

Live Action Roleplaying as Teambuilding

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Abstract

Live action roleplaying (LARP) has during the last decade become a part of the Danish teambuilding environment. The different academic and practical areas of the genre has been analysed in this thesis, to establish how organizers can construct teambuilding events with LARP elements can help professional teams perform better together in a work-related context. A review of academic literature on the subject of LARP and teambuilding was made to analyse the area. The data from the literature review was held up against three different categories of empirical data: (1) Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with four organizers of events with LARP and teambuilding elements in a professional context. (2) Observations and casual conversations with participants at four LARP events and two teambuilding events. (3) Autoethnographic accounts from more than 10 years as a LARP participant. The results show that an event is created on the basis of the experience and preferences of its organizer. However, organizers can rely on several structures and concepts such as play, breaking the routine, physicality, social influences, rules and narratives to design events that both provide the tools and techniques needed by the participants to engage in the teambuilding material, and result in better team performance.

1 Foreword

This thesis was written during the time-period from summer 2012 until spring 2013, as completion to the master *Games*, at the IT University in Copenhagen under the supervision of Researcher and Assistant Professor Jessica Enevold, Lund University.

Due to the arbitrary definitions used in Live Action Roleplaying (LARP), future references to LARP games, theatre and so forth will be noted as *LARP events*. The term *LARP organizer* is used when relating game masters, storytellers, dungeon masters and so forth. Lastly, though it can be discussed whether a LARP event is a game or not, the participants or actors at such events are termed *players* due to the extensive use of the word in both academic and common contexts. For participants at teambuilding events, the term *participant* is used.

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4 Introduction

Whenever you trace the origin of a skill or practices which played a crucial role in the ascent of man, we usually reach the realm of play.

Eric Hoffer

My first experience with something similar to an event with teambuilding and roleplaying elements was as part of the scout society, an entrance to the environment of live action roleplay not unlike many other people I know. The event still stands very clear in my memory, so it must have made quite an impression on me. I was around 11, and we were asked to bring formal attire to a scout weekend. At dinner, we found ourselves seated at tables in front of one of our scout leaders referred to as the “Don”, in different groups, or families, who all had a silly mock-Italian last name such as “Bolognese” and “Lasagna”. A big cake was brought into the room, from which another of our scout leaders emerged with a big toy gun and allegedly killed the Don, starting a number of mafia themed events. I was too young to know or understand the cultural references. But though I first of all was disappointed that the enormous cake was destroyed and also was not edible, I was fascinated by the atmosphere and the pretend-play. I later joined the live action roleplaying community (henceforth referred to as LARP) and experienced the complex social constructs and the different concepts of experiencing and learning embedded in the genre. It is these experiences that I with this thesis try to gain academic insight into, starting with the article LARP “From subculture to mainstream” by Müller (Müller, 2011).

In the article, Müller explains the evolution of the Danish LARP tradition from a cultural point of view. She describes how the environment originated from war board games and developed into a strongly criticized youth subculture. The critique originated in how the homogenous society gradually neutralized the subculture, at first by alienation, and then by gradually assimilating it through the education, entertainment and business industries. Today,

LARP has become a mainstream activity, and has thus reached the point in the assimilation process where it has been accepted as a part of the society. As a result, the act of LARPing can be found being utilized in such varying places as kindergarten, schools and teambuilding courses (Müller, 2011). During the last decade, a number of Danish companies have paired the idea of professional and structured teambuilding events with the often voluntary and playful genre of LARP. This thesis looks into the significance of using LARP elements in teambuilding events. Through the next chapters I will try to account for how it might be beneficial to incorporate LARP elements into teambuilding events, and how such teambuilding events are created. Through the following chapters, I hope to establish what kind of LARP-inspired constructs are used in these events, and how said constructs should be used in order to assemble an event that will help professional teams perform better together in a work-related context. This will be achieved by first defining the concepts of roleplay, LARP, and teambuilding. This is done to gain a fundamental understanding of how these concepts are connected, and to establish a common ground for the academic literature review and the analysis of the collected empirical data. When the theoretical foundation has been laid, I will engage in an ethnographic study of LARP events and teambuilding events with LARP elements. This will provide empirical data and experiences from three methods, interviews with actual LARP teambuilding event organizers, observations from various LARP and teambuilding events and autoethnographic accounts from my own life as a LARP player. Through this, I hope to gain a basic understanding of how social and professional relations can be established in a roleplay situation and how play and roleplay are being used in teambuilding contexts. Following this, I hope to clarify the different aspects and mechanisms of LARPing and teambuilding already discussed in academic literature, in order to present a foundation for analysing and discussing how the two concepts are connected. This will result in an analysis of the material gathered, held up against the academic foundation obtained through the previous sections. During the analysis of the material, I will be discussing and concluding the

circumstances in which a LARP experience can bring people together with regards to performing more efficiently together in a professional relationship.

5 Theoretical Framework and Previous Research

In this chapter, a detailed definition of the terms LARP and teambuilding will be made, in order to achieve a technic and academic understanding of the terms and their associated cultural contexts.

5.1 Defining Teambuilding

The origin of the concept of teambuilding is largely attributed to Professor Elton Mayo (Hughes, 1998). Mayo found that the social context of a work group was the most important factor in management and that productivity increased most by taking an interest in the workers, and other factors such as financial incentives, were much less important (Hughes, 1998). Thus, Mayo among other things concluded that worker productivity increased with the psychological stimulus of being shown individual attention, feeling involved, and being made to feel important. Later, researchers such as Gillespie has criticized the observations as being shallow and biased, and states that other factors play a large role as well, including the earlier rejected financial incentive (Gillespie, 1993). Mayo's work was later criticized for lacking validity and attributing more importance than necessary to human aspects, group decision-making and freedom of workers. He did however trigger an interest in the processes of improving team performance. Today, the teambuilding concept refers to a wide range of activities, often practiced in organizational development, but also used in other constellations where there is a focus on improving team performance, such as schools, sports teams and religious or non-profit organizations. Team building is pursued via a variety of practices, and can range from simple bonding exercises to complex simulations such as group assessment, group-dynamic games and multi-day team building retreats designed to develop a team.

5.2 Defining LARP

In order to define LARP one needs to understand where the LARP tradition comes from. Researchers Beal (Beal, 2006) and Christensen, Jørgensen, and Jørgensen (Christensen, Jørgensen, & Jørgensen, 2003) explain the activity of LARPing by taking a

starting point in its predecessor; roleplaying games. Beal categorizes LARPing as a roleplaying game (RPG) that carried out in the physical world instead of the players taking on a role of a character in the imaginary world of the game. In LARP, the gameworld is projected into the real world and the different types of game actions are enacted physically by the players (Beal, 2006, p. 2). Christensen, Jørgensen and Jørgensen explain that LARP is a “dress-up” version of the classic pen and paper role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons. In LARP an extra dimension is added as the players dress up as their roles and act out their actions instead of recounting them to the other players in an oral narrative. In a classical LARP special rules are made to make up for the lack of dice controlled actions, such as combat, magic and situations which could be difficult, dangerous or too extreme to enact properly (for example pick pocketing or sex). Along with these rules a description of the game universe and its culture and history is usually made as well (Christensen, Jørgensen, & Jørgensen, 2003, p. 1). Falk and Davenport also describes LARP as a physical concept. Though the article does not use classic roleplaying games as a starting point for explaining the concept of LARPing, the description is somewhat similar. LARP is described as game form that takes place in a physical environment and encompasses dramatic and narrative elements. They go on explaining that LARP is a story-telling system in which players can assume a character role, which the players through action and interaction are portraying in person. The gameworld is an environment located in both space and time that is agreed upon by the organizers and players, and is governed by a set of rules that in some instances must be formal and quantifiable (Falk & Davenport, 2004, p. 128). It seems to be a common agreement upon that LARPing in some sense is a virtual game taking place in the physical world. This apparent virtuality is also addressed by Bartle, who explains that things that are a crucial part of the virtual world are expressed and represented by symbols when these fictional things are needed in the physical world (Bartle, 2004).

Contrary to the notion that LARP and RPGs are games taking place in the physical world are researchers such as Bartle (Bartle, 2004), Jesper Juul (Juul, 2003), and Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003) who categorizes roleplaying games as “borderline” or “limit” cases of games. According to Bartle, roleplaying takes place in a world operated by the real world and humans, and transcends the notion of it being “only” a game. Instead, roleplaying appeal to people who do not view themselves as gamers, as roleplaying is also used for non-game purposes (Bartle, 2004, p. 76). Juul claims that the classical pen and paper roleplaying games are not normal games, as they have a human gamemaster. Thus, the rules of these so-called games are not fixed, but can be bend and taken up for discussion (Juul, 2003). Salen and Zimmerman however discuss whether RPGs lack the important component of quantifiable outcomes which is a central part of many game definitions. They do however also argue that the component of quantifiable outcomes might be found from one game session to another. As the players continuously complete missions, achieve personal goals they have set for themselves, and attain new levels of power (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003). This conflicting categorization of RPGs andLARPs as being maybe a game is found in the works of several researchers who claim that these “games” are something more than formal systems, and that the academic angle on the genre should focus on other areas rather than focusing solely on its ludological mechanisms. Mackay states that LARPs may initially start out as games, but develops over time into something else. He observes that when RPGs are engaged in by the same player over a long playing time (for example months of weekly sessions); the rules sink into the background of the game experience. Instead, the player-created characters and stories become the centre of the experience, as the players’ relationship with their player characters and the other players’ character develop into richer and deeper interactions. He thus states that RPGs are imaginary-entertainment environments wherein players move through various spheres (drama, script, theatre and performance), which are domains of the ritual sphere of role-playing (Mackay, 2001). Researcher Nicholson uses

LARP and theatre as a basis in her book *Applied Drama*, where she argues that LARPing can be categorized as drama and theatre, and is a part of the platform of *Open Theatre*. She states that the act of roleplaying along with the platform of theatre can be used as both a form of therapy, to persuade people to cooperate and to educate its participants in various areas (Nicholson, 2005). Moving further away from the notion that LARP should be analysed in a ludological context is Boss, who first and foremost identifies a LARP game as a social system. She claims that the essence of LARPing is that it is both a creative exercise, a complex social activity and by its very nature a collaborative venture. The strength of roleplaying is how it can bring ideas and interests of a group of people together, in order to tell a story, create an imaginary world and entertain people. Boss states that each person participating in and contributing to the experience bring their own personal experience and all are equally able to contribute to the experience (Boss, 2008, p. 1).

Thus,LARPs have been categorized as

- Games
- Borderline games
- Theatre and drama
- Social systems

Copier makes up with the idea that LARPing belongs to any of these categories be it game or drama, and states that these sorts of games should not be viewed as separate entities. Instead, they are part of a larger fantasy subculture (Copier, 2005, p. 2). According to Copier, LARPs can be seen as something in its own right, mainly due to the two-sidedness of the concept: the roleplaying game in itself and the actual act of roleplaying. Copier notes that the act of roleplaying is not reserved for RPGs, as the activity of acting out or assuming a particular role can be done within many different forms of environments and games. Roleplaying is simply a natural part of RPGs, as this game genre offer specific rules and

settings which guide role-play (Copier, 2005, p. 4). Copier thus ends up distinguishing between two sides it seems that the activity of LARPing can be viewed from two different sides:

1. How a LARP event is created as a formal system, be it games, theatre or social systems, touching on the subjects of ludology, structure and mechanics (live action roleplaying *games*).
2. How the player assumes the role of his player character and interacts with the world and the other players, touching on the subjects of sociology and psychology (the *act of roleplaying*).

These two sides will be further explored and put in relation to teambuilding in a following chapter.

5.3 The Nordic LARP Tradition

Since most data gathered for this thesis will be based on Danish LARP events and Danish LARP players, a definition and delimitation of the Danish LARP tradition is in order. Though LARPing is practiced worldwide, the procedure and details of the LARP events differ dependent on local traditions. Denmark is generally dominated by what Stenros and Montola distinguishes between as being classic LARP and Nordic LARP. To them, “boffer combat” and convention LARP is the classical genre that is usually seen in many varieties worldwide. In the Nordic countries however, a subculture centred on the Knutepunkt conventions, develops LARPs as an expressive form. These LARPs are connected through critical and academic discussions published in annual convention books, and the genres are various, differing from refugees, cancer, masculinity, and military occupation, to marginalization and consumerism. The value of the production is high, and participation fees start at €100 per player and continue upwards (Stenros & Montola, 2011, p. 2).

The classical, Danish LARP tradition takes place in a number of LARP- and roleplay associations, which host a number of different LARP formats, ranging from a campaign, where players meet up one weekend day once a month, a trilogy or more of events

taking place over a weekend with several months between each event, to a yearly summer event with a duration of 3-6 days. These events are more than often not documented, and as such the Danish LARP tradition as an academic field is fairly new and little to no academic writing exists on this subject as of the writing of this thesis. The Nordic LARP tradition however has been documented through several increasingly academic events. The definition *Nordic LARPing* has been used to describe a direction in the style of designing LARP events in the Nordic countries (Stenros & Montola, 2010). Within this context are the LARP books from the LARP conferences *Knutepunkt/Solmouktha*, a yearly event which takes place in Denmark, Norway, Sweden or Finland in turns. The conference has since 1997 taken a practical and an increasingly academic view on the subject of LARP theory, game design, and experiences. Through the later years, the participants and contributors to the conferences have expanded to the rest of Europe, Russia and United States of America (USA) and thus the newer Knutepunkt conferences also deal with alternative and foreign LARP cultures (Petterkarlsson, 2012). In relation to the conferences are the Nordic Larp Talks that were held for the first time in 2012. The talks are held in close proximity of the Knutepunkt conferences, and cover a very broad selection of LARP related research and issues. The talks, also called NLT, is described as being a series of short, entertaining, thought-provoking lectures about projects and ideas from the Nordic tradition of live action roleplaying games (Karlsson & Nordgren). Though fairly well documented, the Nordic LARP tradition can be hard to analyse and use as starting point, as it is defined by its experimental and variable techniques. However, the literature is deemed well-fitting for his thesis, and will thus be used for the academic literature review.

