Luxury & Consumption in Postmodern Societies -
How can non-owned possessions be luxury to consumers?

An explorative investigation based on the example of cities
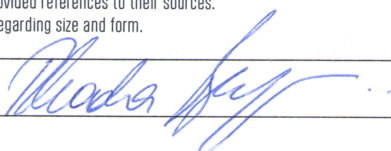
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Declaration of Authorship

(To be placed at page 2 in the assignment])

Identification	
Title of assignment:	Luxury & Consumption in Postmodern Societies - How can non-owned possessions be luxury to consumers? An explorative investigation based on the example of cities
Study programme:	M. Sc. (cand. merc.) in Brand and Communications Management
Course:	Thesis (CBCMO1001U)
Type of Exam (e.g. Home assignment or Bachelor Project):	Master's thesis

Social Security No. or Student ID:	Name of author(s):	Group no. (if relevant)
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Number of pages:

According to the exam regulations for this particular exam, the assignment must be of a maximum of [80] pages [Insert max. number of pages] exclusive front page, bibliography and appendices. Appendices are not included in the assessment.

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ABSTRACT

"You are what you own" has long been a predominant wisdom in the field of consumption studies. With the booming Sharing Economy and the beginning of the present "Era of Access", "you are what you share" became a complementary maxim. In fact, an increasing disconnection from material ownership is observable in today's dematerialized postmodern Western societies. As ownership in strongly related to the concept of possession, the described trend has led to a shift of the value ascribed to possessions from owned to non-owned. In parallel, the dynamic concept of luxury has significantly evolved over the last decades. Luxury has moved from its origins in status consumption towards a more abstract concept - referred to as "New Luxury" - that is increasingly detached from specific product categories In fact, both concepts are compatible, as they have reached a state in which they serve rather abstract and hedonic functions, based on one's inner-directed purposes of consumption and more reflected choices in terms of personal meaning in life. This implies a significant change in consumers' needs and their perception of luxury. As the underlying meanings of non-owned possessions in the context of luxury to have not been explicitly researched in the field of consumer behaviour yet, this thesis addresses the question of how non-owned possession are perceived as luxury by consumers.

Taking an inductive empirical approach, an explorative investigation based on the example of cities as potential non-owned possessions aims to understand how consumers perceive cities as luxury. Findings, based on the hermeneutic-phenomenological interpretation of results deducted from consumer narratives, revealed that city's are perceived as luxury as consumers assign personal meanings in the sense of "New Luxury" to them. Further, findings led to an understanding of how cities represent a non-owned possession to consumers: through the incorporation of meanings attached to the city that are integrated in one's extended self and thus enable the creation, enhancement, and preservation of a sense of identity. Hence, a city becomes a non-owned luxury possession, as it contributes to the construction of one's self.

Following this, and in a more general sense, non-owned possessions can be perceived as luxury in the light of the current conceptualization of "New Luxury", as they contribute to the construction of one's self and thus support one's sense of identity. Thus this study proposes a complementary assertion to Belk's (1988) previous accounts - "you are what you possess".

These findings have several implications for firms in the luxury industry in terms of how they can integrate the conceptualization of non-owned possessions perceived as luxury into their marketing and branding strategies.

This research may be further developed by including different types of potential non-owed possessions, by investigating the perception of non-owned possession as luxury in Eastern societies or by examining the role of non-owned possessions as ne status currency for instance.

Table of content

1. Introduction

The first part sets the foundation for the study. The research context is presented and the problem statement is specified. The relevance of the topic and the study's contribution in the research field is further presented as well as the structure of the thesis.

1.1. Background

"You are what you own" (Belk, 1988) has long been a predominant wisdom in the field of consumption studies. However, today's booming sharing economy indicates an increasing disconnection from ownership as the reflected in the "six reasons why the sharing society will trump the ownership society" proposed by Gansky (2012) in her Bestseller *The Mesh* emphasize for instance. This led Belk to the development of his initial wisdom to "you are what you share" (Belk, 2007), implying the current preference for access rather than ownership. This refers to the present age defined as "age of access" rather than ownership as "the role of property is radically changing" (Rifkin, 2000, p.3) and where "concepts, ideas, and images - not things – are the real items of value" (ibid., p.5).

In theory related to consumption studies i.e. consumer behaviour, ownership is linked to the concept of possessions - broadly defined "as things that one calls his/hers" and as "major contributor to and reflection of our identities" (Belk, 1988, p.139). In fact, intentionally or unintentionally people regard their possessions as part of their selves as their attach certain meanings to them (ibid.). Hence, a possession represents something that an individual feels connected to on a psychological level and that he/she uses to extend and strengthen his/her sense of self. In this view, possessions have long been considered in the sense of material property i.e. ownership - as owned possessions. However, by definition a person can possess objects without owning them as the psychological attachment is based on the meaning ascribed to the possession, which does not require material ownership of the object. Hence, this implies a distinction between owned and non-owned possessions.

An owned possession is thus defined as a person's property, referring to a tangible object that legally belongs to that person. This can be a car for instance that entails functional as well as emotional benefits as it enables its owner to get from A to B, but is also assumed to be an object people feel deeply connected to. In contrast, a non-owned possession refers to an object that an individual cannot call his/her legal property. However the object may be possessed through a psychological connection between the object and the individual based on particular meanings attached to it. A city is an example of such a non-owned possession. Although a city is physically tangible, no individual can call it his/her legal property. However, as any city is accessible to everyone and people "use" cities by living in them or traveling to them (which further implies a city as a shared object), it is likely that people feel psychologically attached to a city by attaching particular meaning to it.

In the light of the booming sharing trend, where "our possessions dematerialize into the intangible" and where our "preconceptions of ownership are changing", implying a change of the relationship

between physical products, individual ownership and self-identity (Botsman &Rogers, 2010, p.7), non-owned possessions are deemed to be of increasing importance to consumers: people are seeking for new ways to express their identities - disconnected from material ownership and implying higher personal and emotional values. Inspired by Belk's previous accounts, this may lead the complementary assertion "you are what you possess".

In parallel to this observed shift in paradigm within consumption studies, the concept of luxury has significantly evolved in the last decades. In fact, the luxury industry has gone through a period of strong growth: new sectors such as the experiential luxury sector including tourism and events for instance have developed, while other more traditional sectors such as the one of personal luxury are declining (Anchille, 2015), which reflects a change of consumer needs and in the perception of the concept of luxury. Recent literature, namely "Rethinking Luxury"(Wittig, Sommerrrock, Albers, & Beil, 2014), "Der nächste Luxus" (engl: "The next luxury") (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014) or "Le Nouveau Luxe" (engl: "The New Luxury") (Michaud, 2013) highlight this trend. In fact, the era of "Jet-set" and "bling bling" seems to be over in today's postmodern Western societies and more inconspicuous ways of luxury consumption are foregrounded (Wittig et al., 2014). Accordingly, luxury is defined as a dynamic concept of constant redefinition (Berry, 1994), that has been developing from its origins as status consumption to a more abstract concept increasingly disconnected from material products (Hemetsberger, Von Wallpach, & Bauer, 2012).

Following from this and combining the concepts of non-owned possession and luxury in the light of recent developments: what do consumers in today's Western societies consider as luxury? What defines their possessions, disconnected from ownership? What motivates luxury consumption in postmodern and increasingly individualized societies?

In fact, the underlying meanings of non-owned possessions in the context of luxury to consumers have not been explicitly researched in the field of consumer behaviour. Hence, this thesis aims to contribute to provide a better understanding of the meaning of non-owned possessions in terms of luxury to consumers. Based in an explorative phenomenological investigation, this research specifically aims to gaining an understanding of how non-owned possessions can be luxury to consumers.

Thereby, this research contributes to existing studies in the field of consumer behaviour as it conceptualises non-owned possessions from a consumer perspective and links them to consumers' individual perception of luxury.

1.2. Problem statement

Based on recent developments in the field of consumer behaviour (Belk, 1988) paired with the emergence of today's Sharing Economy (Gansky, 2012) as well as the shift of the conceptualization of luxury, this thesis aims to explore the phenomenon of non-owned possessions as potential luxury from a consumer perspective. Drawing on previous studies and literature and by taking an inductive explorative approach, the focus is set on the investigation of consumers' relationship to non-owned

possessions in the context of luxury. Therefore, following a constructivist model implying that anything can be a luxury depending on consumer perceptions, the following research question has been established:

How can non-owned possessions be luxury to consumers?

Hence the aim of this thesis is to understand how people attach meaning to non-owned possessions, how these are integrated in consumers' selves, and how this represents luxury to them.

An answer to this problem statement requires a theoretical understanding of the concept of non-owned possessions and the attachment of meanings, as well as of the concept of luxury. Based on existent research about consumers' possession-self link (Belk, 1988) and the concept of luxury, the problem statement is addressed by an inductive explorative research approach based on the example of cities as potential non-owned possessions in order to find out how the meaning of cities as non-owned possessions is related to luxury from a consumer perspective. The findings of this research are aimed to lead to an understanding of current shifts in consumptions patterns and thus to induce useful implications for companies in the luxury sector for instance and their branding strategies.

Accordingly, the problem statement is clarified by the following five sub-questions. They are aimed to help in providing an answer to the main research question and serve as a guide for the conducted research. The sub-questions further delimitate the research topic by specifying how it is explored throughout this thesis.

(1) What does prior research exhibit about (non-owned) possessions and luxury?

(2) Based on the theoretical approach, what is the conceptual link between non-owned possessions and luxury?

(3) How do consumers perceive non-owned possessions as luxury?

(4) Based on previous results, how is the possible conceptualization of non-owned possessions as luxury compatible with current conceptualizations of luxury?

(5) What are potential implications for luxury firms in terms of branding and customer loyalty?

The sub-question (1) refers to the theoretical framework of the present thesis focussing on current developments in consumption studies and conceptualizations of luxury, leading to an understanding of the link between both concepts (2). Consumer narratives generated through phenomenological interviews are addressing sub-question (3). They enable to understand how the meaning of cities as non-owned possessions is related to luxury from a consumer perspective, which leads to an understanding that sub-question (4) refers to - how the possible conceptualization of non-owned

possessions as luxury is compatible with current conceptualizations of luxury. The last sub-question (5) refers to the relevance of the present study to practitioners focussing on how marketers, particularly in the luxury industry, can potentially integrate the concept of non-owned possessions perceived as luxury to consumers in their marketing and branding strategies and thus make use of new opportunities to reach consumers and potentially enhance customer loyalty.

1.3. Research context and contributions

The present thesis is positioned within the academic field of consumption studies and specifically of consumer behaviour i.e. "the study of the process involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires" (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2006, p.6). This applies to the present case as it deals with non-owned possessions that, even though they cannot call them their property in a legal sense, people are selecting to fulfil their needs based on a psychological connection between them and an object.

Within this field, this thesis is further linked to Consumer Culture Theory stressing contextual, symbolic and experiential aspects of consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The authors define consumer culture as a "social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets." (ibid., p.869). As such, consumer culture is constructed by embodied practices, meanings and identities (ibid.). Accordingly, consumer culture is reproduced in this thesis, as it deals with underlying meanings residing in non-owned possessions that contribute to the construction of one's self.

Further, this research is linked to the theoretical field of luxury marketing referring to rather subtle strategies based on the dynamic and highly subjective character of luxury (Wiedmann & Hennigs, 2013). As this thesis challenges traditional conceptualizations of luxury and is concerned with a new understanding of the concept in today's Western post-modern societies, implications concerning luxury marketing may be derived.

Following this positioning, this research contributes to existing studies in the field of consumer research and specifically consumer behaviour in the light of luxury consumption, as it conceptualizes non-owned possessions from a consumer perspective and links them to consumers' individual perception of luxury. In fact, the underlying meanings of non-owned possessions have not been studied within the theoretical context of luxury consumption. Hence this thesis contributes by progressing the understanding of the phenomenon of non-owned luxury possession through a phenomenological investigation in today's Western societies.

This thesis is based on an interpretivist approach based on existential phenomenology (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). The latter is defined by three interconnected metaphors (ibid.). First the pattern metaphor referring to a context related worldview that requires an in-depth investigation of individuals' life worlds to describe their experiences in the related context. Second, the figure/ground

metaphor calling for a "holistic research strategy" (ibid,. p.137) in order to comprehensively understand individuals' lived experiences. Third, the seeing metaphor implying that most of individuals' experiences remains suppressed unless they are reflected upon enabling the emergence of underlying symbolic meanings. Hence in-depth consumer narratives are required to surface these meanings.

This approach is linked to the epistemology applied. According Thompson et al. (1990) epistemology implies that lived experienced must be considered in relation to the context it emerges from and the research method has to be adapted to the investigated phenomenon. This explains the application of phenomenological in-depth and semi-structured interviews in the present research, that enable gaining detailed and specific descriptions based on individuals' own lived experiences. Further, epistemology suggests a hermeneutic approach consisting in an iterative interpretation approach that has been applied in this thesis, by following a back-and-forth procedure through the continuous relation of different parts of the verbatim interview transcripts to the whole in the course of the interpretation of findings (chapter 3).

1.4. Limitations

Here, the context and limitations of this research are discussed. This thesis deals with two main concepts - (non-owned) possessions and luxury - that are strongly influenced by external factors and especially by culture (Csaba, 2008; McCracken, 1990). In fact, consumption patterns are known to vary among regions and cultures. Hence, this research is situated in the context of interview participants living in post-modern European i.e. Western Societies, defined by prosperity and security as well as "subjective well-being" implying individual well-being and high quality of life is of central importance (Inglehart, 1997, p.76).

As the aim of this qualitative research, is to understand underlying meanings in consumers' experiences related to cities, phenomenological interviews were conducted. Due to the high degree of subjectivity, differences in meanings and behaviours among age groups, genders, nationalities etc. may imply the attachment of generated insights to the particular context. However, the interpretation in likely to be transferable to other contexts based on the detailed explanation of the methodological process (chapter 3).

Limitations concerning the research process that should be taken into considerations include the fact that all interviews were held in English, even though none of the participants were English native speakers. Although they spoke the language fluently, this might have reduced their capability to fully express their thoughts and feelings, which however did not crucially impede present findings. Moreover, the Informants' age similarities and their relatively young age may be seen as a limitation. Selection older informants having more life experience may have led to a greater variety of insights. However, this was deemed compensated through participants' strong academic backgrounds and various international experiences. Additionally, that the researcher was not a very experienced

interviewer should be considered, as with more interview experience as well as psychological knowledge, more insights could probably have been "pressed" out of participants. Concerning the collages, subjects were asked to make in the end of the interviews, it is noteworthy, that the images were chosen by the interviwer, which might have biased informants' perception of luxury. As this more "fun" aspect was the concluding part of the interview, a potentially biased perception is not believed to have negatively influenced the results, especially because the choice of images was mostly overlapping with what participants had mentioned before.

Finally, even though trying to be as distant as possible, the findings based on subjective perceptions of participants may have been influenced by the researcher's own cultural background throughout the interpretation process, as De Mooij put it "[…] we are all more or less prisoners of our own culture, it is difficult to exclude our own cultural value pattern from the way we perceive and classify other cultures" (2005, p. 51).

1.5. Outline

According to the previously presented guiding research questions, this thesis is structured into five main parts. After an introduction to the topic, the presentation of the research problem and of the limitations and outline of the thesis, the theoretical framework is presented. Referring to sub-question (1), the concept of non-owned possessions and its link to identity and self extension is elaborated, while emphasizing the meaning transfer from (non-owned) possessions to consumers based on McCracken's model of movement of meaning. Further the dynamic and multidimensional concept of luxury and its development over time is presented. Based on these theoretical findings, the conceptual link between non-owned possessions and luxury is analysed (2).

Following the theoretical framework, the next part of this thesis is dedicated to an empirical study investigating how the potential conceptual link between non-owned possessions and luxury is mirrored in consumer narratives, based on the example of cities. The investigation based on consumer narratives is aimed to reveal how consumers perceive non-owned possessions as luxury (3). Therefore, the methodological research approach is introduced in the third part, before the findings are subsequently analysed and interpreted in the fourth part of this dissertation. The goal of these steps is to answer the third (3) and fourth (4) sub-questions. In a concluding step, the findings are discussed and implications (5) for luxury brands and marketing representatives will be presented as well as propositions for further research in the field of consumption studies and consumer behaviour.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical foundation of this thesis that presents the background of the research problem and served as basis for the empirical interpretation of meanings attached to cities as non-owned possessions in the context of luxury, in order to fulfil the aim of the present study.

The objective of this first part of the thesis is to present existing research about the concept of possessions while focussing on the possession of previously defined non-owned objects, and the concept of luxury (1), in order to investigate the conceptual link between non-owned possessions and luxury (2). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the key concepts non-owned possessions and luxury as well as their development over time will be given. Based on McCracken's model of movement of meaning (1986), the flow of meaning of non-owned possessions from the culturally constituted world to the individual will be explained. Hence the possession-self link is elaborated in detail while emphasizing the concept of extended-self related to identity and pointing out the rising importance of non-owned possessions. Likewise, luxury will be defined based on its origins and the concept's development towards a new conceptualization of "New Luxury" according to the luxury lifecycle including different phases (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014). Following this, it will be concluded on the deduced conceptual link between both concepts. Hence, the subsequently presented theoretical framework provides an answer to the sub questions (1) and (2).

1.1. The (non-owned) possession-self link

Possessions play an important role in individuals' lives and can be broadly defined as things that one calls his/her and intentionally or unintentionally people regard their possessions as part of their selves as their attach certain meanings to them (Belk, 1988). Hence, the relationship between an individual and their possessions, referred to as possession-self link (Ferraro, Escalas, & Bettman, 2010), is based on the psychological connection between individuals and as in the present case non-owned objects. The more an object represents important aspects of a person's self-worth, the more the formation of a possession-self link is encouraged (ibid.). As previously defined, the concept of possessions is in the present context not limited to tangible owned objects, but focuses on non-owned and often rather intangible objects that individuals may feel psychologically attached to such as activities, experiences, other people or places (Belk, 1988).

As this psychological relationship is based on the meanings ascribed to non-owned possessions, the latter will be elaborated in detail based on McCracken's (1986) model of movement of meaning, which presents the flow of meanings thus encouraging the establishment of a possession-self link. Therefore, the origins of meanings, how they are transferred to (non-owned) objects and how these contribute to individuals' self-extension will be presented.

1.1.1. Culturally constituted world and meaning transfer

The model of movement of meaning developed by McCracken (1986) reflects the mobile and dynamic character of meaning and shows that meaning is residing in three distinct stations and is drawn from one to the other through two main phases of meaning transfer. In fact, meaning must be considered as a dynamic concept always being in circulation (Batey, 2008) and is concretely defined as a scientific construct that consumers react to according to their subjective meaning i.e. values they ascribe to stimuli they are confronted to (Kleine & Kernan, 1988). According to McCracken's model of meaning transfer (1986), meaning originates from the culturally constituted world and is then transferred to the objects of consumption via different instruments. Once the meaning is residing in the objects, it is drawn onto the individual consumer via different vehicles. By taking on the meanings transferred to them, individuals can consequently express their (extended) selves (Belk, 1988). This process of meaning transfer and the stations meaning passes through - the culturally constituted world, the consumption object and the individual (self) - are elaborated in detail in the following, while emphasizing the applicability of the model to non-owned objects such as cities.
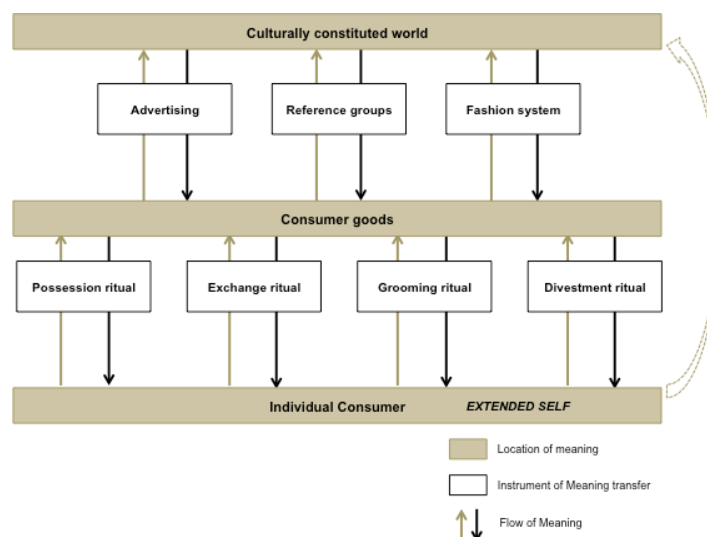
Figure 1*: 2 way model of meaning transfer model (own illustration based on McCracken, 1986; Batey 2008)*

The Culturally Constituted World

The culturally constituted world is defined as "the world of everyday experience in which the phenomenal world presents itself to the individuals' senses fully shaped and constituted by the beliefs and assumptions of his/her culture" (McCracken,1986, p.78). Generally, culture refers to "the values, ethics, rituals, traditions, material objects and services produced or valued by members of society" (Solomon et al., 2006, p.649). Further, culture is viewed as main influencer of consumer perceptions, as most consumer choices are made in a cultural context and objects of consumption are likely to have a cultural meaning as they reflect consumers' desire to be associated with certain attitudes besides fulfilling their utilitarian needs (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2006; McCracken, 1986,

p.72). Hence, culture implies how the world is seen and determines how it is shaped by human effort. It thus supplies the world with meaning and constitutes the world (McCracken, 1990).

The meaning residing in the culturally constituted world is based to two concepts: cultural categories and cultural principles. Cultural meaning divides the phenomenal worlds into different categories. The most important segments are class, gender, age and occupation (McCracken, 1986, p.72) that contribute to the conceptualization of a culturally constituted world. Material objects making abstract meaning tangible and demonstrable mostly substantiate cultural categories: "goods make culture material" (McCracken, 1986, p.73). Thus, material objects contribute to the differentiation of cultural categories. This differentiation is based on cultural principles referring to ideas and values determining the organization, evaluation and construction of cultural phenomena. Thus cultural segmentation is based on these principles that are substantiated by material objects and their symbolism (McCracken, 1986, p.73). As stated by McCracken (1986), "goods are both creations and creators of the culturally constituted world" (p.74). A city may be an example of a symbolic object signalling one's cultural principles of a certain lifestyle associated with this city based common cultural meaning. By travelling to New York for instance, an individual may signal his/her cultural principle of a cosmopolitan lifestyle. To ensure the attachment of cultural meaning in objects, it is transferred from the culturally constituted world to the object by different instruments, which refers to the first phase of meaning transfer proposed by McCracken (1986).

Meaning transfer from culturally constituted world to non-owned objects

The flow of meaning starts with the transfer from the culturally constituted world to objects. Therefore McCracken (1986) proposes two instruments: advertising and fashion systems. Advertising combines an object with the culturally constituted world in order to establish a symbolic equivalence. In consequence, consumer should be able to attribute aspects from the culturally constituted world to the object. The meaning transfer, from world to good is deemed accomplished, when the known properties of the culturally constituted world are residing in the good and thus when and if the viewer successfully decodes these meanings (Batey, 2008; McCracken, 1986). With the right materials, advertising intends to forge similarities between the culturally constituted world and the object in consumers' minds, so the object becomes concrete evidence of the cultural meaning the consumer wishes to express (McCracken, 1990). When an individual associates a cosmopolitan lifestyle to New York for instance, the meaning from the culturally constituted world has successfully been transferred to the city as a good. Through advertising the meaning of goods can constantly be developed and innovated. New meanings can be established or old ones reassigned. These developed meanings then become a new "social currency" originating from one sector or industry, but then available for all (Batey, 2008, p.104). Consequently McCracken (1987) views advertising as "an important contribution to the context of consumption" (p.122).

