Living travel vulnerability: A phenomenological study

Abstract

Most tourism-scholars have taken an etic perspective on vulnerability, defining the concept as a risk for – and mostly confined to - vulnerable populations. An emic perspective, defining vulnerability as a universal, experiential state of the human condition is anyhow largely absent. Based on forty collected experiences from interviews with twelve participants, this study adopts a phenomenological stance and demonstrates that travel vulnerability is typically lived through different inherent, situational and pathogenic sources, ranging anywhere from potential physical harm and unfamiliar contexts to heightened dependence on the other. The peak experience for the traveller is described as a loss of soundness, where vulnerability actualises from a dispositional state into a transformative experience. Through a Nietzschean lens, the study suggests a different and more complex approach to travel vulnerability, where the concept is embraced and not transcended, lived and not avoided; in order to move towards fulfilling travel experiences.

1. Introduction

The term vulnerability originated in the early 17th century, derived from the Latin vulnerare (to wound) or vulnus (wound). Although commonly used in colloquial English, the concept remains fuzzy across academic disciplines and is interpreted in various ways, not without controversy. There are two broad approaches towards the conceptualisation of vulnerability, based on the anthropologic etic (externally evaluated risk; confined to vulnerable populations) and emic (experiential state; universal) perspectives respectively (Mackenzie, Rogers, & Dodds, 2014; Spiers, 2000). Supporters of the etic approach argue that by starting from a preposition that "everyone is vulnerable", it is hard to identify groups in need of special protection, which are consequently neglected (Levine et al., 2004; Luna, 2009; Schroeder & Gefenas, 2009), and subsequently all vulnerabilities are "normalized" (Rendtorff, 2002). Supporters of the emic perspective, on the other hand, consider vulnerability an omnipresent feeling of threat and fear of harm, which is embedded in lived experience. This highlights vulnerability as an inclusive part of human life, rather than as a condition specific to particular groups (Grabovschi, Loignon, & Fortin, 2013). While vulnerability has commonly been equalled to externally judged levels of risk through an etic approach, scholars are increasingly calling for a deeper emic understanding of the concept. There are several additional points which have been raised to justify this shift. First, evaluating vulnerability from the onlooker perspective imposes it on certain groups, regardless of individuals' personal experiences, differences and situations. This obscures the vulnerability of persons who don't fit into these given categories. Second, vulnerability can be considered as an integral part of the "conditio humana", which transcends a mere focus on externally established conditions (Erlen, 2006; Kottow, 2003, 2005; Nussbaum, 1992). Heaslip and Ryden (2013) underline that the emic approach to vulnerability, despite being increasingly called for, is rarely considered in current research practice. Particularly in the tourism field, this standpoint is largely absent and a strictly etic view on vulnerability prevails. In a majority of cases, the vulnerability of natural destination features is investigated; among which coastal and marine environments (e.g. Moreno & Becken, 2009; Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008; Scott, Simpson, & Sim, 2012), mountainous attractions (e.g. Dawson & Scott, 2007; Elsasser & Messerli, 2001), crops and

agricultural land (Su et al., 2016); while other scholars look at the phenomenon in the context of overall destinations (e.g. Calgaro, Lloyd, & Dominey-Howes, 2014).

Most of the studies that discuss human vulnerability in a travel context are concerned with the vulnerability of local communities in relation to the tourism industry (e.g. Amir, Ghapar, Jamal, & Ahmad, 2015; Bennett, Kadfak, & Dearden, 2016; Kaján, 2014; Tsao & Ni, 2016) or specific types of perceived vulnerable populations, such as beach vendors (e.g. Baker & Coulter, 2007), backpackers (e.g. Adam, 2015; Adam & Adongo, 2016) and female tourists (e.g. Brown & Osman, 2017; Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2015). This is often reinforced through a strong etic perspective, such as Boakye's (2012) finding of age as a major socio-demographic variable in the increased feelings of vulnerability of international tourists in Ghana. Thus, travellers' lived experience of vulnerability as a phenomenon it is still not properly understood (Williams & Baláž, 2015). The etic perspective taken in most related studies also potentially oversimplifies the concept into a risk-management approach (Heaslip & Ryden, 2013). This research fills the gap by following an emic approach to accurately and comprehensively describe and interpret travel vulnerability as a phenomenon, adhering to the principles of descriptive phenomenology. Although phenomenology has been interpreted in different ways, Todres (2014, p. 107) outlines descriptive phenomenological research as gathering concrete descriptions of specific experiences through a phenomenological reduction, looking for the most invariant meanings in the phenomenon under investigation. Through this process, descriptive phenomenology aims at describing what is typical for a phenomenon and to express this in an insightful and integrated manner.

Following the descriptive phenomenological approach offered by modern phenomenologist Amedeo Giorgi (2009), this study looks at a total of 40 lived experiences of tourist vulnerability. The typicality of the phenomenon is subsequently represented through a phenomenological essence. The findings offer a theoretical contribution through an emic lens on how tourists live the experience of being vulnerable, aiding our understanding of this increasingly important concept. Finally, the study offers food for thought on broadening risk control towards a more holistic experiential and emotional approach to vulnerability and travel.

2. Literature review

2.1. Conceptualizing vulnerability

Generally, human vulnerability goes through a virtue of embodiment (e.g. illness, death), human nature as social and affective beings (e.g. emotions, rejection), human nature as socio-political beings (e.g. manipulation, oppression) and last, a relationship with the natural environment (dependency and influence) (Mackenzie, Rogers, & Dodds, 2014). While these contextual factors are relatively clear, whether to approach this phenomenon from an etic or emic perspective is still debated in academic circles.

