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## **THE SOCIAL SPA CONCEPT DESIGN**

An investigation of innovative experience services which need to be included in a spa concept to encourage socializing. A case study of Germany

Master thesis

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Recommendation for permission to defend thesis



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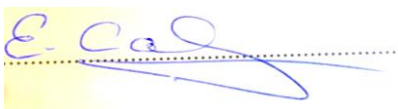
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This Master thesis has been compiled independently. All works by other authors used while compiling the thesis as well as principles and data from literary and other sources have been referred to.



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## INTRODUCTION

Innovative experience services are crucial for the competitiveness of a spa on the market nowadays. They can increase the value of the spa concept and the profit. The following problem statement will explain the need for a socializing concept, which is not well researched yet. Therefore, this thesis will be a valuable source for spa professionals and managers to develop a concept, which fulfils the needs of the customer and is financially sustainable.

The problem for this Master Thesis is based on the author's Bachelor Thesis. The thesis conducted an expert interview in a rural area in north-western Germany with the research question, if it is profitable for public saunas to be primarily positioned in the health segment, with a lower taxation, to stay on the market. The background was the rise of the taxes for saunas in 2015, for which reason some public saunas had to close. The results showed that the organizations make a decision for their target market based on the competition in the area and therefore not many saunas planned to focus on a health-oriented business. Other than that, many of the saunas changed their services and products to a leisure-based menu. More establishments were focusing on leisure time.

Based on those results, the question was raised, which services can be offered to keep especially the public saunas in rural areas profitable, which are not mainly for tourists but the local population. Due to the higher prices, the sauna visits are less regular and for many people seen as special events only.

Another problem which is not about the financial survival of a business is the social disconnection from family, friends or neighbours and therefore due to Putnam the loss of social structures in the modern world. The concerns of Putnam lay in the shrinking social capital which might threat public and personal health. (as cited in Waxman, 2006, p.35) In the age of social media, where personal social bonds are less common, the need

for services designed to help people socializing again might be a starting point to align a business too.

Based on these problems, the research question is raised; which innovative experience services need to be included in a spa concept to encourage socializing? Four objectives will help to give valuable results for the research question. Those are the following four:

- Objective 1: To explore understandings and definitions of service design based on socializing
- Objective 2: To evaluate which socializing services already exist in German public saunas
- Objective 3: To find out which socializing services are already proven to be successful in a spa concept
- Objective 4: To make recommendations which new services the spas can offer

The aim of this work is to figure out which services can help a public sauna in Germany to be profitable and to stay on the market. The idea is to design services which are consumed on a regular basis to gain loyal customers who visit the sauna more often.

Oldenburg (as cited in Waxman, 2006, p. 35) created a concept of the third space. He described it as “a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (*Ibid.*, p. 35). The thesis will collaborate with this concept to design a space with services encouraging socializing. The aim of building this third place is to enhance people’s life and overcome the social disconnection between individuals in the real world.

This study aims as well to deliver up-to-date information and results. The service design will, therefore, be based on the newest trends and the theories on the latest research articles and studies.

To fulfil the aim of this study, different tasks are set up at this point. First of all, a theoretical research will be conducted to define service design and socializing. In a next step, different theories of services which encourage socializing are discussed, which methods are useful for the design process and which risks are considerable. The

evaluation and results will offer valuable clues for the particular work in saunas and the implementation of services in that setting.

Based on the outcome of the theoretical part, a primary research is done to find out if there are already services existing in German public saunas which encourage socializing and if so, which and how are they used. The evaluation process will again consider both, the newly collected data as well as the theoretical knowledge to come to a conclusion. Those results will be used to see which services are already commonly used and which services might be missing and could be beneficial to include in an establishment's portfolio.

Best practice examples will be analysed to show which services are part of a successful spa concept. The examples will be taken from all over the world and compared with the results of the qualitative content analysis. The aim is to find out, which services are applicable for the German market and are mainly focusing on socializing. Other than that, it will state that socializing services in spas are successful and a market exists.

The recommendations for new socializing services will be based on the literature research, the results of the qualitative content analysis and the services from the best practice examples. The purpose is to state general recommendations which are for diverse businesses in Germany as well as specific examples to show the possibility of an implementation. As the services can be both, for a new or an old spa concept, a particular focus will be on the setting where the service is conducted.

Secondary research was undertaken to gather material for the theoretical analysis. The description of the secondary research strategy will explain the different steps, which were necessary to gain enough materials for this broad topic about sauna, service design and socializing. The research, as the basis for the first part of the thesis, was done to define terms which are important to the research question and topic, as well as to analyse the existent knowledge and studies in the field. The purpose was to gain an in-depth insight into the subject and the interrelations between socializing and spa service design. The study was conducted in the library of the University of Applied Sciences in Lingen, the online library of the University of Tartu and online search platforms like Google. The articles used were mainly used from EBSCO Discovery and Science

Direct. The criteria for the research included literature that was written in English or German and it must have been published after the year 2000, except literature for the history of the spa culture. Keywords for the research were focused on the combination of spa and socializing. The following Table 1 shows the keywords used for the research. It was searched for single keywords and fields of research as well as in combination (AND).

**Table 1.** Keywords for the secondary research (compiled by the author)

Order	Field	Keywords
1.	Sauna	Public German saunas, trends, history
2.	Service Design	Method, service design for spas, designing social settings, risks
3.	Socializing	To be social, services encouraging socializing, social settings, socializing used for business
4.	Experience	Customer-to-customer experience, trends, experience-centred services, emotions
5.	Scientific research	Qualitative research, content analysis, coding

The structure of this thesis is divided into three main parts, and additionally the introduction and conclusion part. To answer the research questions and objectives, the main part will start with a theoretical approach of spa service design and socializing, including spa services, service design, socializing and the role of the customer. The specific characteristics of services inside a spa are the base for the following aim to develop a theoretical construct of service design for services which encourage socializing.

Afterwards, an overview of the spa market follows, including the German sauna culture. A summary of recent spa developments and trends follows. The next structural part will present the empirical results of the primary research, with its main research methodology. After analysing the results of the German market, best practices examples from different countries are analysed with the newest trends for spas focusing on socializing. The theoretical input will be discussed with the results of the primary research and the analysis. The discussion will lead to a new design proposal, including a customer journey and service blueprint. In the end, the conclusion part will show the relevant results for the thesis and the research question and objectives will be answered. Finalizing the thesis, strengths, and weaknesses will be reflected on, and open questions for further research will be made.

# **1. A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO SPA SERVICE DESIGN AND SOCIALIZING**

## **1.1. Spa Services and Socializing**

This chapter will analyse which spa services can be offered in a spa with a particular approach on socializing. The theoretical knowledge will be the basis for the following service design approach.

The following definitions of “public sauna” and “socializing” will briefly explain how the most important terms for this chapter and study will be used, which can be interpreted differently.

### Public Sauna

The term spa is not very common in Germany when talking about a sauna experience. Therefore the term public sauna will be used, and for further discussions, the results about the public saunas will be the base for a generalization for spa designs. The list of all registered public saunas in Germany is listed on the website [saunaindeutschland.de](http://saunaindeutschland.de). All organizations have in common that they are open to the public. They can be both, private owned or belonging to the city or region. The saunas mentioned include thermal bath, as well as medical establishments and not saunas only. Not included are hotel saunas or saunas included in fitness or other wellness facilities.

### Socializing

Socializing for this paper describes the verb of acting in a social way such as meeting other people, enjoying time together or interacting with other individuals in general. This research does not aim to design services for an interactive social setting like social media, but for real life interactions, in a social setting. Socializing is not only meant for



individuals and groups who know each other but as well for people who do not know each other and the social interaction between employees and guests.

To understand which kind of services are necessary to be competitive as a spa it can be said that spas sell primarily “experience” (Lo, Wu & Tsai, 2015, p. 155). The term of Bærenholdt and Sundbo (as cited in Nilsen, 2013) “primary experience industry” (p. 140) can be added at this point. It means that the services are mainly of non-material nature.

In the spa environment, the term wellness is used frequently. A comprehensive wellness experience can be planned, with different concepts considered for the development phase. Wellness itself is a holistic concept that concerns physical, mental and spiritual well-being (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009, p. 31). Based on Doctor Travis wellness assessment there are three key concepts for wellness; the illness-wellness continuum, the iceberg model and the wellness energy system (Wellness Inventory, 2011). These concepts should be combined with the nine dimensions of wellness (physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, environmental, occupational, financial, aesthetic (medical)). Social is already a fundamental dimension of wellness, and must, therefore, be an essential part of a good spa service design.

Another dimension regarding the experience industry is emotional; “consumption emotion is the emotional reaction of an individual in response to a product or service” (Richins as cited in Lo, Wu, Tsai, 2015, p. 156). Without these emotions, the service will be non-beneficial for the customer. Different authors argue that experiences need to be memorable to be good and therefore competitive (e.g. Pine & Gilmore as cited in Lo, Wu & Tsai, 2015, p. 158). In this case, there are different theoretical works written about engaging the customer with the aim of creating a memorable experience. These thoughts can be based on the theory of Holbrook and Hirschman who suggested “that consumers are feelers, thinkers and doers in the consumption of products and services (as cited in Lo, Wu, Tsai, 2015, p. 158)”. It signifies that the guests need to be part of the service as well as to take part in the service with different dimensions, like on a physical, psychological or even spiritual dimension.

Pine and Gilmore (as cited in Lo & Wu, 2014, p. 959) describe the “services as a stage” and “products as props” to engage the individual. As this theory is already from 1999, it does not include a social dimension. That means that it is not only about engaging an individual alone but a group. Another possibility is to offer services which include other persons to be the setting or stage. This idea can be argued with the model of experiences as “co-created” (Boswijk *et al.* as cited in Nilsen, 2013, p. 141). In the statement from 2007, the experience production depends on both the producer and the consumer (*Ibid.*, p. 141). On the other hand, Boswijk *et al.* (as cited in Nilsen, 2013, p. 141) define the experience space as “the personal space and context of the individual and in that connection his physical, sociocultural and societal context”. This definition brings a broader spectrum to space with it in a societal and sociocultural context by its nature and could be a base for social interactions.

Regarding space, Manu (2012, n. p.) stated that “individuals develop a unique behavior space by developing new habits around communication, socializing, playing, [...]”. It could mean that it is possible to engage an individual to develop its own space while socializing. Through the given services and products, the person can experience himself or herself through interacting with others.

The “co-creation” approach could be as well understood as an experience production dependent not only on producer and consumer but other individuals or groups as well. The base is that experiences can have social or collective dimensions (Mossberg as cited in Nilsen, 2013, p. 141). Known joint activities or services in spas are mostly courses which are fitness related, like aqua fitness or yoga classes. The new trend arose through these classes, like yoga or pilates sauna where the practice is inside a heated sauna at 40° - 50° degrees Celsius (Saunayoga, 2014). In Germany, they are mainly advertised as health beneficial or events, whereas the Saunayoga International Ltd. (2014), markets sauna yoga additionally to the well-being part for workplace events, team building or parties. That means that the main idea behind it was more focused on the collective activity and the social get-together.

Different papers show the importance of socializing and social aspects for a spa visit. A study from 2010 in the U.S. found out that the four major benefit dimensions for spa-goers are social, relaxation, health, and rejuvenation (Koh *et al.* as cited in Kucukusta &

Guillet, 2014, p. 116). Even though the study was not conducted in Germany or Europe, similar findings can be seen in other articles. Spas are now seen as a way to meet other people and make friends and can be called a place for socialization (Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015, p. 259). Since 2010 Koh, Yoo and Boger (as cited in Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015, p. 259) included socialization in their description of the term spa next to relaxation, treatment, satisfaction and rehabilitation. It shows the importance of socializing as well as the need for services encouraging it. The following research will show if there are existent services or if the market does not satisfy this need yet.

When looking at spa services, it is important to develop those based on the customer's wishes and needs. With the aim to fulfil that, the primary motives for wellness tourists were researched to know what the market is asking for. In a new study wellness tourists state that their motives are mainly socialization, excitement, and relaxation (Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015, p. 264). Even though this thesis will be not mainly focused on tourists, these results show the wish of the society for a social dimension in services at a spa or sauna visit, combined with relaxation and excitement. It might be contradictory but could be a possible strategy for a business to make space for different services and therefore experiences.

With a view on tourism, it is interesting to consider that different cultures use the spas differently. It is of particular importance when looking at how to implement socializing in a German spa culture which was historically not established for socializing, as stated in the previous chapter. For other countries, like in southern Europe, it can be said that "it is more common to visit spas in groups and to enjoy the social interaction" (Smith & Puczkó, 2009, p. 262). The following research will show if the spas in Germany nowadays offer socializing services. If yes, it is a direction towards a more social mentality in the German spa culture. The study of Dimitrovski and Todorović which also focused on tourists' behaviour in spas (2015, p. 264) found out, that the market could be divided into two segments; "socially active and self-focused tourists". A recent study on motivations and experiences of spa customers got similar results, in which they clustered rejuvenators and indulgers; and socializers and self-esteem enhancers (Cain, Busser & Baloglu, 2016, p. 263). There is a recognizable motivation for socially active

persons to visit a spa. On the other hand, there is the motivation of the individual to do something for himself or herself.

The second study focuses more on hedonic services which might not be the only direction (spiritual etc.). That means that different markets are developing whose needs should be met by suitable services. Socially active persons or so-called socializers might not be the prime target group of the spas in Germany yet. The primary research will show how many services already exist to meet their needs. In the study by Cain, Busser and Baloglu (2016, p. 263), they found out as well, that men are more likely to be motivated by socialization and self-esteem enhancement than women and the main age for those services is between 18 and 34 years. Another study had similar results by focusing on spa-goers choices regarding treatments. Due to their research, males do engage more in sports and are therefore more likely to do social activities, whereas females are more likely to enjoy beauty, aesthetic and relaxation treatments (Medina-Munoz & Medina- Munoz as cited in Adongo, Amuquandoh & Amenumey, 2017, p. 107).

