

# Broadening the Concept of Luxury: Transformations and Contributions to Well-Being

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## Abstract

Luxury has always been an intrinsic part of human societies. Prior research shows how luxury transforms from being-to-having and owning-to-searching for meaningfulness via shifting from having-to-being and from owning-to-experiencing. The study here is a critical commentary of foundational literature that includes examining the ongoing luxury transformation in the ongoing COVID-19 era in a world of climate change and disaster displacements, environmental degradation, and awareness of future pandemics. Building on prior advances in luxury transformations and the macromarketing literature on well-being, this commentary takes a fresh look at the prevailing role of luxury and its accompanying well-being in Western European societies amid the progressing tripartite storm. This critical commentary serves to clarify and broaden luxury's meaning and roles in making the shift from a micro individualistic focus to a macromarketing sustainable foundation. Entering the fourth year of COVID-19, the commentary implies that luxury goes beyond experiencing to catalyze cherishing self-care, nurturing, and the well-being of others.

## Keywords

creativity, excellence, luxury transformation, post-COVID era, sustainability

## Introduction

Luxury is a complicated construct with a meaning that depends on the context and the era (Cristini et al. 2017). Luxury's meaning broadens and transforms over the ages such that explaining the phenomenon of luxury remains an intricate task due to its inherent meanings and conditions that toss-and-turn on a number of paradoxes. For example, in recent years, the paradox has emerged from the meaning of luxury that revolves around its democratization (Cristini et al. 2017). In an attempt to clarify some of the issues, a study by Cristini et al. (2017) discusses the transformations of luxury across centuries by using historical, philosophical, and anthropological frames. Their study shows how the transformation evolves philosophically and morally, and most interestingly, it pinpointed how luxury has only recently been associated with “a desire for the superfluous” (p. 101). Cristini and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2020) add to the discussion of the complexity of the luxury construct and its transformation. They move beyond man-made luxury to discuss how the elementary resources of the global commons (air, water, and land) have also become luxuries—that is, something that, through the availability of excellence or excellent quality and creativity, has become rare and elevated to an exclusive status.

Since the studies by Cristini et al. (2017) and Cristini and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has spread dramatically, triggering health, social, and economic

crises that have impacted all nations in an unequal and harmful manner since 2020 (e.g., OECD 2021). While disrupting daily activities, the pandemic changed human lives (Tiwari 2021). Above all, the COVID-19 pandemic awakens human awareness of existential issues causing necessary ecological resets (e.g., Clarke 2020; Everingham and Chassagne 2020). Namely, the awareness of cataclysm (i.e., violent changes in Earth's crust) and the era of Anthropocene (i.e., the current geological era distinguished as the time in which human activity alone altered climate and the environment) have recently heightened the impact on how the resources of the global commons are approached (Bennett et al. 2016; Cristini and Kauppinen-Räsänen 2020). In particular, there is an unavoidable quest to protect the global commons from the tripartite storm of climate change with attendant disaster displacements,

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environmental degradation, and future pandemics (e.g., Chassagne 2020; Messner 2020). This storm, which threatens environmental and human health and, thereby, the overall well-being of the planet (e.g., Thoma, Rohleder, and Rohner 2021) is heightened by the recent alarming results of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) urging necessary prescriptive changes “now or never” in order to avoid going beyond the threshold of a two-degree Celsius increase of temperature (IPCC 2022, p. 2). Failing it, humanity would cross the Rubicon.

This commentary builds on discussions about luxury transformations (e.g., Cristini and Kauppinen-Räsänen 2020; Cristini et al. 2017; Donzé 2020; Woodside and Fine 2019) and fits into the macromarketing well-being literature (Bolton 2020; Lee and Sirgy 2004; Lusch and Webster 2011; Melé et al. 2022; Sirgy 2001, 2012, 2021; Sirgy et al. 2021). Confronted by a background of tripartite storm and interdependent crises, the focus is on how luxury transformations contribute to the well-being of Western European societies in the post-pandemic or approaching endemic times. In the present commentary, human well-being is approachable as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO n.d.). Hence, by taking a fresh look at the ongoing luxury metamorphosis, this commentary challenges the view whereby “luxury is often taken for granted. It is considered a clear-cut economic concept” (Mortelmans 2014, p. 193). According to Cristini et al. (2017), the transformation of luxury broadens from contributions to societal and economic well-being into enhancing individual well-being, which means that luxury has shifted from being-to-having and owning to searching for meaningfulness for oneself and from having-and-owing to being and embracing personal experiences. The question is how entering COVID-19’s fourth pandemic year will affect luxury? Is it possible that luxury moves beyond the pursuit of individual well-being through (e.g., self-serving searches for meaningfulness and embraces of experiencing)?