The Fashion system is another vehicle investing meaningful properties in goods: meaning is transferred through medias such as magazines, newspapers or online platforms (e.g. blogs, Social Media Platforms) for instance. The fashion and lifestyle world attributes certain objects with existing cultural categories and principles. Further, opinion-leaders, "individuals who by virtue of birth, beauty, or accomplishment are held in high esteem" (McCracken, 1986, p.76) may invent new or refine established cultural meanings by using their insights into cultural innovations, style, attitude and value and thus influence cultural categories and principles. McCracken argues that subordinate individuals then imitate them (1986). This meaning transfer from the culturally constituted world to objects of consumption through the advertising and fashion system may explain the deeply rooted image of many cities as objects: Milan, Paris and New York are known for fashion, Copenhagen for design and Los Angeles for movies for instance. Most of these associations are based on what the cities symbolize and are engraved in consumers' minds influencing their attitudes towards these cities. Advertising and the fashion system including opinion leader may thus have shaped the symbolism of these cities that are now engraved in consumers' minds and influencing their attitudes towards these cities. The cultural meaning is thus transferred from the culturally constituted world to cities through advertising and the fashion system.

Besides advertisement and the fashion system proposed by McCracken, reference groups should be taken under consideration as another way of meaning transfer from the cultural constituted world to goods that is especially supported by the recent boom of Social Media. A consumer's reference group is "a group whose presumed perspective, attitudes or behaviours are used by an individual as basis for his/her perspectives attitudes or behaviour (Arnould, Price, & Zinkham, 2005, p.609). Four types of reference groups are distinguished in theory: the avoidance group, that consumers do not want to belong to, the disclaimant group that individuals attempt to dissociate from by avoiding similar behaviour, the aspirational groups towards which consumers have strong attraction but not belong to and the contactual group consumers have similar consumption behaviours to and thus belong to (Arnould, Price, & Zinkham, 2005). In the context of cities, reference groups and especially aspirational groups play an important role, because, as they are likely to influence one's perception of a city. One's perception of and attachment to Paris for instance may be influenced by the French way of dressing or Instagram posts from a trip to the city of another individual part of one's aspirational reference group. Hence, consumers' reference groups and especially those they aspire to are transferring meanings from the culturally constituted world to an object while influencing consumers' perception of that object based on individual meanings attached to it.

1.1.2. Non-owned possessions and meaning transfer

Non-owned possessions

Through advertising and fashion systems as well as one's (aspirational) reference groups, meaning emanating from the culturally constituted world is transferred to (non-owned) objects (McCracken,

1986).

According to Batey (2008) these objects have different types of properties that meaning drawn from the culturally constituted world can be attributed to: tangible and intangible properties. Tangible properties are related to the object per se and can be objectively perceived through the senses and exist independent of one's mind. Intangible properties only exist in consumers' minds where they emanate from and are then projected onto the object. These refer to purely subjective mental constructs that are often based on previous experiences (Batey, 2008, p.85). A city's buildings may reflect its tangible properties as they can be seen by everyone and do not dependent on one's individual perceptions, whereas memories associated to a city rather correspond to a city's intangible properties as they are based on previous experiences. The meaning of an object to an individual is thus a combination of meaning attached to the object's tangible objective properties on the one hand and on its intangible subjective properties on the other hand.

The cultural meaning attributed to an objects' tangible or intangible properties can be hidden or evident to the individual and thus not necessarily conspicuously visible to consumers, but only appearing under exceptional circumstances, in case of loss for instance (McCracken, 1986). Cultural meanings attached to a city is hidden to consumers as it may only surface when being remembered of some experiences in the city, or evident if it has become part of one's daily life for instance (ibid.).

Further, Batey characterizes objects as "multimeaning" (2008, p.103) as they are likely to carry different types of meanings categorized as public i.e. social and private i.e. personal meanings (Richins, 1994). Public meanings reflect meanings shared by society at large and are used to express one's sense of self to others, whereas private meanings reflect rather subjective meanings residing in objects based on individuals' personal values, beliefs and experiences and are used "as markers to remind ourselves who we are" (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988, p.531). Both types of meaning do not necessarily exclude each other, as private meanings attached to an object may include aspects of its public meanings. Individuals' personal situation and experiences related to that object are determining factors of the attribution of meanings to an object. By repeated interaction with an object and so-called "psychic energy" that refers to the labour, time and attention devoted to an object private meaning is generated for instance (Batey, 2008; Belk, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). This implies that the meaning residing in objects is partly constructed by individuals' personal experiences reflecting their role of co-creators of meaning.

Overall, the meaning residing in objects ranges from conventional shared meanings in society to rather idiosyncratic, personal meaning (Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly; Rochberg-Halton, 1981). This may also be applicable to cities, as a "cosmopolitan" meaning of a city such as New York transferred by the media for instance may reflect a public meaning of the city, whereas personal meanings attached to a city are rather based on one's individual experiences (e.g. travel experiences and memories). In combination, public and private meanings imply that individuals use objects to differentiate themselves from others and to remind themselves of who they are, which refers to their self-concept

that they derive from certain objects (Wallendorf et al., 2016, p.531).

Meaning attached to objects often reflects its symbolic character. In fact, the meanings residing in material owned objects, is perceived as going beyond their economic value and functional qualities and as rather based on their symbolic value (Wallendorf et al., 2016, p. 532), which has led to Levy's (1959) conceptualization of "symbols for sale" for instance. As non-owned objects are generally not related to any monetary value, their meaning is primarily based on their symbolism. As basic needs have been materially satisfied in modern Western societies, symbolic meanings are assumed to have gained in importance, which thus can be linked to the increasing relevance of non-owned possession in the light of the contemporary post-ownership era (Slater, 1997; Batey, 2008). The definition of symbols originates from the Greek verb "sumbolein" - "to throw together" (Batey, 2008) and has developed over time, leading to the current conceptualization as "unitary characters composed of signs and their meanings" that define "things which stand for or express something else" (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967, p.24). In fact, symbols are all around consumers and an integral part of their lives. Status symbols may be one of the most popular examples of symbols. This term was coined by Veblen (1899) who affirms that certain goods carry status meaning and thus become objects of "conspicuous consumption". Considering the symbolic character of objects, cities may symbolize something that an individual may use to reflect some aspects of his personality. By highlighting his/her connection to a city such as New York for instance, an individual may exhibit his "cosmopolitan" character. Therefore, the symbolism residing in an object such as a city must be correctly understood by others, especially within the group an individual is associated to, as the symbolism defining the meaning residing in goods enables communication between the individual and his references (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). Accordingly, symbolic objects goods are considered as "social tools" supporting the maintenacne of a link with others (Wallendorf et al., 2016, p.532).

The value of (non-owned) objects, resides in their meanings drawn from the culturally constituted world via different vehicles (McCracken, 1986; Richins, 1994b), which make the object become a potential possession. Accordingly, these possessions become "storehouses of meaning" (Wallendorf et al., 2016, p.532). Through different vehicles the meaning stored in possessions is then transfer to individuals.

Meaning transfer phase from objects to consumers

The flow of cultural meaning from the object to the life of consumers is enabled through another set of instruments taking specific "symbolic actions" in form of different consumption rituals and social interactions. Rituals are defined as the opportunity to "affirm, evoke, assign or revise the conventional symbols and meanings of the cultural order" (McCracken, 1986, p.78) and are effective social tools leading to the "manipulation of cultural meaning for purposes of collective and individual communication and categorization". McCracken (1986) proposes four rituals through which cultural

meanings can be manipulated and transferred from an object onto individuals: exchange, possession grooming and divestment rituals.

Exchange rituals

Exchange rituals correspond to Christmas or birthday rituals for instance, where a consumer chooses and purchases a good that is then given to another person, which reflects the process of gift exchange (Batey, 2008; McCracken, 1986). According to Mauss (1969), exchange activities in societies are driven by three main compulsions: the compulsion to give, the compulsion to receive and the compulsion to repay or reciprocate. Through the exchange of objects, relations between people are affected, which outweighs the material value of the object. In fact, the exchange of goods influences the construction of social ties, such as friendships or supports the resolution of rivalries for instance (McCracken, 1986). The exchange of objects such as gift giving implies the process of meaning transfer through the properties residing in the chosen object. The symbolic properties of the goods are transferred to the receiver, who is likely to absorb them (McCracken, 1986). Hence, the gift-giver is considered an "agent of meaning transfer" as he/she "selectively distributes goods with specific properties to individuals who may or may not have chosen them otherwise" (McCracken, 1986, p.78). Sometimes, the act of giving can be as pleasant for the donor as for the recipient (Batey, 2008; Llamas & Thomsen, 2015; McCracken, 1986). A city may be involved in an exchange process as a trip to a city could be given away as a present. Thereby the meaning the gift-giver associates to the city is likely to be transferred to the receiver as the latter may attach particular meaning to the city after the trip for instance. By giving a souvenir from a city to someone, the meaning of the city could also be transferred. Through receiving an object as a gift, for instance an individual takes on the meaning carried by the object, that consequently may become of the individual's self (Llamas & Thomsen, 2015; McCracken, 1986; Sartre, 1943).

Possession rituals

Consumers spend an important amount of time „cleaning, discussing, comparing, reflecting, showing off and photographing" objects and thus assign specific value to these objects by claiming the concerned possessions as his/her (McCracken, 1986, p.79). Thereby, individuals intend to draw the qualities given to the objects by the media and fashion systems from their possessions. They extract the meaningful symbolic properties of objects and appropriate them, which enables them to use these objects as markers of time, space and occasion. Through possession rituals, individuals thus "move cultural meaning out of their goods into their lives" (McCracken, 1986, p.80). Thereby mass-produced goods can become personal possessions and thus a "my object" (Solomon et al., 2010, p.518). McCracken further argues that through personalization and customization, consumer attempt to transfer meaning from their own world to their possessions. Hence, individuals may create a personal world of goods reflecting their own experiences and concepts of self (McCracken, 1986). Consumers

may claim their possession of a city and thus adopt the meaning residing in he city by talking about their personal experiences related to the city, sharing their memories or showing pictures for instance.

Grooming rituals

Some cultural meanings drawn from goods have a perishable nature. Therefore, a continual process of meaning transfer is necessary, which is enabled through grooming rituals (McCracken, 1986). These rituals ensure that the perishable properties are extracted from the object and revitalized in the life of consumers. Meanings based on memories linked to a city for instance may fade. By e.g. visiting the city on a regular basis or by repeatedly looking at pictures taken in the city, memories associated to the city may recalled and thus meanings maintained. Likewise, by grooming one's personal connection to certain aspects of a city, such as the relationship to people that one has met in the city or aspects of the city's culture (e.g. lifestyle, food), the meaning associated to the city could also be maintained and be continually transferred to the individual. This could be done by staying in contact with the people or integrating part of the city's culture in one's daily life. In this context, it is thus not the individual that is groomed, but the object by cultivating the meaningful properties in the object by maintenance. Hence, grooming rituals enable the transfer of symbolic properties from objects to individuals by helping to draw cultural meaning out of objects and investing it in individuals, which strengthens the connection between the object and the individual.

Divestment rituals

Divestment rituals enable to avoid potential confusions between individuals and objects because people are likely to associate goods with personal properties when meaning is drawn from objects (McCracken, 1986). Generally, divestment rituals are used for two purposes: first, when an individual purchases an object that has been previously owned by another person, the ritual enables to erase the meaning associated with the previous owner. Second, when an individual is about to give an object away or sell it, he/she is likely to erase the meaning that has been invested in the object. This implies that the meaning residing in objects can be transferred, confused or lost when it comes to a change in ownership. Consequently, objects must be "emptied of meaning" before there are passed to another person and cleared of meaning when another person takes it (ibid., p.80). This ritual is less relevant in the present context focussing on non-owned possessions, as it rather applies to tangible owned possessions

The exchange, possession, grooming and divestment rituals are all instruments to transfer meanings residing in objects to individuals. By taking on these meanings, individuals can communicate their culture and who they are i.e. they identity as they have freely chosen the meanings originating from the culturally constituted world and forging the object's symbolism that they integrate in their lives. Hence, these objects become part of individuals' selves. The possessions of these objects thus enable

individuals to express their extended selves (Belk, 1988). This process is further supported by active and intentional as well as passive ways of incorporating objects into one's self (Belk, 1988; Sartre, 1943).

<u>Meaning appropriation</u>

As further elaborated subsequently, Belk differentiates between one's core and extended self with one's body, internal processes, abstract ideas and experienced being part of the core self and with other persons, places and things being part of one's extended self (1988, p.141). These categories serve as a structure of the self. But what these structures are specifically constituted of may differ between individuals and evolve over time, as Belk argues "the possessions central to self may be visualized in concentric layers around the core self, and will differ over individuals, over time and over cultures that create shared symbolic meanings for different goods" (1988, p. 152). Referring to Sartre (1943), Belk (1988) proposes different active and intentional as well as passive processes of incorporating possessions into one's extended self.

Possessions may actively become part of one's self by appropriating or controlling it for one's personal use, which Sartre (1943) equals to "overcoming, conquering or mastering" for an non-owned object (e.g. a city), by creating it or through knowledge of the object possessed. When an individual exercises power and control over an object by using it, the latter is likely to become part of the individual's self. In the same vein, when an individual overcomes a certain challenge for instance, the latter may also become part of his/her self. Hence, if someone overcomes the challenge of finding his/her way in a city, the latter is likely to be experienced as part of one's self. Creating an object to incorporate it into one's self is may be considered in terms of mental creations to which one associates his/herself as well as by buying it, as the monetary power behind it may contribute to the sense of one's self. By dreaming about it or by investing money in a trip, a city can thus become part of one's self. The third way making an object part of one's self, is knowledge. Knowing an object, a person or a place for instance allows a person to consider it as part of his/her self. A way of passionately knowing a material object is by cultivating a collection of this object (Belk, 2004). Considering a city, knowledge of specific places in the city or of the city's history for instance are likely to make the city become part of one's self.

Possessions are passively incorporated into one's self by the means of contamination through proximity and habituation (Belk, 1988, p.160). Thus, by being physically or mentally close to a city i.e. by being in the city or often thinking about it for instance, as well as through having certain habits related to the city, it can be experienced as part of one's identity.

By actively or passively incorporating possessions into one's self, the meaning residing in these possessions is thus taken on by individuals and used to reflect their extended self. After all, individuals are not considered only passive receivers of the meaning associated with the concerned possessions, but are also involved in the creation of that meaning (Batey, 2008). In fact, Batey argues, "we alone

are the source of whatever meaning or value the world has for us; we are responsible for giving meaning to our world" (2008, p.30). In current postmodern individualized societies (Cova, 1996b), each member of society is considered to actively create its reality and identity and the individual is thus viewed as "the product of sociocultural structures and circumstances" (ibid.). Accordingly, through creating their own experiences and future memories related to cities, individuals may define the meanings residing in these cities. This implies a two-way meaning flow of meaning, referring to meanings of objects rooted in the culturally constituted world that are transferred to individuals, and then developed by them before being transferred back to the culturally constituted world by using the objects for instance (Fig.1). This implies the idea of social construction of reality brought up by Berger & Luckmann (1966). Hence, this justifies again that even though the meaning residing in a city is influenced by external factors including advertising and fashion systems and one's reference groups, is also forged by consumers themselves through personal experiences and memories.

1.1.3. The extended self

According to the model of meaning transfer proposed by McCracken (1986), meaning flows from the culturally constituted world to (non-owned) objects and these objects to the individual who potentially considers these as his/her possession by taking on the meanings residing in the objects he freely choses. Thus the objects contribute to the expression of one's extended self and support one's identity reflection. Hence, it is essential in this context to understand why individuals are searching for meanings in the first stage and how one's self and extended self, expressed through these meanings residing in possessions, is defined. This will be elaborated subsequently, followed by the benefits that individuals may take from their possessions incorporated into their extended selves.

Underlying motivations

The question of why and how individuals search for personally relevant meanings in their possessions to become part of their selves ultimately refer to an undertanding of individuals' needs. A need occurs when there is a perceived gap "between the actual and the desired state of physical or psychological being" (Batey, 2008, p.12). Needs build the base for one's motivation defined as "drives, urges, wishes and desires" guiding one's behaviour. Hence needs range from basic needs required for survival to needs of self-definition (Batey, 2008). This refers to the distiction of four main types of needs: utilitarian needs having a conscious and rational nature and linked to specific practical necessities, tasks or processes; experiential needs driving consumers to stimulate their senses; identity needs referring to one's self definition, status in society and affiliation with other social groups; and emotional needs that may imply a need for achievement or control. These are similar to the Maslow's hierarchy of needs including basic, psychological and self-fulfilment needs (Solomon et al., 2006). As basic needs are mostly satisfied in Western societies, people are increasingly concerned with meeting their identity-related and emotional needs (i.e. self-fulfilment needs), that they look for in the symbolic meaning of their possessions (Batey, 2008). People's search for meaning is thus triggered by

coexisting different and increasingly emotional and subtle needs. This set of need is refers to one's needstates, defined as a dynamic construct with different needs overlapping and changing over time. In contrast to Maslow's hierarchical model implying a progression, needstates imply a constant fluctuation. Additionally, peoples' needstates are influenced by their environment as well as individual mood, attitudes and feelings i.e. their "moodstate" (Batey, 2008, p.13). The satisfaction of these needs is consequently linked to personal meanings they draw from most likely non-functional aspects of objects. This implies the rising importance of personal values in their choice of possessions. This may be linked to Gutman's (1982) means-end theory referring to a combinations of meanings based on which consumers perceive object attributes ("means") in terms of their personal values ("ends"). Individuals thus strive to take on cultural meanings residing in their possession in order to fulfil their increasingly emotional and identity related needstates. Thereby, they intend to communicate this cultural meaning and express their selves.

Multidimensional extended self

As Belk states in *Possession and Extended Self* (1988), "we are what we have", which implies the reflection of one's self through owned material possessions. In the light of the trend of the dematerialization of society and the current Age of Access (Rifkins, 2000), Belk adapted his initial wisdom by questioning "why not share rather than own" (Belk, 2007) leading to his insight "we are what we share" (Belk, 2014). This implies non-owned possessions as a means of self-reflection.

It is generally understood that every individual has a self (Belk, 1988) that can be defined as "what one is aware of, one's attitudes, feelings, perceptions, and evaluations having reference to oneself as an object" (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967, p.24; Rosenberg, 1979, p.7). Individuals' selves are based upon their identity (Bauer, Von Wallpach, & Hemetsberger, 2012; Belk, 1988; Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995). The concept of identity refers to "sets of meanings people hold for themselves that define "what it means" to be who they are as persons, as role occupants, and as group members" (Burke, 2004, p.5; Hemetsberger, Von Wallpach, & Bauer, 2012). Possessions support the construct of identity as individuals select which meanings he/she wishes to be associated with and freely choose their possessions accordingly based on the objects' symbolism, forged by the culturally constituted world. Truly, individuals choose their possessions according to what he/she finds meaningful in relation to his/her person, which refers to one's self (Belk, 1988; Levy, 1959). According to Belk, the self is composed of one's core and extended self. He further suggests that one's "physical body, internal processes, abstract ideas and experiences" are most likely to be part of the core self, whereas "persons, places and things" to which one feels attached are the most clearly extended parts of the self (1988, p.141). Based on this conceptualization, cities corresponding to "places" are theoretically likely to become part of one's extended self. In fact, when an individual claims something as "his/her", he/she usually believes that the object is "him/her" i.e. part of his self (Belk, 1988). Hence the individual uses the object concerned to express his/her extended self.
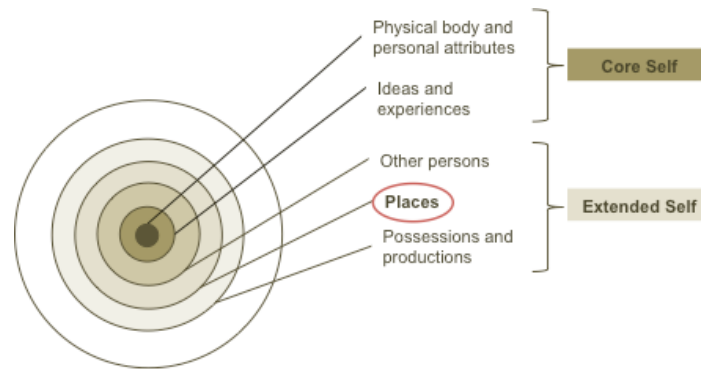
Figure 2: The Core Self and the Extended Self (own illustration inspired by Belk (1988))
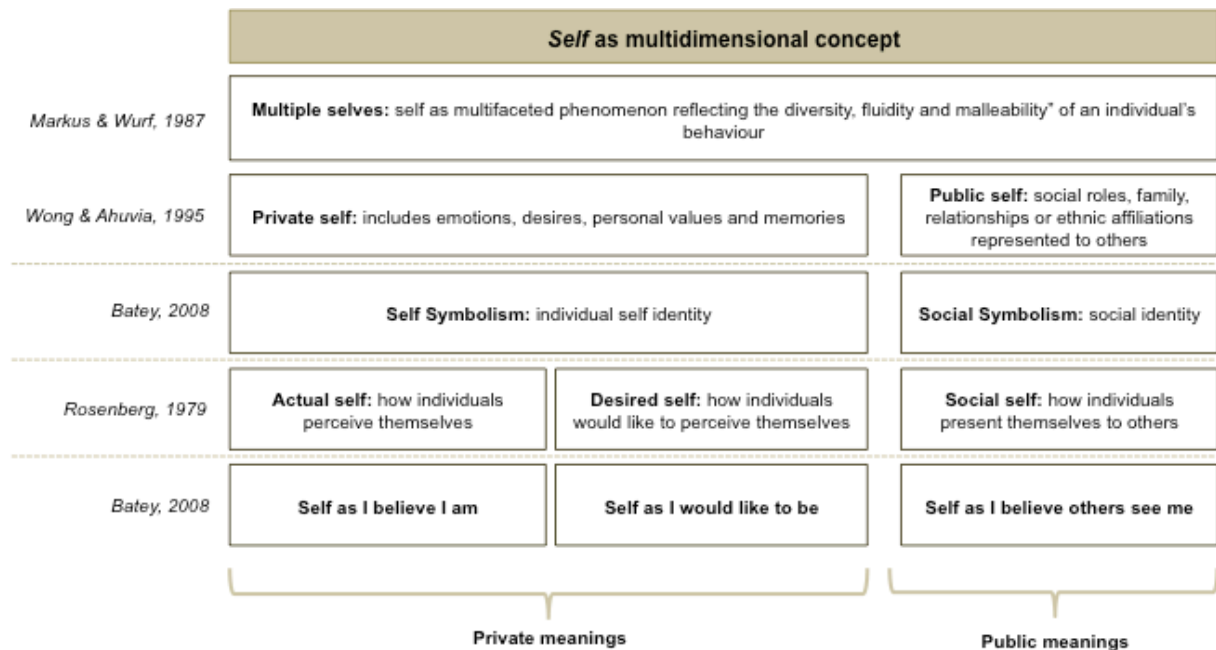
Thus, the extended self, reflecting one's sense of who he/she is, refers to the totality of objects one acquires that become part of that person (McCracken, 1986). Through their valuable meaning to consumers, possessions become part of one's extended self and go from being "mine" to being "me" (self) (Belk, 1988, p.140; Ferraro et al., 2010, p.2). Further, the concept of extended self manifests an interrelation between the basic states of human existence *having*, *doing* and *being*, as Belk states "[…] having possessions functions to create and to maintain a sense of self-definition and that having, doing, and being are integrally related" (1988, p.146). In fact, possessions serve as a tool allowing one to do things that he/she would otherwise be incapable to do or by convincing one to be a different person with the possession than without it. One's sense of self may thus be achieved from *having* that contributes to one's ability of doing and being. According to Sartre (1943), the only reason why people want to have something is to enlarge their sense of self and their only way to know who they are is by looking at what they have (Belk, 1988, p.146). Based on this, *having* and *being* become intermingling concepts as people seek, express, confirm and ascertain their sense of being through their possessions (Webster & Beatty, 1997). In fact, "the more we believe we possess or are possessed by an object, the more a part of self it becomes" (Belk, 2004, p.79).

As previously mentioned, possessions contribute to one's identity construction through the meanings they contain. Accordingly, individuals are considered to pursue two main purposes with the expression of their selves through possessions based on the meanings associated: the communication with others rather based on public meanings residing in an object as well as more inner directed purposes such as self-fulfilment linked to an object's private meaning (Richins, 1994). These two dimensions may be linked to the reflection one's public self on the one hand and one's private self on the other hand, implying the multidimensionality of the concept of self (Wong & Ahuvia, 1995). The public self is referring to individuals' social roles, family, relationships or ethnic affiliations represented to others, whereas the private self includes emotions, desires, personal values and memories (Webster & Beatty, 1997; Wong & Ahuvia, 1995). Noteworthy, these two dimensions must be viewed as coexisting constructs, as a same individual is likely to simultaneously express his public as well as his private self.