Nevertheless, it does not mean that woman doesn't like to socialize. Commonly women are easily getting into conversations and take their friends to the saunas. These results show that the main target group for services encouraging socializing will be young professionals who are looking for self-esteem enhancement. It is beneficial that especially men are likely to do social activities to attract them as well.

Another study's results were that the social aspect was for some people so important, that it was unthinkable for the candidates to visit a spa alone; several customers said that they have difficulties to relax in a spa on their own (Nilsen, 2013, p. 145). Nilsen (2013, p. 145) describes it as the ability to "feel in-place" when customers prefer to visit a spa in someone's company only. It stands for how important social contact for many clients in spas is. A basis for the need of services encouraging socializing is given. Nevertheless, there are differences between different nations and cultures as already stated above about southern countries. For other countries like the US, it can be said, that looking at the spa visitors, they are "more oriented towards the affirmation of a healthy lifestyle" (Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015, p. 259). This orientation shows in

comparison to the previously stated example the wish for a healthy lifestyle instead of a social event as a primary reason to visit the spa.

Regarding the trend of hedonistic services, a study in 2011 found out, that well-being tourism is “more oriented towards emotional motivation instead of using luxurious spas” (Pesonen, Laukkanen & Komppula as cited in Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015, p. 260). The statement does verify the assumption, that the creation of experience is more important than luxurious facilities only.

Another point for this study based on the problem statement was that the visit to a spa is for many not a regular event. Therefore the aim is that the spa and sauna visit becomes a habit and a regular occasion. A study by Loureiro, Almeida, and Rita (2013, p. 41) showed that when the spa experience becomes a central role in an individual's lifestyle, the pleasure and relaxation felt greater. This statement does underline the importance of attracting customers to visit the spa on a regular basis. It might be an idea to achieve that by combining it with the wellness concept, which is definite to be a lifestyle (Voigt, 2014, p. 20) rather than a single service. Nevertheless, it is necessary to know that wellness cannot be accomplished through business services only but through one's initiative (Chalupa, 2001, p. 1; Smith & Puczkó, 2014, p. 5). Services encouraging guests to live a wellness lifestyle can be a way to create a bond between the company and the individual.

Even though this thesis is especially about social services, it should as well be considered, that there can be a social overload. This concept is defined by McCarthy and Saegert (as cited in Zhang, Zhao, Lu & Yang, 2016, p. 905) as the "negative effect of population crowding". Additionally, they describe the situation that "individuals have to enhance social contacts and interactions and invest more time and attention in maintaining social relationships with the increase of regional populations, mental and psychological stress" (*Ibid.*, p. 905). To overcome this described social stress, the services might need to include spaces where the individual is in the centre only. It can be as well an opportunity for services which take away the stress of a social interaction and create a setting, where socializing is valued as a comfortable situation.

On the other hand, there are already examples in practice which show that spas are getting very crowded like on weekends or for certain events. People are still going. The question is, if they enjoy it or if they don't have another choice. One example where people come to enjoy a full spa with no relaxation are the bath parties or so called "sparties" in Budapest. Those sparty events are running for 22 years already, with more than 50000 visitors annually (Spartybooking.com, 2016). These facts show the success of those party events in the spas which are not focused on relaxation or wellness at all. The market for those events is therefore given.

Nevertheless, it needs to be considered, that the spa culture in Hungary is not the German market and similar events might not be possible. Iso-Ahola (as cited in Mak, Wong & Chang, 2009, p. 187) developed a new thought for these two phenomena of seeking either escape or crowded event. The wish comes from four dimensions: "personal seeking, personal escape, interpersonal seeking and interpersonal escape" (*Ibid*, p. 187). Due to this approach, there would be four different target markets. For a concept, not all could be included. Either there is focus like interpersonal seeking at a party event or a combination through creating different spaces, for example interpersonal seeking and personal escape. That would be the option to combine the wellness and escapism approach, with the socializing aspects.

To sum up, this chapter brought out different theoretical concepts which need to be considered for the service design. First of all, it is not only about offering non-material services but non-luxurious, experiential services which deal with emotions. With the aim to create those services, the customer needs to be engaged, and treated like a "feeler" and "thinker". Through this step, the co-creation concept will be part of forming the superior individual experience. The advanced design management should include planning where the customers are engaged to live a particular lifestyle, which includes the services of the company. Regarding theory, the literature showed that the social dimension is not only a factor which is part of the design but an essential benefit. In this chapter, the theoretical input was already put in connection with the service design approach, which will, therefore, be explained more specifically in the following section.

## 1.2. Service Design for Services Encouraging Socializing

This part will continue with the thoughts of the last chapter by explaining how service design can be an option to implement services encouraging socializing based on the already mentioned theoretical concepts into a spa concept design. Therefore it will be explained which steps are the most important to follow and how to put the main focus on the social dimension. Afterwards, the role of the customer during this process will be analysed.

The most important terms for this chapter and the study are “services encouraging socializing” and “service/concept design” which will be defined first.

### Services encouraging Socializing

Services are the efforts of a company to be made to satisfy its customers. As the sauna industry is mainly a non-material business, those services are essential for a competitive business. The term serves encouraging socializing stands for all the services which a company can offer to its guests, which are designed to help people to get into social contact or to enjoy activities and time in a social setting.

### Service\Concept Design

Service design is a method to evaluate the existing services on the market encouraging socializing, and it can be used as well to propose new and better services. The following definition by Ostrom *et al.* (as cited in Untersteiner, 2015) gives an overview of service design:

Ideally, service design is a collaborative, cross disciplinary activity that, at times, crosses marketing, human resources, operations, organizational structure, and technology disciplines. Service design involves the orchestration of clues, places, processes, and interactions that together create holistic service experiences for customers, clients, employees, business partners, or citizens. (p. 43)

The definition shows that service design tries to find a holistic approach and therefore different dimensions, stakeholders, and environments are necessary for a valuable outcome.

These definitions can be expanded with other factors mentioned in the literature. One example is the approach of Untersteiner (2015, p. 43), who cites Mager and Sung that service design needs a strategic approach and positioning for the developed services. This management proposition can help the organization to fit the new services to organizations' values and strategic goals. A new approach from social service design is to develop not only new or better services but innovations which are meaningful for both suppliers and users (Herold-Majumdar, 2016, p. 15). The essence is to be innovative to be competitive and on the other hand to have a purpose, which makes the service long lasting and valuable to the organization and the consumers.

One standard technique for service design is the customer journey with its different element or clues (Berry *et al.* as cited in Teixeira *et al.*, 2012, p. 364). These elements are also described as touch points, and only some are under the control of the company (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 76). This statement is important to consider when setting up the new service, regarding which factors can be controlled by the spa. Additionally, the customer journey includes all stages, "from prepurchases (including search) to purchase to postpurchase" (*Ibid.*, pp. 74–76). That means that the service is seen holistically, and with this approach, the experience is improved. For the management, the customer journey can show the points, where guests have a choice (Verhoef, Kooge & Walk, cited in Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 79) and help them to understand how to use that for successful business offers.

Based on the results of the customer journey, a second basic tool for service design is used, the service blueprint. With this method, the service delivery process is designed (Shostack; Bitner *et al.* as cited in Teixeira *et al.*, 2012, p. 363). Ideally, this service fills a gap which was discovered in the customer journey, for example a stage where the customer had no choice to choose from services. In the case of this study, it will be a stage, which was not designed for groups socializing yet. Lemon and Verhoef (2016, p. 79) state that "service blueprinting maps out the entire service delivery process from back-office internal processes to front-facing customer interactions". This approach



helps to improve both, the client's experience and the effectivity of the service. Another design tool, which can be part of the service blueprint, is the "pre-experience stage" where the guests are prepared for the experience (Buswell *et al.*, 2017, p. 132).

These two techniques of the customer journey and the service blueprint should be part of every service design project, to know the different touchpoints, situation, and dimensions which need to be considered for the holistic experience. For this study, the customer journey will highlight the most important touchpoints for the guests, which will be designed to create the social setting. The blueprint tool will be used for this thesis to present new design proposals.

The results of the last chapters show that the sauna organizations do mainly sell non-material services and the services can be considered as based on experiences. The literature calls those services experience-centric (Voss, Roth & Chase as cited in Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010, p. 67). The nature of socializing features that it will be not about a product only to be sold. To take the experience-centric form only for the service design of services encouraging socializing might not be sufficient because the experience is very personal and depends on different individuals. Another term is added at this point; the human-centred design, which "looks at the people in their context within their community, considering the experience of all the actors, and trying to provide a response to their expressed or latent needs" (Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011, p. 38). This design type comes from social service design which is mainly used for communities like in cities or social institutions, but nevertheless, it could be beneficial for businesses to consider not only the organizations' environment but as well the context of the community of the target group, to work in a social setting.

The context, which is another valuable tool for the service design, includes "the physical setting, the social actors, and any social interactions with other customers and/or service facilitators" (Gupta & Vajic as cited in Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010, p. 68). This theory goes beyond the architectural design of a sauna or spa facility and includes social interactions as a part of the context in which the customer experiences the services. Meroni and Sangiorgi (2011, p. 38) try to define a similar situation, in which people's interaction with objects, environments and other individuals are to be designed. Those three dimensions can be designed with promoting "comfort, a sense of belonging,

and a bond between people and place” (Waxman, 2006, p. 38) and an additional bond between people. Waxman (2006) wrote his article about the coffee shop as one example where social factors can create an attachment to the place. This coffee shop phenomenon, where the setting makes it easy to create the feeling of comfort and an interpersonal bond is created, can be a best practice example for a spa setting.

It is also a strategy, not only to plan the bond between people and places or people and people but in particular people and service employees. The idea for the employee’s behaviour is not to stay in their roles, but to connect as authentic individuals (Price, Arnould & Tierney as cited in Zomerdijs & Voss, 2010, p. 69). Like this, a social bond can be created, which encourages the customer to experience the services on a social and emotional level.

To sum up, service design is meant to follow strategic goals. The aim of this study, to develop services encouraging socializing, will, therefore, be a general approach, which needs to be adjusted to each business individually. The customer journey as one of the most important tools will be used to highlight the critical points for the services for groups. Other than that, the services need to be designed in a human-centred way and with a focus on the social setting and context. This approach can be part of the primary data collection, where separate spaces will be included as well. The following part will focus primarily on how to integrate the customers into the concept, to create a social setting and human-centred services.

The role of the guests is discussed at this point as they are the main parts of a socializing concept. In a sauna setting, there are usually multiple guests simultaneously, and each customer’s experience can impact on the experience of the others (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009, p. 32). This impact can be of different value. Zomerdijs and Voss (2010, p. 70) argue that “the presence of fellow customers can enhance or damage customer experiences”. The aim of the management should be to design a setting where fellow customers improve others experiences and co-create the experience.

Derived from daily life and human’s evolution it can be said, that people often obtain utility when socializing through interactions or helping others (Fehr & Gintis as cited in Schlüter *et al.*, 2017, p. 22). This approach can contribute to design a service for

everyday life and follows the aim to control a more regular visit. Additionally, it is a true case that very often people feel better when socializing and that makes it easier to integrate this approach into a service. This idea is again dependent on the strategy of the business, and which dimensions from Iso-Ahola, which were stated in the previous chapter, are desired to include into the concept. As already said, the aim to combine wellness with socializing could be met with combining services for interpersonal seeking and personal escape. That would mean having separate rooms for both guest groups, that no disturbance is created.

The concept that customers can affect one another (Baker; Bitner as cited in Verhoef *et al.*, 2009, p. 34) is not mentioned a lot in the literature. When designing services which should encourage socializing, it can be considered to use this knowledge and create the already explained context where guests affect one another in a beneficial way for the business, regarding experience creation and retail. Considering that the “human behavior [...] differs [...] according to the environment in which they find themselves at any particular time” (Mace, 2010, p. 396), it is essential to control this environment, for example with behavior standards. Other non-behaviour factors need to be considered as well, like the time or day of the week or weekends which influence the guest structure.

As already mentioned before, for some people it is essential to visit the sauna with a partner or friend. Sometimes it is only the presence of other people which is described as a prerequisite which enhances a social event or social contexts like restaurants or bars (Buswell, Williams, Donne & Suttion, 2017, p. 132). This enhancement through the presence of people does not exclude that guests can behave rudely or guests have a bad personal experience. Based on that, they would not enhance the context. Authors suggest prevention methods against possible misbehaviours, like codes of conduct, holding certain time periods for individual customers or offering multiple sections and areas for different purposes (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009, p. 35). The idea, in this case, is to manage in a preventive way, to deal with the delicate topic of planning customer-to-customer interactions.

All in all, the theoretical background showed the difficulties and importance of the customer’s role and the planning process. For the design process, it is necessary to plan in worst and best case scenarios to prevent undesired situations and enhance the

experience positively. This theoretical part is the basis for the following overview of the spa market and will be considered to set up the customer journey for a group spa visit, as well as for the analysis during the research.

## **2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE SPA MARKET**

### **2.1. A Brief Overview of the Sauna Culture in Germany and Spa Trends**

The primary part of this overview will point out the most important facts of the history of the German sauna culture and traditions nowadays. After the theoretical background for this thesis was analysed, it is possible to look at the German market in specific. The first commercial sauna in Germany was opened in 1936 based on Finnish traditions (Berghahn & Schumann, 2001, p. 26), mainly for relaxation and clarification and not for social reasons as a leading dimension. After the Second World War, many saunas were opened by war returnees, who brought the traditions from other countries and saw it as a perspective of existence (*Ibid.*, p. 26). The trend in which public saunas were rising can be seen in the data of the organization Deutscher Sauna-Bund e.V. (n.d.) who stated an increase from 1000 public saunas until 1960 up to more than 5000 organizations until 1980. After 1980, the number of public saunas decreased steadily due to reforms in the German health system, age-related closure of business and intense competition (*Ibid.*). Other factors will have influenced the decrease as well, like the opening of saunas in fitness centres which are not included in the data given or the change of values in the society.

Today there are about 2300 public saunas in Germany, and due to a survey of the Deutscher Sauna-Bund e.V. (n.d.), 30 million guests are visiting the saunas. The numbers show that there is a capacity of saunas available for the people and many people visit the spa. Nevertheless, as already expounded, the problem is that most of these guests do not visit the sauna on a regular basis.