Against this backdrop, this commentary broadens the prior niche macromarketing view of well-being (cf. Lee and Sirgy 2004) and to deepen foundational knowledge for planning effective “quality-of-life marketing” (Sirgy 2008, 2021). The commentary here flows from Bolton’s (2020) call for research addressing challenges to people’s well-being and Melé et al.’s (2022) “value based well-being framework”:

...well-being consists of a person’s positive affect, low negative affect, satisfaction with life (Diener et al. 2010), sense of purpose and meaning, and ability to overcome challenges (Ryan and Deci 2001). It also anticipates that well-being can emerge from the effects of the direct use, indirect use, or non-use (economic, social, and environmental factors) of resources. The framework then links it to four value outcomes (use, option, existence, bequest) related to using or knowing about current or possible future uses of resources. These links reflect the three dimensions of beneficiaries, as individual or collective; time, including

present and future; and space, as proximal or broader. (Melé et al. 2022)

Melé et al.’s (2022) is foundational for recognizing “milestone” descriptions that Cristini et al. (2017) describe and how these milestones—place, quality, creativity, and time span—evolve and attach new meanings to luxury. The milestones are not exclusive, but they are advanced in this commentary to deepen perspectives into the nature of luxury’s progression in supporting individual’s well-being in eras following pandemics. This commentary takes an unconventional approach to luxury, which means that luxury is not limited by its context but defined by its characteristics. This means that luxury can be identifiable as anything—goods, brands, services, experiences (e.g., lived experience of something or exposure to something), and even resources of the global commons—which is characterized or perceived as excellent, creative, and exclusive (Cristini et al. 2017). An essential notion to the definition is that “luxury rests on asymmetry, which means that although all the three conditions are sufficient to define luxury, they are not necessary” (Cristini et al. 2017, p. 105). Luxury is traditionally attached to the intriguing luxury market, which was worth US\$309 billion in 2021 and is estimated to reach US\$382 billion by 2025 with a growth at a CAGR of 5.4 (Statista.com).

With the aforementioned approach, the commentary contributes to the emerging discussion on luxury advancement (e.g., Cristini and Kauppinen-Räsänen 2020; Cristini et al. 2017; Donzé 2020; Woodside and Fine 2019) and to understanding luxury’s prevailing meaning and roles. Specifically, the commentary does this by first exploring how place continuously transforms from public to private to the sharing with a sense of privacy (Carrigan, Moraes, and McEachern 2013; Castarède 2004; Wilkins 2008). Second, the commentary looks at how quality is regenerating from excellence to mediocrity to being forced into discovering excellence again (Hennigs et al. 2013). Third, the commentary assesses how creativity is restyling from artistic creativity to profitable creativity to becoming luxury empowered by local autochthon (local or native inhabitants; Hennigs et al. 2013; Wilkins 2008). Fourth, this commentary examines how the current luxury time-span and its concordant well-being is moving from a long-term versus short-term approach (Khalla 2006; Michaud 2003) to desire for a propitious embrace of time for oneself and others. While a critical question might be how luxury fits in during an unprecedented health, social, economic, and environmental crisis of conjunctive illness, death, pollution, and natural loss (cf., Agarwal and Narain 2019; French Press Agency 2013), this commentary is not an attempt to condemn or judge. Instead, the commentary edifies the existing efforts toward transforming luxury to account for the well-being of all—humans and the environment (Cristini and Kauppinen-Räsänen 2020). Such transformative luxury shifts beyond the exclusive well-being of a few to the well-being of the many—a shift manageable only by consciousness of others—encompassing the common good—the flora and fauna, Earth’s biodiversity, the atmosphere, and human beings, while indulging in

own(ing) luxuries that do not jeopardize the well-being of others.

This commentary is organized as follows. Each milestone description—place, quality, creativity, and timespan—presents a discussion of how luxury has transformed over time, attaching new meanings to luxury, and ends in an examination of how the regeneration of luxury contributes to the well-being of Western European societies in the post-pandemic or approaching endemic times. Each description can also be read as a mini-analysis that ties into clarifying and broadening luxury's meaning and roles in the shift from micro individualistic focus to macro sustainable foundation. Following the milestone descriptions, research contributions, implications, and recommendations for future studies are presented.

## How Luxury Continues Transforming in the Post-Pandemic Era

### *Place—Back to the Shared Luxury: Cherishing the Common Good with a Sense of Privacy*

Luxury and well-being in the ancient Greek world first served the common good before the individual, out of the Greek inclination to virtuous ethics (Cristini et al. 2017). To that effect, Seneca, as a stoic, argued that slaves and beautiful houses are of no real worth to a man because they are “on the outside” (Aggrey-Darkoh 2003, p. 5). Instead, Seneca reasoned that what is important is what is “on the inside.” Such a virtuous approach to luxury reflected the ancient Greek (stoic) view of ethics that rested on the cultural lynchpin dictating that a man should be guided not by self-interests but instead by the common good (Edwards 1997). The idea of limits was essential for curbing the greed for luxury among the ancient Greeks, to whom, “governed by the fear of lust, the need for control, and the desire of peace and moderation” (Cristini et al. 2017, p. 2), luxury had to be regulated and limited in order to maintain a peaceful and harmonious city where justice prevailed. In so doing, the city and individual would be shielded from “luxury fever,” which corresponded with envy and greed spreading and bringing conflicts to the city (Cristini et al. 2017). Deriving from the cultural ethos respecting luxury, the ancient Greeks politically and economically enacted the sumptuary laws that were used as buffers against disorder. These laws evolved through history (Roman era, Medieval era up to the Renaissance), and, fluctuating across time, luxury was approached as a danger. Hence, luxury was discerned as something to be exposed in public spheres and that “should be shared for the means of common good” to serve societal well-being (Cristini et al. 2017, p. 102).