The etic (externally evaluated risk; confined to vulnerable populations) approach takes an "objective" perspective, where a level of vulnerability is judged by external observers, such as healthcare practitioners

or the general society (Spiers, 2000). Through a social and relational lens, the focus is frequently placed on the susceptibility of certain persons or groups to specific kinds of harm or threat by others (Mackenzie et al., 2014). Demi and Warren (1995) add that the etic perspective also heavily relies on demographics, meaning that certain individuals or groups are more susceptible to specific issues, such as concern and risk for health problems among the elderly. Consequently, people who are less able to function according to the values of a certain society are described and identified as vulnerable (Ferguson, 1978; Kipnis, 2001; Schroeder & Gefenas, 2009). Following this approach, groups such as the homeless, mentally ill, poor, disabled, elderly people or refugees might not be able to up live to western society standards of independence and self-sufficiency, and socially sanctioned intervention is considered desired and necessary. This highlights a range of issues, including power inequality, dependency and exploitation (Mackenzie et al., 2014). Often this evaluation takes the form of risk assessment, where vulnerability is equalled to "relative risk" and related to "endangerment", "functional capacity", "external recognition to the increased susceptibility to harm", "observable and measurable behaviour", and "universality" (Lessick, Woodring, Naber, & Halstead, 1992; Rose & Killien, 1983). An etic approach has also been adopted in the natural sciences, where vulnerability often refers to "the probability that a given product may be misused, not meet its function effectively, become broken in use, may damage the environment; or that a service may occasionally become ineffective" (Cipolla, 2004, p. 109). In this case, vulnerability denotes product weakness, which is to be avoided or overcome, and leads to a somewhat exclusive dichotomy – being vulnerable or not. From an etic perspective, vulnerability can thus be considered the passing of a threshold of factors, beyond which harm is likely (Spiers, 2000).

The emic perspective, on the other hand, defines vulnerability as a lived experience, typically through concepts such as individual selfperception and discernment of challenges to the self, and resources to withstand these (Spiers, 2005). Spiers (2000) highlights that the individual's perceptions of self, challenges to the self, and of resources to withstand such challenges define (emic) vulnerability. These perceptions may have their origins in the socially determined values of performance and function, but are always filtered through personal values and realities Scholars in ethics, bioethics and feminist philosophy, among others, have re-conceptualised vulnerability as an ontological feature of the human condition in order to dissociate the concept from negative connotations, such as victimhood, helplessness, neediness and pathology. This new conceptualisation presents vulnerability as an universal, enduring and inevitable aspect of the human condition (Fineman, 2008; Mackenzie et al., 2014). Hence, vulnerability is defined through its universality, inevitability and enduring entanglement with human nature (Fineman, 2008; Ricoeur, 2007; Turner, 2006). Two human conditions are usually linked to universal vulnerability: human embodiment, which exposes us to affliction and injury (MacIntyre, 1999; Nussbaum, 2006), and the inherent sociality of human life, which makes us both, vulnerable to and dependent on other people (Butler, 2009; Mackenzie et al., 2014). Vulnerability comes to light when a person's sense of soundness in the various dimensions of his/her life gets disrupted by a challenge to which he/she is unable to respond.

Several other conceptualisations of vulnerability exist in addition to etic and emic perspectives. Rogers, Mackenzie and Dodds's (2012) classification of vulnerability demonstrates that a taxonomy of different sources and states of vulnerability enables a finer-grained analysis of the sense in which vulnerability is both, an ontological condition of humanity and context specific. This classification mentions three different sources of vulnerability: inherent, situational and pathogenic. While inherent vulnerability refers to the natural physicality and sociality of human condition, situational vulnerability is short-term and context specific. Closely related to situational vulnerability, pathogenic vulnerability is defined as relational and ethically troubling. These are expressed through two different states (dispositional, occurrent), referring to potential versus actual vulnerability. The latter is associated with interrupting a person's "sense of soundness". Phillips (1992) reaffirms that vulnerability is commonly triggered by a perceived force or challenge which necessitates response, offering a potential for personal growth when the experience is lived. Overall, Rogers et al.'s (2012) taxonomy acknowledges vulnerability as emic, universal, and experienced in the body (Butler, 2004, 2009; Turner, 2006), a conceptualisation which lends itself to be investigated in the context of travel experiences.

As mentioned earlier, most tourism-related studies have adopted the etic perspective on the concept of vulnerability, usually equating it with risk. Natural destination features are commonly considered as vulnerable, such as coastal and marine environments (e.g. Moreno & Becken, 2009; Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008; Scott, Simpson, & Sim, 2012), mountainous attractions (e.g. Dawson & Scott, 2007; Elsasser & Messerli, 2001), crops and agricultural land (Su, Hammond, Villamor, Grumbine, Xu, & Hyde, 2016), and overall destinations (e.g. Calgaro et al., 2014). Other researchers evaluate the vulnerability of the tourism sector in light of external challenges, such as terrorism (e.g. Liu & Pratt, 2017), climate change (e.g. Dogru, Bulut, & Sirakaya-Turk, 2016; Paquin et al., 2016; Prideaux & Thompson, 2017), and crisis and disasters (e.g. Curtis, 2016). Others look at specific sub-segments of the industry, such as winter recreation (e.g. Brouder & Lundmark, 2011; Scott, Dawson, & Jones, 2008; Tervo, 2008) and park visits (Jedd et al., 2018). Similarly, research around tourist rather than sectorial vulnerability strongly relates the concept to risk and exposure to crime (e.g. Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015; Schiebler, Crotts, & Hollinger, 1996). Cohen (1987), for instance, suggests that increased tourist independence is related to augmented levels of vulnerability to crime, a country's law and legal processes and attitudes of the law enforcing agencies. Brunt, Mawby and Hambly's (2000) study of British tourists identify higher levels of victimisation when traveling than when staying at home, although fear of crime was not found to be a major issue. On the same line, Lepp and Gibson (2003) identify health, political instability, terrorism, strange food, cultural barriers, crime, and political and religious dogma as major perceived risk factors for young US-born tourists, with novelty-seekers usually feeling less vulnerable than familiarity seekers. Risk and emotion have also been discussed in the context of adventure tourism and extreme sports tourism, where there is a conceptual link between emotion and safety, uncertainty, challenge, novelty, exploration, and discovery (Cheng, Edwards, Darcy, & Redfern, 2018; Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie, & Pomfret, 2003). Hichang (2010) specifically mentions perceived vulnerability which, in addition to

