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The future of experiential travel
Guest Editors: Sabrina Seeler and Heike A. Schänzel

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From the fluidity of the experience economy to transformative experiences as a catalyst for positive change: the future of experiential travel

The travel behaviour of today’s increasingly experienced tourists is constantly changing and a value shift from global consumerism towards more personalised and meaningful experiences that encourage personal growth and transformation can be witnessed (Packer and Gill, 2017). The demand for immersive and emotionally rich experiences is growing and in-person interaction with local communities and real human connections are gaining in momentum. At the same time, experienced tourists desire perspective-shifting itineraries that challenge the status quo, inspire them on a deeper level, foster global citizenship and comprise developmental qualities that encourage personal transformation (Jantzen, 2013). Thus, travelling is increasingly understood as a catalyst for deeper connections with the self, nature, places and people. This shift is also reflected in the progression of economic value towards transformative experiences, self-actualisation and expansion of the mind (Pine and Gilmore, 2013; Skift, 2019). However, as the process of identity construction can be everlasting and individuals aim to engage in peak experiences and flow, a dialectical tension emerges. The mutual dependency between partaking and reminiscing experiences and the increasing sophistication of tourists and their demand challenges tourism suppliers to be more innovative in creating experiences that are transformative (Seeler, 2018). To remain relevant in the future of experiential travel, tourism businesses need to transform while also keeping in mind their responsibility towards a more sustainable development of the tourism industry. Transformations of tourism businesses, particularly in the sphere of collaborative consumption, in turn can lead to the transformation of local communities which then impact global communities. Taking a prospective lens and critically reflecting on the future of experiential travel needs more attention and this special issue is a first milestone in deepening the knowledge on the who, why and what behind transformative experiences in experiential travel.

Who is transformed and why?

In a thought-provoking way, the 17 international scholars of this special issue share in nine articles their empirical findings, thoughts and ideas on the future of experiential travel. Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie introduce seven micro trends associated with the changing consumer behaviour and implications for the experience economy. The futurologists synthesise that not only tourists themselves possess an increasingly fluid identity expressed by a hybrid travel behaviour, the experience economy itself is a fluid concept. This fluidity represents the future of experiential travel meaning that tourism businesses constantly need to reinvent themselves and innovate their offerings to meet the demand of the experience-hungry tourists. The authors predict that despite having digitally exposed personalities, the hybrid tourist of the future aims to escape modernity, is authenti-seeking and craves human interaction in a non-digital environment. The constantly connected consumer is also addressed by Urquhart who proposes three potential directions of technological mediation in the future of experiential tourism. These range from mass acceptance and fully automated, de-humanised experiences to digital-free travel and authentic dialogue and interaction. More commonly applied is the middle alternative, summarised as experiential convergence, which might be the easiest to implement and justify. However, its future-proofness needs to be more critically discussed particularly with regard to the experienced tourists’ desire for transformation.
Often labelled as “digital natives”, Robinson and Schänzel explore the behavioural changes of Generation Z and suggest a theoretical framework based on findings derived from qualitative interviews and blog entries with Generation Z travellers in New Zealand. The authors found that the age cohort values experiences over possessions and demands a more traveller-centric approach. Although they are open-minded towards new experiences and off-the-beaten path travel, their transformative experiences are often defined by the bucket list approach acquired through social media and driven by the desire for epistemic transformation and not necessarily personal transformation. In analysing transformative travel experiences of Chinese Millennial mountain bikers on the Qinghai–Tibet Highway, Folmer, Tengxiage, Kadijk and Wright provide a perspective of this market segment that goes beyond the dominating image of Chinese package and group holidaymakers. The authors conclude that Chinese Millennial adventure tourists’ experiences are life changing and phenomenologically transformative. While aiming for freedom of parental control and advancing social status through independence, respondents only realised upon reflections that it was the physical and emotional suffering throughout the challenging journey that led to long-term memorability and growth towards more personal resilience. This finding demonstrates that transformations need continuous reflective and interactive processing of that experience.

By looking at transformative experiences in educational travel of Generation Z travellers, Wee addresses the critical role of reflections to achieve students’ personal growth and advances of personal identity through embodied learning and experiential mobilities. The author challenges the transformative potential of traditional classroom learning and claims that the students’ narrative reflections on their “out of classroom experience” during a field trip to Corfu encouraged them to understand places beyond theoretical idealism and created an awareness of real-life realism. A rethinking of traditional tourist typologies is pushed forward, not only as Generation Z travellers are an upcoming force in tourism and their consumption habits will have an impact on various stakeholders involved in experiential travel, but their reflections demonstrate their ability to decipher the tourism industry’s future challenges. One such change is Generation Z’s attitudes towards food consumption and experiences. Bertella and Vidmar propose food tourism as a force of change and catalyst for global food justice and sustainability. Instead of commodifying food in the form of “gastronomic theatres in which chefs play with food to entertain guests”, the authors see food tourism more as a remake of the Grand Tour where personal growth and transformation were sought through education. The authors provide a utopian scenario, inspired by a factual company on Svalbard (Norway), that has the potential to transform the global community towards the fulfilment of several sustainable development goals of the UN.

In critically asking whether the guest or the host communities is (and will be) transformed through experiential travel and collaborative consumption, Guttenag provides insights into transformative experiences via Airbnb. Although tourists seek peer-to-peer short-term rentals mainly to satisfy their quest for authenticity, memorability and personal transformation, the author questions the likelihood and effectiveness of these personal transformations through Airbnb. Instead, Guttenag argues that the changing nature of Airbnb stimulates a touristification process that will continue to transform local communities, possibly even more than the tourists themselves. Zmyslony and Wędrowicz introduce the urban leisure format (ULF) as another form of temporary and less disruptive local community transformation through experiential travel in cities. The authors note that by applying a “light” and more informally standardised formula in designing and implementing these staged and structured experiences in the form of community-driven, locally organised seasonal short-lived and place-time based events, there is a higher likelihood of preserving localism while meeting global consumers’ expectations. The success of ULFs lies in the ability to adopt localities to transnational trends and allow repeatability and replicability while limiting long-term transformation of spaces. Tresidder and Deakin look at historic buildings in the context of experiential travel and discuss the reinvention of heritage and transformational reuse of historical sites towards extraordinary experiencescapes. Using two examples from the UK, the authors illustrate how continuous innovation and reinterpretation of heritage can lead to historically rich, differentiated and inimitable places that meet the needs of today's experiential tourist. In doing so, cultural heritage and sites are preserved, and their stories carried to the next generations of
experience-hungry and curious tourists. With their closing quote from Bob Marley, the authors remind the reader of the importance of reflecting on the past to allow for positive transformation in the future – personally and globally. “In this bright future you can’t forget your past”.

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About the Guest Editors

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Abstract

Purpose – This trends paper is based upon a literature review and access to a series of databases; thus, with the help of these the purpose of this paper is to provide insight into changing consumer behaviours.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper explores how the experience economy will evolve and outlines the micro and sub-trends that will shape its future.

Findings – This paper identifies seven micro trends associated with the experience economy. The micro trends are: once is never enough, luxury experienced, leisure upgrade, escape from modernity to authenti-seeking, fluid identity, everyday exceptional and experience first.

Originality/value – This trends paper provides useful insights into the experience economy for researchers, practitioners, students or interested parties. Going beyond a broad interpretation, it focuses on specific micro trends in action.

Keywords Tourism, Consumer trends

Paper type Trend paper

Introduction: the experience economy

The experience economy dominates the philosophy of tourism: it permeates how we engage with tourism and how we consume tourism. The literature tells us that tourists want to encounter a whole range of experiences such as holidays abroad, cultural events, fine dining or cutting-edge leisure activities (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). They want to enrich their daily lives by experiencing new things and undertaking activities that deliver self-improvement, enjoyment and revitalisation. Sampling new, unique and aspirational experiences provides consumers with the opportunity to develop new skills, acquire new knowledge and thus boosts their share of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2000). The desire to collect “stories” underpins so many of our consumption choices: new experiences are sought in order to build memories, identities and stores of social capital. Hence, consumers can be seen as the experience seekers. Indeed, social media has become a living journal and portfolio of our daily lives, which naturally increases the demand for experiences to fuel our online story platforms. Snapchat and Instagram stories allow consumers to display a constant stream of experiences, where the mundane or everyday sits comfortably with more glossy, performative content. Here, shareability and good storyfodder is worth more than any material value. From beautifully presented restaurant meals to music concerts often the sharing of every moment with friends and followers appears to overtake living in the moment itself. Alongside this, rising access to those items once seen as luxuries has encouraged many to place a greater focus on the pursuit of experiences – whether in addition to, or in place of, more material-based forms of consumption. The ephemerality of the experience economy is also a common draw. Limited-edition events feel more exclusive, while transient pop-ups provide extra status for those who are in the know and reach the location first. And the most premium of experiences cleverly create even more hype by eschewing social media altogether – though shareability and status-boosting is still key. Cult venues such as www.sohohouse.com and www.secretcinema.org ban mobile phones so guests cannot take photos, which could be considered a riskier approach for brands who want to build reputation. However, consumers benefit from feeling they have experienced something truly unique and are even more likely to share it in real life via word-of-mouth. A growing focus of the luxury sector has been the delivery of premium, status-boosting experiences in addition to best-in-class physical products. Those with the means to access the sector will expect the experiences they collect – in-store, on holiday, online – to surpass those available to a mass market clientele.
According to Foresight Factory (2018a), the ephemeral experience has become an acceptable capitalist asset; it cannot be quantified or valued, yet it signifies authenticity, individuality, and solidifies personal positioning in the realm of the fascinating. One driving motivation for travel is the desire to collect unique experiences; the ultimate souvenir is a lasting memory. At its fringes this trend boosts interest in rarer experiences and unvisited places – because a story uncollected by others is more exceptional and thus more valuable. The increasing ability to personalise trips and create bespoke tours, even for travellers on a budget, gives rise to a wider range of unique experiences which everyone feels entitled to enjoy. Many experience led holidays focus on disconnecting from the internet, to further absorb oneself in the present. A craving for meaningful human interactions and a sense of belonging in a world dominated by technology drives the desire for immersive, intense, off-the-beaten track experiences. However, we also see social media playing an increased role in holiday-booking. Lured in by others’ experiences on platforms such as Instagram, new embedded links allow for direct booking from stories.

Micro trends and experience economy

As the experience economy is now mainstream, how will it evolve and what are the micro or sub trends that will shape its future? Penn (2007) and Penn and Fineman (2018) note that micro trends illustrate the changes that are occurring in the experience economy and that they are consumer focused. Key micro trends are as follows.

Micro trend: once is never enough

Millions of lives are now no longer marked by “things will never be the same after this” moments. Fewer people will face only one wedding ceremony or cohabit with the same person forever. Fewer individuals will achieve only one major but unitary ambition (e.g. visiting Machu Picchu, witnessing an eclipse, or completing a marathon). Many will survive life-threatening illnesses only to face others some time later and then, in due course, survive them too. Across their lives, many will embark on sequential careers when once upon a time a single one was more than enough. The essentialism of such elasticated experience is the widespread realisation that no moment, no choice and no state of affairs is unique and irreversible. The tourism sector has long had to address the issues of long distance and big spend or how to tempt consumers into taking perhaps unusually expensive vacations in far flung destinations. This leads to marketing promotions which emphasise once in a lifetime or do this before you die aspects. But, as life extends, affluence stabilises and (even extreme) experiences multiply, there now a generation of over 65s who will have to make more than one bucket list. Why should a young Californian backpacker assume that s/he will only visit Machu Picchu once (Yeoman et al., 2012)?

Micro trend: luxury experienced

The definition of luxury has shifted to encompass more experiential forms of indulgence, elevating the value of both unique experiences and everyday moments (Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2018). Millions in the UK now feel entitled to luxury in some form and while it is certain that the financial crisis of the late 2000s and early 2010s subdued the growth of prosperity, our sense of entitlement to luxury is irrepressible (Foresight Factory, 2017; Seo and Buchanan-Oliver, 2015). As access to luxury becomes more mainstream, however, its very definition has evolved to carry ever more nuanced associations alongside more traditional ones (Lee et al., 2015; Hennigs et al., 2015). While the meaning of luxury for many consumers is rigidly wedded to its classic, traditional definition of expensive, unique material quality, we note too that intensity of experience is becoming more important to consumers. So too is any form of indulgence that enables consumers to fulfill their deeper psychic ambitions and confirm their social success and savoir-vivre in the process. Underpinning the luxury experiences (Foresight Factory, 2019) trend is the notion that the leisure activities should contribute to one’s skill set, cultural awareness or even character. Indeed, it is argued that superior premium experiences have a lasting impact upon one’s personal outlook and therefore represent an investment. And that ultimately, such endeavours (and improvements) can be broadcast across networks, both on and offline.
**Micro trend: leisure upgrade**

Whether at home or outdoors, consumers see their leisure time as a source of pleasure and escapism. But many have also come to crave a sense of self-improvement from their free time – that they want, as it were, to do much more than just have fun (Yeoman, 2013). It is a truism that our leisure time remains an important and prized release from the daily stresses and strains of modern living; it is a period when we pursue fun, seek enjoyable experiences and, more simply, indulge in passive downtime. And we do not expect this to change in the foreseeable future; the value we attach to simple pleasures is in no sense suffering a decline. However, for some, the very concept of leisure time has evolved to encompass a more nuanced and complex set of requirements. While many still want their chosen pastimes to be pleasure rich, so too do they seek pursuits that allow them to express a wide range of interests such as learning new skills, undertaking self-improving activities and trying new experience. In addition, we suggest that many individuals strive to reflect their wider attitudes and beliefs through their chosen leisure activities, especially as social media constantly increases the pressure to perform by exposing us to others’ meticulously curated, active selves thereby driving our “fear of missing out” levels upwards (Foresight Factory, 2018b). All this invites a culture of permanent innovation among leisure providers. Indeed, the leisure industry has constantly to find new experiences to entertain, engage and excite that trump those enjoyed last year.

**Micro trend: escape from modernity to authenti-seeking**

As global consumers continue to embrace the convenience and reliability delivered by mass production, they also aspire to an alternative to the perceived “homogenisation” of contemporary culture, food and leisure experiences (Yeoman et al., 2014). The craving felt by many consumers for products, services and experiences imbued with a genuine sense of authenticity is something that has been coined as the authenti-seeking mindset (Foresight Factory, 2018c). Authenti-seekers search for experiences which are real and original, uncontaminated by being fake or impure (Yeoman et al., 2007). The authenti-seeker is the individual who enjoys finding products or experiences that have clear links to a place, time or culture – those that are produced in a traditional way, that are unique and that have a genuine story behind them. Such authenticity is perceived as adding value. In tourism, authenticity-seeking consumers pursue authentic experiences, distancing themselves from mainstream tourism providers and venturing into pastimes that feel more meaningful, which test them, which help them to, as it were, discover themselves. There is a sense too of the consumer’s desire to be individual, to be unique, to create a social CV that rivals that of any friend or colleague. In this respect, seeking and finding the authentic can increase one’s social capital (Stringfellow et al., 2013). Laing and Frost (2015) note that modern holidaymakers wish to experience cultures and to sample foods and leisure activities specific to a region or country. Authenticity in relation to food is about products that are simple, rooted in the region, natural and ethically produced (Yeoman, 2008).

**Micro trend: fluid identity**

Rising incomes and wealth accumulation distributed in new ways alter the balance of power in tourism. Through the opaqueness of online booking systems for travel and holidays, the power base has shifted from the institution of the travel agent to the individual tourist. At the same time, modern life is rich with new forms of connection and association, allowing a liberated pursuit of personal identity that is fluid and much less restricted by the influence of one’s background or geography. Today’s society of networks in turn has facilitated and innovated a mass of options provided by communication channels leading to the paradox of choice (Yeoman, 2016; Yeoman et al., 2012). The concept of fluid identity is supported by Boztug and colleagues (2015) research on the hybrid tourist who challenges the concept of market segmentation. The hybrid consumer buys cheaper generic and low-end brands but trades up on some occasions. S/he likes to sample, tries new experiences and has no brand preference (Ehrenrooth and Gronroos, 2013; Silverstein and Fiske, 2003). Boztug et al. (2015) emphasised that the hybrid tourist’s purchases vary dramatically.
**Micro trend: everyday exceptional**

Consumers are constantly searching for reasons to break routines and indulge in unscheduled celebration (Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2018). Commercial opportunity lies not just in finding the occasions when consumers party, but also in supplying fresh reasons to celebrate. The pretexts for our celebrations are becoming more numerous and more ingenious. In the social media enhanced lives of millions, few milestones go unmarked and few achievements undeclared. Energised by dynamic multiculturalism, a globalised events calendar presents more opportunities to make something special of the day. Many people are comfortable participating in re-interpretations of celebrations not necessarily rooted in their own religious practices, national traditions or local cultures. Even specifically national holidays can have an international appeal. Public enjoyment of all kinds of cultural phenomena, from the season finale of a favourite TV show to major sporting events and even to political contests, derives as much from the pretext for the party as the spectacle itself. Consumer enthusiasm for celebrations is continuously re-ignited and more occasions come to be seen as legitimate pretexts, particularly in the light of branded energy being devoted to the trend. There is in theory a limit to how many (more) events or occasions the consumer will be impelled, as well as financially able, to celebrate (Yeoman et al., 2012).

**Micro trend: experience first**

The coveting of material goods is being threatened as more consumers come to favour the experiential over the material. Experiences and stories collected and shared are becoming a more common way for people to express themselves. Whereas once the designer handbag was a signal of success in life, now a memory from a faraway land is a marker of a good life (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003). This opens up significant opportunities for the leisure sector, as objects are transformed into experiences, and consumers look for ever more exciting and novel events to discover. One driving motivation for travel is the desire to collect unique experiences; the ultimate souvenir is a lasting memory. At its fringes, this trend boosts interest in rarer experiences and unvisited places – because a story uncollected by others is more exceptional and thus more valuable (De La Paz, 2009; Howison et al., 2017; Ogilvy, 2005). The increasing ability to personalise trips and create bespoke tours, even for travellers on a budget, gives rise to a wider range of unique experiences which everyone feels entitled to enjoy. Many experience-led holidays focus on disconnecting from the internet, to further absorb oneself in the present (Boyle, 2005; Collins and Weiss, 2015; MacLaren et al., 2013). A craving for meaningful human interactions and a sense of belonging in a world dominated by technology drives the desire for immersive, intense, off-the-beaten track experiences (Foresight Factory, 2019; Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2018).

**Conclusion**

The experience economy is a fluid concept and that fluidity is a representation of its future and transformation. Tourism experiences include everything from a Michelin meal in an exclusive restaurant to an encounter with a Kingfisher bird while on a nature adventure. Indeed, the desire for new and enriching experiences is growing exponentially and those providers that deliver experiential value beyond basic function will be particularly successful. Experience-hungry tourists will actively seek experiences that offer new skill acquisition, have a sense of purpose and are associated with aspirational value.

