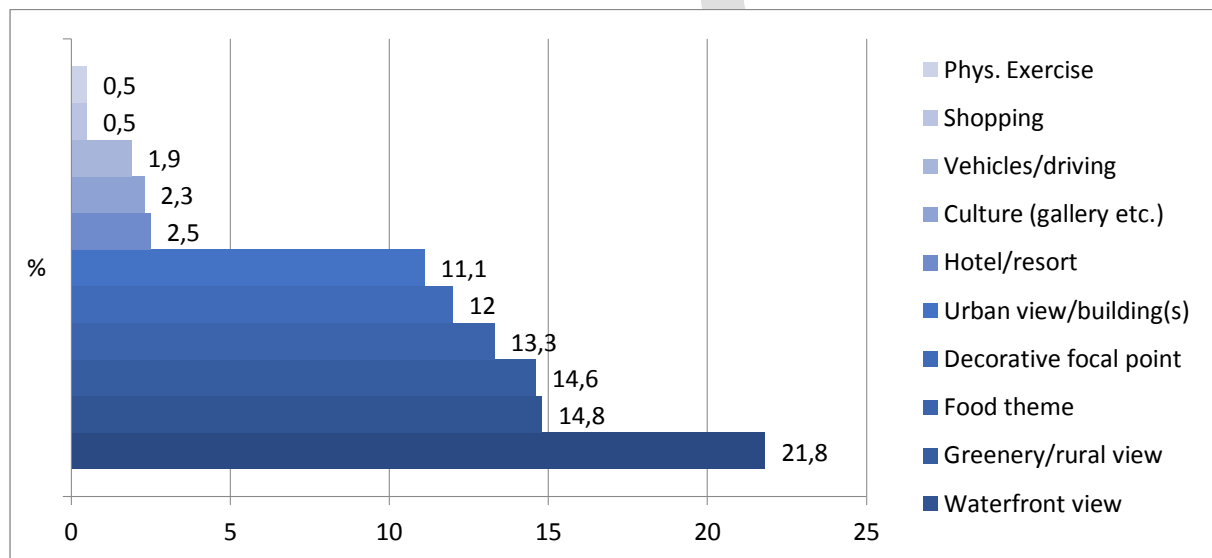


The fact that the majority of the photos could be classified as composed – reflecting an aesthetic intention or reaction – indicates that a poetic or prosaic version of what is experienced, is considered as pertinent (and perhaps prestigious) to notice and share. It can be argued that snapshots should dominate, if photos were taken for mere recording purposes. Even if the composed photos were primarily meant for boost of self-image and identity, the boost takes place through aesthetic means, revealing a cultural and social connotation linking prestige and beauty. As discussed in theory section, photos can serve a number of purposes and focusing on the act of photographing is commonly understood as enjoyable – and so is contemplating beauty, as argued by Hume. Focusing on creativity or aesthetic activities can, in turn, boost SWB, as argued by Melchionne.

The most popular subject-matter was a person or people posing. The other common themes in the order of popularity were a waterfront view (e.g. a beach, pool, marina or lakeside); greenery or rural view (e.g. a garden or resort, scenic landscape, flowering plant); food theme

(a meal, drink, restaurant or food market) and a decorative focal point (e.g. design furniture, architecture detail, fireplace). Urban views and buildings were significantly less popular than nature and greenery. By far, the most popular activities were swimming and sunbathing (depicted in every fifth photo), echoing Tuan's notion about satisfaction found in the beach, sun and water.<sup>63</sup> The prevalence of water- and nature- themes builds on a long history of cultural understanding about a holiday. The bourgeoisie tradition of relocating to countryside for summer is an obvious reference point; and the findings in environmental psychology about the restoring effect of nature are also echoed in this data. Noticeably, the photos depicting nature were most typically portraits of something perceived as beautiful due to its aesthetic qualities - colours, rhythm, harmony etc. (e.g. turquoise water or colourful sunset), indicating that not mere naturalness appeals to people. [Refer to figure 5].