With modernity, a revolution occurred in an astronomical sense. Namely, as the sumptuary laws were repealed for the most part, the public sphere came to be replaced by the private sphere. In the 17th century, luxury in Europe had swollen (Ramsey 2010). For example, in the fast-growing metropolis of London, “people established a pattern of seeking out and consuming splendor that was eventually

embraced by a wider society” (Ramsey 2010, p. 246). The democratization of luxury evolved as luxury goods were found and openly sold in the two most famous trade centers of London: the Royal Exchange and the New Exchange. These shopping centers had a handful of shops filled with luxury items such as cloth, furniture, and jewels collected from the remotest corners of the world (Ramsey 2010). Individualism progressively replaced the common good as individuals grew eager to fill their private—self-serving—needs (Veblen 1899) with pleasure. Trade increased, and so did the quest for economic and individual well-being (Cristini et al. 2017).

The 18th and 19th centuries gave birth to luxury fashionable goods and famous luxury brands such as Hermès (1837), Louis Vuitton (1854), Burberry (1956), and Lanvin (1889). In the 20th century, a number of other authoritative luxury fashion designers came forth, including Coco Chanel, Miuccia Prada, and Guccio Gucci. Haute couture (high dressmaking or custom-fitted design) was followed by prêt-à-porter (ready to wear), and fashion became accessible to wider consumer groups (Ott 2018; Whiteley 1987). Actors and other celebrities replaced aristocrats as fashion icons. Gradually, the business focus became consumer obsessed, and evidently, consumerism was underway with its ever-changing fashion styles and throw-away experiences. From beginnings as something attached to private spheres, luxury had gradually transformed into something to be conspicuously exposed in the public sphere.

Late in the second half of the 20th century was a transformational time for luxury. Not only was luxury attached to designer brands, but many of those brands were made available through mass production. Thanks to democratization, luxury became largely accessible to even wider audiences (Hemetsberger 2018), which has had consequences for production, consumption, and post-consumption, causing harm on multiple levels. For example, “communities around extraction and processing sites harmed by environmental damage or chemicals; children via enforced labor during extraction; wildlife species killed for fine wool/fur/leather” (Carrigan, Moraes, and McEachern 2013, p. 17). The Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman cautioned as early as 1997 that the luxury industry must undertake a transition from conspicuous to consideration when it comes to luxury fashion consumption and fashion consumption in general (Bauman 1997; Carrigan, Moraes, and McEachern 2013; Ertekin and Atik 2015). One of the most extreme manifestations—the 40-year growth of a mountain of secondhand clothes, or “*obroni wawu*” (dead white man's clothes) from the United States, UK, Europe, and Australia—can be seen on the banks of Korle Lagoon in the Ghanaian capital of Accra, causing an indescribable environmental disaster (Besser 2021).

In the post-COVID-19 era, luxury fever may not abate, but luxury will continue transforming due to changing attitudes toward consumption (Chaboud 2020; Guzzetti, Crespi, and Belvedere 2021) and toward alternative approaches to well-being. On the one hand, people are beginning to question whether consumption makes them happier, and on the other

hand, they question the consequences of their behavior. A few people have started to holistically—as opposed to individually—reconsider their individualistic consumption desires, and focus instead on mindful consumption in terms of human and environmental well-being (Bahl et al. 2016; Holbrook 2009; Sheth, Sethia, and Srinivas 2011). Such mindful consumption focuses on moderating acquisitive and abusive consumption for the sake of cherishing the common good—the fauna, the flora, Earth’s biodiversity, the atmosphere, and human beings.

In ancient Greece, in the pandemic and post-pandemic eras, that shared public space contributed to luxury, although they approached luxury in distinctive ways. For the ancient Greeks, luxury had to be limited to the man-built public place (e.g., Wilkins 2008). In doing so, the built place provided peacefulness and societal harmony, whereby it served the common good and promoted societal well-being (Brown and Vergragt 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic brought limitations and controls to day-to-day life. The man-built public places were closed, and many discovered natural public spheres like urban forests (e.g., Weinbrenner et al. 2021). These sort of semi-man-made places provided freedom and empowering luxury experiences (e.g., Cristini and Kauppinen-Räisänen 2020; Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen 2019; Thomsen et al. 2020). In the post-pandemic era, along with the growing appreciation for landscapes and wildlife, nature-based tourism is expected to boom (e.g., Komasi, Zolfani, and Cavallaro 2022). Hence, in the post-pandemic era, luxury continues to evolve from the semi-man-made public space to the authentic natural public sphere. Hence, empowering luxury experiences—serving the environment and humanity for the purposes of overall well-being—are deliberately sought in the natural sphere. In this sense, places like the Finnish Lapland—which not only provides pristine experiences like natural geological walks, but also offers the purest drinking water and air in the world—responds readily to changing attitudes and reshaped desires for mindful consumption characterized by informed and conscientious behavior (e.g., Rantala et al. 2020; Sheldon 2020). As such, these authentic places may be perceived as luxury—characterized by excellence, creativity, and exclusivity—while simultaneously permitting travelers to live empowering and even edifying luxury experiences.

Consequently, in the post-COVID-19 era, the luxury “milestone” of place continues to transform. So far, it has evolved from the public to private, and then to public again. In the post-pandemic era, luxury continues to emerge from the public place, yet it gains a new meaning which emerges from a sense of privacy. Heretofore, luxury has been something to be displayed through brands exposed to others in the public sphere. In the post-pandemic era, luxury might still be conspicuously displayed, but as the search for experiences increasingly prevails (Carrigan, Moraes, and McEachern 2013; Castarède 2004; Guzzetti, Crespi, and Belvedere 2021; Rantala et al. 2020; Wilkins 2008) consumption of luxury brands will not be replaced, but accompanied by empowering and edifying luxury experiences. Although these experiences are holding a

sense of privacy, they are most likely still shared with others, either in situ or through digital channels.

