EXPERIENCE DIMENSIONS IN NEW RESTAURANT CONCEPT PROPOSAL

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ABSTRACT

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The main objective of the thesis was to explore the local customers' needs and desires of dining experience and propose a new concept for the restaurant, based on the findings. In order to reach the objective, primary and secondary data were gathered and analysed. Primary data were collected with quantitative - a survey - and qualitative - focus group discussions - methods.

Along the lines of compiling and processing of the data gathered through surveying and focus groups, it has been concluded that the existing features of the case company do not meet the customer needs or desired features of experience dimensions. Therefore, in line with the research, a proposal for a new concept for the restaurant has been created. It is designed to address the four dimensions of experience and transform the existing restaurant into a social venue for the local community. The outcomes of the thesis can be used for further strategic development of the case company.

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Key words: experience dimensions, restaurant, experience economy

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

As agreed with the commissioner, the **main objective** of the research was to explore the local customers' needs and desires of dining experience and propose a new concept for the restaurant, based on the findings.

The proposed concept is aimed to improve the level of customer satisfaction through staging an experience, as well as to expand the client base and become a social-hub for the local community.

In order to fulfil the requirements of the main research objective, several research questions were distinguished:

1. What theoretical framework of the concept of experience economy and concept development as well as the dimensions of experiences can be explored and applied?

2. What dimensions of experience the customers have experienced in the case company and elsewhere?

3. What restaurant concept proposal could be designed by addressing the dimensions of experience?

The innovative feature of this research is the creation of concept proposal based on the dimensions of experience, which also is the outcome of the thesis.

The thesis consists of six main chapters. First is the introduction, which defines the main objectives and research questions. In the second chapter an insight on the operations of the case company is provided by describing the industry, environment, potential and existing clients and other fundamental information. In the chapter of literature review, the theoretical framework of concept development, experience economy and experience dimensions are explored. The fourth chapter describes the methodology chosen and adjusted to fulfilling the main objective of the research. In chapter five, discussion, the gathered data is being analysed and a proposal of a new concept is created. Chapter six provides the summary of the thesis and recommendations.

2   CASE COMPANY AND RESTAURANT INDUSTRY IN LATVIA

2.1. Brief description of Latvian restaurant industry

Within the recent decades, there has been a major influence of new trends within the industry. In line with development of the global dining tourism, also the Latvian restaurant industry has experienced rather a significant development and growth in demand. However, even if the tourists are fully enjoying the benefits of and positively evaluating Latvian restaurant industry, the locals are not showing as high level of active economic and social participation. The local population is encouraged to choose to dine out more often than it is done usually. It has to be taken into account, that a significant part of the decision of not dining out in a restaurant is purely financial reasons. By supporting local restaurants, the customers are, indeed, also supporting the economy of Latvia and, consequentially, themselves and others around (The Jūrmala Dome 2013). The government of Latvia has demonstrated the intention to reduce the Value Added Tax for the restaurant and food industry, therefore, contributing to the support of the local restaurant industry.

The most significant asset in the hands of Latvian restaurants is the flow of tourists from EU and other countries. The tourists are aiming to experience the culture, also food culture of Latvia, in a limited amount of time, therefore they are looking for restaurants to combine food with a cultural and social experience. This aspect is facilitating the success of Latvian restaurants which are positioned as authentic, traditional or Latvian-themed.

Locals are evaluating the quality of food and the overall restaurant experience in Latvia as more than good and possess a particular amount of pride. Nevertheless, the restaurant industry is becoming increasingly creative, innovative and restaurants are keen on differentiation from one another either by quality, theme, design, offerings or other features. Such trend is purely beneficial for the customers, since it provides with more different options and, presumably, a better service and experience.

2.2. Case company restaurant "Tupeņkrogs"

Restaurant "Tupeņkrogs" is situated 200 meters from the coast of the Baltic Sea, in the top curort city of Latvia - Jūrmala. The restaurant is located almost in the social, political and economic center of the city and is easily accessible by all means of transportation - public, private and pedestrian. The restaurants' working hours are from 10 a.m. to 23 p.m. during the winter season and until the last customer in the summer season. Overall, restaurant's location can be described as strategically beneficial. Currently the company employs in total 10 staff members, including 2 chefs, 1 kitchen worker, 1 manager, 1 administrator and 5 waitressing staff members. Working is organized in shifts.

The name of the restaurant – "Tupeņkrogs" – originates in the traditional Latvian language and is in an old-fashioned form. The name itself implies that the restaurant is held in a traditional Latvian style and, indeed, the offerings are rather traditional, whereas the interior is rather more neutral and modern than it would be in a traditional Latvian themed establishment. The building can host up to 100 customers at a time. "Tupeņkrogs" has been serving private and corporate customers. Its offers include the organization of dinner parties, corporate dinners, banquets, different types of celebrations, along with catering services.

The company was established in the year 2006 and has operated fairly successfully ever since. In fact, "Tupeņkrogs" has been nominated "Best National Cuisine" in the Jūrmala's top restaurant awards in years 2009 and 2011. However, ownership shift in 2012 caused a high level of employee turnover, drastic changes in the restaurants' offering and pricing. It resulted in a plunge in customers and regression of financial indicators. The company has been on the path of recovery and progress during recent years, however it is still actively looking for the most sufficient and well-suited concept and organization of operations.

The major segments of "Tupeņkrogs" customers are local population, and occasional foreign clients, but mostly in the summer season. The average age of a typical "Tupeņkrogs" customer is between 20 to 35 years. Evaluating by the pricing decisions made by the administration of the venue, the customers are with

medium and high level of income. The restaurant is not favored by one specific group with common nationality or ethnicity, rather the clients of "Tupeņkrogs" can be described as multinational. Among the clients many different social groups are noted - married couples, young and already established families, retired people, businessmen and women, students and others.

PICTURE 1. Exterior of Tupeņkrogs restaurant

Visual material documenting "Tupeņkrogs" appearance can be found in appendix 1. All information presented has been provided by the case company and the publishing of the information has been agreed upon.

3   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Concept development

The choice of a concept and its further development is essential for any business. In the modern market of free trade and fierce competition, there is no space for mistakes and second chances for businesses. Either the best suited concept gets selected and developed or the business fails due to inefficiency and inadequacy of the concept. In case of failure, the business is exposed to losing share of the market, high level of customer dissatisfaction, and lost financial and time investments. In order to successfully perform and evolve, companies must be able to explore and identify many concepts at once and possess the ability to see the most significant opportunities behind the selected concept. An organized and structured concept development process is a valuable tool used by companies for generating, selecting, developing and establishing a successful concept.

In order to explore the topic of concept development, it is essential to familiarize with defined notion of a concept and concept development (PTC 2006). According to the definition, a concept is "a unifying idea or theme, especially for a product or service", which is formed by incorporating all characteristics of the matter and other considerations (American Heritage Dictionary 2011). Furthermore, concept development is distinguished to be a process, which is directed by identified set of customer needs and target specifications, which are transformed into a kit of conceptual designs and possible solutions to the matter. The distinguished solutions are a representative of approximate characterization of prospective operational principles, forms and features of potential product or service (PTC 2006). The basic concept development process is crucial because a better forming process leads to an outcome of a higher quality. The decisions made during the first steps of the process, are said to directly constrict future options (Ulrich & Eppinger 1995). An optimized and well-defined concept development process holds certain benefits and advantages, such as increased concept development efficiency, improved collaboration among stakeholders and ensured concept exploration. The most essential benefits are listed in the following.

Benefits of an optimized concept development process (PTC 2006):

• Re-evaluation of previously dismissed concepts

• Employment of best methods and tools to facilitate a productive concept generation process

• Adoption of formalized, repeatable and transparent concept development processes

• Capture and document concept ideas to minimize repetition and increase reuse of knowledge

• Consideration of customers' paradigm in concept evaluation to stimulate market acceptance upon the launch of a product or a service

• Reduction of the wasted effort by involving all stakeholders

The process of concept development divides in three major steps – problem definition, concept generation and concept evaluation/selection (PTC 2006). To gain more versatile knowledge of the concept development process, steps of the development process shall be discussed in greater detail.

3.1.1 Problem definition and concept generation

Within the framework of this step of development, all customer needs and requirements are clarified as issues yet to be solved. The highlighted issues directly refer to customer needs and therefore are the core of the whole concept development process. After major issues have been defined, problems are re-evaluated and disintegrated into simplified sub-issues. Functional breakdown and issue decompositions are fixed and documented in order to provide the benefits of efficient concept development process. Furthermore, the issues are weighted, since not all of the documented issues share the same level of significance. (Berkey 2008.)

In this step, the defined sub-issues of the problem are being explored. Concept generation is said to be the most creative part of the concept development pro-

cess, because the main purpose of this step is to create various concepts that would regard the problem and consequential sub-issues. At this point, all the generated concepts should not be developed in detail, however, they must cover all the targeted issues and sub-issues. This step provides an opportunity to benefit from extensive collaboration between the customers and the company, because the insights of all the involved parties are taken into account when shaping a prospective concept (Pugh 1981, 1991). Once several prospective concepts have been generated, it is suggested to use the Pugh matrix to scale, compare and do further developing and selection.

Pugh matrix is a criteria-based matrix, used to assist in quantitative determining from several alternatives the most suited and efficient alternative to the highlighted problem. Pugh matrix is executed in the same way as a basic decision-making matrix. However, the matrix holds an additional feature, which is the concept of weighting and scaling criteria in order of significance. The weighting system is integrated in the matrix to better reflect the significance of essential features, thus helping to facilitate the decision making process. The more significant the highlighted criteria, the higher grade of the weighting it shall be assigned. Every potential option is given a score, which will be addressed in the concept selection (Pugh 1981). In case of re-developing an already existing concept, a term "base-case" is introduced. The current concept, or otherwise referred to as the base-case, is to be given a grade "5" for every of the distinguished customer requirements. Further, the generated concepts are scaled in a comparison to the base-case by 1-5-9 approach. Within the framework of the approach, concept features which are much worse than the base-case are to be graded with a "1", those approximately equal to base-case are graded with a "5" and, finally, those features, which are considered to be much better than the base-case are graded with a "9" (Berkey 2008). The use of the matrix provides a platform of evaluation, comparison and a visual representation of the concept generation phase.