Through this chapter I have gone through a number of definitions of the concepts of teambuilding and LARP. With regards to teambuilding it has been established that even in the earlier days, the social context of a professional team has been viewed as a crucial factor with regards to productivity by management. Today there is a large wish to improve the performance of a professional team and this can among other choices be done through a

teambuilding event with LARP element. In the following sections I will look into why this particular teambuilding structure is used, and in which ways it is beneficial for a professional team. The LARP concept proved far more intricate to analyse. In its basic form, LARP is explained as physical enactment of virtual classical roleplaying games, though the development of the genre has led to many different categorizations of the genre. In the Nordic countries, one direction ofLARPs are defined as experiences rather than games, and this particular direction, also called the Nordic LARP tradition, will be a substantial part of the academic literature held up against teambuilding in a later section.

6 Material and Method

As mentioned in the previous chapter, teambuilding is a central part of achieving high performing teams. During the last decade, a number of Danish companies among others have paired the idea of professional and structured teambuilding with the playful genre of LARP. From the definition of these concepts I found that teambuilding and LARP are areas that are complicated to define and generally differs a lot with regards to mechanisms and structure. In the next chapter I will go into analysing literature that covers the converging area of LARP and teambuilding. To support the academic literature review and contribute with a more local survey of the Danish teambuilding and LARP culture, a collection of data are retrieved from the LARP environment and LARP-related teambuilding events in Denmark. The empirical data collected is an ethnographic study of qualitative nature, carried out as a triangulation consisting of the following three parts; (1) Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with four organizers of events with LARP and teambuilding elements in a professional context, addressed for people aged 18 and older with little or no experience with roleplay. Each interview lasted for approximately 35 minutes. The output of the interviews varied greatly and can be seen in full length in the appendix. (2) Observations and casual conversations with participants at LARP and teambuilding events. For the teambuilding event, observations were made at two different events, mainly for participants with little or no earlier experience with roleplay. One event was for middle-ages professionals, and one for young adults. For the LARP observations, four weekend events were followed as a passive observer. A full account of the observations can be seen in the appendix. And lastly, (3) I have chosen to contribute to the empirical data with my own experiences from more than 10 years of being a LARP player. Through the following section I will go through my phenomenography and approach to these different methods to summarize their methodology and discuss some of their strengths and weaknesses.

Validity is an important factor in research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000), and to ensure the validity of my research a clear idea of what have been considered as being validity for this research is in order. Overall, the study has been carried out in order to explore the highly undocumented field of teambuilding and LARPing in Denmark, so that the empirical data can support the literature review and serve as a base for developing new hypotheses and theories. Thus, the study is explorative, where the theories are created through the thesis, instead of the study being theory testing. For this, qualitative data has been deemed fitting; as there is a need to uncover feelings, ideas and cultural views in order to understand the area. When discussing the concept of validity in connection to my empirical data, my involvement with the LARP environment could prove problematic as some parts of the empirical data is considered insider research as I have a direct connection with the research setting (Robson, 2002). To approach the question of validity and obtain a nuanced pool of data that provides a stable foundation for the subject, methodological triangulation has been used together with an emic and etic approach to the data. The triangulation consists of etic interviews with organizers of LARP and teambuilding events, which are paired with emic observations and personal accounts through autoethnography.

The first part of the triangulation are the interviews, which were carried out in order to centre the research on the subject of teambuilding, and to obtain personal thoughts and experiences on how to construct these events from organizers behind LARP themed teambuilding events. In order to reach people who have been involved in LARP-related teambuilding events, the snowball sampling method was used (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981), where a message was created on a national group for Danish role-players on Facebook, asking for anyone involved in LARP-related teambuilding activities to contact me. I deliberately chose not to reveal myself as a part of the Danish LARP culture, to avoid that the interviewees would change their accounts to be of more perceptive nature (Labaree, 2002), and to uphold the etic methodology. The snowball sampling method led me into the system of Danish

roleplayers and provided me with further data from four organizers in total. Interviewee 1 has helped carrying out a larger teambuilding event in 1995 by interacting with the participants as various npc roles. Interviewee 2 has been arranging events for teenage and adult scouts. Is furthermore a roleplayer and in charge of an event-organization that does special effect makeup and often plays the part of the stand-ins or NPCs (non-player characters) in different roleplay-settings. Interviewee 3 has been arranging several roleplay events as well as professional teambuilding events and is part of the company *Rollespilsakademiet*. Interviewee 4 has been arranging around 100 events for companies and private persons as a part of the company *Midgaard Event*, were most of these events are having teambuilding elements as part of the event. In connection to all interviews a semi-structured interview guide for interviews was used, in order to have both structure and flexibility, as recommended by Peabody (Peabody, 1990, p. 452). Especially since this was an exploratory study, I believe that it is important to not be bound by rigid examination questions, and this approach has allowed me to follow the flow of thoughts of the interviewees and explore various aspects of their accounts (Marton, 1993, p. 4427). The interviews were mainly focused on a single teambuilding event, but the organizers have in most cases provided additional feedback when they had further comments or wanted to share interesting experiences from earlier events. The interviews were structured around the following points:

- General information and thoughts on creating the event
- What happened at the event?
- What happened just after the event ended?
- How was the feedback from the customer and the participants?
- What is your own opinion on the event?

After the interviews, the full interview was transcribed and anonymized. The transcription was translated from Danish to English, it is therefore a possibility that some

information may have gone lost or changed in the translation. In the case of the interviews, I have thought it important to have a critically approach to the data, as it was human interviews and not strict experimental data, and Rathburn warns that respondents will strive to put themselves in a favourable light (Rathburn, 2008).

With regards to the observations, two different methods were utilised; emic observation and autoethnography. The observations at events with LARP and teambuilding elements were used to gain an overview of the genre. The method of observing the LARP environment and players has provided a broad understanding of the overall structure of such events, and serves as the foundation for understanding how social connections are established and developed through these events. Opposite the etic research, the observations and autoethnography have probably been affected by the fact that I possess inside knowledge of the field site. I can have been pre-established opinions and preferences about people, organizers, and genres of events and so on. Positivists will argue that, because of this involvement, I am no longer objective and as a result, the empirical data that has been collected may be distorted (Kvale, 1995). Thus, the positivistic approach to how science, in which the researcher must remain objective and an outsider to the studied environment to uncover objective truths (Hammersley, 2000) is not optimal for this research. Instead, an anti-positivistic approach, which is based on the epistemological premise that truths or meanings do not exist independently, but are created by the human mind on a personal level (Hammersley, 2000), seem to be the best possible approach for this research. With this approach several advantages can be found in the method of insider research. From my experience with the LARP environment I have a deeper understanding of the research area, allowing me to see through what some would find to be obscure conducts and terms used by the players. Thus, from this perspective my insider relationship with the field area has the potential to increase validity because of the richness, fidelity and authenticity added to the acquired empirical data. Furthermore, as my material is mainly obtained through qualitative, ethnographic research, and

consists of data dealing with feelings and individual ideas, I will argue that the positivistic view on “valid” or “true” knowledge is not useful to my research. Though it is not possible to expect complete honesty and openness from my research subjects, and there will be a certain amount of personal interpretation of the data, the research will in some way have been coloured by my subjectivity.

For the observations I observed participants taking part in four LARP events and two teambuilding events, which will be described briefly. Firstly, *Kongernes by* (KB) takes place 4-6 times a year on Friday and Saturday evening and night with 20-75 players, 2 game masters and 2-10 NPCs participating. The event took place in Roskilde, where players could move around in the city freely (also called in-crowd roleplaying), though most of the in-game events took place around a large building borrowed by the game masters. KB was using the old setting of White Wolf’s “World of Darkness”, a twist on the modern world where humans unknowingly live among supernatural and dangerous creatures such as werewolves, vampires, fairies and mages. The players took on the roles as Sabbath vampires, anarchistic renegade undead who refuse to submit to the controlled rules of the settled vampire society, where it is believed that vampires should hide from humans and control our world from the darkness. The event focused on supernatural lore, stage fights and controlling different territories within the city. Secondly the event *Little Rock Nightlife* (LRNL) was the second event out of three to be held in 2012, and lasted from Friday evening to very early Sunday morning with 41 players, 3 game masters, 4 kitchen responsible and 5 NPCs participating on a public school in Odense. The setting was inspired by Celtic folklore. The players took on the roles of “changelings”, enchanted humans that after abduction by fairies (much like the Celtic folklore or movies such as *Pan labyrinth*), has escaped from the magical and horrible home of the fairies from Arcadia and returned to the human realm through the Hedge (the mystical realm between the normal world and Arcadia). Though the characters has been replaced by a perfect duplicate in this world and their bodies and minds have been changed in Arcadia they try to fit into the normal

world while hiding from or fighting their fairy-masters who wants them back. The player characters were either pre-written by the game masters, or made by the players, and at least a couple of pages were used to describe the characters' time as a human, the time in Arcadia, the escape and the present life as not human not changeling, but something in-between. The setting placed great focus on feelings, politics, and personal relationships and conflicts. The event took place on a public school that made up an American diner in Arkansas, southern USA. The main in-game area was "The Diner" where people eat, drink, talk and dance, while "The Meeting Room" were used by the five leaders of the society. Thirdly the event *Steampunk – London tur/retur* (Steampunk) was a one-time event that lasted from Friday evening to Sunday morning with 50-60 players and 2 game masters participating on a public school in Odense. The setting of the event was in a steampunk version of our world in the 1860s, where steam, coldblooded Victorian murderers and wonderful inventions were mixed with classic supernatural myths such as vampires, mummies, demons and spirits. The players were either travellers or crewmembers of a large airship travelling from Odessa in Ukraine to London in England, with small breaks made in Italy and France. Most characters had some sort of secret, were villains or demon worshippers, or were in other ways "special". The event had a large focus on investigation and mysteries, action and some focus on social relations. Lastly, the *Firefly* event was a one-time event that lasted from Friday evening to very early Sunday morning with 175 players, 2 game masters and 20 NPCs participating on a public school in Odense. The event was built on the setting from the sci-fi television series *Firefly* by Joss Whedon. The school made out the small moon Firaxis where gold and minerals had recently been found, attracting large amounts of nobles, merchants and crews of space cowboys known as "fringers" seeking out their destiny. The player characters were made by the players, and the background stories of the characters varied from being just a few words such as "He is a pilot" to lengthy stories about the character's childhood, upbringing and earlier events. A large

amount of the game was centred on action, looking bad-ass, shooting with NERF-guns (foam-based weapon toys) and trading resources with the other players.

The two teambuilding events were the *Konfirmandtræf*, which took place in Roskilde Cathedral, and is a yearly event that presents the teachings of the bible and god to around 3000 future confirmations in Roskilde parish's 7th graders. The participants were divided into teams of 10-25 young people, often class-wise, and were escorted through four controls by an organizer. All organizers had earlier experiences with roleplaying events. The second teambuilding event called *Dinner with Hubertus Hibiscus* was a murder mystery game arranged for an event club and included 22 participants of various occupation, aged 20-35. The dinner took place on the fictional manor of Hubertus Hibiscus, where his colourful family met and are was forced to solve several murders. The two organizers both had previous experience with LARPing.

Both sets of observations were direct, as it included my presence being openly a part of the virtual world of the event while taking notes of interesting happenings. For the LARP event, I culturally adapted to the event by playing a passive role that fit in to the event's setting, due to the possibility that the observation could have been perceived as being obtrusive by the players. In this study, I primarily took on the role of a bartender, allowing me to observe the main area of the event, and loosely interact with the players, while being a separate part of the event, someone that have no influence nor importance to the other players. The neutral and more practical role of the bartender has hopefully hindered the players from acting different around my presence or to treat me as an alien part of the event world. The observations are supported by selected camera recordings when something of interest happened. For the teambuilding workshops I followed the groups as a silent observer and practical helper, with the hopes that the participants would view my role in the event as practical and "invisible". It was only after the events were finished that I engaged in casual conversations with the participants, to hinder the participants from creating any theories as to that I was observing

them. The LARP and teambuilding events differed from one event to another, as the same event is rarely organized several times. Even then, the players are different from earlier editions of the event, and important parameters such as the narrative and structure of the event thus changes. It will therefore not be possible to replicate the study undertaken for this thesis, as the events from which the data has been collected will not be repeated. Thus the reliability of LARP and teambuilding events as field sites is quite low. To counterbalance this, the events chosen for the study is deliberately very different from each other in terms of structure, genre and focus, making it possible to obtain at least a somewhat similar base for future studies.