The meanig in a possession appropriated by individuals that hence supports him/her in the task of self-

definition and self-categorization in society is tighly linked to the symbolism of the object possessed. In view of this, Batey (2008) proposes the concpept of one's self symbolism implying the construction of one's individual self-identity which is mainly influenced by personal and private meanings of an object and one's social symbolism implying one's construction of social identity, mainly derived from an objects' public meaning (Batey, 2008). The creation and cultivation of one's individual and social self, based on symbolic meaning in possessions, are likely to proceed in parallel.

The multidimensionality of the concept of self is refelcted in a further division of the self proposed by Rosenberg (1979) who distinguishes between the actual self - how individuals perceive themselves, the ideal self - how individuals would like to perceive themselves, and the social self - how individuals present themselves to others. This conceptualization is simlar to the one's private and public self suggested by Wong and Ahuvia (1995), but adds the third perspective of one's ideal self. Hence, it may be aligned with Batey's (2008) three dimensions of one's self image: the self that one believes he/she is (actual self), the self one would like to be (ideal self) and the self as one believes others perceive him/her to be (social self). Here, the first two dimensions rather refer to one's private self and the latter to one's public self. The ideal self may be opposed to another perspective of one's notion of identity - one's "undesirable self", which corresponds to one's self-perception towards the despised others through avoidance, aversion or abandonment of certain objects (Joy, Sherry, Troilo, & Deschenes, 2010; Sirgy, 1982). This implies that individuals seek to protect their selves and thus their self-enhancement and self-esteem (Joy et al., 2010; Sirgy, 1982). In fact, the self is playing a central role in one's life and is thus something that individuals strive to maintain "safe-guard" and to make become more valuable through constant development in order to reach self-fulfilment, which is supported by the use of "products, ideas, people and objects" implying one's possessions including non-owned possessions (Joy et al., 2010).

Self as multidimensional concept		
Markus & Wurf, 1987 — **Multiple selves:** self as multifaceted phenomenon reflecting the diversity, fluidity and malleability" of an individual's behaviour		
Wong & Ahuvia, 1995 — **Private self:** includes emotions, desires, personal values and memories		**Public self:** social roles, family, relationships or ethnic affiliations represented to others
Batey, 2008 — **Self Symbolism:** individual self identity		**Social Symbolism:** social identity
Rosenberg, 1979 — **Actual self:** how individuals perceive themselves	**Desired self:** how individuals would like to perceive themselves	**Social self:** how individuals present themselves to others
Batey, 2008 — Self as I believe I am	Self as I would like to be	Self as I believe others see me
	Private meanings	Public meanings

Figure 3: Self as multidimensional concept (own illustration based on Batey, 2008; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Rosenberg, 1979; Wong & Ahuvia, 1995)

The multidimensionality of the self reflects one's existence not only as an individual, but also as collectivities. This refers to the individual's hierarchical arrangement of levels of self with at least four levels of self - individual, family, community and group - that individuals define through their possessions (Belk, 1988). The primary distinction is being made between the individual and collective conception of the self (i.e. private and public self). This implies that individuals take on different roles in their lives, where their different selves and identities come into play. Through their possession, individuals can thus define their multiple identities i.e. their individual self, their family self, their sense of community (*Gemeinschaft*) as well as their group identity (Belk, 1988). Hence, individuals' definition and expression of self reflects how they define themselves and how they connect to others as well as social groups.

This conceptualization goes in line with Markus and Wurf's (1987) theories on multiple selves in which the self is perceived as "multifaceted phenomenon reflecting the diversity, fluidity and malleability" (p.301) of an individual's behaviour. Hence one's self is not a "unitary, monolithic entity" but acts in multiples ways depending on the one's motives and immediate situation (ibid.). This work highlights the broad range of distinction of multiple selves, as "some are more important and more elaborated with behavioural evidence than others. Some are positive, some negative, some refer to the individual's here-and-now-experiences, while other refer to past or future experiences […]" (Markus & Wurf, 1987, p.302). Agreeing with Batey (2008), Rosenberg (1979) and Wong and Ahuvia (1995), Markus and Wurf (1987) similarly argue "some are representations of what the self actually is, while others are of what the self would like to be, could be, ought to be, or is afraid of being" (p.302).

Valuable functions of possessions

As previously elaborated, individuals are able to express their multiple identities through their owned and non-owned possessions. These possessions individuals incorporate into their extended selves serve further valuable functions.

Belk (1988) argues that possessions are "good for thinking" (p.159), as they help individuals to manipulate their possibilities and present a desired self for instance to others who give them feedback that they could use to guide their future identity (Belk, 1998). This leads to another valuable function of possessions that is human development, which includes approaching desired future selves. In this view, possessions may support the process of *becoming* referring to another state of human existence as they help to signal the development of one's desired self (Belk, 1988; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Further, human development includes managing identity crisis in the present and creating a sense of past of the self (Belk, 1988). In fact, possessions are likely to help creating one's sense of past as they are perceived as "convenient means of storing the memories and feelings that attach our sense of past" (ibid., p.148) and can thus help people to reflect on their history and their individual development over time. Accordingly, memories of past experiences may explain people's attachment to specific objects, as according to Belk (1988) a large number of possessions are valued for their non-utilitarian functions including the memories, self-extension, and magic associated with them and can thus be defined as memory-evoking possessions (Belk, 1991). Hence, the possession of objects that provide a sense of past support individuals in knowing who they are (ibid.). In fact, a city is a non-owned object that is likely to capture and store memories of one's past experiences related to that city and thus support one's sense of past.

Part conclusion I

Consequently, the previous chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of how meaning is attached to non-owned possessions and how these become part of one's extended self by contributing to the construction of one's multiple selves. In fact, meaning - generally defined as a scientific construct that individuals react to according to their subjective meaning based on their values and beliefs that they ascribe to stimuli they are confronted to - is rooted in the culturally constituted world where it is forged by cultural categories and principles (Kleine & Kernan, 1988). Through the advertising and fashion system this cultural meaning is then transferred to the object. This meaning transfer in accomplished when the viewer successfully decodes the meanings (McCracken, 1986). In fact, meaning can be attached to a multidimensional object's tangible as well as intangible aspects. Accordingly, an object is likely to carry meanings shared by society at large as well as private meanings referring to subjective meanings based on individuals' personal values, beliefs and experiences. This multidimensionality implies the role of individuals as co-creators of meanings (private meanings). Further, the meaning in object can be hidden or evident and mostly has a strong symbolic character.

This "multimeaning" (Batey, 2008) is then transferred onto individuals via different rituals (possession, exchange, grooming and divestment) and actively or passively taken on by different means of appropriation such as controlling or mastering an object, by knowing it or through contamination via proximity or habituation (Sartre, 1943; Belk, 1998). Thereby an object becomes one's possession, as he/she can incorporate the meaning into his/her extended self (ibid.).

Hence individuals are enabled to reflect their multidimensional selves including their public self, seeking the communication with others, and their private selves following more inner-directed purposes such as self-fulfilment (Richins, 1994). Consequently, this flow of meaning encourages the establishment of the (non-owned) possession-self link (Ferraro et al., 2010) based on the emerging psychological relationship between the object and the self. In fact, individuals appropriate meanings that represent a central value of their selves and thus contribute to the construction of their selves, which reflects the formation of the possession-self link. Through the expression of their extended selves they are thus enabled to create, enhance and preserve their sense of identity (Belk, 1988).

Further, one's possessions have additional valuable functions, as they enable human development and thus support one in approaching his/her desired future self. By supporting the creation of one's sense of past, possessions can also help to reflect on one's history and individual development over time.

Considering that basic needs are mostly satisfied in today's post-modern Western societies, people are more concerned with meeting their identity-related and emotional needs such as individual self-fulfilment needs that they seek in a possessions' symbolic meaning (Batey, 2008). Hence, people's emotional and subtle needs are becoming increasingly important and their consumption is more and more driven by inner-oriented purposes. As non-owned possessions are disconnected from material objects, their meaning is deemed highly subjective and based on individuals' emotional values. Considering this in the light of todays increasingly dematerialized society living in an era of access rather than ownership (Rifkin, 2000), it stands to reason that non-owned possession (besides shared possessions referring to Belk's wisdom "you are what you share" (Belk, 2014)) play an increasingly important role in individuals' lives and thus the reflection of one's private self is deemed predominant. Hence, Belk's wisdom "you are what you share" may be complemented by "you are what you possess".

1.2. The Concept of luxury: towards a conceptualization of "New Luxury"

An understanding of luxury as a key concept of this thesis is indispensable in order to evaluate how consumers may perceive a non-owned possession as luxury. Therefore, a brief historical introduction depicting the origins of the concept of luxury as well as its general multifaceted conceptualizations is given in the following section before elaborating the multidimensional nature of luxury in further detail. Subsequently, the evolution of the concept over time is presented based on the life phases of luxury proposed by Kühne and Bosshart (2014), implying the concept's development towards "New Luxury".

1.2.1.Origins and definition of luxury

The term luxury originates from the Latin "luxus" standing for "exuberance of vegetation" and the "abundance of delicious things" (Corbellini, Savialo, 2009, p.20). Further the term is derived from "luxuria" referring to excess, lasciviousness, negative self-indulgence (Brun & Castelli, 2013; Dubois, Czellar, & Laurent, 2005) and describing "any intense desire or craving for self gratification" (Corbellini, Savialo, 2009, p.20). Etymologically luxury is thus related to splendour on the one hand and to sin and decadence on the other hand, reflecting conflicting meanings (ibid.). The historical origins of luxury further indicate this contradictory meaning of the concept, while yielding the associated controversy (Wittig et al., 2014). The concept of luxury dates back to the earliest origins of human culture and society, as human desires have always been present (Wittig et al., 2014; Bastien & Kapferer, 2012). In the beginning luxury was restricted to small elites as it has a divine character, as "it was long associated with splendour and characterized the sacred marks of princes and gods "(Corbellini and Savialo, 2009, p.21). This early restriction to the upper class made luxury become subject of controversy. In Ancient Egypt for instance, the utility of luxury and some practices was disputed as many considered luxury as waste and unnecessary, whereas others saw it as a way of artistic discovery (Bastien & Kapferer, 2012, p.22). Hence, luxury served as a way to display power and achievements for higher social classes, as they lived more opulently to "stand out from the ordinary folk" (Thomas, 2007, p.20). Thereby, Luxury encouraged envy and scorn among lower classes and was threatening the social order and harmony (Berry 1994, p.59) and thus became subject of moral concerns (Mortelmans, 2005, p.498). Luxury remained highly controversial, as it was associated to the "unnecessary, superfluous but also conspicuous, affluent, refined." (Corbellini & Savialo, 2009, p.21) until the "bourgeoisie" emerged, leading the idea of luxury to "sumptuous surroundings" making life more comfortable (Brun & Castelli, 2013, p.827). From then on luxury covered all social classes and during the 17th and 18th century, with the fall of many monarchies and the rise of the industrial revolution, the view of luxury turned into a rather commercial one linked to an economy of quality. Hence a more contemporary conception of luxury referring to the "habit of indulgence in what is choice or costly" or "something enjoyable or comfortable beyond necessities in life" emerged (Brun & Castelli, 2013, p.827). From then on luxury was accepted as driver of economy (Thomas, 2007, p.21) and became accessible for a broader range of people (Bastien & Kapferer, 2012), which implies a historical shift in the perception of luxury referred to as "de-moralization of luxury" by Berry (1994, p.62).

Nevertheless there is still no real consensus regarding the definition of the concept of luxury, neither in theory nor in practice (Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009) or as Cornell put it: "luxury is particularly slippery to define" (Cornell, 2002, p.47), which is reflected by the plethora of conceptualizations (Bauer, Von Wallpach, & Hemetsberger, 2012).

In general, luxury is understood as the consumption of certain goods and brands that are mostly associated with "high quality", "exclusivity", "extra value", "scarcity" (Mortelmans, 2005; Berry

1994) as well as a "very high price", "upscale", "good taste", "class", "aesthetic beauty", but also "superfluouness", "flashiness" and "bad taste", reflecting once more its controversy (Dubois & Laurent, 1994; Kapferer, 1997; Llamas & Thomsen, 2015). A "strong element of human involvement, very limited supply and the recognition of value by others are further considered as key components of luxury" (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004, p.485).

This traditional conceptualization of luxury implies the notion of necessity introduced by Mandeville who proposed that luxury is "everything […] that is not immediately necessary to make Man subsist" (1732, p.107) and further elaborated by Sombart (1992) stating that "luxury is any expenditure that goes beyond necessity" (p.85) and Berry (1994) claiming that it is an "obvious fact that luxuries are not needed" (p.23). It is however difficult "to identify where necessity ends" (Mandeville, 1732, p.108), which leads to the notion of relativity. Luxury is considered as a "relational concept" as it varies from person to person due to their social positions (Sombarts, 1992). Thus, the determination of "necessary" is subjective and differs among individuals as well as according to macro-economic factors (ibid.). Hence, luxury is viewed as a subjective construct, as it is influenced by individual perceptions based on individual values (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2007).

Additionally, desires and wants represent a fundamental aspect when it comes to defining luxury, as Berry argues "luxuries do not fulfil basic necessities but rather stimulate the senses and are thus positively pleasing and widely desired" (1994, p.4). The fulfilment of desires through luxury may be based on the symbolic value of luxury brought up by Appadurai (1986) who suggests five characteristics defining this symbolism: the restriction to elites by law or price, scarcity, signals of social messages (semiotic virtuosity), codes for appropriate consumption demanding specialized knowledge and a strong linkage of consumption to body person and personality (p.38). In fact, luxury have later been defined as having a strong "sign-value" and thus as "meaning-producing devices circulating in a particular cultural environment" (Mortelmans, 2005, p.508).

Based on this multifaceted conceptualization of luxury, several theoretical approaches to luxury have emerged: some researchers have investigated luxury as a brand property (Dubois & Paternault, 1995), others have related the concept to specific products or services in a marketing context (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999) or have examined the meaning of luxury to consumers (Dubois & Czellar, 2002). These different approaches reflect the concept's multidimensionality based on different interrelations between luxury, the individual and society (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). In fact, luxury may be considered as a social marker i.e. "luxury for others" or as a more personal concept i.e. "luxury for oneself" (ibid., p.46).
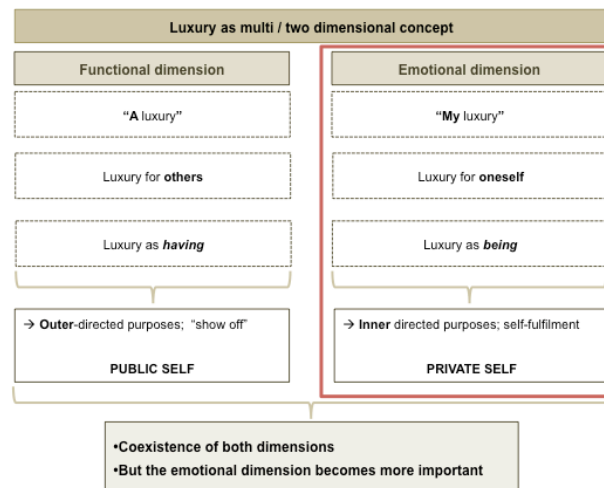
1.2.2. Luxury as a multidimensional concept

The conceptualizations of luxury as "luxury for others" on the one hand and as "luxury for oneself" on the other hand (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012) reflect its multidimensional character, corresponding to Wiedmann et al.'s (2007) definition of luxury as "multidimensional and subjective" construct (p.3).

Accordingly, four dimensions of luxury are distinguished: a financial dimension that addresses monetary aspects and defines the value of a product based on its price; a functional dimension focussing on core benefits and basic utilities such as quality and uniqueness of a product that drive the luxury value; an individual dimension associated with consumers' personal orientation towards luxury and focussing on personal matters such as materialism or hedonic value; and a social dimension referring to the perceived utility consumers acquire through the consumption of certain products or services valued within their social environments, which is likely to have an impact on their image evaluated by others (Wiedmann et al., 2007, p. 4). These dimensions reflect a distinction between purely functional aspects of luxury and rather emotional ones, which is mirrored in Sombarts' (1992) differentiation between a quantitative and a qualitative form of luxury. The former refers to a lavish way of consumption and the latter to the use of better and more refined goods (Sombart, 1992, p.85). Noteworthy, these two forms of luxury can appear in combination. Complementing this idea, Sombart (1992) suggests the distinction between idealistic, altruistic luxury referring to the consumption of refined goods for public purposes and materialistic, egoistic luxury linked to a more personal purposes, implying different consumer motivations behind the consumption of luxury. In fact, differences in consumers' underlying motivations in the context of luxury represent another factor contributing to the concept's multidimensionality: on the one hand consumers seek to "show off" through luxury consumption and on the other hand they strive rather personal purposes such as pleasure or as Bian & Forsythe put it, people use luxury to "portray their individuality and/or social standing" (2012, p. 1444). This refers to external and internal expectations driving consumers in the context of luxury consumption (Truong, 2010). External expectations refer to luxury as conspicuous consumption and thus motivated by the perception by others, whereas internal expectations are related to private pleasure and quality: "consumers are more focussed on their own pleasure than on the display of conspicuous consumption" (Truong, 2010, p.653).

Hence luxury has functional as well as rather emotional dimension defining the concept's multidimensionality that people use to meet their outer-directed (public) as well as their more inner-directed (private) underlying motivations in regards to luxury. Referring to humans' states of existence, these different driving forces imply "luxury as having" and "luxury as being". It is important to note that both dimensions coexist and consumers are likely to aim the fulfilment of both motivations through luxury consumption.

Finally, luxury as a multidimensional subjective construct is viewed as dynamic concept, notably due to its fluidity and the fact that it changes across time and culture (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006). As Berry (1994) states, once luxuries have become usual and customary, they are likely to be reclassified to social necessities. Accordingly, a definition of luxury always depended on the "Zeitgeist" and how scarce a good was for instance (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014), which reflects a certain "transience" of luxury (Berry, 1994), which is elaborated upon in the concept's development over time in the following.

Figure 4: Luxury as a multidimensional concept (own illustration based theoretical foundations)

1.2.3. The development of luxury

The multidimensional concept of luxury is strongly dynamic and subject of constant redefinition (Berry 1994). Based of the lifecycle of luxury including four main life stages - the infantile, adolescence, maturity and seniority phase - proposed by Kühne and Bosshart (2014), the concepts' development will be elaborated in detail. Therefore the different stages and related theoretical conceptualizations will be presented, leading to the current understanding of luxury, referred to as New Luxury in the present study.

Infantile phase

The "infantile phase" of luxury reflects the idea of "more and more" (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014, p.5) characterized by a hunger of consumption and a need to catch up (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014, p.5). In this context, consumers are believed to take everything they can get, comparable to a child that is likely to take everything it is fed with. The main purpose here is social advancement (ibid.). The infantile phase of luxury refers to the early beginnings of the concept, implying the time where basic necessities where not yet totally fulfilled in Western societies implying the relevance of scarcity in terms of luxury. Hence this phase views luxury as reserved for the "happy few" (Dubois, Laurent, & Czellar, 2001). Further, luxury is closely linked to materialism, referring to a "mind-set […] an interest in getting and spending" (Rassuli & Hollander, 1986, p.10) or "the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions […] [that] assume a central place in a person's life and are believed to provide the greatest source of satisfaction and dissatisfaction" (Belk, 1985, p.65). According to Dittmar (2008) a key element of materialism is the so-called self-determination theory defined by the importance a person places on intrinsic life goals such as community involvement and self-acceptance and extrinsic goals such as financial success and image. Hence materialism referring to personality traits, to financial goals and materialism as consumer value can be distinguished (ibid.). Finally, luxury is in this phase considered as "luxury as having" implying the importance of perceived value

reflected in the quality, the design, the materials and the manufacture of a certain object (Brun & Castelli, 2013 p.829). The idea of accumulating more and more material objects with an explicitly perceivable value is strongly linked to the underlying social aspect of luxury, which leads to the adolescence phase of luxury.

Adolescence phase

The "adolescence phase" of luxury is characterised by peer-to-peer pressure where the "more" becomes a "must" (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014). The signal effect of products implying strong conspicuousness is here of central importance, as people seek to keep up with their peers. Accordingly, luxury serves as social marker in this phase referring to "luxury for others" and its functional dimension is predominant (Sombart, 1992). Luxury's adolescence phase is this tightly connected to the notion conspicuous consumption first introduced by Veblen (1899), stating that luxury goods are consumed to impress others and signal wealth and views it as "expenditures not made for use or comfort but for purely honorific purposes to inflate the ego" (ibid., p.74). Veblen argues that the accumulation of owed possessions is used to display status in societies and sees consumption as competition in which products are used to distinguish oneself from others (ibid.). Hence people established their social position in an affluent society by spending and the show-off of purchased goods became status symbols (Csaba, 2008, p.5), status being defined as a form of power residing in respects, considerations and envy from others (Eastman et al., 1997, p.53). Based on the consumption habitus of the leisure class defined by Veblen (1988) luxury equals status and represents a mean of social distinction (ibid.; Csaba, 2008). Hence, the desire to achieve social status with the "ostentatious display of wealth" (Mason,1981, p.vii) reflects the so-called Veblen-effect implying that "consumers display a willingness to pay a higher price for a functionally equivalent good" (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996, p.349). This effect goes in line with the bandwagon effect - the increase in demand of one product because others are buying the same - introduced by Leibenstein (1950). This foregrounds consumers's collectivistic values as they strive "to be one of the boys" (Leibenstein, 1950, p.189) or to "keep up with the Joneses" (Matt, 2003). Sombart (1992) picks up the same idea through his notion of "cultural necessity": "levels of material comfort deemed necessary to maintain a minimum standard of decency and dignity in a given society at a given time" (Sombart cited in Csaba, 2008, p.9).

In this context, luxury is linked to status symbols enabling consumers to fulfil their need of placing themselves within the society, which stresses the important social role of luxury (Bastien & Kapferer, 2012, p. 35).

These two phases marking the beginning of the luxury lifecycle, put the concept of luxury in a social context reflecting the idea of "luxury for others", which refers to consumer's need for ostentation i.e. the exhibition of wealth and the comparison and communications with other through status symbols (Wittig et al., 2014).

Maturity phase

At the end of the adolescence stage luxury became more accessible: due to mostly fulfilled basic necessities in Western societies, growing purchasing power and economic and industrial advancements products that were initially considered exclusive became more accessible and were widely consumed by the masses (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014). Further demographic and cultural factors have supported this development such as the increasingly active role of female consumers, the increasing number of singles implying a higher amount of money spent on the individual as well the increased sophistication of consumers and their growing aspiration due to higher levels of education and a higher willingness to try out of a broad range of offers (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006). Similarly the greater supply of products in the luxury sector due to the fact that traditional luxury houses were transformed into brands that targeted broader ranges of consumers has affected this development (Okonkwo 2007, p. 226). By increasing the economical and physical availability of their products, these brands made luxury "available to anyone, anywhere, at any price" (Thomas, 2007, p. 29) and concept of "fast moving luxury goods" (FMLG) emerged. This development reflects the democratization of luxury that marks the beginning of the maturity phase of the luxury lifecycle.

The democratization of luxury also referred to as "luxurification of society" (Bauer, Von Wallpach, & Hemetsberger, 2015) or masstige (Truong et al., 2009) was at the time of its emergence considered as the "New Luxury" in the sense of "products and services that possess higher levels of quality, taste and aspiration than other goods in the category, but are not so expensive as to be out of reach" and that people are willing to pay a premium price for - which refers to "trading-up" (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003, p.3). This definition of "New Luxury" is different from the current one (relevant in the present thesis), as elaborated subsequently in the further development of luxury. These "new luxury" goods are characterized by stronger emotional engagements by consumers than they have with other goods, based on the combination of a good's superior functional performance and other benefits such as brand values (ibid., p.8). Further, Silverstein and Fiske underline that the democratization of luxury leading to their notion of "New Luxury" implies more selective consumption as consumers tend to trade up to products if the category is important to them and they are likely to trade down to low-cost in the opposite case. This combination induced a "disharmony of consumption" (ibid.).