TABLE 1. Pugh matrix. Adapted from Pugh (1981).

Concepts								
Functions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
A								
B								
C								
D								
E								
F								
Score								

3.1.2 Concept selection

After the creation and application of the Pugh matrix, the concept of the highest total value is selected, based on the scores that are in a relation to the base-case. It has to be ensured that the selected concept does not only satisfy the customer needs, but also will delight the customer (Simpson et al. 1996). Nevertheless, a brief reality-check shall be performed. The evaluation of the concept can be executed by answering several check-up questions with an aim to determine whether the new concept is realistic, are all the customer requirements met, are there any unnecessary customer requirements and how much investments and effort will be needed (Simpson et al. 1996). Competitors also have to be taken into account and it is crucially important that the selected concept is impossible or at least very difficult to imitate. (PTC 2006). If all the criteria of concept evaluation are met, the most adequate concept can be selected for further development and execution.

3.2. Experiences

In the Oxford English Dictionary experience is defined as "an event or occurrence which leaves an impression on one" (Oxford English Dictionary 2015). Experience as a term is widely used and it is easy to come across the word on a daily basis, during a regular conversation. Starting from job-seekers emphasizing

the value of their previous work and study experience, to travel agencies promoting and selling holiday experiences and friends describing a particular event to each other. The term itself is so common and vague that, among the academics, it has received judgement for being just a buzz word extensively used by managers and businesses (Carù and Cova 2003) to attract customers and capture their attention. However, the opinions regarding the matter of experiences vary significantly.

For many years, consumer research was based on the assumption that buying behaviour is based on a highly rational model. Such assumption resulted from experiments and observations, where consumers were intentionally choosing particular brands or doing the purchasing process, basing all the decisions on subjective and predictable reasons. (Holbrook, O'Shaughnessy and Bell 1990.) This point of view is based on the idea that the decisions made by customers are purposive, pre-planned and conscious (Belk 1985) and therefore can be treated as a purely rational and predictable matter. However, such assumption has received a dose of criticism, arguing that cognitive models alone cannot explain and back up customer behaviour fully (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Consequently, research of consumer behaviour has, ever since, shifted towards a more reactive point of view (Holbrook et al. 1990), where the major emphasis is on the experiential features and dimensions of behaviour and consumption. It became noted that individuals are intending to purchase a product not only for its physical functions, but also for what it stands for and what it means. The emotional attachment to a product or service has gained its significance ever since (Levy 1959).

On the other hand, it is argued that the experience is not a nebulous concept, moreover, it is equally as tangible of an offer as any product or service. Nowadays many businesses are wrapping their classic offerings with experiences, in order to increase the customer satisfaction and enlarge the sales margin. (Pine & Gilmore 1999.) An experience can be created when a business uses its service as the stage and products as attributes in order to employ individual customers in such ways that a memorable moment is created for each of the involved customer individually. The basic idea of this concept lies behind this thing to keep in mind - commodities are compatible, goods are tangible, services are intangible, whereas experiences are memorable. (Pine & Gilmore 1998.)

Yet, it needs to be noted, that experiences as a theme have been addressed as early as the 20th century. For instance, in psychology, within the framework of the Theory of Motivation, Abraham Maslow has stated that the individual after achieving the basic needs is seeking for unique experiences through the drive of self–actualization (Maslow 1943).

When investigating marketing literature, it is evident that the experience, as a term or concept, is still unclear. When addressing the matter of experiences, a lack of theoretical models and common terminology can be noted (Gentile et al. 2007, 397). It may be due to the fact that experience is a highly personal matter (Pine & Gilmore 1998) and therefore can be interpreted differently, based on personal bias.

Some of the authors contribute to the idea that experience is created in the process of the interaction between the customer and the business or its offerings (Addis and Holbrook 2001). A common and wide-spread idea is that the customers are often co-creating the experience and it engages the customer personally and helps to develop a sense of uniqueness (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004) and therefore fully absorbs the experience mentally. In such context, the company is slightly in a secondary position, where it is hosting the experience and providing the customer with all the needed attributes and shaping the environment around the client in order to create a platform for the unique customer experience. From a more holistic point of view, customer experience is defined by factors that are contributing to it. In some cases, the customer is aware of the contributing factors on a subconscious level. Such customer experience is defined in terms of five dimensions – sensing, which is a sensory experience, feeling, which is an affective experience, thinking, which is a creative cognitive experience, acting, that is understood with physical behaviour, lifestyle experience, as well as relating – social-identity experience. (Schmitt 1999.)

An experience is a fluid concept and can be achieved in many different shapes and sizes or through various happenings. An experience can consist of a particular product. For instance, a theatre play is an experience for viewers. The experience can also execute a supplementary function for the product, such as a dinner or lunch in a particular restaurant. Furthermore, the experience can consist of the combination of all the mentioned features. It, therefore, makes the experience not

just a happening or a product, but a mental process. It can also be referred to as a certain state of mind, when all the features are being absorbed and immersed, adding up to the gained sense of experience (Sundbo & Darmer 2008). The key point is that the experience is created through more than just the product itself. Even in the cases, when a product is designed in a way that already is an experience for the customer, there is still more to it. The experience is being shaped with the location, sense of atmosphere, availability and a number of subjective issues of evaluation that vary from one individual to another.

Over the last half of the century the role of food and eating has experienced a significant change. Food and the act of eating has become commoditized and, later on, transformed into dining experience and other food-based scenarios. A significant part of this shift in the means of food and dining takes the main drivers of service and, furthermore, experience economy. In the modern community, food is no longer a highly valuable and rather inaccessible commodity. (Sundbo & Darmer 2008.) Rather, dining has become a relatively more financially accessible alternative of an experience. In contrast to the former situation, where only local products were consumed in the local market, nowadays products are distributed globally, thus contributing to creating an experience of a higher quality.

The eating or dining experience is a delicate and highly personal matter and, therefore, is under the influence of the individuals' psychological and physiological features. Psychological features refer to the mood the individual has during the process of dining, social interactions, ethical attitude and general set of beliefs and values, whereas physiological features refer to the feeling of hunger and the need for comfort. (Jacobsen 2008.) The dining experience is also shaped by external factors and dimensions described in the previous paragraphs. The combination of all the factors responds to the individuals' basic need - hunger, but the outcome of the merger is something exceeding the basic satisfaction, it creates a profound social and emotional experience (Simmel 1997).

Dining is, both, a body and a mind experience. The body reacts to the experience through the senses - taste, smell, sound, sight, feel, as well as the fundamental process of metabolism. In contrary, the mind perceives the sensation delivered by all the senses and reads them both consciously and subconsciously, thus generating emotions, recreating memories and forming an idea of the experience and

attitude towards it (Jacobsen 2008). It is also emphasized that, in order to fully embrace and, primarily, realize that for the individual to become a part of the dining experience, it is necessary to have rather an extensive previous experience in the restaurant industry as a customer (Sorensen 2008). It is supported by the fact that if an individual is generally interested only in satisfying the basic, physiological needs through dining, it becomes insufficient to impose a concept of dining experience on the particular individual, because it simply will not be in line with customer needs, beliefs and desires.

3.3. Experience economy

It is common knowledge that economies change over time. To successfully illustrate how the global economy has come to the modern setting, an example of a birthday cake will be used. In the agrarian economy, birthday cakes were handmade by the mother. The cake was made from scratch by mixing ingredients that were available in the farm - flour, sugar, eggs and butter. The total costs of such a product were fairly low. During the advancement of goods-based industrial economy, mothers used products of already mixed ingredients, but still did the process themselves, however, they were willing to pay for 3€ to 5€ more for the mixture, because it benefited them with convenience, ease and time efficiency. When the same situation occurred in times of services economy, busy parents chose to buy an already made cake from a bakery by making an individual order and paying for 13€ to 15€, which is up to ten times more than the price of a premixed ingredients package. However nowadays, the parents choose neither to bake the birthday cake themselves, nor to organise the birthday party itself. Parents in our modern society much rather would do an act of outsourcing the party to a professional event planner company for kids. Such companies exist for any desired type of event and in them the birthday cake is a common attribute. In such cases, the parents spend 100€ or more for the professionals to stage the experience. (Pine & Gilmore 1998.) In other words, modern economy has transformed into experience economy, however, the influence of previous phases of economy is still present and it shapes the present economy.
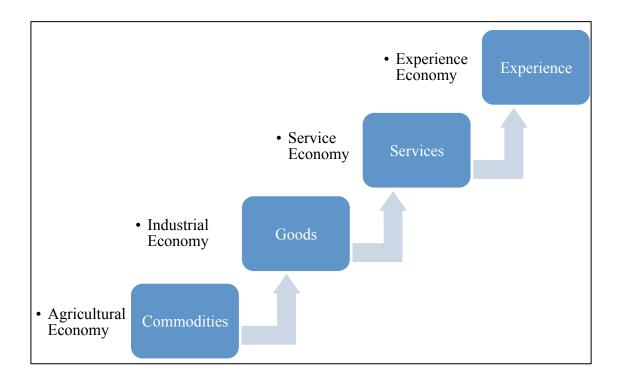
FIGURE 1. Evolution of economy. Adapted from Pine& Gilmore (1998)

Usually experiences are being associated with services, however experiences are a defi-nite economic offering that should be separated from the alms of goods and services. Nowadays experience is noted separately and can be described as an economic value, because the customer needs and desires have significantly skyrocketed over the last decades. Nevertheless, more and more businesses are reacting to this shift in economy and are designing and promoting experiences for their customers. Over the time, ser-vices have become commoditized and this has caused experiences to be next in line on the progressions scale of economic value. (Pine & Gilmore 1999.)
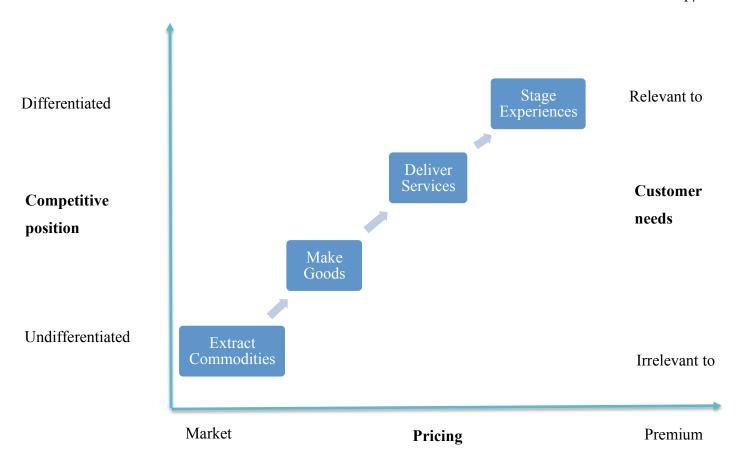
FIGURE 2. Competitive position. Adapted from Pine & Gilmore (1998)

It is being pointed out that experience holds the highest of economic value, due to the fact that the customer is not perceived as a buyer of a product or a service, but rather as a guest, who is taken care of and served in the best possible manner. Consequently, such a guest is willing to invest more financial remuneration in this differentiated, unique customer experience, which directly targets the customers' desires and needs. (Sundbo & Darmer 2008.)