Last of all, to explore the area of social connections through LARP events further, and to broaden the empirical data, I have chosen to draw on my own experience from more than 10 years of attending various LARP events as a player, thus contributing with autoethnographic accounts. The method of autoethnographic can be defined as a self-narrative that analyses how the researcher is situated along with others in social contexts, and describes personal experience in order to understand cultural experiences (Davies, 2008). It is difficult to categorize and relate so many years of different experiences, and thus the autoethnographic data has been used as a form of understanding the area and as supporting data for when holding the academic theories from the literature review up against the empirical data. Though a valuable method, autoethnography imposes some challenges to the goal of providing an objective picture of an event or culture, as any information gathered is filtered through the researcher's impressions and personal biases. It is obvious that my findings are subjective and coloured by my own experiences and memories as a LARP player, and thus the data from these events are coloured from earlier LARP experiences and discussion about events with other LARP players. It is however the hope that these extensive amounts of subjective data can be of use to the project, and that the emic data, combined with the etic data from the interviews and observations, will prove a valid addition to the understanding of the subject of LARP and teambuilding.

7 Variables of Teambuilding and LARP

This chapter looks at different aspects of academic research done within the converging areas of teambuilding and LARP, to establish a foundation for understanding the creation of teambuilding events with LARP elements. From the definition of teambuilding and LARP it was found that teambuilding in its core is about the social context of a work group. Teambuilding is thus used to build teams, but teambuilding events are also traditionally used for various forms of learning. On the subject of LARP, researchers had several opinions on how to define the genre, but overall two parts seemed to describe the fundamental of the genre. Firstly how a LARP event is created as a formal system, and secondly how the player assumes the role of his player character and interacts with the world and the other players. For this thesis I hope to illuminate the different aspects and mechanisms of pairing LARPing and teambuilding, in order to present a foundation for analysing and discussing how the two concepts are connected and come closer to under which circumstances a LARP experience can bring people together with regards to performing more efficiently together in a professional relationship. In order to do so, I will in the following section dissect LARP to isolate and analyse different variables within these two areas, in order to hold them up against the empirical data from actual events and event-organizers.

A general overview of a given LARP event is provided by researcher Konzack (Konzack, 2007) who relates that it is hard to categorize the genre. The many variations in LARP events make it difficult to specify the different circumstances and mechanism that constitutes a “good” LARP structure suited for a teambuilding event. Instead, various forms, styles, structures and genres compose a LARP event. A LARP can have almost any number of players, consisting of only a few players or hundreds of players playing at the same time. The location can be anywhere from in a room indoors to in a field or forest outdoors, the event can last only a few hours or several days, and may be played with physical or symbolic combat or no combat at all. The genre can range from realistic genres to a diversity of fictional genres

from books, films or pure fantasy (Konzack, 2007, p. 83). Since form and structure varies to such an extent that it is not possible to present an overall form or recipe for what constitutes a “good” LARP event, the quality and efficiency of this might be found in more overall terms. Konzack compares LARP to child’s play like cops and robbers, but states that LARP with the same content of physical contact often has more advanced rules and schemes than these activities (Konzack, 2007, p. 85). The term “play” indeed seems central to the area of LARP. “Players” who attend a LARP event is referred to as “to play a role”. The concept of “play” is central in Huizinga’s work (Huizinga, 1955) as he sees the game as one of the basic forms of human activity and existence in general, and that key cultural phenomena such as language, poetry, and theatre have their roots in play and games. Within the act of playing we find the root of ceremonies, rituals, and the shaping of communities. These are all ancient concepts from the birth of mankind that according to Huizinga also can be seen expressed in the rules and structures of play and games, which might seem as leisure activities, but are actually built on activities made to ensure human survival (Huizinga, 1955). If one applies Huizinga’s theory to teambuilding workshops, it becomes clear that play and learning, or the passing on of information, are deeply connected. Huizinga’s writing has inspired many later works on play, games and in particular digital games, and was also the foundation for another researcher’s writings. Caillois (Caillois, 2001) build his work on Huizinga’s writings, but criticizes Huizinga for ignoring the fact that play and culture influence each other in a reciprocal relationship. He states that play and games can also occur on the basis of culture, such as games like “Cowboys and Indians” that are based on and mimes something historically and culturally. He furthermore distinguishes play from games and sports in stating that play is a free/optional activity, it is uncertain, unproductive, and governed by rules and pretence (Caillois, 2001). In the light of Caillois’s work it seems that for an activity to be productive, it must hold some form of frame and organization. Thus, in order for the teambuilding participants to achieve and learn something from a teambuilding workshop, there must be some

sort of delimitation of the activities in the form of event structures and rules. Huizinga sets up a sort of delimitation, as he distinguishes between the real world and the play world, and visualises a “magical circle” as an arbitrary area that encompasses play. It is in this circle that the play-environment is bound and the rules of the game are upheld (Huizinga, 1955). This notion of a clear distinction between the “gameworld” and the world outside of the event is also found in LARPing, where the term “in-game” refers to character and anything taking place within the gameworld, and the term “off-game” refers to real life players, actions and so on. These boundaries between real life and gameworld however are not static, and have been challenged by several LARP organizers. Researchers Montola and Stenros use the term *pervasive LARP* to describe a form of LARP that uses mechanisms known from theatre and drama (Montola & Stenros, 2011). In the LARP and theatre hybrid *Sanningen om Marika* they introduce the term *ractor*, which describes an actor living out a fabricated media personality in the real world while participating in a pervasive transmedia experience. The article draws parallels between the embodied roleplay taking place in LARPing and the ractors parasocial relationship with her audience and involvement in her role and gameworld. (Montola & Stenros, 2011). Researchers Bichard and Waern (Bichard & Waern, 2008) likewise find the interaction with the physical world a positive aspect of a pervasive game experience. They describe the design of the pervasive game *Interference*, a game playable by groups of 6-8 players lasting for a total of 3-4 hours using technology and human actors (Bichard & Waern, 2008). They explain the aesthetic considerations, choice of location, storyline, gameplay design, and the design and use of technology in the game, and conclude that *Interference* shows how an emotionally complex game experience can be achieved without resorting to ambiguity or deep role playing. Another work on pervasive LARPing (Montola & Johnsson, 2006), discusses the pervasive LARP *Prosopeia Bardo: Där vi föll*, a game event that for 52 hours merged the ordinary lives of 12 players with the fabricated lives of their roles, 12 dead spirits possessing them. The focus of the paper is on the game design, where the merging of

ordinary lives with a ludic frame resulted in outcomes that were taking place at the border between game and ordinary reality, and the resulting outcome that could not be controlled or predicted by neither game masters nor players (Montola & Johnsson, 2006). Montola and Johnson thus break away from designing for the magic circle, and places roleplay somewhere between a virtual play-world and the physical world. In another article, Montola (Montola, 2007) further challenges the notion of the magic circle in roleplaying context, and provides yet another take on a platform for teambuilding and LARP: The pervasive game. Montola compares pervasive roleplaying to other, different forms of roleplay, such as tabletop roleplaying, LARP and online role-playing. The pervasive form stands out in that it “break out of the magic circle of gameplay in order to interact with surrounding society”, and thus utilizes real-world objects and aesthetics in an entirely new manner in a roleplaying context. This actual, unmediated physicality is described as being a precursor to *fun* and challenges mediated experiences so often used in other forms of roleplay (Montola, 2007). Thus, the traditional thought of a clear boundary between the real world and the gameworld does not necessarily have to apply to LARPing. Instead, involvement with the real world while still being in a play context results in the concept of “fun”. This concept is central in the work of researcher Harviainen (Harviainen, 2007), who defines LARPing as pretence play where players are physically present in the activity (Harviainen, 2007, p. 2). He claims that roleplaying environments can be modelled as information systems, and goes on explaining that these systems can be competitive, and are often created to facilitate enjoyment, medial functions, or both (Harviainen, 2007, p. 2). As the systems contain highly visible and occasionally unique information elements and variables, it is possible to use LARP events as a tool for testing theories on social information systems and information behaviour. He classifies the information behaviour within the roleplaying environment as *pleasurable*, which encourages participants to engage in the system and to create more connections between the subject

representations (Harviainen, 2007, p. 8). Thus, the notion of the players experiencing some sort of pleasure while engaging in the LARP system is crucial to Harviainen.

The pleasurable and fun aspects are also taken up outside of purely roleplay-centred material. In their book about teambuilding, Wang and Mogan shortly refer to roleplay as a teambuilding activity that help build teams, develop employee motivation, improve communication and are fun, along with other activities such as team building exercises, team building games, role play, and high level activities such as strategic planning, team designing and organisation designing (Wang & Mogan, 2005, p. 571). The theories of Wang and Mogan emphasizes that roleplaying is well-suited as a complementary genre to non-LARP events as it is “pleasurable” and “fun” (Wang & Mogan, 2005, p. 571). Nurmi (Nurmi, 2010) goes further in depth with the concept of roleplay used in educational and social regards, and explains the psychological aspects of LARPing as being a “pleasurable way to learn” and because it challenges the dominant spectator culture and hopefully facilitates a change to participation. These two aspects form a justification for live action role-playing as both a “pleasurable” method to facilitate learning and as governing principle (Nurmi, 2010).

The notion that pleasure is not the key element of a successful LARP experience is questioned by Montola, who states that a positive experience is not necessarily a crucial part of an event that is to explore roles and promote social solidarity within a group. Montola looks into two examples of LARP events that go against traditional ways of constructing games and experiences (Montola, 2010). Instead of focusing on fun, the two events focused on delivering “extremely intense experiences of tragedy, horror, disgust, powerlessness and self-loathing”. The events were made for experienced LARP players, and parallels are drawn between such extreme LARP events and extreme sport. Though visibly touched by the experiences, the players also recognized that the events provided them with new and rare experiences of learning, insight and accomplishment, as well as establishing a deep-felt sense of fellowship among the players. It should however be emphasized that the events were for experienced

roleplayers, and therefore might not be suited for people without any previous experience with the genre. Moynihan and Gunten expand on the perspective of LARP experiences that are not necessarily positive, as they rely that being taught how to act in a specific role also serves as a mean to get familiar with unpleasant, unexpected or rare situations. The authors comment on the article *The Sentinel* that describes how the author of the article, a physician, fails to communicate with a dying cancer-patient, using it as a starting point for the importance of palliative care training. Moynihan and Gunten explain that physicians “*rely on a team of players*”, and that training conversations with patients dying from cancer not only ease the course of the illness for the patients, but also gives the physician the crucial ability to recognize the different needs the situations call for, such as outside expertise (Moynihan & Gunten, 2008, p. 2). These examples describe techniques where professionals step into the role of for example the all-knowing doctor who demonstrates perfect control over a hard and frightening situation. This calms the patient and in turn eases the course of patient, doctor and the rest of the medical team.

Another example of how roleplay can further the professional self-image of participants is found in the work of Stoller (Stoller, 2004). Stoller et al. describe and evaluate the impact of a 1-day retreat focused on developing leadership skills and teambuilding among postgraduate year 1 residents in an internal medicine residency (Stoller, 2004, p. 1). The retreat included activities enhancing a feeling of belonging to the group, such as breakfast, games and sports, and a survival exercise with elements of roleplaying. Feedback from participants suggested that the retreat was successful in developing the principles of effective leadership and teamwork and in helping to confer these skills (Stoller, 2004, p. 1). This example of teambuilding event seems to follow an overall, traditional formula; the event takes place away from the workplace, and has a social and a professional side that is explored through different tasks and events. The high degree of students claiming to have become better leaders and professionals is discussed, and it is suggested that such teambuilding events itself may not

prove to actually better the professional skills of the student. Instead, the student becomes more self-confident by practicing the role of for example a doctor, and thus achieves a better professional self-image. Henriksen analyses the concept of the role, and states that a role provides the player with a specific perspective that can be used by the game designer to stage desired events, provoke specific emotions, or create certain experiences. He concludes that roles should be taken into consideration when creating a LARP event, not on the base on whether the purpose of the event is educative, entertaining or political, but on the nature of the wished experience of the players (Henriksen, 2007, p. 54). Thus, the role is not only something that is usable by the participants at a teambuilding event. The roles of the participants can also be used to design a teambuilding workshop towards a desired experience. This change in personality where a person takes on a role to achieve a certain image is nearing the concept of roleplay, and is also noticeable in alternative environments such as the digital, virtual world as described by Yee and Bailenson. They claim that when users in a virtual environment are able to alter their digital self-representation, the actual behaviour that the users live out via their self-representations also change. The Proteus effect is used by the authors to describe how a user's self-representations have a significant and instantaneous impact on his behaviour, a change that takes place within minutes (Yee & Bailenson, 2007). Though taking place in a digital realm, the important point in this article is that the visual appearance of a person can alter his own as well as other's behaviour. Thus it would seem that when for example the doctor takes on his "uniform" and takes on a highly professional role, he is not only able to convince his surroundings that he can control the situation. He is also able to convince himself. LARP environments offer the players the possibility to alter their self-representation through costumes, make-up, special effects and roleplay. And these physical changes might in turn also alter their behaviour. The concept of the role is also highlighted by Sullivan (Sullivan, 1993), who attaches great importance to the concept. Sullivan follows a group of students as they engage in a fictitious software project. The students take on the role of a software project

manager and engage in a large project divided into smaller cases that are to provide the students with practical software project management experience. The different projects were found to support academic concepts already taught in class, as well as strengthening the students' written and oral communication skills, as long as they were of practical nature and seemed meaningful to the students (Sullivan, 1993). In relation to this, Culley (Culley, 2010) relates how roleplaying is utilized in learning-based activities, and goes on describing how a combination of synchronous and asynchronous role play learning activities was used as a teaching strategy for enhancing oral presentation proficiency in an online course at the University of South Carolina (Culley, 2010). Participants are thus able to receive knowledge and practice their own knowledge through roleplaying. Another example of a roleplay-based learning environment is presented by Santarelli et al. in an analysis of the use of role-play for cultural training, and a feasibility assessment of using a game-mediated environment for this kind of role-play. The research is used as a base in the development of a single and multi-player gaming technology used to augment traditional methods of cultural familiarization. This technology, referred to as the *CulturePad*, builds on two key elements: (1) proper preparation and guidance in creating and enacting role-play based training and (2) the type of game interface (Santarelli, Pepe, Rosenzweig, Paulus, & Vi, 2009, p. 1). Santarelli et al. specifically highlights the finding that it is possible to translate specific cultural behaviours and gestures from real life encounters to a virtual, game-based computer environment (Santarelli, Pepe, Rosenzweig, Paulus, & Vi, 2009, p. 5). It has thus been found that roleplay can be a very useful tool in a learning situation.