**Figure 5. The most typical content of Instagram photos.**



Instagram photos are usually labelled with keywords, “hashtags”. The 200 photos contained a too varied selection of hashtags, such as place names, to make meaningful statistical inferences. However, the most used hashtags were family or couple (8.3%), sea, lake or swim (6.2%) and weekend (6%). The popularity of weekend hashtags indicates that for staycationers, weekend becomes or is portrayed as active self-realisation and search for pleasant experiences.

#### 4. Discussion

In the articles, staycation is targeted to urbanites with financial means for mini-holidays between holidays,<sup>64</sup> it is promoted as a self-help stress-management tool, and it offers easy-read content. The articles could be dismissed as mere marketing, but they offer insights on social conventions. Staycation is understood as inadequate for the purposes of a holiday, but adequate for the purposes of “quick-fix” restoration. The appeal arises from “ring-fencing”: staycation is earmarked for specified pleasurable activities, incl. outdoor recreation, exploration, entertainment, social bonding, gustatory experiences and playful creativity (DIY

and art projects). The content largely aligns between the articles and the photos, indicating that staycation is understood fairly similarly globally.

The prevalence of whole-of-body experiences in the photos (e.g. water, nature and sun; food markets, cocktails and restaurants), in my view, points that moments of savoured *aesthesis* – sensuous experiences of aliveness – are understood as restorative. It is conceivable that in the modern everyday filled with cerebral or non-physical activities, sensory experiences act as restorative counterbalance. The idealised, tranquil paradise island of Tuan is found in the data in the symbolic form of a resort, garden, beach or pool. In my data, the objective of staycation is to obtain exciting, enjoyable and/or enticing experiences, including experiences of beauty, which in turn can be seen as an attempt to open oneself to wonder. Recent research in psychology has found causation between feeling awe and (momentarily) increased SWB.<sup>65</sup> Dr. Keltner, professor of psychology in Berkeley, writes:<sup>66</sup>

*[...] people report feeling awe in response to more mundane things: when seeing the leaves of a Gingko tree change from green to yellow, in beholding the night sky when camping near a river [...]. Intriguingly, each burst of daily awe predicted greater well-being and curiosity weeks later.*

Aesthetics as a field has for long focused on disinterested, contemplative aesthetic experience, whereas today's voluminous online content (lifestyle and social media, including Instagram and blogs) indicate that many seek creativity and aesthetic experiences as an inseparable part of the enjoyable everyday - combined with self-expression, entertainment, mastering a skill etc. Staycation, especially one shared in social media in the form of composed images, can be seen as a strategy to refresh or sharpen one's aesthetic sensitivity by engaging with and capturing what is perceived aesthetic.

Instagram can only tell a limited story. By selecting scenic or fun-filled images a staycationer builds a narrative of an idealised break or self. The lack of negative photographs indicates that those do not fit into the narrative. It can be asked, whether negative experiences (for example encountered discrimination) are psychologically harmfully erased for the purposes of fitting into the convention. But, it is equally possible that non-positive experiences are dismissed (and perhaps faster forgotten) in favour of the positive ones – photographing one's environment may help in this, as indicated by the study noting a connection between enjoyable experiences and photographing. Staycation undoubtedly is one manifestation of today's experience economy, but its popularity, in particular the popularity of composed photos, lends support to Melchionne's proposition that everyday aesthetics has unacknowledged power in bringing about greater wellbeing.

The popularity of staycations implies that opportunities to recharge in the everyday are lacking, questioning the sustainability of today's work-life from the well-being perspective. My findings reinforce the Ipsos Mori finding that many treat experiences of beauty as an instinctive need, an integral part of good life. Everyday aesthetic (self-)education, learning to acquire aesthetic experiences within the ordinary, could offer a vehicle for more frequent revitalisation and enhanced well-being as proposed by Melchionne.



## 5. Concluding comments

The lack of coherent background data – demographics etc. - sets limitations to my study. It was not possible to conclude how deep or conscious was the staycationers' own emphasis of the aesthetic aspect of their break. Despite the limitations, based on history and theory of holiday-making and everyday aesthetics, this study enforced a link between everyday aesthetic experiences and restoration. Composed (aesthetic) photos on social media cannot prove, but they indicate aesthetic intentions or reactions, pre-steps of aesthetic experience. Photographing as an act appears to deepen the enjoyment drawn from the experience. This study summarised and found further theoretical and empirical support for the view that everyday aesthetic experiences can increase SWB. Also, on holidays, relaxation may aid noticing beauty and savouring *aesthesis*, sensuous experience of aliveness, which in turn may enable revitalisation.