Such experience might include the feeling of safety, new discovery, individuality, authenticity or even romance. Moreover, the experience can be facilitated by new ways of application of already existing knowledge, traditions, skills or values. The value of such experience is created by, both, rational application of a good or a service and the emotional side of the process. (Sundbo & Darmer 2008.) It must be taken into account that, for an individual, an experience seems unique and only one of a kind, even if it is shared with others at the same time.

3.3.1 Dimensions of experience economy

As mentioned before, services are becoming increasingly more and more com-moditized. In regard to this trend, businesses are striving to add value to the ex-isting range of offerings by staging memorable and delightful experiences around the core service. As the result, customers are willing to spend increased sums to enjoy the experience of the service. From the business point of view, staging an experience around the service undoubtedly generates more profit and return on investment. (Pine & Gilmore 1998.) Four core realms or dimensions of experi-ence can be identified, distinguished by customer involvement and participation. The dimensions are – education, escapism, entertainment and esthetics. The di-mensions of education and escapism require active participation of the custom-ers, where the involved individuals play a significant role in co-creating their experience. And, as it has been stated, the best and the most memorable experi-ences are often the ones, which have been co-created. (Gentile et al. 2007.) On the contrasting side, the dimensions of entertainment and esthetics do not require active participation of the customers. Moreover, the individual does not interact or, therefore, affect nor influence the outcome of the experience. In line with the theoretical framework of Pine and Gilmore (1998), the stated four dimensions are combined to generate the optimal experience for the customer. This ultimate combination is referred to as the sweet spot.
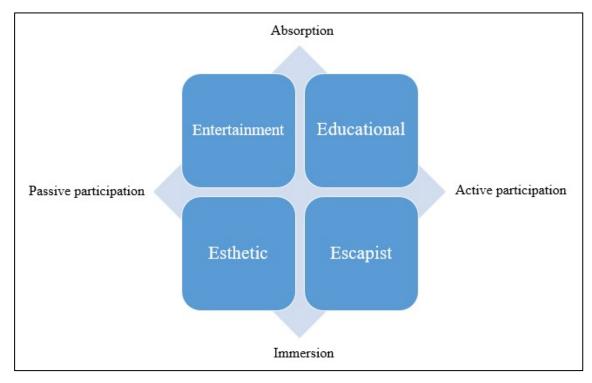
FIGURE 3. The four realms of an experience. Adapted from Pine & Gilmore (1998)

The global hospitality and restaurant industry has formed into a field of fierce competition and therefore it is an essential challenge to understand and put into use the defining characteristics of customer experiences (Perdue 2002). The following paragraphs address each of the four experience dimensions and how they are in a relation to dining out.

3.3.2 Education

Within the lines of experience economy theory, the dimension of education requires an active engagement of customers' full attention and concentration (Pine & Gilmore 1998). In order for it to fulfil the cornerstones of the dimension, first it has to excite and intrigue the customer so that the willingness to gain new knowledge would be facilitated (Schmitt 2003). The experience of education is said to require active participation and is fully absorptive. In other words, it is evident, that the customers themselves play a key role in co-creating the experience (Prentice 2004). Nowadays, the opportunities for the businesses to add or expand the feature of the education for their customers are very resourceful. Some of the basic examples are annotations and guidelines for preparation of different foodstuffs found on supermarket shelves (Schmitt 2003). The customer, as a re-

sult of active participation in the educational experience, will be gaining knowledge or skills. The ultimate goal of the dimension of education is to make the customers feel as if they have participated and, in return, have learned something new. No matter how large or small of a skill or piece of knowledge it is. (Pine & Gilmore 1998.) As stated in the business literature, the key factor of participating in an activity is the possibility for and the desire to educate and discover new features about one-self (Prentice 2004).

It activates the customers' mind and contributes to the desire of learning something new. The customers are co-creating their learning experience by taking active participation in activities that can enhance their knowledge. The knowledge can be enriched by socializing and learning from others' experiences, by dipping in a culture or environment as well as by experimenting and discovering something new on their own. (Pine & Gilmore 1998.) The dimension of education is achieved only if the customer feels as if he or she has learned something new.

3.3.3 Escapism

An escapist experience is defined by a state where the individual is fully invested in and absorbed in the performed activity (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). Escapist experiences are highly immersive, meaning that they require a high level of active participation. Typical and the most common examples include theme parks, simulated destinations and themed attractions, such as theme restaurants, for instance. The vivid rise in popularity of motion simulator rides can be noted as the ultimate victory of the escapist experience. For example, "The Simpsons Ride" is a simulator ride featured and hosted at Universal Studios in Florida and Hollywood theme parks. The journey lasts for six minutes and it provides a possibility to meet and virtually interact with a number of different "The Simpsons" characters and absorb the sensational highlights of this interaction. (Gilmore & Pine 1999.)

A large number of opportunities for experiencing escapism can be found within the hospitality industry. For instance, dining out, either when being on a vacation or during the daily routine, serves as a way to solve personal problems caused by daily stress, lack of time to devote to friends and family, as well as supplies the diners with new energy and strength that comes out of the excitement of a new

experience. (Krippendorf 1987, 17.) Moreover, going on a vacation and doing the things that are out of the daily routine provides a psychological escape from the daily mundane life (Uriely 2005). A discovered fundamental of motivation behind choosing to get involved in the dining out experience is the desire for the person to find himself or herself somewhere else, than doing the daily tasks (Cohen 1979). The customers are looking for authenticity (Boorstin 1964) in order to, in a way, compensate for or enlighten their inauthentic lives that they experience daily (MacCannel 1973). Therefore, customers are willing to travel with an aim to encounter satisfying, memorable and authentic experiences (Turner 1973).

It has become evident that the public's desire for exciting fantasies and escaping from the daily routine encounters a significant increase (Russell 1997). The modern idea of escapism is often associated with experiencing another time, place, environment or atmosphere that overruns one's daily routine and is most likely to be preferred over the daily flow of happenings (Uriely 2005). Escapism in one form or another can be experienced in various different environments. One can experience the sensation of escapism starting from the privacy of the own home to large public venues. These environments can be anything. The only criteria for the medium is to provide the person with some level of the sense of escaping the daily reality, heavily or just to some extent (Turner 1973). A number of environments providing the experience of escapism have become popular due to their therapeutic features. For instance, spa resorts, sauna procedures or even live classical music events.

Nowadays, in the modern society, dining out has become a popular form of escapism. The amount of restaurants that are designed or re-designed to provide the guests with a sense of another time, space, environment or atmosphere is significantly increasing. Theme or theatrical dining experiences are predicted to encounter a rise in the market. It is expected that themed dining experiences will represent up to 10 or 15 percent of the hospitality industry (Russell 1997). The success of dining out experience is largely due to two factors. Firstly, dining out has proven to be an easily affordable and accessible, quick escape that provides a possibility to relax and release the tensions of the day. Secondly, dining out is viewed as an entertainment for those who are living in a peaceful daily routine (MacCannel 1973). Themed and experiential entertainment venues have been nominated as one of the most popular areas of service design that the public

tends to "escape to". Themed and experiential entertainment dining venues provide the guests not only with the sense of another time, space, environment or atmosphere, but as well with a memorable experience for the guest to remember and "take away" with them (Wearne 1994). It needs to be noted, that any restaurant, without a doubt, provides an experience to any person dining in it. However, the difference lies in the fact, that themed and experiential entertainment restaurants are utilizing service design concepts, in line with marketing strategies, in order to create an environment that provides a sense of another time, space, environment or atmosphere. (Russell 1997.)

3.3.4 Entertainment

Entertainment is most likely to be one of the oldest forms of experience. The dimension of entertainment requires passive participation from the individual, who is willing to emerge into the experience. One common trend in the global business industry is that the companies are creating a so called, stage for entertainment to take place and, therefore, affect the customers in the best possible way (Pine and Gilmore 1998.) Moreover, it is happening throughout different businesses, even if the businesses are not related to entertainment itself in any way. Such events as performances of artists are one of the most typical forms of entertainment. It has been noted that entertainment essentially remains to be at the core of any hospitality product (Hughes & Benn 1995). The city of Las Vegas in the United States of America, is providing the customers with exquisite dining experiences, together with other forms of exciting, authentic experiences. This is the main reason behind why the city is commonly referred to as the "entertainment capital of the world".

Entertainment vs education, for example, does not require the customer to actively participate in the experience. The core aim of entertainment is to encourage the customer to feel entertained. The state, where the customer is feeling consciously entertained, can be achieved in various ways. (Pine & Gilmore 1999.) Important paradigm to take into account is that the sense of entertainment to different individuals is achieved in varied ways. It means that the dimension of entertainment needs to be tailored in order to combine it with the profiles of expected customers.