However, it is not only practical and academic information that is processed in a roleplaying environment. Utne (Utne, 2005) especially accentuates that LARP activities allow for new social and behavioural patterns to develop, as it gives the students the opportunity to distance themselves from already established rules, and produce new ones (Utne, 2005, p. 27). Thus a dynamic organization emerges. LARPing is therefore easily adaptable to several

learning situations, such as teambuilding, because LARP as a learning environment can be applied to any learning situation where information is gained. The information gained is received and utilized by the participants' previous experiences (Utne, 2005, p. 27). Another researcher looking into how a roleplay environment can alter old roles and patterns is Lee, who analyses gender, motivations and self in the concept of adult play in the LARP environment through qualitative research. She argues that LARPing allows grownups to enter a state of play normally reserved only for children. By participating in adult play, the adult players are allowed to explore social, personal and psychological boundaries of themselves and others in a safe environment, thus achieving personal and social growth (Lee, 2011, p. 13). Conclusively, the fact that LARPing is so influenced by roleplaying makes it beneficial for exploring or dealing with a problem, and encompasses educational, psychological, and social benefits (Lee, 2011, p. 32). Lee relates a design process in which experience designers focuses on positive experiences and the sensation of overcoming something.

The different works on roleplay experiences shows that it is not only factual information that is exchanged between the players, but that something is also "created" among them. Different sorts of narratives are created on the basis of the different small events taking place within the LARP, and these narratives seem to encompass the LARP experience among the players, allowing them to practice new roles, alter their self-image and even break free from old behavioural patterns. Though one would initially think that a fundamental mechanism in LARPs would be the narrative, the actual existence of narratives or stories for the players in LARPs are generally dismissed by authors such as Heliö (Heliö, 2004), Rognli (Rognli, 2004) and Berger (Berger, 2010). According to Heliö any form of narration requires a narrator and someone for whom the story is narrated. In a roleplaying game however, Heliö argues that there is no actual story, despite of there being sequences of events, characters and structures of narrative. The functionality of these is to give the players a basis for interpreting them as a narrative (Heliö, 2004, p. 68). Rognli likewise rejects the notion that LARP events follow a

traditional story concept, due to the subjective player viewpoint. This makes traditional linear storytelling with a main character and a supporting cast known from books and films obsolete in a LARP context (Rognli, 2004). Rognli goes on elaborating that a LARP might be designed with a narrative in mind, and as such, narratives can be used as a tool for LARP designers. He goes on dividing the range of narrative functions into three categories: (1) Structure-building, (2) Conflict-driving, and 3() Mood-setting. However, the narrative used for designing the LARP is transformed into non-narrative mechanisms through the LARP event, more specific into clearly defined tasks for players to handle. In this way, each player gets a clear and specific part in the LARP event so it is clear what the players' essential contribution to the story is supposed to be (Rognli, 2004, p. 151). Berger follows up on the research done by Heliö and Rognli, and concludes that stories are a feature of LARP, either through an author's intention, a player's interpretation during the game or as means of recapitulation afterwards. So even if a LARP is constructed to fulfil, deliberately disappoint or plainly ignore a narrative, the narrative will always be a part of the LARP (Berger, 2010, p. 55). The highly ambitious LARP *Dragonbane* from 2006 utilised narratives to large extends as a tool in order to establish the player faction in the *Cinderhill Village*. Koljonen discusses how a strong feeling of belongingness and community was created from a common, shared narrative, established through shared doctrines, physical labour and play. The players expressed the increasing trust and familiarization to their co-players through their characters' trust in the community (Koljonen, 2008, p. 45). As Koljonen, Tan (Tan, 2003) also refers to how narratives are a crucial part of the LARP experience, but not in its traditional sense. He describes his personal experience with the evolving LARP environment from the beginning of the early 80s as members of the MIT Assassins' Guild participated in game-like events in which the act of assassinations eventually evolved into theatre style format. Instead of adhering to strict, ludological game mechanisms, players started engaging in social, performative make-believe play and thus started actually role-playing the assassins (Tan, 2003, p. 26). The narrative is

thus not seen as a mechanical part of LARP, but rather seems to either simply rise as a consequence of the LARP or to function as an important and fundamental tool to frame the event.

In continuation of this, the person who is to actually frame the event is the last aspect left to discuss in relation to events with LARP and teambuilding elements. By understanding the tasks of the event organizers, a deeper understanding of what a LARP and teambuilding events is built from might be attained. The importance of such organizers is emphasized by Stoller, who points to the facilitators as a crucial part of a teambuilding experience. The facilitators organize and continuously adapt the event to the needs of the participants (Stoller, 2004, p. 1). The functionality of the facilitator seems to rely heavily on the person that is the facilitator. Thus, crucial traits or variables held by the facilitator such as personality, experience, attitude and ability to adapt the social and professional sides of a teambuilding event to the needs of the participants are hard to put into a recipe that in the end results in a “good” facilitator. Instead I will look at the variables of a facilitator that are not dependent on the person, for example variables that can be translated into the digital realm. Nakamura et al. looks into how digital agents can provide “the function of a mentor in order to realize project management education for students who have no practical experience of project management”. Research on and implementation of such agents proved to be beneficial to students, in that the agents assisted in helping the students to (1) get into the role of a stakeholder and guided the students to share information, (2) gain insight into the structure of project management, and (3) to develop human-related skills such as communication, leadership, and team building (Nakamura, Takashima, & A., 2010). The facilitator and the mentor both cover different functionality in a teambuilding event. The facilitator makes sure that events proceed as they should while the mentor has knowledge that is to be passed on to the participants. The borders between the two concepts are however blurred, as some of the fields of responsibility associated with each of them overlap. A common notion of both

concepts is that they are able to control the structure of the workshop in order to ease and optimize the learning process of the participants. Agents assigned to these tasks can also be found in roleplaying games, in the form of the “game master”. Tychsen et al. explores the core concept of the *game master*, or the GM, a person attributed with adjusting various game mechanisms in role playing-based games, from pen and paper role playing games to live action-, computer- and massively multiplayer online role playing games (Tychsen, Hitchens, & Brolund, 2005). First and foremost the game master is attributed with (1) **Narrative flow** which is “Creating the scenario (pre-planned plot or environment that the game takes place in) or alternatively improvising the scenario on-the-fly, delivering narrative control through interacting with players, introducing new elements and resolving events” (Tychsen, Hitchens, & Brolund, 2005, p. 1). The facilitator of an event must likewise create, or at least know about the structure of the teambuilding event, and make sure that the participants are taken through the different tasks and small events as planned. (2) **Rules** are mentioned, as “The GM is responsible for ensuring that all players know and understand the game rules, as well as enforcing these” (Tychsen, Hitchens, & Brolund, 2005, p. 2). In the same way, a teambuilding facilitator must make clear what the participants should expect and how they should react to the event. (3) **Engagement** is addressed as well, since “While entertainment in most RPGs is the responsibility of the players themselves, providing fun and tension is commonly a responsibility of GMs in PnP RPGs. To support engagement, the GM must present the events taking place in the gameworld, and facilitate communication flow between the players during the course of the game” (Tychsen, Hitchens, & Brolund, 2005, p. 2). When it comes to (4) **Environment**, the comparison becomes more unclear. “In order to play, the players must have a fictional setting [...] In essence; the GM creates the magical circle around the game” (Tychsen, Hitchens, & Brolund, 2005, p. 2). In some teambuilding events there is no created narrative. I will however argue that, even if the teambuilding event as a setting is quite vague, it can still function as a narrative. The mere explanation that the participants are taking part of a

teambuilding event, can serve as an excuse or incitement to perform tasks he participants would not dream of doing normally. Lastly Tychsen mentions (5) the **Virtual world**. “In the case of CRPGs and MMOGs, the role of the GM can include responsibilities uniquely related to the virtually constructed gameworld” (Tychsen, Hitchens, & Brolund, 2005, p. 2). This is evident in teambuilding events as well, as different events calls for different kind efforts and contributions to the event.

The thought of pairing LARP with another genre than games, in this thesis a teambuilding event, is far from unthinkable. Several researchers have already analysed and argued that LARP is much more than an isolated game genre, and is already being used in various degrees in teambuilding events. Through the previous sections several core concepts and aspects of LARP and teambuilding has been explored. First of all it was established that for the participants to be able to learn something, an event must be assigned to some kinds of structures and rules. However, the notion of a clear distinction between three gameworlds and the real world was challenged by several researcher discussing pervasive game experiences. In these examples it was described how LARP elements can be used in other contexts than actual games. Thus interesting and useful experiences were found to be experienced by the players when the gameworld was brought in close proximity of the real world. Instead, concepts such as fun and pleasure were discussed as being the key to a successful LARP experience. In relation to this, several angles on how to make good or pleasurable events were analysed, where one emphasized the need to focus on concentration, challenge and immersion. The concept of “the negative positive experience” was also touched, as it was demonstrated that a LARP experience does not necessarily have to be positive in order to be socially and professionally rewarding. Another core concept mentioned was trying on and practicing new roles. This is easily put into the context of roleplay, as it seem to be the essence of the genre to be able to suppress the regular self while exploring alternative roles using different techniques and tools. The role should be taken into consideration when designing an event, as it can be

beneficial to consider what experiences the participants should achieve and practice through their role. Another part of the importance of the role was the “retreat”, or breaking the everyday routine. Through the break, the participants are able to rethink their own professional situation as well as their role in the larger social context. From these reviews on theories on roleplay and teambuilding it has become clear that roleplay is a commonly used tool for training and preparing for different situations. Though not as frequently referred, the body of theory concerning LARPing shows a general tendency to attribute the act of LARPing to the same social and psychological effects as roleplaying. Thus, LARP events are also attributed with being able to establish social contacts as well as to train for specific situations. Lastly the concept of narratives and the facilitator was gone through. The narrative of LARP events were not found to be central to an event per se. Rather it serves as a tool to set up the frames of an event and delimitate the gameworld, making engaging with the gameworld a more manageable task for the participants. Lastly, if one is to look “behind” a teambuilding workshop one would find the “architects” of the event, the facilitators and mentors, who are responsible for the structural and professional outcome of the workshop. Though it can be difficult to directly translate some aspects of the facilitator, some of their common tasks can be isolated. The same responsibilities are also found in roleplaying contexts, and are very similar to the role of the game master. One construction of this common functionality was found to be Narrative flow, Rules, Engagement, Environment and Virtual World. These findings will in the following sections be held up against the empirical data from the Danish LARP and teambuilding environment.

8 Report and Analysis of Data

In the following chapter I will hold data from the academic definition, the literature review and the empirical data collections up against each other, to locate and discuss the different structures and concepts of teambuilding events with LARP elements that might facilitate improving the performance of a professional team. Since the empirical data is of a qualitative nature and includes large numbers of data, it will not be represented in a statistical. Selected accounts and comments from the field work from the interviews are presented as quotes, and personal stories and observations from my own LARP experiences are presented in boxes. An account of the empirical data, with the exception of my own experiences, can be found in the appendix on the enclosed cd.

8.1 Play and Breaking the Routine

To begin on the discussion on how a teambuilding event with LARP elements that will help professional teams perform better together in a work-related context can be created, I will start from the interviews with organizers of similar events. The first and most fundamental thing mentioned by Interviewee 1 with regards to the construction of teambuilding events, is simply by starting from the different practical information specified by the customer:

So if a company asks about a certain event, what kind of event it should be, is it because they need to get to know each other in a new way, is because it is a group of people who does not know each other at all, who need to get to know each other? What is the focus in this case? And from this we build a game, which also fits the customer's price range, duration, number of hours, do they expect something to eat, does it have to be outdoors, do they need to exercise, can they all exercise, are there some participants with disabilities, what kind of rooms are at our disposal during the event, stuff like that. And from this we choose a concept, a theme that fits these things. We have done Lord of the Rings, Godfather, vintage and some other themes.