Staycation is understood as imitation of a “real holiday” - or, make-believe: a performance played with and for oneself. In this data set, a “successful” (restorative) staycation appears a four-layered process, aligning with Mandoki’s poetics, prosaics and five types of play: 1) staycation emerges from different configurations of the five types of play, 2) staycation involves poetics, e.g. performance or narrative for oneself and/or one’s social circles, 3) staycation involves prosaics, e.g. an attempt to notice the aesthetic around, and 4) staycation involves aesthetic reactions and experiences, such as photographing and sharing sights to obtain eudemonic pleasure from self-expression, identity building and connecting with others.

## End notes

<sup>1</sup> Sebastien Filep & Philip Pearce (edit.), *Tourist Experience and Fulfilment: Insights from Positive Psychology*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Pykea et al., "Exploring well-being as a tourism product resource", *Tourism Management*, Volume 55, August 2016, pp. 94–105, Section 1.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Kaplan, "The Restorative Environment: Nature and Human Experience", *The Role of Horticulture in Human Well-Being and Social Development* (Diane Relf, edit.), (Portland: Timber Press, 1992). pp. 134-135. Mental fatigue follows from directed attention (cognitive effort e.g. work and studies). Mental fatigue causes irritability, inability to focus and make decisions, and decreased overall health.

<sup>4</sup> Sensuousness means absorbing information sensuously; sensitivity refers to the ability to discriminate and savour; imagination refers to the intermingling of perception and thinking; and evaluation refers to recognition but also valuation of objects. Pauline von Bonsdorff, *The Human Habitat - Aesthetic and Axiological Perspectives*, (Jyväskylä: International Institute of Applied Aesthetics Series Vol. 5, 1998), pp. 81-89.

<sup>5</sup> Building on Neoplatonic tradition, the medieval church fathers of the 4th century interpreted beauty in terms of good and pleasurable, as a reflection of the world's divine order and beauty: contemplating beauty offers pleasure. Gian Carlo Garfagnini, *Medieval Aesthetics, Key Thinkers: Aesthetics* (Alessandro Giovanelli, edit.), (India: Continuum, 2012) pp. 34-35.

<sup>6</sup> Hume 1740, p. 299, quoted by Crispin Sartwell, "Beauty", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), (Edward Zalta, edit.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/beauty/>, Section 2.4.

<sup>7</sup> Sartwell (2016), Section 1.

<sup>8</sup> Arnold Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World*, (Imprint Academic, 2010), p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Yuriko Saito, "Aesthetics of the Everyday", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), (Edward Zalta, edit.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/aesthetics-of-everyday/>, Section 2.

<sup>10</sup> Previous empirical research includes for example Pauliina Rautio's "On Hanging Laundry: The Place of Beauty in Managing Everyday Life", *Contemporary Aesthetics* (2009), vol. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Katya Mandoki, *Prosaics, The Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Great Britain: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 25-26.

<sup>12</sup> For example: Kaplan (1992), pp. 137-138.

<sup>13</sup> Ipsos Mori: "People and places: Public attitudes to beauty", (2010), pp. 4, 9-10, 20, 23-24. <http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/people-and-places.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Beth Harpaz, "The Origins of Mashup Marketing Terms Like 'Bleisure' and 'Staycation'", *Skift*, 10 April 2014.

<sup>15</sup> The reports are available on VisitEngland's website, <https://www.visitbritain.org/economic-downturn-and-holiday-taking-behaviour>. The list is from VisitEngland: *Qualitative research on short-break-taking – Topline findings* (December 2014), accessed 16 October 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Lauren Davidson, "The rise of the staycation: more Brits holidaying at home", *The Telegraph*, 7 February 2015.