Hence, the democratization of luxury has engendered a significant change in paradigm in the context of luxury reflected in the maturity phase. In fact, this phase is shaped by a "tiredness of luxury" (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014, p.6) or as Thomas (2007) states "luxury has lost its lustre". As luxury is easily accessible its exclusivity and the linked feeling of joy is believed to decrease (ibid.). This mirrors the so-called "snob effect" - the decrease in demand of an object because too many others are purchasing it (Leibenstein, 1950). The latter implies new ways of differentiation and is consequently linked to rather individualistic values (Corneo & Jeanne, 1997). In fact, "more is (always) less" becomes the reigning principle in this phase (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014). Consequently there is a noticeable shift from products towards experiences, following the experience economy (Pine and

Gilmore, 1999). In its maturity phase, luxury is increasingly disconnected from material goods and the experiential factor of luxury or gains of importance (Bauer et al., 2012; Llamas & Thomsen, 2015). As experiences represent a more subtle form of consumption, the shift to experiential luxury (Michaud, 2013, p.8) is interpreted as a shift towards inconspicuousness (Eckhardt et al., 2015, p.816). This foregrounds the rather hedonic purpose of consumption linked to pleasure based on a holistic experience instead of a transactional relationship (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Dubois & Duquesne, 1993), which implies "luxury as doing". The underlying personal orientation towards luxury implies indicates that the notion of "luxury for others" is slowly outweighed by "luxury for oneself" (Müller-Stewens, 2013). At the end of this phase, luxury has thus moved towards more meaningful objects and activities linked to form of consumption encouraging individuals to consume for their own pleasure instead for their social status as argued by Lipovetsky (2005) referring to the idea of "hyperconsumption". Here differentiated consumption is emphasized i.e. informed and discerning choices made by consumers to display their sense of elegance and quality (Wittig et al., 2014). Throughout its lifecycle, luxury has thus so far moved from "luxury as having" to "luxury as doing", before entering the next phase of "luxury as being".

Seniority Phase

The "seniority phase" corresponds to the present phase of luxury i.e. to "New luxury" as referred to in the present context. It is characterized by strong inconspicuous consumption, even ostentatious renunciation ("demonstrativer Verzicht"), knowledge and authenticity (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014). The question of meaning and a shift in consumer needs towards less materialism and more meaningful possessions are predominant in this phase. Here, "less is more" – "less" implying the "nothingness" people tend to seek consisting in the renunciation of materialistic luxury as well as the capability of taking the most indulgence out of the necessary (ibid.). The seniority phase of luxury is based on the trend towards "less bling" and "more discretion" (Wittig et al., 2014) and the notion of inconspicuous consumption becomes even more important in the sense od the art of recognizing and understanding how to live the essential and the "reduced" (Eckhardt et al., 2015; Kühne & Bosshart, 2014; Wittig et al., 2014). Millennials representing a significant part of the concerned population in this phase grew up with a stronger sustainable mind-set and do not need to own a car to exhibit status for instance (Belk, 2014). This reflects the idea of "conscientious consumption" implying a sustainable aspect to luxury (Hennigs, Wiedmann, Klarmann, & Behrens, 2015). Hence, the seniority phase of luxury, represents an understated form of luxury with consumers moving from a "birthing culture" characterized by a strong hunger to consume, to an "aging culture", in which consumption decreases (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014). This is further associated to the movement "from lifestyle to deathstyle" implying a more conscious way of life (ibid.). Hence, reflections about past experiences and memories gain in importance: luxury is not only about dreams anymore, but also about memories (Wittig et al., 2014). The trend towards "deathstyle" presented in this last phase of luxury is mirrored in today's

booming sharing economy for instance as through sharing, consumers reflect more about what they really need for living (Kühne & Bosshart 2014). This also implies a development from quantity to quality and a shift "from waste to taste" (Shipman, 2004, p.277), which goes hand in hand with an increased desire for sophistication significant for inconspicuousness (Eckhardt et al., 2015). Actually, inconspicuousness is the new conspicuousness according to Kühne and Bosshart (2014), relying on the principle of keeping things plain and simple ("I can afford to renounce to it") (ibid.).

A key aspect in regard of this conceptualization of "New luxury" is authenticity reflected in the wisdom "perform the real" (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014). This is based on the fact that people are looking for "something with soul, with character and stories attached to […]" (Trendwatching, 2004).

Another key element in regard of this conceptualization of "New luxury" is knowledge requiring cultural capital i.e. "nonfinancial social assets, such as cultural knowledge, that people have in a particular domain" (Bourdieu & Passeron 1973). Being "in the know" of processes and workmanship for instance leading to expertise and connoisseurship enable consumers to read the subtle signs, the codes of simplicity of "New luxury" (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014). These codes become increasingly important as they are only likely to recognized by other elites or "cognoscenti" being in the know (Eckhardt et al., 2015, p.808; Berger & Ward, 2010;Wittig et al., 2014), implying the pleasure in enjoying the company of "other elite enthusiasts" (Eckhardt et al., 2015, p.808). Accordingly, this new form of luxury refers to an "inward hedonistic turn" meant to impress other elites by consuming in a "right" way. Hence the knowledge of how to do things right and choose well (Thomas, 2007), corresponds to the new "status currency" (Boston Consulting Group, 2013). The latter implies "stealth wealth" defined by "invisibility and the satisfaction of inner needs" (Wittig et al., 2014) that represents the emergent form of luxury consumption driven by cultural capital rather than wealth in a monetary sense (Berger & Ward, 2010).

Overall, this last phase of the lifecycle leads to an understanding of "New Luxury" as referred to in the course of this thesis. This development of luxury and according consumption patterns display the growing importance of hedonic aspects i.e of self-fulfilment pleasure, implying the concept of luxury as "my luxury". Overall, this development of luxury and according consumption patterns displays the growing importance of hedonic aspects i.e of self-fulfilment pleasure, implying the concept of luxury as "my luxury". It further reflects a new perception of luxury by consumers, which goes in line with recent studies that have shown that consumers do not define luxury through "bodily exhibited products and brands", but rather as "exceptionally valuable, hidden supporters of everyday life" (Bauer et al., 2012, p. 6).
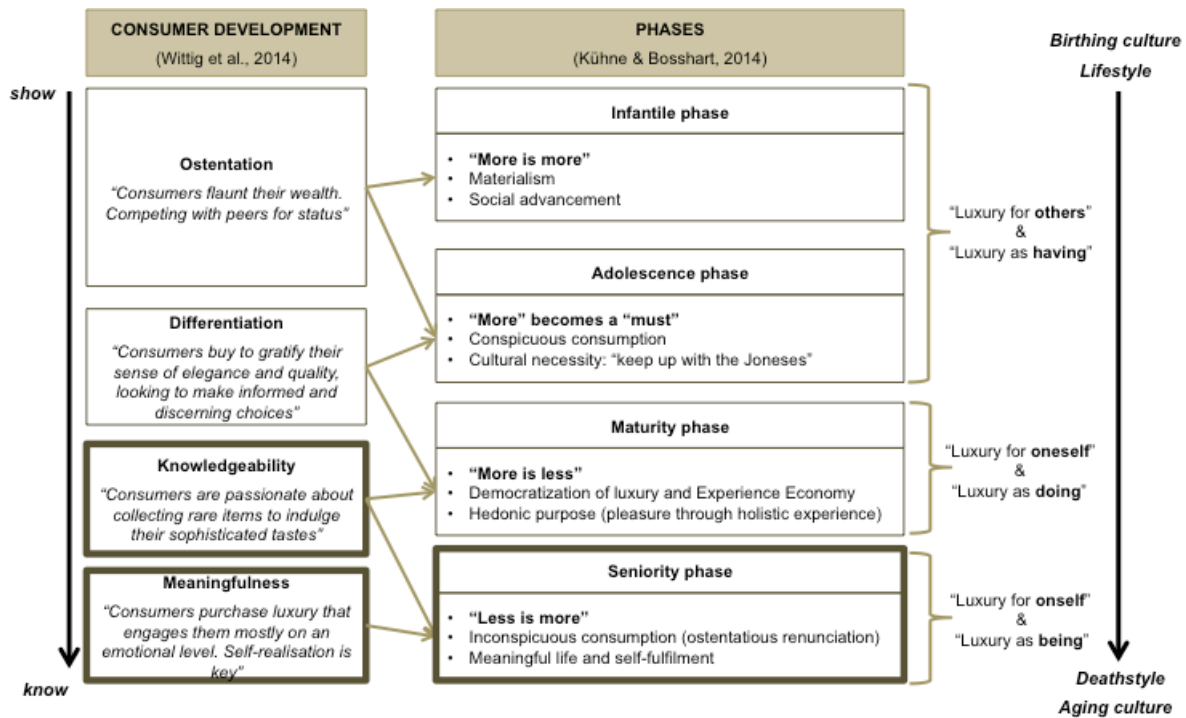
Figure 5: *Luxury life phases and simultaneous consumer development (Own illustration based on Kühne &*
Bosshart, 2014 and Wittig et al., 2014)

Part Conclusion II

In sum, the prior chapter clarifies the theoretical understanding of luxury by providing insights into the concepts' origins in the earliest stages of human culture, presenting its multifaceted general conceptualization as well as its development rooted in status consumption and moving towards a rather abstract and hedonic form of consumption implying the idea of "New luxury". In fact, luxury has remained controversial over a long period of time, as it was simultaneously perceived as "unnecessary" "and "superfluous" and "affluent" and "refined" (Corbellini & Savialo, 2009, p.21). Hence it has been linked to the concepts of necessity, desires and wants. Overall concept is deemed "slippery to define" (Cornell, 2002, p.47) and no consensus regarding the definition of luxury is found. Besides the agreement of luxury as a subject construct having strong symbolic character, most theorists brought up a broad understanding of luxury as the consumption of certain goods associated with "high quality", "exclusivity", "extra value", "scarcity" (Mortelmans, 2005) as well as a "very high price", "upscale", "good taste", "class", "aesthetic beauty", but also "superfluouness", "flashiness" and "bad taste", reflecting once more its controversy (Dubois & Laurent, 1994; Kapferer, 1997; Llamas & Thomsen, 2015). These multifaceted conceptualizations of luxury have led to various theoretical approached based on different rapports between luxury, the individual and society (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012), reflecting the multidimensionality of luxury. In fact, a theoretical distinction is made between "luxury for others" and "luxury for oneself" (ibid., p.46). This distinction implies the analogous contrasts based on the basic stated of human existence between "luxury as having" and "luxury as being". This distinction is justified by different underlying consumer needs:

On the one hand consumers seek to "show off" and to communicate with others and thus look for rather functional aspects in objects enabling the expression of their public self, and for rather hedonic driven purposes such as pleasure and self-fulfilment and thus searching for the emotional aspects in their possessions supporting the construction as reflection of their private selves. The consequently multidimensional concept of luxury is further defined as highly dynamic as indicated by its lifecycle consisting of different phases (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014) The infantile phase incorporates the idea of "more as more" and "luxury as having", is based on materialism and refers to social advancement trough ostentatious consumption as purpose (status). The adolescence phase refers to the maxim "more becomes a must" underlining the importance of conspicuous consumption and the cultural necessity of consumption in order to keep up with peers. The maturity phase implies the wisdom "more is less" hinting a certain tiredness of consumption based on the democratization of luxury and leading to increasing importance assigned to experiences. This refers to "luxury as doing" and the underlying hedonic purpose of pleasure through a holistic experience. Finally, the seniority phase of luxury understood as "New Luxury" in the present context is characterized by the belief "less is more" implying highly inconspicuous consumption with the fundamental purpose self-fulfilment found in a meaningful life (ibid.; Wittig et al., 2014). Hence this development of luxury from "lifestyle" to "deathstyle" (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014) implies the strong disconnection from materialism and the importance of underlying hedonic motivation of contemporary Western consumers.

2.3 Summary of theoretical framework

The previous chapter presented the theoretical foundations for this research problem and thus the basis for the following empirical investigation. Hence, existing theoretical conceptualizations of possessions, focussing on non-owned possession, and the idea of luxury have been introduced. The elaboration of the flow of meaning attached to possessions (McCracken, 1986) revealed that cultural meaning is transferred to individuals through possessions. In fact, possessions, and thus non-owned possession central in the present case, carry multiple coexisting meanings (public and private) that are adopted by consumers through different rituals and appropriation processes. These support the construction and expression of individuals' extended self and underlying multiple selves (e.g. public and private selves) enabling the creation, enhancement, and preservation of a sense of identity (Belk, 1988) through the formation of a strong possession-self link. Noteworthy, the meaning residing in non-owned possessions is the result of the culturally constituted world and of individuals' influence based on personal experiences, which implies their role as co-creators of meaning. This implies a two-way movement of meaning disregarded by the model proposed by McCracken (1986). In the light of today's dematerialized society and the predominant consumer need of fulfilling emotional and subtle needs, the rising importance of non-owned possession incorporating strong private meanings rather formed by individual's personal beliefs and values and experiences, and thus supporting individuals in expressing their private selves, is assumed.

Luxury is rooted in the beginnings of human culture and society and has long been a controversial subject, as it was perceived "unnecessary" "and "superfluous" on the one hand and "affluent" and "refined" on the other hand (Corbellini & Savialo, 2009, p.21). Until today, there is no real consensus in regards of the concept's definition, which is reflected in the myriad of theoretical conceptualizations presented earlier. However, based on common agreement, luxury is viewed as highly subjective and emotional due to its strong symbolic effect. Moreover it is theoretically conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, as the distinction between "luxury for others" and "luxury for oneself" is made (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). This implies different underlying consumer motivations i.e. to "show off" or personal purposes such as individual pleasure. However, one does not exclude the other and the two dimensions of luxury can appear in combination (Fig.4). Further, luxury is a highly dynamic concept as its development based on its lifecycle including the infantile, adolescence, maturity and seniority phase of luxury indicate. In fact, the luxury lifecycle exhibits the concept's evolution from its origins in status consumption (infantile phase) to an inconspicuous abstract concept referred to as "New Luxury" (seniority phase), via its perception as cultural necessity (adolescence phase) and the process of democratization leading to experiences being increasingly valued as luxury (maturity) (Fig. 5). This development is accompanied by changing consumer needs in terms of luxury, shifting from ostentation to meaningfulness, by passing through differentiation and knowledgeability (Fig. 5). Although this development of luxury towards the rather abstract conceptualization of "New Luxury" is deemed predominant in today's Western societies, this does not mean that luxury in the traditional sense, as defined within the infantile and adolescence phase for instance, has become obsolete. Although "New Luxury" becomes is potentially more valued, both conceptions of luxury should be viewed as coexisting constructs.

Hence, theoretically elaborated concepts have gone through a similar development over time implying a disconnection from materialism. This is due to the fact that post-modern consumers living in a dematerialized society i.e. an era of access rather ownership (Rifkin, 2000) are assumed to increasingly value non-owned possessions and that the attribution of luxury to possessions has taken as similar route towards an abstract concept increasingly disconnected from specific product categories (Hemetsberger, Von Wallpach, & Bauer, 2012), which the present conceptualization as "New Luxury". Noteworthy, this implies the compatibility of owned possessions with the more traditional conceptualization of luxury closely linked to materialism (Fig. 6).

Hence, both concepts defined as multidimensional, carrying a public as well as a private dimension, have reached a state in which there are associated to rather abstract and hedonic functions based on one's inner-directed purposes of consumption and more reflected consumption choices in terms of personal meaning in life. Consequently the conceptual link between non-owned possessions and luxury resides in their compatibility (Fig. 6), as the value ascribed to possessions has shifted from owned to non-owned and the attribution of luxury is similarly increasingly disconnected from

functional, status and thus materially oriented aspects (2). Following this, non-owned possessions can theoretically be luxury to consumers.

The following empirical study investigates how this conceptual link between non-owned possession and luxury is mirrored in consumer narratives and how consumers thus perceive non-owned possessions as luxury (4).
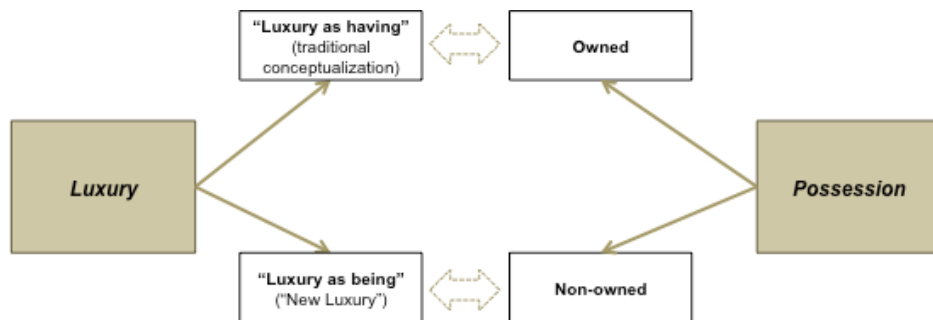
Figure 6: *Conceptual link between non-owned possession and luxury (own illustration based on theoretical foundations)*

3. Methodology

The following chapter elaborates upon the research methodology of the present study in order to investigate how individuals in today's Western societies attach meaning to cities making them become their non-owned possessions. Further the study tries to answer how the meanings attached to cities as non-owned possession represent luxury to consumers. Therefore, the research approach and research method based on epistemological premises are presented. This is followed by an explanation of the data collection and selection method of informants, a presentation of participants as well as an outline of the interview process. Finally, the chapter concludes with the presentation of the data analysis.

3.1 Research approach

The research methodology of the present thesis is of inductive and qualitative nature. It has an interpretive foundation and is concerned with words. Based on existential-phenomenological and epistemological assumptions, the phenomenological interview was used as a research method in this study. This method enables attaining detailed descriptions of personal lived experiences based on informants' thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Thompson et al., 1989; Kvale, 1983), which is aligned to the goal of this research. Although other methods such as the analysis of informants' written statement exist in phenomenological research, the in-depth interview is considered the most rewarding in terms of gaining in-depth understanding of their experiences related to cities and their perception of luxury (Thompson et al., 1989; Kvale, 1983). Therefore, the aim was to conduct narrative interviews as consumer narratives allow gaining deep insights into consumers' experience and are viewed as "the most natural way for humans to acquire, store and retrieve knowledge" (Bauer, Von Wallpach, & Hemetsberger, 2015, p.9; Shankar et al., 2001) and as "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.1). The approach applied in the present thesis was inspired by precious phenomenological investigations of luxury from a consumer perspective (Llamas & Thomsen, 2015; Bauer et al., 2015). The detailed research process including the selection of informants, the interview procedure, the interpretation of data and finally reflections on quality, are presented subsequently.

3.2 Selecting informants

To derive data, "long interviews" were conducted (McCracken, 1988). The "long interview" as defined by McCracken (1988) allows the researcher to dive into individual's mental worlds to identify the logic by which he/she sees the world as well as into individuals' life-worlds to see the content and pattern of his/her daily experience (ibid., p.9). Therefore appropriate informants were selected. In qualitative research, selecting informants is a matter of access and not of generalizability in order to generate themes (ibid.). In fact, the goal of this research is not to discover how many or what kind of people attach a meaning of luxury to cities as their non-owned possessions but to get access to how

and what kind of personal meanings are involved. Hence, the aim of qualitative research approach in the present case is to mine the terrain instead of surveying it as a quantitative approach would do (ibid). Therefore two requirements informants had to fulfil were defined in advance. Rather open-minded people presenting some experiences related to different cities and thus reflecting a "globetrotter mind set" were believed to have more relevant content to share within the context of this thesis. Related to this first condition, it was believed that a certain interest in the topic as well as in travelling and cities would enhance the quality of narratives.

Although McCracken proposes to recruit perfect strangers in order to manufacture distance (ibid.), informants were in the present case purposively selected among casual acquaintances. This selecting method was chosen because of the belief that casual acquaintances would have a basic trust in the interviewer, which would facilitate to build up a relationship between interviewer and the informant in order to encourage a free and honest dialogue. Moreover, as the participants had to fulfil the above-mentioned criteria, knowing them casually and thus having a basic idea about their internationality and open-mindedness for instance eased the recruitment process. In respect of McCracken's (1988) theory, selected informants did not know each other, which helped avoiding any kind of information exchange about the research topic previous to the interview.

Further McCracken proposes a maximum of eight "long interviews" before redundancy is likely to be reached. The restriction of the number of informants to eight people also enables gaining in-depth stories from informants by working longer and more intensively with them than rather superficially with a greater number of them. This reflects the idea of "less is more" brought up by McCracken (1988) in this context.

Taking into consideration the risk of cancellation of a scheduled interview by one ore more respondents as well as the risk of "useless" inputs, ten interviews were organized with six selected female and four male participants covering an age range between 23 and 32. Selected participants all fulfilled the defined pre-requirements as they have all lived in different cities and travelled a lot for instance. The Informants' age similarities and their relatively young age, may be seen as a limitation as a more heterogeneous group of informants including older people having more experience or people having children potentially confronted to different challenges for instance may have led to a greater variety of insights. However, as the selected participants all have a strong academic background and significant international experience as they have lived and visited a significant number of different countries, it can be presumed that despite their relatively young age they have a sound level of experience enabling them to share valuable insights.

Selected participants were contacted in advance and date, time and location of the 1-2 hour-interview were agreed on. Further, They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality (Thompson et al., 1989). That it would be about a meaningful city to them was the only information given in advance. Most expressed curiosity regarding the topic and first had doubts about their ability to contribute anything, as they did not have a concrete idea about what the investigation could be about. However their

curiosity outweighed their scepticism and all recruited informants agreed. Hence the chosen respondents clearly had no specific knowledge about the topic, but the necessary curiosity implying a certain degree of ability of reflection, which is advantageous in the present study. One of the informants cancelled and thus nine out of the ten scheduled interviews took place in quiet locations where informants felt at ease and comfortable talking about personal experiences.

Participant	Name	Age	"Little luxury" city
#1	Michael	26	Vienna
#2	Anna	28	Copenhagen
#3	Fabienne	27	Paris
#4	Felix	32	Hong Kong
#5	Vanessa	24	Madrid
#6	Ricarda	27	Berlin
#7	Maria	29	Vienna
#8	Lucas	25	Groningen
#9	Alex	30	Bucharest
#10	Christina	23	Sydney

☐ Considered
▨ Not considered

Figure 7: Selected informants

3.3 The interview process

One interview was conducted with each selected informant. It was designed to yield information about how they attach meaning to a city they consider their "little luxury". Informants were interviewed for 45 min to 1,5 hours and the interviews were semi-structured. The course of the interview followed an interview guide in order to provide consistency, while leaving sufficient flexibility to formulate new spontaneous questions in reaction to informants' answers and allowing the interviewee tell insights that go beyond the specifically questions. In fact, "the more spontaneous the interview procedure, the more likely one is to obtain spontaneous, lively, and unexpected answers from interviewees" (Kvale, 1996, p.129), which is aligned with the aim of this data collection. To maintain a dynamic conversation rather than an interrogation session the questions were designed in order to promote a positive interaction by keeping the flow going and motivating the subjects to share their experiences and feelings (ibid.; Thompson et al., 1989). Accordingly, the interview followed the structure of the "long interview" introduced by McCracken (1988). Hence an interview guide containing three parts was prepared (app.1). All interviews were held in English, audiotaped and transcribed verbatim (app 2).

The interviews started with a small talk and broad introduction to the research in order to make the informant feel comfortable and clarify the overall purpose of the interview. The whole interview process started very openly and became more and more intrusive throughout the process. To allow participants to freely talk about their personal stories in own words, questions were asked in an

unobtrusive manner and the following questions were phrased in a general and non-directive. Accordingly, in the first part, opening and nondirective questions, so-called "grand-tour" questions were asked (McCracken, 1988) - *"Which city would you call your little luxury?"* being the first one. Further, informants were stimulated to expand their ideas by different types of prompts. "Floating prompts" such as simply raising an eyebrow or the repetition of the informants' last words with an interrogative tone, were used to encourage interviewees to return to their utterance and elaborate on it. Likewise, by giving them something "to push against" by means of contrast prompts referring to "planned prompts", participants were encouraged to share opposite experiences, about their "non-luxury city" in this case. Informants were thus led to discuss phenomena that they would otherwise not come to their minds (McCracken, 1988). Further, interviewees were asked to recall and develop exceptional experiences or incidents related to their "little luxury city" referring to another planned prompt. Here the focus was set on the reasons how and why the cited experiences were particularly significant for informants. All respondents came up with a specific incidents or experiences linked to particular aspects of their "little luxury city" such as the people or the nature for instance.