And then we build an exercise where they have to work together in a way that they are not used to. (Interviewee 4)

Interviewee 4 describes how there are different kinds of teambuilding events, and that, dependent on what the desired output of the event should be, it is possible to design events for different needs. Interviewee 4 goes on, elaborating on the main difference between the traditional teambuilding event and events with LARP elements, explaining that the concept of “free play” is facilitated by LARP:

A traditional teambuilding event should have some exercise or game and then an evaluation. It is not always that our events have that, often we focus on play and doing something different, talking together in a new way with some different questions that the participants never meet in their daily life. For example, should we kill the orc first or the other team? So this is to underline that there are different ways to use the word teambuilding, and we do a lot of teambuilding, a lot of teambuilding in the American sense, but we also do a lot of entertainment where the participants are kept active and talk together in an alternative way. So we have this breaking the routine and especially seeing and experiencing people in another way. (Interviewee 4)

Here, Interviewee 4 touches upon play and play in relation to the concept of “doing something different” or to do something in “a new way”. Play can according to Huizinga be found as a fundamental part of games. However, Caillois emphasizes that in order for something productive to come out of the magic circle rules and boundaries should be made (Caillois, 2001). So according to Caillois, for something to provide an actual outcome in a teambuilding event, the event should *not* use unstructured, free play. However, this does not mean that free play is unsuited to forming the basis of a teambuilding event. On the contrary, Interviewee 4 emphasizes that play can be put to great use in alternative teambuilding events, where the main focus is not the passing on of information. Though no productive outcome can

come of it, play can be used for breaking the routine and to see people in a new light. Stoller and Lee also engage the concept of breaking the routine. Stoller emphasizes that it is a central theme in teambuilding, because it allows the participants to break old habits and role patterns (Stoller, 2004). Lee explains that adult play lets the participants explore social, personal and psychological boundaries, achieving personal and social growth (Lee, 2011). The importance of the idea that it is possible for the participants to re-evaluate themselves through the teambuilding event is also reflected in several of the interviews. Interviewee 3 mentions that it is easier for the participants to learn new things when they are put in another context, as they are then seemingly more open to new experiences:

So there is a lot of these events in the leisure time and outdoor life societies, a lot of them use the imagination as a part of their activities. Because that is just what is good about these events taking place outdoors, the brain and the body is suddenly working in a different manner. But the difference between using fantasy as a natural part of an event, and to use roleplay as this kind of medium, which is neither controls nor races, is making the event flow naturally. And that is something that demands a lot of work and effort. You might have a talent for acting, to be able to grab something and pass it on. That is what roleplaying requires, and that is hard and demands practice. (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee 3 also comments on the change of context, but in relation to the different members in a team. A teambuilding event with LARP elements also facilitates that participants get the opportunity to view each other in a new light:

They really liked it. They thought that it was both interesting to be put into new roles and to see each other in a new light. [...] It is an excellent way to open up and get to know each other in a different way. You also get a common ground, some things to look back at. Some had the possibility to shine or call attention to

themselves through play. And then it is also a great excuse to walk up to someone and talk to them. (Interviewee 3)

In that way, the participant might settle accounts with a stereotypical image, such as breaking free from being perceived as a shy or boring person. This advantage is also touched upon by Interviewee 4:

The contact person from the company commented that she enjoyed seeing these laboratory technicians, who are usually rather dry, and who find numbers and technical stuff exciting. And then they suddenly go from this, to talking about obscure subjects that no one had expected would come from their mouths. And that was a fantastic experience, and a big success, because they did not talk about company-related things. So that was what made the event good. And that some persons surprise more than others, with a little focus, we can bring forth the more timid persons by giving them a role that need to make a speech or something like that. That is the amazing thing about roleplay; they can hide behind the role. So they are thinking “I am not doing this because I want to, but because my role has to do it”. And that self-confidence that they get, that makes them stand up and say something, they can bring that with them back to real life. (Interviewee 4)

So not only are the participants taken from their usual work-environment, they are also put into different roles that force them to live out other sides of their personality. This is possible because the participants can “hide behind the role”. This behaviour was also observed to some extent at the Konfirmandtræf:

The young students stand in teams outside the cathedral waiting. Some are smoking and talking, most just look rather cold in the windy winter-evening. A man and a woman dressed in monks' robes call out for their attention and start to explain that they are now officially part of the group of Jesus' disciples. The statement is met by both superior snickering and curiosity.

The small talk and comments stops as the two organizers start handing out brown gowns. They immediately put on the gowns to wear on top of their normal clothes, and after being properly dressed and briefed on what is going to happen, the team is led from the cold and stormy darkness into the lit-up and impressive cathedral.

In this case, the young people stopped putting up a superior attitude to the event as soon as they were handed the brown robes. This could be due to simply being busy with the clothes, but it also seemed to spark some kind of curiosity among them. There might also have been a certain kind of value in everyone suddenly looking the same, or indeed that they could hide behind the gown. I observed that some of the more tough-looking young men put up their hoods during the event, and in general seemed to be quite comfortable in the gowns.

Interviewee 4 relates how a costume given to a participant in some way makes it easier for the participant to behave in a certain way:

In this particular event we had a role that, put in a nice way, is a professional dancer, or stripper on a nightclub and the participant with that role receives some accessories from us, cowboy hats and some very grotesque details in the form of makeup. And that role is always given to a man, if possible, because that is a very strong break away from their daily selves. And we often experience that the men accept the role, and talk with a kind of funny voice or tell stories about their fictional experiences in the local night club, how they have met all the colleagues. And that is a very, very strong difference from their usual selves. Especially on the event this Tuesday, where the other told him that he should be a part of the company's revue. So yeah, it is a break and a way to see this guy in another way.

(Interviewee 4)

8.2 The Physical and the Virtual

Overall, physical symbols and representations such as costumes, make-up and scenery seemed to be assigned an important role in both my observations and interviews. The Bishop behind the event Konfirmandtræf touches upon the physical aspect of the LARP experience when explaining why the physical roleplaying experience was central to the event: “The reason why we use roleplay is because we want to have confirmed children to actively engage in the subject as much as possible. We do not just want them to listen, but to participate actively” (Bishop Peter Fischer-Møller). This notion of participating actively implies a certain bodily and physical presence in the material. The participants are active parts, interacting with the gameworld. At the LARP events several examples of symbolical scenery were observed, something Bartle explains as “Things the game wants to have, that the real world doesn’t” (Bartle, 2004). Common for these were that they were not a complete physical recreation of what they actually represented. Instead, the scenery was created in such ways that it seemed “close enough” to deliver the associated experience. Take for instance the Steampunk event, which took place at a public school. Several measures had been made to create the illusion of being on board a zeppelin. As an example, the control cabin was a large steering wheel in front of a white, lit-up canvas. As the captain manoeuvred the airship, cut-outs of clouds and other ships were held up behind the canvas by organizers, creating a sensation of looking through the windscreen while flying. The Firefly events also took place at a school, where the gymnasium was transformed by eager players into a square with a myriad of shops and spaceships. Several interiors of spaceships were created, complete with sleeping rooms, workshops and so on. But the outside of the representations of spaceships were simply marquees or room dividers put together (See *Figure 1*).



Figure 1. Two examples of the mixture of symbolical and physical scenery. Left: The control cabin on a zeppelin at the *Steampunk* event. Right: Building the interior of a spaceship at the *Firefly* event.

The importance of the physical aspect in relation to the roles was also evident in all LARPs observed, where a lot of work was put into the costumes and makeup for the player characters. At the Little Rock Nightlife event, a very make-up heavy LARP, the physical aspect especially stood out as being very important to the players. When a makeup team was appointed to the event, the players were faced with the option to pay a small fee to let the make-up team apply the players' makeup. Most players happily accepted and seemed to take a lot of personal interest in the final look of their player character. This involved coordinating and exchanging ideas for make-up with the makeup team weeks before the event, and some players even sought out other makeup artist before the event. The process of getting all the characters ready for the event took approximately eight hours. In *Figure 2* a selection of some of the characters and their makeup can be seen.



Figure 2. Examples of players and their makeup and costumes from the event *Little Rock Nightlife*

I will however from my insider perspective argue that it is not so much a question about whether the participants are hiding behind the role. Rather it is about using physical aids such as costumes and makeup to “dress for the part”, to convince other players as well as oneself:

The role of the faery-changeling Cristal is something I have never tried to play before and have not really prepared for. She is sexy, interacts with people in an extremely physical way and is in many ways the classical lesbian femme fatale. She is everything I at the time of starting on the role feel uncomfortable being. Getting the dress on and setting her hair and make-up helps me distance myself from the actual me. The transformation is not only for me, it is also for my co-players who will know that this is not my actual self that they are usually being around. I start to find the character by touching people, holding their hands and flirting. A little uncertain and trying at first, I do not want to go beyond anyone’s boundaries, but as this is only a game, it does not matter if anyone gets mad. I know it will not be at me, it will be at Cristal. As the game progresses the physical and flirty interaction is accepted and welcomed by the other players, it quickly becomes the norm of Cristal’s and my own behaviour, and I quite quickly start to feel comfortable in the role. I even caress and kiss my in-game female romantic interest even though I have never done something like that before. The long-term effect of Cristal is

radical and very surprising to me. I am suddenly comfortable wearing tight skirts and accessories I considered “girly” before. In real life I establish a whole new circle of friends consisting of people I played with in-game, and who I have known for a long time but never really talked to. The interaction with these people is a less extreme version of Cristal’s interaction with their roles; it is physical, fun and flirty, despite of the fact that I have not really been this physical with friends before, unless I know them extremely well.

Instead of hiding behind the role, the physical aids serve as tools that supply the player with distance and security from the role. It also allows for a more easy immersion into the character. This is consistent with the claim of Utne, who emphasizes that LARP allows for new social and behavioural patterns to develop, and lets participants distance themselves from already established rules, and produce new ones. Interviewee 4 goes on relating how costumes are used as a way to create distance between the person and the role, stating that a costume allows the participant more easily to let go.

Because you are not just given a task, as in other traditional teambuilding exercises, you also get a narrative and a role, like “you are the warrior or you are the colonel or whatever”, and often some kind of costumes. For our outdoor events, we bring coats, tunics and swords, because then a distance to their own personality is created and they can let go, and that is where I think that the roleplaying is really cool to use. When the players become specific roles like the colonel, the doctor, the warrior or the wizard, so that they are able to distance themselves from their normal personality, let go and not be in their usual scope that they are used to at work.

(Interviewee 4)

Yee and Bailenson touched upon the subject of how the digital self-representation of a person can bring forth different forms of behaviour (Yee & Bailenson, 2007). It seems that this also applies to the non-digital world of roleplay. The physical

representation of a player/participant can in the same way construct a new way for that person to act. It also allows other players to more easily understand and relate to the role, and thereby the other participants are also helpful in placing the participant in the role through the physical aids. If a participant is dressed in a doctor's white coat, the other players will automatically recognize the symbolical value of the coat and act from the perspective that the participant is a doctor. Thus, organizers are not only able to create distance between the person and the person's role, but also between the participant and the entire gameworld. Through physical aids, the organizers and the player form the character and the character's belongingness in the game environment.

The distinction between the physical reality and the fictional gameworld has on a more overall level also been touched upon by researchers Huizinga (Huizinga, 1955) and Caillois (Caillois, 2001) as shown in the literature review. They describe the magic circle as a separate realm of play, very much alike the distinction between the off-game world and the in-game world seen in LARP. The separation between the real world and the gameworld is only made more apparent by the before mentioned use of the physical aids such as costumes, narratives, make-up and scenery. This is also consistent with the academic work of Falk and Davenport (Falk & Davenport, 2004), who describe the prominent attribute of LARP by emphasizing the physicality of the genre, as opposed to for example table roleplaying and board games. InLARPs the players experience an embodiment of the role in a way not found in other genres, expressed through body language, physical aids and scenery, and actual physical contact with other players.

The physical contact and social relations were especially evident at the LARP events, where physical contact between the players had an interesting significance. In most cases a lot of virtual interaction took place between the players before and after the events. Some players created their character without talking to other players, had it accepted by a game master and showed up at the LARP event. But a lot of players' characters, and relations

between these characters, were in most cases established to some degree before the game through online groups on Facebook or on forums. For the Steampunk and Firefly events, players at least established pre-defined relationships with other members of their characters' team or family. The shared information between players included their characters names, appearances, occupations, demeanours and habits. Some players formed a relationship with other players before the actual game event through chat, mails or physical conversations. However, in the case of the Little Rock Nightlife event, the second event out of five where a lot of the game was centred on social relations, physicality was mentioned by the players as establishing "more real" character relationships. This was especially emphasized in relation to that a preceding event had already been held. A general consensus was that "old" player characters, who had already met each other physically during the first event, had more established relationships than characters having talked through virtual channels only. It was also mentioned that new players, who had not been a part of the first event, felt excluded from the already established social relations. However new players, who had sought out other players and established virtual preceding relationships themselves, noted that they felt that they felt part of the game rather quickly. Some old players expressed some concern as to roleplaying a relationship with a new player, whose player character was supposed to have been in town for years. This concern was also attributed to the already established physical relationships with the other old player characters that were established during the first event. The old players stated that the relationships made during the first event were deeper and more real, because they had interacted physically and gone through experiences that were not controlled by the players, but facilitated through the game masters. The physical contact between the players thus seems to be of great importance, as players who had shared a physical experience seemed closer compared to players who had only shared virtual experiences. It could be that the physical experiences and relations in a LARP connection are easier to relate to and remember compared to virtual or fictional experiences. At least, the physical aspect in connection to

social relations seemed of great importance. Though the players in a very high degree are part of a first-person experience when participating in LARP events, it is a highly social form of event that takes its starting point in the other players and the different groups. It can be discussed whether it is possible for a single person to engage in a self-made LARP event with no predefined co-players or not, but since the focus of this thesis is on the team, this discussion is not relevant.

8.3 The Team

Establishing social relations is also very important during a teambuilding event, as the goal of a *teambuilding* exercise is naturally to *build* a team. Interviewee 1 argues that LARP events are great foundations for developing team mentality as seen in professional contexts, as it is possible to develop events where there is a need for a lot of different roles:

“But the thing that LARPing is uniquely capable of is that it is team-based, it is us against them, while sports events and smaller survival courses are much more “Me, how good am I? How good am I compared to others on my team?” However in roleplay you put people into roles and makes sure that there are things going on where there is a need for all the roles. I think that roleplay is the most efficient way to do a teambuilding course (Interviewee 1)

In roleplaying contexts, the participants in a teambuilding event are not equal in the sense that there is no reason to compare one participant with another. In order for the LARP element to function, players must accept different forms of roles, and organizers can use this as a design tool. The idea of using the role as a tool for the organizers has also been mentioned by Henriksen who explains that the role provides the player with a specific perspective that can be used by the game designer to stage desired events, provoke specific emotions, or create certain experiences (Henriksen, 2007).