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to consider the role that technology may play in the future of experiential tourism. This viewpoint paper begins to question future developments in technological mediation and how these may challenge the author’s view of experiences and their construction in a period of immense and rapid technological development.

Design/methodology/approach – This is a short viewpoint paper driven by theoretical perspectives in the existing academic literature and the author’s personal stance on the future of experiential tourism.

Findings – This paper suggests that while there is considerable research into the role and application of technology within tourism, there is a lack of future-orientated debate. The views expressed within the paper argue that three potential directions exist for the future of technological mediation in experiential tourism: mass acceptance and customisation; experiential convergence or “rewinding the clock”, each with significant implications for the management of technological mediation in experiential tourism.

Originality/value – The paper provides an initial insight into future directions of the tourism industry in a period of immense technological development. Based on existing theoretical perspectives, these viewpoints indicate three potential routes for the industry and act as a catalyst for further dialogue within tourism scholarship.

Keywords Technology, Mediation, Experience, Tourism

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

The rapid development of technology has revolutionised the tourism experience. As suggested by Benckendorff et al. (2014), contemporary technology can play a wide variety of roles within travel and tourism. It can enable and facilitate, enhance and protect, or act as a substitute for elements of the experience that are lacking. The adoption of technology within tourism has also inspired changes in consumer behaviour. Coussement and Teague (2013) argued that innovations in technology have led to constantly connected consumers which have reconfigured the relationship between travellers and tourism providers. This has inspired organisations, and the wider industry, to consider the role of technology as a constant mediator in the tourism experience. For the purpose of this paper, mediation refers to the various points of interaction (both tangible and intangible, personal and non-personal) which broker an engaging and quality tourism experience (Jennings and Weiler, 2005). Increasingly, however, this mediation has taken a technological form through mobile, handheld, virtual or internet-based platforms (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009). This, in turn, has made it particularly challenging to predict how the future use and management of mediation may impact the industry.

The range of technological mediation in tourism is significant and has grown to include mobile-enabled platforms to provide information (Morosan and DeFranco, 2016; Wang et al., 2014); fixed touchpoints within tourism experiences such as visitor attractions (Rey and Casado-Neira, 2013); e-services to facilitate traveller research, booking and management (Barrutia and Gilsanz, 2009); social media and user-generated content (Haddouche and Salomone, 2018; Hvass and Munar, 2012); and virtual/augmented reality to add additional layers to tourism experiences in destinations (Jung et al., 2015; Scarles et al., 2016;
Younes et al., 2017). However, despite the growth in technological innovation, there is a surprising lack of scholarly discussion on the future directions and associated implications for the travel and tourism industry.

While significant academic discussion has revolved around the role of technology and current innovations in the sector, less has been considered from a futures perspective. This is interesting considering the wide-reaching implications of technology for future tourism experiences. Particularly relevant to this Special Issue is a need for academic discussions to consider future directions for technological mediation in tourism. In this viewpoint paper, an initial discussion of existing technological mediation perspectives acts as a theoretical framework to begin the debate. Thereafter, three future directions have been identified and considered to encourage conversations into the future of technological mediation in tourism experiences.

**Technological mediation in tourism experiences**

An understanding of the importance of technological mediation is well established in the literature. From a service management perspective, Schumann et al. (2012) provided a distinction between services which were fully automated (such as self-service platforms) and delivered services (where technology exists alongside other features). These delivered services use technology for customisation, personalisation and to engage consumers in co-creative activity – which can have significant effects on experiential value (Buonincontri et al., 2017; Mathis et al., 2016). Within tourism scholarship, Tussyadiah (2014) argued that effective control over how tourists interact with the physical, social and media elements of a tourist destination is a fundamental feature of experience design. This control can be enacted through various forms of mediation. This is supported by Gretzel and Jamal (2009), who suggested that emerging “creative tourists” are empowered to construct their experiences iteratively through engagement with not only physical structures but also interactive technologies. Such perspectives reignite the need to conceptualise technology, not only as a tool but as a powerful mediating force that can have significant influence over tourism experiences.

Critical to this discussion is an awareness of the diversity in technological mediation in the tourism industry. Neuhofer et al. (2014) identified a hierarchy of technology-enhanced tourism experiences from conventional (low technology-enabled and staged experiences) to technology-empowered experiences (high interactivity and pervasive technology-use) to benchmark tourism organisations for their technology provision and experiential aspirations. As the industry is diverse and technology-use within the various sectors of travel and tourism are varied, there is no singular way to predict technological mediation throughout the collective industry. However, the directions discussed later in this paper have been kept inclusive to acknowledge the variety that exists within the industry.

The powerful mediating role of technology has seen considerable attention in the academic literature, particularly for its implications for enriching tourism experiences. Wan (2018) suggested integrating the psychological components of memorable, meaningful experiences into technology design so that platforms better reflect the needs and wants of consumers. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2015) suggested that environmental stimuli (afforded by interactive technology) can lead to customer learning, social integration and hedonic value within an experience. Such perspectives advocate the need to view technology as a means, to not only achieve business benefits but also as a fundamental component of the consumer experience. This is particularly true in recent research that debates the importance of technological mediation for targeting and engaging certain audiences, such as Generation Y (Zhang et al., 2017).

However, there are complexities associated with technological mediation. For example, Lu et al. (2015) suggested that mobile-enabled applications in the tourism experience can have an empowering effect for consumers through enhanced access to information and control over elements such as research, bookings and sharing platforms. However, Minghetti and Buhalts (2010) argued that although consumers in the developed world have ready access to technology, this does not imply that they use it wisely. Lack of trust, knowledge, skills or capabilities can hinder consumer engagement with technological platforms and as such may compromise the extent to which they feature within the experience. As a mediating force, it is therefore unsurprising that the
industry has diverted significant capital into designing innovative technologies; however, there are inherent challenges in relying too heavily on technology as a sole mediator.

Beyond the experiential benefits of enhanced technological mediation, there are operational advantages in adopting such technologies. Namely, there are potential efficiency benefits (Alford and Clarke, 2009; Buhais and Law, 2008), value-adding prospects (Chathoth et al., 2016; Peña et al., 2014) and opportunities to protect core resources – such as cultural heritage (Gombault et al., 2016; tom Dieck and Jung, 2017). The proliferation of academic research in these areas is reflective of its growing importance within the tourism industry; however, more focus is needed to consider future directions.

Future directions

Despite the plethora of academic arguments surrounding technological mediation in tourism, this area is primed for further debate from a futures perspective. In considering where technology and its management may proceed in future generations, the following three directions, illustrated in Figure 1, provide avenues to expand current discussions. As technology continues to become advanced, intuitive and reactive, the industry may choose to undertake mass acceptance and customisation to utilise technological mediation to its fullest through adoption and investment. Alternatively, the industry may elect to adopt a middle-ground approach through experiential convergence, with the further blurring of the division between the physical and virtual tourism experience. Finally, and perhaps most controversially, may be the industry’s choice to “rewind the clock” and actively remove technological mediation from certain experiences. The following discussion considers each of these three directions to provide a proving ground for future academic debate.

**Mass acceptance and customisation**

The first direction which the industry may elect to follow is mass acceptance and customisation. Driven by a reaction to technological trends occurring in society, this direction would reposition technology as the main influencer within experiential tourism. As such, tourism providers would need to accept and constantly adapt to emerging technology as it becomes available. This is particularly the case with cutting-edge innovations in robotics, artificial intelligence and ubiquitous systems. Furthermore, organisations of the future would invest heavily in mediation that can be customised to various consumer groups (namely Generation Z, Generation Y and increasingly senior travellers). This future direction would place significant focus on automation and self-service technologies as mediators within current experiences to adapt to wider consumer trends. However, such a move would bring with it a host of management challenges for the sector.

From an operational standpoint, such an approach would call for further focus on dedicated expertise in-house within tourism organisations to manage and maintain their technology provision. While this may sound commonplace, a number of authors have already indicated a
skills gap in tourism with regards to attracting and retaining technology specialists (Baum, 2006; Hojeghan and Esfangareh, 2011; Maurer, 2015). As such, a future challenge for the industry would not only be adapting to the changing technological landscape but also to ensure that the tourism workforce has the skills to react to these developments. Such a shift may encourage further outsourcing of technological expertise and a need for enhanced collaboration with stakeholders at various stages of the tourism supply chain (such as strengthening links between technology designers, manufacturers, suppliers, businesses and users).

In line with a need to consider expertise and capabilities, the industry of the future may need to consider the direction of business expenditure, namely, considering heavy investment not on individual platforms but on collective interfaces with the most potential for customisation. For example, in a museum setting, future strategies may shift from purchasing distinct touchpoints (each with different capabilities and levels of maintenance) to designing interlinked holistic systems which can be simultaneously updated, customised and managed internally. Conversely, a key future priority may also involve viewing the process of technology upgrading as cyclical rather than periodic. While such an approach would indeed have a high initial cost, the long-term maintenance implications and consistency-benefits to the visitor experience could be substantial.

Experiential convergence

A second potential route for the industry could involve further experiential convergence. As a “middle ground” of the two other directions discussed in this paper, this route can already be seen developing in the industry now. From this perspective, the divide between the physical and digital tourism experience would continue to blur. As a result, future tourism activity is likely to see a merging of tangible and technological landscapes within the travel experience. This direction would require tourism organisations to further invest in technologies which complement or extend the work of the human resource and move towards hybridisation of experiences. This route aligns closely to the rapidly proliferating literature in experiential co-creation in which technology can be seen as a tool to support customer involvement, engagement and dialogue within the tourism experience (Campos et al., 2015; Frochot and Batat, 2013). Examples of this could involve growth in geo-location systems that can guide visitors within locations and encourage active participation in the wayfinding. As identified by Skinner et al. (2018), activities such as geocaching are particularly well-placed to use technology to engage broader audiences and add additional layers to the experience. In shifting this perspective into the future, tourism businesses may consider the operational potential of technological mediators that most effectively act as co-creative tools.

A particularly interesting area that would align closely with this direction, is a renewed focus on multi-sensory engagement and hybridised “experiencescapes” (Mossberg, 2008; O’Dell, 2007). Tourism providers of the future may focus more on the environmental aspects of their experience and reframe their experiential spaces so that travellers seamlessly move between tangible and intangible opportunities. Examples of this are already emerging in the industry, where technology is being used to add sensory dimensions to traditionally static experiences. A project that illustrated this trend was the Sensorium exhibition at Tate Britain in London. This temporary exhibition brought classic artworks from the collection and invited designers, innovators and technologists to add technology-based touchpoints linked to each artwork. Innovations in sound, lighting and sensation were added in an attempt to engage the multiple senses of visitors and engage individuals more deeply with the artwork (Davis, 2015). While an isolated example, future tourism operators may continue to utilise technology to add additional sensory layers to the travel experience.

Rewinding the clock

A third route perhaps less travelled in current discussions on technological mediation would be to effectively “rewind the clock” and consider removing technology from certain experiences. Many would argue that this is an unachievable goal in a constantly connected digital landscape; however, there is an argument for returning, at least to some extent, to simpler tourism experiences that focus on human contact, interaction and authentic dialogue. In contrast to the routes suggested previously, this future scenario would require a bold stance from tourism managers to shun technological interfaces in favour of the human resource. If we reflect on a typical tourism experience,
rarely will the entire visitor journey be completely technology free. This seems a radical departure now but perhaps there is an opportunity in returning to an experience which is mediated purely by people. Such a move would reignite the significance of personal connections, peer-to-peer contact and a sense of communitas in future tourism experiences. While of course, elements of this exist now, it is quite a transformational thought to imagine entire experiences as being technology free.

Critics may argue that this is just fallacy, that it is impossible to rewind the clock and detach from technology. However, as the works of Dickinson et al. (2016) and Neuhofer and Ladkin (2017) have begun to suggest, disconnection from the digital world does hold an appeal for certain travellers. Such moves would indicate that even if we are now digital natives, perhaps future travellers may choose to avoid technological mediation and actively pursue experiences that provide solace from connectivity and virtual interactions. Termed by Li et al. (2018) as digital-free tourism, the concept is growing in tourism scholarship for the potential benefits and opportunities of limiting technological mediation in certain spaces. Equally, this stance poses some interesting yet challenging questions for practitioners in tourism who may, in the future, need to examine their value propositions and question what would happen if they removed the technology altogether. Undeniably, basic utilities and back-office IT systems are paramount, but for customer-facing technologies, could they be reduced, stripped back or returned to service personnel? The more we think about how much of the tourism experience can now be mediated by technology, the more we realise that experiences have become increasingly automated. While these undoubtedly have implications for efficiency (both financially and for time-saving), has this rapid development begun to compromise the deeper level meaning or significance of tourism experiences? From a futures perspective, perhaps the most intriguing prospect for the industry is to consider how we can use technology more selectively or remove it from certain environments.

Conclusion

This paper sought to consider three potential directions for the future of technological mediation in tourism experiences. Considering rapid and progressive technological development, tourism businesses may elect to follow one of the routes identified within this paper and adapt their practices to accommodate the shifting landscape. A mass acceptance and customisation strategy would see organisations routinely adopting and investing heavily in cutting-edge technologies in an attempt to accept new innovations. An alternative direction could involve the industry engaging in experiential convergence, whereby organisations manage technological mediation that blurs the division between the physical and virtual experience. Finally, tourism businesses may elect to “rewind the clock” by actively removing layers of technological mediation within the tourism experience. Each direction brings its own challenges and complexities, however, only with open and future-orientated discussions can the industry begin to strategically plan for the inevitable growth of technological capabilities.

While these are individual viewpoints at this stage, there is already evidence of such directions emerging in the industry. As technology has become firmly embedded into the social fabric of travel and tourism, a future-orientated discussion is not only timely but necessary. Despite being drawn from an individual, subjective viewpoint, the directions identified in this paper will hopefully encourage debate and provoke further discussion as to the future role technology may play as a mediator in tourism experiences, and the inherent challenges for the sector in reacting to this phenomenon.

References


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A tourism inflex: Generation Z travel experiences

Victor Mueke Robinson and Heike A. Schänzel

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it highlights the emergence of Generation Z and the interface of its members with the tourism system. Second, by way of a theoretical model, the paper provides a more holistic approach to understanding Generation Z travel experiences in which the emphasis is shifted from the destination to the traveller. This is in keeping with the trend which lays more emphasis on people rather than landscape.

Design/methodology/approach – This is qualitative research founded on an interpretive (constructivist) paradigm. Selecting Generation Z as the subject locates this study under generational theory and assumes prima facie a socially constructed reality. The paper is based on research conducted in New Zealand aimed at understanding the travel experiences of inbound Generation Z travellers. Data were collected from 12 semi-structured interviews lasting about 30 min each and from 5 blogs. Nvivo 11 programme was used in analysing data and developing themes. Core categories and related themes were generated forming building blocks of a theoretical model.

Findings – Findings revealed interplay of multiple factors in Generation Z’s travel experiences at a destination. The factors are global in nature, destination centric and those which are immediate or proximate to the individual. To fully grasp the notion of experience requires the gestalt of the three as well as pre-trip, during-trip and post-trip factors.

Research limitations/implications – The impact of significant events upon participants is assumed. A specific analysis of the events and the magnitude of their influence on the individual participants may be necessary.

Practical implications – Destination marketers tend to concentrate on psychological aspects to appeal to the traveller. The focus, in this case, is creating an attractive image in the mind of travellers to get them to come to the destination. This research suggests shifting the focus to understanding the evolving traveller.

Social implications – Governments and tourism purveyors may require an ever-increasing budget to map out strategies to meet the continuously morphing needs of the future traveller. The constantly evolving global environment necessitates greater flexibility in institutional framework with less bureaucratic bottlenecks.

Originality/value – Generation Z is a relatively new entrant into the tourism market which makes this research relevant and timely. The paucity of academic literature on a generation which is contemporaneously in its “highly influenceable” period of life and entering adulthood in an increasingly changing world is further credence for this research. A more holistic theoretical model to understanding Generation Z travel experience is proposed.

Keywords Motivation, Digital, Theoretical model, Generation Z, Realm of experience, Travel pattern

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Any successful tourism industry player requires not only the ability to recognise change, but also effectively respond to this change. Generational change is one such occurrence, rendering both opportunities and challenges for tourism destinations. A new generation is entering adulthood amidst shifting global realities and concerns such as climate change, terrorism and technological advancements. Christened Generation Z, this young generation comprises individuals born in the year 1995 and after, making the oldest members 24 years old (Eisner, 2005; Chhetri et al., 2014). Visitor statistics for the year ending April 2018 show that of the 3,790,505 New Zealand inbound visitors, 428,192 were aged 15–24 years which translates to...
Demographic changes can affect tourism directly or indirectly (Grimm et al., 2009). Direct impacts relate to demand (volume and structure) and the labour market (number of workers and their qualification) while the indirect impacts relate to jobs within the tourism industry, and tourism services. Demography is, therefore, a key driver for future tourism demand (Yeoman et al., 2013). Exploring demographic trends allows important change agents, on both the supply side and the demand side of tourism to be highlighted and discussed (Dwyer et al., 2009). The future growth of tourism will depend to some extent on how well the industry understands the social and demographic trends influencing traveller behaviour (Moscardo et al., 2010). Destinations and individual operators that make decisions on the supply side without matching them to changing travellers and traveller needs suffer “strategic drift”, a phenomenon which occurs when strategy gradually deviates from addressing the forces in the external environment with a clear direction (Dwyer et al., 2009).

While numerous market surveys biased towards effective marketing and advertising have been conducted on Generation Z, a dearth of academic literature has been noted. It is only recently that Generation Z literature is beginning to appear in tourism academic journals. The recent special issue on Millennials and Generation Z in Journal of Tourism Futures is one such contribution (Corbisiero and Ruspini, 2018). This may be attributed to the fact that the oldest members of this generation have only recently attained legal age of adulthood and can travel independently. In addition, they no longer require parental consent to participate in research. The USA and Western Europe predominate in generation-based studies, thus creating a gap in other regions. Based on research of New Zealand inbound Generation Z travellers, this paper provides a lens through which the generation’s travel experiences can be understood. It is a contribution to the body of knowledge from which future studies can borrow. In addition it provides, by way of a theoretical model, a more holistic approach and deeper insights into Generation Z travel experiences in which emphasis is shifted from the destination to the traveller.

Whereas Phillimore and Goodson (2004) have deemed typology studies insufficient on insights into the complexities of tourism interactions at experiential and emotional level, this research prods into the multiple facets and levels of experience thus unearthing the all encompassing psychological, physiological and spiritual levels. Several shifts in focus are presented in this research:

1. from an erstwhile “destination-centric” model to a “traveller-centric” model thus focusing more on the “experiencer” (O’Dell, 2007);
2. from market research and surveys orientation to an academic orientation; and
3. from a unilateral (Managerialist) coverage to a multi-dimensional/cross-disciplinary coverage (Echtner and Jamal, 1997; Hollinshead, 2004).