perceived severity of risk, influences adventure tourists' protective behavioral changes. In this context, perceived vulnerability is usually defined as exposure to a threat or risk perception (Lwin & Saw, 2007; Wang, Liu-Lastres, Ritchie, & Pan, 2019). While traditionally related to cognitive factors, recently scholars have highlighted the role that emotions play in this process (Fennell, 2017); among which worry (Breakwell, 2014; Wolff & Larsen, 2014), sensation, and novelty (Lepp & Gibson, 2003; 2008). Wang et al. (2019) also highlight the importance of personal traits in informing risk perception, with age of the tourists being particularly important. This resonates with earlier research by Cohen (1972) and Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992), where certain groups of tourists were identified as perceiving risk as part of excitement when traveling. Lepp and Gibson (2003) had suggested that this may be related to the role, gender and experience of the subjects involved. Although this body of literature has looked into vulnerability, the concept is again largely equaled with risk perception and more often than not, vulnerable populations are identified and delineated. One rare example of an emic approach in a tourism context is offered by Cipolla (2004). Based on philosopher Martin Buber's (1923) book "Ich und Du", she conceptualises vulnerability as the key word underlying the host-guest relationship. From this perspective, vulnerability refers to "the possibility to 'be hurt', not necessarily in a negative sense, but rather 'to feel' or 'be affected or touched'." (p. 110). While tourists are considered "invulnerable" as they are anonymously observing attractions and have very limited interaction with human beings, hospitality processes are based on the co-presence of human beings, a condition in which vulnerability between the Buberian "I" and "Thou" is present as an essential human condition. This creates a relationship in which not only the visitor is vulnerable to a potential host, but also the local community members are vulnerable to the visitor. Therefore, service design is fundamentally dependent on the understanding of human interaction. In a recent follow-up study, Cipolla (2018) reaffirms the possibility for vulnerability to foster Buberian "I-Thou" relations through design. Accordingly, if exposure to "otherness" – and consequent vulnerability – is mediated by design, interpersonal relations can flourish.

Also other philosophers, in addition to Buber, have discussed the concept of vulnerability. Paphitis (2013) highlights different related perspectives in relation to personhood, drawing a particular distinction among the Ancient Greek Stoic philosophers and German existentialist Friedrich Nietzsche (1883/2008). Paphitis (2013, p. 13) offers diverging perspectives on the human relationships with vulnerability, citing the ancient Stoics as seeking "to transcend their vulnerability and the suffering of this world" through self-control and acceptance of unchangeable external factors. While the Stoics interpreted this as mental salvation, other movements have labelled transcendence of vulnerability as decadent, pessimistic, and ultimately life-denying (Elveton, 2004; Gemes, May, & May 2009). On the other hand, Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch (Sovereign Individual) can be interpreted as offering a different type of self-overcoming. Accordingly, the deep vulnerability of the human being should not be ignored and forgotten, but should be kept in mind through self-honesty and bravery. Paphitis (2013) states that transcending vulnerability would result in a

form of nihilist escapism and it is only by affirming personal vulnerability
that the Sovereign Individual is able to engage in affirming life
to the highest degree. While the latter partly resonates with previous
studies in adventure tourism, there is still theoretical ambiguity on how
travelers live through the experience of vulnerability and in how far
managing, transcending, overcoming and embracing is part of this
phenomenon. Phenomenology, as a philosophical approach to lived
human experience, is a possible guideline for a deeper understanding of
this issue.

2.2. Phenomenology and the lived experience of vulnerability

Phenomenology (a combination of the Greek phainomenon and
logos) is not a monolithic theory or research approach, but rather a
manner of approaching human experience – understanding how things
are perceived and appear to our consciousness (Donohoe, 2017;
Langdridge, 2007; van Manen, 2016). German philosopher Edmund
Husserl (1859‑1938) is commonly cited as the "father" of phenomenology
– although the term has appeared earlier - and his philosophy was
further developed by several of his followers, among which Martin
Heidegger (1889‑1976) is arguably the most prominent. Recently, the
potential of phenomenology applications in a wide range of social research
approaches has slowly started to attract academic attention
(Todres & Holloway, 2004). Contemporary phenomenological research
is continuously evolving in a broad range of fields, ranging anywhere
from technoscience to ecstatic-poetic phenomenology (van Manen,
2016).
Descriptive phenomenology is arguably the most traditional approach
and remains closest to Husserl's earliest works. The purpose of
descriptive phenomenology is to describe a phenomenon in terms of its
essence, without interpretation of what is described (Giorgi, 2009;
Moustakas, 1994). This essence is commonly uncovered through a
process of phenomenological reduction, a procedure which is initially
mentioned in Husserl's earliest works, but is understood differently and
still contested by leading philosophers (van Manen, 2016). Crucial to
this is the so-called bracketing of the researcher, a process where personal
beliefs, theories and assumptions are restrained to let the phenomenon
emerge from what is given (Dahlberg, 2006). Another key
term for descriptive phenomenological analysis is intentionality, that is,
the understanding that consciousness is always directed towards
something (Moustakas, 1994). This incorporates what Husserl calls
noema (the "what" of the experience) and noesis (the way that something
is experienced through thinking, feeling and remembering). The
function of intentionality is to clarify the noema-noesis relationship
(Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). As such, phenomenology
tries to grasp "the living sense of an experience before we have
lifted it up into cognitive, conceptual, or theoretical determination or
clarity" (van Manen, 2016, p. 39). In light of this methodological and
philosophical rigour, descriptive phenomenology is a promising approach
to the investigation of tourists' lived experience of vulnerability.
To summarise, the existing perspectives on vulnerability in tourism
and travel contexts are largely etic and rarely human-centred. In contrast,
the emic understanding of the phenomenon in the lifeworld of the
tourist is almost entirely missing. Descriptive phenomenology has a

potential to provide insight into this perspective, attempting to restrict the researcher's lens and to faithfully describe the lived experiences of the phenomenon under investigation. Its strong philosophical base has enabled the development of rigorous methodological guidelines for research (e.g. Giorgi, 2009; 2012). Several tourism-related studies have also demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach (e.g. Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015; Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017a; Wassler & Kirillova, 2019; Wassler & Schuckert, 2017), which justifies its adoption in this study of travel vulnerability.