Below, I report my first-hand experience of the process of establishing, forming and growing with a team of players and the internal culture produced:

It is the second day of a 5-days game event, it is in the middle of the summer and the tent is awfully warm. I am part of a larger group of what would be knights and nobles with their staff of servants, if it was not for the fact that we are actually a band of thieves, bandits and assassins who have kidnapped the now murdered knight's youngest brother. Our goal is simple; We are here to steal whatever valuables we can come across. But as our priest reveals that our captain, the fierce baron of bandits Brutus, is actually heir to the throne, that goal is suddenly changed. It is us against them in an even more obvious way now. Through the next couple of days we race against time and do whatever is in our power to hinder the future queen from getting crowned, but in the end we are not successful. As the game ends and we begin to await the next chapter in the game that is to come in a year, we find ourselves sharing not only experiences, but also behavioural patterns, sayings, songs, stories and so much more. A culture has developed around that group that still, over two years from the actual event where it was formed, thrives as we all patiently await the next instalment that has been promised us. Nothing has changed, the narrative is not done yet, the group structure is frozen in time and the same internal jokes are brought up again and again.

During this event, there was a very heavy focus on developing the team and the internal bonds of the group. We spent a lot of time together before and during the event, and fought a common cause. The same pattern applied as related by Koljonen in the creation of the Cinderhill community at Dragonbane (Koljonen, 2008). We all shared a narrative and grew with it, establishing everyday routines and a strong feeling of belonging. And the team turned out to be very important, not only because socialising was a welcome break from the rest of the event, but also because there was something special about that sense of belonging. In the case of the Steampunk event one player related to one of his close relations how he enjoyed her company: "Getting to be a part of your family really saved my game experience. It was nice to have someone to be around". A team is thus not only important because the player is

experiencing the event through different roles, but also because people seem to have more fun when they belong together with someone and have somewhere to go. In relation to this, Interviewee 3 mentions that the reason for making sure that the participants feel involved in the process is that it makes them feel more secure:

The less secure they are the less inactive they are. There were some consultants at the event as well, who were in charge of some of the practical things, and they were very secure about their social positions, they were used to be in charge, so they, especially one of them, let go completely. Because he was certain that he normally was seen as one of “the cool kids”, and therefore had no problem being laughed at.

(Interviewee 3)

This is also important to consider in a teambuilding context, as Interviewee 2 relates how participants not engaging in the gameworld because they feel unsure or alienated by it, are more likely to not become a part of the teambuilding experience, and thus not gain anything from it:

But if the experienced players are too experienced and do not show considerations to the newer players, everything is going way too fast and it becomes too much. And then you will not be able to catch up with the others and you are scared off instead.

(Interviewee 2)

The need and importance for involving other players was evident during the second Little Rock Nightlife event. In this weekend event, many players experienced a rather dull Friday, with little plot related roleplay. Instead, the focus seemed to be on social play, which was a problem for the new players as they found it difficult to be part of already established relationships. Some courts tried to involve the new players, while others did not. Before the event continued the next day, the members of the winter court gathered and used approximately one hour to discuss how the new players could be involved in not only the court, but also the game itself. In this case, the players introduced themselves to each other (again),

but this time they also shared some secrets and weaknesses, and each player pointed out how they wanted the other players to see, interact with and use their player character. One example was a very neutral and sneaky character that in the Friday of the event seemed passive and bored off-game to the other players, when she was actually walking around unnoticed, eavesdropping on conversations. The player turned out to live up to her sneaky and spy-like player character so well, that the other players mistook her passiveness for off-game shyness and inactivity, so they did not know that she was actually a very valuable asset. During the court conversation, she established her role in the court, so the other members of the court knew her strengths and during the Saturday interacted with her to a much larger degree, and gave her small tasks that fitted her player character.

Interviewee 1 goes further into the subject of the shared experience by players and participants, stating that the stronger an experience a team is part of, the stronger the team structure and feeling of social belonging gets:

It is a question about simple psychology, to get people to do something together. Like problem-solving. If we look at the comradeship of soldiers that have been to war, that is the strongest kind of teambuilding you can find. But you cannot just send people to war. So instead you need to get people out there to that level, get people to work together against some problems and solve them. It works every time. It is just a question about how high the level should be and how much the participants can take. If I were to recommend something that would create the strongest team, then fine, we will go on a survival trip for seven days in the wild with no food and water. Then it gets really strong. But not everyone has time for that, so instead you have to do it in alternative ways. And some of these are to get people to play and have fun. (Interviewee 1)

This observation about the strong and personal experience is a commonly discussed subject in the LARP environment. Montola talks about “the negative positive

experience”, and states that events focusing on “strong” negative feelings lead to strong experiences and solid social connections between its players (Montola, 2010). The idea of extreme roleplaying is also mentioned by several of the interviewees as something that is highly efficient in creating social bonds, and talk about how situations perceived as being strong in turn create strong social relations:

I have participated in small events where the big, strong guy broke down crying because the experience was so strong. The people participating in this event are sharing an experience for the rest of their lives; they will never have a serious argument or become enemies, because of this extreme experience that they share.

(Interviewee 4)

Interviewee 3 goes on elaborating on why LARP gameworlds seem to facilitate shared experiences and strong feelings of belonging to a group:

A lot of social relations were definitely established, and something like a cult was established, though it is wrong to call it that. When people share a strong experience, no matter if it is at a high school, in the military, at the theatre, social relations are established. (Interviewee 3)

The thought of being a part of a negative experience that marks you for a very long time might be hard to understand. I will therefore try to summarize it with one of my own experiences:

My friend Michael and I are playing in the same group for a classical fantasy weekend event in a large forest. I am the young and egotistical elf mage Mani and he is the monk from the rebel movement that has taken me as his apprentice while being hunted by the tyrannical emperor. It is late evening, I have just returned from a dimensional travel where my fellow monk brother has betrayed our little group, causing me to seek comfort in my teacher’s arms. He hugs me firmly and as we embrace something clicks into place, and we both realise that our relation in

that instance has shifted from being master/apprentice to being father/daughter. I leave the game area to visit the bathroom and suddenly realise that my reaction to losing my brother must be growing cold and distanced. Not because our monk teachers always told us we should distance ourselves from people, but because it would somehow be cinematically perfect and cause Michael an immense amount of grief. The thought of causing him, and maybe also myself, to feel so strongly about each other is exciting, and I remark to his real life girlfriend that I am going to break him. She high-five's me and I return to the game area. When he asks me about my monk brother Mani answers in a calm, logical and apathetic way. Michael immediately reacts by staring at me in disbelief. The pain is evident in his eyes and I strain myself to hide my trembling lips and moist eyes. Later, I can see from the corner of my eyes how he follows every single of my controlled movements in silent agony. After the game has ended Michael is silent, and even after sleeping he seems introverted and depressed. I realise that he needs closure about our characters' story so I take his hand and we find a quiet spot in the forest. As I start telling him about how Mani returns after 10 years, he starts crying and squeezes my hand, and as we talk our way through the conversation that would have taken place in the future of our fantasy world, we both sob and embrace. When I later try to recount the experience to others I feel that they cannot understand the depth of the experience, and I somehow feel lonely, like this is something only Michael and I understand. In the following days we talk and write about the experience, but slowly the fictional bond between Michael and me starts dissolving and the details get blurred. But sometimes a small part of these feelings resurface, and to this day Michael still have a note from Mani with her necklace wrapped around it hanging on his noticeboard at home.

The above example emphasizes how virtual experiences from LARP events can affect the real life of a participant. But because it is in a safe environment, players are able to distance themselves from the experience. The virtual gameworld acts as a safety-net that can be

broken at wish, and thus players might not suffer as serious drawbacks compared to if one had gone through the experience in real life. The strong experiences were also emphasized by the interviewees as being well fitting in a teambuilding context, as it allows for extreme situations, while still being safe and fun for the participants. Interviewee 4 emphasized that the area of extreme roleplaying so far is fairly unexplored in the Danish teambuilding tradition, but that it would possibly lead to interesting and strong teambuilding experiences:

Roleplay is really just total-theatre without a manuscript. We have some things, we agree on the world, some things are already set, but apart from that it is very free. It is not just running around in a forest with swords. There are roleplay that exist and are created in order to give a complete and intense experience. And these intense experiences are where I at least experience a personal gain, and in these examples, it does not matter if the surrounding area is not exciting or true to the setting. It is the intense experience that is important. And that is a bit difficult to use in connection with teambuilding, because then it becomes very personal. But I really think there is something there to gain. [...] if we could do something like that for the lawyers, accountants and so on, that would really be something. We have an event next week where a couple of office-people are going to do something extreme, they have to steal things, all in the name of Good yes, but it is still an extreme experience. Of course we tell them about the frames for the event, they are not going to be put to jail. It is all about setting the events up in the right way. (Interviewee 4)

In this context, the interesting thought is what the consequences of a positive negative experience would be for a teambuilding event. In the cases where the teambuilding participants are meant to prepare for extreme situations, such as disasters, surgery under difficult circumstances or similar situations, there is a need for the participant to be able to handle the extreme conditions. For this, an extreme roleplaying experience seems to be well suited, as a well prepared event not only comes close to feeling real to the participants, it also

lets the participant go through and train the abilities needed to tackle the situation in a safe and consequence-free environment. The thought of sending a group of people out in the city as a thieving gang as described by Interviewee 4, would probably also create this feeling of being together against a common goal. It is evident that extreme roleplaying creates strong experiences for the participants, but the question of whether the outcome of such a type of event is actually beneficial to making a professional team perform more efficient together, remains.

From the observations I realised that extreme experiences are not the only form of experiences that can influence the emotional and social bond of participants. Even a small event that is taking place in the virtual shared world, matters to the player. In the case of Konfirmandtræf, the participants were forced by the event and the facilitators to make certain choices. Though participants were clear that the events were fictive and with no real consequences, the actions made by the participants affected other participants. At the third control the participants were met by an npc posing as a roman soldier, accusing them of worshipping the false prophet Jesus, instead of the godly roman emperor. Three participants raised their hands and tried to defend themselves, while the rest stayed silent. As the conversation progressed, the roman soldier made it clear that if they did not wish to worship the holy emperor, then he would choose three random participants to be sentenced to death. The participants laughed at this, and continued bickering with the npc. As he pointed out which of the participants that were to be sentenced to death, the participants again reacted with laughter. It was quite apparent that the situation was not taken very seriously. However, 8-10 participants were at this time actively engaging in the control, talking, laughing and protesting. As the control ended, one of the sentenced participants sarcastically remarked to his friends: "It is nice to have such good friends, huh?" The experience, though not real or even taken seriously, still made an impact on the participant. Thus, extreme or negative experiences are not necessarily needed to provoke emotions in the participants. This is also the experiences of

Bichard and Waern who with the LARP event *Interference* concludes that “deep roleplaying” is not needed for the players to experience an emotionally complex game experience (Bichard & Waern, 2008).

The advantage of the gameworld as somewhere “safe” is also discussed in less extreme or emotional situations, in relation to learning. It was established earlier that not only does breaking the routine allow participants to see their colleagues in a new light; it also provides them with a break that encourages learning. However, breaking the routine is not the only concept that according to data from the literature review furthers learning. The possibility for the participants to practice being a certain professional “role” is also mentioned. Both Stoller and Moynihan & Gunten describe how medical staff or students participate in events that let them “train” their professional roles as medical personnel (Moynihan & Gunten, 2008). For Moynihan & Gunten, the participants familiarize themselves with the appropriate way to talk to terminally ill patients and cooperate with the rest of their affiliated medical team members (Moynihan & Gunten, 2008). Stoller discusses whether students felt that they had become better doctors after the event because they had actually learnt something, or because they felt more comfortable taking on the role of the doctor. This predicament was also discussed by my informants; three of the interviewees stated that the LARP elements are not solely used to bring about experiences, but that they are also used for learning. Interviewee 2 discusses how the roleplay elements in a teambuilding event where the participants should better their practical skills, in many ways are much alike disaster-training:

The first aid (post) is often built on a case, where the scouts arrive at a location where something happens and then they have to quickly react to that. And that is because in the case of first aid training, you really have to know your stuff, and you have to be able to keep a cold head and react in a stressed situation. In a traffic accident, no one is waiting for you; you have to rely on yourself. That is one part of it. The scouts get out of their houses, where they have been working with a lot of

theoretical stuff, and then they get to use it in a practical way. For those arranging the event, it is possible for the organizers of the event to see if they have organized the event properly. Have they made a convincing scenario? And the people requesting the event will have the possibility to see if the participants actually know how to use all that theory in real life that they have been working with. (Interviewee 2)

As shown in the literature review Nurmi also touches upon the idea of a safe training ground and states that roleplay encourages people to participate in the learning environment (Nurmi, 2010). Here, the participants have nothing to lose from engaging in the event, as there is no actual accident, only a virtual imitation. Interviewee 4 also talks about the learning of practical skills in a safe environment, and compares this process to a pilot using a flight simulator:

If we take the example of a flight simulator, a pilot, if he gets into an artificial storm, he can test and try out and crash a couple of times, and it does not matter, because he can just press the big fat reset button, and then he is back to where he started. But he still gets the experience. When he leaves the flight simulator, he is still learned how not to fly. "Alright, I am not supposed to drive into the mountain, now I know that. But if I steer away from the mountain, I am doing a lot better, and then it is a much better experience". So he does not get all the bad stuff, he is not damaged or anything, he gets all the experience instead. And that is the same thing that roleplaying does. (Interviewee 4)

The gameworld is thus described as being a "safe environment" for the participants to both fail and learn from earlier experiences.