The second part of the interview was concerned with another planned prompting procedure: informants were asked to comment on previously chosen images that were put on handy cards by the investigator, representing objects, situations or activities that could potentially be associated with one's "little luxury" city (app.1). Subjects were challenged to give their own description of what they see, and to explain what their associate with the image in general as well as in terms of luxury. Subsequently, they were asked to arrange the images on a poster around the name of their little luxury city in such a way that the closer they would put them to the name of their little luxury city, the more it would represent the city in terms of luxury (app. 2). Finally, they were provided with blank cards to draw any additional aspect they would attribute to the cited they cited in terms of luxury. This procedure reflects the prompting method of "auto driving" (McCracken, 1988, p.35), which is useful as it encouraged informants to "see familiar data in unfamiliar ways" (ibid.,p. 24). Further informants seemed to have fun dealing with these images and creating their personal "collage". Overall, by means of the auto-driving method, an understanding of informants' personal perceptions of luxury and how they link it to their "little luxury cities" could be provided. Some aspects, such as the fact that immaterial things (e.g. time, friends etc.) were higher valued than material things (e.g. houses, big cars etc.) in terms of luxury by all participants were objectified.

The interview ended with biographical questions including questions about informant's person as well as their residence pattern. Information about where respondents have lived offers an idea about their internationality.

The role of the interviewer was to provide an adequate context to attain a phenomenological dialogue enabling informants to freely talk as detailed as possible about their lived experiences and thus allow to generate valuable insights about informants' perceptions of luxury and how they attach meaning to their little luxury cities (Thompson et al., 1989). Therefore, the interviewer tried to make the

informants feel comfortable and questioned them in as unobtrusive and nondirective ways as possible. The interviewer's intention through the whole process was to maintain a position of equality with participants (Kvale, 1983; Thompson et al., 1989). However, the interviewer made an effort to guide the conversation by exercising some control over the interview by engaging in "active listening" (McCracken, 1988, p.21). Here the use of the described prompts supported the interviewer in guiding and structuring the dialogue. The use of prompts required the investigator to quickly recognize the key terms to encourage informants to elaborate on them. Another key challenge was to find the balance between structuring the dialogue while allowing respondents to talk freely. According to McCracken (1988), manufacturing distance is an essential aspect in qualitative research. The applied prompting procedures that encouraged respondents to put into words what they otherwise take for granted, such as showing the images, supported them in manufacturing distance and to thus report their personal experiences.

3.4 Interpretation of interviews

The interpretation phase began based on interviews transcriptions from the audiotapes (Thompson et al., 1989). Seven out of nine conducted interviews were used, as two did not provide any valuable insights and were thus not included in the analysis. As the goal of the phenomenological interviews was to collect personal descriptions of specific lived-experiences, the aim of the interpretation of consumer narratives is a holistic understanding of consumer perception and meanings emerging from the informant's lived experiences. In the present case the aim was to holistically understand how individuals attach meaning to cities, how these meanings are related to their perception of luxury and how cities may thus potentially become their non-owned luxury possessions. Hence a thematic description of experience and identification of recurring experiential patterns is the goal (Thompson et al., 1989, p.139).

Therefore a hermeneutic-phenomenological interpretation approach was followed (Thompson et al., 1989), based on the "human ifeworlds were transformed into written texts" (Kvale, 1983, p.185) in form of the interview transcripts.

Within the pursued hermeneutic-phenomenological interpretation approach, common themes across the interviews were identified, while always supporting the proposed interpretation by evidence i.e. the respondent's description of lived experiences (Thompson et al., 1989). Hence, the interpretation followed the hermeneutical principle of hermeneutic circle proposed by Thompson et al. (1989). The latter was reached by an iterative "part-to-whole" mode of interpretation including an idiogrpahic (individual) understanding of each interview by considering each transcript as a whole and relating separate passages to the overall content and the subsequent identification of common patterns i.e. global themes by relating the different interviews to each other (ibid). Therefore, as "coding represents the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), a coding process becoming progressively deeper through open coding,

followed by axial coding and finally selective coding was applied to each interview transcription. Hence, the content of each sentence was analysed and all identified patterns in all interviews were related to each other and combined in a catalogue of major common themes in the following steps, which enabled the identification of global themes that all other codes were then related to. The interpretation of the transcripts was then complemented with the informants' collages that reflected most consumer narratives. Hence common patterns in informants' city related experiences in terms of luxury could be identified. In fact, different situations may be experienced in the same way or a similar situation may be perceived differently (ibid.). In the present case, the themes thus emerged from a cross-person analysis of meanings attached to cities and the perception of luxury of these meanings. Throughout the identification of global themes the researcher continuously referred back to the individual interviews to ensure that the themes as not "rendered in abstract terms removed from the informants' experiences and specific passages in the transcript reflecting a clear statement of the theme were highlighted. Further predefined theoretical concepts referring to the movement of meaning, the extended self and related identity as well as luxury were taken into consideration in the course of interpretation allowing the establishment of an interpretive link between theory and empirical findings. According to Kvale (1983), the presented hermeneutic process ends when "sensible meaning" is achieved (p.185). Hence this iterative interpretation process was ended in the present case when several redundant criteria of cities that people attach particular meanings in terms of luxury to, common ways of appropriating these meanings and common identities forming one overarching self that informants express through the meanings have been identified. These respectively refer to the global themes ""multidimensional city", "city rituals" and "balanced self".

3.5 Quality reflections

Within qualitative phenomenological research, it is essential to assess the quality of research in terms of methodoligical criterial in order to prove reliability and validity of qualitative paradigm. The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of and reliability in the research process, potentially enabling the reader to replicate the study. Golagshani (2003) conceptualized reliability and validity as trustwortiness, rigor and quality, that were enforced trough different aspects in the present research.

First, to ensure trustwortiness, rigor and quality of the present reasearch, a pre-test was conducted to find out which beginning "grand tour" question people would be most reactive to and would thus lead to more valuable insights. Therefore, two options were proposed to seven volunteer testers among the interviewers circle of acquaintances: *"If a city would be a luxury to you, how would it be - and why?"* and *"Which city would you call your little luxury?"*. Five out of seven chose to answer the second question implying an existing city, which reflected a clear preference and thus influenced the choice of this question for the final interview guide.

Second a test interview was conducted with a friend of the interviewer, who however had no prior knowledge in the field of research. In fact, in order to differentiate a good from a bad research, testing

is deemed to increase reliability and validity in terms of truswothiness, quality and rigor (Golafshani, 2003). The test participant provided feedback on the clarity of posed questions and interview skills of the researcher. There were noteworthy changes to the interview guide after the trial interview. As the test interview was not recorded, it is nor included in the analysis.

Moreover, the interviewer conducted an introspection by answering the questions of the developed interview guide herself, before interviewing selected informants. On the one hand, this enables the investigator to reflect on her pre-understandings of possible results that may be drawn from the narratives and on the other hand it enhances the curiosity about what was going to be said by informants, while however "bracketing" her presumptions during the interview (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989, p.150).

Finally, appropriate participants fufilling the requirement of having an open-minded ans international mindset were selected. Moreover, as suggested by McCracken, participants did not know each other in order to avoid previous information exchange.

According to Golafshani triangulation defined as a "validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Golafshani, 2003, p.604) is another ways to improve the quality of research. Triangulation was undertaken by including the second part in the interview process, where participants were asked to use provided images to describe the city they cited in terms of luxury. This refers to an additional source of information, not focused on words but on visible cues.

Overall, rigor was reached throughout the whole interview process, as the researcher adhered to the interview plan, listened carefully and did not bias the participants.

As the interview interpretation was based exclusively on the verbatim interview transcripts, three criteria of phenomenological interpretation (Thompson et al., 1989) were fulfilled to ensure trustwortiness, rigor and quality: the emic approach, autonomy of the text and bracketing. In respect of an emic approach only respondents' terms were used in the course of the interpretation in order to stay at the level of lived experience and to fully understand their perceptions (Thompson et al., 1989). Further, the transcriptions were treated as an autonomous body of data containing informants' lived experiences and reflections, which means that none of their descriptions were externally verified and their interpretation did not include any hypotheses or conjectures going beyond the provided evidence (ibid). Finally, any preconceptions about the phenomena were "bracketed" in order to maintain a distant and objective view to ensure autonomy of the text (Thompson et al., 1989, p.140).

3.6 Summary of method

As the aim was to gain phenomenological insights into individuals' lifeworlds, the phenomenological interview was chosen as the research method by taking a narrative approach. This enabled to focus on individuals' subjective thoughts and feelings in terms of the meaning they attach to a certain city. The interviews were semi-structure "long interviews" enabling a free a detailed description of participants'

personal experiences. During the interview process the interviewer's role was to make informants feel comfortable about their personal thoughts by engaging in active listening and questioning in an non obtrusive way, while encouraging to elaborate on their thoughts in detail through the use of appropriate prompts. With the purpose of gaining insights into lived experiences, ten interviews were scheduled, out of which nine were conducted and seven used for the present research. Informants were selected among casual acquaintances, as this was believed to support relationship and trust building ensuring free and open speech. The selection was based on the criteria of having a rather open-minded and international mind set.

The interpretation of the interviews was fully based on the verbatim interview transcripts and consisted in the identification of common patterns in informants' city related experiences in terms of luxury. It followed a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach based on the hermeneutic circle reached by an iterative "part-to-whole" mode of interpretation including an idiogrpahic (individual) understanding of each interview and the identification of global themes by relating the different interviews to each other (Thompson et al., 1989). A coding process becoming progressively deeper through open coding, axial coding and selective coding supported the interpretation. Common themes thus emerged from a cross-person analysis of meanings attached to cities in terms of luxury.

Based on Golafshani's (2003) conceptualizations, trustwortiness, rigor and quality were ensured through the conduction of a pre-test to help developing the interview guide, a test interview to gain feedback on the questions and the resaerchers interview skills as well as an introspection conducted by the interviewer enbling to reflect on pre-understandings of possible results to enhance the curiosity in terms of consumer narrative generation. As suggested by Golafshani (2003), triangulation was applied by including the collage in the second part of the interview process as an additional source of information. Finally, the emic approach, autonomy of the text and bracketing were fulfilled to ensure quality, implying that only respondents' terms were used in the course of the interpretation to fully understand their perceptions, that the transcriptions were treated autonomously as none of their descriptions were externally verified and their interpretation was only based on the provided evidence and finally that preconceptions about the phenomena were "bracketed" in order to maintain a distant and objective view (Thompson et al., 1989, p.140).

4. Findings

The theoretical foundation and the appropriate methodological approach specified, the findings of the research are interpreted and presented in the following in order to reach the aim of this thesis. The findings from each conducted interview are compiled and their analysis is structured by the global themes emerging from the interpretation process: *"multidimensional city"*, *"city rituals"* and *"extended balanced self"*. By drawing upon presented theory on possessions and self-extension as well as luxury, the global themes are explained by interpreting their underlying aspects. The interpretation of these themes provides an answer to the defined sub question (3) implying an explication of how a city represents a non-owned possession to consumers and how they perceive the city as luxury.

Theoretical findings have revealed the multidimensional character of luxury and a significant development of the concept over time, reaching a new understanding referred to as "New luxury" in its current life stage (2.2). This conceptualization of luxury is mirrored in consumer narratives as informants made a clear distinction between luxury in a rather material sense and linked to status and communication with others, and a more abstract and personal form of luxury implying inconspicuousness - the latter being more valued by participants, which reflects the idea of "New Luxury". Statements such as *"[…] it's a **different luxury**. For me that's **a more superficial luxury, that is visible, but not valuable**"* (#6 Ricarda: Berlin)[1] when referring to the image "Status symbols" (app.1) in the second part of the interviews for instance as well as the distinction between *"the **money part** and the **feeling part** of luxury"* (#5 Vanessa: Madrid) reflect this contemporary perception of luxury. In line with this, participants also underlined their understanding of the current development of luxury away from materialistic ownership and towards a more abstract concept, as they exemplary stated *"everything that does not fall under the classical definition of material luxury items, I think increases in significance"* (#4 Felix: Hong Kong), or *"luxury for me is also experiencing, traveling, visiting my family. **There is this materialistic luxury, but I think nowadays it has changed.** There is more **understatement**."* (#2 Anna: Copenhagen), which reflects the previously theoretically defined shift in paradigm.

Theoretical findings about the concept of luxury were thus mirrored in empirical findings. In fact, participants perceive luxury as a rather abstract and personal concept disconnected from material ownership. Based on this conceptualization, participants brought up various dimensions of their "little luxury cities" they ascribe particular meaning to and that thus make the city a luxury to them. This refers to the global theme *"multidimensional cities"*. Further, their relationship to the city was surfaced through certain underlying aspects assigned to the global theme *"city rituals"* as they imply the transfer and appropriation of meaning attached to cities, referring to McCracken's (1986) model of movement of meaning. Finally, drawing upon theory about the possession-self link (2.1.), several

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[1] (#6 Ricarda: Berlin) = Participant #6 who cited Berlin as "little luxury city"

selves emerged that participants are believed to express through appropriated meanings from cities. These coexisting selves could then be combined in one overarching self - the *"balanced self"* i.e. the third identified global theme. As elaborated subsequently, the reflection of different identities through the meaning residing in cities enable individuals to reach different types of balances in life, which contribute to the definition of their overarching balanced self.
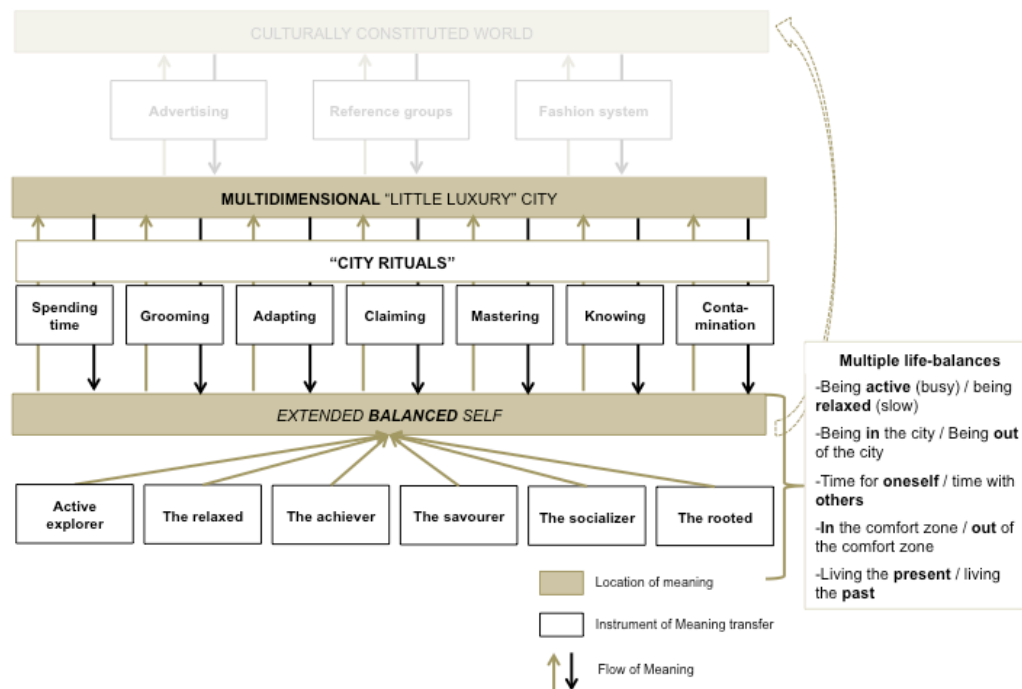

Figure 8: Model of movement of meaning applied to "little luxury" cities (own illustration inspired by McCracken, 1986 and based on empirical findings)

4.1 Multidimensional city

Findings revealed several dimensions of cities that people particularly value by ascribing specific meaning to them, which makes them perceive the cities as "little luxury". As meaning is generally understood as a scientific construct that consumers react to according to their subjective values they ascribe to stimuli they are confronted to (Kleine & Kernan, 1988), the different dimensions of cities described represent these stimuli that people attach particular meaning to. In this sense, various stimuli i.e. aspects of different city dimensions have been brought up by participants, which refers to the identified theme *"multidimensional city"*. Hence the multidimensionality of cities consists of a combination of different meaningful city aspects valued as luxury by participants. Noteworthy, it is not the meaning of one of a city's aspects that make it become a luxury, but rather a combination of all of them. In this sense, the most recurrent meaningful city characteristics are presented in the following. Inspired by the idea of public and private meanings attached to possessions proposed by Richins (1994), the different aspects individuals attach meaning in terms of luxury to, are divided into a public dimension based on "tangible" (objective) properties of the city reflecting rather evident meanings likely to be shared by a society at large, and a private dimension based on rather subjective

properties implying hidden meanings linked to one's personal context, values and experiences. The cities' *vibrance*, *nature*, *beauty*, the *convenience* it offers, it's *unique culture and lifestyle* as well as *authenticity* were identified as most recurrent public aspects informants revealed to attach meaning to that makes the city become a luxury to them. Likewise, private aspects that emerged include the *feeling of home*, *personal relationships* to people in the city, a feeling of *specialness*, *nostalgia* and personal *transformative challenges* that informants relate to the cities cited as their "little luxury".
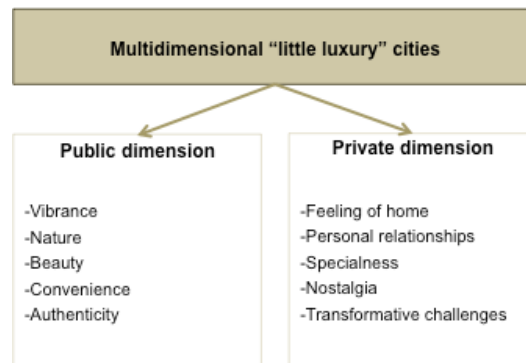
Figure 9: Meaningful dimensions of "little luxury" cities (own illustration based on empirical findings)

4.1.1.Public dimensions

Vibrance

In fact, a city's vibrance implying that "there is a lot going on" and thus the lively character of a city was often mentioned as first aspect describing one's "little luxury" city, e.g.*"it's the **most vibrant city I have ever lived in** […] it provided the **most experiences in one spot**" (#4* Felix: Hong Kong). According to the interviewees, the vibrance making a city become a "little luxury" is supported by *"a great cultural mix"* (#6 Ricarda: Berlin) or the *"**clash of cultures**" (#4* Felix: Hong Kong) implying different types of people one is likely to meet in the city, as well as a great offer of activities, restaurants and shops - *"you have **a lot of different** bars and restaurants"* (#6 Ricarda: Berlin) - that provide choice.

In fact, the vibrant aspect of a city is thus making a city become a luxury to individuals as it provides them with choices. Most informants agreed on the association of choice with freedom, being a luxury to them as summarized in the statement *"anytime you have **choice**, when you have the **freedom** to choose whatever you want **from many different opportunities**, it is luxury"* (#4 Felix: Hong Kong). This further reflects participants' conceptualization of luxury aligned with the theoretically defined "New Luxury" as it is hedonically driven based on one's individual need for freedom in life for instance.

Nature

In the course of the interviews, participants often mentioned nature-related aspects characterizing their "little luxury" cities, which underline the importance they attach to nature in terms of luxury. In fact, *"green spaces"* *(#1 Michael: Vienna)* or the city's *"really nice nature"* *(#4 Felix: Hong Kong)* came up when informants described their "little luxury" cities. Further, when asked about their favourite spot in the city, many mentioned spots in the nature such as the *"Retiro"* park in Madrid *(#5 Vanessa: Madrid)* or the *"Kahlenberg"* [2] in Vienna *(#7 Maria: Vienna)*, which further emphasizes the importance of nature as a characteristic contributing to the luxury perception of a city. Likewise, participants mentioned different nature related activities they enjoy and are able to do in their "little luxury" cities as the following statement implies: *"in summer we would go up there [to the mountain] and spend the day in the nature"* *(#7 Maria: Vienna)*. When informants were asked for their most striking experience in the city, nature was a predominant topic as well, such as the *"awesome"* and heavenly hike in the *"gorgeous nature"* described here:

> *"[…] Once, we did this one hike […] And that beach where we ended up was so isolated […]. And so we were like only six people sitting in sand on that beach. It was heaven. Awesome. […] It was a crazy day, but also so intense and surprising. And the nature was gorgeous […]"* (#4 Felix: Hong Kong).

Finally, the importance of nature to informants was underlined when they were asked about aspects that would make their "non-luxury" city become a little more of a luxury to them. Results revealed that most would take nature-related "things" such as *"some trees and flowers"* *(#6 Ricarda: Berlin)* *"the green areas"* *(#7 Maria: Vienna)* or *"the water and the lake"* *(#2 Anna: Copenhagen)* from their "little luxury" city to improve their non-luxury city.

These findings based on consumer narratives show that nature is an essential aspects contributing to a city's perception as luxury. In fact, this natural dimension of cities is highly valued due to its "escapist" character, as pointed out by one informant *"it gives you the feeling of being away"* as *"it's* like *"holiday"* and "gives you the opportunity of *taking a little break"* *(#7 Maria: Vienna)*. Again, this dimension of a city is valued in terms of luxury based on individual's personal motives, mirroring luxury in a contemporary sense.

Beauty

A city's objective beauty came up several times when participants were asked to describe their "little luxury" city such as *"I would say that it's a very beautiful city, with a lot of beautiful old buildings"* *(#7 Maria: Vienna)*, or as in this statement about Paris:

> *"There are just no areas that are not beautiful […] the first time you come to Paris, you just think 'Oh my Good, everything is so beautiful!' because of all these old beautiful buildings."* (#3 Fabienne: Paris).

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[2] Mountain near Vienna

In fact, beautiful buildings and the related architecture of a city were viewed as a central aspect defining a city's beauty as further highlighted by one participant who explained that her "non-luxury" city would *"a city that [she finds] **ugly in terms of the houses and the architecture**"*.

Hence, the beauty of a city, mainly based on its cityscape, represents a central aspect that according to consumer narratives contribute to the city's perception as luxury. The perception of beauty may be viewed as subjective and thus different from individual, but a common comprehension of beauty in Western societies can be assumed justifying the city's beauty as one of its public aspects. According to statements such as *"when you walk around you see all these **beautiful buildings** and you immediately feel more **happy**"* (#5 Vanessa: Madrid), it can be assumed that the relevance of a city's beauty in terms of luxury is linked to one's pleasure of indulging and discovering something aesthetic, implying inner-directed purposes referring to "New Luxury".

Convenience

A city's convenience represents another dimension contributing to the perception of a city as luxury that emerged from consumer narrative. Here, convenience consists in the ease of getting around in a city as indicated in the statement *"[…] what is really important to me is to **get around easily**"*(#1 Michael: Vienna) for instance. The cities were described as convenient in this sense as they provide short ways enabling to walk everywhere as emphasized is the following:

*"[…] the fact that you can walk everywhere. It's super **convenient**. When you compare it to Berlin for example, where you have such long distances and where you can't walk anywhere almost. Here I walk to my friend's place, to my parents' place and also to my grandmothers'. **Everything is so close by**."* (#7 Maria: Vienna).

Besides the short ways, a city's convenience was described in terms of its good infrastructure as Michael brought up for instance: *"[…] because of **public transports**, which are well organised in Vienna and which makes it very **easy to go wherever you want to** […]"*(#1Michael: Vienna).

Hence, *"it must be **easy to move around**"* (#2 Anna: Copenhagen) in a city so it is perceived as luxury, as this makes the city convenient. The latter implies a certain flexibility and comfort people seem to look for in a city in order to call it their "little luxury". Comfort as luxury also represents a personal aspect in term of "luxury as being" deemed predominant in today's Western societies.

