

BOOK REVIEW

TOURIST EXPERIENCE: CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

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Experiential tourism is, for sure, one of the hottest topics today in the tourist industry. In their search for differentiation, companies and destinations do their best to give their customers and visitors memorable experiences, as a deliberate strategy to maximize their satisfaction. So any scientific contribution to a better and deeper understanding of the dynamic and complex construct of tourist experience, and the concept of the tourist as a collector of experiences, is welcome, both in academia and among practitioners.

Unfortunately, sometimes tourists suffer memorable experiences but in a negative sense: they naturally feel disappointed, if not deceived, when their expectations are not fulfilled; visitors are frustrated at not being able to get to their planned destination or event, when the promised dream, often aggressively marketed (or hyped) to attract as many people as possible, comes to nothing in the face of harsh reality. This kind of situations can be frameworked and assessed within the confirmation-disconfirmation theory or in connection to the destination image that has been developed, as shown by Prof. Ryan in its recently published literature review (2010).

Of course, often the experience provided by a trip is positively memorable, but there is no doubt that dealing with this issue is not a simple task. First of all, many factors are not under the control of those managing the travel, destination, event or attraction, but also experience is something intrinsically personal and subjective: each tourist, each individual, attaches value to their own experience, depending on their personal characteristics and backgrounds. There are as many

experiences as there are tourists at any single place at any single moment, some of them positive, some of them negative, and at many different levels. Besides, the landscape changes over time, because of the evolution of trends in tourism and consumption of tourist products.

If satisfaction is understood as the process of surprising, exciting, and fascinating every client, then the capability of the organization responsible for the travel, destination or attraction to reinvent the experience offered for each individual is critical. This leads to two considerations:

From an external point of view, that organization must be able to anticipate and understand the tourist's new preferences. As in any other mature industry, customers are becoming more and more sophisticated, and the tourism market more and more heterogeneous. Each year sees more segments or niches (micro-segments and micro-niches, we could say), tending towards personalization of service, and in contradiction, therefore, to the phenomenon of mass and standardized tourism. In other words, organizations and companies must recognize that people are looking for new and different experiences, and are often actively averse to undifferentiated and meaningless commodity-type "experiences".

From an internal point of view, innovation is highly relevant; it is important for organizations to be able to renew their portfolio of products and services from time to time, on the basis of progressively shorter time-spans.

In this search for new and more authentic experiences, the topics of dark tourism (section 1) and poor places tourism (section 2) are well worth our consideration. There are more and more people curious to "know the unknown", to see what is not usually seen in regular tours: the poverty-ridden "backyards" of townships in the third world, (slum tourism as described in chapter 4, with the paradigm of Brazilian favela tourism in Rio de Janeiro) or places which have suffered devastation and calamities, whether man-made through bloody wars (as described in chapter 3 with regard to Croatia and Bosnia, and connected to the involvement theory and theories of intimacy mentioned in chapter 1) and organized crime & corruption, or from natural events like earthquakes and tsunamis, etc. It is really interesting the insight given in chapter 2 about the notion of darkness, understood as a socially constructed one, rather than an objective fact; and the need to differentiate between intentions and motivations for a better understanding of this type of tourism.

Chapter 6 emphasizes the phenomenon of favelas tours, which is clearly connected to the Theory of the Gaze explained in chapter 1: the differences between the genuine tourists' gaze (photographic gaze) and the gazes provided by government agencies and other players in the industry are well worth a reflection.

Concerning tourist experiences of these kinds, potential critical incidents for holiday makers, there is a particular ethical dimension to the arguments. Is it morally acceptable for tourism companies to use human suffering, poverty and devastation as tourist attractions? Do these tours benefit these miserable communities, and if so, in which senses? Can they be justified as a way to open the visitor's eyes and minds to a cruel reality, to awaken their sensitivity and compassion? Maybe the concept of moral development, researched in chapter 15 of this book, could be applied to tourists experiencing this kind of tour as well. And maybe the view taken on human rights-based tourism is debatable (as it is in chapter 5), when serious doubts arise about the full possibility of freely choosing contacts with local people, in a dictatorship with a tight control on tourism and tourists, as in the treated case of Cuba. Are the organizations responsible really helping to educate tourists or are they helping the regime with its propaganda?