In relation to safe training grounds I will return to the before discussed physical roleplaying aspect of LARP. Physicality in various forms is also mentioned by all my interviewees in relation to the participants' self-image. The general consensus seems to be that

the roleplaying element helps improve the physical self-confidence of the participants.

Interviewee 1 commented on how people from for instance the theatre environment are used to expressing feelings and opinions through their body. He states that such persons are better at talking with other people, express themselves and to make their opinions heard:

The nice thing about roleplaying is that it is both a mental, but also a physical thing and I have seen so many persons develop. If we look at theatre, people participating in theatre always have a lot of body language, they touch people and they learn how to use their body. And it is the same thing with roleplay. I have seen so many people grow from timid persons to caring and self-confident persons. In roleplay you learn how to control yourself, how to solve problems and how to act in certain situations.

(Interviewee 1)

Interviewee 3 also mentions that a better understanding of the participant's physical appearance and behaviour can be achieved through LARP-related exercises:

The advantages of using simulations as a teambuilding method are that we can let participants experience a lot of humorous situations, which can later form the basis for serious discussions about serious topics. They get to experience campaigning at micro-level when it comes to being elected to the students' council. They learn about presentation skills when they have exams and they are going to get some absurd experiences with sexual harassment when the school's aging history teacher is put in charge of sex teaching. (Interviewee 3)

This tangibility with the physical world is described by Montola to emphasize *fun*. These physical LARP experiences are described as being “unmediated”, thus making the experiences more direct (Montola, 2007).

However, the concept of fun has not only been mentioned in relation to LARP's connection to the physical world. Harvainen states that LARP events should be pleasurable (Harvainen, 2007, p. 8) and the concepts of pleasure and fun is also mentioned by Wang and

Mogan as a key element in teambuilding events (Wang & Mogan, 2005). The concepts of fun and pleasure were also evident in the interview material, where they are mentioned in relation to breaking the routine, or the unexpected and extraordinary. Interviewee 1 describes his impression of the participants after a teambuilding event:

They had a lot of fun! There were big smiles all over and it was evident that people were really having fun, because it was very different from what they were used to at the office. So you can really see that the teambuilding is functioning really well, just by putting people into a new situation where they have to use their imagination, consider things and react in a different way than they are used to, this at least to me seemed like a crucial thing. (Interviewee 1)

The element of fun and the idea of the extraordinary could also be seen during the observations at the Konfirmandtræf, where participants were laughing and smiling.

Before the event, the participants arrive to the cathedral together with their classmates and local priest by bus. Outside they gather around the cathedral in their teams and talk, smoke and hang out. Most of the participants are rather excited about the event, and talk about what their elder siblings or friends experienced in earlier years. Some think that the idea is rather silly, but there is a general consensus that the event is a new and fresh take on the preparation for confirmation and that it is “more fun than to sit and read in some book” or “to just sit in church”.

Interviewee 3 relates that fun is also used in relation to learning, as a way for participants to relate to the material of the teambuilding event:

They were very excited about the social part of the event, because they were allowed to play. They experienced parts of each other in a very different way, and they thought that was very funny. We had this part about sexual harassment, because it is an actual problem out there in the real world, and we were able to push

the subject to extremes, with this humorous twist that made it easier to talk about. So the roleplaying part was always much exaggerated, while the reflection afterwards was serious and a bit more down to earth. The participants reacted in a very positive way. (Interviewee 3)

Thus, by presenting information in a humoristic way, the organizers of the event were able to present the information material as something unforgettable and extraordinary to the participants.

8.4 Rules and Narratives

In the previous sections it has been established that free play can be useful in a teambuilding context for breaking old habits and patterns. However, Caillois and Huizinga also state that organizers must utilize some sort of structure in order for the participants to be able to produce something. This discussion of why rules and structure are needed is also taken up by Interviewee 3, who compares a teambuilding event to a ball game:

[...] newer players would like to know what is going to happen. That is why soccer is really good. If we were to make soccer for roleplayers we would go “Here are some balls, use some of them, make some teams, it is mainly about having the ball in the air some of the time, make it work”. And they would pretty quickly come up with some kind of game that works or at least is very funny. Whereas people who have not tried this before, will start to ask about the goal and rules of the game. They want something concrete so they can be certain that they will not screw it up. Most roleplayers are ridiculously creative and good at taking something and make it their own or make it make sense. (Interviewee 3)

It is possible to introduce a group of people to a bunch of balls and ask them to make a game. Likewise, it is possible to place a group of professionals in a room and ask them to make a teambuilding event for themselves. The result of these unstructured events however is highly random and there is a high possibility that the outcome or product of the events would

not be optimal. And since a teambuilding event should seek to better a professional team, the idea of free play with no rules seems a very bad one. Interviewee 2 emphasizes the importance of the LARP exercises being meaningful to the participants:

These activities are all about solving tasks and problems, were the scouts have to show and use their skills, be it first aid or building things, it has often worked very well to put them into a situation where they have to use their skills for a purpose, rather than just letting them show that they can. (Interviewee 2)

In relation to this, Sullivan also states that there should at least be some sort of sense-making in the experience (Sullivan, 1993). He relates how roleplay can better students' skills as long as the projects are of a practical nature and seem meaningful to them. Thus, a teambuilding event with a clear goal and a strategy for reaching this goal will not only help the organizers but also secure a better output of the teambuilding event for the participants. Thus, structures and rules can actually be made useful for improving the skills and social relations between the participants.

One way to introduce meaning to the events and exercises are mentioned by the interviewees to be through a narrative. Interviewee 4 elaborates on the subject and relates why the narrative is important:

I have done quite a lot of roleplaying, and have a very broad understanding of the field. And the reason I think that roleplaying is really interesting and cool, and the reason we educate people using roleplay, is that one thing is to make some traditional teambuilding exercises: "Here are ten bottles, it is your job to get a pencil down in each of them, do it better than the other team and you win. 1, 2, 3 go!" That is one thing. The other thing is to tell a good story together with these exercises. The participants might not be totally involved in the role or the roleplay. Instead we create the scope for the experience, we establish atmosphere using scenery and theatre effects, such as manner of speech and gestures [...] There is always

something to fight for, and the exercises are very much like traditional teambuilding exercises. But we wrap it up in this story and atmosphere, and that makes it fun and interesting. I also have a feeling that it creates solidarity much more easily, because the participants have a reason to execute these tasks, not just because it is a teambuilding exercise, but because “We need to do this for the Godfather; he has just told us how important this is”. If we attach an incentive to the narrative, “This is it! We need to do this”, even in these circumstances where there actually is not that much roleplay involved, that is the interesting thing about it. (Interviewee 4)

As soon as some sort of delimitation is made in the form of a narrative, the participants find it easier to operate in the gameworld and relate to it.

As I show in my literature review, a number of studies argue that LARP events are not narratives (Tan, 2003; Heliö, 2004; Rognli, 2004; Berger, 2010). Rather, narratives are naturally created by the players, both individually and as a shared experience, when they engage in the game. Narratives can furthermore be used by the game masters to create a frame for the event.

Thus the narrative is a useful tool for creating a need to engage with the teambuilding event and the other participants. This idea of using narratives as a tool was also evident in the interviews as well. Interviewee 3 also touches upon the subject of framing, and emphasizes that the framing of an event is even more important when the event is directed at non-roleplayers:

If I were to make the perfect teambuilding event for non-roleplayers, I would make something similar like this event. The first thing you need to do is to frame the event so that you can do a lot of things with it. When dealing with non-roleplayers we need to put the event into a frame that is explanatory and that they can relate to. It is a school; we know that a lot of silly things can happen at school, we know this. It could also be a dating show or even a teambuilding event. That is also a great frame.

So we can do a lot of silly things because the frame allows us to. “Why do we have to do all these things, why do we have to lift a large tree?” “Because it is a teambuilding event” “Oh right” So the frame is the absolute most important thing about these events. (Interviewee 3)

The same is stated by Interviewee 1:

When creating the setting for non-roleplayers, it seems easier for people to participate if they can relate to the setting. If they can relate to their characters, everything gets a lot easier. Everyone is an actor; they just do not know it yet. If I ask you to act like someone of the opposite sex, it is really hard. But if you ask someone, who has at a point in their life been a student, it is easy for them to get into the role. (Interviewee 1)

Interviewee 2 also elaborates on the framing and relates how the physical world is used to create the frame, when players need a helping hand with getting into the gameworld:

Other times, roleplaying is used in a starting sequence of a scout race. This could be in the beginning of a race where some acting and drama takes place. So the organizers have some helpers running around creating and setting the scenery for the race. At that point in the race, it can be a bit hard to attract the scouts; it is a bit hard to make them play along. And that is because they have just come from real life, so they need to be “started” in some way, to get into the mood. And that is a question about putting enough work into it. And that is done by making the scenery together with them, using them in the scenery rather than doing something around them.

(Interviewee 2)

Thus it would seem that there is a need to “coach” new participants to engage in roleplay situations. Interviewee 2 mentions that the use of other roleplayers or actors as npcs can create sceneries in which the participants see other people behaving in a specific manner.

The thought of talking and acting in a strange way then does not seem so alien or barrier-breaking to the participants:

There is a barrier that for first time participants has to be broken down. There is natural alienation towards the roleplay. Not just to your own role, but also towards the other “free” roles or the acting that takes place all around them. There is tendency for newcomers to view the role from the outside, and sees that now the role does this and now it does this. So it takes some time to break down the barrier and take on the role. And there is no doubt about that this is so much easier when there are experienced people surrounding you who just do this. Then, as long as they do it and keep doing it, you are forced to take part in it. (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee 2 goes on relating how the narrative can be paired with the physical activities to make them appear both meaningful and make the participants able to relate to them:

There were not a lot of actual monk-related things in it. It was all about using stories and different activities to go through this learning process. They had some activities, cooking and crafting, all open activities that they could participate in. And then we made the roleplaying scenery around them, so different things happened. We tried to rob the monastery and so on. (Interviewee 2)

The meaningful activities are described by several interviewees as being very important. Both Interviewee 1 and 3 explained that the participants must be able to relate to the roleplaying situation.

If I ask you to play someone of the opposite sex, it is really hard. But if you ask someone, who has at a point in their life been a student, it is easy for them to get into the role. (Interviewee 1)

[...] the thing about playing a high school student is that it is easier to roleplay than an orc. It can be difficult to stand in the rain, screaming, or try to convince others

that you are an elven prince. But to play a high school student, you can always do that; you can always “just” participate and follow the event while pretending to be you as a high school student. (Interviewee 3)

Interviewee 2 elaborates on why it is important that the participants are able to relate to the gameworld and situation. This is simply put because organizers can design a given experience and achieve the output that they want from it:

But the best way to get people engaged into roleplaying is to put the participants into situations where it is simply not possible to react in any other way than the way you want them to react, and then shape it. So if you are confronted by a situation that seems somewhat realistic to you, then you cannot help but react in a specific way. We are all, deep down, actors; we just do not know it. We do not think about it, we are not trained to start acting on command. Everyone can act; it is just a question of placing them in a situation where they cannot, *not* act upon it.

(Interviewee 1)

But even though it has been mentioned that creating meaning in the gameworld and the characters in it should be a high priority for both organizers and players, Interviewee 4 states that even if participants or players are not able to relate to the gameworld, they will try to make sense of whatever setting they are put in by drawing from similar knowledge of for example the middle ages in the case of a Lord of the Rings setting:

I have made about 100 events, and so far nobody has dissociated themselves totally from a concept that they do not know. Of course some are distanced from it. We have instructors who know how to get people started, “Here is the costume, now you need to put it on”. And then people do that. Of course some get bigger experiences from it, because he knows that “Oh, that is Gandalf, he is an old, wise man”, and other might say “What a weird conjure-fool”. But in the end people find a theme that they can relate to. If they cannot relate to Lord of the Rings, they might be able

to relate to a general fantasy world, or the middle ages, and then they use that as a starting point. “Here is a sword, this is the end that I hold onto, this is the end that I hit people with, and that is what I’ll have to make do with”. We have never experienced anyone refusing to participate or engage in the theme. What is special in these events is that people let go to a much higher degree than they are used to. (Interviewee 4)

Thus it would seem that the theories of Tan, Heliö, Rognli and Berger can apply to a teambuilding event with LARP elements (Tan, 2003; Heliö, 2004; Rognli, 2004; Berger, 2010). LARP is not a narrative. It is rather narratives that are created by the participants in relation to sense-making of the virtual world.

I have conceived a simple model for framing or constructing the events that could be seen in all empirical data, following three phases; (1) The Initial Phase, (2) The Event Phase, and (3) The Grounding Phase.

The Initial Phase was especially evident during the LARP events, and was very similar even if the events were of very different nature. In the hours up to the start of an event, the players helped decorating the play area, preparing rooms that were to be used and talked with each other. Some started taking on their player characters persona, and started acting and behaving like them, while still retaining their off-game identity. The different groups met shortly two hours before the event started and presented themselves to each other so that the players could meet their co-players and their player characters. The group leaders informed their respective groups about their way of being a leader, and laid out the rules that would apply for the members in the group. This was followed by a short description of the different player characters. Just before the event started, the game masters called for a “briefing” where some general, practical information about the event was shared. In the minutes before the event started the players positioned themselves together with other players, whose player characters were relevant for them and started talking and acting for a minute until they were in character.