### Quality—Forced to Rediscover Excellence

Throughout history, luxury has inherently strived for excellence (Cristini et al. 2017) depicting qualities beyond the ordinary, conveying superiority and splendor, and acting as an antidote to daily life. Excellence not only emerged from the perceived high quality, but it also came from materials such as exquisite fabrics and modes of production like tailor-made artisanship. Such quality aspects of luxury have inherently been part of its essence. In the mindset of ancient Greeks, the adage, *age quod agis* (do well whatever you do) prevailed also in the luxury area, epitomizing high moral values and top quality.

Mass production enables duplication of identical designs in numerous pieces, and this fabrication also characterizes the democratization and popularization of luxury. Hence, through mass production, luxury brands became largely accessible to ever wider audiences, reaching more and more social strata. At the same time, luxury went from excellence to settling for mediocrity, hence becoming “anything and nothing” (Heine 2012). As luxury spread in the contemporary era, some luxury brands even came to be referred to as “cheap chic,” often fast fashion brands, allowing them to challenge genuine luxury brands for appeal: “Driven by the growth imperative, many climbed down from their pedestals into the realm of ‘accessible luxury’ and the hilarious but sadly un-ironic ‘mastige’” (Pinkhasov 2015, p. 3).

In the approaching post-COVID-19 era, luxury transformation in changing attitudes about consumption (e.g., Guzzetti, Crespi, and Belvedere 2021) is noticeable in various sectors of luxury, including fashion, perfume, and tourism. As far as tourism is concerned, if pre-pandemic tourism was linked to mass tourism and its environmental destruction and poor social developmental plans, the post-pandemic era may come as an alternative or even turning point (e.g., Sharma, Thomas and Paul, 2021; Stankov, Filimonau, and Vujičić 2020). People are pleading for tourism that enhances human and environmental well-being via excellence in its “form” and “content,” such as excellence in how the tour “product” is composed and how the product is communicated or its meaning conveyed. Such tourism is not necessarily portrayed by golden surroundings and exclusive prices, but rather by places providing empowering and edifying experiences that welcome such tourists, who are informed and conscientious of the dire need to constrain oneself for the common good.

Indeed, such tourism is difficult to achieve. For example, the main island of Fernando de Noronha—a volcanic archipelago and UNESCO natural world heritage site—is at first glance not spoiled by tourists. For example, it has no luxury accommodations; tourists stay at *pousadas* or modest local guesthouses (St. John and St. John 2019). Also, the daily authorized limit is 400 tourists, who can only reach the island by air. Moreover, the island seems to protect its marine life, as tourists are obliged to pay a daily tax of \$20 to compensate for the

potential nuisance of their presence when they swim or snorkel in the beautiful pristine sea for half an hour. Yet, in spite of the regulations, detrimental impacts of tourism have been felt on the island (da Costa Cristiano et al. 2020), which in a nutshell are mainly anthropogenic. For example, the island suffers from noise disturbance (e.g., noise pollution linked to beach buggies, trucks that provide transportation, and music bars), litter (e.g., bad sewer lines and sewage leakage), and augmented offerings required for delivering the core tourism product (e.g., parking lots, gas stations, dining services, snack bars, and harbor services), which may even be harmful to the local environment and autochthons. The main difficulty in achieving excellence of form and content, that is, tourism building upon overall well-being and being genuinely sustainable, resides in a prevailing balance of its dimensions (e.g., cultural, environmental, sociocultural, and economic) (e.g., see Mowforth and Munt 2009).

What else do the changing attitudes and reshaped desires—characterized by informed and conscientious behaviors pleading for human and environmental well-being—mean in post-pandemic times? Scholars have determined that a “normative-conceptual perspective [...] of frugality has emerged as a mega-trend that may shape a frugal affordable green excellence” (Michaelis 2017). This trend implies that the so-called luxury consumers will not turn frugal, but will continue consuming goods and services provided by the luxury industry. However, these consumers might be increasingly driven by “economic and societal choices” as a growing number of consumers are voluntarily opting for simplicity (Craig-Lees and Hill 2002; Etzioni 1998; McGouran and Prothero 2013; Tiwari 2019). Concisely, frugal consumers are not anti-consumers. Instead, they are informed and conscientious, and they are deliberate and driven by their needs rather than spontaneous and heeding self-directed desires. They also contemplate excellence through the sustainability and value provided by the offering, “This regulation between conservation of existing resources and getting the best value when acquiring new resources during the venture creation process is a learned skill, reinforced over time. Thus, a frugal person may consume as much as a non-frugal person; it is how they consume resources, which differentiates the frugal from the non-frugal consumer” (Michaelis 2017, p. 1).

Hence, in the post-COVID-19 era, luxury consumers may again seek excellence rather than settling for mediocrity in their consumption, as if the global pandemic made them aspire to new enlightened meanings and a new, more mature, range of desires befitting the post-COVID-19 ethos. To that effect, consumers who are more and more informed and conscientious in constraining themselves for the common good will consume sustainable and ethical luxury brands and even pre-owned goods (e.g., Besser 2021). In so doing, they treat themselves by seeking excellence in the luxury they consume and the luxury goods or services they purchase, while they simultaneously contribute to a positive Anthropocene thanks to their frugal intentions.