The sauna culture in Germany is a bit different to other nations, as it is normal to use the sauna nude, with a towel only and the so-called Aufguss. It is a local tradition, where

the sauna master pours water onto the hot stones and raises the heat by swirling a towel (Smith & Puczkó, p. 108). The wellness trend number 1 “reinvented” for 2017 includes in many spas the sauna Aufguss and is described as a theatre culture where the sauna masters are the performers (Global Wellness Summit, 2016, p. 4). This trend is not only for the German market, but as they have the Aufguss as a part of their sauna tradition, this service seems to be an advantage on the global wellness service market.

Even though there was no primary focus on establishing socializing during the German history of saunas, spas have “played a social function since ancient times” (Tarabella, Burchi, 2011, p. 1). The Finnish author Kallioniemi (2014), who explains the tradition of a smoke sauna, writes that the sauna experience is relaxing in companionship with well-known people, making jokes, drinking and socializing. That means that the ceremony itself was mainly the setting to socialize, even though the main purpose before might have been for health reasons. This statement gets along with the theoretical part of the role of the customer, where the guest

Starting from 1700 two different paths developed which persist today. One is more focused on tourists and well-being treatments combined with entertainment and fun activities and the other one more focused on health and medicine (Tarabella, Burchi, 2011, p. 1). This statement is made by various authors, for example Hall who divides into “curing illness or creating well-being” (as cited in Nilsen, 2013, p. 140). It shows that it is a well-established theoretical idea. Especially the path for well-being and fun activities includes services which can only be performed in interaction with other persons and fulfils, therefore, social functions. For the further development of this study, it should be taken into consideration if the business is mainly oriented towards health or well-being. Results could be that there is a higher focus on socializing activities for well-being businesses and it might not be necessary to include those in a more medically-oriented organization.

The author’s Bachelor Thesis showed that German saunas were perceived as establishments for health prevention and had, therefore, the benefits of lower taxation and some services were supported and paid by the insurance companies (Caffier, 2015). Since the change of taxes for saunas in 2015, saunas are officially not part of therapeutic

benefit anymore and seen as a lifestyle product only (*Ibid.*). This shift caused the problem, as well as higher competition, that smaller private owned saunas had to close.

To sum up, the German sauna tradition is well established in the country but was never mainly focused on socializing. With the shift in the orientation of the business as no preventive establishment, the companies choose the path to either to become more medically orientated or for well-being and leisure. The second direction can be a basis to develop services encouraging socializing. Due to the “Aufguss” trend, a first step is set, to shift the picture of saunas from a place of silence and health only to a more social setting. The following part will mainly focus on trends for the spa industry, to broaden the spectrum of opportunities the spa business has, especially regarding new service design. New trends, which are basics for the research topic will be stated and will explain both, the need and demand for socializing services as well as the new trends for competitive business.

The Global Wellness Summit presented as their trend number one for 2017 the “sauna reinvented” (Global Wellness Summit, 2016, p. 3). The trend is explained with statements like “there are even light, music, laser and smoke show” (Global Wellness Summit, 2016, p. 4). Another statement from the Global Wellness Summit (2016, p. 4): “the sauna reinvention trend is taking many other forms: from huge, hip, new sauna amphitheatres where 50-300 people sweat communally”. Other industries are becoming part of the sauna as well, citing the Global Wellness Summit (*Ibid.*, p. 4): “architects reimagining saunas as cool community spaces (with music, food, bars, and talks on art and culture)”. This reinvention process of the sauna is therefore oriented towards a mixture of ideas and services from other industries and the usage for big groups of people, enjoying the sauna bath together.

Another statement follows this thought, of creating a social which is not designed in a traditional way anymore; “the trend: far more creative, social, fun and glorious sauna design and experiences, which look to be exported beyond Europe” (*Ibid.* p. 4). The future of the wellness industry is described as well, and that the sector is facing “the need for social and fun experiences in our Age of Loneliness” (Global Wellness Summit, 2016, p. 7). This thought proves that services engaging socializing are a need of the market. Additionally, it should be said, that there is an “interweaving of spa

experiences with art, culture, music and performance" (*Ibid.*, p. 7). This idea brings the setting itself to the front, and not the services offered only. On the other hand, the problem of loneliness and the need for social experiences is reassured and opens the way for new concepts, like the social spa concept.

The qualitative content analysis will show how and if the German saunas already implement these new trends for their businesses, with a particular focus on the social part and its spaces and services. The creativity part will take a more important role for the best practice spas, to show, what is possible for spas. It will as well show if those new services and trends are suitable for a socializing spa concept. The following research results will show in parts, which services already exist.



### **3. A PRIMARY RESEARCH: SOCIALIZING SERVICES IN GERMAN SAUNAS AND BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES**

#### **3.1. Primary Research Methodology**

The aim of the primary research strategy is to gather more information about the services which are already provided in German public saunas. Nowadays, services are all listed on the websites of the organisation. Therefore, as the most suitable method for this research, case study analysis was chosen to find out which services are already on the market, which encourage socializing. Two data collection methods were used, qualitative content analysis and benchmarking.

A content analysis is defined as an analysis of materials which is from any kind of communication (Mayring, 2008, p. 11). It was already mentioned that the focus should be on the web pages of the organisations and due to the literature, it is possible that the data consists of internet sites and can be of a visual or language based nature (Saldana as cited in Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 72). In this case, the materials can be additionally either visual or language based in nature. The main focus will be on the treatment and service menu, but as well on facilities and marketing, which might be only communicated through pictures and videos.

Due to the definition of Mayring (2008, p. 13), a content analysis aims to analyse communication, to analyse fixed communication, to do so systematically and based on rules and theory. The results should show that there can be conclusions drawn from different aspects of the communication. For this research, the communication is based on information from the organisation for the customer, and in many cases, marketing strategies are used. These facts should be considered when evaluating data, as information could be exaggerated or services promised which are not parts of the concept.

As the research question is complex and not about quantitative data only, a standard quantitative content analysis would not be sufficient to gather enough information. Besides, the websites are very complex, and data should be analysed not only through facts and text, but through visual communication as well and a holistic glance at the web page. Therefore, a newer version of qualitative content analysis was chosen.

The qualitative content analysis takes the chosen materials as the basis for the data (Gläser & Laudel, 2010, p. 199). For this study, the complete website of an organisation will be the material. Gläser and Laudel state that it is the aim to extract the raw data of the origin text instead of coding it, to only have relevant data for the research approach. This is done with search grids based on theoretical knowledge and created before the content analysis (2010, p. 200). The following Table 2 shows the grid, which is used for this study with theoretical explanations.

**Table 2.** Criteria for the first cycle of the content analysis (compiled by the author)

Category	Theoretical Consideration
No.	Countability and identification
Organization	Name for identification
Source	Confirmability
Category 1	Extracting raw data based on the theory of Gläser and Laudel (2010, p. 199)
Category 2	Extracting raw data based on the theory of Gläser and Laudel (2010, p. 199)
Category 3	Extracting raw data based on the theory of Gläser and Laudel (2010, p. 199)

This system of categories can stay open for the research itself, to be changed and added if needed (Gläser & Laudel, 2010, p. 201). Newest articles confirm this theory and state that it is a characteristic of qualitative analyses to have mixed forms of developing category systems, which can be described as deductive-inductive categorization (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 69). The deductive way of finding a categorization means to find the categories based on theoretical considerations made beforehand. On the other hand, the inductive way is to derive the categories while analysing the material (Mayring, 2008, p. 74–75). Table 3 shows the categories for the first cycle of the content analysis, and it will be changed if needed during the study process.

**Table 3.** New criteria for the first cycle (compiled by the author)

Criteria	Theoretical Consideration
No.	Countability and identification
Organization	Name for identification
Source	Confirmability
Region	Which kind of market, touristic or not, problem statement showed the difficulties for rural areas
Size	Comparability
Target Group	Are groups already targeted?
Services	Are there any socializing services?
Facilities	Are there any facilities encouraging socializing?
Events/Workshops	Are there any events or workshops encouraging socializing?

The web page <http://www.sauna-in-deutschland.de> features a list of 2351 public sauna organizations in Germany as well as a list of producers and merchants from the sector. The platform is trusted as it was developed with the support of the Deutscher Sauna-Bund e.V. As there are more than two thousand public saunas listed, systematic random sampling is used to gain sufficient information and that the study is of scientific value. It is defined to “take every x element from a main unit” (translated by the author from Brosius, Koschel & Haas, 2009, p. 79). In this case, every 10th organisation will be chosen for the study, with a total of 235 saunas. The confidence interval, in this case, is about 90 %. If the organisation does not have a menu of services on their website, an email will be sent to ask for more information, regarding their services and treatments.

In the empirical social sciences, there is a probability of error of about 5 % for random sampling (Brosius, Koschel & Haas, 2009, p. 77). It has to be considered as well, that some organisations might not have all information on their websites and will not provide an online version of their service menu. The data could be biased by that as well.

After filling in the grid with all information, a second step will be taken, to already analyse data and to receive an even more meaningful outcome. Even though this method is better known from quantitative research, it is also used in modern qualitative data analysis. It is conducted in two cycles. The first cycle is meant to summarize the data (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 86) and therefore similarly used as the extracting of the most important information. The second cycle is called pattern coding, with the task to group the summaries into smaller numbers of categories (*Ibid.*, p. 86). These

categories will be developed from the information of the grid and the theoretical background. For this work holistic coding will be used, as it applies a single code to a large unit of data (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 77). The reason for this choice is that the different services offered by the organizations will have different descriptions, for example, due to marketing reasons, but are still of the same category. In this case, data can be added to a holistic code. Some of the treatments or services will be categorised for different themes, and therefore simultaneous coding will be used as well, where multiple codes occur for one data content (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 81).

The following Figure 1 of Mayring (2008, p. 64) will be used as a basic table for this step.

Paraphrase (text from data)	Generalization (e.g. sauna event)	Reduction (add or delete generalizations)
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**Figure 1.** Criteria for the second cycle of the content analysis (Mayring, 2008, p. 64, including additional notes by the author)

The last results of the reduction step will be taken to evaluate which services, facilities or events are already given with the main focus on socializing and which kind of companies seem to use them, based on the size, the region and the target group of the establishment.

Another form of primary data will be gathered through benchmarking, to learn from the best business and benefit from their knowledge. The first author who set the basics for benchmarking was Robert C. Camp. He defines benchmarking as the search for solutions, which should be based on the best methods and procedures for the industry, the so-called “best-practice” with the aim to achieve the best practice possible for the business (as cited in Frank, 2006, p. 2). For this work, it means that the best practice examples which were presented in the Global Wellness Summit for trend number one are taken to gather the information. At this point, it is not possible to compare these businesses with one new business but to gain new knowledge which can be compared and discussed with the background of the results of the qualitative content analysis. To make it comparable, the same categories as for the content analysis will be chosen.

This method will be undertaken in two categories, as they are presented in the 8 Wellness Trends for 2017 from the Global Wellness Summit (2016, pp. 4–5); “sauna design” and “Aufguss theater”. A current London Design Festival exhibition showed the trend “sauna as the new social, community-creating “hangout” (and a healthy and hot alternative to bars and restaurants)” (as cited in Global Wellness Summit, 2016, pp. 4–5). This trend is very suitable for the topic of this Master thesis and therefore the eight best practice examples which were listed for the “sauna design” will be taken for the benchmarking. As the content analysis showed the importance of the Aufguss in German saunas, the second category will be “Aufguss theatre” with six businesses. The following chapter will continue with the research results and the analysis which are based on the explained methodology.

### **3.2. Research Results and Analysis**

The following part will explain the different steps of the research which were adjusted, as described in the methodology part, during the research. Afterwards, the results will be presented in three categories, the target market, events which encourage socializing and services and facilities encouraging socializing.

First of all, a trial with ten companies was done to see if the categories were suitable for valuable results. It can be said that some categories were not precise enough, took a lot of time to research and would not have been suitable to put into a code for the second cycle. Therefore, the categories were adjusted.

The categories of the size of the spas and the offered facilities were not easy to distinguish. New and more specific terms were conducted to do the analysis and will be exemplified in the following part. The decision how to quantify the region in its size was made on the base of the economic lexicon Gabler Wirtschaftslexikon (n.d.). It was valuable to know how the results vary for different sizes of markets. The term “Bad” was added to show that those regions are commonly categorized as rural areas, but frequently offer a wider variety of services due to health and wellness tourists and patients.

Categories of the region:

- rural area with less than 20000 inhabitants (RA)
- city area, between 20000 and 100000 inhabitants (CA)
- urban area with more than 100000 inhabitants (UA)
- "Bad" as a curative area for health and wellness tourists (BAD)

The trial research showed that it is difficult to distinguish between the different sizes and that there is a need for a categorization. The aim is to find out, which areas have which kind of size in general and which size is commonly used for socializing services. The following adapted size breakdown is used to categorize the different business to their size in the amount of saunas only, as this is a commonly known aspect of the defined regions and markets. Nevertheless, it needs to be considered if this is a criterion for a socializing spa concept.

Size:

- Less than four saunas (S)
- Four to seven saunas (M)
- More than seven saunas (L)

The different facilities should show what the business focusses on most. Therefore, the aim is to answer the question, in which areas socializing services are useful to integrate. On the other hand, it does as well give an answer to the theoretically discussed idea of separating certain guest groups, to create a preferable social setting, for example with "relaxation areas", "silent rooms", "terraces" or "garden". The different variations of gastronomic facilities like "restaurant", "bar" or "bistro" are important due to the "coffee shop" phenomenon which is known to bring people together to socialize. The terms are generated from the trial websites. Other than that, the first facilities "swimming pool hall", "small pool" or "sports pool" are necessary because they show on what the business is focusing. A huge swimming pool hall for instance, shows that the focus is commonly on leisure, swimming and family activities, whereas small pools generally state that the primary focus is on the sauna bath. The following services like "cosmetic" and "massage" are valuable to see because they are the most commonly

used services in spas. For this thesis it is interesting to see, if the spas offer those services only or as well new socializing services.