3. Method

In order to faithfully adhere to the principles of phenomenology, a careful choice of ontological and epistemological stances is suggested as a starting point for research (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). In terms of ontology, Wassler and Schuckert (2017) point out that, contrary to empiricism, phenomenology does not assume that conscious experience creates the world, but distinguishes phenomena into concrete objects (investigated through natural sciences) and objects of experiential phenomena (investigated phenomenologically). Epistemologically, phenomenology oscillates between rationalism and empiricism. Consciousness is taken as a gateway to understanding the universal, where the human body is merely a mediator in the process of true experience (Moran, 2000; Petrescu, 2013). In this, particularly early Husserlian phenomenology has offered a new approach to human psychology. Theoretical approaches such as behaviorism, which restricted the understanding of human phenomena largely to stimulus and response through a natural science approach, had been predominant in early 20th century psychology (Giorgi, 2009). Phenomenology, on the other hand, takes intentional structures of human consciousness as the starting point of understanding psychological phenomena, framing the central research question of "what is it like" to experience a phenomenon. Following the previously discussed research paradigm embedded in the principles of descriptive phenomenology, this research adopted a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews with travellers. In this study, travellers were defined as people who had left their home countries voluntarily for a period of at least an overnight stay and up to under a year-long stay for purposes of leisure, business, education, or combinations of these. This allowed to examine a variety of travel experiences in tourism and other voluntary mobility contexts. Participants were recruited following experience-based sampling, as the main criteria for phenomenological studies is that participants have had the aforementioned experience which is being investigated (Englander, 2012; Kirillova, 2018). In this case, the key criterion was to have experienced vulnerability when traveling and to have had a recent or vivid memory of this experience. Interviews were held face-to-face or through online video calls. Participants were not given any specific time frames for the interview and were encouraged to share their experiences with as much detail as possible, resulting in interview lengths from a minimum of 23 to maximum of 72 min. Following the suggestions of Giorgi (2012), interviewees were asked to recall an instance (or multiple instances) in which they experienced vulnerability when traveling. Thick descriptions, as faithful as possible to the lived-through events, were encouraged and a focus on feelings and recalled details was enhanced through mostly unstructured follow-up questions. Participants

were recruited and interviewed throughout October and November 2018, finally resulting in a total of 40 experiences described by 12 interview participants (see Table 1).

Experience-based sampling was initially held randomly then purposefully in order to gain demographic variation within the respondent sample. Snowball sampling was also applied for this purpose. The number of collected experiences was based on the principles of phenomenological saturation (Giorgi, 2009), meaning that the data produces a largely invariant structure across the collected experiences. It needs to be noted that the concept of saturation is not typically applied to phenomenological studies; as they generally do not look for sameness or repetitive patterns, but rather for instances when insight on lived experiences arises (van Manen, 2016). Accordingly, van Manen (2016, p.353) suggests that, depending on the phenomenon under investigation, saturation can be interpreted as gathering "enough experientially rich accounts that make possible the figuration of powerful experiential examples or anecdotes that help to make contact with life as it is lived". Although the data was deemed as "phenomenologically saturated" below 40 experiences, several more experiences were collected for data validity purposes. Following Wassler and Kirillova (2019), interviews were collected in person and through Skype, in the language most comfortable to the interviewees and interviewer (English, Russian). As the goal of this research was to describe the participants lived experiences, they were asked to recall a particular instance of feeling vulnerable when traveling; in terms of context (where, when, who) and cognitive processes (thoughts, feelings, sensations). This resulted in a final data set of 90 single spaced pages of transcribed and translated text in English.

As aforementioned, phenomenological "bracketing" is crucial to research methods embedded in descriptive phenomenology. Corresponding largely to the Husserlian notion of "epoché" or "suspension", bracketing refers to the researcher(s) purposefully putting their beliefs and background aside before and during the research in order to suspend individual judgment (Carpenter, 2007). This was ensured in two ways, namely (1), although the theoretical background of the study was not unknown to the authors, the literature review was not consulted until the write-up stage of the study. Hamill and Sinclair (2010) suggest that delaying the literature review until the end of the data analysis is an efficient way of bracketing in phenomenological studies, as it minimizes research bias in understanding the phenomenon "given" by the data; and (2), a third, non-expert independent analyst was involved through separate data analysis in order to verify the findings; which resulted in a final conjoint discussion where findings were compared, elaborated and agreed upon. However, as the ability to bracket researchers completely out of a phenomenological research has been widely disputed, the focus was placed on minimising personal influences rather than on entirely excluding the researchers (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013).

Giorgi's (2009) four steps of data analysis were followed at the analysis stage (see Table 2). Step one is a detailed reading of the transcripts for the "sense of a whole". At this stage, researchers carefully re-read through the obtained data to gain an overall understanding of the phenomenon at hand. This has been done separately by the researchers and outcomes have been discussed informally afterwards.