The study goes back to more of the roots of generational theory in sociology and psychology. The aim of this research is to understand the travel experiences of New Zealand inbound Generation Z by examining their travel patterns, attitudes and travel motives. The possible factors shaping these experiences are identified.

The next section explores the context of life for Generation Z. This is followed by some projections and economic value of the generation. In the literature review the Generation theory is explored and so is the experience. The research methodology is then presented with findings being discussed thereafter. The main contribution of this research, a theoretical model is then explained along with implications and recommendations.

**Generation Z in context**

Generation Z is mostly the off-Spring of Generation X and has been raised during changes occasioned by the internet, smartphones, laptops, freely available network and digital media (Tulgan, 2013). Elsewhere they have been called “postmillennial”, “centennials”, “pivotals” or...
“digital natives” among other tags (Grail Research, 2011; Southgate, 2017). Noting that the most common name used for this group is Generation Z, Hertz (2016) tags them Generation K after the fictional character “Katniss Everdeen”, the determined heroine of the Hunger Games. This is attributed to their view of the world as one of perpetual struggle, characterised by inequality and harshness. In her 18 months interviews of 2,000 teenagers in the UK and USA, Hertz (2016) notes that this generation feels profoundly anxious and distrustful. This can be attributed to the fact that the generation developed their personalities and life skills in a socio-economic environment marked by chaos, uncertainty, volatility and complexity (Sparks and Honey, 2014). They have come of age in an era of economic decline, increased inequality, job insecurity and social media presence. As argued by Read and Truelove (2018), Generation Z has never known a world without war and terrorism and as such they crave safety and financial security.

Although some other generations, such as the First World War and the Second World War generation cohorts lived through war, no generation before has been exposed to war and terrorism 24/7 through the internet and social media. Similarly, Seemiller and Grace (2016) have identified connectivity, information at the fingertips, creative entrepreneurship, diversity and social justice, fear of disaster and tragedies and economic hardships as some of the common events constituting the context for this generation. A further list is offered by Read and Truelove (2018) to include recession, ISIS, Sandy Hook shooting, marriage equality, the first black president of USA and the rise of populism. Instructively, Generation Z members have developed coping mechanisms. They are considered to be highly educated, creative and innovative and able to multi-task in an increasingly changing environment (Corbisiero and Ruspini, 2018).

Generation Z and the economic value

In the USA, Generation Z makes up a quarter of the population. The generation contributes US $44bn to the American economy and influences US$600bn in family spending (Sparks and Honey, 2014; Ketchum, 2015; Southan, 2017). It is further projected that by 2020 the generation will account for one-third of the USA population and will become the most powerful spenders representing 40 per cent of consumers in the USA, Europe and BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China). In tourism and travel, Generation Z is considered an incredibly important cohort (Barnes, 2018). This, Paul Redmond, a generation cohort expert observes, is due to several factors; first is their powerful influence on family holidays as their parents opt to consult them prior to booking trips. Second, is their preference for experiences rather than possessions thus increasing their propensity to travel in search of “fun experiences”. Furthermore, it is observed that they are open-minded, bucket-list oriented and look for off-the-beaten path locations (Expedia, 2017). Consequently, they can be expected to seek out remote places and engage in numerous travels/ activities. Southan (2017) has further noted that Generation Z members are budget conscious travellers and usually start off their travel without a set destination in mind.

Born into a digital age and with increasing international travel, this young generation is likely to transform tourism and destinations. Indeed, it has been argued that “Fordian” (mass) tourism may no longer provide destinations with requisite competitiveness in the face of new tourism (Stănciulescu et al., 2011). The implication is that destinations relying on mass tourism characterised by an ageing demography will find it increasingly difficult to operate profitably in an environment characterised by an emerging and more contemporary form of tourism comprising youth and youthful travellers. This envisaged demographic change represents an important phenomenon which may pose both opportunities and challenges for the development of tourism and destinations (Benniti and Cracolici, 2015). Generation-based research that identifies different groups of consumers and their specific needs and desires is therefore important (Chhetri et al., 2014). Recent findings, for instance, indicate that the less technologically enabled tourism destinations can benefit by employing contemporary principles and practices to meet the needs of the new generation of tourists who seek rich digital and gamified tourism experiences (Skinner et al., 2018).

The importance of this generation and the wider youth market lies in the fact that it represents the market of the future (Vukic et al., 2015). From an academic perspective, it is to be expected that as the generation matures and takes centre stage as adults more research will be conducted and published.
Generation theory

Generation cohorts have been widely explored. Despite the extensive research, there are differing opinions as to the historical location of any particular generation and what they are to be referred to as. There, however, exists some consensus on what generations are like as explained in Manheim’s concepts of generation actuality and generation unit (Donnison, 2007). Extant generation cohort studies have focussed on mapping consumption patterns so as to develop effective marketing strategies (Rentz et al., 1983; Holbrook and Schindler, 1989; Schuman and Scott, 1989; Schewe and Noble, 2000; Schewe and Meredith, 2004). This, it would seem, deviates from the theory’s “ancestral roots” in sociology and psychology. This research incorporates socio-cognitive thought.

Recent years have seen an increase in generational analysis in the tourism literature (Beldona et al., 2009; Huh and Park, 2010; Li et al., 2013; Pennington-Gray et al., 2003). Studies on lifelong travel patterns have concluded that a greater use of cohort analysis is needed to examine changes in travel behaviour (Oppermann, 1995). Gardiner et al. (2014) indicate that future travel behaviour will differ between the generations. Therefore, there is an implied necessity for continuous studies and research on each generation in order to effectively respond to the needs and demands of each of them. This research on Generation Z is a contribution to this demand.

Experience in tourism

In English, the word experience refers both to lived experiences as well as to the knowledge and expertise gained over time as a result of lived experiences (Duerden et al., 2015). A distinction is made between experience as a noun and experience as a verb. A further distinction is made between two German words for experience; “Erlebnis” and “Erfahrung” (Larsen, 2007; Cutler and Carmichael, 2010). Larsen notes that both these words are applicable to tourism in that tourists participate in events while travelling and also accumulate memories from the trips. Elsewhere, Schmitt (1999) defines experience as the triggered stimulations to the senses, the heart and the mind occurring because of encountering, undergoing or living through situations.

Beyond the definitional lacuna, however, experience is a widely studied phenomenon across disciplines. In tourism, the concept of experience is considered important for a destination’s competitiveness (Jensen et al., 2015). Tourist experience studies vary in approach and perspectives with concentration being on a social science approach and a management/marketing approach (MacCannell, 1973; Lee and Crompton, 1992; Quan and Wang, 2004; Volos, 2009). Experience has been viewed as an interaction between destinations as the “theatres” and tourists as the “actors” (Stamboulis and Skayannis, 2003). The tourism industry is considered a player in generating, staging and consuming of experiences through manipulation of place and presentation of culture (O’Dell, 2007; Cutler and Carmichael, 2010). However, it has also been suggested that places do not attract people, nor do they push people away (Larsen, 2007). Consequently, the author opines, that studies should concentrate on individuals engaged in or about to engage in tourism. The argument shifts the locus of experience and experiencing to the tourist/traveller. Indeed, in his observation, Uriely (2005) notes a shift from tourism’s displayed objects being the determinants of experience to the tourist’s subjective negotiation of meaning being the determinant.

This research regards Larsen and Uriely’s suggestions that the individual is the arena of experience. Experience is realised by the individual and can, therefore, be viewed as subjective. In this regard, experience is a reality bound within the person and not an externality. Similarly, this research holds that travel is more about the person and his/her experiences rather than about places and things (King, 2002; Morgan, 2010). Consequently, and as suggested by King (2002) the focus of destination marketing organisations should increasingly shift from promoting physical features of the destination to being more traveller centric. Equally important is that while some literature narrows experience to occurrences at the destination, this research incorporates the gestalt of pre-trip, during trip and after trip in the discourse on experiences. The research underscores the necessity of a multi-dimensional and multidisciplinary analysis of experience in tourism.
Methodology/methods

An interpretivist paradigm underpins this study. This fits with the more sociological and subjective approach taken. Two methods were used to gather data; 12 interviews, and 5 blogs. These methods and approaches were considered reality-aware and context-appropriate (Hollinshead, 2004) in that Generation Z has grown up in a digital environment, thus making use of online platforms to communicate a norm. Increasingly, social media and blogging have become avenues to post and share experiences and life happenings. Therefore, these platforms are a source of potentially rich data. In addition, the methods complement each other. The blogs helped in overcoming limitations of time, space and individuals’ biases; factors which are endemic to face-to-face interviews. Interviews ameliorated the absence of personal cues in blogs.

Recruitment of face-to-face participants was through publicly displayed posters bearing the researcher’s contact details. These were displayed in accommodation facilities where young people frequent as well as by the researcher on the streets. In addition, the referral method – snowballing was applied. For blogs, the process involved the use of search engines such as Google and Explorer. By using key search words such as tourism blogs/bloggers, travel blogs, youth travel blogs and generation Z bloggers/blogs, several blogs were identified from numerous options. Two criteria suggested by Hookway (2008) – diary style blogs and availability of search function according to location were utilised to shortlist the blogs. Eventually, five blogs were selected.

Elimination process followed to ensure that selected blogs entries were by persons within the correct age bracket and who visited New Zealand. Some bloggers were forthright with their age while for some key “give-away” information was used. An example is a participant who posted that she bought a 1997 car and added “it is older than me but runs very good”. Only participants born after 1995 and above 18 years of age were selected. Interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were saved in Microsoft word format and later uploaded to NVivo 11 programme for coding and analysis. For blogs, data were directly copied from the online entries and pasted on a word document. The documents were formatted to an acceptable standard and uploaded to Nvivo 11 programme for coding and analysis. Six steps were used in this process as shown in Figure 1.

The steps involved data collection, transcribing, back and forth reading of the transcribed and copied data. Codes (referred to as nodes in NVivo 11) were assigned and later developed into initial themes within which codes were now clustered (referred to as parent and child nodes, respectively, in NVivo 11). The codes were then assigned more meaningful categories. Step 6 explored the categories to form core categories which are the building blocks of theory (Goulding, 1998). The process yielded nine categories. These were re-assigned to form six core categories. While four of the categories (travel patterns, destination profile, reasons for travel and identity) are common in available literature, two are unique to this research; context and realm of experience. The six core categories and their corresponding themes represent a lens through which travel experiences of Generation Z can be understood.

![Figure 1: Coding process](image-url)
Findings and discussion

Of all the participants 13 were female, while 4 were male (see Table I). In total, seven nationalities are represented. Seven participants are from Germany, two from the USA, two from the Netherlands, two from France, two from Luxembourg, one from Iceland and one from England.

Table II presents the six categories and their related themes. Column three provides a more meaningful interpretation associated with each category/themes. It is the synthesis of the interpretations that forms the basis of the theoretical model and thus, an overall of understanding of Generation Z travel experiences.

Travel patterns

The themes related to the core category, travel patterns, are accommodation, activities, places visited, transport and travel profile. These are interpreted as services/destination interfaces and travel career. Destinations are an arena of multiple interactions to a tourist. The tourists/travellers interface with the destination through engaging with the spaces, places, cultures, facilities and systems at the destination (Wearing and Foley, 2017). These contribute to the experiences of the participants. A poor interaction with the above services may lead to an overall negative experience at the destination (Morgan et al., 2010). Several factors were found to influence the choice of service. These included affordability and budgets, convenience and accessibility to these services, the flexibility of the travel plans but also serendipity. Participant 13 blogged – “After the fair we went to the harbour where someone proposed us a tour on his sailing boat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>DOB</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Length of stay</th>
<th>Accommodation</th>
<th>Transport</th>
<th>Budget (NZ$)</th>
<th>Reason for travel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Hostel and flatting</td>
<td>Bus and walking</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>Internship, Exploration, to see the landscape and to discover self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Host family and camping</td>
<td>Train and walking</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>Internship and exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Hostel and camping</td>
<td>Hitchhiking and hired car</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>Break, new discoveries, scenery and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>Camping</td>
<td>Hired car</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>Break, get away and exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Car and camping</td>
<td>Own car</td>
<td>6,900</td>
<td>Nature, norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Car and camping</td>
<td>Own car</td>
<td>6,900</td>
<td>Nature and break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Dorm and in their car</td>
<td>Own car</td>
<td></td>
<td>Visit far-flung destination, get away from Winter, nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>Hostel, van and friend’s family</td>
<td>Own van</td>
<td>13,700</td>
<td>Touring around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>Family and hostel</td>
<td>Bus, train, boat and own car</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>Visit family, freedom, experience NZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Hostel and flatting</td>
<td>Taxi and skateboarding</td>
<td>3,300</td>
<td>Independence, visit far place, personal development, watched hobbit and wanted to see this landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Farm housing</td>
<td>Hitchhiking and Uber</td>
<td>9,500</td>
<td>Break, Independence, visit far land, Visit far land, see landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Farm housing, shared car</td>
<td>Hitchhiking and Uber</td>
<td>6,900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 (Blog)</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>Hostel, camping and host families</td>
<td>Own car</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Tour and explore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 (Blog)</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Hostel, camping and host families</td>
<td>Own car</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Tour and explore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 (Blog)</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>8 weeks</td>
<td>Host family</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Tour and explore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 (Blog)</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Hostel, hotel, camps</td>
<td>Own car – shared</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Tour and explore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 (Blog)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>13 days</td>
<td>Hotels</td>
<td>Flight, walking</td>
<td>6,500</td>
<td>Tour, excursions, group travel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We couldn’t resist”. Participant 3 said of her travels that – “the plan is to have no plan”. Majority of the participants planned to take up temporary work to supplement their travel budget Participant 12 blogged – “I worked there 2-3 hours a day for accommodation”.

On travel career, it was observed that most of the participants had toured other countries or were en-route to other destinations. Generation Z are keen on multi-destination travel. However, travel was not without constraints and setbacks at times. These may well be described by categories provided by Dellaert et al. (1998) and Hägerstrand (1970) as thus:

1. authority constraints which are imposed by law or institutions as noted by Participant 8 – “I think the rules here are too strict because I am not used to strict alcohol rules and also prices for alcohol”;
2. coupling constraints which relate to family, friends and colleagues; and
3. capability constraints which are caused by availability of travel options and/or resources such as money.

**Context**

In this research, participants were drawn from seven different nationalities. The implications of this from a generation cohort perspective are varied. First, it could be argued that each participant would exhibit unique characteristics, values and behaviours because of the unique circumstances within their own country. This, it can be said will differ from a participant from a different nation where he or she experiences a different set of circumstances. Participant 7 notes – “In Germany lots of people go to New Zealand”. Participant 3 said – “New Zealand is a new country, in Europe we are like more old country so we had time to develop”. In these examples it can be said that the participants’ views and behaviours are influenced by their context of life. The context within which travel behaviour of any group occurs is important to understanding the behaviour (Wilson et al., 2008). These contexts include historical, temporal, institutional, social, global and cultural. Similarly, Jennings (2010) notes that evaluation of tourism experiences requires a consideration of local, glocal, national and global environment.

A study of Millennials by Bernardi (2018) supports this view. In the study, differences relating to country of origin were observed. The Chinese were found to be the largest spenders, while
Singaporeans and Indonesians were more budget conscious, seeking budget flights and accommodation. This would put to question the cross-cultural and cross-border generation cohort validity of shared behavioural and attitudinal patterns; each nation would have its own generation cohort. However, observations by Corbisiero and Ruspini (2018) repudiate this. They opine that, due to ubiquitous connectivity, this generation has more in common with their international peers than any previous generation.

Reasons for travel

While it is possible to locate Generation Z’s multiple reasons for travel within different models in literature, an intrinsic-extrinsic classification is preferred for this research. Among the intrinsic factors are, seeking for adventure and novelty. The extrinsic factors included attractions, escapism and engaging in travel because it is the popular culture (norm). While it could be argued that escapism is also intrinsic in nature, it is generated by external circumstances such as undesirable events in country of residence or workplace. Participant 10 from the USA said – “I was kind of running away from the negative changes that are happening and I didn’t really want to be associated with that I guess”. An alternative classification would be on a hedonic-utilitarian continuum. Hedonic reasons have to do with emotional and experiential aspects while utilitarian are benefits driven (Asraar, 2015). Generation Z behaviour and choices were not only consistent with the search of travel experiences, but also with the quest for value for the resources invested in the travel.

Travel for Generation Z is also a time of conviviality, socialisation and empowerment (Haddouche and Salomone, 2018). In travelling, new friendships were forged, interactions with locals and fellow travellers craved and deeper meanings to personal life and self-development sought. Participant 9 – “I’ve met people now in my hostel, now we are going in March for a road trip”. Furthermore, travel was attributed to the popular concept known as fear-of-missing-out. This is a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent (Przybylski et al., 2013). A survey by Smith (2018) corroborates this, reporting that 82 per cent of Generation Z regretted losing out on chances to travel.

Two participants were travelling on internship. However, these participants were intent on using internship as the means to get to New Zealand and do some travelling. While the participants expressed a desire to tour more places in New Zealand, the time limit on their internship prevented them from undertaking longer trips. The diversity of flora and fauna motivated one of the travellers whose interests are botany to visit and immerse in the country’s nature. Research shows that the 15–24 year old age groups are more likely to travel for educational purposes when compared to older age groups (Collins and Tisdell, 2002; Huh and Park, 2010). Related to this is partnership and transnational connections between organisations which saw the two afore mentioned participants travel to New Zealand as interns through partnership of an organisation in Germany with a New Zealand-based organisation.

Destination profile

This relates to perceptions about New Zealand as a destination, the attractions and facilities and the resultant expectations. Expectations are further linked to the appraisal of the destination by the traveller, which relates to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Eventually, this will influence the sort of experience that the traveller has. However, a destination is not just a geographical unit but is also subject to people’s judgement and evaluation (Chen and Šegota, 2015). Implied are not only the evident physical features but, also the abstract and subjective psychological elements as perceived by the tourist. Elsewhere, this dichotomy is observed by Echtner and Ritchie (1993) who opine that destinations have functional (tangible) and psychological (abstract) characteristics.

Several media were responsible for communicating and enhancing New Zealand’s image as perceived by Generation Z. These included film and the movies, social media, referrals as well as agencies and organisations. Participant 1 – “the reason I actually came here is because I was watching the Hobbit. It was such amazing landscape that I felt that this should be the place I
should come first”. In categorising destination image Avraham and Ketter’s (2008) model proves to be helpful and is applied as follows:

1. cognitive which constitutes what Generation Z knew about the destination;
2. affective which relates to Generation Z’s feelings about the destination;
3. evaluative which describes how the destination was appraised – Participant 3 – “I think the rules here are too strict because I am not used to strict alcohol rules”; and
4. behavioural which is tied to decisive actions to undertake an activity or to visit a place.