3.3.5 Esthetics

When referring to esthetics dimension, it needs to be understood as the customers' interpretation and conception of the physical space and environment around them. Bitner (1992) systematized the surrounding physical environment into three major dimensions that are; firstly, comprehensive state, secondly, functionality and layout and, thirdly, artefacts and signs. There are increasingly more and more studies that are stating that esthetics have a significant role and power in the process of customer decision making and overall evaluation of the experience (Turley and Milliman 2000). In the hospitality and experience economy literature (Bonn et al. 2007) the writers are emphasising that physical surroundings are holding a significant power when it comes to the customers clarifying their attitude, level of loyalty and the possibility for recommending.

The dimension of esthetics largely consists of the delicate interaction between a customer and the surrounding environment, which is created by the venue. Moreover, the quality of esthetics dimension directly influences customer evaluation of the received service. (Kwortnik 2008, 292.) Esthetics is the dimension behind what customers refer to as "the design", "the atmosphere" or "the feeling of the venue" (Brady and Cronin 2001).

4   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To distinguish what are the customer experiences, expectations and the most valued features when visiting a restaurant and, therefore, to develop the most suitable concept for "Tupeņkrogs", a survey and focus group discussions were selected as the research methods. Survey questions were designed to understand the common attitude of Jūrmala inhabitants towards the features of dining experience, whereas the focus group discussions were done to provide a more detailed and in- depth information about the matter.

4.1. Instrumentation

To build up the research questions and to achieve the aim, a quantitative data collection method – surveying - and a qualitative data collection method – focus group discussions - were selected and further executed.

A number of researchers (Hughes & DuMont 1993) have defined focus groups as in-depth group interviews (Sagoe 2012), which is in line with the concept of this research, which implies in-depth investigation of individuals' opinions and experience with dining out. Methods, similar to the ones selected for this research, have gained popularity in the academic community and have earned positive evaluation from the field experts. The success is due to the fact, that, in contrast to purely quantitative methods, focus group discussions provide with the opportunity to investigate the mind-set of the participants and gain the answer to the question "why?" Features of this method are somewhat similar to the interviewing method, yet, they provide more in-depth investigation and a more developed form of data collection. When the data are being gathered from within a homogeneous or heterogeneous group, it creates an interaction between the participants, the opinions are exchanged and compared by using characteristics that unite the group while keeping in mind that each individual has a unique perception. (Sagoe 2012, 1-3.)

Questions for the focus groups were designed based on the concepts described in the theoretical framework, as well as on the grounds of deepening the knowledge about matters addressed with the survey. Through the designed questions, it was aimed to find out the experience, satisfaction and evaluation of certain features

and dimensions of dining out experience. The investigated concepts were viewed within the context of experience economy and its integration into restaurant business. It was of paramount importance to explore secondary data in order to practice the evidence-based research activity (Mārtinsone & Cimdiņa 2011,28).

In relevance to the previously mentioned aspects, as well as executed surveying, the instrumentation of the research has been constructed. It consists of two major blocks of theme questions - general perception and attitude towards dining out experiences and addressing of four – education, entertainment, escapism and esthetics - dimensions of experience.

Focus group discussions were partly structured. Such method was selected, because it allowed the participants of the focus group to interact with each other as well as it provided the opportunity to enquire the participants of both focus groups with the same open-ended questions and to supplement the discussion with additional questions on the go. Such alterations ensured a safe and encouraging environment for the participants to feel indulged to share their experiences and opinions (Dearnley 2005,21-22). Also to distinguish what are the customer experiences, expectations and the most valued features when visiting a restaurant, a survey was conducted. The survey method was chosen to provide rather statistical data, which supplemented the research in a way that it helped to capture the general trends and to put the research aims into a perspective. These questions of evaluation were designed to understand the common attitude towards the features of dining experience among the potential and existing customers of "Tupeņkrogs".

4.2. Participants

To avoid any bias of subjectivity and to gain a better, wider understanding of the research problems, in both focus groups the participants were chosen on the basis of different demographic indicators. The participants were representing various age groups from 20 to 50 years of age. The participants were representing such categories of occupation as students, teachers, public servant, police officer, IT specialist, salesperson, corporate managers and others. The gender distribution among the groups was chosen to be equal - 4 male and 4 female participants in each of the focus groups, in total 8 male and 8 female respondents were engaged

in the research. Due to issues of privacy and confidentiality the identity of the participants was coded by letters, because pseudonyms and different code names are used to protect the identity of the respondents. This also helped the participant to feel more confident and not to worry about possible issues that might result from publishing the research (Dearnley 2005, 23).

Survey forms were distributed both virtually and physically. Target audience for surveying was selected based on the geographical location - inhabitants of the city of Jūrmala, Latvia, preferably within a radius of 10 kilometres form the venue of the case company. The respondents represented a wide range of age groups - from 19 to 56 and older.

4.3. Procedure

In the first part of the research procedure, a survey was conducted. The survey was conducted with the representative sample of the target population. The designed questions involved demographic data and information about customer behaviour, as well as the respondents were inquired to provide answers about their experience in restaurants and evaluate certain features of the dining out experience. Virtually the target respondents were reached via social media and official webpage of the city of Jūrmala. Physically the survey forms were distributed in two ways. First, the survey forms were placed in the restaurant "Tupeņkrogs" for the customers to answer the questions, while being in the restaurant; secondly, by polling people living nearby and other individuals on the streets of Jūrmala.

The second part of the research procedure consisted of two focus groups – one with 8 individuals, who had never visited "Tupeņkrogs" restaurant, second with a group of 8 individuals who had been to "Tupeņkrogs" at least once. All of the participants live within the radius of 10 km from the restaurant. Both focus groups were hosted and guided by a neutral person, with an experience in managing focus group discussions. The person is not in any relation linked to the case company and, therefore, did not cause any bias or influence the participants of the discussion. Simultaneously, focus group discussions and the host were observed by the author of the research from the other side of the one-way glass. The facilities were provided by Government Agency of Social Integration College in Jūrmala. The duration of each of the focus group discussions was approximately 1,5 hours, during which the host of the discussion asked questions, and the opin-

ion of every participant was respected and heard, while the responses were rec-
orded and analysed. The structured part of the questions for both groups did not
differ greatly from one another. The group with participants who had never been
to "Tupeņkrogs" was inquired also about the reasons why they had not been in
interaction with the restaurant, whereas the group of existing customers were
guided towards an analysis of the acknowledged and acquired experiences in
"Tupeņkrogs".

4.4. Data analysis

The analysis of the case company, related gathered data and the developed new
concept is a unique matter that cannot be generalized, because it was based on
information that was provided by individuals regarding the retrospection of al-
ready passed time and lived experience or unexperienced experience. The author
was required to fully trust the participants of the research and the data provided
by them, however, taking into account that some of the answers would be given
via the criteria of being socially acceptable.

In data analysis the information gathered in both focus groups was categorized,
several correlations were made, moreover, the answers to the research questions
were looked for in order to develop a customer friendly new concept that would
satisfy the needs of the dimensions of customer experience in the restaurant. In
survey analysis, the correlations between the questions, general shifts and
tendencies were explored. All data were compiled with the assistance of SPSS
programme.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1. Survey analysis

Within the framework of the research total of 170 surveys answers were gathered. The respondents were selected from a common background - residents of the city of Jūrmala. Among the respondents there were individuals, who had and had not been in an interaction with the case company. The amount of gathered responses was a representative sample of the target population.

68% of the respondents were female and 32% were male.
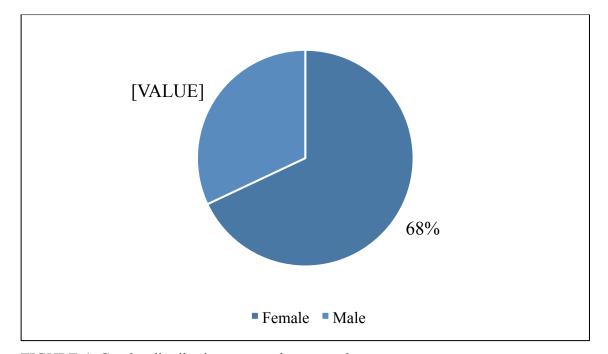

FIGURE 4. Gender distribution among the respondents

55% of the respondents were in the age group from 20 to 25 years. The second largest represented age group was respondents aged from 26 to 35 years, which contributes to 19% of all respondents. 9% of respondents were within the age group 16 -19. Furthermore, 8% of all respondents were in the age group from 36 – 45, whereas the least represented age groups among the respondents were respondents aged in the group from 46 – 55 (6%) and 56 and more (3%). Particular distribution of the age groups among the respondents of the survey can be explained by accessibility to the Internet as well as willingness to contribute, since

the respondents were targeted virtually and also hard copies of survey forms were available on the premises of the case company.
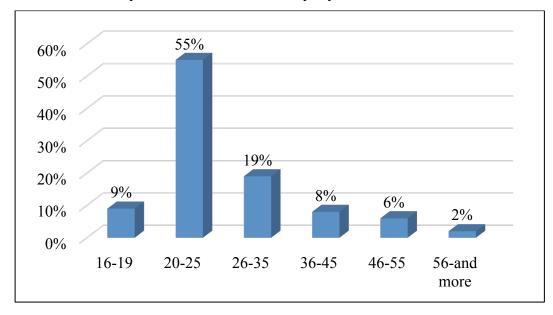

FIGURE 5. Representation of age groups among respondents

30% of the respondents of the survey admitted that they are visiting restaurants 3 – 5 times per month, although over half of the respondents (52%) are choosing to dine out only 1 – 2 times per month. 9% of the respondents are visiting restaurants 6 – 10 times during one month period. Furthermore, 6% of all the respondents of the survey are enjoying their meals at a restaurant more than 10 times per week. Nevertheless, 4% of the respondents admitted to visiting restaurants more rarely than the period of one month. It can be concluded, that, in average, these respondents of Jūrmala are choosing to dine out 1 – 3 times per month.
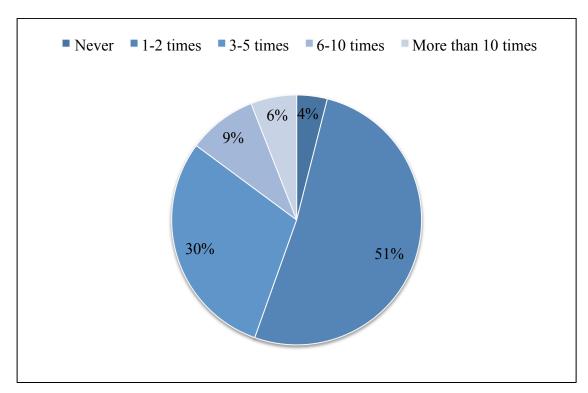
FIGURE 6. Restaurant visiting frequency among the respondents