Step two refers to a determination of relevant phenomenological meaning units, which was done following Giorgi's (2009) suggestions of marking places in transcripts where a shift in meaning occurs. This was done separately on different transcripts, with several samples being "double-marked" by the researchers to check for coherence in the units identified. Step three transforms the identified meaning units into phenomenologically meaningful statements, changing them from a first-person to a third-person, intersubjective expression. This was done on separate meaning units by the researchers. Finally, step four identified a general structure of the phenomenon based on the meaning units most commonly found across transcripts. Following Wassler and Schuckert (2017), this was also based on the intuition of the researchers and not based on communality of the units only. The final step was first followed separately by the researchers and the final findings were then compared; and the phenomenological essence was identified through a final discussion and is presented next.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Phenomenological essence of travel vulnerability

In the context of descriptive phenomenology, the essence of a phenomenon is usually represented by a descriptive paragraph which outlines the general structure of an experience (Giorgi, 2009), but other creative forms of representations, such as visuals, can be used (e.g. Wassler & Kirillova, 2019). Giorgi (2009) states that the general essential structure of a phenomenon should be separate from its discussion, in order to distinguish between descriptive and interpretive steps of the method. Following the above outlined method and steps followed, the findings in terms of the phenomenological essence of lived travel vulnerability are presented as follows:

Travel vulnerability is lived as an ongoing condition of dispositional vulnerability, through inherent, situational and pathogenic sources. The inherent vulnerability manifests itself in a continuing state of potential physical and emotional harm; typically associated with feelings of exposure to mistreatment and objectification. The situational vulnerability is lived through feelings of contextual and cultural unfamiliarity and uncertainty, while pathogenic vulnerability is primarily experienced as a heightened dependence on other people through interplays of power and trust. Under an external trigger, commonly caused by encounters with other people or unexpected situational factors, the individual experiences the peak level of travel vulnerability as a loss of soundness. This state is perceived by the individual as a threat to an aspect of the self to which they have limited capacity to respond. The loss of soundness is typically lived through a variety of intense emotions, ranging from sensations of freedom and authenticity to fear, helplessness, anger and self-reproach. Following the peak experience, the occurrent travel vulnerability usually transitions into a transformative experience of regaining control through reflection on the self and the other. The experience informs the individual's return to varying levels of inherent, situational and pathogenic vulnerability in the dispositional state.

Relevant dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation are discussed and interpreted in relation to theory in the upcoming section.
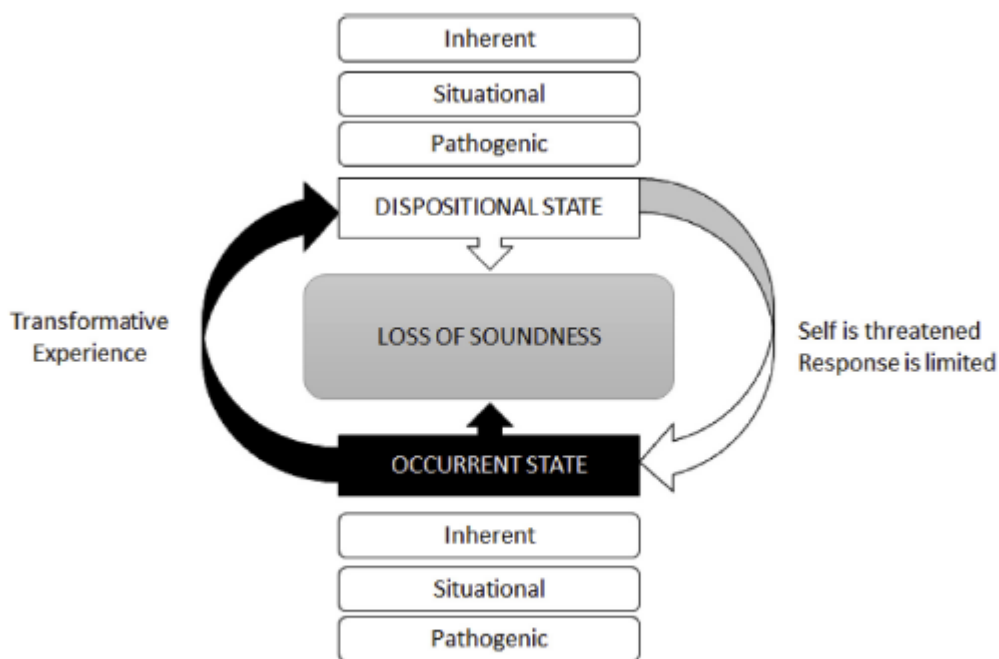
Fig. 1. Graphic representation of lived travel vulnerability.

4.2. Sources of travel vulnerability

Sources of travel vulnerability were found to be analogous to Rogers et al.'s (2012) proposed fonts of inherent, situational and pathogenic vulnerability.

The inherent sources of vulnerability are defined as intrinsic to the human condition and as arising from embodiment, inescapable human needs, and our inevitable dependence on others (Mackenzie et al., 2014). In other words, these sources expose humans to physical and emotional harm which, although varying in intensity, is present throughout our lifetimes. Respondents have shared several experiences of exposure to physical harm, such as driving on an unknown and dangerous road (P8) "If I had just done one mistake with driving, with steering the wheel, I probably would have driven out from the road and I might have driven down to a gorge that was perhaps 200m below me"; and being subjected to potential violent assault and mistreatment (P4) "… and then he pushed me to the side and told me that I should now listen to him and do what he tells me, otherwise he will stab me with his knife"; "I mean, he could have shot me actually"; and (P10) "… Maybe that's what I have to do, just go on the street and hope that I survive the night."