- <sup>17</sup> Anne Pilon, "Staycations Survey: Staycations Almost as Popular as Vacations", AYTM website (Ask Your Target Market), 8 November 2016, <https://aytm.com/blog/daily-survey-results/staycations-survey/>, accessed 9 June 2017.
- <sup>18</sup> Belinda Tasker, "Aussie holidaymakers switch to staycations", *News.com.au*, 21 December 2016, <https://goo.gl/i0GOcP>, accessed 9 June 2016.
- <sup>19</sup> Tej Vir Singh (edit.), *Challenges in Tourism Research*, (Channel View Publications, 2015), p. 25.
- <sup>20</sup> Photographs were sourced with the keyword "staycation" in two counts on 3 October 2016: 100 photographs at 9am and a further 100 at 3pm. During the interval, the number of "staycation" photos on Instagram increased by 717 photos, totalling 1,075,464.
- <sup>21</sup> Kevin Melchionne, "The Point of Everyday Aesthetics", *Contemporary Aesthetics* (2014), vol. 12.
- <sup>22</sup> Eudaimonia or eudemonia is comprehensively discussed in Chapter 1 of Felicia Huppert and Cary Cooper (edit.), *Wellbeing: A Complete Reference Guide, Volume VI, Interventions and Policies to Enhance Wellbeing*, (UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014).
- <sup>23</sup> This point is also made by Damien Freeman, "Aesthetic Experience as Transformation of Pleasure," *the Harvard Review of Philosophy* (2010), vol. 17, pp. 56-75.
- <sup>24</sup> By way of example, the number of everyday aesthetics themed blogs indicates that many find undertaking, discussing and viewing everyday aesthetic activities meaningful and rewarding. A Google search on 12 June 2017 with keywords "home design blog" produced 388 million hits; "photography blog" 309 million hits; "fashion blog" 152 million hits; "cooking blog" 23 million hits; and "crafts blog" 14.6 million hits.
- <sup>25</sup> Denis Campbell, "Facebook and Twitter 'harm young people's mental health'", *The Guardian*, 19 May 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/19/popular-social-media-sites-harm-young-peoples-mental-health>, accessed 13 June 2017.
- <sup>26</sup> Kristin Diehl et al., "How taking photos increases enjoyment of experiences", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol 111(2), Aug 2016, pp. 119-140.
- <sup>27</sup> Ipsos Mori (2010), p. 57.
- <sup>28</sup> Shannon Gausepohl, "Instagram for Business: Everything You Need to Know", *Business News Daily*, 3 January 2017. <http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/7662-instagram-business-guide.html>, accessed 8 June 2017.
- <sup>29</sup> John Boy & Justus Uitermark, "How to study the city on Instagram", *PLoS ONE* (2016), vol. 11(6).
- <sup>30</sup> The other high-ranking motivators were the cost of alcohol in the location (24%) and chances for personal development (22.6%). Rachel Hosie, "'Instagrammability': Most Important Factor for Millennials on Choosing Holiday Destination," *The Independent*, 24 March 2017.
- <sup>31</sup> Rod Chester, "Australians say Instagram obsession drives holiday choices and the power of the humble brag", *News.com.au*, 27 December 2016. <https://goo.gl/i0GOcP>, accessed 8 June 2017.
- <sup>32</sup> Orvar Löfgren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing*, (USA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 18, 77.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid, 79-80.
- <sup>34</sup> Kristin Diehl et al., (2016).
- <sup>35</sup> Thomas Leddy, "Everyday Aesthetics and Photography", *Aisthesis* (2014), vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 45-62.