### *Creativity—Local Autochthon Empowerment of Luxury*

Cristini et al. (2017) approached luxury through excellence, creativity, and exclusivity, within which creativity always pegs to luxury (Lipovetsky 2003; Michaud 2003). Yet, depending on the era (e.g., Roman era, Medieval era, Renaissance), luxury’s orientation has varied and evolved from a focus on the public sphere to the private one and being reinforced by sumptuary laws. The latter administered luxury expenditures in order to govern the differences between economic and political power (Ott 2018). Creativity in luxury used to be identified by monuments epitomizing public splendor, whether visible as fountains or cathedrals (Lipovetsky 2003; Michaud 2013).

In the 17th century, as sumptuary laws were repealed, creativity came forth in artisan luxury goods like rich fabrics, watches, and jewelry that were affordable only to the few (e.g., Berry 1994; Hill 2012; MacCants 2007; Sombart 1967). Since the 19th century, luxury’s creativity has gradually moved from luxury brands to haute couture, and prêt-à-porter to mass-produced luxury brands (Ott 2018; Ramsey 2010). Hence, luxury’s transformation across 25 centuries went from unique luxury goods to artistic, tailor-made creations to be portrayed by luxury brands designed as ready-made creations guided by luxury’s democratization (Ott 2018). In the 20th century, creativity became, above all else, embraced in luxury brands’ boutiques or brand cathedrals (Kauppinen-Räsänen, Mühlbacher, and Taishoff 2020; Taishoff, Mühlbacher, and Kauppinen-Räsänen 2022). The CEO Bernard Arnault for LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy) focuses on embrace in quality-of-life marketing” (Sirgy 2008) as follows, “What interests me in luxury is not creativity but the idea of transforming creativity into profitability” (Thomas 2007, p. 13). Hence, the essence of creativity for luxury may not have been changed, but rather than being valued for itself, it became valued for its potential to benefit the business.

Possibly as a reaction to the ravages of the neoliberal system, its mass production, and the damages of exploitation and degradation of the resources of the global commons, more and more people have rejected the hedonic treadmill (Brown and Vergragt 2016). As a reaction, people have begun to gain appreciation for the necessities of human and environmental well-being, even to the extent of treating natural and global common resources as luxuries (Cristini and Kauppinen-Räsänen 2020). Hence, due to the growing awareness of the scarcity of clean air, water, and land, and related to such appreciation, notions of unconventional luxuries have come to the fore, implying that creativity may not be limited to art or what it means for business, but may become a way of living (Cristini et al. 2017; Cristini and Kauppinen-Räsänen 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles 2009, 2010; Thomsen et al. 2020).

The empowerment of local autochthon is a recent aspect characterizing luxury’s ongoing transformation (Chebanne and Glon 2017; Escobar 2001; Osburg, Davies, and Yoganathan 2021). It is widely known that the combination of the gold and diamond mining industries and tourism, as one of the largest industries, are notorious for the heavy

human and ecological toll they take (Chebanne and Glon 2017; Herstatt and Tiwari 2020). For example, the gold and diamond mining industries are known for reprehensible mining practices (e.g., causing water pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, soil erosion) (Keller Aviram 2018), while the tourism industry is infamous for its harmful actions (demolishing, e.g., local populations or local cultures) (Chebanne and Glon 2017). An example of the latter is Botswana, where the tourism businesses owned by wealthy foreigners in charge of moving the San, an autochthon population of the Central Kalahari game reserve, succeeded only in destroying the San culture (Chebanne and Glon 2017). Fortunately, these industries have begun to be shunned for their predatory economic policies.

Numerous voices call for autochthons to be consulted and integrated into, for example, the gold and diamond mining industry and tourism (Moraes et al. 2017). For example, the Kimberley process certification scheme—in the gemstone mining industry—was the first step up, in 2002, to impugn “conflict” or “blood” diamonds (Keller-Aviram, Coste-Manière, and Gardetti 2021) and prevent them from fueling armed conflicts, whether in Angola, Sierra Leone, or the DR Congo (European Economic and Social Committee 2013). An essential notion here is that “conflict-free” diamonds means that they are regulated to avoid rebel-funded diamonds being mixed with ethical diamonds, which refers to a concern for the workers and the environment (Fried 2021; McAdams and Reavis 2008). Within the tourism industry, an example of this is Bali (also named the Island of Gods and the Island of 1,000 Temples). With regard to tourism and well-being concerns, Bali has tried to elaborate tourist well-being with its unique sustainable approach to tourism—*Tri Hita Kawana* (THK). Founded on a respect for nature and the local culture, THK’s philosophy and spirituality that promotes harmony between humans, environment, and culture, epitomizes creativity for luxury tourism. THK aims to familiarize and “responsibilize” travel operators and tourists with the philosophy of the island, thanks to an agreement with autochthons (Michel 2013). Such tourism aims to first, respect the environment while serving the interests of the Balinese villages; and second, to assure that the economic benefits are used for local human resources (Michel 2013).