The regular frequency of terrorist attacks has seen increased measures by governments to curb the menace. This has significantly changed the mind-set of international tourists. Some of the participants believed destinations have become safer because of terror attacks. Reasons presented included the resultant increase in surveillance and security procedures. Still others believed that shrinking back from travelling would mean a triumph of terrorism. It would therefore appear that, Generation Z has become accustomed to and adapted to the volatile global environment in which they have grown up in.

On environmental issues a participant thought it contradictory that New Zealand is portrayed as this pristine green environment but there appeared to be a crisis with plastic bags: Participant 8 – “I always thought New Zealand is so natural, and they take care of their environment but, the biggest problem is the plastic bags at the super market, it’s so crazy”. This participant also considered it paradoxical that there were issues with harsh sun rays, but that protective sunscreen was expensive or at least higher than at her home country. A further area of focus is the socio-political issues in the destination (New Zealand). Commenting on society, a participant reported what they perceived as discrimination against indigenous people. There was a feeling that the Maori were treated unfairly. Participant 2 – “We spoke to a lot of Maori and local people and I think, I don’t know whether it’s right to say but, there was quite a lot of discrimination which we found shocking”. Separately, some participants who engaged in part time jobs felt exploited by their employers. Another participant felt extorted by mechanics and car dealers. The use of English as an official language contributed to a seamless and fulfilling experience to some as it eliminated possible language barriers: Participant 7 – “Because it is an English country and a lot of people speak English so it’s a good place to come”. However, this might be viewed differently by participants drawn from non-English speaking regions. Immigration policy permitting work is critical to the long period of stay. Participants needed work to supplement their travel budget or subsidise on spending such as accommodation and activities.

Seasonality and weather patterns were factored before and during travel. To some the timing of the trip was to coincide with Summer season in the destination. Participant 9 – “Winter is starting in Germany. This is the reason I came here”. Locally, some participants altered their schedules to fit to the weather patterns of the time. Whereas the majority favoured Summer, there were some who, because of their passion for skiing thought Winter months would be good time to plan a visit to Queenstown. A study in Romania showed that seasonality was a determinant of the type of adventure and sport tourism practiced by the youth (Demeter and Brâncu, 2014). New Zealand statistical data show a preference for the warmer Autumn and Summer months by international travellers. In the year 2017, international arrivals during the Autumn–Summer months were 57.8 per cent while Spring–Winter months were 42.2 per cent (Smiler, 2018). In this regard, global, socio-political and environmental factors appear to alter or modify the travellers’ behaviours and contribute to their overall experience.

Because Generation Z is characterised as being digitally adept, social and mobile, ICT is a critical component and a linkage to services or to the outer world. The widespread use of mobile apps, such as Campmate, and the reliance on social media was a common feature among the participants. Participant 1 – “Instagram is a big feature because I have seen so many beautiful pictures of New Zealand holy crap and I want to visit these places and take these exact photos”. There was reliance on social media to make travel decisions. These technological advancements facilitate ease of access to information, facilities and places. Therefore, Generation Z behavioural patterns in a destination and their experiences may be impacted or influenced by ICT advancements.
Identity

It is observed that travel offered the opportunity to plan one’s life. Being far away from the accustomed way of life, New Zealand provided the requisite environment for self-reflection: Participant 3 – “I think in those moments you really get to know yourself”. Photos and experiences shared online by the participants is a way of building personal identity and part of experience (Bernardi, 2018).

Realm of experience

Generation Z experiences in New Zealand were explained in varied and multiple ways. Participant 16 blogged – “One of the activities made one of my dreams come true; it was snorkelling with dolphins. It was one of the best experiences I’ve had”. Participant 14 blogged – “For the first night I stopped in a free camping near Timaru. It was really creepy”. Some described the landscape/sceneries as “amazing and breath taking views”. However, these varied experiences fit within three realms:

1. physiological realm (sensory experience – relating to body);
2. psychological realm (cognitive, affective and conative experiences – relating to the soul); and
3. spiritual realm – spirit (spiritual experiences – relating to spirit).

Seemingly, this agrees with Walls’ (2013) definition of tourist experience as a blend of many individual elements coming together and may involve the tourist emotionally, physically and intellectually. Indeed, everything tourists go through at a destination can be experience, whether behavioural or perceptual, cognitive or emotional, expressed or implied (Oh et al., 2007). Noteworthy though is that, the reasons and patterns of travel exhibited by Generation Z do not appear to be fundamentally different to previous generations when they were of the same age. In this regard, this research evinces extant literature on youth/backpacker/gap year or even other recent generations such as Generation Y travellers (Adler, 1985; Benckendorff et al., 2010; Luo et al., 2015; Richards, 2015). While the reasons and/or patterns may be similar, contemporary factors can impact on a generation’s experiences. The advances in technology (internet, social media and smartphones), for example, have fostered internet-based travel services, thus, altering traveller expectations, and resultant travel experiences.

Conclusions and recommendations

A more holistic definition or discourse on the tourist experience requires contextualisation. This requires incorporation of different strands or thoughts, and different disciplines. In this regard, three factors are considered as shaping Generation Z experiences as shown in the theoretical model (see Figure 2):

1. Immediate influences (forces) – including family, friends, events in the home country. Participant 13 offered – “We took a bath in the outdoor bathtubs of the villa. It was like a childhood memory. As children we always used to take a bath together. Still another observed, we grew up buying fish in a supermarket in plastic but here someone comes with fresh fish caught an hour ago”.

2. Destination influences (forces) – including socio-political, cultural, physical features/attributes. A participant talking about a local couple she met said – we ate together and shared our food. I really enjoyed listening to all their stories. Participant 3 noted – “I also did glow worms which is definitely an experience that I will remember probably for the rest of my life”. On her part Participant 4 said – “We listened to locals’ advice”.

3. Global influences (forces) – including events with global ramifications, climate change, terrorism, financial volatility, geo-politics and technological advancements as noted by Participant 1 – “For me going to New Zealand it was like stepping out of the craziness happening in Europe”. Participant 5 mentioned – “I’m from Germany, the east, so my parents did not get a chance to travel at all because of the separation […] I think they could only go to Ukraine and maybe Russia […] They didn’t have the chance to travel like we are doing now”.

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The individual arrives at the destination with embedded subjective elements as a result of interfacing with immediate influences and global influences. Additional elements are embedded in the individual through interfacing with the tourism system at the destination. The amalgamation of these elements contributes to the traveller’s experience at the destination. The destination can further be described as an “agitator” or “instigator” of the experience. To effectively understand the individual’s experience requires an appreciation of the context of life from which he/she has come. This entails awareness of both historical and contemporary influences in the life of that individual or group of individuals. While it is a logistical and practical impossibility to fully profile each individual travelling to a destination, an understanding of the multiple channels that contribute to the individual’s ethos would lend additional credence to understanding and managing tourist experiences.

Generation Z is progressively taking the centre stage. Members of this generation will soon be the adults occupying leadership positions and become the financiers of tourism and travel. Investment into more research informed by an impending future is recommended. While tourism infrastructure development is important, significant focus needs to be placed on understanding the tourist of the future. Governments and tourism purveyors may require an ever-increasing budget to map out strategies to meet the continuously morphing needs of the future traveller. In addition, strategies are required to address the evolving global consumer trends, especially bearing in mind the global influences (forces). Incorporating current technologies at every level should be at the forefront of government and industry future planning. This may include deployment of internet connectivity in remote areas which lack strong links. Greater flexibility in institutional frameworks, with less bureaucratic bottlenecks is further suggested. Destination marketers tend to concentrate on psychological aspects to appeal to the traveller. The goal, in this case, is creating an attractive image in the mind of travellers to get them to come to the destination. Emphasis is more about the destination. This research suggests shifting the focus to understanding the evolving traveller’s needs and preferences.

A key limitation of the research is that the impact of significant events upon participants is assumed. A specific analysis of the events and the magnitude of their influence on the individual participants may be necessary. Research is recommended for not only the different ephemeral factors, but also longitudinal studies of generations.
References


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Exploring Chinese millennials’ experiential and transformative travel: a case study of mountain bikers in Tibet

Akke Folmer, Ali (Tanya) Tengxiage, Hanny Kadijk and Alastair John Wright

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore domestic experiential travel by Chinese millennials, a group of consumers who will increasingly influence the global travel and tourism industry.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative research method was adopted to explore motivations and memorable experiences of Chinese millennials who successfully mountain biked the Qinghai–Tibet Highway in China.

Findings – For Chinese millennial mountain bikers in Tibet, experiential travel motivations and experiences are important. During the trip, they challenged their mental and physical abilities, enjoyed nature, bonded with friends and perceived a warm welcome by Tibetan families. This study adds to existing knowledge on experiential travel, as it was found that transformation was perceived as important outcome of the trip. Participants perceived personal change in attitude and behaviour, which will help them face everyday life challenges.

Research limitations/implications – Further research could focus on gaining insight into other types of Chinese adventure tourists, on comparing wishes and demands of Chinese with other mountain bikers and on developments in transformative travel.

Practical implications – Adventure tourism organisations could adjust their tourism product range to cater more for Chinese millennials who aim to improve their physical and mental skills.

Originality/value – In-depth research into motivations and experiences of Chinese millennials is scarce. The influence of Chinese millennials on the tourism market is already large and will continue to increase.

Keywords China, Generation Y, Memorable experiences, Travel motivations, Mountain bike tourism, Transformative travel

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
Increasingly, Chinese millennials are experienced and influential tourists. They travel far more than previous cohorts of Chinese (Cheng and Foley, 2018; Wang, 2009), as travelling within and outside China has become much easier (Gardiner and Kwek, 2017). When travelling, they seek unique, fun and meaningful experiences (Allen, 2017), and are thus increasingly willing to try out new and adventurous activities (Hotel.com, 2018). They demand "experiential travel", a worldwide trend involving purposeful and enjoyable travel to places which appeal to the imagination (Chan et al., 2016). In the coming decade, Chinese millennials will significantly impact the global tourism market (Cheng and Foley, 2018; Fyall et al., 2017). First, there are currently about 415m Chinese millennials, which is more than the population of the USA and Canada combined (Lu and Yiu, 2015). Second, their spending power will increase as they move up the career ladder (Hotel.com, 2018), meaning they can stay away for longer, visit new destinations and try out new activities. Third, millennials tend to be early adopters of innovations (Cavagnaro and Staffieri, 2015) and have a large influence on older generations’ consumer behaviour (Doster, 2013; Migacz and Petrick, 2018). Thus, if a new tourism product or service is picked up by millennials, it is likely to also become a trend amongst previous cohorts. As Chinese millennials travel behaviour differs greatly from older generations, who grew up with less wealth and
freedom to travel around the world, Ryan et al. (2017) state that more research into this group is necessary. Therefore, it is clearly important for the tourism sector to ensure sufficient understanding of this cohort’s experiential travel preferences.

As part of their rising demand for new, adventurous and fun activities, Chinese millennials increasingly participate in domestic adventure tourism (Buckley, 2016). Commercialisation has facilitated a rapid growth in the now extensive adventure tourism sector in China (Buckley, 2016; Cheng, 2017). For instance, Buckley et al. (2014) estimate that about 80–100m young Chinese participate annually in white water rafting. Many such Chinese millennials will travel internationally in the future, with their expectations influenced by their experiences in China. According to Buckley (2016), it is important for foreign adventure tourism companies to understand the Chinese adventure tourist better, as their culturally driven wishes and demands often do not correspond with the existing nature of international adventure tourism products. However, despite these implications for the future of the global adventure tourism sector, there is still limited research on Chinese adventure tourists. As the Chinese travel market and, within this, the demand for adventure tourism, is large and still growing, Buckley (2016) and Gardiner and Kwek (2017) call specifically for more research on Chinese adventure tourists’ wishes and demands.

This study addresses several gaps in the academic literature by aiming to gain deeper insight into motivations and experiences of Chinese millennials who participate in an adventure tourism activity, mountain biking, in China. The Qinghai–Tibet Highway was chosen, as this is a popular mountain biking route. The following research questions were investigated:

RQ1. Why do Chinese millennials choose to go on mountain biking trips?
RQ2. What are the major factors influencing Chinese millennials’ choice of the Qinghai–Tibet Highway as their mountain bike destination?
RQ3. What memorable experiences do Chinese millennials have during their mountain bike trip over the Qinghai–Tibet Highway?
RQ4. Why do they regard their mountain bike experiences along the Qinghai–Tibet Highway as memorable?

Literature review

Experiential travel of millennials

Currently, experiential travel forms a significant trend in tourism. Experiential travel is defined as “more immersive, local, authentic, adventurous and/or active travel” (Peak and Skift, 2014, p. 7). Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) associated experiential travel with hedonic consumption, defined as: “those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of product use” (pp. 99-100). However, tourists have been found to be more than hedonic consumers. The view that tourists mainly seek hedonic experiences was challenged by Franklin (2003), who argued that tourists are more than superficial consumers of tourism destinations. With regard to millennials, Cavagnaro et al. (2018) also found that not all seek hedonic travel experiences. Some are interested instead in being active and adventurous, immersing themselves in the local culture and gaining authentic and meaningful experiences whilst travelling.

Travel motivations of Chinese millennials

Chinese millennials were born approximately between 1977 and 2000 (Benckendorff et al., 2010; Gardiner and Kwek, 2017). They differ greatly from previous Chinese cohorts regarding values, behaviour and lifestyle, as their formative years took place during a period of fast and important societal changes (Cheng and Foley, 2018). They grew up during modern reforms and open door policies which created a Chinese middle class who was allowed and could afford to travel (Chung et al., 2015). For Chinese millennials, travelling has become the norm. Compared to previous cohorts, Chinese millennials travel more for fun and entertainment, family bonding, social interactions and stress reduction (Chung et al., 2015). They also travel to escape their parents’
control and find their “sense of self” (Gardiner and Kwek, 2017; Chen et al., 2014). Chen et al. (2014) attribute the quest for self-discovery to the fast-changing nature of Chinese society, which causes young people to be uncertain and anxious about their future. Chan et al. (2016) found that Chinese millennials’ travel motivations are largely driven by experiential demands, which are strongly related to seeking unique tourist experiences and products. This helps Chinese millennials to differentiate themselves, contributing to a desired social status and thus creating their own “experiential travel journey” (p. 33).

Various studies found overlap between Western and Chinese millennials’ travel motivations (e.g. Chen et al., 2014; Gardiner and Kwek, 2017; Noble et al., 2008). Like their Western counterparts, increasing numbers of Chinese millennials seek more involvement and submersion in local communities (Chen et al., 2014). Furthermore, Chen et al. (2014) identified five motivation factors of domestic Chinese millennial backpackers which correspond with those of their Western equivalents (Noble et al., 2008): social interaction, self-actualisation, destination experience, escape and relaxation. Like young Western travellers, Chinese millennials see in travel a way to gain freedom, supporting their transition from adolescence to adulthood (Gardiner and Kwek, 2017; Noble et al., 2008).

However, Gardiner and Kwek (2017) also found some significant differences; Chinese millennials feel greater moral obligation to meet their parents’ expectations regarding education, career, marriage and social family status. These pressures are expressed by avoiding risks in recreational activities. In addition, the upbringing of Chinese millennials is much more focused on education than on physical activities, resulting in less self-confidence regarding adventurous activities (Gardiner and Kwek, 2017). A study amongst young Chinese adventure tourists in China revealed that nature and relaxation, scenery, culture, exercise, escape, fun, challenge and learning were important motivations (Buckley et al., 2014). It can thus be concluded that Chinese millennials are highly driven by experiential travel motivations, seeking freedom from parental control, escape from everyday life, social interaction, self-actualisation, destination experience and relaxation.

No studies were found specifically on travel motivations of Chinese mountain bikers, while only a few focus on mountain bikers’ travel motivations in general. Moularde and Weaver (2016) found that mountain bikers are intrinsically motivated to improve their skills and seek challenges. In addition, they choose destinations which offer sufficient challenges to increase their skills (Moularde and Weaver, 2016) and for natural aspects (Robertson et al., 2014; Kulczycki and Halpenny, 2014). Mountain biking is undertaken to form personal identity and gain authentic experiences (Moularde and Weaver, 2016).

Memorable experiences of Chinese millennial travellers

Gaining insight into how to create memorable tourism experiences has become highly important to the tourism industry, as these drive future decisions, loyalty and provide word-of-mouth promotion (Pine II and Gilmore, 1998). The rise of social media has further increased the extent to which they contribute to destination promotion. These images and stories form a strong driver of follow-on tourism, whereby peers are stimulated to attempt to emulate the life-enhancing experiences of their pioneering friends (Wright, 2015). Kim et al. (2012) define a “memorable tourism experience” as “a tourism experience positively remembered and recalled after the event has occurred” (p. 13). They identify seven key experience elements that could affect its enjoyment and memorability: hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment (liberation and revitalisation), meaningfulness, involvement and knowledge.

With regard to memorable experiences in adventure tourism, it has been discovered that “flow” and “peak” experiences make the trip memorable (e.g. Dodson, 1996; Ayazlar, 2015). A state of flow is reached when individuals reach complete involvement with their activity, thereby perceiving a perfect balance between challenge and skills (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). According to Csikszentmihalyi (1975), flow results in feelings of happiness. A “peak” experience, on the other hand, is described as a transformational experience which goes beyond the usual level of intensity, meaningfulness and richness of the experience (Privette, 1983). A peak experience leads to joy and self-fulfilment; the individual gains a sense of awe and achievement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Everyday issues are forgotten, and a sense of achievement is reached.
The individual perceives personal control and mastery, and gains awareness of personal power (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Dodson, 1996).

With regard to memorable tourist experiences of mountain bikers, no studies were found on the Chinese and only a few on the Western context. Dodson (1996) investigated the relationship between peak experiences and mountain biking in the USA. She found that mountain biking can lead to peak experiences which lead to a change in self-concept and identity. In addition, Moularde and Weaver (2016) found that mountain biking is perceived as a holistic activity which leads to long lasting benefits such as good health, a way to express oneself, self-actualisation and feelings of group belonging, together leading to feelings of well-being.

Despite the increasing importance to the tourism industry, understanding of Chinese millennials' adventure travel remains limited. Following recommendations for further research by Buckley et al. (2014), Cheng (2017), Gardiner and Kwek (2017) and Ryan et al. (2017), this study aims to gain a better understanding of Chinese millennials' travel motivations and experiences. As Chinese millennials form a heterogeneous group, this study focuses on a specific segment, namely mountain bikers in Tibet. To the authors’ knowledge, this study is unique in applying a qualitative research approach to gain a better understanding of Chinese millennials and in focusing on Chinese millennial mountain bikers.