To provide an answer to the question about what features of a restaurant are attracting the most of respondents' attention, the respondents of the survey were provided with a possibility of stating more than one answer. The declared most attention-dragging feature of a restaurant is the interior design, which was named by 115 out of the total of 170 respondents. Such features as the menu and feelings caused by the restaurant were named by, accordingly, 84 and 83 respondents. Furthermore, the features of the staff and the availability of the vacant tables were named, accordingly, 67 and 66 times as components that the respondents are paying attention to, when entering a restaurant. The background music was designated as the least attention-catching feature of a restaurant, named by 41 out of 170 respondents. Under category "others" 6 responses were collected and they displayed such features as prices (4) and hygiene requirements (2). Based on the results of the analysis it can be noted, that the most significant feature that the respondents pay attention to, when entering a restaurant, is the interior design and the least attention is payed to the background music, however, all the stated features are a subject of respondents' personal evaluation of the restaurant.
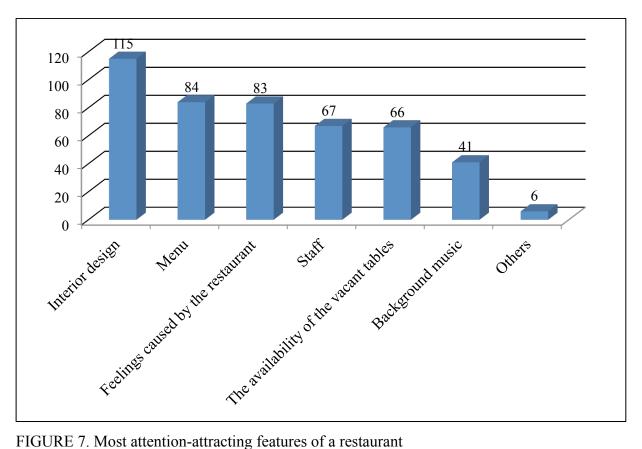
FIGURE 7. Most attention-attracting features of a restaurant

The respondents were required to state the major reason to choose the option of dining out. 24 percent of the respondents named food as the most significant reason to visit a restaurant. Close second most popular answer was to be together with family/friends that equalled to 20% of the respondents. Escaping from daily routine gathered 19% of respondents' answers, whereas 18% of the respondents stated enjoying the atmosphere as the reason behind the choice of dining out. 9 percent of all respondents of the survey admitted that they are choosing to dine out, because they are unwilling to prepare meals at home and 8% of the respondents named the entertainment as a reason to choose the option of dining out.

The respondents were provided with an opportunity to state an "other" answer and 2% of the respondents gave answers as follows: not being able to cook, all the mentioned reasons, the experience of dining itself and wanting to try something new. As it is displayed in the results, besides the basic need for food, the respondents are also choosing the option of dining out for social and emotional reasons such as being together with friends or family and acquiring a sense of escapism from daily routine and revel in the atmosphere of the venue.
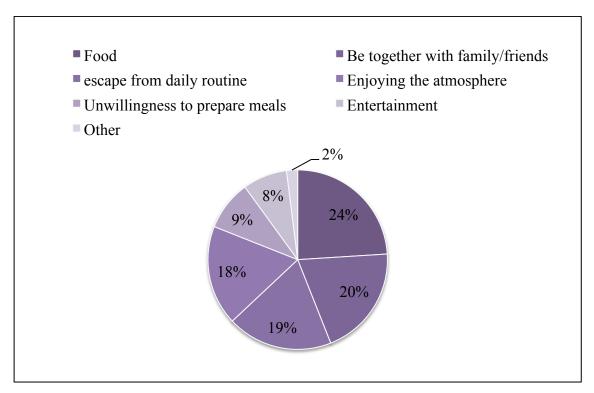
FIGURE 8. Main reasons for visiting a restaurant

The respondents were asked to evaluate given statements in a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 – Not important, 2 – Rather unimportant, 3- Neither important nor unimportant, 4 – Rather important and 5 – Very important.

The respondents of the survey were urged to evaluate the significance of experiencing the sense of escapism to another time or place. 14% of all the respondents stated that the sense of escapism is very important by evaluating it with the highest grade (5). 30 percent of the respondents rated the statement with a grade 4, which indicates that the sense of escaping to another time or place while dining is rather important. The largest group of respondents, which equals to 32%, marked that sense of escapism is neither important nor unimportant that indicates a rather neutral attitude towards this dimension of experience. 16% of gathered answers were contributing to the respondents' opinion that the sense of escapism is rather unimportant, whereas 12% of the respondents were stating that feeling as if they are in another place and time is not important to them. It can be concluded that the overall scale of importance regarding the matter of escapism shifts towards significance rather than insignificance of the dimension.
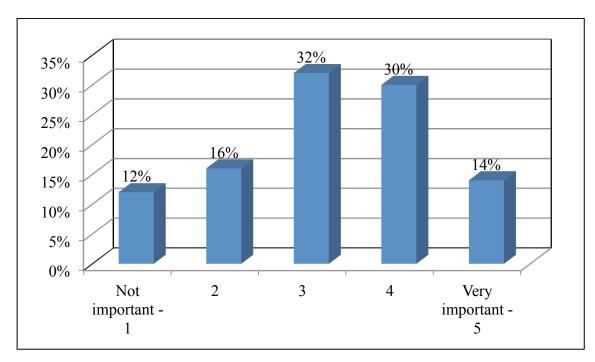
FIGURE 9. Significance of escapism

The dimension of entertainment within the dining experience was targeted by asking the respondents to evaluate the importance of feeling entertained while dining out in a scale from 1 to 5. 24 percent of the respondents rated the importance of the sense of entertainment with the lowest grade 1 thus demonstrating that being entertained while dining out is not significant. 27% of the respondents of the survey stated that entertainment is a rather unimportant dimension of experience. The largest group of respondents determined a neutral attitude towards entertainment in the dining experience by grading the statement with a 3 - neither important nor unimportant. However, 14 % of the surveyed respondents graded the dimension of entertainment with a 4, which means that feeling entertained is rather important and only 7% of the respondents graded entertainment as a very significant attribute of dining out experience. As it can be seen in the graph, overall scale of significance shifts to unimportance rather than importance.
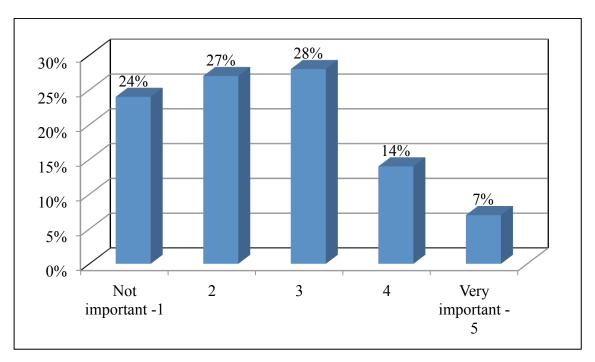
FIGURE 10. Significance of entertainment

The matter of the dimension of education in the dining out experience was ad-
dressed by asking the respondents to evaluate the importance of learning some-
thing new during the visit to the restaurant in a scale from 1 to 5. 15% of the re-
spondents stated that the experience of learning something new while visiting the
restaurant is not important by evaluating it with grade 1 out of 5. Furthermore,
23% of the respondents rated the dimension of education with grade 2 – rather
unimportant. The largest group of respondents, 27 percent rated the dimension of
education neutrally - neither important nor unimportant. 26 % of all the respond-
ents stated the dimension of education to be rather important by grading it with
the grade 4 and 9 % of the respondents of the survey graded the dimension of
education with the highest grade 5, stating that it is very important. The overall
evaluation of the dimension of education shifts to the not important side.

FIGURE 11. Significance of education

The esthetics dimension of the restaurant experience was targeted by indulging the respondents to rate the importance of feeling comfortable and pleasant in the premises of a restaurant. The great majority, 62 % of the respondents, rated the dimension of esthetics with the highest grade 5. 31% of the respondents graded the importance of feeling comfortable and pleasant in the venue with a grade 4 – rather important. Furthermore, 6% of all the respondents did show neutral attitude towards the dimension of esthetics by grading it with a 3. Only 1% of the respondents stated that feeling comfortable and pleasant is rather unimportant and none of the respondents contributed to the belief that the dimension of esthetics is not important. As it is visible in the graph, a clear tendency of evaluating the dimension of esthetics with the highest grades of importance is present in the results of the survey.

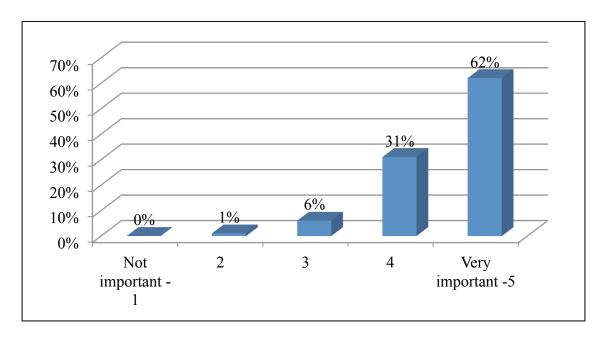FIGURE 12. Significance of esthetics

5.2. Focus group analysis

Qualitative research, where individuals are being interviewed, heavy relies on respondents' introspection, retrospection, verbal culture and the ability to recall and describe own actions (Jensen 2012, 161), therefore a decision, which data shall be emphasized, minimized or even ignored, has to be done. (Mārtinsone & Cimdiņa 2011, 220-221). Information gained through secondary data research got confirmed, when interpreting the data of discussions, it became clear that variable social factors were influencing the answers of the respondents. For instance, the respondents' marital status, social group, working environment, hobbies and many other social factors were shaping the respondents' point of view and, consequently, the presented answers. In order to address the objectives of the research and answer the research questions, it is essential to investigate these factors and evaluate, which answers cannot be compared in relation to each other, which answers are to be minimized or ignored (Mārtinsone & Cimdiņa 2011, 27). Meanwhile, the differentiation in social factors is stimulating interactive discussions and drives sharing of different opinions among the participants of the focus group, therefore helping to develop new hypothesis as well as valuable ideas on how to improve the restaurants' operations, experience and service (Mārtinsone & Cimdiņa 2011,27).