- <sup>36</sup> Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2007), Chapter 4.
- <sup>37</sup> First published in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790) and since discussed extensively in the field of aesthetics.
- <sup>38</sup> I prefer to use the term aesthetic instead of beautiful to not limit the association to visual perception.
- <sup>39</sup> Arnold Berleant, "What is Aesthetic Engagement?", *Contemporary Aesthetics*, (2013), vol. 11.
- <sup>40</sup> VisitEngland reports on staycation, <https://www.visitbritain.org/economic-downturn-and-holiday-taking-behaviour>. Accessed 8 June 2017
- <sup>41</sup> According to Tuan (1995), paradise island appears in many ancient myths across cultures and eras; and the South Pacific Islands with hula skirts, flower garlands and palm beaches gained a mythical reputation as "the paradise" from mid-1800s, promoted by Western artists and writers.
- <sup>42</sup> It is not conclusive what causes the restoration effect of green spaces: aesthetic experience, physical exercise, physical and mental relaxation, something else, or all of these combined? Research in this field includes for example Stephen & Rachel Kaplan (1989), Roger Ulrich (1991), Terry Hartig (1991), and Anette Kjellegren & Hanne Buhrkall (2010). For an overview, see Anna Dale & Yuill Herbert, "Community Vitality and Green Spaces," *CRC Research*, accessed 6 December 2016. [https://crcresearch.org/sites/default/files/u641/vitality\\_-\\_green\\_spaces.pdf](https://crcresearch.org/sites/default/files/u641/vitality_-_green_spaces.pdf)
- <sup>43</sup> Semir Zeki has found that aesthetic experiences with art can increase the release of dopamine. For an overview of neuro-aesthetic studies, including critique, see Mengfei Huan, "The Neuroscience of Art", *Standford Journal of Neuroscience*, Vol. 2, 2009, pp. 24-26.
- <sup>44</sup> Statista, "If you could take only one holiday, what type of holiday would you prefer?", Preferred types of holidays in the United States 2012, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/249577/preferred-holiday-types-in-the-us/>, accessed 8 June 2017; and Peter Woodman, "Beach breaks are the most popular holiday type say survey," *The Independent*, 24 May 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/beach-breaks-are-most-popular-holiday-type-says-survey-7784549.html>, accessed 8 June 2017.
- <sup>45</sup> John Walton, "The seaside resort: a British cultural export", website *History in Focus* (2005), Department of Humanities, University of Central Lancashire, <https://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Sea/articles/walton.html>, accessed 29 May 2017. In 2013 in the UK, city breaks and beach holidays were the two most popular holiday types. ABTA (the Association of British Travel Agencies), "City breaks now as popular as beach holidays", August 2013, <https://abta.com/about-us/press/city-breaks-now-as-popular-as-beach-holidays>, accessed 29 May 2017.
- <sup>46</sup> Daniel Nutsford et al., "Residential exposure to visible blue space (but not green space) associated with lower psychological distress in a capital city," *Health & Place* (2016), Vol. 39, pp. 70-78. This study did not establish what is the required exposure time or the size of the water body: hence, it is not conclusive whether people are drawn to water bodies due to the "blue space effect" or for other reasons.
- <sup>47</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*, (USA: Columbia University Press, 1974/1990 edition), p. 96. Also, Tuan has noted that places that offer diverse tactile experiences are seen as more appealing overall than monotonic places. *Passing Strange and Wonderful. Aesthetics, Nature and Culture*, (New York: Kodansha America Inc., 1995), p. 44.
- <sup>48</sup> For example Richard Ryan et al., "Vitalizing effects of being outdoors and in nature," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (2010), Vol. 30, Issue 2, pp. 159–168.
- <sup>49</sup> Tuan (1995), p. 72. Also Tuan (1974/1990 edit.), pp. 116-119.

<sup>50</sup> Boy and Uitermark (2016) note that social media users typically do not report on their everyday chores: instead, shared images are part of strategies of identity-building and distinction-making.

<sup>51</sup> Mandoki (2007), pp. 75-77.

<sup>52</sup> Mandoki's (2007) theory about prosaics parallels with Leddy's suggestion about the existence of aura in an object that transforms ordinary to extraordinary. I understand Leddy to mean that aura is product of a shift in one's attitude, to be open or curious to look at the object like an artist. Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, (Broadview Press, 2012), pp. 128-130, 244.

<sup>53</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, (Great Britain: Routledge & Paul Kegan, 1949), pp. 8, 21-22.

<sup>54</sup> Mandoki (2007), 94.