Methodology

The Qinghai–Tibet Highway

In this study, the Qinghai–Tibet Highway was chosen as a case study, as it is a popular route amongst Chinese mountain bikers (see Figure 1). The 2,000 km long route is asphalted, has a maximum incline of 7 per cent (Top China Travel, 2004) and takes about 21 days to complete (TibetTour.org, 2019). More than 80 per cent of the route is higher than 4,000 m above sea level (Su and Wall, 2009). The Qinghai–Tibet highway is regarded as the safest road to Tibet (Third Pole Tour, 2019; Top China Travel, 2004), although TibetDiscovery.com (2019) recommends tourists to travel by train rather than by car. Typical mountain road dangers are present, such as difficult cycling conditions due to steep and/or long slopes, small curve radius, precipitation, poor

Figure 1 Qinghai-Tibet Highway

Source: Google Maps (2019)
pavement friction, roadside perils (e.g. deep ravines), long and dark tunnels, truck traffic and the possibility of fatigued and/or speeding drivers (Li et al., 2019).

The route is promoted as relatively safe and technically easy, and suitable for novice mountain bikers, as it is asphalted and not too steep (e.g. TibetTour.org, 2019; China Tibet Train Tours, 2019). However, the route mainly attracts tourists who want to challenge themselves with rough climatic conditions (Su and Wall, 2009). The route is thus not suitable for all novice mountain bikers. They should be adventurous (Explore Himalaya, 2019), physically fit and in good health (e.g. TibetTour.org, 2019; China Tibet Train Tours, 2019) (Plate 1).

**Research design**

A qualitative research method was used to gain in-depth insights into the motivations and memorable experiences of Chinese millennial mountain bikers. The interview questions on motivations were based on the motivational push and pull theory of Dann (1981). With regard to formulating interview questions on memorable tourist experiences, the definition by Kim et al. (2012) was adopted (Table I).

The interviews were carried out at the terminus of the route in Lhasa, China in April 2017, in two popular tourist hostels and the Jokhang temple square in Lhasa, using a convenience sampling method. The fact that the interviewer is a resident from Lhasa who speaks Chinese facilitated gaining a deep insight into participants’ motivations and experiences. Chinese mountain bikers between 20 and 40 years old, who were available at the locations, were approached for an interview, which lasted about 30 min each and were audio recorded. In total, 19 members of the target group were interviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Interview questions</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel motivations</td>
<td>For what reason do you participate in a mountain bike trip?</td>
<td>Motivational push factors (Dann, 1981)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why did you select the Qinghai–Tibet highway for mountain biking?</td>
<td>Motivational pull factors (Dann, 1981)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorable experiences</td>
<td>Please describe the most exciting memories of your trip</td>
<td>Memorable tourist experiences, Kim et al. (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please explain why these experiences were memorable to you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Plate 1  Mountain bikers on the Qinghai–Tibet Highway

Source: Tengxiage (2017)
The participants were all in the age group 21–35 and were predominantly male (see Table II). They had just successfully completed the entire route to Lhasa by mountain bike. The level of cycling expertise was not asked.

Data analysis

The data were first translated from Chinese to English, then analysed and interpreted using coding. The coding process was carried out in three stages: open, axial and selective coding (Boeije, 2014). During open coding, the data were interpreted and clustered into several categories, which were then labelled. Then, axial coding took place, in which components that contributed to travel motivations and memorable experiences were identified. In the final stage, selective coding, core categories were identified and given an overarching code, for instance “to be physically and mentally challenged by the environment” (Table III).

Findings

Motivations

The main motivations are presented in Table IV.

Table II  Sociodemographics of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bikeshop owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techan</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bikeshop owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Freelancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheng</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Male</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ting</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hu</td>
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<td>Hotel employee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Huifui</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>Hotel employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bao</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chao</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao Niu</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Xia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lang</td>
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<td>Fan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mai</td>
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<td>Wang</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III  Example of coding process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two answer examples</th>
<th>Open coding (interpretation)</th>
<th>Axial coding (subthemes)</th>
<th>Selective coding (main theme)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chen: “This route poses a big challenge, due to the high altitude, and low population density. I have to be well prepared to do this route. Actually, this route prepares me for everything in my life”</td>
<td>Being challenged by the environmental conditions Getting prepared for challenges in life</td>
<td>Being physically and mentally challenged by environmental conditions</td>
<td>To be physically and mentally challenged by the environment Expected to be physically and mentally challenged by the environment contributes to the motivation to choose the Qinghai–Tibet Highway as mountain bike destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan: “I want to be challenged by the dangers of the mountains, the high altitude, and the extreme climate”</td>
<td>Being challenged by danger, high altitude, and extreme climate</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reasons for participating in mountain biking

To escape daily life. The findings show that reducing stress and seeking freedom are important reasons to go mountain biking. For some, mountain biking was regarded as a way to get away from unhappy situations in daily life; Wang (m, 27): “I went mountain biking to get away from stress at my work. I quit my job and decided to go cycling, and to stimulate myself.” Also Zhang (m, 29) indicated struggles with his daily life as a reason: “I am not happy about my city life, and want to try new things.” Getting away from it all, seeking freedom and looking for activities and destinations which can uplift their spirits, indicate that participants seek an escape from daily life, while at the same time trying to find and change themselves.

To have special experiences. Student participants mostly indicated that they chose this route as their graduation trip. Mountain biking in an environment which they perceive as beautiful yet challenging fit their demand for novel and meaningful experiences. Bao (m, 23): “This was my graduation trip. I wanted to do something different and meaningful.”

Graduation trips are a popular new tourism trend which motivates young people to participate in exciting, novel and adventurous vacation activities. They perform a ritualistic function for graduates of saying farewell to college life, escaping parental control, searching for personal identity and finding a new state of mind. A graduation trip is associated with seeking transformative experiences to mark the end of college life, and to prepare to start future careers.

Motivations to select the Qinghai–Tibet Highway

To be physically and mentally challenged by the environment. Almost all participants mentioned the opportunity to be challenged as reason for choosing the Qinghai–Tibet Highway. They wanted to identify and measure their own strengths and weaknesses by facing the Tibetan highland’s high altitudes and extreme weather, something most of them had often not experienced before; Han (m, 22): “through long-distance biking, I want to change my ideas, and become stronger and braver.” For others, the environment posed the challenge; Fan (m, 30): “I want to be challenged by the dangers of the mountains, the high altitude, and the extreme climate.”

Participants chose the destination because of its reputation as a challenging environment. Most participants said they had dreamt about visiting and had wanted to experience Tibet for a long time. Others were attracted because “the Tibetan Plateau is the roof of the world” (Techan, m, 28; Mai, m, 27). The significance of destination fame illustrates that the destination brand can strongly influence Chinese mountain bikers’ destination choice. These motivations represent the dream and desire to visit the destination and to gain higher social status by displaying their accomplishment.

The motivations show that the participants are very goal-oriented; they choose this route to reach certain desired outcomes, to challenge and test themselves and to apply their newly acquired insights to their daily lives. They regard the Tibetan highland as a place where they can test and measure their physical skills and mental capacities. Participants indicate that they want to develop personal resilience.

Perceived attractiveness of the natural environment. Most participants mentioned the perceived attractiveness of the natural environment as a main reason for choosing the route. Several participants also mentioned the opportunity to get close to nature. As Zhang (m, 29) stated: “The natural

### Table IV Main motivations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Main themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for participating in mountain biking</td>
<td>To escape daily life work-related stress family obligations To have special experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for selecting the Qinghai–Tibet line as destination</td>
<td>To be physically and mentally challenged by the environment The perceived attractiveness of the natural environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
landscape, because I have always lived in the city, and I can never get close to the nature.” Furthermore, participants selected this route as it is a famous destination for mountain biking, while others said that they had dreamt about visiting Tibet for a long time.

**Memorable experiences**

The main memorable experiences, and the reasons why they are memorable, are presented in (Table V).

**Most exciting memories**

*Suffering.* Suffering was mentioned by all participants as exciting memory. Suffering was caused by external conditions, such as the weather, altitude stress, wildlife encounters, perceived danger of the road and conflicts with companions. This resulted in mental and physical suffering. Study participants often considered giving up, but were strong enough to resist the temptation. Lang (m, 30) described a multitude of challenges: I felt loneliness and altitude stress, I had difficulties breathing. Although I knew that would happen before I started, it still felt so painful and difficult. One day, when I realized that I had cried, I thought I had a fever. That time I missed my family. I was afraid that I could not finish this trip and that I would have to abandon my companion.” Several participants mentioned experiencing fear, hunger, altitude stress and missing their family; K (m, 31): “I only biked 88km today, but it was really hard because it was uphill, and there were many trucks on the road. It felt dangerous, especially through a very long and dark tunnel. This was the first time I felt fear of death. It had been snowing, I had altitude stress, I felt hungry, I was feverish, and biking uphill was so exhausting. I was almost broken. I missed my family.” Not giving up made them feel stronger afterwards; they felt that they developed a strong attitude.

As the participants suffered without giving up, they felt a great sense of fulfilment. Mountain biking on the Tibetan highlands requires a relatively high level of physical and emotional control. Taking risks, perceptions of danger and experiencing varying degrees of suffering results in a thrilling experience, and feelings of relief pride, and growth in confidence.

*Overcoming difficulties.* The suffering lead to the most favoured experience, namely overcoming physical and mental difficulties while biking over mountains in tough conditions. Achieving their goal lead to experiencing various degrees of flow, resulting in memorable peak experiences. Overall, overcoming physical and mental difficulties made participants feel proud of themselves, and confident about their capabilities. Comparing their own achievements with that of others made participants especially proud; Mai (m, 27): “When some people gave up and returned home, I kept going. I enjoyed that feeling, I am proud of myself.” Bao (m, 23): “When we ascended the rubber mountain, we pushed the bike to reach the summit. This is difficult at such high altitude. I think this was my most memorable experience, because some bikers take a car to the summit; but we biked up ourselves.”

Overcoming environmental challenges was mentioned by Huihui (m, 27): “My most memorable experience is biking to Tanggula Mountain. There was snow at that time, and I felt altitude stress. But I still cycled to the top and got through it. I experienced difficulties and frustration when

<table>
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<th>Table V Most exciting memories and reasons why they are memorable</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview question</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Most exciting memories of your trip</td>
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crossing the mountains. But I did it; and that was a feeling of conquering. When I summited each mountain, one by one, I was amazed that I could do it. It made me very proud of myself, and gave me a lot of confidence.” Physical challenges were also mentioned; Ma (m, 28): “My most memorable experience was that I felt so hungry, but I still did not want to stop. I just wanted to reach the destination quicker. I think that the fact that I just wanted to keep going on was the most exciting memory for me. It is useful for my everyday life. As long as you do not quit, you can overcome anything. When I finished, I felt very satisfied, and proud of myself.”

Participants firmly believed in their goal to complete the route, which helped them overcome mental, physical and environmental difficulties. These challenges made them more aware of their ability to solve problems and to adapt to changes. A sense of fulfilment, achievement and flow was experienced. The participants were satisfied with the accomplishment of their goals and having reached their destination successfully (Plate 2).

Enjoying and having fun. Participants also experienced enjoyment and fun. There are moments of silence and enjoyment of the natural surroundings; Bao (m, 23): “When we are biking, no one talks. We are all so silent, because everybody feels tired. But the scenery looks beautiful everywhere; this makes me enjoy the beauty of nature and the quietness.” Mai (m, 27) indicated that cycling is a different way to experience both nature and culture: “Through the cycling experience I now understand Tibetan people and culture better. Other people cannot experience it; you can only feel it when you are cycling. Because mountain biking is a slow way of travelling, you can enjoy many aspects of nature.” Cycling can be a way to connect with nature and culture, as it is a slow mode of travel. Being in natural surroundings gives participants a feeling of freedom; they can sing out loud and relax; Cheng (m, 28): “When I feel loneliness, I shout out over the fields and sing a song. Then I think, I can’t do this in my normal life. So this is a different experience, I feel like I can relax more.” The enjoyment also comes from the movement of cycling; Wang (m, 27): “I enjoy the feeling of being on my way.” The experience of timelessness also adds to enjoyable memories; Xia (f, 23): “It is refreshing, I forgot everything. I just focused on the present.”

Travelling slowly through a natural and cultural environment which is perceived as attractive, triggers an emotional response; it gives participants a sense of timelessness, and relaxation.

Plate 2 Study participant who arrived at the destination

Source: Tengxiage (2017)
It makes participants forget about daily life. They can simply enjoy and connect with the environment, with nature and culture, and live in the moment. This can be regarded as a flow experience.

*Enhancing social relationships.* Mountain biking can be an individual sport, and can generate feelings of loneliness. However, social relationships were also an important element of the experience. Trail companions played a significant role in helping participants to finish their trip. The importance of having a trail companion to provide inspiration, encouragement and company when facing difficulties was notable. Bao (m, 23): “Biking with friends, and experiencing both problems and happiness together was the most exciting memory. We could handle problems and encourage each other to overcome difficulties. It made our friendship stronger, we became closer, and understood each other better.” Friendships can be strengthened by simple gestures; Cheng (m, 28): “When attempting my first mountain, I cycled for an hour without reaching the top. I felt very hungry. But when I finally summitted, my team mate gave me some food. That was my most memorable experience.” Sometimes participants felt friendship for the first time in their life; Zhang (m, 29): “My new friends show interest in me when I express my feelings or mood on social media. Before the trip, I always felt loneliness; that I had no real friends.” These new friendships can lead to feelings of being at home, even in a strange environment; Wang (m, 27): “I have made many friends with different habits and interests to me. When I first stayed in a hostel, it felt like it was full of strangers, but later it felt like home.”

The stories show that social relationships improved and bonding developed with friends, and even strangers. Mountain biking in a highland area is dangerous and risky. Participants made new friends. This means that they could open up and accept new things from strangers, who react and engage in a similar way. This created a happy and comfortable atmosphere, far away from their familiar home environment. Some of the participants indicated that this helped them feel closer to each other. The experience increased understanding and intimacy with their companions when they faced difficulties. Importantly, this shows that personal characteristics of honesty and trust in others are important values in challenging circumstances.

*Received hospitality by Tibetan families.* Tibetan hospitality contributed greatly to memorable experiences. The participants experienced Tibetan culture and perceived authenticity when overnighting with Tibetan families. The importance of family, receiving love, warmth and encouragement when needed, gave them a special feeling.

Luo’s (m, 29) most memorable experience was staying overnight at a Tibetan home: “[…] I pitched my tent outside their house, and we ate together. They treated me as a friend. That gave me a warm feeling, because when I left home to go on this trip, no one had shown much interest in me. I will never forget that time and these people. If possible, I will visit them again.” He clearly connected with the family, which made him long to go return there. This was an experience shared by more participants; Chao (m, 21): “When we suffered during a rainy day, we approached a Tibetan family to request a stay for the night. My most memorable experience was waiting for the food to be cooked, because I was so hungry. The Tibetan family was so friendly; they gave us food and a free overnight stay.” Another much valued experience was the encouragement given by Tibetan locals they encountered; Wang (m, 27): “[…] along the road you can see lots of locals. They talk to you, saying ‘Tashi delek’ to wish their best and encourage us, even when they are busy working. This made me feel that they were very friendly, giving me a warm feeling.”

The participants experienced an increased awareness of culture, people and the environment, which shaped their behaviour and attitude. Tibetan people interacted with the participants, creating value and benefit for those who asked for assistance. Hospitality and offering help is seen as a characteristic of Tibetan people; this was experienced and highly valued.

*Reasons why experiences are regarded as memorable*

*Social aspects of the trip.* Mountain bike experiences were often regarded memorable because of social aspects. Participants experienced new friendships, deeper bonds with friends, meeting and interacting with other mountain bikers and strangers.
Bonding with friends was important for many participants. Bao said: “My most exciting memory was biking with friends, and facing all problems and happiness together. We could handle problems and encourage each other to overcome difficulties. It made our friendship stronger and we got closer to each other. We also better understand each other now.” Zhang discovered that he had made new friends: “[…] I found that my friends care about me when I express my feelings. Before that, I always felt lonely, I felt I had no real friends in my life.” Some participants noted that they had become friendlier and more open to strangers. For instance, Wang (m, 27) mentioned: “When I had travelled previously, I did not talk to strangers, especially not to farmers or workers. But through this experience, I learned how to be friendly.” Hu commented: “Because of the frustrations I had, I found that I had become friendlier to strangers […] I became more open. Therefore I am very happy with this trip, I got lots of things out of it. It is my best memory and gives the richest harvest in my life.”

The strengthening of interpersonal relationships made it an unforgettable trip.

**Personal change.** When participants were asked why they found their experiences memorable, they mentioned personal change and transformation. Long-distance mountain biking has a great impact on participants’ personal characteristics, attitude and behaviour. Several participants mentioned that they had become calmer. Chen (m, 35): “[…] It stimulated me to do things independently; I had to motivate myself. I now know that I can temper myself; the experience made me more patient, and I can plan better.” A deep understanding of their sense of self was gained. Techan (m, 28): “[…] After suffering difficulties, I found that I had changed my attitude towards life. Cycling in Tibet is not about how strong or how good a cyclist you are, it is about your perseverance, persistence, and being goal-oriented. This was an exciting experience. I did not quit, because I had belief in myself.” Participants indicated that they learned to persist, and that they gained confidence from their achievements.

Several participants indicated that they learned how to stay calm when faced with trouble. They felt that they had become stronger mentally, and more independent from their parents. The participants also felt they had made significant personal progress, which they reflected on, and which they perceived as being important life lessons. They identified personal change as an exciting and worthy outcome of hardship they endured.

**Building personal resilience.** A trip which started with a dream to conquer the Tibetan highlands became a life changing experience in which participants found their sense of self. The findings show that participants were deeply influenced by their experiences; Lang (m, 30): “I think Tibet is not the final destination for a mountain biker. The final destination is unrestricted, as long as you want to achieve something”. Trip completion gave participants a sense of great achievement and pride, which made them feel they can handle anything in life from now on; K (m, 31): “It is just the usual cycling […] in a highland area. The difference is that you need to endure many difficulties, such as physical sickness and mental struggles. But, after that, you gain a little more persistence, you have a stronger heart. As long as the road ahead is not broken, we will keep moving. We will pause for a while, try again, and then be closer to the end. The destination may not necessarily be a place; it may also be inside you.” This shows that the experiences led to deep reflections and that reaching the physical destination may not even be the most important aspect of the trip. Getting to know and challenging themselves, finding their own independence, strengthening their own mental and physical abilities, and building personal resilience was valued most amongst participants.

**Discussion**

**Motivations**

This study suggests that participants’ desire for experiential and meaningful travel is the most important driver to go mountain biking over the Tibetan highlands. This corresponds with the worldwide trend in purposeful and enjoyable travel to places which appeal to the imagination as found by Chan *et al.* (2016). Furthermore, our participants are motivated by escape: gaining freedom and reducing stress, which can be linked with their situation at home. Many participants...
had just graduated, were in-between jobs, or were unhappy with their current life. These results agree with Gardiner and Kwek (2017), who state that Chinese millennial adventure tourists travel to gain freedom from work, school and family obligations. Our participants also seek travel experiences which help them overcome physical and mental challenges in daily life. This aligns with Chen et al. (2014) who argue that Chinese millennials travel to improve their personal skills and capacities. This also corresponds with reasons why Western mountain bikers choose certain destinations (Moularde and Weaver, 2016).