Facilities:

- Swimming pool hall (SPH)
- Small pool (SP)
- Sports Pool (SPO)
- Cosmetic (CO)
- Massage (MA)
- Restaurant (RE)
- Bar (BA)
- Bistro (BI)
- Garden (GA)
- Terrace (TE)
- Silent room (SR)
- Relaxation area (RA)

Other than that, it was hard to find out which target group the sauna addressed without doing primary research on this topic specifically. The category “target group” will be changed into “images”, as they show visually what the company stands for and what the business tries to sell.

Another result of this trial study was that many services are included in the standard entrance fee, as they are part of the experience, for example, an Aufguss. It is also important to show services for which the customer is charged. Additional charges for special services need to be taken, to have a profitable business.

The new criteria which are used for the first cycle and specified above are the following in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Final criteria for the first cycle (compiled by the author)

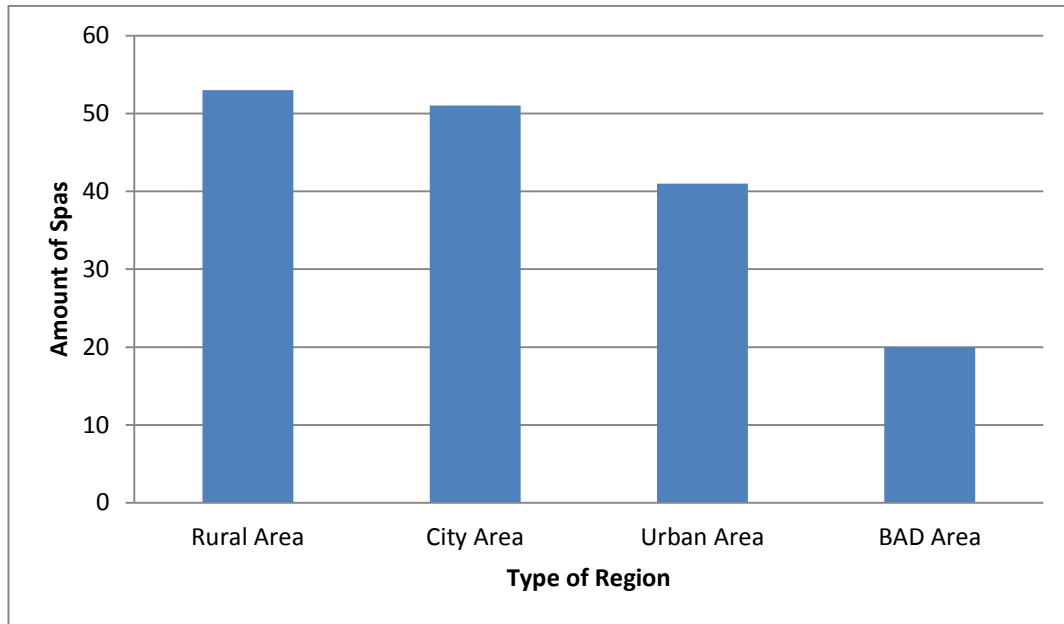
Criteria	Theoretical Consideration
No.	Countability and identification
Organization	Name for identification
Source	Confirmability
Region	Which kind of market, touristic or not, problem

	statement showed the difficulties for rural areas
Size	Comparability
Facilities	Which facilities are needed for a successful spa concept in different regions?
Images	What do the images say about the spa, its target group and offers?
Events/Workshops	Are there any events or workshops encouraging socializing?
Special services/facilities	Are there any special services or facilities encouraging socializing?

The first cycle with the above-mentioned categories was done with a total of 236 establishments. The developed criteria after the trial were well applicable for the analysis. In the end, the author found out that for this research 165 businesses were eligible to take for the second cycle and the final analysis. To explain the high number of saunas, which were not suitable to include in the research, it can be said that 57 saunas did not have a website at all or it was not possible to find them under their name and city. Other than that, four saunas were closed recently, and other ten companies had no information about the sauna area itself on their website. Most of the establishments which did not have their own website were saunas in small villages and saunas integrated into private physiotherapy practices or massage practices. In general, it can be said that the web pages varied a lot and the research does only contain the information of the websites. That means that certain facilities or services might be available but not mentioned online.

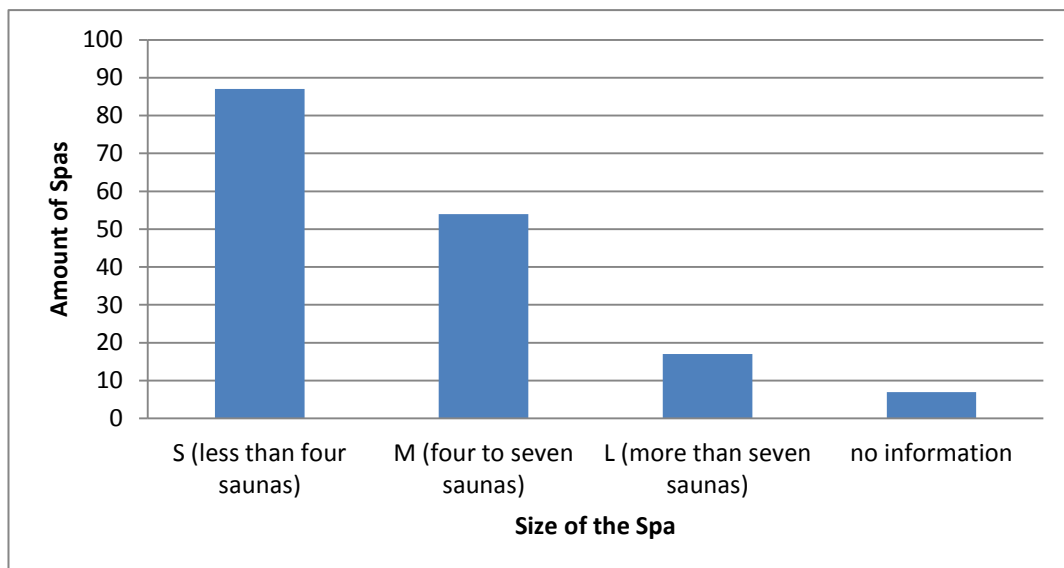
For the second cycle, all the 165 valuable saunas were taken to find out the most important outcomes. The following Figure 2 (p. 33) shows the number of businesses in the different areas. Most of the saunas with an amount of 53 are located in the countryside. As already said, a majority of the saunas without a website were from rural areas; this amount could be much higher. The fewest saunas in this research are from curative areas (BAD) and this is good for the results, as those are mainly focused on their therapies and not on a socializing spa concept. Nevertheless, they can give valuable ideas for the concept.





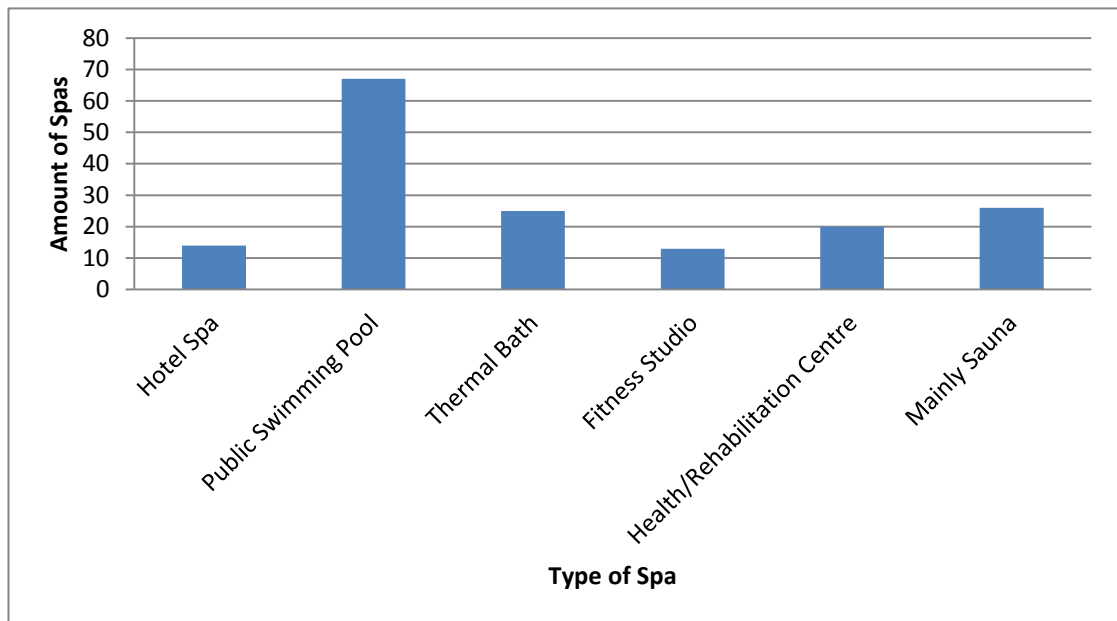
**Figure 2.** Amount of spas divided by the areas (compiled by the author)

The next Figure 3 shows the size based on the number of saunas in the different businesses. Most of the researched saunas have less than four saunas. This result would fit the table before, in which most of the regions were rural areas, which do not have a huge market and therefore not that many saunas are needed in one business. The 17 large companies with seven or more saunas did as well have the most informative websites and more facilities and services.



**Figure 3.** Size of the spas (compiled by the author)

Another aim for the second cycle was to develop new categories out of the information, for better results. Even though the saunas from the Deutscher Sauna-Bund e.V. were meant to be public saunas only, there were as well some hotel spas and saunas of health and fitness centres which have a different target group than for a sauna concept which could mainly function as an independent business. The following Figure 4 was designed to show the various types of organisations. The differentiation was made due to the purpose and target group of the business.



**Figure 4.** Spas differentiated by types (compiled by the author)

It can be said that most of the saunas are part of public swimming pool businesses. That means that the focus is on the swimming hall with different sports activities and family and children events like birthday parties. Those events are already very social but might not be a new spa concept. Attractive to a new design is the idea to implement more settings, facilities and services for families or to integrate any team sport. For this research, these establishments did not have many services for the sauna area itself, as it was not the main area. Based on the author's Bachelor Thesis there was the trend visible, especially for rural areas, to focus on these leisure and family based businesses. One reason is the support of the city government which wants to provide swimming training for the local children.

26 companies concentrate mainly on the sauna business. Included are especially the large firms with seven or more saunas. Out of 165, this is not a huge number, and it proves that most of the saunas in Germany need to offer other services as well to survive on the market or the saunas are additional facilities to another business.

Examples are hotel spas or saunas in fitness centres which give extra value to the business but they are not the main selling point. The research showed that hotel spas mainly focus on couples and packages for them, which means that they already provide certain services to enhance socializing. Fitness centres try to do similar for individuals or friends with the atmosphere and setting. For example, they have small relaxation areas, which invite to have a chat, through the atmosphere creation. It is usually not entirely separated from the fitness area and therefore not a silent area. Other than that, the chairs are similar to a bistro or bar.

The health and rehabilitation centres include the sauna mostly for the curative and preventive purpose but see as well the additional value in creating a wellness space for their guests and patients. As already mentioned, the results will be presented and analysed in the following three parts.

First of all, the target market for a socializing spa concept is analysed in detail. To find out if the spas already target groups of friends or families the contents of the pictures were analysed. It was counted how many spas show groups of friends, and how many spas show families primarily. Couples were not mentioned here, even though they socialize, as they are already the main target group of many spa businesses. The results state that 30 spas show an interest in attracting groups of friends and 42 spas show mainly families. The second number is apparently based on the high number of public swimming pools and might, therefore, be more for the pool itself than the sauna. Nevertheless, if counting those two categories together, for this research, approximately 44 % of the saunas advertise their saunas for groups of people and not couples and individuals only. That means that the companies see a market in this field for the spa environment.

Going back to the problem statement which mentioned that people visit the sauna not on a regular basis, the category “day out” was implemented. The results were from the

pictures, topics, and advertisement of the websites. 31 organizations were found out to market especially escapism and the wish to make holidays for one day close to home. Those were again especially the large ones. This result gives the impression that a whole day is needed and it is more like something special the guest would enjoy for certain occasions but not regularly. On the other hand, these spas market special prices as well, for example after-work tickets which can be used more frequently.

For a socializing spa concept design, it means that it is possible to target whole groups of customers directly. Nevertheless, a market analysis for the particular business needs to be undertaken as well as an adaptation of the other services and products. For the hypothesis that regular sauna visits are better for a socializing spa, there was no clear conclusion made here. Some saunas even market both, a whole day out as well as some hours. Like this, the business can target different groups and plan the degree of capacity utilization. The direction or philosophy if targeting either a regular customer or a “day out” customer depends again on the market’s needs and the company’s mission. However, if building up a spa concept which should be a lifestyle concept, the regular visit would be focused again, referring to the coffee shop phenomenon as an example.

After taking a deeper look into the target market, this part will point out events which encourage socializing. Approximately 37% of the researched saunas offered themed events for their guests. Mentioning that some saunas do not publish events on their websites and smaller saunas which are part of a fitness studio or health centre do not primarily organise events based on saunas, it is quite a high number. The sauna events are both included in the standard entrance fee or for an additional fee, depending on the spa and cost of the event. The events vary from themes like Asian, country style, family, romantic, crime sauna or literature night.

Other than that, there are party events with themes like the 80s party, pool party or dance. This comes close to the trend of thermal bath parties like in Budapest. In all those events, the guests enjoy the experience with other guests around them. There is the possibility to interact with other guests or simply enjoy individually or with the companion. Due to the theoretical research, it is vital to design the different touchpoints if guests get into contact with other unknown guests to make it a superior experience.

This approach might be a way to get individuals and couples to a group and give them the setting to socialize.

On the other hand, there are events which are specially designed for an already existing group like stag parties, cooking clubs or a sauna club. Those groups are either addressed by the spa as a whole or created by the spa itself. The sauna club, for example, was established by the spa itself, and the members benefit from seminars and special events and bonuses.