Other respondents mentioned emotional harm, particularly in terms of heightened dependence on others; where they typically would feel singled out as a tourist rather than accepted as part of the local community. Some examples were: being exposed to stereotypes enforced by the locals (P10) "I went to the shopping mall, and then the guy then asked: oh yeah, we like Nigerian customers, I know you guys really have a lot, lots of money … and I was like, where is that coming from?! (…)", being discriminated based on appearance (P12) "Had I had

people around me who'd looked more British, I think it wouldn't have happened" or just generally being treated "differently" due to being perceived as an outsider (P12) "… they do assume that I probably don't know the language very well, or they try to speak to me as if I'm a child" and (P10) "Considering the fact that most people see that you are a foreigner, you are standing the risk of being maneuvered, manipulated or cheated". Although respondents sought to minimise such vulnerability, they were generally aware that this could not be eradicated wholly (Fineman, 2008; 2010), but rather just be mitigated (Mackenzie et al., 2014).

Situational vulnerability is context specific and caused or exacerbated by social, political, economic, or environmental factors; and can be short term, intermitting or enduring (Mackenzie et al., 2014). Situational travel vulnerability was found to be highly related to contextual and cultural uncertainty and unfamiliarity, recalling the importance of issues such as language barriers and cultural unawareness in forming the travel experience (Wassler & Kirillova; 2019). Based on the data analysis, situational vulnerability can be characterised by an unsettling state of uncertainty associated with being unfamiliar with or having inaccurate perceptions of the local context when traveling. This uncertainty was typically connected with having to make a choice or taking an action, such as (P4) "I didn't really know what happened. I just became aware of it, like, afterwards. When I had to get off the bus. And when I got off the bus I didn't really get off by the right spot where the stadium was. So I didn't really know where to go and that was one of these moments when I felt vulnerable". Another participant expressed related feelings of helplessness as (P10) "I didn't feel as if I was vulnerable in terms of security reasons, let's say, but vulnerability is just the fact, like, okay, feeling stranded, not knowing what to do. Now I have to embark on a long journey. In the cold weather. It was winter. It was very nasty. Very nasty."

The unfamiliarity factor was found to be largely context specific. According to the participants, a language barrier is a frequent source of situational vulnerability, such as (P11) "I feel like she is taking advantage of me not knowing the language, for one, and the other one, not knowing the area, not knowing the people and not knowing the culture" or (P12) "it made me feel as if I was literally a foreigner, or terrorist, or something because why would I go to a country where I don't even know a single bit of language, right?". Other participants mentioned unfamiliarity of a geographic or socio-political context which was perceived as different from "normal", as in one respondent's accidental experience of favelas in Brazil (P4) "I got off at some kind of favela - Which is a slum in Brazilian - And the bus line ended there, and I was like s**t! Why did I – how did I get here? … In normal places you have the time schedule on the bus station and usually have an app where you can see which bus is coming – at least here in Germany. But there you had like, nothing. There was no timetable at the bus stop." Another participant described the experience as (P10) "I think it was perhaps just the fear of the unknown actually. It was not like somebody behaved in a very awkward manner. No. But just the feeling of 'I'm a foreigner', I don't really know the personality of these people. Well, what would their response be like? Will they have to shun me?"

Finally, pathogenic vulnerability is a subset of situational vulnerability and functions as a source of all morally unacceptable vulnerabilities and dependencies which we have not yet managed to eliminate (Goodin, 1985). Pathogenic vulnerability is sourced through abuse in interpersonal relationships, social domination, oppression, or political violence (Mackenzie et al., 2014); topics which have been commonly discussed in tourism literature. In this study, respondents highlighted that their travels typically heightened their perceived dependence on others, which upsurges lived vulnerability through a complex interplay of power and trust relationships. In particular, they emphasized multifaceted power relationships in travel, which has been thoroughly discussed through concepts such as "the Gaze" (e.g. Urry, 1990, 2002; Urry & Larsen, 2011).

Several sources for pathogenic travel vulnerability were identified from the participants' experiences. These include female travellers' experiences of being looked at and approached by local men in an objectifying manner. As per one of the female respondents (P8) "I was traveling by myself, and it is just – of course, I had no base of the Turkish culture, that it is very common that there are men who approach you in some way - but in Turkey, especially if you are traveling there by yourself, it can be overwhelming, that how many complete strange men approach you and even if you go to a dinner, to have a dinner by yourself, they want to sit at your table and they want to flirt with you, and they want to chat with you, and they want to get a kiss on the cheek from you. Or they want to hug you and everything." Another source of pathogenic vulnerability was related to solving financial matters in a foreign country. This was often stated along with the feeling of heightened dependence on others in financial terms and the increased levels of trust this requires (P10) "Basically, it's just that feeling of being financially vulnerable because of inability to judge accurately the value of the currency and the services that are being offered or the products that are being sold." Mackenzie et al. (2014) further highlight that pathogenic vulnerability is habitually increased by interventions to mitigate inherent or situational vulnerability, particularly through assigning higher levels of vulnerability and thus levels of disempowerment to "risk segments" – as common in tourism studies and relevant etic perspectives adopted.

4.3. From dispositional to occurrent vulnerability: a loss of soundness

Dispositional vulnerability refers to a type of vulnerability which is "not yet or not likely to become sources of harm" and is experientially omnipresent in the lived experience of travel vulnerability; while occurrent vulnerability refers to a phenomenon which places "a person at imminent risk of harm" (Mackenzie et al., 2014, p. 39). The latter was found to be typically reached through a type of intense peak experience, reported as highly memorable and ultimately transformative. This peak experience of lived travel vulnerability was described akin to a loss of soundness. Spiers (2000, p. 179) defines loss of soundness as a moment when a person's integrity is challenged. Accordingly, "people may 'rationally' consider themselves to carry risk factors, but unless they perceive that some aspect of their self is threatened, and they do not have the capacity to respond to the threat, they do not experience vulnerability."

In other words, people have a unique sense of stability as a person, couple, or community. When this stability is disrupted through an experienced challenge, emic vulnerability typically comes to light. Obtained data shows that this actualises when the dispositional state of vulnerability suddenly transforms into occurrent vulnerability. Travellers typically perceive this as a threat to their capacity to respond to a challenge. Loss of soundness was described by respondents through a variety of intense positive and negative experiences.