**From experiential to transformative experiences**

This study sheds new light into characteristics of experiential travel, as it was found that transformative experiences are perceived as very important. Participants regarded their experiences as life changing. Their descriptions suggest reaching a state of flow, as they felt totally involved in the activity, and close to nature (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Furthermore, participants showed perseverance by not giving up, developed pride in their personal achievements, and noticed a change in attitude and behaviour in themselves. Cognitive skills were developed, such as improving self-control, balancing personal capacity and adapting behaviour during extreme situations. These experiences can be regarded as transformative peak experiences: bringing joy and self-fulfilment and reaching a sense of achievement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Dodson, 1996; Privette, 1983). When reflecting on their memories, most participants were aware of the transformative and life changing nature of their trip. They travelled to find the destination inside themselves.

**Contribution to theoretical insights into experiential travel**

This study adds to theoretical insights into experiential travel by suggesting that individuals may not travel only to escape daily life, to experience “fun, feelings and freedom”, to immerse themselves in different cultures and to find their sense of self. They may also travel to transform themselves, in order to better deal with everyday challenges in life. In the Cambridge University Press (2019), transformation is defined as “A complete change in the appearance or character of something or someone, especially so that that thing or person is improved.” The importance of personal change and transformative experiences also sheds new light on the nature of memorable tourism experiences, as defined by Kim et al. (2012). “Transformative experiences” leading to perceived improvements of personal attitude and behaviour (e.g. being able to talk with and trust strangers, making new friends), and the perceived improvement of mental and physical skills (e.g. becoming more patient), may be an eighth key element of a memorable tourism experience. Thus, memorable tourism experiences could be defined as hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, knowledge and transformation.

As individuals become more experienced travellers, they climb up their travel career ladder. They become more demanding, seeking travel experiences which improve their knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviour. In itself, transformative travel is not a new phenomenon. Personal transformation has long been associated with travel (Leed, 1991), as this was, for instance, an important goal for young English gentlemen to embark on their “Grand Tour”. However, due to today’s increasingly fast-changing society, demand for transformative travel may be on the rise. Besides dealing with personal uncertainties regarding finding work, starting families, coping with illnesses, falling in love and dealing with grief (Lean, 2012), individuals are also increasingly having to deal with the uncertain effects of global challenges such as climate change, terrorism, migration and political unrests. These uncertain futures may make individuals seek travel experiences which improve their resilience to change. Seeking transformative experiences may thus become a more important driver of travel in the near future.

**Implications for adventure tourism sector**

As Chinese millennial adventure tourists gain confidence and experience in travelling, they will increasingly visit more exotic and far away destinations. Due to increasing future uncertainties in daily life and beyond, their demand may develop from experiential to more transformative travel. Chinese millennials may seek more adventurous trips which challenge them on different levels, facilitate
personal growth, boost self-confidence and prepare them for their future life. These motivations could provide significant opportunities for international adventure tourism companies. They could adjust their tourist products to cater more for Chinese millennials who are seeking experiential and transformative travel experiences. They can offer individual and relatively safe adventure trips for novice adventure tourists, with a focus on experiencing local food and authentic hospitality.

Limitations of the study

First, this study focuses on Chinese millennials who succeeded in mountain biking the Qinghai–Tibet Highway. Their experiential experiences are thus characterised by success. Very different experiences could have been reported amongst participants who had given up en route. Second, this study focuses on a domestic adventure tourism destination. For tourism destinations abroad, results may differ. Third, the results of this study can only be regarded as an illustration of Chinese millennials’ changing demand from experiential to transformative travel, as the study is based on qualitative research amongst Chinese millennial adventure tourists.

Recommendations for further research

To gain more insight into changing travel motivations and memorable experiences of Chinese millennials, it is recommended to do more in-depth research on this topic. It is also worthwhile for the international adventure tourism sector to investigate to what extent Chinese millennial mountain bikers’ wishes and demands differ from their non-Chinese counterparts. These insights can support adventure tourism companies with developing new, or adapting existing, adventure tourism products which meet the specific wishes and demands of Chinese millennial adventure tourists. Finally, it would be interesting to explore to what extent the demand for transformative travel can be regarded as a new trend amongst contemporary tourists.

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Generation Z talking: transformative experience in educational travel

Desmond Wee

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to position experience as an immersive process through the documentation of student reflections of place involving the intricacies of embodied learning and experiential mobilities. This study is framed through situational positionalities and placed movements of the tourist, the non-tourist and more specifically, students of Generation Z engaged in educational experiences.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper explores a student fieldtrip (on the island of Corfu, Greece) as a medium of expression for situated learning, involving a case study of tourism students learning critical tourism through sensual and haptic dimensions of reflection. The students “experienced” Corfu by participating in an international tourism conference, stayed on a yacht, went on various tours, met with tourism industry representatives and reflected their experiences in a collaborative photo story book.

Findings – Generation Z seemed to have the ability to discern the environment and decipher the role tourism plays. Their critical impressions of place in terms of infrastructure, sustainability, beauty, etc., force a rethink of traditional tourist typologies. It is necessary to reconsider the categorizations of tourism, challenging the need for tourism marketers to encapsulate experiences as both a single, yet multi-varied segment. What remains crucial is a deeper comprehension of this generation through their consumption patterns in relation to the various stakeholders of tourism.

Originality/value – This paper documents an engagement of self through experience as part of the “experience.” Hence, the transformative experiences of place reflections as opposed to linear post-trip representations of experience may be insightful for tourism practitioners dealing with a tourism of the future.

Keywords Critical reflection, Experiential learning, Generation Z, Educational tourism, Transformative experience

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The sense of place and the multi-sensory tourist experience cannot be understated (Crouch et al., 2001; Franklin and Crang, 2001; Bærenholdt et al., 2004). Doreen Massey (1993, p. 146) underscores a “global sense of place” in which one “retain[s] appreciation, and an understanding of the importance, of the uniqueness, of place while insisting always on that other side of the coin, the necessary interdependence of any place with others.” The connections between place and other are a crucial characteristic of the global citizen and could consequently be seen as transformative learning.

Study abroad trips are often described as “life-transforming experiences” that increase cross-cultural understanding by immersing students in different cultures (Crabtree, 2008). In fact, “educational travel […] can serve to create a transformative educative experience where students reconsider and reshape fundamental issues from a global perspective” (Tarrant et al., 2011, p. 151). What evolves is a kind of active learning in which students develop their own “values, beliefs, behaviors, skills, insights, and particularly one’s overall disposition to critical and self-reflection” (Hanson, 2010, p. 81). The students ask transformative, larger-than-life questions to renegotiate their own identities, create their own self-understanding and belonging by reimagining a global community through encounters of diversity and struggle (Pashby, 2008; Stoner et al., 2014).
Much has been written about the cultivation of personal growth, personal development, confidence, lifelong learning, intercultural competences, life skills through experiential learning theory (Kolb et al., 2001), experiential learning through fieldtrips (Peterson et al., 2007) and global citizenship (Stoner et al., 2014). Yet, little has been written about the transformative tourist experience of such travel through out-of-classroom experience as a “developmentally powerful experience” (Kuh, 1995, p. 141). Stoner et al. (2014) reiterated that experientially based, short-term educational travel programs provide a learning site for students to reflect on and reframe issues global in nature, fostering transformative experiences that may lead to a shift in perspective, awareness and worldview. This can be achieved by exposing students to new cultures, places and learning environments (Perry et al., 2012), and provide at the same time, “disorienting dilemmas” necessary to trigger perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978).

Experiential travel in the form of educational travel has been embedded into the history of human traveling, notably from the Grand Tour all the way to ERASMUS university partnerships and exchanges. This paper positions experience as an immersive process that was documented through student reflections of place involving the intricacies of embodied learning through experiential mobility. If “experience” can be exemplified as method, then it can also be considered as co-creation of knowledge using multi-modal and experiential methodologies that are encapsulated in and through everyday practice.

This study is framed through situational positionalities and placed movements of the tourist, the non-tourist and more specifically, students of Generation Z engaged in holistic, educational experiences. It goes beyond the mere post-destination dissemination of experience made easily accessible by tools such as Instagram. As much as the “social” in social media is important in terms of connectivity, self-worth and reputation, what is seminal here is the engagement of self through experience and the reflection of experiences as part of the “experience.” Hence, the transformative experiences of reflection in situ as opposed to a linear post-trip representation of experience may be insightful for tourism practitioners dealing with a tourism of the future.

This paper explores a framework by way of a student fieldtrip as a medium of expression for situated learning, involving a case study of tourism students learning critical tourism through sensual and haptic dimensions of reflection. It documents a module entitled “Critical perspectives on tourism” at Karlshochschule International University in Germany in which a particular component was conducted as a fieldtrip in Corfu, Greece. Included as part of this fieldtrip was participation at the “5th Corfu Symposium on Marketing and Managing Places” as conference delegates, organized by the Institute of Place Management (IPM) at Manchester Metropolitan University. The students experienced Corfu by participating in an international tourism conference, stayed on a yacht, went on various tours, met with tourism industry representatives and reflected their experiences in a collaborative photo story book. The end result, rather than being a top-down, academic assessment of learning outcomes, was a shared resource of reflections fostering collaborative and transformative learning.

Framing transformative experience

The adjective “seamless” is often used to describe the modern process of travel (Verhoef et al., 2015), yet little is discussed about the disruptive travel episode with Otherness, a kind of “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000) through which a person’s existing habit of mind precipitates reflective reformulations to become more justifiable and dependable through encounters. Hence, the actions, intentions and experiences of the traveler and actual place engagement become crucial dimensions that drive transformative learning processes. While experiences of place and encounter are indeed key components to the transformative learning that challenges a student’s views and perspectives, the experience must be coupled with integrating circumstances whereby students begin to search consciously and unconsciously for the missing pieces (Clark and Wilson, 1991).

Morgan (2010) utilized van Gennep’s (2013) very powerful metaphor of “rites of passage” as transformation through liminal encounter with Otherness and applied it to educational travel in which the traveler changes during travel from “ordinary resident” to “traveler (encountering Otherness)” and finally “transformed home comer” (p. 252). Yet, van Gennep’s original
Anthropological treatise, *Les Rites de passage*, was written in 1909, from the perspectives of a different kind of traveler on ethnographic business. While the “transformed home comer” is important to highlight transformation, what needs to be questioned is the nature of the modern-day traveler after a century; if the frequency of travel, new travel technologies, stunning mobile visualization and place marketing representation, already situate the traveler as a kind of “transformed home comer” before the commencement of any journey. The cyclical reinforcement and continual perpetuation of this otherwise sound concept need to be considered in dealing with the future of tourism. It is necessary to go beyond the widely spoken about tourist gaze (Urry, 2002) of quenching the exotic quest to reposition the more mundane, everyday elements in understanding the rituals of modern, young travelers.

Abrams (1997) referenced a “more-than-human” world of nature and landscape in facilitating transformation through engendering intimate engagement across various spaces. Educational travel employs these spaces by creating a “pedagogy of travel” with the educated traveler through observation, recording, interpreting and sharing of experiences. A qualitative study conducted by Mouton (2002) of experiential learning concluded that self-directed learning, combined with reflection and experience, led to greater meaning and transformation. The transformative potential of traveling and reflecting on the travel as part of the experience are engagements that arise as a result of critical reflection through reshaping, reforming and reimagining perspectives. Hence, what occurs between experiences and pedagogies are influenced by the theoretical underpinnings of critical reflection in which students begin to make meaning out of their experiences and adjust their frames of reference (Moore, 2005).

By engaging students in critical reflection and discussion, it becomes possible to foster a shift in perspective where students become “critically aware of how and why their assumptions have come to constrain the way they perceive, understand, and feel about their world” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167). What is created is transformation based on the integrative combination of educative experiences, critical reflections and sound pedagogies. Gmelch (1997) analyzed the journals of overseas students and discovered that students learned more through travel than in academic experiences. Thus, journaling and reflection constituted learning, even if they are not commonly thought of as knowledge.

Küpers and Wee (2018, p. 380) explored the idea of “refl(a)ction” as a “constructive illumination of what is experienced (embodied reflection in action) and reconstructively, what has been experienced (embodied reflection on action)” in the creation of meaning through the entanglement of practices and practitioners. What is most crucial about such entanglements in the sharing of reflections is their contribution to the learning process based on positionalities and reflexivities that could foster critical engagement and creative learning (Harris et al., 2007). Disruption occurs at the real and imaginative realms, coercing different ways of thinking. Yet at the same time, it provides agency in empowering young people and creating transformative experiences in tourism as a reflexive part of everyday life.

A case of (and for) Generation Z

It is only recently that we started attributing certain characteristics to Generation Z, a cohort born in the mid-90s, such as their preferences for convenience, security and comfort, their propensity for quality and the most obvious being their technological prowess in terms of virtual connectivities (Scholz, 2014; Turner, 2015). These traits lend themselves as factors that govern consumer behavior – a paradigm shift for the tourism industry. Yet, putting these into tourism perspectives and consumer behavior is a demand that remains increasingly challenging. It is important to understand Generation Z as an intrinsic relationship embedded within our contemporary social fabric as we seek to understand new ways of tourist consumption and co-production (Sonnenburg and Wee, 2016). Rather than typologize Generation Z as a rigid, analyzable form of consumer behavior, this paper serves to locate the reflections of Generation Z that relate the experiences of tourism and self in relation to meaning-making in place through various stakeholder involvement. It is about moving beyond the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) into transformational experiences in which students recount their lived experiences in terms of tourist consumption, industry networking and academic input.
Scholz’s (2014) monograph on “Generation Z” described the condition of “Ohnmacht,” a kind of void based on uncertainty and powerlessness in a worldly order characterized by crises involving the political, financial, nuclear, environmental, terror and humanitarian. Largely aided by media and new technologies, there seemed to be a disjuncture between the perfect lifestyle that premised the ultimate consumption of ease and convenience (products, services, education, etc.) alongside mediated catastrophes. What needs to be understood in a deeper way is the culmination of insecurity, distrust, pessimistic world views and their relationship to travel consumption, enjoyment and quality of life. This is especially pertinent as time spent on leisure and tourism has become an essential part of the quality of life for many people in the developed world (Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter, 2003).

What has become a priority in this day and age is the rise of a group of young people who have considerable experience traveling to many places despite (or because of) their age and their thirst for exploring new destinations. Yet at the same time, this is a group which is difficult to grasp in terms of consumer culture and tourist behavior. One thing is for certain, this group of Generation Z are experienced in travel and have the propensity to travel, not only by the fact that they have traveled to many places and have a desire to do so, but they are also acquainted with tourism discourses through the distributions of experience represented in traditional tourist brochures and the proliferation of Instagram pleasures over social media. The forces of digitalization are less about the increasing use of technologies, but how they are conceptualized in place (as opposed to virtually) by a budding tourist segment.

While the “first” generation of experiences in the “90s” (Pine and Gilmore, 1998) emphasized the pleasure pursuit in fun and entertainment, the “second” generation experiences based on a rather paradoxical combination of both individuality (and individualization) and co-creation seem to have arisen, upholding values of selfhood incorporating social and cultural values of a modern existence and consumption (Boswijk et al., 2005). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argue for a “co-creation experience” in the “next practice” or “second generation” experience economy as the basis for value in the future of innovation. This next generational construct which they have aptly suggested seems to flow with Generation Z, allowing novel ways of consumption not in terms of products and services, but reflective, co-creational experiences. How does the co-creation of experiences fit into the making of transformative experience for the future of tourism?

Method and study design

The module “Critical Perspectives on Tourism” was designed around the idea of learning tourism through tourism by extending the space of the classroom into the world. It sought to relate business ethics alongside sustainability in tourism by looking at new economies and products of tourist consumption. This included using critical methodologies in tourism research to understand the impacts of the changing cultural, political and physical landscape. A fieldtrip was always incorporated into the content.

As a lecturer of this module, I was very fortunate to take ten Bachelor students on the fieldtrip to Corfu, and combined this with the “5th Corfu Symposium on Managing and Marketing Places” based on the thematic “Connecting places: visions of utopic or dystopia.” The conference objective was to explore the connections between places and the people who use and inhabit them, through both real and virtual partnerships and networks alongside utopian and dystopian visions associated with place practices. The thematic connection between the module and the conference could not have been more in sync.

The assessment of the module comprised of what is known as a “learner’s portfolio” in which students select a series of written assignments and demonstrate learning progress and level of proficiency in a particular area at a given point in time. Students assume responsibility for their own learning process and demonstrate that they have achieved the qualification objectives set out in the module description. The learner’s portfolio was integrated into a series of three reflections based on “classes” that consisted of four blocks.

The first block comprised of theoretical inputs gravitating toward the thematic of sustainability and critical engagement. This was followed by the assignment of a task in which students needed to
investigate diverse tourism discourses on the island destination of Corfu, to be presented in the next class. The second block was a workshop about tourism in Greece where trends and issues in Greek tourism (e.g. seasonality, tourist tax, mature island destinations and juvenile parties) were contextualized. This was combined with collaborative inputs from the students as they presented their "secondary research" on Corfu and discussed what their aims were. This became the subject of the first reflection: a preliminary (pre-trip) research into the identification of a tourism issue.

The third block was in situ: a week in Corfu, pre-tourist season. The students attended the conference in the day including organized tours and networking sessions, and in the evenings, they reflected on their experiences on board two yachts in which we were fortunate enough to be sponsored. The second reflection was based directly on the experiences of the trip and its relevance to the first reflection. The students were tasked with analyzing the spaces they selected and reflected their observations. They also had to describe their favorite presentations, as well as, how some of the presentations related to their own personal research on the island.

The final block was back at the university in Germany in which learning experiences on Corfu were shared and put into perspective to reflect the learning outcomes of the module. How did experiences on Corfu contribute to tourism issues, personal research and the conference inputs in meaningful ways? The final reflection based on personal feelings, images, thoughts and insights was collected and later condensed into a volume so that all participants would have an old-school, tangible piece of memory of their university experience in the form of a photo book entitled "Once upon a tour in Corfu."

Reflections of transformative experience

The students approached their projects through explorative and observational method, as well as, taking photographs, videos and mobile encounters by connecting with locals, tourists and official representatives. At the conference, it felt as if the students were immersed, not only through the conference, but also running alongside it, in parallel, striving to understand how the tourism academy and industry converged over various topics and issues. The following are four selected snippets (left intentionally in original, uncorrected format) documenting the students’ experience of place, with pseudonyms used instead of their real names.

JS wrote on a topic about wasps as tourist hazard that triggered a rather "dystopic" response from the conference delegates:

If (as funny as it might sound to some) there are more and more wasps coming to Corfu each year, then tourism changes [...] Change is also one reason why online reviews (I would say, another trend) become more and more powerful. Experiences are shaped accordingly to the very individual consumption of a destination’s features. Some keep their experiences to themselves, complain at the responsible person or tell their friends and families. More people tend to write online reviews to share their experiences with a wider audience. By writing online reviews, one influences the expectations of others. He/She can even eliminate the desire of purchasing a specific product or traveling to a specific place. The travel decision-making process therefore is really facing a new area, where social media platforms and actual, same as fake reviews make an enormous difference.