During the focus group discussions, the four dimensions of experience were discussed with the participants. Because, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, services are becoming increasingly more and more commoditized. With regard to this trend, businesses are striving to add value to the existing range of offerings by staging memorable and delightful experiences around the core service. As the result, customers are willing to spend increased amount of money to enjoy the experience of the service. (Pine & Gilmore 1998.)

The arisen debates in focus groups helped to gain a better understanding what would be a successful concept for restaurant "Tupeņkrogs". The participants were encouraged to express their needs and desires that would improve and fulfil their dining out experience, making it wholesome and delightful. Due to the mentioned factors, the focus group discussions were executed successfully and they could be referred to as highly productive, because the created environment stimulated generation of new ideas and disclosure of desires for an unforgettable dining out experience. Further analysis of the focus group discussions was executed through the four dimensions of experience economy – education, escapism, entertainment and esthetics.

5.2.1 Education

When investigating the data collected during both focus group discussions, it became evident that the dimension of education has not been comprehensively fulfilled for the respondents, who had visited "Tupeņkrogs" restaurant at least once. Within the framework of experience economy, education experience actively engages the mind of the consumers, intrigues them and appeals to their desire to learn something new. The educational experience is active and absorptive, in other words, consumers play a vital role in co-determining their experience (Schmitt 2003). But in the focus groups the only feature of the educational dimension that was mentioned as acquired was new knowledge about preparation a specific dish or ingredient.

"There is nothing so special about the place. It is just yet another restaurant. I highly doubt that I have learned something new during my experience there, because the restaurant does not offer anything like that. It just offers food and aims to serve it." (Participant A, Focus group 1).

The great majority of all the focus group participants emphasized the fact that the restaurant is not offering any ways of gaining some specific knowledge or skills. It has been said that, evidently, the venue is not aiming to create a learning space and is primarily focused on the basic functions of a restaurant. However today, there are a number of opportunities for companies to offer an educational experience to their customers. For example, a restaurant can provide its customers preparation and cooking guidelines (Schmitt 2003).

However, when this group of "Tupeņkrogs" clients got enquired about whether the educational dimension should be introduced to the restaurant and its clients, the responses significantly varied. One half of the participants revealed that they would be willing to widen their knowledge and develop skills when not only visiting "Tupeņkrogs" restaurant, but in the dining out experience in general. While in turn the other half of the participants confessed that this feature is completely insignificant and remarked that they are choosing to dine out primarily to have food, not to learn or be distracted by other activities.

"Personally I find the fact that a restaurant offers something extra, not just food, very essential. Yes and also it is important to learn something new daily. For instance, it is especially significant, if I dine out with my two children. I like when they can interact with the surroundings and learn something new. For example, when we were in "Tupeņkrogs", my kids noticed those old photographs from Soviet times that are hanging on the walls like an element of design. While we were expecting our food, my children wanted to see all of the photographs and also asked me to tell about what events and times are pictured. I think they gained new knowledge through this." (Participant B, Focus group 1).

Furthermore, those participants of the focus groups, who emphasized that the dimension of education is insignificant, highlighted the important role of food in the restaurant as well as the fact that they are not willing to be bothered or distracted while enjoying their meal. It was emphasized that the most important reason to come to a restaurant is to be served a meal, not to be engaged in activities that they did not want to pursue or information that was not wanted to be acquired. When asked a question to specify the details of this opinion, it became clear, that even while the food has not been served yet, the participants want to be in control of how they spend this waiting period and not be bothered by side

activities. The knowledge can be enriched by socializing and learning from others' experiences, by dipping in a culture or environment as well as by experimenting and discovering something new on their own (Pine & Gilmore 1998).

In the second focus group, where people, who had never been to "Tupeņkrogs" restaurant, were gathered, the opinions regarding the matter of willingness to experience the dimension of education were fluctuating as well. During this discussion, the positive answer on the question was similar to the opinion presented by the first group, however a new aspect was mentioned:

"I don't have anything against the fact that a restaurant officiates other functions, complementary to the basic feature and role of the establishment. I really have no hard feelings, as long as I am in charge of making the decision, whether I want to be engaged in the new experience or not. I think it is very important that the final decision stands behind the client. In my opinion, when the client is not provided with the opportunity to make a choice and it is made for him/her, it can be considered to be a bad practice and could serve as the only reason why the customer will not want to acquire the imposed knowledge or information." (Participant C, Focus group 2).

Although, other participants did not express this point of view as this Participant C, all in all, from both of the focus groups, it can be concluded, that generally individuals are keen on having an opportunity to gain new knowledge and acquire information. However, the participants clearly stated that it shall be made optional, where they, as customers, have the final say whether they want to engage in the dimension of education or not.

5.2.2 Escapism

Since the development of the new concept for "Tupeņkrogs" will be based on the research, where four realms of experience have been investigated, a somewhat more specific emphasis has been put on the dimension of escapism. Hospitality industry provides numerous opportunities for escapist experiences. Experiences are a means to escape, problem solvers, and suppliers of strength, energy, new lifeblood and happiness (Krippendorf 1987, 17). As studies show, often an experience of escapism is created or absorbed unconsciously, without subjects even realizing it. But an escapist experience is defined by a state where the individual

is fully invested in and absorbed in the performed activity (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). Escapist experiences are highly immersive, meaning that they require a high level of active participation.

In the first focus group with clients of "Tupeņkrogs", it was inquired, whether the restaurant has served to them as a place to "run away to" from the stresses of daily routine. The received answers on this question differed, because a part of the participants revealed that they are not used to "escape" to restaurants, in order to avoid some problems of daily routine. The other part of the respondents admitted that, indeed, being in a restaurant creates a sensation of escaping to another reality, where time and routine are less essential, in comparison to what is going on in the restaurant. It has to be noted, that those participants, who claimed that they have never felt a sense of escapism while dining out, could actually not be consciously realizing that, since the sensation of escapism activates on a subconscious level. Today's idea of escapism is being provided with another time, space, place, atmosphere or environment that transcends one's every day experience within any given medium. These media range from the privacy of one's own home to a crowded theme park, restaurant, or from a television show or commercial to an entertainment venue or rock concert. These media can be anything that provide some degree of escapism, large or small (Turner 1973). Thus, the participants of the focus groups may not realize that running away from the daily routine lies behind the desire to dine out. The desire to go to a restaurant is the conscious part of the desire for the escapism experience (Henning & Vorderer 2001,103). In the focus group of existing "Tupeņkrogs" customers, a few individuals admitted that the visit to the restaurant was intentional and performed in order to avoid certain problems of the daily life.

"Yes, I have gone to this restaurant to have a moment on my own. A moment away from the daily routine. I remember the time, when something went wrong and I wanted to enjoy silence and food in my own company, that's why I went to "Tupeņkrogs". It is always calm and quiet there, because there are not many other customers usually. Other places in Jūrmala are packed with people at that time of the year. Also, the location was a good point that helped me make my choice - only 3 minutes from the beach and 15 minute walk from my house. After the meal, I went to the beach to complete my little relaxation procedure fully." (Participant D, Focus Group 1).

Other participants also mentioned that they particularly enjoy the peaceful environment and surroundings of the restaurant. It often serves as the main argument in the decision making process, because other restaurants in Jūrmala are usually more active and with large amounts of loud customers and the respondents are not situated in a geographically beneficial place.

Moreover, participants of the focus group, who had never visited "Tupeņkrogs" emphasized that just from time to time a restaurant is chosen in order to integrate a small change from the regular in their lives, however it is unlikely to often visit a restaurant due to the particular reason. When addressing the escapism dimension, the participants mentioned, that if they were to escape from their daily lives, they would choose a very cosy, calm and visually attractive restaurant. For instance, a restaurant with comfortable, beautiful interior design, qualitatively developed menu with a wide range of alternatives and where books and newest newspapers and magazines would be freely available, would be at the top of customers' choice list. It was stressed that such features are stimulating the attention to focus on the current moment and surroundings, and completely forget about the life outside the restaurant. And restaurants are using this aspect, because more and more restaurants are being designed or are changing their designs to provide another time, space, place, atmosphere or environment for everyday users. Themed and theatrical dining represents one or two percent of the restaurants, and will go to maybe 10 percent by early next century (Russell 1997).

In general, it can be concluded that not all of the potential and existing customers are conscious when they are performing an act of escapism. Also, the surroundings of the restaurant and interior design decisions are two major features that are facilitating the experience of escapism and become the reason why individuals are making a choice to which restaurant to go, in order to avoid the worries of an everyday life.

5.2.3 Entertainment

Entertainment is difficult to define as a set of activities, because for every individual the actions involved in "entertainment" can differ. For some entertainment can be reading literature or newspapers and magazines, for others watching movies or listening to music. It is essential to fully comprehend this aspect, because

some of the attributes under categories education and escapism could have been perceived as entertainment activity. In essence, entertainment remains an essential component of the hospitality product (Hughes and Benn 1995) with some destinations famous for the level, variety and quality of their entertainment. However, all the gathered data were analysed within a context of particular matter, therefore those previously mentioned activities that were considered as entertainment are not being reviewed in this category, because they were associated with other dimensions by the participants.

Under the category of entertainment, the participants of the survey mentioned a set of activities that, in their opinion, are classified as entertainment. For instance, the participants of the focus group, who had been to "Tupeņkrogs", mentioned that in the summer season several live music performances of various genre were organized on the outdoor terrace of the restaurant. All through the year, a playground and different toys are available for the children that are used for entertainment while the parents are dining or while the food is anticipated.