Positive experiences were related to a deep feeling of freedom and/or authenticity. A respondent (P6) recalled an instance where, being "dragged" into an underground salsa bar in Cuba, he experienced a total loss of control, but also intense feelings of authenticity "⋯ you know, there's something about this place that you feel very insecure. But (.) you, you're, you're so curious that (.) that keeps you coming. You know, keep you walking, you want to explore how does it feel, and especially you're in that place ‑ dark, like weak lights, and very (.) tiny. Crowded and tiny. You know, that's not like a club with spacious ⋯ People just play the local instruments and also people just (.) nicely dance, nicely salsa together. So that's ‑ that actually attracted me, - just keep going! You know, these underground bars and pubs, they don't have names!" Accordingly, being nearly forced into a dark, un-named underground venue by locals and being dragged on the dance floor for dancing was a liberating experience, although the respondent felt highly vulnerable as this occurred.

Another participant stated that the most meaningful travel experiences can be made when one is vulnerable and open, particularly through meeting locals as a solo-traveller (P8) " Yeah, I think that's part of why I travel a lot by myself, cause then, well, you travel a lot by yourself, you're automatically more vulnerable, because you are alone, but then, it creates this opportunity to meet new people and really have really good experiences. Yeah, you are by yourself, you meet new people, you trust them, like, to an extent, and so you'd learn. You have to be vulnerable to put yourself out there to meet the new people and to have new experiences."

Negative emotions associated with loss of soundness were mostly described in terms of fear, helplessness, anger and even self-reproach. One participant described this intense experience of fear and helplessness (P4) "I had this feeling, that something I think, animals have ‑ you know National Geographic, and all these animal movies, and then you see all the deer on the field and then when danger approaches, these animals approach, they kind of stop, they freeze and they look around ‑ and then they just start running and the predator just comes seconds after (⋯)" ; "⋯ there's danger approaching, there's someone, he's going to come, he's going to do something bad to me. And yeah, and then it happened. And even got worse when he told me that he had the knife and all that because I felt like ‑ I felt like a prisoner. Like this feeling that someone has control over you. Just because he is aggravating you and saying things that might not even be true, like with the knife. It's really bad feeling. And I don't wish anyone to have this sensation ever! Because that's really bad." These intense confrontations typically lead to feelings of guilt and self-reproach, as reported by one participant (P5) "I was in panic then ‑ and then, having exhausted all the options ‑ well, there was none, actually: the only one was to talk to

the man so that he somehow gave me money or payed my bills, that's it. In my mind thoughts were circling round, I was scolding myself, I was swearing at me, in bad words, remembered some – well, it was an inner worry.", while another started questioning (P7) "Why is every other people like normal while this yuck is happening to me? Well, so this was a self-reproach. I tortured myself, wanted to destroy myself, if I could."

The sources of a loss of soundness can be internal or external (Herring, 2018). Analysis of data revealed a complex interplay between actualised inherent, situational and pathogenic vulnerabilities. This was typically triggered by a sudden loss of control over contextual factors, such as encounters with other people or unexpected situational issues arising from the immersion in unfamiliar surroundings. Respondents gave various examples of relevant encounters where situational and pathogenic sources were apparent, such as having to approach a local for financial help (P5) "I was in panic then – and then, having exhausted all the options – well, there was none, actually: the only one was to talk to the man so that he somehow gave me money or payed my bills, that's it." Another respondent described how this experience was intensified by approaching darkness, highlighting the importance of situational changes (P1) "It was also getting dark, so it is of course (difficult) when you don't have the daytime anymore, it is not so easy, and perhaps not so nice, to approach complete strangers" and "I ended up in Kotor and it was also in the time when it was really dark already, so the sunset had happened. And I would say that it is never really a nice thing to come, to arrive in the new city, to a new place when it is already dark ⋯". One traveller recalled an instant of being approached by strangers in an isolated area where inherent bodily vulnerability was experienced strongly (P8) "The fact that you are approached by completely strange people in a quiet holiday place which is almost practically closed or deserted, gave me the thoughts that you never know what might happen." Thus, Spiers's (2000) assertion that loss of soundness is typically triggered by a somewhat unexpected challenge or disruption was found to hold likewise in a travel context.

4.4. Regaining control: a return to dispositional vulnerability

Loss of soundness, as an actual state of travel vulnerability, was found to be temporary and eventually to fade back into the dispositional state of inherent, situational and pathogenic vulnerability - an experience of non-imminent vulnerability (Mackenzie et al., 2014), where response capacities have been re-established (Spiers, 2000). This peak however, was lived through an intense, transformative experience, akin to Kirillova, Lehto and Cai's (2017b) "existential transformation" and Wassler and Schuckert's (2017) "catharsis". Participants showed that this typically manifests itself through experiences of "reflection on the self and on the other" and of "regaining control". In line with the aforementioned studies, this is found to be characteristically an intense cognitive process. Findings have revealed that travel vulnerability as a lived experience results not only in blunt reflections on external circumstances, but also results in a heightened focus on "planning", "self", "care for others", "appreciation of friendship" and "independence".