Ellagee wrote on Tripadvisor: I love the Ionian Islands but do tend to avoid later in the summer due to past experiences with wasps. Getting stung several times when just snoozing on the beach and not being able to even have a drink outside ruined our “relaxing” holiday. I believe that some years are worse than others, due to weather or fruit crops? Not completely sure. If you can I’d change islands and go to one of the less green islands going south such as Rhodes, Crete and Kos etc. for September hols. the weather is better too. It might sound drastic to some but our holidays are so important and special to us. Sorry for being so honest with my response and I hope you all gave a lovely wasp free holiday.


Unfortunately, I was quite frustrated when finding out that Corfu and many delegates from the conference have not yet understood this so to say trend and its impact. However, social media is so much more than just reviews. Social Media is a great way of marketing and communicating products, places and cultures. I think the world is ready for the so-called next generation to enter the job market and bring fresh knowledge and creative ideas into businesses and organizations.
JS was passionate about the wasp problem on the island and the need to address this through preventive methods. Unfortunately, she felt scoffed at by industry representatives who thought her point to be overly trivial. What they failed to realize was that it was less about the existence of wasps on Corfu, but discourses of wasps on Corfu, on social media, which called into question the representation of place, especially to a Generation Z of social media savvy people. She observed the failure of “older” generations to understand not so much the complexity of social media, but the simplicity of how simple feedback channels in the form of reviews may challenge an entire marketing paradigm.

JT contemplated another kind of critical disjuncture:

Destination Marketing of Corfu focuses on its stunning and historical buildings rather than on the opportunities of celebrating the party of your life. Nevertheless, the village of Kavos still has some major reputation problems which eventually could be addressed by changing their marketing strategy in regard to the wanted prospective British tourist. Then again, this is not as easy since it’s connected to the current infrastructure and stakeholders of the place. While local families of Kavos state that they still want British tourists to come, they’re referring to the older ones and not the young adults, club and bar owners are supposedly perfectly fine with the current situation since they are the ones gaining the highest profit. Also, the politicians seem to be between the fronts wanting to calm the local citizens, while enhancing the tourism figures and keeping a good relationship to entrepreneurs and Great Britain. Moreover, social issues are involved as well when Greek locals are in disdain regarding the tourists behavior during high season whereas in low season Kavos has the other extreme called emptiness. Furthermore, it is questionable how those things happening in Greece will influence the Island Tourism in the Mediterranean in general and how this will affect future processes of dealing with “misbehaving” tourists.

 [...] one could also encounter utopia with a fraction of dystopia and vice versa. This is because every issue which occurs in life cannot be perceived to be either black or white, since there are so many shades of grey. Furthermore, I believe a utopic destination can transform into the embodied vision of dystopia within seconds depending on what is happening at the destination and what the individual perceives to be dystopic. Meaning, this is a question of subjectivity [...] Do tourists even consider the impact their actions have and do they actually realize the meaning of their presence at a destination at a bigger scale or on a higher level? [T]here are so many facets to this concept than just the basic perception of utopia and dystopia and I get the feeling that most tourists and people working in tourism are not aware of that.

What was crucial for JT was an active, social crisis dealing with tourist behavior as both the cause of the problems and the problem itself. This brings to mind the work of Hazel Andrews’s (2005) rich ethnographic account of the construction of the British tourist subject in terms of national and gendered identities in the making of embodied experience in Mallorca. An interesting observation arose from these mature and relevant insights: the “culprits” were indeed Generation Z tourists, yet JT (also Generation Z) was in essence revealing an underlying trait in both herself and her cohort that varied in polar opposites in terms of tourist consumption. What surfaced here were contrasting ideologies, utopian visions cloaked in dystopian practices, of tourism stakeholders unable to speak a common language.

RM was interested in the “infrastructure” of the island, but specifically pertaining to waste management:

I would like to come back to my personal impressions on the spot and that for me the waste actually is a problem on Corfu. Nevertheless, I would argue that it is less a problem in terms of tourism, but much more a problem caused by the island itself, due to inadequate infrastructure. In spite of everything, it must be said that it is a general island problem and that there are places that are far worse affected by waste issues, for instance by thinking at some threshold or developing countries. In addition, it is ultimately a matter of perception and is, so to speak, in the eye of the viewer or the tourist, how the place is actually perceived.

Ultimately, the consumer decides whether it is a serious problem or not [...] In fact, it is the case that how visitors perceive the place depend on a few personal and social factors, such as “needs, desires and motives, personality, personal and economic circumstances and social and cultural influences” (Middleton et al., 2009, pp. 80-2): [...] it is up to the viewer, in other words, to the tourist whether he chooses the place as a destination or return to it as destination again. With regard to the waste problem, however, the question arises in what direction the place will develop, “Utopia” or “Dystopia”.


The question is whether the place loses its value through the waste or still remains “utopian” for tourism. For this reason, place management has to be carried out by the various responsible stakeholders in order to prevent “Utopias” from becoming “Dystopias” or at least maintaining a certain balance.

RM’s reference point were the bags of trash that were piled up on the sides of roads and in front of beaches. There was a system in place, evidenced by bright, blue trash bags, but somehow the disposal mechanism was short of the final stage. RM went back to the conference thematic to ponder about her case on waste management, if Utopia would disappear in the long run or was it already dystopic? Or what if one person’s Utopia was really another person’s Dystopia?

For many years, AR has visited her mother, working in the tourism industry on Corfu island and felt a deep connection with Corfu. Yet, she pondered over the role of the people who have always lived on the island and their relationship to tourists:

[…] one-way streets, deep holes in the roads, narrow roads and hardly no road signs show, that there has not much been made to improve the road conditions and system on the island Corfu. Even though, these roads are still being used for tourism reasons. In my opinion, driving with big buses full of tourists on roads like these and around narrow curves is like trying to make the impossible possible. Nevertheless, attending the conference also gave me another new perspective to look at the road conditions: The perspective of the locals from the island. I recognised that especially the locals are suffering from the bad established road system. They are the ones who have to handle big buses driving through their village and finally being stuck maybe directly in front of their house. For instance, while we were stuck with the bus from the conference in the small village, a local man came outside his house and tried to help the bus driver out of his helpless situation. However, we were stuck there in spring time, but how annoying must it be for locals if this happens several times in peak season in front of their houses? And how do tourists feel when they start their holidays being overwhelmed by the road conditions?

I began to ask myself about how often do locals actually get included into the planning of tourism destinations. […] I linked this thought to one of our learning objectives and agreed to the point that we have to question socially responsible frameworks in tourism in order to consider the making of sustainable communities. We can see tourism as a social force, which is able to lead to a transformation of places. Finally, we need to think about sustainability for locals. In my opinion, the three terms: residents inclusion, city image and tourism industry; are very deeply connected. I would even say that they rely on each other for a positive outcome […].

AR was concerned about the physical state of the island in terms of transportation infrastructure and at the same time, she saw this as a marginalization of local communities. She felt the need for a kind of social activism bearing different voices, juxtaposing her identity role, “feeling like a local” as she has been frequenting Corfu since she was a child, with her role as a “tourist” and the need to be responsible while living among the residents and finally her role as a tourism academic who was critical of tourism development on the island.

Discussion

In less than a week on Corfu (and a lot more secondary research), the students identified pertinent issues that need to be addressed. Not only did they underline the need to tackle some major challenges within the specific place, the reflections pointed to a larger question of the future: if all the stakeholders on the island may be able to find common space and time for dialogue and action. The students’ disillusionment with tourism practices, tourism development and tourism policies became more evident as the trip progressed. The ideal worlds which they have read about in text books seemed to collapse as they could not comprehend the simplest of tasks in terms of tourism regulation. Indeed, there was a kind of idealism which the students expressed at first, having been to an academic conference for the first time, full of hope and energy, and later disrupted when faced with a sad realism of what the tourism academy and industry were like.

Perhaps, it had less to do with a disenchantment of the events within the trip per say, but a learning experience of being in the real world dealing with the management of expectations. After all, relationship building is based on antagonisms and disjuncture became a part of the students’ experiences. “[B]y undertaking an actual journey involving a profound engagement […] , a person may experience a degree of disruption to their subjective orientation to the world (worldview or
inner consciousness) sufficient to engender transformative learning” (Morgan, 2010, p. 249). These challenges could not be accommodated within the existing worldview, leading to a situation of “cognitive dissonance” and “decentration” that stimulated the remaking of new and more adequate frames of reference; that is, a transformation of consciousness (Morgan, 2010). Hence, the “disruption” of routine contributed to the stimulation of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter, 2003) in which the “habits of the mind” (Mezirow, 2000) created reflexive reformulations that enhanced experiential travel in deep and meaningful ways.

It became apparent that the students were “[…] a kind of ‘displaced’ people informed by an everyday cultural practice through which the work of the imagination is transformed” (Loutfy et al., 2019, p. 153). What emerged was a transformative experience that was not only structured alongside the “exotic” nature of experience, but everyday experiences in which the familiar was made, both contextually and experientially, unfamiliar. Woodside (2010, p. 531) reiterated, “Possibly any engagement in action – students or consumers talking about a problem, getting up, and moving toward accomplishing some objective – represents a rudimentary story that is inherently more appealing than listening to someone else talking.” What emerged was a compilation of reflections from student perspectives, creating a body of experiences. Reflections with atmosphere (Edensor, 2015) and reflections that were fragmented (Ash and Anderson, 2015) evolved and flowed as they were co-constructed across time and space. These reflections became embodied in that they not only conveyed a particular kind of feeling for the reader of the reflections, but also for the writers as well.

Conclusion

The students were transformed through the experience of reflecting as they told stories of practice These are illustrated in a more lucid way in the next section. that provided insights that encouraged reflection, learning and reaching new thresholds of understanding (Dredge and Jenkins, 2011). The power of critical reflection in tourism education cannot be underestimated since it contributes to the co-creation of values, shared learning and co-production of future actions. Like in Michael Ende’s (1984) world, Momo walked backwards in order to go forward. It was clear that the students walked across different spaces, in different ways, through different times, even though their places of accommodation and activities were predominantly the same. They explored various phenomena and investigated actual or possible conflicts and forms of collaborations involving varying competencies in chosen arenas. Yet, they all possessed different feelings as seen from their reflections.

The students’ critical reflections of experiences were reformulated through various perspectives on social change and sustainabilities. Beyond that, they also questioned their lived experiences, exploring self through other, and maybe even the other through the self. This is aligned with Stoner et al. (2014, p. 159) when they emphasized that “[i]n order to truly facilitate the transformative experience necessary to cause a real and lasting reformation of social responsibility and civic engagement, students’ experiences must be married with a process of critical reflection.” What was seminal here was not so much the prevalence of transformational experiences, but how transformational experiences translated into critical reflections that could be important for tourism academia and industry in the future.

It seemed that the young people of Generation Z have the ability to discern and dissect the environment at large to decipher the role tourism plays. One cannot be sure they will emerge to become an LOHAS (a demographic defining a market segment oriented toward “Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability”) type traveler, for example, but what is certain is that the impressions, especially the first impressions, of how a place is in terms of infrastructure, sustainability, beauty, etc., do matter in a substantial way. It is no surprise that consumer behavior and the study of the tourist is what the modern business of leisure wants to ascertain. Yet the young tourists now have the ability to swap, morph, appear and disappear or in short, do what one does best in everyday life while being connected to real and virtual communities and networks. Perhaps, the biggest insight gained from this paper is that people research needs to replace the focus on consumer behavior and move into understanding people’s values, needs and desires instead. Hence, Generation Z is not utilized here for the sake of creating typologies, but to demonstrate the
current existence of a new, hard-to-pinpoint consumer group that is an upcoming force in tourism, with a focus on experiencing spaces incorporating everyday elements.

The dichotomies of tourism and tourist typologies (Cohen, 1979; Wickens, 2002; McKercher and Du Cros, 2003; Uriely, 2005) need to be revisited because what seems to be here to stay is a hotchpotch of varying roles during a tourist journey. It is necessary to consider the blurring of categorizations, of what constitutes XYZ-tourism, because cultural tourism, dark tourism, gastronomic tourism, beach tourism and educational tourism may all be a part of the same trip. How could tourism marketers encapsulate these as a single, yet multi-varied segment? Better still, what might be some combined core values embodied by Generation Z that might contribute to understanding their preferences for tourism consumption? That being said, as much as it is important to comprehend some characteristics of this generation, what is more crucial is to understand their consumption patterns in relation to the various stakeholders of tourism, or more succinctly, the direct relationship between the young tourists of today, tourism providers and local communities, and their implications toward a tourism of tomorrow.

References


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Learning to face global food challenges through tourism experiences

Giovanna Bertella and Benjamin Vidmar

1. Introduction

This study presents and discusses a futuristic scenario about food, tourism and sustainability. As was highlighted by Luks (2014), attempts to promote sustainability might need not only measurements and models but also engaging narratives. The goal of this study is to provide such a narrative. This is in line with the suggestions of Bina et al. (2017) in their review of fiction in relation to the global goals identified in the European policy since the development of the “2007 Green Paper” on research areas. Imagining the future through fiction can be useful for reflecting on and framing global challenges; consequently, it can be determinative in the search for feasible solutions and the consideration of their effects.

This study builds on two reflections. The first is the key role of food in the United Nations (UN) “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (United Nations, 2015). Food is relevant to Sustainable Development Goal 1, which is about ending poverty, and Goal 3, which deals with health. Moreover, it is the focus of Goal 2: “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” (United Nations, 2015, p. 14). Other aspects of this goal include ensuring food access, developing sustainable food production systems and resilient agricultural practices, strengthening the capacity for adaptation to climate change and extreme weather, maintaining the genetic diversity of food sources and increasing investment and international cooperation.

The second reflection on which this study builds relates to two trends identified by Yeoman and McMahon-Beatte (2016). They concern the future of food tourism: food tourism as political
capital and a visionary state. Food production and tourism have been important elements of many recent public policies and strategies because of their potential to create economic prosperity, to generate jobs opportunities and to develop specific geographical areas that are typically rural. The interrelation of food production and tourism activities has important political implications and can be viewed as a type of utopian vision. The latter was described by Yeoman and McMahon-Beatte (2016) as a shared project through which communities, producers, tourists and political groups shape a future on the basis of ideologies such as localism, authenticity and activism against globalisation.

On the basis of these reflections, this study poses the question: How will the food tourism experiences of the future contribute to the alleviation and subsequent eradication of hunger and malnutrition? It develops a futuristic scenario about the role of food tourism experiences in the management of the food-related challenges identified by the UN. This scenario can be viewed as a normative scenario developed on the basis of the authors’ hopes about a preferred future. The study elaborates on the transformative potential of tourism experiences, specifically one type of educational tourism experience: the Grand Tour. This educational tourism experience is presented in the next section, together with the challenges identified in the scholarly literature related to food and food tourism. The main source of inspiration for the development of the futuristic scenario, a factual company located in the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard, Norway, is described. Its adoption of elements of entrepreneurship, more specifically ecopreneurship is analysed. The paper then presents the futuristic scenario with a discussion on potential problems. The conclusion reflects on food tourism experiences and their transformative potential for overcoming the challenges of imagining and, even more, implementing the changes needed for a better future.

2. Educational potential and food tourism challenges

2.1 Educational potential of tourism experiences

Several scholars have argued that tourism experiences might not only increase knowledge but also influence attitudes and values. In other words, tourism experiences can be transformative, i.e. contributing to the realisation of the ideal person who a tourist truly wants to be (Morgan, 2010; Coghlan and Gooch, 2011; Falk et al., 2012; Pine and Gilmore, 2013; Stone and Petrick, 2013). The Grand Tour is an example of such forms of educational tourism. The Grand Tour is the travel undertaken by upper class European youths in the seventieth and eighteenth centuries as part of their education (Towner, 1985). Such travel had the aim of exposing the European elite to various aspects of European culture. It was characterised by a romantic view of urban and rural landscapes, including attractions such as classical antiquities, renaissance treasures, picturesque scenery and wild nature. The major destinations were France, Switzerland and Italy. Towner (1985) has argued that many features of the Grand Tour can be useful for understanding today’s tourism. It can be added that the Grand Tour can also be useful for imagining future tourism.

Inspired by the core idea of this form of tourism, this study reflects on the role of food tourism in the development of solutions for the urgent food-related challenges.

2.2 Food tourism challenges in theory and practice

Ellis et al. (2018) review the literature contributions about food tourism from 1994 to 2017 commenting on the various understandings and perspectives. In the literature, food tourism is understood as a sensory and cultural experience for tourists who are motivated by an interest in food, as well as an element of a destination’s offer, often in relation to the authenticity of a place. Ellis et al. (2018) conclude that the management of food tourism needs to adopt an approach that combines the experiential aspect of such form of tourism as well as issues relevant to sustainable food production and consumption.

De Jong et al. (2018) review the literature about food tourism across disciplines and, in line with Ellis et al. (2018), note that food tourism tends to be investigated and discussed in relation to the issues surrounding regional development, localism and authentic experiences.
Moreover, De Jong et al. (2018) highlight a lack of engagement in critical approaches, including sustainability. Based on both reviews and as observed by Higgins-Desbiolles (2010), the reflection about the role of food tourism in an increasingly vulnerable and stressed environment and its possible re-orientation towards alternative systems of production and consumption are very limited.

A similar situation has been noted regarding the traditional profile of the television shows, films and documentaries dealing with food. This phenomenon has become relevant for food tourism through the destination branding and cooking classes for tourists (Stewart et al., 2008; Lindenfeld, 2010). It has been noted that celebrity chefs can be strong influencers. Food shows often fail to represent the problematic aspects of the food system; instead, they support the commodification and fetishization of food (Caraher et al., 2000; Lindenfeld, 2010). Only recently has a shift occurred in food documentaries. Several films, e.g. Food Inc., have encouraged consumers to act as political agents and to make more sustainable choices (Lindenfeld, 2010). Such a shift is also desirable in the food tourism scholarly literature; however, this has not yet occurred.

Moskwa et al. (2015) have noted that few practitioners engage in activities that support food justice and sustainability. They referred to “pioneers”, often lifestyle entrepreneurs, who are engaged in and develop offerings based on sustainable practices that respect the environment and contribute to the wellbeing of their communities. They suggest that food can be an important medium for change and that food tourism should be reconsidered in these terms.

Based on these considerations about the limitations of food tourism theory and practice and in accord with potentials presented in Section 2.1, this study understands food tourism as an educational experience potentially relevant to sustainability. Thus, the intended contribution is both in relation to the scholarly literature and the practice of food tourism.