To sum up, for many people, death and destruction exerts a peculiar and strong fascination, even a feeling to be closer to risk. This appetite is leading to a new sort of commoditized tours, searching for (and showing) the back stage and authenticity of a particular place.

In any case, motivation is a critical issue that has to be investigated in depth. Among varied customer motivations, the search for authentic travel experiences is gaining importance nowadays. The perception of authenticity, of a product or destination, is a complex construct because of its multidimensionality. This must, of course, be a subjective appreciation, like many others related to the final assessment of the tourist experience (satisfaction). This is why the study of people's subjectivity is essential in this process. The procedure proposed for an objective measurement of subjectivity, as presented in chapter 14, through the Q method, is fascinating.

Sporting traditions and culture are very much part of the contemporary and authentic personality of some cities; this is not necessarily because they have hosted a major event—such the Olympic Games or a World Championship— but because of well-known sporting successes of its past and present (people like winners) and its unique sports installations. In fact, sports events and facilities have become major tourist attractions in many cities. Within the concept of sport tourism (addressed in the third section of this book), the phenomenon of “sleeping stadiums” is of special interest and is well treated in chapter 7. Two significant Spanish examples can be added to those in the book:

The “Santiago Bernabeu” stadium (home of the Real Madrid football club) and its museum is the fourth most visited place in Madrid, after the Prado, Reina Sofia and Thyssen-Bornemisza Museums (its world-famous cultural triangle). More than seventy thousand people visit it every month, and this generates millions of euros in profit a year: these are the basic data of the Tour of “Santiago Bernabeu”.

-Another statistic that should not leave anyone indifferent is that around 20% of all the tourists who visit the city of Barcelona pass through the “Camp Nou” football stadium.

Of course the experience of tourists who interact with a particular sport will have many different subjective values, as explained in chapter 8; and it can be linked to the role play approach mentioned by C. Ryan. Tourists may be active participants, practicing the sport and competing, or may be mere spectators (passive or not so passive), but in any situation, the sporting experience surely provides excitement, fascination and even passion, all very valuable ingredients for a memorable (satisfactory) experience. Sports (such as football/soccer) also provide individuals with a feeling of identity, of being part of an “in-group”, of sharing certain values with like-minded others: this is another extraordinary strength of this phenomenon, as shown in chapter 9, devoted to gays and lesbians.

Finally, a few words on writing the tourism experience, another section in this book. Researching (section 5) is the necessary antecedent of writing (section 4) in the scientific community (and because of that the order of these sections could have been the opposite), and the controversy between quantitative and qualitative methodologies should be overcome by using the most appropriate method based on the nature of the research project and its objectives. Nevertheless, it is true that, in the field under study in this book, and in its current state, the qualitative method (chapter 13) has a special value for exploring a reality that is still not very well known. Having said that, the contributions of chapters 10 and 11 on tourists’ narratives, particularly with regard to new media such as travel blogs, represent an immersion in the shifting waters of new technologies. There are new and powerful means emerging for tourists to learn and share experiences, which give companies the opportunity to gather massive insights on what tourists think and feel, on what they have actually experienced. In a nutshell, both customers and suppliers can benefit from making systematic efforts to monitor these new media.

A last consideration about the potential of tourism as a powerful source of learning: journaling, writing daily experiences when travelling, is usually a fruitful exercise which has been well addressed in chapter 12, in different contexts and with its corresponding limitations. Nevertheless, this kind of reflective thinking, when people are asked to record their experiences, has demonstrated a higher value when referred to educational purposes, more than for leisure ones. In any case, gathering robust insights from these journals will only be possible if certain methodologies are used, as recommended in this chapter.