Most of the saunas had long sauna nights as their main events which had different themes for each event. This takes the direction of after work specials to attract people after a working day and not only during the weekends or for a whole day. Regular events like that could be influential to create a lifestyle habit for the guests. Some saunas even advertised these nights especially for colleagues and friends and showed the concrete wish to attract groups and friends not only to relax but to socialize.

For the design part, it was important to figure out what needs to be included for those events. In some points, the findings were very similar, but for others, it was dependent on the region, size, and modernity of the business. Commonly used are the Aufguss with different fragrances and special snacks or drinks. During this research 64 saunas were found to do regular Aufgüsse for their guests and 12 spas even had an exclusive Aufguss sauna which is mainly used for Aufguss events and usually has room for more people. The already mentioned wellness trends for this year show that these event saunas and special Aufguss fulfil the needs of the market.

Next to the basics for the event, other different services are offered. For the themed events these are mainly focused on food and drinks, like special cocktails, barbecue or wine tastings. A themed buffet is usually at extra charge, as well as the menu dishes. Cocktails or small snacks are included in the entrance fee. It is as well considered to give the guests 30 minutes credit note if they consume any food or beverage. It is a win-win situation for both, organization and guests.

Other than that, many provide a show, like comedy, fairy tale telling, theatre or fire shows. It indicates that the sauna is not anymore a place to only relax and enjoy silence

as it is known for German spa culture, but as well for fun and amusement. The show makes people talk about it, tell others about and start a conversation. A little bit more advanced are shows, in which the guests actually take part, for example in massage courses, family activities or dancing. Those events encourage socializing for a group as well as between individuals and couples.

Facilities and services, especially for the party events, include lounge music, live music or DJs, costumes, celebrities, business events, drinks and championships (e.g. Sauna Meister championship, cocktails competition). These are services which are typical known for bars or discotheques and now newly interpreted for the spa design. Given the fact that spas are already working on this, the habit of socializing in gastronomic establishments is combinable with the German sauna tradition. Nevertheless, it needs to be considered which region and target market is being addressed, as it might not work for very traditional rural areas.

The last point for these events is again a group distinct separation. One event is commonly used for swimming pools, where they heat their water one day a week or month to a higher temperature than usual. This service can be beneficial to get a different target group, like pregnant women or elderly guests who prefer the warm water whereas swimmers would prefer colder water. The other variation that more and more spas do, especially if they have relatively small pools, is to open the regular pools at night for naked use only.

To sum up, events are already well established in many spas. Dependent on the theme they can be even party-like. For the design concept, it needs to be considered which events could work on a regular basis, like Friday lounge evenings, where people do not get annoyed or bored. Other than that, especially for an existing spa, the events need to satisfy the market's wishes and be part of the organization's philosophy. From the business point of view it needs to be at low effort but high acceptance and satisfaction by the customer. Additional services at extra charge like special menus can increase profit and should be included. The events are not exclusively factors for a profitable business, and therefore the next part will analyse services and facilities which were offered as well.

The main focus at this point is on special services and facilities which are already part of spa concepts in Germany. There will be a particular focal point on offers which are included in the entrance fee as well as for an extra charge. Both seem to be important, to on the one hand create a social context and on the contrary gain higher profit. The facilities which were shown and advertised on the researched websites can be categorized into three different groups; facilities creating atmosphere, facilities giving an extra value and facilities for private use. Facilities which create a special atmosphere were mainly the restaurant, bistro or bar places. They bring people together and talking is allowed.

As the tradition of enjoying hot coffee or food together is known by many to be a social event, where you can relax and talk about things, it seems to be a necessary part of a socializing concept. Especially the pictures of smaller spas showed that the bar or restaurant area is a central area in the spa, where people meet up, and it looks cosy or creates a homely feeling. These emotions are created by having an open kitchen like in a typical family house, fireplace or counter like in a bar. Some spas brought new concepts into their businesses, for example with a beer garden which would not be a typical spa restaurant. As the beer garden is known for its sociality, it might be much easier for people to calm down, relax and be open for conversations.

But other places were also designed to be a social hotspot. One example is a so-called “village square” in the garden. The name alone implies that it is an area where people chat, laugh with each other and are not as quiet as in other parts of the spa. The same idea is to have rooms called “Plauderecke”, which would be translated into chatting area, or to advertise a whirlpool as a place to talk. As already said, it shows again the areal separation of people, with different needs to create a harmonic setting.

Some spas even offer a variety of relaxation rooms with different features, like tables, sofas, for single use only or TV. Another German tradition which is not commonly utilized in all countries is the naked visit of the sauna bath. For some people, especially colleagues or friends it might lead to a strange situation. The possibility in some saunas to go in bathing clothes could be a solution to attract also those people who would not visit the sauna otherwise.

The research made very clear that many spas build facilities which add value to the business, or add the sauna to a different facility. Examples would be bowling areas, golf courts or exhibition areas. Certain possibilities open up with this strategy. In particular for rural areas it might be beneficial to offer different services to attract a wider market. There is as well the opportunity to use those facilities to create a certain atmosphere and client base. A bowling hall, for example, would probably enhance the socializing environment. To implement those ideas into a concept, they are always dependent on the philosophy of the organization, and which target group is addressed. An exhibition is as well a way to get people to talk and exchange ideas. Another relatively new way for spas is to have separate areas for men, women or children. Commonly known are special days a week where only women are allowed to enter the sauna. Large organizations have the chance to let everyone enter the spa every day through providing separate, as well as mixed areas.

The third category, facilities for private use, opens the possibility for the spa to gain additional profit and to create the perfect setting for a specific event and group. One example is an exclusive wellness area next to the common spa area for club members only. It is an environment to form a privileged group with very personal and special services. Even in this place, the people would be still very different, and the challenge to get them to socialize would be still there. Another situation is the rental of sauna spaces or lounges to groups for private events, celebrations or private use only. A start is given by offering rituals like Rasul baths or beer bath, where one to six people experience the ritual with a trainer, for example putting on a mud wrap. Those services need to be booked separately and are for an extra charge.

To sum up, the research showed that the design of facilities has a huge influence on the perception of the area and what the customer expects. Examples like creating cosy restaurants or social meeting points show the guests how to behave and make for example conversations feel more natural. For groups of friends or colleagues, the usage of the sauna in bathing clothes could be a solution. It would be necessary to have this regulation for the whole area so that no one feels out of place. Nevertheless, it needs to be researched, if the market would accept it. This decision could also be made for private sauna areas to host parties, anniversaries or after work meetings.



Services which encourage socializing in a spa setting are in large part dependent on the given facilities which were explained in the previous section. Already existing services from the research will be described here and can be categorized according to gastronomy, staff, activities, seminars, and events.

In the events section as well as in the facilities section the gastronomy played a predominant role. Therefore, special services for this department are needed, to increase customer's satisfaction and raise profit. It does indeed depend on the type of business, and therefore these can be seen as examples. For instance, the use of a cosy and familiar atmosphere is very common in bars, and restaurants and especially the small spas served homemade bread and cake with it and offered entrance packages which include coffee and cake. This atmosphere was similar to a café atmosphere and the described coffee phenomenon.

Packages, like the earlier described ones, already include quite a lot of social services but do not seem to be offered or bought separately yet. "Friendship Wellness" packages (Victors, n.d.) or packages "for Father and Son" (Reiter Alm, 2017) show that the industry targets people who want to spend time with each other. Most of those packages include drinks, snacks, and massages or beauty treatments. Nevertheless, these could be enhanced with more services in which for example the "friendship" could actually be enjoyed together and therefore in a social way.

Most of the services especially for the spa section are very personal and need excellent staff for the experience. A service which does not have any extra fees for the guests is the employment of special or famous team members like the German champion in Aufguss. It is not only a marketing strategy but can give a whole image to the business. Especially if the expert is well known, people might come for the "event" of seeing him instead of taking time and relaxing "only". It might be comparable to the phenomenon of visiting a concert which is in the majority of cases a social event.

Social activities are not very well established as services in the spa section yet, but already part of the already addressed packages, as well as in events or seminars. Examples of already existing services are different sports activities like aqua fitness, sauna yoga or mermaid swimming, workshops like sauna diplomas, how to use the

sauna, baby sauna or events like children's birthday parties, Aufguss or mermaid championship. All those activities have in common that they are quite active in general and include a different intensity of interaction with other people.

All in all, the German market already has many services which encourage socializing in different ways. Most of the time, those services are more active or based on certain events. Others are again more lifestyle-oriented like a cake and coffee afternoon or having celebrities as role models, actors and staff in the business.

To sum up, this chapter showed that most of the German spas are in rural areas and a particular need to look for profitability is critical to keep them successful in the market. The research showed that there are already many facilities and services existing in spas which encourage socializing but are not marketed as such yet. The most commonly used tools to advertise and reach more people are events which include socializing services, and most of the time, create a social atmosphere. Crucial service success is the design of the facilities where the service is placed. Moreover, it should be an aim not only to create monthly or occasional events but services which are on a regular basis to create a lifestyle setting.

The design is very dependent on the particular spa, its strategy and market. The research showed that the services vary mainly in the size of the spas which is commonly based on the size of the market and region. The final open question is, if it is necessary to combine the sauna with other segments, as most of the spas were not mainly focusing on the sauna, to be profitable. The answer to this question might be especially attractive for rural areas.

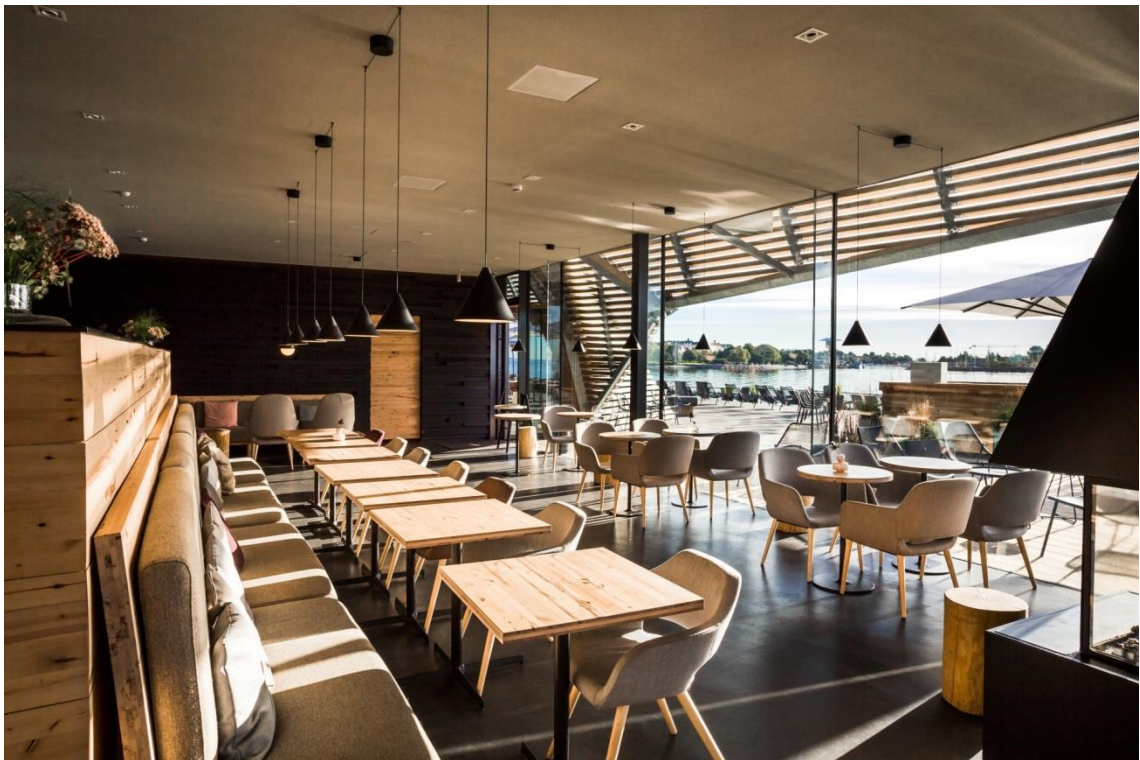
Other than that, the benefit could not only lie in increased profitability but enhanced experiences for the customers. The following chapter will analyse best practice examples, to show what can be included to the already existing concepts and to reach the best experience for the customer.

### **3.3. Best Practice Examples for Socializing Spa Concepts**

The following chapter will analyse the best practice examples of the world which will be compared with the results of the qualitative content analysis. The aim is to find out

about new services and facilities encouraging socializing which could be implemented in a German spa service design.

The benchmarking was conducted as described in the methodology. During the research process it was easily visible, that the presented spas were very special and unique, and therefore a focus was put on their philosophy and services and facilities encouraging socializing. As the results of the content analysis showed, service design depends on different factors of the spa; the businesses need to be evaluated individually. Spas which are located outside Europe followed a very different strategy than in Europe or for this thesis, mainly focusing on body ideals, cosmetics, and relaxation and not specifically towards a socializing setting. Therefore they were not considered as a best practice organization for this study. In the end, four “sauna design” businesses were chosen. For the “Aufguss theatre” six were suitable because they offer services which can be adapted to a German spa concept. The “sauna design” spas are presented here.



**Figure 5.** Restaurant at Löyly, Finland (Royal Ravintolat a, 2017)

The first spa is called Löyly and is situated in an urban area, the capital Helsinki. In Finland, many houses have private saunas and less and less public saunas were

profitable (Royal Ravintolat b, 2017). A new direction is an urban lifestyle which wants a sense of community, and therefore public saunas are becoming more common again (*Ibid.*). This idea of creating a space for many to enjoy the sauna is very social in nature. The spa includes three different saunas, which aims to present the Finnish tradition especially to tourists, as well as a restaurant (*Ibid.*). Compared to the results of Germany it is quite uncommon for a new spa, which is mainly focused on its sauna, not to provide a huge variety of saunas, pools or other services (like bowling, hotel, or physiotherapy). The special focus on one bigger communal sauna and a large restaurant and café area seems to fit the urban environment. It does as well not imply spending a whole day there, but a few hours being in company.