Unique culture and lifestyle

The unique culture the city reflects and the respective lifestyle of the people living in the city represents an additional characteristic valued by participants. In this sense, the people's openness and thus tolerance in the city was often mentioned as contributing to the city as luxury by making it an open-minded space - as exemplary stated here:

> *"It's these **people that are so open and always talking to you**. People are **connecting** with you. That's something super common, usual, **everybody is just talking to you as he would know you for ages**."* (#3 Fabienne: Paris)

Another participant emphasized people's open mentality by directly linking it to the culture, as she described one of her most striking experiences - a night out in her "little luxury" city Madrid:

> *"[…] We didn't expect much of the night but then we met this large group of people and immediately were **kind of in this group**. And then we spent like the whole evening together. […] And I had this place near Plaza Major with the balcony, so we invited them to come up to our place. And suddenly we had this whole group in my living room. **I barely knew them, but we immediately felt comfortable. I think that's just the Spanish mentality**."*

Hence the open-mindedness and tolerance of the people living in the city that is part of the city's culture and lifestyle implies informants' interest in different cultures and represents an important aspect making the city be perceived as luxury.

Further the lifestyle in one's "little luxury" city was repetitively linked to certain relaxation, as one informant pointed out for instance: *"It is all linked to that lifestyle. **Everything is so relaxed**, **no pressure on you!**"* (#3 Fabienne: Paris). Hence, the valuable meanings informants attach to this relaxed atmosphere in a city make them perceive it as a luxury. One may interpret that the relaxed lifestyle that can be found in the given city provides a certain harmony in one's otherwise busy life.

Besides, culinary aspects related to a city's distinctive culture and lifestyle emerged as relevant characteristics that make the city a luxury to consumers. In fact, when participants were asked about what they appreciate the most about their "little luxury" cities, many mentioned the food (e.g.*"and the **Viennese food** for sure!"* - #7 Maria: Vienna). Further they focussed on city-typical food and restaurants when they were to describe a perfect day in their little luxury city, as reflected in the following statement:

> *"[…] first of all we would go to the next Bakery and get a **Croissant**, then we would go to the Marché des Enfants Rouges, eat some **Couscous**. I would order **my four favourite dishes** […]"* (#3 Fabienne: Paris).

Consequently, the meaning attached to the culture-typical food provided in a given city supports the city's perception as a luxury and further implies individuals' strong cultural and culinary interests.

Hence, the different aspects informants mentioned related to a city's culture and lifestyle imply their own interest in different cultures, their potential search for harmony in life and pleasure in indulging. Informants' designated cities enable them to fulfil these needs by offering things to explore and to live an *"**easy going lifestyle**"* (#1 Michael: Vienna), while sometimes *"**letting loose**"* (#5 Vanessa: Madrid) which contributes to the city's perception as luxury. The underlying wish of broadening one's horizon by getting in touch with different cultures, of finding harmony in life and of indulgence are again rather inner-directed purposes linked to luxury, in the sense of "New Luxury".

Authenticity

According to consumer narratives, a city's authenticity was also viewed as one dimension making the city become a little luxury. In fact, informants highlighted several typical country or city aspects, especially related to the people, when they were asked to describe their "little luxury" city as exemplary mirrored in the following:

> *"Actually it's funny because **Parisians are different from other French people**. They are really strongly in their groups. […] **But that's what defines Paris** somehow. Especially the people - they just are how they are. Somehow arrogant and stressful, but **that's also what you somehow appreciate** (#3 Fabienne: Paris).*

In the same vein, another participant explained that she would miss the *"typical Viennese"* and thus authentic people being *"part of the city"* she cited as her "little luxury" by stating:

> *"In Vienna…well **people are not always friendly**. Sometimes they seem **a bit angry and would sometimes talk to you in a rude way**. But that's exactly what I would miss. I know it sounds strange, but **it's somehow part of the city. It's typical Viennese**."* (#7 Maria:Vienna).

These are exemplary statements reflecting the authenticity of the participants' "little luxury" cities, that all attached particular meaning to and that thus justifies their perception of luxury character of these cities. This implies people's underlying interest in discovering authentic local cultures (instead of getting the same experience no matter where they are) as well as their search for the "real". Hence, if the city can offer them a "real" experience, it is likely to be perceived as luxury. As elaborated previously, authenticity is one of the central aspects in regards of the conceptualization of "New luxury" (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014).

Besides the above-mentioned public dimensions of a city that informants seem to attach particular meaning to as they offer choice, enable them somehow to escape (nature), to reach pleasure by discovering and indulging something aesthetic (beauty), present comfort (convenience) and city-typical cultural and lifestyle aspects that can be explored and indulged (unique culture and lifestyle), while offering a "real" experience (authenticity), similar private dimensions having valuable meaning for informants emerged.

4.1.2   Private dimensions

Home

One of the predominant private dimensions participants brought up when asked to describe their "little luxury" city was the "feeling of home", as exemplary stated in the following:

> *"[…] And it is also my luxury town because I have this **"homy"** feeling"[…] and Berlin is somehow my second **Hometown,** also because my sister lives there. So I have this feeling of **being a part** of this city and having **my own place** in the city […]* (#6 Ricarda: Berlin).

Likewise, the "feeling of home" surfaced when informants described the opposite case, their non-luxury city, as it was described as a place where it was *"difficult to really adapt and **feel home**"* (#1 Michael: Vienna) or as a place that, *"didn't really give [me] this **'at home feeling'**"* (#5 Vanessa: Madrid) for instance, which brings up the importance of a "feeling of home" for a city to be perceived as luxury. By using the term *"**coming back**"* (e.g. *"It was kind of a **'coming back'**"* - #5 Vanessa: Madrid) related to their "little luxury" city, implying the idea of "homecoming", informants supported the "feeling of home" attached to the cities. This was further emphasized, as most informants interpreted the image "House" (app.1) as **"home"** (e.g. *"It reminds me **of home sweet home**, a place*

where you feel welcomed […]" – #1 Michael: Vienna) and associated it to their "little luxury" city by putting it close to the city name on their collage (app.2).

Hence, the cities are perceived as luxury as they provide a "feeling of home" highly valued by informants. In fact, this feeling was often tightly connected often related to their families, as one stated: *"The most important aspect is really my **family** […]. **They make me feel home here**"* (#7 Maria: Vienna) or which is further reflected in the *"**family feelings**"* another informant referred to (#6 Ricarda: Berlin). Following this, a "feeling of home", sometimes linked to one's family, that a city can provide is an important aspect that people value in terms of luxury to them. In fact, this feeling of home may be linked to a certain feeling of comfort and security for instance. The perception of a "feeling of home" as luxury also implies the perception of luxury in the sense of "my luxury" i.e. "New Luxury".

Personal relationships

Similar to the linkage to their families, participants consider a city their little luxury based on the association with friends and/or other important people in their lives. In fact, consumer narratives reveal that the presence of the right people i.e. one's friends in a specific city contributes significantly to the city's perception as luxury, as one stated: *"This is probably why Vienna as a city is such a luxury to me… **because of the people** I would say."* (#1 Michael: Vienna). This implies the friendships people associate with their "little luxury" city, as highlighted by another informants describing a close friendship that had began in her "little luxury" city: *"I met this **one very good friend of mine** there and we are really **very close now**"* (#5 Vanessa: Madrid). Likewise, the importance of one's partnerships related to the city was often mentioned as an aspect making the city a luxury to informants (e.g. *"also the fact that I was there with my **boyfriend**, made the time there so precious."* - #3 Fabienne: Paris). Further, stating that the right people are an essential factor missing in their "non-luxury" city further revealed people and relationships as aspects forging the luxury character of a city from the informants' perspective. Accordingly one for instance described her "non-luxury" city as a place *"where I don't have or **where I can't find nice people**. So people I want to spend time with after work. To relax, to have some nice conversations, to go for a coffee..."* (#6 Ricarda: Berlin). Finally people are reflected as an essential aspect in terms of luxury related to a city in the collages informants made (app.2). In fact, the image "Friends" was enthusiastically commented and seven out of seven placed it very close to the city name on their collage (app.2).

Hence, personal relationships to people in a city represent an essential contributor in making the city being perceived as luxury to consumers. Cities with the right people are likely to enable individuals to indulge in quality time and live a social life, which makes the city become a luxury to them and which again reflects a perception of luxury in a hedonic sense as "luxury for oneself".

Specialness

Participants mentioned a certain feeling of "specialness" they attach to their "little luxury" city. This "specialness" is mainly due to the fact that people associate the city with things they usually do not do or do not have the time to do, implying a certain rarity. This is exemplified by one informant stating that in her "little luxury" city "*[she] can explore things that [she] **normally [doesn't] have time for**. Like the **rare things** […]*"(#5 Vanessa: Madrid) for instance. Further another interviewee described Berlin as her "little luxury" city because she cannot be there all the time ("*[…] it's special because **I can't be there all the time**"- #6 Ricarda: Berlin). Hence, informants call a city a "little luxury" based on the rare and special moments they associate with it. These moments may imply quality time that people are enabled to spend in their "little luxury" cities. Thus, by providing people with the opportunity of spending time in an unusual special way and thus to live rare moments implying diversion from daily life, a city is likely to be perceived as luxury - again in the sense of "New Luxury".

Nostalgia

Nostalgia is based on memories that a person associates with something and that he/she returns to in his/her thoughts. In fact, consumer narratives revealed many memorable experiences informants came up with and passionately described, especially when they were to describe one of their favourite spots in the city or a particularly memorable experience they associate with their "little luxury" city, as shown in the following statement of one informant reminiscing about her school time:

> "*[…] and my other favourite place is probably Kahlenberg, because I associate it with many goods **memories** as well. You have a wonderful view there. And every time I went there was just so much fun. **We went there a lot when I used to be in school**.*" (#7 Maria: Vienna).

Further, one participant explained that "*it's always **very nice to reminiscence of all things you have done and the people you have done special things with**" and that this applies to his "little luxury" city ("*[…] and that's the case for me with Hong Kong […]") (#4 Felix: Hong Kong), which highlights the importance of nostalgia related to a city in terms of luxury.

Finally, memories as an essential aspect reflecting a city in terms of luxury were also brought up in the second part of the interview when participants described the image "Old Pictures" (app.1) they were then asked to use for their collage. In fact, all participants immediately linked this image to memories (e.g. "*[…] There are **memories** behind. So it's very valuable. You have **pictures that remind you of something**, of a special situation.*" - #6 Ricarda: Berlin and placed it very close to the city's name on the collage, which implies that they are important in making the city become a luxury.

Hence, through the memories of experiences people attach to a city, the latter becomes a luxury to them, as nostalgia is induced. In consequence, cities become a means of storing memories and feelings evoking one's sense of past (Belk, 1988). This further reflects luxury in a contemporary sense,

supported by the luxurious nature of memories in a more general sense for instance highlighted in consumer narratives:

> "***the beauty is in your memories, not in your things…*** *Our lives are moving towards this idea. And for that,* ***memories are very important****. I mean I can buy something,* ***but I can't buy memories… the capture of special moments in my life.****"* (#4 Felix: Hong Kong).

Truly, this quote explicitly foregrounds the new conceptualization of luxury implying that luxury is not only about dreams anymore, but also about memories (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014).

Transformative challenges

A final identified aspect of a city's private dimension that informants valued in terms of luxury are "transformative challenges" they were confronted to in their "little luxury" city. These challenges and their transformative power that is released by overcoming them contribute to making the designated cities a luxury to consumers. Here, different types of challenges were mentioned, such as related to cultural differences, people or one's professional life. Overcoming these contributed to the informants' personal development, justifying their high value to them. This is exemplified by one informant who described the time spent in his "little luxury" city as an experience that made him develop by making him become *"tougher and stronger"*. He highlights the transformative aspect derived from the challenge of leaving his comfort zone:

> *"[…] I think in Hong Kong the experience was a bit more extreme because of the* ***huge cultural difference****. But anyways* ***it was a really meaningful time for me there in the sense that I really developed a lot*** *I would say*. (#4 Felix: Hong Kong)

Similarly, another informant brought up that she was able to strengthen aspects of her personality as she was challenged to adapt to many different types of people in her "little luxury" city (#3 Fabienne: Paris). Likewise, the challenging and responsible job position one participant had in her "little luxury" city helped her *"growing"* and becoming more *"self-confident"* (#6 Ricarda: Berlin), which made the city particularly meaningful to her.

The importance of challenges in life to develop and broaden his/her horizon was also exemplified in participants' collages, as the image "Man on mountain" (app.1) was for instance often associated to the accomplishments of goals implying certain challenges. In most cases, this image was then placed close to the city's name on the collage reflecting the importance of achievements contributing to a city's perception of luxury.

Theses results show that a city presenting challenges to individuals is likely to be perceived as luxury. This is due to the transformative power of these challenges released when individuals manage to overcome them, which contributes to individuals' personal development that may be linked to self-fulfilment. Hence, perceiving personal development as luxury implies the ideas of "New Luxury" as it refers to self-fulfilment as ultimate goal in life (Eckhardt et al., 2015) as well as the need for meaningfulness in life (Wittig et al., 2014).

Overall, participants reveal to attach particular meanings to different aspects of a city's public as well private dimension, which make them perceive the city as luxury. Referring to the initial definition of meaning, the city related aspects described by participants correspond to specific stimuli they value in terms of luxury. Hence the cited multidimensional cities carry various meanings that informants perceived as luxury. Based on theoretical foundations, it is worth noting that the meaning residing in aspects of a city's public dimension are likely to originate from the culturally constituted world and transferred to the object (i.e. city) by advertising and fashion systems, whereas meaning carried in aspects of a city's private dimension are rather conceived by individuals as co-creators of meaning based on their in individual experiences and memories (2.1.). However, most value is given to city aspects based on their underlying hedonic purposes and desires to find pleasure through experiencing the city's culture and lifestyle for instance and self-fulfilment by e.g. spending quality time with friends in their "little luxury" city, or by accomplishing a presented challenge, which mirrors current conceptualizations of luxury ("New Luxury").

According to McCracken's (1986) model of meaning transfer, these meanings residing in cities being defined as non-owned objects is transferred to the individuals by the means of different rituals and incorporations processes (2.1). Analogous processes defined as *"city rituals"* have emerged from consumer narratives. These explain how individuals take on the meaning residing in the cities that are thus likely to become one's non-owned possession.

4.2 City rituals

Based on the previous elaboration, different aspects of a city's public as well as private dimension are meaningful to consumers in terms of luxury. Based on theoretical conceptualizations, by taking on these luxury meanings attached to a city, the latter is likely to become one's luxury possession, specifically one's non-owned luxury possessions because as defined previously, a city cannot become one's owned property in a legal sense. Thereby the city is becoming part of one's extended self. Drawing upon McCracken's (1986) model of movement of meaning (2.2.) defining different rituals of meaning transfer from an object to consumers, different "city rituals" have been identified based on consumer narratives. Further identified processes of meaning appropriation aligned with those proposed in theory (2.1), complement these "city rituals".

4.2.1 Rituals

Spending time and reminiscing

By spending time in their little luxury city informants invest psychic energy as their assign their efforts, time and attention to the city (Belk, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly; Rochberg-Halton, 1981). In fact, all participants cited a city they have lived in or currently live in as their little luxury (e.g. *"I stayed there **for more than six months**"* - #6 Ricarda: Berlin). This implies that participants have spent a significant amount of time in their little luxury city and have thus invested psychic energy in it.

Moreover, some informants annotated that they are *"planning their **return**"* (#4 Felix: Hong Kong) to their little luxury or *"plan **to go there at least once a year**"* (#5 Vanessa: Madrid). Hence, informants are planning to spend time in future in their little luxury cities. The process of planning implies that they are thinking and reflecting about the cities, which is similar to spending time as a way of meaning appropriation, as individuals are thus spending time related to the city in their minds (Belk, 1988). In fact, many participants declared that their "little luxury" city plays an important role in their lives because they are often spending thoughts about it, as exemplified by one informant stating *"Actually I'm **thinking** about the city quite often"* (#6 Ricarda: Berlin). Likewise, the fact of talking about one's "little luxury" was identified as a way of meaning transfer, based on statements such as:

> *"[…] we are also still **talking** a lot about our time there; like 'oh you remember this and this in Paris'? 'It was so nice!' 'How nice would it be to be there now - eating this, doing this […]'"* (#3 Fabienne: Paris)

This quote illustrates that through talking about a city, memories are surfaced, implying reminiscence. In fact, reminiscing can be viewed as a particular way of thinking about a city implying mental proximity surfacing hidden meanings of cities and that people attach their sense of past to the city thus becoming their non-owned possession. Hence, cities further become memory-evoking possessions as people link them to memorable past experiences (Belk, 1988).

Overall spending time, thinking and talking about one's little luxury city represent identified rituals following the possession rituals defined by McCracken (1986) by which the meaning of the city is transferred to consumers. Thereby the cities informants cited as their "little luxury" become their non-owned luxury possession and hence part of their extended self, also because the psychological connection between them and the city is deemed empowered through the presented rituals.

Adapting

By „cleaning, discussing, comparing, reflecting, showing off and photographing" objects, meanings residing in that object are surface and its possession is claimed, which refer to the possession ritual introduced by McCracken (1986, p.79). This implies the use of the object that foregrounds its evident meanings (McCracken, 1986). In fact, meanings are likely to be taken on by one's personal use of an object (Sartre, 1943). In the present context, using aspects of the city personally can thus be a way to appropriate a city as a non-owned possession. Consumer narratives revealed that participants have integrated some aspects of their "little luxury" cities in their daily life, referring to the "usage" of these aspects, or adapted to the lifestyle their "little luxury" city reflects. Specifically, the adoption of a city's relaxed lifestyle in one's daily life has emerged in consumer narratives (e.g. *"I felt really relaxed and well there, so I thought **I should try to implement that in my daily life**"* - #5 Vanessa: Madrid). Further, informants brought up the adaptation to their "little luxury" city through their style and range of interests, which is exemplified by the following statement:

> *"Since Paris**, I have a more easy-going lifestyle**… with **more going out**, meeting friends for and drink etc. **and the way I like to dress changed** […] **and I'm looking at things in a***

*different way sometimes. We used to go to many museums and art exhibitions in Paris for example and **that's something I'm more interested in now and that I'm doing more often now,** after my time in Paris* (#3Fabienne: Paris).

Hence, by including some meaningful aspects of a city to one's daily life, the meanings residing in that city are transferred to the individual and the appropriation of these meanings is encouraged and thus the possession asserted. Further, the integration of certain city related aspects into one's life could in a broader sense be viewed as a grooming process, as certain relevant aspects are groomed while one is not physically in the city in order to avoid the memories about the city to fade (McCracken, 1988).

Grooming

Grooming rituals represent another way of meaning transfer from an object to the individual proposed by McCracken (1986). Consumer narratives revealed that people are trying to maintain the relationships with important people they associate with their "little luxury" city. In this case it is not the individual who grooms himself, nor the city that is groomed, but one of the aspects that based to consumer narratives make cities become a luxury: personal relationships. In fact, participants emphasized the importance of people and that they try to keep in touch with people they have met in their little luxury cities by visiting them on a regular basis and organizing reunions for instance, as it is exemplified in the following:

> *"[…] I mean I met this one friend of mine there and we are really very close now […] and actually **we are planning a little reunion with her and all these Madrid people** this year. It was like our plan to actually do it once a year, but well then again it's the daily life that gets in the way, but **I will definitely go back to Madrid to visit some people** and the city etc."* (#5 Vanessa: Madrid).

By grooming one's relationship to important people that count among the meaningful aspects making the city become a luxury, the transfer of these luxury meanings carried by the city to the individual is supported. This grooming ritual further implies a certain control over the city, referring to one of the processes enabling self-extension proposed by Belk (1988). In fact, the individual is in control of one of the central aspects – personal relationships in this case - and its meaning forging the city's luxury perception. Hence, through grooming rituals and underlying control, a city is likely to become part of one's extended self

Claiming

The previous processes enable the transfer of meanings residing in cities to consumers, which makes the city become a possession. Based on consumer narratives, this idea has been supported by informants who explicitly their possession of the city or of parts of the city through the use of possessive pronouns. This goes in line with Belk's theory that when an individual claims that something is "his/hers", he/she also believes that the object is "him/her" (Belk, 1988). This is reflected in consumer narratives, as one informant affirmed for instance: *"oh I'm **back in my city**"* (#3

Fabienne: Paris) when she was asked to describe the last time she went to her "little luxury" city. Others claimed their possession of specific places in the city, such as by stating:

> *"What we do a lot is like really celebrating these coffee houses, like they became part of **'our spots'.**"* (#1 Michael: Vienna)

Hence, by declaring the city or aspects of the city as his/hers, based one the city's underlying meanings, one implied the city to be his/her non-owned luxury possession.

4.2.2 Meaning incorporation

Mastering

Another way of taking on the meaning residing in an object to extend one's self, suggested by Sartre (1943), is by mastering it. This applies to the present case as many participants mentioned challenges they were confronted to, which they mastered to overcome. Precisely, informants mentioned challenges related to their professional life (e.g. *"I had a very **responsible and demanding position**"* - #6: Ricarda: Berlin), related to the *"**difficult time**"* being *"**out of [their] comfort zone**"* (#4 Felix: Hong Kong) due to significant cultural differences for instance, or related to dealing with all *"**different types of people**"* (#3 Fabienne: Paris). The act of overcoming the challenges implying special meanings to the participants, provide an explanation of how the cities become possessions integrated in one's extended self, notably because they lead to one's self-development implying the approach of one's future desired self.

Knowing

According to Sartre (1943), "knowing" represents another way of meaning appropriation enabling an object to become part of one's extended self. In the present research this is reflected in consumer narratives, as participants mentioned the positive aspect of knowing the city they call their "little luxury". In fact, *"**the way you know your city**"*(#1 Michael: Vienna) emerged several times as an aspect that informants associate particular meanings in terms of luxury to, notably because it helps avoiding to pay *"too much attention and wasting too much thoughts"* (#1 Michael: Vienna). Further, the knowledge of the language spoken in a city and of other cultural aspects came up as a valuable aspect in consumer narratives, as this informant pointed out:

> *[…]because **I know the culture**, **I know the people**, **I know what it means to live in Paris**. **You know what the apartments are like, what kind of food they eat. You know if your talking to other French people, you know this "oh yes that's so French", you know the French daily life, the supermarkets et**c. (#3 Fabienne: Paris)*

Hence, by "knowing" the connection between an individual and a city is encouraged, which in turn supports the city in becoming a non-owned possession.

Noteworthy, that informants mentioned the fact of knowing the city as contributing to the city's luxury perception reflects the ideas of connoisseurship and of "being in the know", which is a predominant aspect within the current conceptualization of luxury (2.2).

Contamination through proximity and habituation

A final way of meaning appropriation in order to integrate these into one's self is the contamination by proximity or habituation (Belk, 1988). Hence the meaning of cities or certain aspects of the city is attached to people by their physical contact to the city implying proximity or habituation. In the present case, participants who cited the cities they currently live in as their little luxury implied proximity as a means of taking on the meanings residing in the city (e.g. *"Vienna. Because **I have grown up and live here** and my family lives here…I have all my family here and my friends." - #9 Maria: Vienna*). This shows that being physically close to aspects of a city that one particularly cherishes is likely to strengthen the feeling of possession enabling self-extension. The proximity may also be linked to a more abstract for form of mental proximity, supported by often thinking about the city (reminiscing) and maintaining the relationships to the people (grooming) in the city for instance. Further, by being repeatedly confronted to a city or having specific habits related to the city, the possession-self link can be encouraged. Accordingly, informants brought up city related "habits" such as visiting the same places or going to the same favourite restaurants or shops when being in the city, as illustrated by the follows:

> *"[…] **That's actually what we always do** or always did when we're there together. **We go to these small shops, also some small beauty shops that are there and which I can't find in Munich**. […]"* (#6 Ricarda: Berlin)

This implies a repetitive activity and thus a habit linked to one's "luxury" city, which leads to contamination as consumers thus take on the meaning residing in different aspects of the city (her the variety in terms if restaurants and shops). Consequently, physical as well as mental proximity and habituation to certain aspects of a city, support the transfer of meaning residing in the city onto individuals thus making the city become a possession that is integrated in one's extended self.