The respondents mentioned the lack of available literature and newspapers and magazines in the restaurant, because they wanted to read while their order was being processed. It has been noted, that other activities of entertainment, have not been organized in the restaurant, however, the participants also revealed that they did not feel the need for such activities, because they were entertaining themselves.

 Usually, the participants choose to dine out with family or friends and it has been explained that having a conversation with them is a good enough entertainment. Similar point of view was represented in the focus group with participants, who had not been to "Tupeņkrogs".

"To be honest, I don't need extensive programmes of entertainment and shows in the restaurant. If I am alone, it is completely enough if there is a magazine to read through or a possibility to connect my smartphone to the wireless network and browse the Internet, but if I am with my family or friends, I don't want to concentrate on nothing else other than them. Organized concerts in the restaurants usually disturb me, because they are very loud and I cannot hear what the other person is saying." (Participant G, Focus group 2).

It is important to understand that entertainment does not require an active participation of the individual. The main aim of the entertainment is to make the customer feel entertained and it can be achieved in many different ways (Pine & Gilmore 1999). It needs to be noted that to different individuals the sense of entertainment comes in various different ways, therefore it needs to be tailored specifically to fit a framework of a particular experience. Based on the gathered information, it can be concluded that the participants view socializing with others as the main attribute of entertainment, as well as the availability of newspapers and magazines, books and wireless Internet connection are evaluated as important attributes of entertainment. Nevertheless, other sources of entertainment are playing rather a secondary role, and in some situations, can be perceived as a distraction, not a way to entertain. Due to this two-sided issue, the administration of the restaurant has to make decisions about entertainment only after evaluating the needs and desires of the customers.

5.2.4 Esthetics

The esthetics dimension refers to consumers' interpretation of the physical environment around them. Bitner (1992) classified physical environment in terms of three dimensions: ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality and signs, symbols and artefacts. After gathering and analysing the responses from the participants of the focus group, who had been to the restaurant "Tupeņkrogs", it became evident that the dimension of esthetics received a positive evaluation. The existing customers are satisfied with the existing interior design and the reigning atmosphere in the restaurant. And that is very important because a number of studies recognize that the role of esthetics in consumer behaviour, decision making and service evaluations (Turley and Milliman 2000) is increasingly of high significance. In the tourism and hospitality literature (Bonn et al. 2007) it is noted that the physical environment of heritage attractions play an important role in determining visitors' attitudes, future patronage intentions and willingness to recommend.

"In my opinion, the interior of the restaurant is very cosy and homelike. Maybe some technical work should be done to freshen up the general looks and condition of the venue. In the winter and fall, it is very enjoyable that the fireplace is

lit, therefore creating a sense of extended cosiness and warmth." (Participant E, Focus group 1).

The only negative aspect that was mentioned in the focus group, was the hygiene requirements of the restaurant. Some of the participants of the focus group engaged in the discussion about the fact, that, especially in summertime, the restaurant has not been kept to the highest level of cleanliness and that has distracted them from fully enjoying the atmosphere of the restaurant. However, this aspect shall not be ignored, because the quality of esthetics dimension directly influences customer evaluation about received service (Brady and Cronin 2001).

Although this situation can be explained with the fact that the size of the case company is small and even in the peak season there are no additional employees hired, yet summer season in Jūrmala brings large amounts of clients. This is a managerial issue and shall be addressed by the administration of the restaurant, because the cleanliness of the restaurant is an essential and very significant feature that builds the first and the overall impression of the establishment. The importance of this issue has also been stressed by the focus group with perspective clients, who had never been to the restaurant "Tupeņkrogs", although are living within a walking distance from the restaurant. When encouraged to discuss the reasons why they have never visited "Tupeņkrogs", a significant reason got revealed. As one of the essential mentioned reasons was the unattractive external appearance of the restaurant.

"When by-passing the restaurant, it seems like it is not open. The doors are dark, lights are dimmed and there are no marks of service hours visible. I have not seen any indicators that the restaurant is working, such as displayed menu, advertisements nearby or anything else, the owner should give that a second thought" (Participant F, Focus group 2).

Moreover, other participants of the focus group, mentioned the badly maintained surroundings of the restaurant as reasons why they had not visited "Tupeņkrogs". For instance, it was signified, that the choice not to visit the restaurant was made due to the fact that there were autumn leaves all over the territory and even next to the front entry. Also, near to the entrance, there were bushes that needed serious gardening maintenance work. All of these aspects have created an impression that either the restaurant is out of service, or the interior is as messy and untidy

as the exterior. This was the main roadblock for visiting "Tupeņkrogs" for the first time. Also existing clients mentioned the visual issues of the exterior, however, once served by "Tupeņkrogs", their thoughts had changed to a more positive ones.

When the participants, who had never been to "Tupeņkrogs", were asked what interior design they consider to be a well-suited and a good choice for the restaurant, the answers varied. The most popular answers were as follows – minimalistic interior, without any distracting attributes, traditional Latvian interior and layout, however, the common detail of all the answers was the cosiness. It was highlighted, that the most important feature, that overcomes even the interior design, is how comfortable, cosy and pleasant the restaurant makes them feel.

5.3. Development of new concept proposal

After the analysis of the survey and focus group discussions, several guidelines for the new concept proposal were noticed and developed further. To reach the goal of the research and to answer all the research questions, a conceptual proposed idea of the possible restaurant concept was described further. The concept was categorized in four realms – education, escapism, entertainment and esthetics, since the analysis of the research components was executed in the same structure.

In order to better illustrate the advantages of the selected new concept, Pugh matrix (1981) was used. According to the theoretical framework of the matrix, the existing current concept of the restaurant was given a grade "5" in all the features. Remaining concepts were scaled in a comparison to the current concept using 1-5-9 approach. Within the framework of the approach, concept features which were much worse than the current ones were to be graded with a "1", those approximately equal to the current were graded with a "5" and, finally, those features, which were considered to be much better than the features of the current concept were graded with a "9" (Pugh 1991). The features were the previously discussed dimensions of experience and supported the evaluation process of the new concept. While analysing the results, several ideas of a new concept were generated by the author, and the grading of their features was also displayed in the matrix. However, further, in-depth explanation of the concept and its features

was available only for the concept, which had been named during the concept selection process. In the matrix below, evaluations of three different concepts can be seen. By calculating the highest total grade, concept 2 was selected for further description and development with total grade of 32, which was for 12 grades higher than the existing concept.

TABLE 2. Application of Pugh matrix.

Functions	Concepts			
	Current	1	2	3
Education	5	1	9	5
Escapism	5	9	9	1
Entertainment	5	5	9	9
Esthetics	5	1	5	5
Total:	20	16	32	20

More detailed analysis and description of the features of selected concepts were based on the findings of the survey and focus group discussions, as well as the theoretical background of the research issue.

After the analysis of the research results, a clear mismatch in customers' expectations and desires to learn something new and the offering of "Tupeņkrogs" was noted. As mentioned by a participant of a focus group, the restaurant is purely focused on its basic functions, which are to serve food and host guests. However, in the modern economy, where services are being replaced with experiences (Pine & Gilmore 1998) and within the field of fierce competition of restaurants the need to differentiate is essentially significant. This concept aims to successfully integrate the dimensions of experience, since, according to Pine and Gilmore (1998), the four dimensions of experience are to

be covered, and there is a need to generate the optimal experience for the customer. The sweet spot will be reached, if "Tupeņkrogs" will be transformed into a social hub, where people are going not only for the food, but, significantly, for the joy and experience of being there. The major benefit for the company lies under the fact that staging an experience around the service undoubtedly generates more profit and return on investment (Pine & Gilmore 1998) and the new concept will rise the interest of the public.

Features of the new concept

All dimensions of complementary features of the new restaurant concept are blended together, thus making a clear distinction what dimensions the features represent. Each feature contains a combination of at least two dimensions of experience. As concluded in the survey analysis, most of the respondents visit a restaurant only 1 to 3 times per month, therefore "Tupeņkrogs" needs to make sure that the unique experience is truly memorable, individual and simply delightful.

Outlay of the restaurant

As the results of the survey showed, 20% of the respondents told that being together with friends or family is the most important reason why to visit a restaurant. It is important to provide this chance of communication and feeling of togetherness to the customers, therefore the outlay of "Tupeņkrogs" needs to be adjusted. In the new concept, all tables are separated from each other with wooden decorative elements, in order to create a sense of privacy and intimacy with family and friends. It is psychologically proven that such a simple adjustment will make the customer to feel more comfortable and as if he/she or they have a space on their own to enjoy the experience among themselves. Moreover, the table and eyesight-level decorations within each separated area are planned to differ from booth to booth. It will guarantee the fact that when the returning customer will be seated in a different area, the decorations will be different from the ones he or she saw the previous time. It will contribute to the dining experience in the restaurant. Such feature refers to the sense of escapism to an extent that the customers are willing to feel like in another place and time, where the only important thing is being together with friends/family in this experience. As it can

be seen in the results of the survey, the overall feeling as if the customer has found him/herself in another space and time is "rather important". Also, it contributes to the dimension of esthetics, because it is important for the customer to feel the atmosphere of the venue and, moreover, feel comfortable and pleasant. Such opinion is clearly visible in the survey where the great majority (106 out of 170 respondents) rated the dimension of esthetics with the highest grade 5.

Interior

It has been decided that the interior design solutions will be held in a traditional Latvian, yet, contemporary and minimalistic style. The main textures of the restaurant will remain similar - wood, linen textile, metallic surfaces and glass. Not many changes will be implemented in the interior of the restaurant, because the results of focus group discussions showed that internally the restaurant is considered to be cosy, homelike and warm. Moreover, due to the limited accessible financial resources, it is preferred by the commissioner to invest as little as possible in the esthetics of the restaurant. It is especially enjoyed, when the fireplace and all the candles are on and the lights are slightly dimmed (Participant E, Focus group 1). It is planned to use more natural sources of light, like candles and petroleum lamps, because this creates a particular authentic atmosphere and is recognized as being more homelike. This feature refers to the dimension of esthetics, since it strives to create a warm and traditionally-authentic atmosphere.