The pictures and the image show a very modern and urban place, and the vast halls in the restaurant and the saunas provide much space for many people. The restaurant and terrace-like in Figure 5 (p. 43) does not look like a relaxation area after a sauna bath, but a modern restaurant, which can be used for non-sauna guests as well. This approach is a way to attract a bigger target group and to create an atmosphere of spending time with friends rather than in a quiet retreat. The same aim is given by the design, which provides a view from all saunas and the restaurant to the outside, both towards the open sea and the city centre. This connection of nature, silence, and relaxation as well as the urban lifestyle seems to be a way, to be part of that lifestyle, even though it is a short escape. For a service design approach, it should be considered that the architecture and building of facilities are crucial for the actual services. Other than that, for a social setting, the sauna culture should be combined with lifestyle elements of the region, for example, an urban lifestyle which includes large restaurant possibilities.

The possibility to rent a sauna is given as well. The capacity at Löyly (<http://www.loylyhelsinki.fi>) is for up to 10 people and officially advertised for parties. The idea to have a personal sauna for a party occasion might not be typical or frequently used in all nations but better known in Finland. Nevertheless, the results of the content analysis showed already that those facilities are available in Germany.

The sauna is only accessible in bathing clothes because they want to give foreign guests the chance to feel comfortable in enjoying the Finnish traditions (<http://www.loylyhelsinki.fi>). This statement shows that this spa is having a bathing

cloth obligation which seems to be wished by the target group. It does not provide a clear advice if it is better for a social place to offer naked or non-naked bathing.



**Figure 6.** Loft sauna at The Well (The Well a, n.d.)

The following spa “The Well” is situated in Norway and on their homepage is written “the Well is the largest spa and bathhouse in the Nordic region” (The Well b, n.d.), and the concept combines different sauna traditions from all over the world which exist since centuries. It does include 11 different pools, 15 different saunas and steam rooms, more than 100 showers, waterfalls, an Onsen, hammam, relaxation rooms, bars and restaurants. (*Ibid.*) Compared to the previous spa it follows the other direction in building a large wellness retreat, which is mainly focused on their amount of facilities. They describe The Well as a “break from everyday life, where you can indulge in the luxury of tranquillity, wellness, and revitalization” (*Ibid.*). Due to those facts as well as the offers for hotel packages, this spa is meant to be a place where people stay for a longer period, more likely on an irregular basis. This thought is similar to large spas in Germany as well as the fact, that they include other services, for example a yoga school.



The spa is as well announced to be for adults 18 plus only and like many other companies do not allow children at any time or in a separate area. Unfortunately, not much information on the website is given in English, but more in Norwegian. However, the pictures and the image video show a very modern design and adult guests are of all ages, mostly as a couple. Different relaxation areas, as well as the Hamman or Rasul, provide areas to enjoy time together and socialize. Given the enormous variety of saunas, there are new concepts like loft saunas which are on different stages, like in Figure 6 (p. 45) and send out a familiar and homely atmosphere. Another modern sauna is the TV sauna with a screen. Probably a modern facility but it does not encourage socializing.



**Figure 7.** Communal sauna at SALT (Langferd AS. a, 2015)

Different than the other spas, SALT is a nomadic art project which is currently in Oslo for a few months (Langferd A.S. b, 2015). It is a “venue for cultural events, reflection and nightlife” and includes the largest sauna in the world with the place for 100 people sweating at the same time. (*Ibid.*) It can be seen in Figure 7. This concept is similar to the Löyly as it is in an urban area and does not provide much more than the sauna itself, which is big enough for a communal sauna event. With the location close to the sea as well as to the city centre, it combines the wish to be in nature as well as the urban lifestyle. The art project is advertised as a festival, which includes concerts, art projects,

talks, panel discussions and family activities (*Ibid.*). It offers a variety of services next to the sauna experience. The pictures show the nomadic way of life, with cosy interiors and arts. The possibility to rent some of the houses is given, for example the boat house sauna, which is for a group of up to 12 people.



**Figure 8.** Hot box sauna at Taymouth Marina (Cladglobal.com, 2016)

The hot box sauna is a new concept which could be installed easily anywhere. It was specially made for places in nature with beautiful views because the design includes a large window front as shown in Figure 8. The sauna is part of the harbour complex with apartments and lodges to stay overnight. The primary focus is therefore on tourists. Nevertheless, they advertise a membership for the sauna visit (Taymouth Marina Ltd. a, 2017), which could include long-term tourists and locals from the area. The architecture is similar to the SALT spa, as it is easy to build up on the spot and does not seem to be made forever. It is an attractive possibility for accommodation facilities like the Taymouth Marina, to try out the sauna as an additional service for their guests. It opens up the opportunity to relocate the sauna to new hot spots or more profitable areas as well. As it is assumable that most of the customers will be tourists, it is more likely seen as a place for a short vacation and random event than a regular retreat. It still seems to

be a very social atmosphere, as the apartments are mainly for families and the activities are focused on outside activities.

On the website, the sauna is not only named sauna but a “multi-functional venue” (*Ibid.*). That means that for special events, the sauna does not need to be heated but could be used as a garden house for a birthday party. Private sauna parties with an alcohol license and outside bar are offered as well and show the convertible concept of the sauna. The trend to use the sauna not only for prevention and relaxation but parties and socializing is clearly visible here again.

As well as many other spas, the business is not focused on the sauna but offers different services. An event which the Taymouth Marina markets is a community day out at a farmers market (Taymouth Marina Ltd. b, 2017). It shows the direction towards a variety of social activities where the sauna is one part of it. Similar to the SALT sauna, it does not include a huge spa with beauty or massage treatments, relaxation areas or a variety of saunas but one communal sauna and the nature of its setting.

To sum up, there is a trend visible towards smaller saunas with fewer facilities but one bigger space for communal sweating. The sauna is not primarily a preventive tool but a lifestyle event which can be for a longer period, for example vacations or a short breakout. Particularly for the urban areas, the combination of city and nature is essential. The prior ranking of the nature effect only, like in a retreat, does not seem suitable for those concepts. Like this, the sauna visit becomes part of a lifestyle and not a break from everyday life. With smaller facilities and less water based facilities like pools, it becomes more convenient to create a design which is easily set up in different locations and can be changed over time. The combination of sauna with other services seems to be important as well; examples are restaurants, yoga studios or art exhibitions.

The spas which were chosen for the “Aufguss theatre” were mainly selected for their Aufguss events and not their service design in general. Therefore, they will not be analysed separately, but relevant content regarding socializing services and facilities were filtered and will be presented below. The following spas were included:

- A-ROSA, Austria
- Stanglwirt, Austria



- Aqua Dome, Austria
- Asmana Wellness World, Italy
- Thief Spa, Norway
- Nordik Spa-Nature, Canada

The A-ROSA, Stanglwirt as well as the Thief Spa are hotel spas which are accessible for a day spa as well. They have in common, that due to the pictures, images, packages and offers, they mainly target couples and wellness tourists. Therefore, they offer beauty and massage treatments like expected from a hotel spa. The Aqua Dome in Austria is as well part of a hotel complex but is with its thermal bath much more independent from the hotel guests. The Asmana Wellness World in Italy is a sauna place for itself, as well as the Nordik Spa-Nature. Four of the six spas are medium sized in their amount of saunas and two facilities small in their size. These information show, in comparison to many spas in the German market, that even though these saunas do not have a huge size, they are successful and have a variety of offers. Naturally, the spas all have the Aufguss ceremony, and three saunas advertise their own event sauna or at the Aqua Dome the so-called event stadium on three tiers. The Aufguss is not anymore a ritual only but called an event. Therefore, the saunas itself are getting bigger in their size and are becoming accessible for more and more people.

Other events, which especially the A-ROSA Kitzbühl advertises on their homepage (<https://www.a-rosa-resorts.de/>), are yoga festivals, events with celebrities and golf or boxing championships. These events are based on the prestigious location and hotel mainly, but especially the yoga festival is as well an essential element of their spa services. The Asmana Wellness World, on the other hand, focuses more on events with music and party. Every Friday they organize pool parties with live music and buffet (for an extra charge), as well as live music on Saturday evenings. Their motto is: “Discover a new way to enjoy your Saturday evening” (Asmana, n.d.). This motto and the service to provide regular events could be a way to make the sauna visit a regular event. The described services are similar to those of a social weekend evening, with music, food and good company. The entrance is for guests 18+ only. The Nordik Spa-Nature in Canada tries a similar way. Other than bringing the Finnish sauna culture to the Canadians, they also offer different events which are suitable for groups and fun

evenings rather than a quiet wellness retreat. Lounge nights, bridal shows, mask balls and girls getaways are examples of their offers which their homepage (<http://www.lenordik.com/>) features. The trend to a more open spa design is visible, where services from different fields unite in a unique product. It shows more a direction towards lifestyle and fun than a primary focus on health and prevention.

Another trend which was seen in the previous content analysis was the availability of private spa areas for rent. Two out of these six spas offer the same, with for example an included sauna, whirlpool and waterbed relaxation area.

All in all, the best practice examples showed that there is a high potential for socializing services and concepts and the implementation is well accepted. Especially the Aufguss event is already a central part of the German sauna culture and leaves room to design creative concepts for the spas around it. As many of the basics from the best practice examples are already part of German saunas, the implementation of some features is possible. The discussion will show, to which extend the best practice businesses give valuable input for a German spa concept.

### **3.4. Discussion and Recommendations**

The discussion aims to critically analyse the results of the primary and secondary research, to draw connections and find out differences. The results will be determining factors to answer the research questions, to develop new services and to generate further research approaches.

First of all, the theoretical approach of service design for socializing is focused. Service design, in this case, does not start with the design or redesign of a service but the analysis of the company's context. This was already said by Gupta and Vajic (as cited in Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010, p. 68) and the research showed, that most important are a market research and the design of facilities before the actual service design. Just as general service design it can be both for an existing business or a new one. It could be argued as well, that a social setting needs to be designed, including atmosphere, staff behaviour or spa guides or rules. Those could be part of the service design for every service. For a socializing concept, it was found out, to create a social atmosphere before

the actual services begin. A good way, to figure out which services and areas need to be designed, is to set up a customer journey for the target group and special guests (like big groups, disabled or colleagues). For this method, it is important to have an experienced manager, to figure out what the guests want. Otherwise, services might be designed which do not satisfy the target market. Other than that, the services need to follow one philosophy to create a harmonic concept. One example would be services for individuals as well as services for groups. This can work when a spatial separation is given. But on the other side, the business point of view should not be disregarded. It could be difficult to plan rooms and staff for two various target groups. For other firms, it could be an opportunity to reach a wider market or to use available space. Once again it depends on the spa and the area it is situated in.

Those different groups are not only a question of space and separate facilities but the thesis raised the issue if it might be better to have a bathing clothes obligation or option or stay with the German nude use of the sauna. Support for the bathing clothes duty would come from the research which showed that especially the new spas outside of Germany which focus on events and trends are for non-naked use. It would as well be part of the lifestyle culture where the sauna event is a regular part of the lifestyle and events are similar to other leisure events which are all performed in any clothes. Regarding the groups which might visit the sauna, those could be business colleagues, friends of different sex or not very close friends, who might want to keep a higher privacy. On the other hand, the German sauna tradition is well established and many people are very proud and might not want a change. When looking at the German sauna portfolio from the research and the variety of events which are all happening while having naked guests, it shows that many Germans feel comfortable without bathing clothes. This conclusion does not prove if they would feel even better non-naked. The assumption for a concept design is that a new target group would be attracted, especially younger people who might not insist on traditions. A third variation would be the separation which is already done in some spas, where special rooms are created for groups in bathing clothes only or naked use only. Further research regarding this topic would help to find out, which way would be more suitable for a socializing spa concept.

Another point is the adaptability of services internationally. Most of the best practice businesses, which were chosen for this thesis, are located outside of Germany with a different tradition and culture and might be more open to a socializing concept than Germany. Nevertheless, there are already many services offered, which encourage socializing in German spas. Other than that, the wellness trend due to the Global Wellness Summit is mainly based on the Aufguss event which is already part of the German tradition. Other services which belong to a lifestyle package are as well known by the population, especially in urban areas, like music events in bars or the atmosphere of a modern café. Consequential, it seems to be possible to create a social spa concept in Germany which would be accepted and used by the German population.

The earlier stated theory that companies choose a path to become more medically orientated or focused on well-being and leisure needs to be changed after the conducted research. First of all, it can be said that the study showed, that many saunas offer additional services in different fields. In this case, it is true, that at the moment, the saunas were oriented towards a more medical or leisure directions. It is hard though to say, which spas are also concentrating on well-being and which direction is suitable for a social spa concept. Looking at the best practice examples and the services provided by German spas, it seems that a combination of old sauna traditions and modern elements like events and parties are the new basis for a spa concept and especially a concept which encourages socializing. That would mean that there is a mixture of preventive and leisure services. Meroni and Sangiorgi (2011, p. 38) already said, that human-centred design “looks at the people in their context within their community”. This theory would be proven with the mentioned services, which were part of the research results. As the direction is not primarily medical, it can be seen as a part of the well-being concept. To create a lifestyle concept, which seems to be a need, the concept can be innovative and needs to be possible to integrate into a person’s life. It could be argued that socializing can be a way to approach a person’s well-being, thinking about well-being in terms of making people more satisfied and happier. In the theoretical part, some studies were found out which state that socializing is a primary reason for happiness and the main push factor for spa visitors. All in all, it can be said that the well-being direction for this thesis is meant to create the comfortable third space which was introduced by Oldenburg (as cited in Waxman, 2006, p. 35) and is part of the aim

of this thesis. It is the space next to work and home which makes people feel relaxed and well. Nevertheless, for a spa concept, it is all dependent on the direction and the philosophy the spa wants to take.

Other than the well-being direction, the wellness dimension, which was defined by Doctor Travis (Wellness Inventory, 2011), takes a very holistic direction and is more concentrating on prevention. It does therefore not seem to be suitable for a socializing concept. Non-wellness examples, like some thermal baths created with their parties, appear to be successful and a good example for people socializing. It is not a best practice concept for every spa, but it shows, that not all wellness dimensions need to be fulfilled, to establish a successful business. To still benefit from the superior feeling after a spa visit, the concept will be primarily focused on well-being.