Creativity always pegs to luxury. In the post-COVID-19 era, creativity gains a new meaning with the enhanced plea for creativity as locals are empowered and natural environments are preserved and cared for. Escobar (2001) emphasizes the imperative empowerment of the autochthons, as they are the ones who know their land best and how to sustain it (Higgins-Desbiolles and Bigby 2022). Failing to preserve the already alarmingly polluted natural environment and going beyond the two-degree threshold will jeopardize human survival in a very short time, because scientists are warning that “the planet is on fire” (Bennett et al. 2016). Yet, as it appears that the luxury industry, in particular, with the approach of integrating tourism locally and ecologically—respecting the authentic ways of living—has started to make numerous adaptations. Without a doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic, in conjunction

with the newly awakened human awareness of existential issues, is causing a requirements for social and ecological resets in the post-COVID-19 era (e.g., Clarke 2020; Everingham and Chassagne 2020).

### *Time Span—Desiring Kairos Approach of Time*

When it comes to how luxury has evolved through history, its usual opposition revolves around a long-term and a short-term approach. That opposition encapsulates a long-term approach of luxury, such as the long and slow construction of monuments like the medieval Scottish Eilean Donan Castle with the extremely long life span symbolizing an heirloom (Khalla 2006; Lipovetsky 2003; Michaud 2003). A short-term approach arrived with modernity (Keller Aviram 2018), symbolized by luxury fashion trends and fleeting successive experiences. With the short-term approach to luxury, the representation of luxury becomes transient as opposed to permanent (Michaud 2013) and the individualistic self is pampered with hedonic feelings.

The appraisal of luxury seems to constantly change, transforming itself over time (Cristini et al. 2017; Thomsen et al. 2020). This appraisal may well rest on the notion that “at great intervals in history the mode of existence is transformed at the same time as the mode of perception of human societies” (Benjamin, in Michaud 2003). Hence, the meaning of luxury is dynamic, as Western culture has transformed itself, modifying the conception (Goldthwaite 1987) from mankind as *Viator mundi* (i.e., pilgrim between this worldly life and the eternal one) in the Middle Age religious ethos to *Faber mundi* (i.e., the creator, as opposed to God) in the Renaissance (e.g., Cristini et al. 2017).

As the nature of human desire has transformed over centuries, so has the aspiration for luxury adopted new directions (e.g., Cristini et al. 2017; Thomsen et al. 2020). With the 18th century, the anthropocentric outlook that had begun in the Renaissance became reinforced with mankind placed as the master of nature. In that century, modern luxury was born “when goods were copied over unto popular culture” (Keller-Aviram, Coste-Manière, and Gardetti 2021, p. 7) turning luxury into fashionable goods (Ramsey 2010). The Enlightenment (as an intellectual and philosophical movement) along with liberalization of the economy, free trade ending protectionism, and the near suppression of the sumptuary laws, luxury was freed, trade was boosted, and luxury artisans began production (e.g., rich fabrics, watches, and jewelry), leading to the broadened use of luxury goods in Europe (Berry 1994). For example, the French predominance of luxury jewelry arose with the rococo style—from *rocaille* (i.e., rocks or stones), which has since been widely imitated (Berry 1994).

In the 19th century, the meaning of luxury took on a fresh nuance as complacency crept in and people started to see and experience luxury as something excellent, expensive, and pleasurable that could be acquired even if it was superfluous or unnecessary (Brun and Castelli 2013; Cabigiosu 2020).

Meanwhile, the jewelry made by Etruscan, Greek, and Roman goldsmiths and exhibited in the Louvre (the museum initially opened in 1793) were admired by the Parisians and hence, served as exemplary models for the local jewelers.

By the second half of the 20th century, luxury goods were, for the most part, products of mass production—exhibiting a luxury form, yet devoid of luxury content. This transformation reflects the period's ethos of speed and simultaneously epitomizes the period's luxury consumer culture (Michaud 2003, p. 204). By the late 20th century, mankind had become *Homo deus* (i.e., man-god), implying that humans were the sole decider of their destiny and evolution, as opposed to being shaped by nature's mechanisms, reflecting humanity's hegemonic impact on the Anthropocene. As the nature of human desire has transformed, so has the relationship to luxury. With human fever for luxury goods, "there is an erasure of the (luxury) work in favor of the experience, erasure of the object in favor of an aesthetic, volatile, vaporous or diffuse quality ..." (Michaud 2013), which amounts to a postmodern experience. An extraordinary example would be taking a bath filled with an iconic luxury brand like Dom Perignon. That brand not only mirrors the exclusive wealthy social class, but the experience echoes the fact that such a privileged consumer is free to do what they want, whenever such an experience is desired (Belk 2014; Joy et al. 2012). The example illustrates how luxury's "content becomes a glimpse" (Michaud 2003) into the "liquid" approach of time (Bauman 1997).

Until recently, approaches to time have been liquid, but also volatile. The Anthropocene (Bennett et al. 2016) and its off-spring of climate change and COVID crisis are the latest warnings about such approaches, which also concerns the luxury field. In fact, more and more luxury consumers are disenchanted with mindless consumption and its impact on human and environmental well-being, and they are questioning the current pace of time, starting to crave a more harmonious tempo or eurhythmy (Coppola 2021; Joy et al. 2012). This approach to time—*kairos*—(Guillamaud 1988) was for the Greeks the right action at the right time, the opportune action.