Menu and food operations

As it was expressed in the focus group discussions, the opportunity to learn something new on a daily basis or within a regular activity is highly valued and many are taking up any chance to learn or to pass their own knowledge further (Participant B, Focus group 1). However, there were also opinions regarding the fact that the restaurant is supposed to serve food, not distract form the meal with other attributes (Participant A, Focus group 1). The dimension of education was also addressed in the survey, where the overall evaluation of the dimension of education shifted to the insignificant part of the graph. Thus, a general conclusion that generally individuals are keen on having an opportunity to gain new knowledge, but the participants clearly stated that it shall be made optional, where they can decide whether they want to engage in the dimension of education or not. Therefore, it is proposed by the concept to create two separate menus.

One, with ready-completed meals to choose from and other one just with ingredients. The first one is a classic, well-maintained menu, however, the second one is a subject of knowledge and creativity. It will represent the dimension of education by providing the customers with brief, but interesting background information about the origins of the ingredients or some fun facts in relation to them. After combining the ingredients they will be prepared by the chef, creating excitement and anticipation about how the meal is going to look, taste and how well the picked combinations of ingredients will complement each other. In the focus groups, it was revealed by Participants C from focus group 2 and Participant B from focus group 1, that such a scenario would also impose the dimension of entertainment, because "it is a basic and a regular thing (ordering food) made interesting and fun".

6 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The research was executed within the framework of experience economy and through the prism of dimensions of experience. "Tupeņkrogs" restaurant is one of the many dining options in the resort city Jūrmala in Latvia. However, after the analysis of the acquired dimensions of customer experience, a proposal of a new concept was created. The concept aims to convert "Tupeņkrogs" into a social-hub for the local customers by staging an experience of visiting an multidimensional restaurant, that is not only focused on the quality of the food and basic service, but also facilitates the sense of escaping from daily routine, provides a choice to gain new skills and knowledge, ensures the most delightful atmosphere and offers a variety levels of entertainment.

It is recommended for the commissioner to execute the trial version of the concept and observe the shifts in customer satisfaction as well as the growth of the client base. If the trial version proves to be successful, it would be highly recommended to do all the necessary investments in order to provide the customers with multidimensional experiences on the daily basis.

If further development for the research would be needed, the author suggests an execution of an experiment with other concepts and to do the comparison or merging of the features based on the results of the experiment. It would be beneficial to explore the psychological aspects of customer experiences more in-depth and create the ultimate set of dimensions that fully satisfy the psychological needs of the customers.

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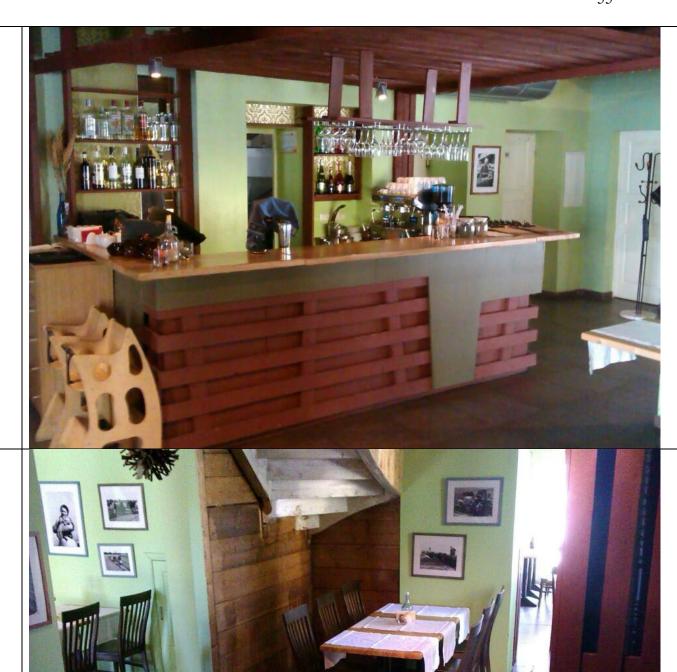Ulrich K. T., Eppinger, S.D. 1995. Product Design and Development. McGraw-Hill. Standford.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interior and exterior of Tupeņkrogs

Number	Picture
1.	
2.	

3.	
4.	

5.

6.	
7.	

| 8. | |
| 9. | |

10.

11.

12.	
13.	

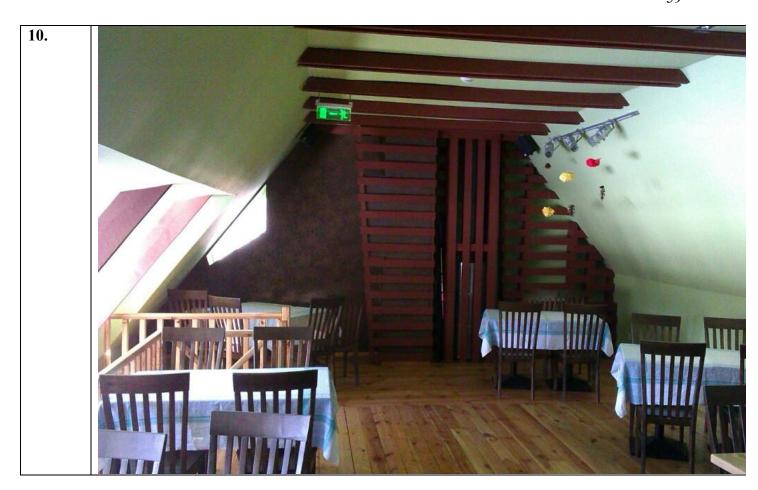Appendix 2. Distributed survey form

1. My gender is:

Male

Female

2. My age group is:

10 – 15

16 – 19

20 - 25

26 – 35

36 – 45

46 – 55

55 – and more

3. How many times per month you are visiting restaurants

Never

1-2 times

3-5 times

6-10 times

More than 10 times

4. Main reason why I visit restaurant are:

Food

Be together with friends/ family

Escape from daily routine

Enjoying the atmosphere

Unwillingness to prepare meals

Entertainment

Other

5. What is the most attention attracting features of a restaurant?

Interior design

Menu

Feelings caused by the restaurant

Staff

The availability of the vacant tables

Background music

Others

6. Feeling that I am in another time or place for me is:

1   2   3   4   5

Not important ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Very important

7. Feel entertain in restaurant during the visit for me is:

1   2   3   4   5

Not important ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Very important

8. Acquire new knowledge or abilities during restaurant visit for me is:

1   2   3   4   5

Not important ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Very important

9. Feel comfortable and pleasant in restaurant premises for me is:

1   2   3   4   5

Not important ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Very important

Appendix 3. Summary of the focus groups discussions

Participant	Education	Escapism	Entertainment	Esthetics
A	Haven't learned anything new in restaurant "Tupenkrogs". But this dimension also is not important for participant	Participant doesn't think that restaurant is the place where he "run away" form daily problems.	In summer in restaurant "Tupenkrogs" there is live music performances, which participant enjoys a lot.	Likes interior design, but in the summer spotted that restaurant is not clean enough and that didn't let her fully enjoy the atmosphere of the restaurant.
B	Thinks that it is important to learn something new, and also in restaurant "Tupenkrogs" have learned something about history.	Participant admits being in a restaurant creates a sensation of escaping to another reality, where time and routine is less essential, in comparison to what is going on in the restaurant.	Haven't noticed any entertainment programs, but says that it is a very good thing that there is a playground for children. So restaurant is organizing like this some entertainment activities for kids.	Likes design, and thinks that restaurant "Tupenkrogs" is very cozy place, especially in autumn.
D	Says that learning something new in restaurants or any place for that mater is not important.	Participant admits being in a restaurant creates a sensation of escaping to another reality, where time and routine is less essential, in comparison to what is going on in the restaurant.	Don't need any special entertainment programs because to the restaurants is going with family and only entertainment needed is conversations with them.	Likes restaurant "Tupenkrogs" design, but notes that it could be cleaner, because this aspect sometimes distracts form enjoying the meal.
E	Participants admits that quality	Participant doesn't think that restaurant is	Participant enjoyed that there in restau-	Admits that restaurant "Tupenkrogs" is cozy

	of food is more important than any activities that restaurant provides.	the place where he "run away" form daily problems.	rant "Tupenkrogs" is a special playground for kids and also there is a lot of toys for them. It is important because kids often get bored while parents are talking or waiting food.	an homelike, enjoys very much fireplace.
Z	Admits that restaurant "Tupenkrogs: is not providing a lot educational information, but then again participant say that he doesn't even feel need for that.	Participant admits being in a restaurant creates a sensation of escaping to another reality, where time and routine is less essential, in comparison to what is going on in the restaurant.	Like that in restaurants are some show programs or musical shows. But in restaurant "Tupenkrogs" they are not providing enough that kind of a entertainment.	Like this restaurant design, thinks that there they have combined traditional and modern styles. Likes that their furniture is made from wood.
H	Participant doesn't feel a need for educational information in restaurant.	Have not opinion about this dimension because, he have never noticed even feeling of escaping.	Only entertainment needed is conversations with friends and family.	Like the physical environment in restaurant, thinks that it goes well together with food what they serve.
L	Participants admits that quality of food is more important than any activities that restaurant provides.	Participant doesn't think that restaurant is the place where he "run away" form daily problems.	Admits that don't need a special entertainment program but wish that in restaurant "Tupenkrogs" would be more books and magazines.	Restaurant "Tupenkrogs" is very cosy, but sometimes it is not clean enough, so it would be nice if employees would pay more attention to this aspect.
M	Would wish that	Participant admits	Liked live music	Very cozy place in a

	restaurant would provide more information about food or how to make that, because right now there is a lack of educational dimension.	being in a restaurant creates a sensation of escaping to another reality, where time and routine is less essential, in comparison to what is going on in the restaurant.	concerts in summer, and also thinks that it is very nice that they have kids playground and toys for them.	very calm place, likes that there is a calm atmosphere, where you can just rest, from daily routine, and design is very homelike.