The question was raised as well if it is necessary to have the sauna as an integrated part of the lifestyle to gain loyal and regular customers or to offer a space for escapism which is more likely to be visited on an irregular basis. The sauna in this case would function as the third place defined by Oldenburg (as cited in Waxman, 2006, p. 35), where a regular visit away from home and work is aimed for (*Ibid.*, p. 35). Both ways seem to work to deliver services encouraging socializing. The question is which mission the spa follows and in which market situation it is. Especially in rural or city areas with no tourists, the rare visit of guests could be not high enough to be profitable. When it is not possible to attract a wider market through neighbouring markets or attracting tourists, the increased number of visiting guests would be the way to stay profitable and to keep loyal guests.

The research showed that especially the large spas advertise escapism and a whole day out, which does not seem to be a good way for smaller businesses. For rural areas, it is mainly a question of competition. Most importantly, it can be argued that the innovativeness of a socializing spa concept could be most easily sold as a lifestyle product which would be based on regular visits rather than those described long breakouts. The reason why to concentrate on a lifestyle service is the already stated theory that wellness can only be accomplished through one's own initiative (Chalupa, 2001, p. 1; Smith & Puczkó, 2014, p. 5). Following a lifestyle change will be a part of the everyday life, with the spa as one essential part. The thesis showed in many cases

that the already existing services and facilities are likely to be similar to the gastronomic and event industry and therefore meant to be for shorter time duration and regularly.

The services themselves can be minimized and are not necessarily body or beauty treatments anymore. The best practice examples showed that especially the saunas for a short visit do not include those body and beauty treatments. They focus on the sauna ritual itself and additional features, like gastronomy, private or public events or lifestyle courses or seminars (like arts or fitness). These findings from the research are based on the theoretical thought of experience-centric services (Voss, Roth & Chase as cited in Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010, p. 67). People want to be part of the service and not only pampered. This new direction opens up the possibility to create a new and innovative concept without direct competitors. Other than that, the customers get to experience something they have never experienced before. The focus lies mainly in the right combination of the sauna ritual with other services based on the location and market situation.

As already said, for this thesis the focus is still on a well-being orientation and the sauna ritual as a leading service. The services which could be combined need to be based on the well-being and socializing philosophy. The theoretical part already stated that those services are “more oriented towards emotional motivation instead of using luxurious spas” (Pesonen, Laukkanen & Komppula as cited in Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015, p. 260). The research showed that there are not many spas which offer luxury services only. Most luxurious is commonly the architecture and building and the pampering services like beauty and body treatments. Nevertheless, it is normally not the main marketing point of the business but the atmosphere or special events.

To get back to the different groups which can be attracted, also the services need to provide different experiences and touch different emotions, from calming, relaxing services towards fun and active activities. The services could be designed for different “persona groups” like a group of colleagues, a group of young girls or a group of school friends. Like this, there would be services available for different target groups. Again, all services need to be accomplishable in similar facilities and with similar staff experiences to keep fixed costs low.

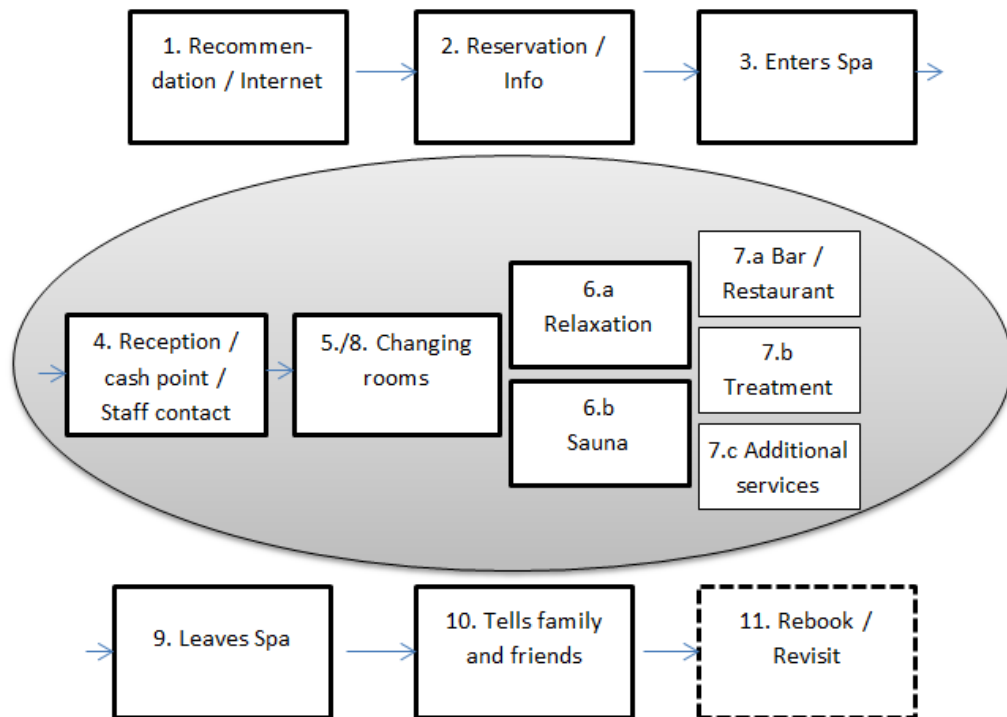
Regarding space, Manu (2012, n. p.) stated that “individuals develop a unique behavior space by developing new habits around communication, socializing, playing, [...]”. It could mean that it is possible to engage an individual to develop its own space while socializing. Through the given services and products, the person can experience himself or herself through interacting with others.

It can be argued, that through the model of experiences as “co-created” (Boswijk *et al.* as cited in Nilsen, 2013, p. 141) and the will to set up a social atmosphere, the staff becomes more instructive, but the experiences are not mainly affected by them. Typically the spa is known as an industry where the employees are crucial to create the unique experience especially for one-to-one treatments which are very personalized. Comparing this to other service segments like in a restaurant, where the staff needs to be helpful and friendly but is generally not interacting that much, it could be argued that less staff is required for the actual service. Especially activities which include a whole group do not need a staff member for every single person. This approach lowers the fixed costs for a service. The main tool behind it is the pre-designed social setting and co-creation process. The employee guides the groups through the activities. Another theory which is a basis for this thought is the creation of a “unique behaviour space” which is created for example through socializing (Manu, 2012, n. p.). In this case the employee takes again a guiding and not a central role.

### **3.5. A New Service Design Proposal for Spas Encouraging Socializing**

The discussion showed that it is not possible to design a generally applicable service for every spa which is encouraging socializing. The whole spa context needs to be analysed, and a market research is recommended. Nevertheless, certain patterns were filtered which are the basis for a socializing spa design. This chapter will show the essential basics for a concept design, based on the tools “customer journey” and “service blueprint”. One new service, which was developed on those criteria, is presented in the Appendix 1 and will demonstrate the various steps inside the service blueprint.

First of all a customer journey is set up, based on the description from the theoretical part and the new knowledge from the empirical chapter. The customer journey in Figure 9 shows a general journey for sauna guests in Germany, which was compiled by the author. Based on the collected theoretical knowledge, a spa visit for a group is drafted, and each step will be explained in the following part. It is important to state the customer journey at this point, to show at which stages it is possible to integrate or offer socializing services and what is important to put into consideration for the concept design.



**Figure 9.** Customer journey for a spa visit (compiled by the author)

The stages which are in the circle are inside the spa facility. The boxes which have thin lines are additional services for an extra charge which are not necessary to purchase. An explanation of the different stages will be following with a special interest in groups, going through this theoretical customer journey. The evaluation will indicate steps which need particular attention for a group experience based on the theoretically established framework.



During the first stage, the customer gets to know the spa facility through the internet, advertisements or recommendations. For a group, at this stage, it is important to address different individuals but find central values or attractions for the group as a whole. An example could be a girls' day out, where all girlfriends are attracted but the given services can be more individualized; like a choice of drinks or body treatments. Especially for groups, it might be more important to gain new customers through recommendations or word of mouth. Like this, it is easier to transport the feelings and emotions which were experienced and as socializing is a lot about the human-centred experience through emotions and feelings; the customers should be addressed like that.

The reservation and info stage is of particular importance for groups, for both the business and the customers. The business benefits from group reservations because they can plan the arrival of bigger groups, for example in providing extra spaces (changing rooms, relaxation areas), giving special promotions in advance and plan the staff. For the groups, there needs to be an additional way to reserve for them because they might have individual wishes (like birthday cakes, Hammam treatments or other services). Web sites and other brochures should include special facts and information for groups, like the possibility of reserving relaxation beds next to each other, the necessity of reserving a table in the restaurant or having parallel body and beauty treatments. The results of the conducted study showed this emphasis on some websites, where especially group packages were advertised with a link to the direct booking site.

When talking about a group, the entering process of a spa is unique in the higher amount of room needed, the loudness and orientation inside the facility. The design of the entrance needs to allow all guests to enter and the service design should pay special attention on how to welcome a group and possibly separate them from other guests to keep a quite atmosphere for other guests and to be able to get all attention from the group. A separate counter would be an idea with a small area for luggage and time to wait, for example until everyone paid. The orientation might be decreased as well because the focus is on the group and not mainly on finding the correct way. It can help to let a persona or trial group walk through the entrance to see how to improve the guidance in the form of architecture, signs or staff. The already mentioned "pre-

experience stage” (Buswell *et al.*, 2017, p. 132), needs to be developed at this point, to prepare the guests for the experience. Getting back to the lifestyle focus, an idea would be to have a café-like lounge, where the group can arrive first, and gets the information and check in.

The reception or cash point is generally the first staff contact for the guest. The welcoming and payment procedure needs to be perfectly designed to create a social atmosphere, prepare the guests for their experience and engage to start the co-creation process. For groups, the spa could offer a first induction, tour or group services, and treatments. Those services can be both included in the entrance fee and at an extra charge.

For the changing rooms, it depends on the kind of group if it is a group of friends having the same or different sex, colleagues or almost strangers. The spa could offer extra spaces for a group to be a bit louder and have more space or separate the group to respect this private situation between the real world and the experience. During the study it was found out that many spas offer silent or relaxation rooms but the separation already needs to start with the concept of the changing rooms. This step is not very present on websites but an essential part for the customer journey.

Point 6.a and 6.b, the relaxation and sauna bath can be mixed and enjoyed according to the guests’ preferences. The relaxation part regarding group enjoyment is important to separate or to have a common understanding how to use the area. Behaviour rules and an atmosphere which shows certain behaviours can help. It needs to be considered, that groups have different needs for relaxation than individuals or couples. The research brought out that some spas offer private sauna areas for groups or facilities which are big enough for a communal sauna bath. Both steps can be used to offer services for additional fees, like a Rhassoul treatment for a group and café-like services in the relaxation areas. The sauna offers many opportunities to design unique group sauna rituals.

The bar and restaurant area is the social hotspot and therefore crucial for a group. The design needs to consider offering separate spaces, enough space, and an atmosphere

which invites socializing. A small bistro or café might not be enough for a social spa concept.

Other additional services are treatments. As already mentioned for the reservation part, group reservations are best planned when a reservation is made in advance because rooms need to be prepared and staff available. Particularly for groups, it is necessary to have services for which the guests are not separated from each other, like in different massage or beauty rooms. Services need to be more social in nature and possible to offer with less staff and room. An example why that is necessary would be a stag group of ten men who all want a massage at the same time.

Additional services for groups should be focused on the socializing aspect to create the unique experience. Traditional services like beauty and body treatments need to be changed to reach that goal. An example would be a group of girlfriends enjoying a facial together in the same room, while listening to their favourite music playlist. With those socializing services, the business can distinguish themselves from other companies and offer the guests a better value. As well as the treatments those services should be designed to include the whole group or more people at once. The co-creation of experience will be enhanced. Taking the example above, the girlfriends will create their own music playlist and take pictures of each other with the masks. Like this, they are creating their own experience. The spa takes the part of the setting in this case and the employees are the guides through this experience.

The way out of the spa should be as for individuals and couples alike, memorable. Like this, the guests will be recommending the experience to others and will be more likely to return. Memorable for a group could be a picture with everyone in bathrobe at the end or the cocktail recipe of the drink they enjoyed during their stay. For a group, it is important to provide spaces where they can wait for each other after the changing rooms. Those areas can be the same, like when the group entered the spa.

The guests need to be touched as an individual and feel like sharing the experience with other people as well, to tell family and friends. Therefore both spaces need to be provided, for the personal and social experience. For a new booking, the groups need

the easy accessibility of the reservation tools again. Even though the guests leave the spa, the business needs to keep contact to the customers, or stay present through email contact, social media and alike.

The results of going through the customer journey for a group are that there are certainly differences comparing to a couple or single person. These variations lie mainly in the creation of spaces, planning processes, and special services. If following the journey in detail and designing services and spaces according to groups, spas have the chance to create a social setting which even helps to enhance the experience through co-creation. On the other hand, the spa would be more profitable because the lost opportunities for profit are shown, where services are easily included at a lower cost and for more guests' satisfaction. These services are not only part of the additional services under point 7. but as well in other stages like at the reception or the relaxation area. The competitiveness would be increased and the business would be more stable on the market.

At this point it needs to be said that this customer journey is very general, to be applicable for a wide range of spas because the study focused on the German market in general. For the design of one specific spa, the customer journey needs to be looked at from different perspectives and target groups. Examples are groups of girlfriends, families or disabled. Same touchpoints will need to be considered especially for them.

Based on those results, the new service blueprint is set up. First of all the target group for the service needs to be clearly described. The theoretical results showed that the target market for socializing services are people between 18 and 34 years old and are young professionals. As it is as well a trend in Germany that companies do and are obliged to do more and more for the health and fitness of their employees, the service will be focused on a group of young business colleagues.