Several examples are provided as follows.
Respondents have ousted that they have deeply reflected on their process of travel planning, such as (P1)_ "It just taught me, you know, when you are in a place where you don't have mutual language, you have to plan your trips and adventures a little bit better because you don't really know where you are going to end up". Other travellers were suddenly made self-aware of their ethnicity (P12) "You don't know what a person would be thinking. Especially in Britain … you don't know how a person will react when a brown-skinned girl comes up"; and their gender (P1) "A female traveller can't just travel in peace and quiet everywhere without being approached." This recalls Wassler and Kirillova's (2019) sudden self-awareness which comes with exposure to the local gaze.
Others described an increased concern about their fellow travellers or local people, including the necessity of caring for the other (P12) "I have seen how solo travel works, how it makes other people feel, so I'd never make assumptions. I try not to, I try to be as helpful as I can to travellers who seek help from me."; friendship (P11) "I'll just call my friend. (…) keep the Thai Embassy number in your pocket, to have a friend you can rely on!" and (P5) "This was comfortable because I didn't have to explain him anything, feeling some sort of humiliation. All this was solved easily and quickly. (…) So I was terribly thankful to him because it was like he gave me a strong, firm, friendly hand and, one can say, saved me. The feeling of gratitude"; as well as maintaining independence (P11) "So, I learned a big lesson that no-one is going to take care of you if you don't take care of yourself! Even if I called my dad, they are not going to help." The transformative lived experience of travel vulnerability is summarised in Fig. 1:

5. Conclusion

This study has adopted an emic perspective to phenomenologically describe and interpret the essence of lived travel vulnerability. Findings have shown that the phenomenon is typically lived through states of inherent, situational and pathogenic vulnerability, which persist in dispositional form but can be actualised through the peak experience felt as a loss of soundness. This leads to a potentially transformative experience when the individual regains control over the situation.
As such, this paper makes several contributions to existing theory. First, although this study is not the first to problematize travel vulnerability, findings have shown a more holistic and complex picture of the phenomenon. Subsequently, we show that vulnerability is a concern not only for "risky" forms of travel, but that lived vulnerability permeates the travel experience as a fluctuating, but inherent part.
Furthermore, we demonstrate that Rogers et al.'s (2012) taxonomy of vulnerability can be applied in a travel and tourism context, in terms of three different sources of vulnerability (inherent, situational and pathogenic) and two different states (dispositional, occurrent). This specific finding has several theoretical implications. Even in contexts like adventure tourism, where vulnerability has been studied, the concept was usually equaled to perceived risk (Hichang, 2010; Lwin & Saw, 2007; Wang et al., 2019). In other words, different tourist types would

perceive different activities with varying levels of risk associated with them; these being usually adventure or extreme-sport related. The findings of this study extend the concept of travel vulnerability to other types of travel and tourism, particularly through highlighting inherent sources and dispositional states. While this has not been investigated in relation to personal factors, such as gender or age, findings also suggest that travel vulnerability goes beyond demographic features and is likely an inherent experience to the human being. This opens the door for a wide range of research investigating sources and states of lived vulnerability throughout diverse segments of travelers and types of travel.

Second, this study introduces travel vulnerability as a potentially transformative experience. Transformative experiences have long been studied in tourism literature (e.g. Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Reisinger, 2013; Soulard, McGehee, & Stern, 2019), but the importance of lived vulnerability in facilitating these experiences has not yet been discussed. This study subsequently ads a philosophical perspective to this transformative experience. Following Paphitis' (2013) interpretation of the Nietzschean Übermensch, one can argue that the transformational aspect of travel vulnerability creates an emotional peak of the individual's travel experience. Thus, through a Nietzschean lens, this research introduces travel vulnerability as a state to be embraced and not transcended, lived and not avoided. If traveling is about affirming life, travel vulnerability could be a catalyst to experience this phenomenon to the highest degree, rather than an experience which should be avoided a-priori.

Third, a loss of soundness as a challenge to personal integrity and actualisation of vulnerability (Spiers, 2000) is suggested as the peak experience of travel vulnerability. This experience is associated with strong emotions, typically causing transformation to the individual's perception of self and others. This leads to an array of theoretical implications. Previous research has often considered vulnerability and autonomy as opposite states (Mackenzie et al., 2014). This study gives evidence of the inevitable transition from occurrent to dispositional vulnerability in travel contexts, tapping into the existing debate on the role of vulnerability in personhood.

This leads to practical implications for the travel and tourism sector. Risk management has been a long persisting key issue of tourism management and practical implications for this purpose have been laid out by the academic sector. In terms of experience design and marketing though, the concept of vulnerability has been avoided and not embraced as a key point of the travel experience. Tourists have long been looking for fulfilling and authentic travel experiences, while tourism marketing has vigorously promoted these for competitive advantage. The findings of this study show that experiences, such as a loss of soundness, can possibly enhance the memorability of travel experiences and that practitioners should attempt to market this asset; at least to suitable sub-segments. Furthermore, it was found that a loss of soundness and actualisation of vulnerability not always put the traveller into real danger (which clearly should be avoided), but that its origins are highly experiential. For example, tour operators can facilitate and promote situations in which tourists are allowed to "loose themselves" and create memorable and satisfactory experiences.

The study has several limitations. First, the issue of bracketing in phenomenological research is widely contested and its effectiveness has

been questioned (Vagle, 2018). Although Giorgi's (2009) method of descriptive phenomenology has been rigorously followed and attempts have been made to minimise bias based on the steps proposed by Wassler and Kirillova (2019), complete neutrality and objectivity cannot be claimed. Second, if descriptive phenomenology does enable a certain degree of researcher detachment from the participants' lived experiences, it does so at the expense of demographic factors which are potentially important for the experience formation. According to Giorgi (2009), descriptive phenomenology draws a line between what belongs to the phenomenon under investigation and to the person perceiving it. The lack of understanding of individual demographic differences, which may have influenced the findings, is a definite shortcoming of the method (Wassler & Schuckert, 2017). This is particularly important, as past studies have shown demographic factors such as age, role, gender and experience as crucial for forming experiences of vulnerability (Lepp & Gibson, 2003; Wang et al., 2019). In this particular case, the experience-based sampling approach has also resulted in an aboveaverage level of education, a factor which could have biased the research findings. As a result, future studies could adopt a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective to investigate vulnerability as a transformative experience by looking into the lifeworld of each participant. While the small sample size is considered appropriate in phenomenological studies, this does not allow to generalise the results. Alternative methods with larger sample sizes could shed more light on patterns and variations across individual experiences of travel vulnerability.

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