Part conclusion IV

These processes describe how individuals appropriate the meaning residing in their "little luxury" city based on aspects of the city's public and private dimension. As previously discussed the meaning carried by cities originates from the culturally common understandings (public dimension) as well as from individuals' experiences and memories (private dimension) implying individual's role as co-creators of meaning (McCracken, 1986). Drawing upon theoretical groundings of meaning transfer (ibid.), different processes of meaning appropriation emerged from consumer narratives. The identified *"city rituals"* reflect the rituals proposed by McCracken (1986) as well as the processes of self-extension first brought up by Sartre (1943) (in Belk, 1988). Although not foregrounded by informants, the exchange ritual proposed by McCracken (1986) could further be assumed to enable

meaning transfer from a city to an individual (e.g. by giving a trip to a city to someone as a present, the meaning the giver associates to the city may be transferred onto the receiver who in turn takes on these meanings through the memorable time spent in the city for instance) (Belk, 1988; Llamas & Thomsen, 2015). Here, the individual is again taking the role of co-creator of meaning.

Through these procedures individuals take on the meanings attached to their "little luxury" cities and integrate these into their extended selves. Hence, the city becomes an individual's non-owned possession as they engage in a psychological connection with the city (Belk, 1988; Ferraro et al., 2010). As elaborated subsequently and referring to theoretical conceptualizations of the self (2.1), the meanings residing in cities and appropriated by informants and thus becoming part of their extended selves actually permit the construction of multiple selves. As it will be shown, these multiple identities are believed to interact and are thus combined within one overarching self: the balanced self, referring to the third identified global theme.

4.3   The balanced self

As elaborated previously, the meanings carried by multidimensional cities is appropriated by individuals through different processes. According to McCracken (1986), individuals use these meanings to extend their selves through the reflection of multiple identities. Thus, the object carrying these meanings becomes a (non-owned) possession (2.1). Hence, a city becomes one's non-owned possession through the appropriation of meanings linked to luxury residing in the city that supports the construction of one's multiple selves. In this sense, different types of selves have been derived from consumer narratives, implying the definition of the self as a multidimensional concept. The depicted multiple identities in this study are viewed as coexisting constructs combined in one overarching (extended) self that individuals are likely to express through the meanings carried by their "little luxury" cities: "the balanced self" (i.e. the third identified global theme). Here, the expression of a combination of different selves allows individuals to reach different balances in life, as their different selves are surfaced in different types of situations. As presented in the following, the identified overarching *"balanced self"* is fed by the meanings residing in multidimensional cities, allowing the expression of different underlying identities that enabling reaching different balances in life.
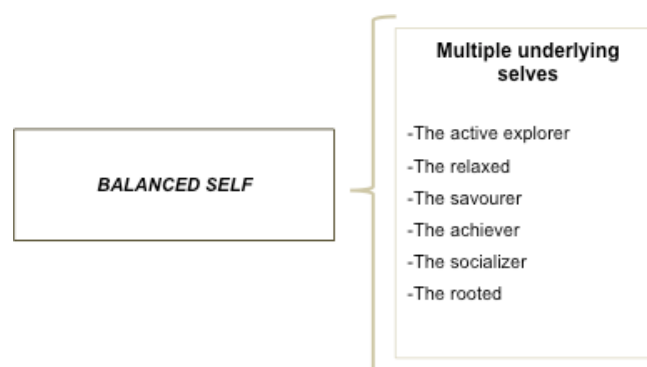
Figure 10: Own illustration based on empirical findings

4.3.1 Multiple selves

The active explorer

A first identity that has emerged from consumer narratives is the individual as "active explorer" that is believed to wish to discover and try out new things in order to broaden his/her horizon. Truly, most participants have explicitly brought up the importance of exploration related to a city. Exemplary one participant declared, *"a city needs things that I can discover"*(#6 Ricarda: Berlin) - similar to another claiming that she wants to *"use what the city has to offer and want[s] to explore it."*(#2 Anna: Copenhagen). Different aspects offered by the described multidimensional cities that informants attach particular meanings in terms of luxury to satisfy this desire to explore. In fact, by taking on the meanings attached to certain aspects part of a city's public dimension, individuals are believed to express their selves as "active explorer". Hence, the city's vibrance brought up as a meaningful aspect in terms of luxury fuels one's "active explorer" self as it provides a range of choices, in terms of different cultures or spots in the city such as restaurants and shops for instance, that people can explore. Moreover informants brought up the beauty of a city as an aspect making the city become a luxury, which implies that they find pleasure in discovering beautiful things. Hence, the meaning attached to a city's beauty supports one's "active explorer" identity. Likewise, the meaning attached to a city's unique culture and lifestyle contributes to the construction of one's "active explorer" identity, as it refers to new ways of life related to a foreign culture or culture typical culinary experiences that stimulate individuals' explorer instinct. Further, by reflecting authenticity - another aspect explaining a city's perception as luxury - a city enables getting a "real" experience, supporting one's "active explorer" self seeking for authentic experiences (e.g. *"I lived at a very cool spot, which was **very local**, […] **no one really spoke English** around my place, which was nice […]" - #4 Felix: Hong Kong*). Finally the latter may be supported by the described convenience contributing to a city's perception as luxury since it implies short ways and a good infrastructure making it easy to move around, which in turn is likely practically facilitate the exploration of the city. The mentioned short ways were often linked to the comfort of being able to *"walk everywhere"* (#7 Maria: Vienna), which implies the one's "active explorer" self through his/her underlying affinity of moving (walking) and of being active.

Hence, the fact that people are exposed to new things in their "little luxury" cities that they discover in order to broaden their horizon, supports the expression of their selves as "active explorer".

The relaxed

Besides one's "active explorer" self, one's "relaxed" identity aspects were foregrounded in consumer narratives. Here being "relaxed" implies being calm and relieved from any stress, worry or anxiety. Noteworthy, one participant explicitly expressed part of her "relaxed self" by stating that in her "little luxury" city she can really enjoy the city and *"leave all the worries behind"* (#5 Vanessa: Madrid).

In the course of this research, various aspects of cities were mentioned that enable one to "relax". As described earlier the nature in a city was often related to "relaxed" situations and places in which one could take a break from his/her daily life (e.g. "[…] *the parks give you the opportunity of **taking a little break, a time-out** in nature*" - #7 Maria: Vienna), which implies the "escapist" meaning associated to a city's nature making it become a luxury. Further, a city's unique culture and lifestyle mentioned as a valuable aspect in terms of a city's luxury, was often associated to relaxation implying one's underlying wish of finding harmony in life. Thereby, the construction of one's "relaxed" self is supported. Moreover, informants emphasized a city's convenience is terms of short ways as valuable aspect as it enables the to walk or bike everywhere. The preference for walking or biking somewhere instead of choosing another faster means of transportation and the time one takes for doing so further surfaces his/her desire to relax. In fact, it implies the idea of certain slowness and to "ease up".

Following this, through the meaning attached to rather public aspects of a city such as its nature, cultural conditioned lifestyle as well as convenience, the construction of one's "relaxed" self is supported.

The savourer

The "savourer" side of individuals has emerged as a second type of self that may be expressed by the presented meanings residing in participants' "little luxury" cities. Here, the "savourer" is defined as a person taking pleasure in something. Different aspects from both a city's described public and private dimension that informants personally value in terms of luxury are believed to bolster one's "savourer" identity. In regards to a city's private dimension, the appropriated meaning attached to a city's beauty is believed to empower one's self as "savourer". In fact, the beauty informants' related to "little luxury" cities provides the "something" people can take pleasure in that potentially leads to happiness. In the same vein, it can be deduced from consumer narratives, that the culinary choice a city offers that emerged as a culturally aspect forging a city's perception as luxury, represents something individuals take pleasure from. In fact, the importance they assign to a city's great choice of restaurants and traditional food in terms of luxury implies culinary indulgence per se as well as the pleasure related in the respective lifestyle or as one participant put it:

> "*You would go out from work and go to a café, have a drink, smoke a cigarette… It's **especially this type of life that I really appreciate**"* (#3 Fabienne: Paris).

Likewise, informants highlighted rare and special moments they associate with their "little luxury" cities implying personal quality time that they defined as time spent by doing things that they usually do not have the time for. Hence, these rare times become subject of pleasure for informants and thus reflect situations in which individuals' "savourer" selves are expressed.

Consequently, the meaning of aspects such as beauty, culinary offer and the quality time informants related to their "little luxury" cities contributes to the construction of their self as "savourer".

The achiever

Consumer narratives further yielded the individual as "achiever" that implies a person striving to succeed by accomplishing a difficult purpose. As previous findings revealed, participants brought up certain challenges they managed to master and that thus contributed to the development of their selves as one private aspect making them perceive a city as luxury. This underlines their ambition and their willingness to achieve in life, implying self-fulfilment as an ultimate outcome. Based on the presented ways of appropriating meaning, individuals thus incorporated the meaning of these transformative challenges to their selves, specifically to their "achiever" selves. Hence through overcoming certain challenges one is exposed in a given city, the construction of one's "achiever" self is supported. This finding mirrors the importance of possessions – cities as non-owned possessions in the present case – for human development (Belk, 1988). Accordingly, the challenges presented by a city may further support individuals in approaching their desired future selves (ibid.).

The Socializer

The social side of participants' identities has further emerged from consumer narratives generated in the course of this study. Here, the "socializer" is defined as someone who likes taking part in social activities. The general statement *"I would **always prefer to be with other people**"*(#3 Fabienne: Paris) of one participant or the explanation of another that a luxury city to her is a city with places where *"**people can meet and socialize**"* (#6 Ricarda: Berlin) reflect informants' social affinity. As previously elaborated, participants ascribe particular meanings to a city's unique culture and lifestyle that was often linked to people's open-mindedness and tolerance as well as to personal relationships such as friend- and partnerships associated to the city that they hence perceive as luxury.

These respectively public and private aspects of informants' "little luxury" city enable them to live a social life including *"**going to a café, having a drink** […]"*(#3 Fabienne: Paris) with friends, *"**celebrating these coffee houses**"* (#1 Michael: Vienna) or just *"**hanging out**"* (#5 Vanessa: Madrid) as informants exemplified for instance, implying the reflection of their self as "socializer". Hence the meanings attached to certain aspects of a city making the city one's non-owned possession contribute to forging one's "socializer" self.

The rooted

Finally, "the rooted" self has been derived from consumer narratives. A "rooted" individual refers to someone strongly attached to his/her personal roots i.e. to where he/she comes from - his/her origins and thus to his/her family in a broader sense. This attachment is assumed to imply one's underlying need for comfort and security, reflected in one informant's comment*"[…] **family is more secure and stays forever**"* (#6 Ricarda: Berlin). In fact, empirical findings revealed that one aspect making cities become a "little luxury" to participants is the "feeling of home" it provides. This *"**homy**"* feeling (#6 Ricarda: Berlin) as one informant called it was often linked to one's family. Hence the meaning of this "feeling of home" as well of one's family members associated to a city supports the formation of one's

"rooted" self. The latter is further encouraged by the nostalgia about one's early days exemplified by one informant citing her *"time in school"* as most memorable experience in her little luxury city (#7 Maria: Vienna) or particular moments spent with one's family (e.g. *"special sister time"* - #6 Ricarda: Berlin) that informants attributed to their "little luxury". Hence several aspects of a city's private dimension enable the reflection of one's "rooted self" implying the fulfilment of one's underlying need for security and comfort.

Part conclusion V

Overall, through the appropriation of multiple meanings in terms of luxury residing in diverse aspects of a city's public as well as private dimensions, individuals are supported in the construction of their multiple selves. Hence the city represents a non-owned possession to individuals. Based on consumer narratives, the "active explorer", the "relaxed", the "savourer", the "achiever", the "socializer" and the "rooted" have been identified as multiple selves informants reflect through the valuable meaning residing in the "little luxury" city they possess. Even though these identities i.e. selves seem conflicting due to their different underlying motivations, they must not be considered independently, but rather as interrelated and coexisting constructs. In fact, one person incorporates different selves that are coexisting by surfacing in different life situations. In this sense, one individual may express his/her "active explorer", "relaxed" and "achiever" self for instance in different city-related situations. Due to the city's contributions in forming one's contrasting but coexisting identities, he/she is thus able to find different balances in life.

4.3.2. Life balances

Based on consumer narratives, the interacting underlying multiple identities, forged by the meaning appropriated from cities, come into play in one's different life situations. Hence, the reflection of these multiple selves implies different life-balances one may intend to reach. The most recurrent balances emerged from consumer narratives and that individuals are thus believed to find in their "little luxury" cities are presented in the following.
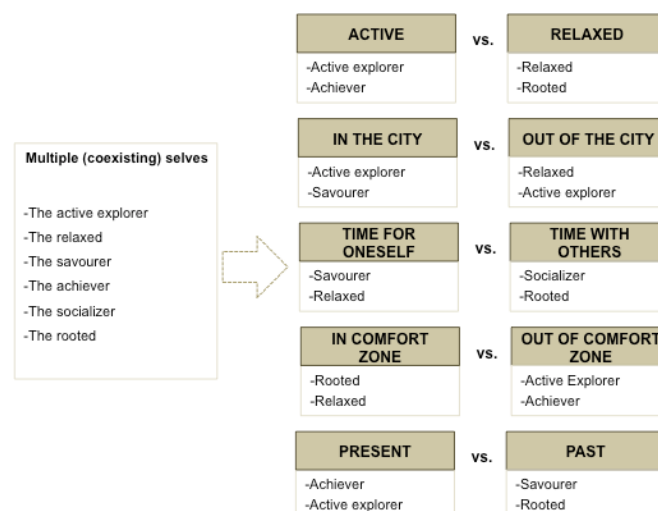

Fig. 11: Multiple selves contributing to life balances (own illustration based on empirical findings)

Being active vs. being relaxed

The first life-balance deduced from consumer narratives and according findings is the one of "being active vs. being slow". One the one hand, the expression of one's "active explorer" self derived from the meanings attached to the possibilities of exploration a city offers in terms of a new culture, lifestyle or its beautiful architecture for instance contributes to one's desire of being active, as the exploration implies certain mental and physical engagement. Likewise, the "achiever" self nourished by meanings extracted from a city refers to mental or physical activity as he/she is actively striving to succeed by accomplishing a challenge. On the other hand, one's defined "relaxed" self implies the pleasure found in being calm and free from any worried and the "rooted" self is believed to value the slowness and easy going lifestyle a city provides. Through the coexistence of these selves emerged from the meanings attached to a city, the balance between "being active" and "being relaxed" can thus be reached.

Being in the city vs. being out of the city

Following the same idea, the coexistence of derived multiple selves originating from meanings ascribed to cities, leads to a balance between "being in the city" and "being out of the", which may be interpreted as a balance between the city- and nature life. In fact, several informants stressed that their designated city is a luxury to them because it enables finding the balance between the vibrant city with *"a lot is going on"*(#5: Madrid) and the nature part having the previously defined "escapist" character. Accordingly, one's "savourer" self defined by one's interest in indulging in a city's beauty based on its architecture and buildings as well as one's "active explorer" self keen on discovering new things such as the authentic culture and lifestyle associated with a city for instance, are expressed while "being in the city". Noteworthy, the "active explorer" self may also be linked to the exploration of the nature "out of the city". This emphasizes the multidimensional aspect of one's self as one same identity is likely to be expressed in different contrasting situations. When "being out of the city", one's "relaxed" self seeking pleasure in calm moments is likely to surface, because, based on consumer narratives, the nature spots in a city provide the opportunity to "escape" from the busy city life in order to take a *"time out"* (#7 Maria: Vienna) and to feel like "being out".

Time for oneself vs. time with others

Another balance in life people are enabled to reach through the expression of their coexisting selves is the one between "having time for oneself" and "spending time with others". As the "savourer" self is fuelled by the meanings extracted from personal quality time associated to a city, one may assume that this part of one's identity is reflected in moments dedicated to his/herself implying certain self-treatment - referring to the *"I treat myself* with something thing" (#2 Anna: Copenhagen), as described by one informant. In the same vein, the "relaxed" self is likely to be expressed in moments of "time for oneself" as it is forged by the meanings attached to the fact of having the opportunity of

spending some personal quality in a city's nature spots for instance. On the other hand, "time with others" implies the reflection of one's social identity aspects i.e. the "socializer." In fact, consumer narratives revealed that living a social live is of particular meaning for informants, which implies social time spent with friends for instance.

Referring to the findings, informants attached particular value to the time spent with friends in a city, and thus "time with others", that in turn supported the formation of their "socializer" selves. Likewise, informants attributed particular meaning to family time that they linked to the "feeling of home" provided by their "little luxury" city, which further implies "time with other". Hence the exemplary coexistence of the expression of one's "savourer" and "relaxed" self on the one hand and of one's "socializer" and "rooted" self on the other hand imply the balance between "time for oneself" and "time with others" that they can find in their "little luxury" city.

In the comfort zone vs. out of the comfort zone

Being "in the comfort zone" and being "out of the comfort zone" represent two additional contrasting life stages forming a balance that participants associate with their "little luxury" city. In fact, the identified "rooted" self, searching for comfort and security and one's "relaxed" identity implying the importance of calm situations disconnected from any stress or anxiety, are rather reflected in situations within one's comfort zone since "being out of the comfort" zone implies certain risks and thus potential anxiety that has to be defeated. Hence the self as "active explorer" keen in discovering the unknown and the "achiever" self forged by the accomplishment of various challenges, mirror the idea of being "out of the comfort zone". Hence, here again the interaction of different aspects of one's identity are reflected in life situations of being "in the comfort zone" as well as "out of the comfort zone" contributing to a certain harmony.

Living the present vs. living the past

A final life balance that emerged from consumer narratives refers to "living the present" contrasted to "living the past". The "achiever" self is based on meanings attached to the accomplishment of certain challenges associated to one's "little luxury" city. This implies the reflection of one's actual self or even future self, as the accomplishment is believed to induce future self-development. Hence, the expression of one's "achiever" self is related to moments lived in the present in lights of future consequences. Similarly, the "active explorer" identity may be referred to the desire of living the "here and now" by discovering what a city has to offer while being in the city. Noteworthy, the explorer is likely to live the past by diving into a city's history he/she wishes to explore. Further, nostalgia emerged as a meaningful "little luxury" city aspect based on one's personal experiences and memories in a city. Individuals are assumed to indulge in these memories my reminiscing specific moments for instance, which contributes to the definition of one's "savourer" self. The latter can thus be related to "living the past". Likewise, the "rooted" self is defined by its strong attachment to one's origins

implying a strong connection to the past. The balance between "living the present" and "living the past" is thus encouraged through the potential coexistence of one's "achiever" and "active explorer" self as well as one's "savourer" and "rooted" self.

In consequence, the multiple selves that are forged by meanings extracted from valuable aspects associated to a city are reflected in different situations in one's life. Their interaction leads to finding different balances in life. All together, these multiple identities are thus believed to define one's overarching extended-balanced self. Thus, meanings residing in one's "little luxury" city support the construction and expression of one's balanced self, which in turn enables to find balance in life that may further be interpreted as finding meaning and self-fulfilment.
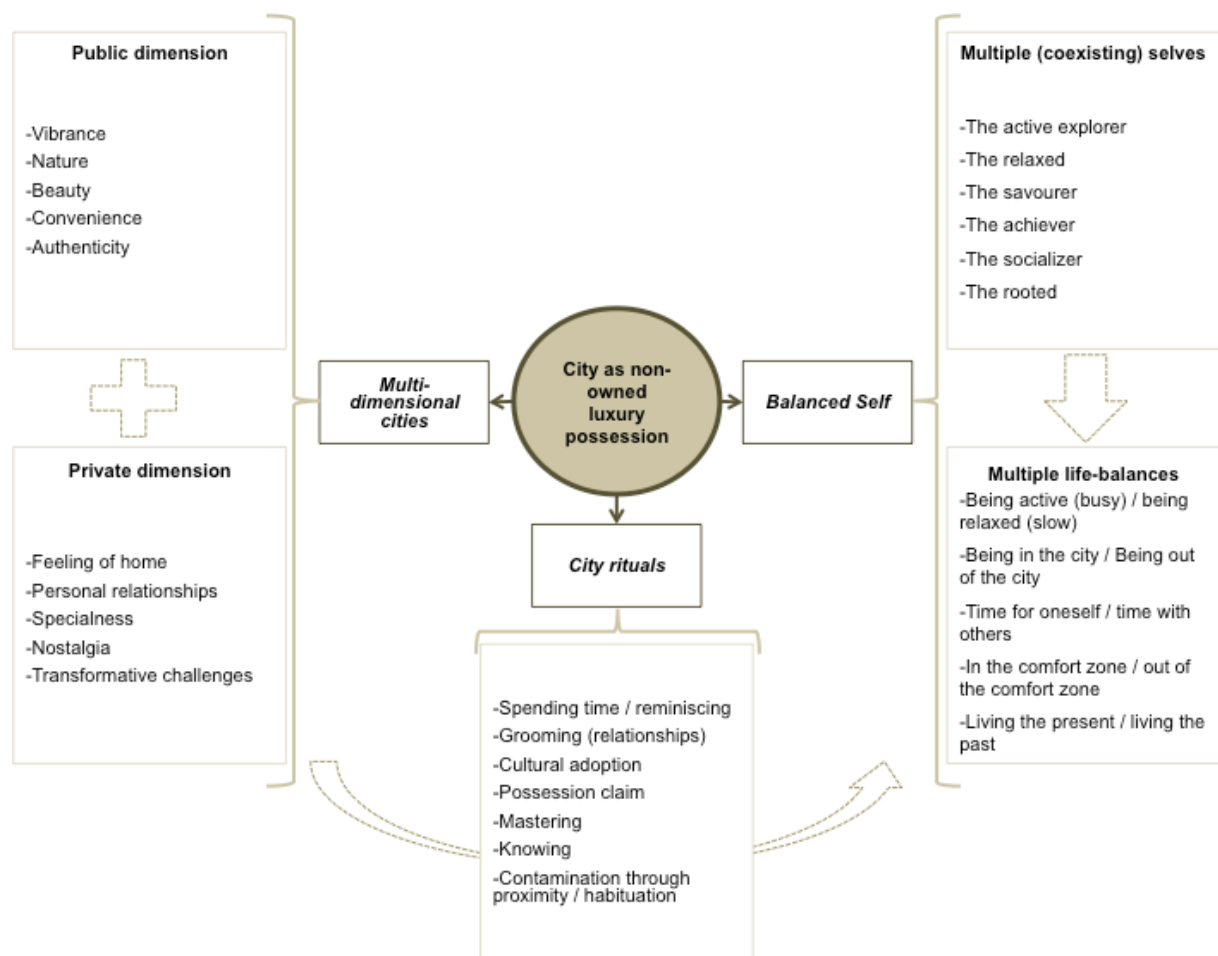
4.3 Summary of findings

The previous chapter presented the findings of this thesis aiming at reaching an answer to the research problem. These findings emerged from consumer narratives generated during the conducted phenomenological interviews. By taking a hermeneutic-phenomenological interpretation approach, the results from the interview were interpreted through an iterative "part-to-whole" process and three global themes could be identified: *"multidimensional city"*, *"city rituals"* and *"balanced self"*. These themes reflect the different locations of meaning of McCracken's (1986) model of movement of meaning. In fact, the respective flow of meanings is mirrored in consumer narratives. As findings revealed, individuals ascribe valuabale meanings to various aspects of their "little luxury" city's identified public and private dimension. Here, the aspects of the city's public dimension represent rather tangible and objective aspects that may be shared by a broader range of people, whereas aspect's of a city's private dimesion are of intangible and higly subjective nature as they are based on one's personal values, beliefs and experience. This implies the role of individuals as co-creators of meanings, as they conceive the meanings residing in aspects of a city's private dimension. Further, this reflects the theoretical assumption of the meaning flow as a two-way process. Based on findings, the diverse meaninngs ascribed to the described "multidimensional cities" are then taken on by consumers via identified *"city rituals"*. Thereby the city is integrated into their extended selves. In fact, the meanigs indivuals extracted and appropriated from their "little luxury" cities contributed to the definition of their multiple identitites i.e. multiple selves. Based on the interpretation of results, different underlying selves could be identified: the "active explorer", the "relaxed", the "savourer", the "achiever", the "socializer", and the "rooted". These must not be considered independently but as coexisting constructs, as one individual is likely to reflect his/her different selves in different situations in life. In the present case, the coexistence of one's multiple selves' enables finding different life-balances. Thereby, one's multiple selves based on valuable meanings appropriated from a city, support the expression of one's overarching extended balanced self.