The new service design needs to be embedded in the design of the facilities and the creation of a social atmosphere. This should be done with the economic thought of creating multifunctional rooms and developing services which can be done by many staff members. For this service, three areas are needed, as part of the spa itself which can be of different size. A lounge with a bar will be the first setting, which all spa guests

can use. A bar counter is included, drinks are served, and the atmosphere is similar to a café or bar. The second room would be a sauna where an Aufguss can be made; it can be a private sauna which is only used for these services or a sauna which is closed for other guests except the group for the time of the Aufguss. The third area is a relaxation or seminar area which should be multifunctional. The aim is to use it for different purposes and themes, and it allows the group to have a private space, where talking is allowed, and no other guests are disturbed. The time which is spent in the different areas was also essential for the concept. Particular attention was put into the rooms which can only be used for one group at a time, and that would be the relaxation and seminar area. The time duration of half an hour would allow two groups per hours to use it. Most of the time will be spent in the lounge and bar area. This follows the lifestyle idea to bring people together with drinks and food.

Getting back to the idea of providing a combination of leisure, well-being and lifestyle experiences; the package includes different stimuli for all dimensions. The atmosphere and sauna event outside the office is for fun and leisure, as well as the seminar itself. For the well-being dimension, the guests are encouraged to slow down in a relaxed atmosphere, having healthy food and improving their social wellness. The lifestyle aspect is addressed through the regular event of spending time outside the office and enjoying a coffee or food.

Regarding the higher return on investment, the spa can minimize the service portfolio and have less staff for more people. The onstage dimension of the blueprint demonstrates that the employees per guests and per time are reduced compared to one-to-one beauty or body treatments. For example the Aufguss workshop can be held by one employee, and the whole group can join. The Aufguss seminar was chosen because it comes close to the already existing workshop “how to use the sauna” which is already part of some spas in Germany. Other than that it is a fun activity which invites the guests to interact and be active. The co-creation process is used here. During the acquisition of a move with the sauna towel, the guests can interact; show each other how it could look like, without the need of a high-end performance like during work time. Another variation of the package would be that the seminar area can be offered with other workshops or even without any. Instead of providing a seminar or workshop,

the guests could have a meeting or celebration organised on their own. This is a way to approach the next basis, to create services which can regularly be enjoyed. The companies would have the opportunity to hold meetings in the spa, especially attractive for creative and modern businesses or to reward their employees for a good month.

To offer this package to business guests or groups of friends, bathing suits are mandatory as well as bathrobes in the lounge and relaxation area. The other saunas can be used naked if there is a clear separation.

The backstage of the service is dominated by regular spa employees who are needed to keep the daily operations going. Especially necessary for this service are continuous trainings for employees who do the seminars. Other than that, technical support can be given through customer-friendly booking pages and email newsletters and surveys. Particularly for groups, these need to be designed according to the specific requirements of a group. Examples were shown in the customer journey in chapter 2.3.

## CONCLUSION

To finalise this thesis, the research question and objectives will be answered. The main research question; which innovative experience services need to be included in a spa concept to encourage socializing, needs to be extended after analysing the results of the thesis. It was found out that there is more required for a socializing spa concept than innovative experience services only. These extras are mainly facilities and the creation of atmosphere. When the main concept is designed, services can be included. The theoretical research confirms the importance of services building on customers' experiences. The experience for this special spa concept is mainly given through experiencing time together in companionship, like during a sauna Aufguss or while enjoying food and beverages. This idea departs from the wellness approach which is commonly used for spas, where the aim is to experience in a holistic way and with all senses. These different dimensions can be still included, but are not essential for a socializing concept.

Other than that, services were found out to be designed more lifestyle oriented because that is how groups can feel comfortable socializing, there is a need for short escapes from daily life, and the regular return rate of the customer is expected to be higher. These services can be taken from other best practice industries in socializing, like cafés or restaurant. A good design combines those elements with some traditional spa features like the sauna bath.

The Objective 1 with the aim; to explore understandings and definitions of service design based on socializing, was met, and the results show, that the definitions of service design already include a variety of understandings to create a competitive business based on socializing. Even though, the definitions are mainly based on a strategic and holistic approach to the whole business. This approach was found out to be beneficial for spas with the focus of socializing, because an entire space needs to be

designed, to create one of the concepts basics, a social setting. An example which needs to be included in a definition is the human-centred design approach, which directly looks at the way people live in their communities. The approach is to create a similar social setting. On the other hand, new understandings were added which are unique for the social focus of service design. Examples were shown during the customer journey, where specific factors for groups were shown, which need to be considered. These factors are in parts different than for individuals or couples only. The design approach starts with the creation of a setting, atmosphere and logistical issues, like the check-in of a bigger group of people or the restaurant delivery. Afterwards, new services can be designed or old ones redesigned. During this procedure, the discussion showed that the staff members don't need to be in the foreground anymore. An excellent designer creates a guiding scheme which helps the guests and groups to co-create their experience. Additionally, the question about the needs, of the target market, was raised. It was found out, that one of the main points why guests visit a spa is socializing, together with relaxation and self-enhancement. Through these wishes, the author decided, to integrate features for social seekers and personal escapers into the design. The services, in this case, are mainly for socializing, whereas separated spaces and silent area provide the place for single personal relaxation. The self-enhancement wish in the concept is mostly given through the lifestyle approach and while socializing in a group.

Answering Objective 2; to evaluate which socializing services already exist in German public saunas, the research showed that German public saunas already offer socializing services. Nevertheless, they are most of the time not advertised as such. The existing services can be categorized as events, party-like services, private or separate areas, gastronomy, and packages. The results showed that the focus on events seems to be better for socializing services in spas than a broad range of body and beauty treatments. The opportunity is given to have other services at an extra charge, to keep the income up. Events in different forms, which are mainly themed or for long sauna night specials are already part of the German saunas. Getting back to the result of the main research question, that a socializing concept needs to start with the facilities and atmosphere, those were researched for the existing spas in Germany as well. Existing facilities are central café and restaurant areas which invite to socialize, as well as separate areas, for



Aufguss events, nude or bathing clothes obligation, silent and chatting areas or saunas for private events. The atmosphere was mainly created through a cosy setting, and event- or bar-like features, with music, light, drinks and entertainment.

Next to the services which are included in events and the central concept, socializing services for an extra payment, like the traditional body and beauty treatments, are available as well. These are saunas for private rent, restaurant services like buffets, group fitness, themed activities (like mermaid swimming) and rituals for groups (Rhassoul or Hammam).

Objective 3; to find out which socializing services are already proven to be successful in a spa concept, can be answered through the research. The author figured out that the trend towards socializing is well established in new businesses. Nevertheless, Objective 3 can only be answered partial, because the exact numbers about the financial successful were not analysed. It can be said that similar advertised services show that these services are consumed by the market, and they seem to give the sauna extra value. Results revealed that the main services, which are therefore successful in spas, are events, including Aufguss, gastronomic services, and communal sweating in larger saunas by space and not the amount of saunas. Other services which include groups were mainly part of fitness services or other combinations with leisure activities. It can be said that the socializing services alone are not responsible for the success, but the design needs to be considered in a holistic way, including facilities, atmosphere, and staff. Not proven yet is, if it is better to have a naked or non-naked use of the sauna bath or if it is sufficient or necessary to have separate spaces.

Even if it is not possible to state the proven success of socializing services, the theoretical part and the results of the research showed that socializing is successful in other areas which are combined with the sauna, like gastronomy, events or sports activities. The trend to consume services and products due to a certain lifestyle can be a strategic tool to design a sauna package or service which is part of such a lifestyle.

About Objective 4; to make recommendations which new services the spas can offer, it is not possible to make suggestions for new services which can be successfully used in any spa. The results show that the design of services is always depended on the whole

context, philosophy, and market of the spa. Nevertheless, the thesis brought up valuable information about basics of the design process. Crucial factors were found out to be the creation of a social atmosphere, the separation of different groups and the combination with lifestyle elements. Even though the main aim is to create services which encourage socializing, economic factors shouldn't be disregarded. The use of facilities for various services and the assignment of employees for different services can be a new way to organize a spa business in a more profitable way. Other than that, whole customer journey needs to be considered for the different types of guests to guarantee the best experience. The experience itself should be human-centred and for both dimensions; the social and personal.

All in all, the research question and objectives were answered and brought out new results. The tasks which were pointed out in the introduction were realised and improved during the study. The aim, to design services which are consumed on a regular basis to gain loyal customers, was reached as well. The suggestions and basics for the design showed the opportunities, spa businesses have. Also, the aim to create a third space is fulfilled, with the approach of building a lifestyle concept, which is part of everyday life but a place which gives extra benefit, especially for socializing seekers. Other than that, all data is up-to-date, and the information and results are valuable for business decisions.

The thesis has a modern approach for real businesses on the German market. The literature does not state much about socializing concept design for spas yet, and therefore the theoretical results are valuable for further research in this direction. Regarding the research, it is a strength that the data was taken from spas all over Germany, to get a picture of the general market situation.

The objective to create both, profitability for the businesses and experience improvement for the customer states the value to address a broad target group. The results are valuable for both sides; the spa visitors and managers.

The weak point is that fewer companies were valuable for the qualitative content research than expected. The main reason was the insufficient internet presence. Through the nature of internet websites, results can be biased because not all information were

provided or services were wrongly advertised. Nevertheless, the internet based research gave the opportunity to research a wider market, and most of the successful businesses have a well-managed website.

The thesis found out, that services which encourage socializing are already existing in German saunas, but nevertheless, further research could try to measure how guests accept it and if there is a demand for socializing services in the German population. Based on this topic, different preferences, which were a subject of this research, could be analysed, like if guests prefer to use the sauna naked or not and if the separation of different groups in one spa is preferred or the specialization of one spa for one target group.

Other than that, the lifestyle or wellness trend can be only short-term trends, which will not last for a sustainable business in the future. The question for further research would be how to create a sustainable concept, which fulfils customer needs on a long term basis.

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## Appendix 1. New Service Design Blueprint (Compiled by the Author)

<b>Physical Evidence</b>	Website, telephone, email, in person	Spa entrance, reception	Lounge, bar	Aufguss sauna	Relaxation, seminar area	Aufguss sauna	Lounge, bar (separated area)	Spa	Email
<b>Users journey</b>	Book group event	Enter spa / reception area	Enter lounge area – drink	Special themed Aufguss for the group only	Seminar how to do Aufguss	Aufguss for companions	Finger Food / snacks	Enjoy all facilities of spa	Evaluation of email
<b>Duration</b>	5 min	5 min	30 min	12 min	30 min	12 min	45 min	1-2 hours	2 min
<b>Onstage</b>	Receptionist	Receptionist	Waiter/waitress	Aufguss master	Aufguss master	Aufguss master	Waiter/waitress		
<b>Backstage</b>	Website developer, spa manager	Cleaning staff	Cleaning staff	Cleaning staff	Cleaning staff	Cleaning staff	Cleaning staff	Spa attendants, Cleaning staff	Website developer, marketer, spa manager
<b>Support Processes</b>	Advertisement, newsletter, b2b partnership	Booking system, welcome and introduction design	Signs or map to find direct way	Workshops for sauna masters	Workshop design				Email system, evaluation

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### THE SOCIAL SPA CONCEPT DESIGN

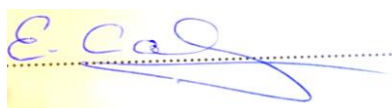
An investigation of innovative experience services which need to be included in a Spa concept to encourage socializing. A case study of Germany,

supervised by Melanie Kay Smith, PhD,

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## **RESÜMEE**

### **SOTSIAALSE SPAAKONTSEPTSIOONI DISAIN**

Uuenduslike sotsialiseerumist soodustavate spaateenuste uurimine Saksamaa näitel

Eileen Caffier

Lõputöö on jätk autori eelnevalt bakalaureusetöös käsitletud teemale ning uurib, milliseid majanduslikult kasulikke teenuseid saab pakkuda maapiirkonna kohalikele elanikele mõeldud avalikes saunades, et suurendada kogukonna omavahelist suhtlemist. Magistritöö eesmärk on disainida sotsialiseerumisele suunatud kasumlikke spaateenuseid, mida kohalik klient tarbiks regulaarselt.

Lõputöö uurimisküsimus on, milliseid innovatiivseid teenuseid on vaja lisada spaa kontseptsiooni, et kaasa aidata kogukondliku elustiili laienemisele. Sotsialiseerumisel põhineva teenusedisaini käsitleste alusel uuritakse, millised sellelaadsed teenused on juba olemas Saksamaa saunades. Samuti uuritakse, millised sotsialiseerumist soodustavad teenused on edukad ning kuidas disainida spaades uusi samalaadseid teenuseid.

Lõputöös kasutatud metoodika jaguneb esmaseks ja teiseks uuringuks. Esmane uuring koosneb kvalitatiivsest sisuanalüüsist, mille peamine eesmärk on koguda informatsiooni Saksamaal asuvate saunade ja nendes pakutavate teenuste kohta. Materjali leiti Saksamaa avalike saunade kodulehtedelt. Saunad valiti kodulehelt <http://www.sauna-in-deutschland.de> süsteemse juhuvalimiga.

Esmaseid andmeid koguti ka ettevõteteid ja nende häid kogemusi võrreldes. Andmeid hinnati samade kriteeriumide alusel nagu kvalitatiivse sisuanalüüsi puhul.

Tulemused näitavad, et teenuste disain sõltub alati kogu spaa kontekstist, filosoofiast ja turust. Leiti, et olulisemad faktorid disaini konseptsioonis on sotsiaalne atmosfäär, erinevate gruppide eraldamine ja elustiili kombineerimine. Nende teenuste häid näiteid saab sotsialiseerumisele suunatud ettevõtetest, nagu kohvikud või restoranid. Hea disain on kombineeritud eelpoolnimetatud elementidest, lisades mõne traditsioonilise spaa aspekti, nagu näiteks saun.

Edasise uuringu puhul on peamiseks küsimuseks, kui kõrge on tegelik nõudlus sotsialiseerumist soodustavatele teenustele Saksamaa saunades.