<sup>55</sup> For conducting a GT analysis, see for example Carla Willig, *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology*, (London: City University London, 2013), pp. 69-75. The analysis process for the articles was as follows: each article, sentence by sentence, was reviewed and each separate statement assigned an identifying label. Similar labels were grouped into categories (i.e. "adventure", "sense of fun", etc.), as presented in Figure 1. The analysis process for the images was similar: the primary and secondary themes of the photos were identified, labelled and categorised (e.g. "people", "food", "waterfront", "urban greenery", "decorative focus point", etc.). The labels were summed up for statistical presentation from most common to least common. Concurrently, the themes were examined against their semantic and cultural meaning (e.g. was a food market photographed for curiosity, documenting or aesthetic purposes or all of the above).

<sup>56</sup> Jorge Ruiz Ruiz, "Sociological Discourse Analysis: Methods and Logic", *FQS Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, May 2009, Volume 10, No. 2, Art. 26. <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1298/2882>, accessed 6 June 2017.

<sup>57</sup> See for example Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*, (UK: SAGE Publications, 2006). Normalisation of ideas and practices was first discussed by Michael Foucault.

<sup>58</sup> The articles were sourced with the keyword "staycation" on 20 June 2016 by selecting the first 20 non-advertisement articles on Google. Most of the articles were published during 2015-16. More than half (12) were from the US, three were from Canada, three were from the UK and two were from Australia. Adverts were excluded from the data, but all of the articles can be considered as promotional. All except one article portrayed staycation positively and did not discuss its potential downsides, such as promotion of consumerism, or financial and social performance stress.

<sup>59</sup> Rebecca Fishbein, "Some Charming Manhattanites Are Buying Second 'Staycation' Homes in Manhattan for 'A Change of Scenery'", *Gothamist*, June 3, 2016. [http://gothamist.com/2016/06/03/always\\_buy\\_a\\_burner\\_apartment.php](http://gothamist.com/2016/06/03/always_buy_a_burner_apartment.php)

<sup>60</sup> The other relatively common source countries were Philippines, Indonesia, China and the United Arab Emirates. Rarer countries with more than one photo were Canada, Malaysia, Australia, the UK, Singapore, Ireland and Qatar. The remaining ~4% of the photos were individual shots from all around the globe, from Mexico to Czech Republic.

<sup>61</sup> The assessment of the aesthetic intention/reaction was informed by Carolyn Korsmeier's discussion of taste, Berys Gaut & Dominic McIver Lopes (edit.), *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, (Taylor & Francis Books, 2013), pp. 259-262: in summary, aesthetic qualities are debatable and depend on the adopted viewpoint and philosophy, but objects have properties that make them worth appreciation or criticism, such as colour, composition, elegance, rhythm etc. and the value of these qualities is understood fairly similarly within a culture or among a class of objects (paintings, photographs, furniture etc.).

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<sup>62</sup> Unity in (visual) variety means the harmony or union of cooperating elements or the balance of contrasting or conflicting elements. Aesthetic harmony exists when some identical quality or form or purpose is embodied in various elements of a whole – sameness in difference. Aesthetic balance is the unity between elements which, while they oppose or conflict with one another, nevertheless need or supplement each other. Dewitt H. Parker, Chapter V, “The Analysis of the Aesthetic Experience: The Structure of the Experience”, *The Principles Of Aesthetics*, (1920), E-book, Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6366/pg6366-images.html>, accessed 15 June 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Appropriate to the narrative of a holiday, half of the images displayed a sunny summer day. One quarter of the photos was taken indoors, and the remaining pictures depicted an overcast weather, night or indiscernible weather. Only one image showed sleet and a half a dozen pictured rain.

<sup>64</sup> The socio-economic background of staycationers was not revealed by this data, but the portrayed staycation (eating in restaurants etc.) requires some disposable income.

<sup>65</sup> See for example Melanie Rudd et al., “Awe Expands People’s Perception of Time, Alters Decision Making, and Enhances Well-Being”, *Psychological Science* (2012), 23(10), p. 1135.

<sup>66</sup> Dacher Keltner, “Why Do We Feel Awe?” *Greater Good*, Berkeley University of California, 10 May 2016. [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why\\_do\\_we\\_feel\\_awe](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_do_we_feel_awe), accessed 14 December 2016.