For the teambuilding events this phase was not as prominent and active as in the LARP environment. Rather, it seemed to serve as a way for the participants to familiarize themselves with the information that they had received about the event. Before the events, the participants seemed expectant and curious about the events. In some cases the participants had earlier experience with the type of events, or had heard about the event from family, friends or colleagues. These participants expressed a positive anticipation towards the event, and shared information about the event to their friends and colleagues. The participants seemed to go through an initial period of passiveness, in which they listened and remained passive rather than act. In both cases however, the level of activity rose throughout the event. Participants with earlier experiences with LARP or teambuilding events with LARP elements were quicker to engage in the gameworld than participants who had not earlier experience with such types of events. In general, the atmosphere and mood of the participants was positive. This was either directly stated by some participants or evident in physical behaviour such as laughing, talking and body language. Physical scenery such as costumes and items presented to the participants by the facilitators were welcomed by the participants with curiosity.

Contrary to The Initial Phase, The Event Phase differed greatly from event to event, which is natural since this phase is the actual event in itself. Common for both LARP and teambuilding events was that people who had had previous experience from similar events seemed more secure in their way, and were quicker to engage in the gameworld. This observation was confirmed by Interviewee 4:

“I talked to a substitute who had also been at a similar teambuilding event that we organized for another department of the company, and she told me that there was a large difference in how fast people let go and engaged in the game in the two events she had participated in. There is a lot of cross-referencing, they need to talk to each other to get information, and then they can cross out each other on a small piece of paper, and in that way find the murderer. At this event the participants had been

much quicker to reach the stage of talking and asking questions than at the other event. There is always a difference, and if it happens to slow, we have to step in. But I have never experienced that a murder mystery did not get solved. My experience is that they start being their character and call each other by their in-game names quite quickly.” (Interviewee 4)

The Grounding Phase was also quite similar for both the LARP and teambuilding events. I use the word “grounding” as it is commonly used in the Danish LARP society to describe the hours after an event, though it is not an actual academic term. Following the LARP event Little Rock Nightlife, most players stayed up for a couple of hours, had some beers and talked about the happenings of the event. This form of grounding is common at roleplaying events, and was explained by one of the players as a way of getting the character out of the body. This is also mentioned by Interviewee 2, who explains why a phase-out at the end of an event is important:

“Even if the event has finished, you still have some part of the role in your thoughts, what would he do in this situation and I would have liked to finish this. And it is not necessarily in the minutes just after the event has finished, but rather after a couple of hours when you are alone with your own thoughts that you are hit by this backlog. It also hits the experienced roleplayers, all dependent on how extreme the event has been. It can last for some time or for a very short time period. But it hits everyone, without a doubt [...] the solution to this is to let go when the event is evaluated. This applies to the role again, evaluate it with others. It is a psychic thing some call “bleed”, a theoretical thought that you always bring something to the game and you bring something with you from the event” (Interviewee 2)

Montola also mentions the term “bleed” in relation to the positive negative experience (Montola, 2010, p. 2). He sees it as a design rhetoric that both maintains a sense of

meaning to the gameworld, and weakens its safe frames of play in order to explore powerful emotions.

Most players still acted like their player character, even though the event had ended, and so players whose player characters had had for example a close and intimate relationship with other player characters, found themselves extending the relationship by continuing flirting, holding hands, hugging or in other ways being physical and intimate with each other. In many cases, the relationship between two characters is continued or otherwise manifested in the players' behaviour towards each other. The behaviour of the players changed constantly from being their player character and their actual, real selves. As stories, special events and situations were related to other players or simply retold between two players; the player telling would for example start out telling objectively about the set-up for the situation, and then proceed while shifting between talking and acting like the player character and their actual selves. These stories often developed into shared narratives, where other players would comment or build upon the fictional situation, sometimes leading into future events. One player, whose player character was involved in a love triangle with two other player characters, exclaimed:

You kissed her? I did not know that! Destiny [the name of the player's player character] would have killed her! There is going to be some changes to Destiny now, she needs to embrace some sides of herself that she ignored before. (Player N)

The closing reaction of the players in the days following the event varied greatly. Many expressed having more energy and having established new friendships, but had no problems returning to their everyday routine. Others, in particular players who had engaged in physical and intimate love-like relationships explained that the fictional crush that had been lived out during the event could still be felt, and they had a need to talk and relive the events with their love interests or people whose player characters had been close to their own player characters during the event. The long-term closing actions were quite surprisingly very

thorough. Even though another six months would pass before the next event would continue the story, players actively filled in the passing six months and roleplayed through mail and Facebook. A dance- and mask-workshop was arranged before the next event, so most players would be able to participate in the planned masquerade ball. The winter court arranged an in-game dinner for all the court members, where three players would meet up outside of the game and play their characters again.

This lengthy phase-out was also evident for the Steampunk event. The players' engagement in the fictional role varied greatly from person to person, and event to event. Some quickly let go of the gameworld and their character, others continued to relive their character, engaging in sharing experiences or acting like the character. In the long run, the experiences from the games were retold by the players at various social gatherings. Several weeks after the events, the participants shared stories from the event, secrets that had not been discovered and pictures placed on the Facebook group. Some of the participants shared letters that their characters had written after the event, to amuse and follow up on some of the roleplay that had taken place. Posts were furthermore used to find new friends that had been made during the event and to discuss the possibilities of another event.

In The Grounding Phase for the teambuilding events the behavioural pattern of the participants seemed very similar to that of the LARP players. Interviewee 4 relates how he uses himself as a tool when the need to change from The Event Phase to The Grounding Phase arises:

“There was a really good atmosphere. The end of the event goes like this: I as a game master and organizer have a role as a butler. In the end the butler then tells the participants that they have found the murderer, and that the evening is over. I take off my hat and present myself as I am in real life; I change my voice back to my normal voice, so we have this flowing transition. I present myself and my colleagues and thank them for a nice evening. And immediately after this, the participants applaud

and they then talk about what happened [...] they also praised our roleplaying, and told us that we were very convincing. I know that they did a city walk before our event, and I imagine that there had been a very different atmosphere, coming from the nice and quiet walk to suddenly being in this restaurant where a person dressed as a cook stands up and welcomes them to Mr Thomsen's old estate, even if they are well aware that they are sitting in a restaurant and not an estate." (Interviewee 4)

That the role is still somehow residing in the participant, is also evident in the case of the teambuilding events, and all interviewees concluded that the following evaluation helps to "ground" the participants, to bring them back from the fictional world to reality:

"It was really funny to see you as a woman when you are a man, you were really funny to talk to, we should do this every Wednesday at the office, have some costumes to put on". So they share their experiences, thank each other and tell each other that this was fun. Then they really step out of their roles, and they know this, not that they are in-character all through the event, they go out to smoke and so on, but it becomes really evident in the end. (Interviewee 4)

Lastly all interviewees agreed that the participants were having "fun". This was interpreted by the organizers in various ways, ranging from participants saying directly to the organizers that they had fun, to the organizers describing how the participants had a general positive attitude during and after the different events, and that most participants were smiling and sharing situations from the event with each other after the event had ended. The relaxed and informal atmosphere not only furthers the conversations about the experiences from the event, but can also be used by organizers to gain valuable knowledge about the event from the participants:

"Each roleplaying episode is followed by a Reflection Workshop, where the issues that have come up during the episode are discussed. Based on experiences from the roleplay, the participants talk about topics such as negotiation techniques, bullying

and volunteering. In each workshop experiences and precise tools for how to deal with those challenges are discussed, both at work and in the participants' social life. But most of all the weekend is about giving the participants both professional and social experiences, and there is thus allocated plenty of time for socializing and talking about a little of everything. It is important for us that there is time to relax and share stories, as well as time for both having a beer and partying [...] We had a party in the end of the event Saturday, and a formal evaluation Sunday. People are talking and pointing out the things they thought was funny, educating or interesting. The feedback was very different, because we have so very different people, and they got something from different episodes. In the formal evaluation, it is really easy to... as a participant you want to bring something to the table, and the feedback quickly becomes way too positive or way too negative. Whereas the informal evaluation that takes place afterwards, at the party, is much more constructive and useful. You get to the core of their experience when you small-talk afterwards. It is really rare that I get any really useful information at the formal meetings that I have not figured out for myself. I guess you get an eye for that when you have done these things as long as I have." (Interviewee 3)

8.5 The Facilitator

In the previous sections, several angles presented in the literature review were held up against the findings and data from the empirical data. One concept, however, was not been mentioned in the interviews, and was not very evident during either the LARP events or the teambuilding events, that of the role and task of the organizer, or the facilitator. This might not be so odd, since the facilitator is, as Stoller mentions the constructor and the adapter, the hidden motivational force behind the events (Stoller, 2004). As has been discussed, different facilitators possess different experiences, personalities, preferences, perspectives and approaches to creating and holding events (Tychsen, Hitchens, & Brolund, 2005). An

important point of the empirical data was to locate the different constructs that independent of the facilitator could be taken into consideration when creating teambuilding events with LARP elements. In this chapter, several perspectives on organizing, carrying out and attending teambuilding events with LARP elements have been discussed and seen through theories discussed in the literature review in the beginning of this thesis, and compared to empirical data obtained through interviews and observations. The constructs discussed are thus those that can be disconnected from the facilitator. In the conclusion that follows, I will briefly summarize my findings.

9 Conclusion

In this thesis I have analysed and discussed theoretical perspectives and empirical findings on teambuilding and LARPS in order to come up with a foundation for constructing teambuilding events with LARP elements that will help professional teams perform better together in a work-related context.

In the theoretical framework section where I defined relevant academic literature on Teambuilding and LARPS, several examples were given that support that LARP is well-suited for being used as an element in a teambuilding context. Generally, organizers should design teambuilding events fitting what the customer's desired output of the event is. Organizers can design a teambuilding event with LARP elements for the team experience and the individual experience. Neither precludes the other, and the amount of focus on either area is up to the organizer. Thus, a teambuilding event with a clear goal and a strategy for reaching this output will both help the organizers and secure a better output of the event for the participants.

In the analysis of the empirical data (The interviews and observations) the concept of play was discussed. Play facilitates a number of important structures of a teambuilding event. Even if it was concluded in general that no productive outcome can come out of free play, when used in the context of teambuilding free play can still be used at assisting the participants in breaking the routine and in seeing people in a new light. Thus new social roles can be established within a team, which allows for a more dynamic and flexible team.

The concept of physicality was also discussed, where it was found that roleplay could be used by the participants to practice for real-life professional roles and situations. Practicing different roles through LARP exercises, allows the participants to achieve a deeper understanding and control of their physical appearance and behaviour. When taking on a role, physical aids such as costumes and makeup can be used to supply the player with a distance

between himself and the role, and to ease the immersion into the character. The physical aids also help signalling what the participant's role is to the participant's surroundings. Thus, to step into a role not only convinces the surroundings of the skills and professionalism of the participants, the feedback and reassurance from the surroundings also help convince the participant. Through the role, participants are able to try on different social and professional masks, without having to fear social or professional rejection. The gameworld is thus established as a safe environment.

Roleplaying events allow organizers to train participants for specific and sometimes dangerous situations, all within the safe frame of a virtual gameworld. Here, the participants can experience both positive and negative experiences through their role. The "positive negative" experience is useful for training for extreme or negative situations, and can be very beneficial for establishing very close and intimate relationships. Contrary to this, fun and pleasure can be used to create a frame of humour for the event. Humour creates a pleasant atmosphere, which eases the participants approach to the event and the social environment. It can also be used for presenting information to the participants in a memorable and extraordinary way. However, it is up to the organizers to decide whether this degree of emotional immersion is actually necessary, as participants not experiencing extreme, personal roleplay will still feel a personal and emotional involvement in the virtual gameworld.

Though the concept of free play holds several useful qualities that may allow for something productive to emerge from a teambuilding event, rules and constraints should be added by the organizers. This is done to ease the participants' relation to the gameworld, and to make sure the intended output of the event is achieved. This can be done by creating frames for the gameworld through a narrative. By using NPCs, costumes, makeup, scenery and background stories organizers can encourage and guide participants to engage in the fictional setting of the event. Through the narrative, participants create a meaning with the event. A

narrative can also be used for creating an incitement for the participant to engage with the other participants, establishing new social connections.

I have found that three phases generally can be applied to events included in my collected material. In The Initial Phase, the participants familiarize themselves with the setting, rules and purpose of the gameworld. This familiarization can be encouraged by the organizers by utilising different forms of physical aids. In The Event Phase, the actual event takes place. Due to the large variety of this phase it has no distinguishing characteristics (see chapter 7). Lastly, The Grounding Phase seems to be of particular importance to teambuilding events with LARP elements. It should be taken into consideration that participants will still relate to their role after the event has ended. Thus organizers should make sure that there is some sort of grounding at the end of an event. This could be in the form of a party or an informal, concluding get-together. This allows for the players to share stories, come to terms with their experiences and slowly get the character out of their bodies. Furthermore, the informal concluding event is an excellent opportunity for organizers to collect informal evaluations from the participants, while the event is still clear in their memory.

In the end the success of the experience is dependent on the individual participant and the person's willingness to interact with and be a part of a virtual world. It is possible to design an event that both provide the tools and techniques needed by the participants to engage in the teambuilding material, and to result in better team performance. This can be achieved by using the before mentioned structures and concepts. My concluding recommendation is that all organizers be aware that they can prepare and control almost every element of the teambuilding experience. This will help professional teams perform better together in a work-related context.

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