Approaching time as *kairos* (i.e., a perfect moment to act) concerns the artisans of luxury goods, but also consumers and how they all relate to alterity, that is, "others," encompassing the common good. Indeed *kairos* would benefit luxury artisans in several respects, as "the laborer with a sense of craft becomes engaged in the work in and for itself" (Mill, in Sennett 2008, p. 176). Such remarks concerned about the overall well-being of the artisan, the luxury offering's excellence, and the common good in general are all the more edifying when they come from the business. A topical example is the 19th Hermès leather goods workshop located in Saint-Vincent-de-Paul in southwestern France. This shop was opened in September 2021 in order to train, tutor, and accompany the best artisans or highly skilled craftsmen (Denis 2021). The company acknowledges their highly unique artisanal craft and pay the crafters during their training. In turn, the crafters, using simple traditional tools, create unique luxury items, one by one (Joy et al. 2012). In the example, time is not

instrumentalized and sacrificed for the sake of profit; there is no need to bring forth deadlines or convey the impatience of prestigious and wealthy customers. Instead, Hermès' affluent customers are informed and ready to wait as long as several years to obtain the unique bag (Tungate 2009, in Joy et al. 2012).

In the post-pandemic era, the craving for that harmonious tempo or eurhythmy evolves with new meaning and roles. It appears for those consumers who look for "new luxury products that embrace human values and high ethics" (Welsh 2018) as a refusal to consume and be consumed by impatience. Instead, they are ready to wait for the luxury item, the Hermès bag made for them, because they are committed to being mindful and conscientious (Keller Aviram 2018). What these consumers might gain may be more empowering and edifying experiences (Doyle and Bendell 2011), which may even respond to the plea for cherishing the common good and creativity empowered by autochthons. Hence, when luxury embraces *kairos*, excellence and creativity with its authentic heritage are empowered and luxury stands far from exploitation and degradation of global common resources (Joy et al. 2012, p. 2). Such luxury implies cherishing an overall well-being encompassing human and environment instead of self-serving searches for meaningfulness and embracing experiential time for oneself.

## Discussion

This commentary describes and explains how luxury transformations contribute to the well-being of Western European societies in the post-pandemic or approaching endemic times from a climatic change perspective. The COVID-19 pandemic awakened human consciousness of existential issues, such as that of cataclysm and the era of Anthropocene causing necessary ecological resets. Hence, the commentary attempts to clarify and broaden luxury's meaning and roles in making the shift from a micro individualistic focus to a macro sustainable foundation.

## Conclusions

This commentary concludes with three remarks emphasizing transformations of luxury in the post-pandemic or approaching endemic times. The first transformation implies mindful luxury supersedes conspicuous luxury (McKinsey and Company 2020). Such luxury situates itself within the current emotional context of a post crisis that naturally intensifies the tendency for a more desirable sustainable world and a "desire for more responsible consumption in luxury" (McKinsey and Company 2020). In such a context, informed and conscientious consumers could prefer luxury building on conditions where the product or experience is high in excellence, creativity, and exclusivity. Instead of settling for the mediocrity of "anything and nothing" (Heine 2012) and luxury emptied of form and content, the desire for luxury might increasingly be driven by

the plea for artisanship, natural elements, or heritage and the surrender of the “bling” appetite for short-term pleasure.

The second conclusion situates itself in the demoralizing and democratizing of luxury. Luxury transformation in the approaching endemic times, characterized by health, social, and economic crises, implies that the demoralizing and democratizing of luxury could be shifted to a pristine democratic approach to luxury. In ancient Greece, with its pristine meaning, *dèmos* epitomizes the common people of a civic community in a Greek city. This *dèmos*, gathered in an assembly, holds the power to decide. Hence, applied to multinational luxury brands such as LVMH, an operational *dèmos* would cause a total change to take place. The multinationals’ superpower would be superseded by a democratic approach to discerning what is precious and serves the common good. This would be a true shift away from a micro individualistic focus to a macro sustainable foundation, while simultaneously fostering excellence and creativity.

The third transformation of luxury places itself in the current cultural outlook of the —*Homo Deus* (i.e., man–god)—whose unreasonable and narcissistic wishes are devastating and relentless on others (*alter* in Latin). With this outlook for background, one might wish for a luxury considering alterity or others’ well-being, or an altruistic approach to well-being, as opposed to a hedonistic luxurious well-being inconsiderate of its impact on alterity. One might also hope and count that, one day, the cultural outlook will switch to *Homo curator* (i.e., man as a steward or custodian). The latest appalling IPCC results may well be the opportune moment that triggers such a change of mindset. Such a luxury can remain exclusive, with well-being from feeding the spirit to pandering the self, while distancing oneself from its harmful impact on the environments and others (Cristini et al. 2017). Such a transformative luxury would beget a “change in priorities towards quality of life, living within ecological parameters and in a context of social relationships, which are guiding us as towards notions of global citizenship and away from the materialism, selfishness and individualism promoted by the culture of consumption” (Higgins-Desbiolles 2010). It could advocate alternative value systems promoting Aristotelian well-being interested in “autonomy, search for meaning, spirituality, commitment and ethical behavior, respect and sense of achievement in life,” as opposed to a Benthamite (utilitarian) one, which implies a micro individualistic focus on luxury for one’s exclusive well-being (Brown and Vergragt 2016). Luxury appears in the public and private realms, and people can indulge in a personal luxurious moment while not infringing on the common good or being conscious of others.