Consequently, a city becomes one's non-owned possession as it is integrated into one's self based on the formation of a strong possession-self link (2.1). and thus the creation, preservation ad enhancement of one's sense of identity is ensured. Further, the meaning attached to different aspects of the cited cities is perceived as luxury. This luxury meaning is then adopted by individuals and enabling the expression of their balanced self. Thus, the city becomes one's non-owned luxury possession.

Put differently, the luxury meanings ascribed to a city enable the expression of one's extended balanced self. Consequelty, a city enabling the construction and reflection of one's balanced self is perceived as luxury by consumers.

Hence, these findings based on the consumer narratives generated from the phenomenological interviews, provide an answer to the previously defined sub-question (3).

Figure 12: *Summary of empirical findings (own illustration based on interpretation results)*

5. Discussion & Conclusion

This chapter draws upon the previous analysis of findings backed by fundamental theoretical conceptualizations in order to discuss how non-owned possessions are conceptualized and associated to luxury from a consumer perspective and how this is compatible with the conceptualizations of non-owned possessions and luxury in theory. Hence, the following discussion is addressing sub-question (4). In order to provide an answer to this question in order to fulfil the overall aim of this thesis, two central aspects are discussed in the following. First, how a city is perceived as luxury, and second how a city represents a non-owned possession to individuals.

A city as luxury

This research is based on findings that emerged from consumer narratives generated through phenomenological interviews that revealed detailed descriptions of personal lived-experiences based on informants' thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Thereby it could be depicted on which groundings informants perceive a city as luxury. Following the previous analysis of findings, different types of aspects of the city that informants ascribed meaning in terms of luxury to, surfaced. This refers to the identified global theme *"multidimensional city"*. First, individuals attributed meanings in terms of luxury to aspects of a city's identified public dimension. These aspects are reflecting "tangible" or objective aspects of the city as they are implying rather evident meaning likely to be valued by a broader range of people (McCracken, 1986). According to findings and their interpretation people value the city's vibrance, it's nature, it's beauty, the convenience it provides, the lifestyle it reflects and its authentic character. This implies that people perceive the experience of exploring the city itself in terms of its architecture and buildings (beauty) or a new culture and lifestyle related to the city as a luxury, which refers to the definition of "luxury as doing" that has emerged during the maturity phase of the luxury lifecycle (and that is still relevant in today's Experience Economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999)) as a consequence of a certain tiredness of luxury (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014). Likewise, by attributing particular meaning in terms of luxury to the authenticity a city emits, individuals bring up a central aspect of the current conceptualization of luxury. In fact, authenticity implying the idea of "performing the real" (ibid.), defines the present phase of "New Luxury" based on the fact that individuals are increasingly looking for "something with soul, with character and stories attached to […]" (Trendwatching, 2004). Further, the nature in a city emerged as one aspect perceived as luxury due to the associated possibility to "escape". This implies that individuals see a luxury in taking a time-out from their business lives to find their inner peace for instance, which can again be related to self fulfilment as ultimate goal - reflecting the conceptualization of "New Luxury".

Further, luxury meanings were attached to aspects of a city's defined private dimension and thus to "intangible" and subjective aspects reflecting rather hidden meanings based on one's individual experiences associated to the city. In this sense, particular meaning was ascribed to the "feeling of

home" and of "specialness" provided by a city, one's personal relationships to people associated with the city, nostalgia based on former experiences in the city as well as to "transformative challenges" one relates to the city. Hence one perceives the comfort and security ensured through the "feeling of home" as luxury, which reflects a purely hedonic purpose. The "specialness" provided by a city through special and rare moments associated to it may be related to valuable personal quality time, which also implies underlying inner-oriented purposes in regards of "New Luxury". Further, luxury meanings in terms of valuable quality time are assigned to the people one relates to in a city. This implies that people attribute great importance to personal relationships, which also reflects the idea of "luxury for oneself" implying strong hedonic aspects (Bastien & Kapferer, 2012). Likewise the feeling of nostalgia based on particular memories one has related to a city is perceived as luxury, which reflects the theoretical understanding of luxury as not only being about dreams anymore, but also about memories (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014). Transformative challenges related to individual achievements one links to his/her "little luxury" city implies personal development and self-enhancement, which may be linked to finding meaningfulness in life, represent another predominant aspect of luxury in todays' Western societies (Wittig et al., 2014). Overall, security, friendships, memories supporting one's sense of past (Belk, 1989), and achievement leading to self-development for instance can all be considered as "hidden supporters of life" corresponding to the definition of luxury found in previous studies (Bauer et al., 2012, p. 6). Noteworthy, the persisting relevance of luxury in its traditional sense has emerged in findings as all participants underlined their perceived difference between luxury in a material opposed to a more abstract sense.

In sum, a city is perceived as luxury based on the subjective and hedonically driven meanings individuals associate with different aspects of a multidimensional city. In fact, as the previous interpretation has shown the meanings ascribed to the designated city aspects reflect current theoretical conceptualizations of luxury ("New luxury") implying the predominance of inner-directed emotional purposes of consumption and thus of the expression of one's private self. Consequently individuals' perception of luxury is compatible with the conceptualizations of luxury found in theory - which provides an answer to a part of the previously defined sub-question (4).

A city as a non-owned possession

To provide an answer to the overall aim of this thesis another aspect has to be clarified - how a city becomes a non-owned possession to consumers. First of all a city has prior to the research been defined as a non-owned "object" as no one can call it his/her legal property. Further, drawing upon the presented theory, an object becomes one's possession based on the meaning ascribed to that object. This encourages the formation of a possession-self link implying the psychological connection between the object and an individual that supports individuals in the construction of their selves (Belk, 1988; Ferraro et al. 2010). In fact, the self is constituted by one's core and one's extended self. As the core self comprises one's bodily parts and personal attributes, object and places are rather integrated in

one's extended self (Belk, 1988). Hence, the meaning residing in objects is integrated into one's self and thus supporting the reflection of one's identity. According to McCracken's model of movement of meaning, meaning is transferred and incorporated by different processes such as rituals.

Based on findings of this research, the luxury meanings extracted from different aspects of a city are taken on by individuals through identified *"city rituals"* implying the second global theme that emerged from the interpretation of findings. Specifically, individuals take on the meanings residing in their "little luxury" city by spending time, thinking or reminiscing about the city, which refers to the possession ritual proposed by McCracken (1986). This implies that an object becomes a possession through the assignment of "efforts, time and attention" to it. Further, McCracken (1986) defines that meanings residing in an object are surfaced by „cleaning, discussing, comparing, reflecting, showing off and photographing" them and that thus their possession can be claimed (p.79). This is aligned with the fact that informants are integrating parts of a city's lifestyle (e.g. fashion) into their daily lives, implying that they are "showing off" underlying meaning attached to their cities. Moreover, different processes such as knowing a city, mastering challenges related to the city or by being physically or mentally close to the city as well as by having some city related habits - which corresponds to the ways of meaning appropriation defined in theory - have emerged from consumer narratives. Hence, individuals take on meanings residing in their "little luxury" city that further enable them to express their extended self. In fact, based on the theoretical assumption that one individual has multiple identities i.e. selves comprised in his/hers extended self, different types of selves have emerged from consumer narratives. Concretely, by taking on the luxury meanings ascribed to a city the construction and expression of one's "active explorer", "relaxed", "savourer", "achiever", "socializer" and "rooted" self is enabled. These multiple and coexisting identities are likely to be reflected in different situations in life and through their interaction one is believed to reach different balances in life. In this sense, the following life balances have been identified in this research: being active (busy) vs. being relaxed (slow), being in the city vs. being out of the city, having time for oneself vs. spending time with others, being in one's comfort zone vs. being out of one's comfort zone and living the present vs. living the past. Hence the underlying multiple selves contribute to the definition of one's overarching balanced self (app.3). Noteworthy, the city as non-owned possession in this sense fulfils different valuable functions of possessions defined in theory, such as contributing to one's personal development (e.g. by being out of the comfort zone) and thus helping one in approaching his/her desired future self or supporting one's sense of past by being a memory evoking possession (e.g. living in the past)

Consequently, a city is possessed by individuals i.e. represents a non-owned possession, because, following McCracken's (1986) model of meaning transfer, the meanings residing in a city are taken on by individuals through different processes and thus contribute to the definition and expression of their multiple underlying selves as part of their balanced self. Or simply put, the luxury meanings ascribed to the city support the definition of one's extended balanced self. Hence as strong psychological link

between the city and the individual is formed and the city can thus become a non-owned possession. Consequently, the theoretically defined process of the formation of a strong possession-self link is mirrored in consumers' behaviour.

A city as a non-owned luxury possession

Based on previous elaborations of how a city is perceived as luxury, it can be deduced that consumers actually perceive a city as luxury based on the luxury meanings they ascribe to particular objective and subjective aspects the city's provides, that then become part of their selves. Further, their conceptualization of a city as luxury mirrors recent theoretical conceptualizations, as it reflects the idea of "luxury for oneself" based on emotional inner directed purposes and aiming at finding meaningfulness i.e. self-fulfilment in life.

I addition, the previous interpretations leading to an understanding of how a city is perceived as luxury and how a city becomes a non-owned possession induce the logical argumentation of what makes the city become a non-owned luxury possession from a consumer perspective: based on the interpretation of findings, the possession of a city enables the definition of one's extended balanced self through the meanings ascribed to the city that are perceived as luxury. By reason, the city thus becomes a non-owned luxury possession to individuals. Differently said, if a city supports the definition of one's balanced extended self, the city represents a non-owned luxury possession to consumers. Here, finding a balance in life represents the underlying motivation in the "consumption" of a city. In fact, this reflects a highly hedonic purpose, which goes in line with current conceptualizations of luxury. This provides an answer to sub-question (4).

Contributions

Overall and based on its findings, this thesis contributes to existing studies in the field of consumer behaviour by conceptualizing the perception of non-owned possessions as luxury from a consumer perspective. In fact, the results on this research imply that a city, being a non-owned object, can be possessed by individuals and that this possession can be perceived as luxury in the sense of the current conceptualization of "New Luxury". In consequence, a city - and in a more general sense a non-owned possession - can be luxury to consumers.

As previously presented, a city can become one's non-owned possession as thus becomes part of one's self. By enabling the expression of one's extended self, the city thus contributes to the creation, enhancement, and preservation of one's sense of identity (Belk, 1988). In this sense, the findings of this thesis address current conceptualizations of possessions implying the disconnection from material ownership by proposing the wisdom "you are what you possess" as a complement to Belk's (2007) account "you are what you share".

Further, the perception of a city as luxury is based on the meanings ascribed to different valuable aspects of the city. This has been analysed based on the model of movement of meaning proposed by

McCracken (1986). In this context, this thesis contributes to the academic field of consumer behaviour on a more subordinate level as it suggests to regard the model of meaning transfer as a two-way process. In fact, findings revealed that people assign meanings in terms of luxury to aspects of a city's public as well as private dimension. Aspects constituting the city's private dimension (e.g. nostalgia) imply hidden and private meanings based on individual's values, beliefs, experiences and memories. Whereas the more evident meanings attached to a city's public dimension (including rather tangible and objective aspects such as the city's nature or beauty) are likely to be shared by a society at large, the described hidden i.e. private meanings differ among individuals based on personal contexts. Following this, the individual must be seen as a co-creator of meaning. Thus, individuals influence the meaning forged in the culturally constituted world, as they are part of this world. In fact, the theoretical model of movement of meaning (McCracken, 1986) disregards this contribution of individuals to the culturally constituted world.

Regarding the concept of luxury, this thesis contributes to existing research with the finding that the trend towards "New Luxury" defined in theory is mirrored in consumer narratives. Hence, current perceptions of luxury by consumers are compatible with theoretical conceptualizations of luxury. However, it must be noted that luxury in a traditional sense has not become obsolete, which is reflected in this research's findings, as a clear distinction between luxury is a material and in a more abstract sense has been made by consumers. Hence, "luxury for oneself" and "luxury for others" may be considered as coexisting concepts; which implies a further contribution of this thesis to existing theory.

Critical reflections

Based on the findings of this thesis some critical considerations have emerged. First, as explained above, although the current conceptualization view luxury as a highly abstract idea implying inconspicuous consumption ("less is more") driven by consumers' search for meaning in life, this does not mean that luxury in a more traditional sense has disappeared in today's societies. The perception of "New Luxury" may have become predominant, but luxury in its traditional sense persists, implying a coexistence of both. Further, "New Luxury" implies a detachment from conspicuous consumption, materialism and the search for status as known from traditional approaches. However, inconspicuousness may be seen as the new conspicuousness, implying a new form of status currency linked to knowledge for instance (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014; Boston Consulting Group, 2013). Accordingly one may define his/her status by "being in the know" based on his/her cultural capital enabling the identification of subtle codes of the simplicity promoted by "New Luxury" (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014). This may be justified by the fact that conspicuous "bling bling" consumption is not as tolerated in society anymore and people thus use different things to reflect their selves and to intentionally or unintentionally define their social status. This "connoisseurship" individuals use to different themselves from others is not necessarily only linked to non-owned objects. One may define

their status through the ownership of a personalized hand-made designer racing bike for instance. In fact, the value of this bike as one's owned possession is only likely to be recognized by other "cognoscenti" being "in the know" (Eckhardt et al., 2015). This implies a current interrelation between owned possessions and luxury in the contemporary sense ("New Luxury") (Fig 13).
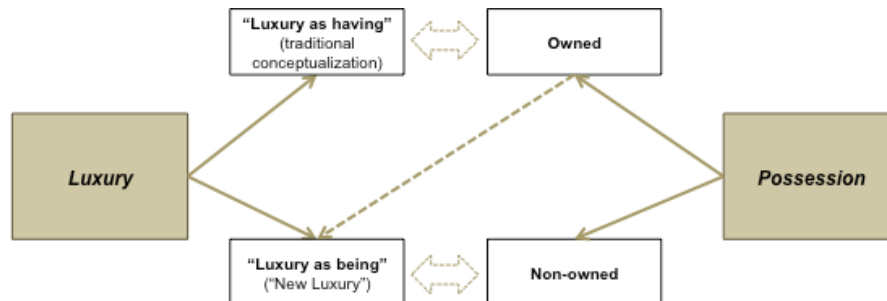
Figure 13: Conspicuous Inconspicuousness (own illustration based on theoretical foundations and empirical findings)

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore the phenomenon of non-owned possessions as potential luxury from a consumer perspective and specifically to get an understanding of how people attach meaning to non-owned possessions, how they are integrated in consumers' selves, and how this represents luxury to them; or simply said, how non-owned possessions can be luxury to consumers. Therefore an explorative investigation based on the example of cities as non-owned "objects" that can potentially be possessed has been conducted based on the prior defined theoretical context.

To set the base for this research, the concept of (non-owned) possessions was defined based on McCracken's (1986) model of movement of meaning, while focussing on the meanings in (non-owned) objects, the multidimensional concept of self and under consideration of today's dematerialized society living in an era of access, rather then ownership (Rifkins, 2000). Further, the dynamic concept of luxury and its development over time were defined (1).

Theoretical findings revealed that the concepts of non-owned possessions and the concept of luxury have gone through a similar development over time as the value ascribed to possessions has shifted from owned to non-owned and the attribution of luxury is similarly increasingly disconnected from functional, status and thus materially oriented aspects, which reflects the conceptual link between non-owned possessions and luxury based on their compatibility (2).

Findings of the phenomenological investigation aiming to understand how a city represents a non-owned possession to consumers and how it is perceived as luxury have been interpreted by taking a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach and through an iterative "part-to-whole" process. Thereby, different insights could be generated. First of all, the perception of luxury from a consumers' perspective is compatible with the one derived from theory, implying the disconnection from materialism and strong underlying hedonic purposes referring to the defined concept of "New

Luxury". However, it must be noted that luxury in its more traditional sense still persists. In fact, both conceptualizations of luxury must be viewed as coexisting, while considering that the current conceptualization is being increasingly valued by today's postmodern Western consumers.

Further, findings revealed that, as theoretically assumed, citys can represent a luxury to consumers based on the luxury menaings, referring to the current understanding of "New Luxury", they asscribe to different aspects of a city. Moreover, the interpretation has shown that cities are likely to be possessed by consumers and thus in fact represent a non-owned possession. This is due to the meanings ascribed to cities and subsequently appropriated by consumers and intergrated in their selves. Hence, these contribute to the construction of their extended balanced self in the present case, which implies the underlying hedonic motivations of meaninngfulness and self-fulfilment behind the "consumption" of cities (3). This mirrors the model of movmement of meaning proposed by McCracken (1986) as well as the underlying purposes of consumption in the era of "New Luxury". Noteworthy, as some of the meanings ascribed to cities are of private nature and thus based on one's individual experiences and memories, the consumer must be viewed as co-creator menaing, which implies a two-way flow of meaning.

Consequently, as cities are perveived as luxury in the sense of "New Luxury", and as they are possessed by consumers based on the luxury meanings they carry that support the construction of their selves and thus their sense of identity, cities represent non-owned luxury possessions (4). Considering this in a more general sense, empirical findings revealed that non-owned possession represent luxury to consumers (in the sense of the current conceptualization of "New Luxury") because they encourage the construction and reflection of their extended self. This provides an answer to the problem stated in this research. Inspired by Belk's (1988; 2007) previous accounts, these insights lead the complementary assertion "you are what you possess".

6. Managerial implication

In this part, potential implications derived from this research for firms in the luxury industry, particularly regarding their branding strategies aiming to enhance customer loyalty, will be presented. This provides an answer to the sub-question (5) defined prior to this research and implies an investigation of how luxury firms can use the insights emerged from this thesis and integrate the conceptualization of non-owned possessions perceived as luxury into their marketing and branding strategies in order to potentially reach new customers and enhance customer loyalty. Generally speaking and drawing upon the definition of a non-owned possession, a brand associated to a luxury firm may be viewed as a non-owned object that no one can call his legal property, but that can potentially be possessed by psychologically relating to the brand. This being said, firms must be aware of the underlying shifts in paradigm and consumption patterns linked to the idea of non-owned possession as luxury. In fact, companies must be aware of the increasing individualization of postmodern consumers searching for meaningfulness and self-fulfilment (Cova, 1996a). This requires the creation of a word of meaning around a brand or products, implying the idea of "storytelling" (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Hence, brands and luxury brands in particular should not focus on the functional aspects of their products, but emphasize on abstract and emotional aspects addressing one's inner-directed purposes. In consequence, people are likely to extract valuable meaning reflecting their self-worth out of the image communicated. Thereby a possession-self link (Ferraro et al., 2010) is encouraged between the brand as a non-owned possession and the individual. Accordingly, firms should consider the creation of such a relationship as ultimate goal, which implies the possession of the brand by consumers. Thus, the creation of a world of meaning can empower consumers to possess a brand, which is likely to increase they loyalty to the brand.

Hence, the more the consumer is empowered to engage in a product or brand, the more he/she is assumed to build up a relationship to the brand leading to the possession of the brand i.e. aspects of the brand becoming part of consumers' selves. Drawing upon findings, firms can enhance the formation of the (non-owned) possession-self link through the transfer of knowledge. In fact, consumers are likely to find the meaning they are looking for in the origins of a brand and it's product. By sharing knowledge about a brands' history, the production processes of the products or other background information, consumers are integrated in the brand's world of "cognoscenti", which is likely to make them possess the brand. Thereby firms can further transmit an authentic character, which is also perceived as luxury (Eckhardt et al., 2015).

Truly, knowledge and authenticity are deemed more valuable in terms of luxury than explicit brands signs and logos for instance (ibid; Berger & Ward, 2010). Correspondingly, luxury firms should be aware of the perception of luxury following the maxim "less is more" referring to the "rise of inconspicuous consumption" (Eckhardt et al., 2015). Hence, it can be assumed that the subtler the interaction with their customers, implying low visual prominence and the use of quiet and discrete

signals for instance, the better (ibid). To reach postmodern Western consumers, firms should thus develop understated branding strategies and "whisper it out loud" (Salter Braxter, 2016).

Noteworthy this particularly addresses global luxury brands operating in the Western as well as in the Eastern World. As consumer needs are believed to strongly differ among Eastern consumers, still seeking for status in material luxury goods, and Western consumers searching for meaningfulness and understated luxury, these global brands are confronted to specific challenges requiring distinctive and separate branding strategies in order to avoid any type of confusion.

Besides, this research was focussed on cities and findings revealed that cities could be perceived as luxury. Consequently, the use of cities in branding strategies could further enhance consumer attachment. By making and communicating the link to a certain city i.e. the city of origin of a brand for instance, the brand is likely to be associated with the city (McCracken, 1986). If the city concerned is already deemed particularly valuable to consumers, they are likely to build up a strong relationship to this brand.

7. Further research

Based on this present research and its limitations (1.4.), some suggestions for further research in the field of consumer behaviour dealing with (luxury) consumption patterns are given in the following.

First of all, this research could be repeated with another type of non-owned "object" potentially becoming one's possession such as a hobby (e.g. Golf, climbing, music etc.). Hence the findings of this study could be verified and complemented.

As this study grounds on the emerging Sharing Economy, it could be of interest to elaborate how the act of sharing itself can become a (non-owned) possession and how it may be perceived as luxury.

Integrating a larger variety of participants in terms of age for instance could develop this research. This could provide insights into the influence of one's age on his/her perception of luxury, based on the assumption that teenagers search for status and differentiation from others through luxury in a material sense, whereas older, potentially more reflected people, seek for meaningfulness and self-fulfilment (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014). Likewise people with different incomes could be included in this research in order to investigate how one's perception of luxury correlates with his/her income level. In fact, this is linked to the expectation that those who can afford truly high-status brands prefer less conspicuous consumption" (Berger and Ward 2010, p. 811).

Further, this research applies to Western postmodern societies; it would be of interest to investigate the perception of non-owned possessions in Eastern societies, because in contrast to the assumed common belief that all consumers in the Eastern World are materialistic status seekers, recent studies have suggested the opposite for countries such as China for instance, where a part of the society follows Western consumption patterns (Boston Consulting Group, 2013).

As critically reflected earlier, the emerging inconspicuous consumption may become a new status currency when considering that "inconspicuousness is the new conspicuousness" (Kühne & Bosshart, 2014). Further research could investigate how this trend of subtle consumption (of owned as well as of non-owned objects) becoming a means of marking one's position is society is perceived from a consumer perspective.

Finally, as today's dematerialized postmodern Western society is also highly digitalized (Belk, 2014a), how individuals claim their non-owned possessions in the online space and what role the use of Social Media plays in that regard could be investigated.

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9. Appendix

Appendix 1:

<u>Interview Guide</u>

1st part

•**Which city would you call your little luxury?**

•**If someone wouldn't know the city at all, how would you describe the city?**
    Follow-up: Any favourite spot in the city you would like to tell me about?

•**Tell me about the last time you were in you "little luxury" city?**

•**Tell me about the things you do when you go there?**
    Follow-up: What do you appreciate most about the city?

•**How is the city *you*?**

•**Has the city left or added any marks in or to your daily life?**

•**Can you tell me about any particularly experience that you have lived in this city?**

• **Which city would you call your "non-luxury" city?**

•**What is missing in this city to become a bit more of a luxury to you?**

•**If you had to sum up, how is the city a luxury to you?**

•Could you describe what you see on the following images and what you associate with it? Also in terms of luxury?

Status symbols

Citylife

Cup of coffee

Pictures

Friends

Man on mountain

Stones on water

Heart

Family

House

•Could you now arrange these images on this poster around the name of your "little luxury" in a way that the closer you would put the image to the city's name, the more it would reflect the city in terms of luxury? (Participants were provided with a white poster and a pen)

•Would you add anything to these images?

3rd part

Biographical questions:

<u>**Participant #**</u>

-Name: _____

-Sex: _____

-Age: _____

-Birth date and place:

-Residence pattern[*]:

Lived in _____ from _____ till _____ - size of the city (big, medium, little, village, rural)

Lived in _____ from _____ till _____ - size of the city (big, medium, little, village, rural)

Lived in _____ from _____ till _____ - size of the city (big, medium, little, village, rural)

Lived in _____ from _____ till _____ - size of the city (big, medium, little, village, rural)

Lived in _____ from _____ till _____ - size of the city (big, medium, little, village, rural)

-Siblings: _____

-Martial status: _____

-Children: _____

-Education (highest level): _____

-Occupation: _____

•Acknowledgments

Appendix 2:

Please find the interview transcripts on the enclosed USB.