POSITION PAPER

Maintaining a tourism objective within the COSME Programme¹ Views of ERRIN and NECSTour

The Lisbon Treaty created a new legal basis (Article 195, Part 3, Title XXII) for tourism within the sphere of the European Union. In order to reach the EU policy goals in tourism, it is very important to dedicate a specific programme and access to EU funding to this important sector. **This is why we believe that it is essential that tourism remains as a specific objective in the COSME programme as proposed by the European Commission.**

Notwithstanding the recommendations of the European Parliament's rapporteur Jürgen Creutzmann MEP questioning specific references to tourism in COSME², we believe that SMEs in the European tourism sector should be the target of a sectorial programme and be able to access to dedicate funding for the following reasons:

1. Tourism is an essential industry both for Member States and for the EU as a whole. Taking into account related sectors European Tourism accounts for 10 % of the EU GDP, even in Germany, and represents 12% of the workforce. This illustrates that the tourism industry is a significantly important economic sector in Europe.
2. Tourism companies - 2 million in the EU - are mostly SMEs, very often micro-businesses. Having a competitive tourism sector is crucial since it accounts for 5.2 % of the labour force, approximately 9.7 million jobs, in the European Union.
3. Tourism is also important for cities and regions. For instance, in many peripheral regions tourism is often the main source of income and employment. Tourism plays a key-role in fostering innovation, inclusion and high-employment. For this reason the sector needs to be supported to become more competitive. Tourism also plays an increasingly important role in building a strong image and profile for Europe as witnessed recently by the London Olympics.

4 REASONS FOR A SPECIFIC TOURISM SECTION WITHIN COSME

1. Given the importance of tourism, it is now time for tourism to have its own specific EU programme. The existing funding structure for tourism is fragmented and limited, and creates challenges for the development of tourism related projects;

¹ The European Commission's Directorate General Enterprise and Industry proposed the new Programme for the Competitiveness of enterprises and SMEs 2014-2020 (COSME, COM (2011) 0834) on 30 November 2011. Its objective is to cater for the needs of enterprises, in particular SMEs during the next funding period.

² 2011/0394(COD), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+COMPARL+PE-489.639+03+DOC+PDF+V0//EN&language=EN> – see specifically Amendment 70 which proposes to delete the Specific Objective: To improve framework conditions for the competitiveness and sustainability of EU enterprises, including in the tourism sector.

2. A dedicated tourism programme would enable the exchange of knowledge, good practices and development models targeted towards stakeholders of tourism destinations and concerning different types of tourism that are not recognized in other programmes: e.g. maritime and coastal tourism, cultural tourism, sport and wellness tourism, social tourism, gastronomic tourism, etc
3. A dedicated objective within COSME would enable the Commission to implement the actions foreseen by the European Commission Communication³ “Europe, the World’s n°1 tourism destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe”. This important communication has been supported by a resolution of the European Council, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Council.
4. A dedicated tourism programme would show the commitment of the European Institutions to this crucial economic sector for the reasons indicated above.

We consider that a specific tourism focused funding programme is necessary for developing European tourism sector. We support the proposal by the European Commission for COSME programme which includes tourism as one of the specific objectives in Annex I. In our opinion this would reflect the importance of the tourism industry in the European Union, and give the sector the support it needs to become more competitive and create jobs and growth.

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ERRIN, European Regions Research and Innovation Network, is a dynamic network of more than 90 EU members from 22 countries and their Brussels-based offices. ERRIN acts as a voice of the regions in Brussels for matters related to research and innovation.

NECSTouR is the Network of European Regions for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism and representing 27 Regional Authorities (NUTS 2) and 25 associated members (Universities, Research Institutes, Representatives of the tourism industry and the tourism employees) from 17 EU Member States.

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³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 010-352