The three remarks about transformation of luxury and well-being builds on the notion that sustainable luxury on a macro foundational level embraces the holistic idea that “sustainability is about much more than our relationship with the environment. It is about our relationship to ourselves, our communities and our institutions” (Seidman 2007, p. 58). Could it be suggested that such luxury is merely harmonious? After all, the Greek *harmonia* means one’s harmonious relationship with others, with

the universe, and with oneself. By so doing, this transformation of luxury and its respective well-being that reflects its sustainable requirement for harmony is therefore experienced twice: as one enjoys the luxurious experience for themselves while simultaneously embracing the idea that their experience of luxury is not negatively impacting others but, rather, empowering the “others.”

## Implications

The overall implications of this commentary converge toward the crucial normative concept of frugality. When luxury comes to “place,” luxury is back to a sense of shared luxury wherein the common good is cherished. When the term refers to “quality,” luxury is forced to rediscover excellence. When luxury evokes “creativity,” it emerges from the local Autochthon empowerment. Lastly, when luxury illustrates time, it demands a specific approach to time (i.e., not a short-term or long-term approach) but the right action at the right time—*kairos*, whereby nature and people are empowered. This frugal approach to the world proposes a positive alternative to the current mainstream economic system, which is attached to a mercantile, mechanical worldview that estranges human beings and commodifies everything, thus increasing the risk of global ecological collapse (Bouckaert, Opdebeeck, and Zsolnai, 2008). Through this frugal and organic outlook, whatever milestone description of luxury is adopted will coherently resolve many conflicts between consumer needs and desires as well as remind humans of how their behavior threatens both environmental and human health and that they are responsible for the overall well-being of the planet.

For luxury business companies and larger political structures, three frugal implications relate to consumers. All these implications stem from the harsh realization that the predatory economics of our current neoliberal system has pushed us to the brink of collapse, as the IPCC results demonstrate. Hence, the logic of the unbridled race toward growth encapsulated in the term *masstige*, which refers to economic excess in a consumer age (Bouckaert, Opdebeeck, and Zsolnai, 2008). First, by understanding that putting limits on growth is a must, luxury business companies should abide to the frugal principle of making money, fulfill their obligation to care for others, and endeavor to contribute to improved justice. Frugality for luxury business companies is currently in a difficult environmental and social context. It is a positive alternative for exploring the possibilities of “stakeholdership” that encompasses the relations between the North and South, nature, and meeting the needs of our community.

Second, by embracing frugality, luxury consumers are endowed with a full sense of responsibility to limit their acquisitive consumption, whether in luxury fashion or any other luxury industry. Some may apprehend the slogan “buy less, buy better” (Gwilt and Rissanen 2012) as a cause of economic “degrowth”, while others may see it as a positive consumption behavior (e.g., Chancellor and Lyubomirsky 2011). This is a ripe solution to growing exponential desires, which have now

gone berserk; today, clothes are bought at a rate 60 times higher than 15 years ago (Besser 2021). Reusing garments or watches and purchasing less of them is helpful “because desire can focus on making every object count” (Bouckaert, Opdebeeck, and Zsolnai, 2008). Again, the luxurious experience and its respective well-being is felt twice: first for oneself, then for the “others” encompassing the positive Anthropocene.

Finally, the third implication, which involves the larger political economy of frugality, stems from individual frugality and the political infrastructure of frugality. This is extended to the use of renewable sources of energy, such as the example of the tourist infrastructure of the Island of Eigg, whose inhabitants decided to opt for a diversified selection of services encompassing tourism and who decided to opt in solely and politically for renewable energies (waves, electrical energy, and geothermic electricity) in order to become self-reliant and regulate the coming and going of tourists, thus continuing to optimize their own local well-being. By doing so, the politics of frugality are guided by a sustainable trinity balanced out by an equilibrium of environmental, socio-cultural, and economic factors (Mowforth and Munt 2009).

Indisputably, the meaning and roles of luxury and well-being have transformed through the ages. Depending on their respective contexts, eras, or paradigms, a frugal approach to luxury can spearhead the adoption of other services. We may either live in following the principle of sobriety or “we’ll perish under a sea of debt and trash” (Bouckaert, Opdebeeck, and Zsolnai 2008). The latter theoretical implications of this commentary emphasizing frugality in the coming transformations of luxury in the post-pandemic times may sound somewhat simplistic. That is, if frugality is one of the solutions to global warming, how can people’s needs and/or sense of necessities quickly and practically turn away from consumption habits? As a result, to palliate this question future research could, on one hand, address how people’s sense of necessities and needs can change with the recent IPCC results as reflected in the last devastating global warming situation with recent fires and icebergs ‘collapse; and on the other hand, how can we instill in the luxury field frugal dispositions?

As tastes, or sense of necessities for luxury stand at the root of people’s consuming practices, confronted to catastrophic global change episodes, frugality may not remain the sole motivation of climate preoccupied people but could spread to other audiences encompassing the largest world’s population. Hence, research in a near future may heed “edifying” luxury needs and desires both on the theoretical and practical level. Such research’s trajectory would in a sense probe whether or not global warming catastrophic effects can be a catalyst to transform people’s sense of necessities and not consume heedlessly. A more positive approach of climate change echoes Hoederlin’s poetic verses: “But where there is danger, the saving also grows.”


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