Thinking about the future of tourism, Wright (2018) explores animal cloning in luxury food tourism. He views such technology as a possible path to meet the needs and desires of future societies. He imagines how a luxury restaurant might be in 2070. In this futuristic scenario, tourists can pre-order dishes that will be prepared using cloned animals that have been extinct in the wild for decades, with the result of exclusive unforgettable tasty experiences.

While Wright’s study concerns wealthy tourists and their desires for food experiences, this study concerns how tourism experiences might contribute to food-related sustainable goals. The focus is on plant-based food because vegetarianism and meat reduction are the diets that can contribute the most to sustainability in terms of the reduction of CO2-emissions, acidification, land use and biodiversity damage (Martin and Brandão, 2017).

The following section presents the case of a factual company. It provides an example of an increased engagement in food tourism based on sustainability, especially the production of safe, fresh and nutritional food. Such a company constitutes the main source of inspiration for developing a scenario about the food tourism experience of the future.

3. Re-thinking food tourism: Arctic veggies and food ecopreneurship

3.1 Polar Permaculture Solutions

The Norwegian town of Longyearbyen is located in the main island in the Svalbard archipelago (78°N). Together with the small settlement of Ny-Ålesund, it has 2,310 inhabitants (SSB, 2018). Longyearbyen is home to Polar Permaculture Solutions, founded in 2015 by a chef from Ohio. The company uses a geodesic dome greenhouse, a microgreens laboratory and sustainable composting systems. It is the only local producer of fresh foods, such as organic microgreens, lettuce, herbs and sprouts, on Svalbard. The company’s vision is articulated in four points (www.polarpermaculture.com):

1. nourish our community: the company provides fresh food to local stores, hotels, restaurants and private residences;
2. create local resources: the company reduces imports to a minimum and strives to reclaim the island’s self-sufficient power;
3. sustain a circular economy: the company uses composting red worms to break down and repurpose waste into a natural fertilizer, avoiding other methods such as the waste dumping directly into the sea or flown to Sweden for incineration; and

4. build global solutions: the company is a living example that innovative agriculture technology and systems can be successfully applied everywhere in the world.

With 20 years of international experience as a chef, the Polar Permaculture Solutions founder first visited Svalbard in 2007. After some years as the head chef at the local pub, he considered growing fresh greens. He intended to create a circular economy in which biological waste from food production could be captured and converted into heat, electricity and fertilizer that could be used to grow more food.

Through his tenacity and enthusiasm, his innovative ideas took shape, and in 2015, Polar Permaculture Solutions was established. Financial support was provided by state-owned Innovation Norway and the Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund for the initial phases of the project. Additional support will be provided for future development, including the scaling up of the reuse of waste to include all of Longyearbyen.

In the meanwhile, two important projects have begun. In 2015, the company added two tourism products: volunteer tourism and guided tours. In both cases, the experiences have so far been very positive. Many people have shown interest in working for or visiting and learning more about permaculture in general and the company in particular. This is evident from the TripAdvisor reviews: 30 out of 33 reviews were excellent. The comments have included: “the tour offers a fascinating insight into a project with exceptionally far reaching [sic.] implications if it becomes a viable and sustainable production site”; “if you are interested in permaculture, individual independent agriculture, organic and healthy food, you should certainly visit the place”; and “[the project] seems to be particularly important in this town, and I feel it is also important also [sic.] globally”.

Since 2016, Polar Permaculture Solutions has led a local school project in which the children learn to grow vegetables and to compost waste. The Polar Permaculture Solutions founder is one of the stewards of the Permaculture Collaborative Laboratory, an international network for the promotion of sustainable and healthy food practices around the world.

3.2 Polar Permaculture Solutions thorough an entrepreneurship lens

The Polar Permaculture Solutions case can be analysed by applying the idea of islands as innovation laboratories. It must be noted that in the human imagination, islands are often sites of fascination, as well as territories and metaphors (Baldacchino, 2013). Interestingly, among the descriptions of islands in the literature are “utopian and dystopian”, “tourist meccas” and “ecological refugia” (Stratford, 2003, p. 495).

In his article “Islands as novelty sites”, Godfrey Baldacchino made a compelling case for islands as “the quintessential sites for experimentation” to facilitate the exploration of new ideas. According to this view, islands can deliver “treasures”, such as “powerful messages, bearing the fullness of new and vital noises” (Baldacchino, 2007, pp. 170–71). Moreover, islands can be laboratories for developing solutions to global challenges, and these solutions can be transferred to other locations for large-scale implementation (Greenhough, 2006; Baldacchino, 2005; Kelman et al., 2015).

The latter consideration can be considered in relation to the potential removal of various constraints that limit or prevent possible societal change (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006; Calás et al., 2009; Rindova et al., 2009; Haugh and Talwar, 2016). Dey and Mason (2018) have argued that some of the more difficult problems in entrepreneurship are the mental constructions based on limited shared narratives and images of how things are and how they could be. Overcoming such mental limitations can be empowering by enabling the envisioning of alternative realities, including sustainable solutions to urgent problems (Shepherd and Patzelt, 2011).

Narratives can be liberating. The story of this Svalbard company can inspire approaches to food production to facilitate the achievement of the UN sustainability goals. Specifically, the
Polar Permaculture Solutions founder can be considered an ecopreneur, i.e. an entrepreneur who develops a new business based on sustainability principles (Schaltegger, 2002; Kirkwood and Walton, 2010). He exhibits several of the ecopreneurial characteristics identified in the literature. They are a strong commitment to specific idealistic values, an inner tension between making profits and acting in a “green” way and relatively strong relationships with the external environment (Walley and Taylor, 2002; Santini, 2017). Linnanen (2005) has described ecopreneurs as having an innate openness to social and ecological responsibilities and, ultimately, being relevant social change actors. These qualities apply to the Polar Permaculture Solutions founder and can be the inspiration for imagining a futuristic scenario.

4. Imagining the future: food tourism in the coming decades

4.1 The construction of the fictional scenario

This study relies on the use of creativity as a potentially fruitful way to think and to reflect (Richardson and St Pierre, 2005). As was briefly mentioned in the introduction, fiction as a mode of inquiry can be useful for deep explorations of phenomena. It is an engaging way to stimulate the imagination and critical thinking (Eisner, 1997; Banks and Banks, 1998; Phillimore and Goodson, 2004; Wilson and Hollinshead, 2015; Bina et al., 2017).

Moreover, fiction can facilitate the engagement of non-academics in academic projects. This is an important aspect of the collaboration of the two authors of this paper (an academician and a practitioner, the Polar Permaculture Solutions founder). Such collaboration, characterised by a reciprocal respect for each other’s expertise and a genuine concern for food-related issues, has been essential to developing and discussing the future scenario.

The process of developing a scenario about the future of food tourism followed some central ideas about scenario thinking and in particular normative scenario development, and is illustrated in Table I (Van Notten et al., 2003; Andreescu et al., 2013; Robertson and Yeoman, 2014; Yeoman and Postma, 2014).

The approach used in the scenario process design leaned strongly on qualitative knowledge and insights, interpreted on the basis of the authors’ values and beliefs, and creatively adopted to imagine a preferred future. The description and analysis of this Svalbard company is the main source of inspiration as it illustrates the existing technology and the related possibility of growing food in extreme environments by applying circular economy principles. In order to develop a plausible scenario and identify weak signals, i.e. early signals of possible change, some information was gained consulting the following sources:

- the pathways to sustainability outlined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (2018);
- the healthy diet report by the World Health Organization (2018); and
- the food grassroots movements (Holt Giménez and Shattuck, 2011).

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<th>Diagnosis and challenges relevant to food tourism</th>
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<td>Polar Permaculture Solutions</td>
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<td>Intuitive creative process: qualitative knowledge and insights, imagination</td>
<td>The fictional narrative is presented in three phases (from bad to worse; seeds of change; 2100: food tourism as a transformative experience for social change) to engage the reader</td>
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<td>Reports (UN, FAO, WHO) and scholarly literature (food tourism)</td>
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<td>Dialogue between the co-authors (one academician and one practitioner)</td>
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These sources were used to identify future challenges about food production and consumption and trends concerning social movements and business creation. In addition, the WHO source was used in relation to the importance to focus on plant-based food as particularly relevant to human health.

This study focuses on a scenario about a preferred future based on the authors’ values and beliefs concerning the possible role of tourism and ecopreneurship in fighting global hunger and malnutrition and, therefore, it can be qualified as normative or visionary (Pritchard et al., 2011; Van Notten et al., 2003; Hurley, 2015). The scenario was developed in a narrative way and identifying three phases, with the intent to engage the reader in imagining a series of possible changes and outcomes (Eisner, 1997). Some reflections about the possible critical aspects of this utopian future emerged at the end of the developmental process. Considerations about these aspects are presented in Section 5.

4.2 The evolution of food and food tourism

4.2.1 From bad to worse. In 2030, the global food situation is extremely problematic. Different types of malnutrition are widespread. Undernourishment has started to increase again in several countries, and the health problems related to overweight and obesity are on the rise in rich societies. In 2015, food-related goals were inserted into the UN’s sustainable development priorities. In 2019, the FAO released the following message:

The future of food is jeopardized by several trends that require a radical change of course: business-as-usual is no longer an option. All countries and social groups must commit to responsibility-sharing in implementing fundamental changes. In particular, those who can reasonably shoulder the costs involved in the necessary transformations have to provide support to those who need it and invest in new food production and distribution systems. (Adapted from FAO, 2018)

Despite the gravity of the situation and the urgency of this message, no government took any significant action that could lead to the necessary change. The situation has worsened, and in the 2020s, a worrying trend has emerged in those societies recognised by the FAO as being particularly responsible for guiding and supporting the change. In the rich societies, food consumption has moved in diametrically opposite directions from those recommended by the WHO (World Health Organization, 2018). Diets characterised by an increase in saturated fats, trans fats, sugar and animal products and a reduction in vegetables, fruits and legumes are popular.

In 2030, the commodification and fetishization of food is very evident. Food is no longer viewed as nutrition but as one of the many commodities through which consumers can gain status and affirm their egos with no concern for the health and ethical implications of their behaviour. A symbol of this trend is the emergence of chefs as role models and worldwide celebrities with enterprises that are admired and followed by the general public.

Food tourism mirrors these trends. Popular destinations have been developing into gastronomic theatres in which chefs play with food to entertain tourists. The foodie is a self-centred globe-trotter seeking food experiences, such as food festivals involving competitive eating, food fights and sitophilia-oriented encounters.

4.2.2 Seeds of change. Despite the above-mentioned trends, some signs of change were identified as early as the 2010s (Holt Giménez and Shattuck, 2011). The global grassroots movement, which focuses on nutritional problems around the world, consolidated and assumed a technology-oriented profile. Ecopreneurs have been the engine of this shift. Strongly committed to change and very competent in new technology-based food production methods, ecopreneurs have identified islands at various latitudes as ideal locations for the laboratories for developing sustainable solutions for hunger and malnutrition.

By 2050, ecopreneurs are assuming the roles once filled by celebrity chefs. People around the world are enthusiastically following their enterprises, such as the production of greens in Svalbard and the cultivation of legumes and high-quality grains on the North Sentinel Island in the Bay of Bengal.
4.2.3 2100: food tourism as a transformative experience for social change. Ecopreneurs are the new role models, and food tourism achieves its potential for social change. In 2100, the foodie trend assumes a new profile. In particular, young tourists travel to islandic food laboratories. At these destinations, food ecopreneurs, motivated by the ideals of justice and sustainability and a strong commitment to translating these ideals into their business practices, inspire tourists to think and to act differently to overcome the food-related challenges.

Such travel has become widespread, especially among the new international potential policy makers. Like the wealth seventieth- and eighteenth-century youths who travelled around Europe, new generations of travellers are visiting distant islands; however, their goal is to learn about food laboratories, food challenges and feasible solutions. While the heart of the old Grand Tour was the classical antiquities and Renaissance treasures in Europe, the new Grand Tours are centred around the innovation laboratories and charismatic lifestyle ecopreneurs around the world. Food tourism has truly become a force for change, and it is based on the value of global justice and the inspiring force of ecopreneurship.

5. Reflections

The scenario depicted in this paper offers hope for the future of food tourism. The potential for tourism as an educational and transformative experience and the possibilities offered by ecopreneurship are the bases for such hope. The scenario suggests that the food tourism could contribute substantially to overcoming the global food challenges. This might depend on the ideals and abilities of food and tourism ecopreneurs, and the support that they might receive from national and international organisations. Food tourism as described in this futuristic scenario provokes critical reflections on several aspects of the possible events and actions for realising some of the sustainable goals identified by the UN.

The first aspect concerns the location of the imagined food laboratories. In this scenario, these laboratories are located in isolated areas, specifically islands, around the world. It is reasonable to question the identification of these islands and the extent to which the interests of the local inhabitants would be considered before and after the establishment of such laboratories. The local inhabitants include humans and wildlife. For example, in the case of Svalbard, questions could be asked about the possible negative effects of an expansion of Polar Permaculture Solutions and the resulting increased attractiveness to tourists. For example, the polar bear population, already threatened by climate change and, occasionally, the presence of tourists, could experience further changes to their habitat (Descamps et al., 2017). The effects of such changes are unknown. If not well-managed, an extensive food laboratory that might attract additional tourists and employees could result in a higher number of close encounters and accidents. Another issue could be the survival of the animals, given the reduction of available place because of the growing number of residents and tourists.

A concern in the areas identified for the establishment of food laboratories would be the aboriginal populations. One of the islands mentioned as a site for future food laboratories in the scenario is the North Sentinel Island. It is one of the few remaining areas where an aboriginal population still lives, virtually untouched by modern civilisation. Sentinelese have no contact with the outside world. Of concern would be the fate of the Sentinelese if their island is identified as a possible location for a food laboratory. A risk is that the future Grand Tour could assume the profile of colonisation.

In sum, the establishment of the food laboratories described in the scenario might be at the expense of some humans and non-humans who might not benefit from the laboratories or the products. Thus, the islands used in the scenario and mentioned in the entrepreneurship literature could be considered metaphors. An alternative scenario could be based on food laboratories located in established urban areas, such as tunnels and rooftops. This might limit the design of tourism experiences in the style of the Grand Tour because the exotic component of travel would decrease. However, it could facilitate the development of a more environmentally friendly Grand Tour that reduces the distance travelled to the food laboratories and does not increase the human presence on relatively wild areas.
Another aspect is elitism. In the traditional Grand Tour, only the members of wealthy families could have afforded to travel around Europe. In the future Grand Tour, the travellers might also be limited to the upper class, given the expense of getting to laboratories located on remote islands. This might lead to the reproduction of a class system in which only wealthy youths can have access to these educational experiences that could facilitate their becoming influential policy makers. Governments and international organisations should therefore provide support, e.g. grants, to make such educational tourism experiences available to talented youths regardless of their financial circumstances.

Similarly, governments and international organisations could play an important role by supporting the emergence of the technology-based food companies described as the tourist attractions of the future. The ecopreneurs in the scenario are role models for the tourists. Although the ecopreneurs’ charisma might play an important role in how they are perceived, publicly financed promotional activities could be influential. The food-related activities of the sustainable enterprises presented in the scenario might require considerable funding. As in the Svalbard case, the accessibility to grants can be determinative.

Finally, elitism can be considered an assumption of this study and, specifically, the presented scenario, i.e. sustainability as a fundamentally anthropocentric approach to understanding and managing the future. In this sense, humans are considered the elites of the planet’s life forms, which are viewed as resources for the present and future generations of humans. It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the ethical assumptions and implications of this position. Nevertheless, it might be appropriate to reflect on the predominant role of sustainability in the discourse on the future of the planet. This has not received very much attention in tourism (Fennell, 2014; Bertella, 2019).

Thus, the final reflection concerns the potential of food tourism as an educational and transformative experience in the promotion of care and respect for all other forms of life. This might require imagination greater than that applied to the development of this scenario. The main point would be the shift from the widespread use of the sustainability approach to an alternative and less anthropocentric one. Although very challenging, this is possible with the application of the core components of ecopreneurship, i.e. competence, responsibility and creativity.

6. Conclusion

This study has posed the question of the contribution of food tourism experiences to the alleviation and eradication of hunger and malnutrition in the future. It was answered by the presentation of ideas from various streams of scholarly literature, in particular educational tourism, food tourism and entrepreneurship. Methodologically, this study adopted a creative approach, developing a fictional futuristic scenario inspired by a factual company. Such scenario and its discussion contribute to deepen the scholarly debate about food tourism experiences, going beyond the broadly investigated issues of authenticity, localism and regional development, and highlighting its potentials in relation to possible responses to global challenges.

The intention was to develop a utopian scenario based on the potential of food tourism as providing transformative experiences that are relevant to a desirable future without hunger and malnutrition. It is worth noting that the developed scenario has several limitations. Specifically, colonisation, elitism and anthropocentrism were present in the imagined future. Such limitations were noted by the authors at the end of the process of imagining and presenting the scenario for the readers. This can suggest that the use of creativity in futures thinking and the best intentions by the scenario developers do not necessarily lead to the conceptualization of more or less feasible solutions with no flaws. Undoubtedly useful in uncovering little debated issues and provoking new ideas, a futures perspective about global challenges might benefit from cross-sectorial and more holistic approaches. There is no doubt that food-related challenges are extremely complex. Solutions might be dependent on technological advancements, the idealism and competence of individuals and organisations and, to a greater extent, a radical re-consideration of food production, distribution and consumption systems.

Despite the tourism sector’s contribution to the alleviation of food-related issues, it is likely that the eradication of these problems will depend on broader changes that are not limited to the
transformative potential of tourism experiences. These changes might be based on a radical re-consideration of our economy. Nevertheless, tourism practitioners, including tourism entrepreneurs and private and public food-related organisations, should strive to develop and to support educational food tourism experiences that truly contribute to the many urgent global challenges.

It can be concluded that food tourism can be a valuable context for the discussion and the development of ideas and projects to face the global food-related challenges. With the adoption of an experiential perspective, this can be achieved through the potential of tourism experiences to be a force for change. Transformative tourism experiences can be viewed as the first steps toward the future. As, at the individual level, transformative tourism experiences can contribute to the realisation of the ideal person who a tourist truly wants to be, at the level of our global community, such experiences can bring us closer to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), as well as SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 2 (Good Health).

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Transformative experiences via Airbnb: Is it the guests or the host communities that will be transformed?

Daniel Guttentag

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to describe how the growing presence of Airbnb rentals, resulting partly from tourists’ increasing desire for transformative travel experiences, is ironically much more transformative for the host communities than the tourists themselves.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper provides a conceptual analysis linking the motivations of Airbnb guests with the impacts of Airbnb on host communities. It uses an experience economy lens, and is based on a review of the academic literature and of media stories related to Airbnb.

Findings – Many tourists are increasingly seeking transformative travel experiences, and Airbnb commonly will be appealing to such tourists. However, the capacity of Airbnb lodging to independently foster personal transformation is questionable. On the other hand, there is little doubt that Airbnb and its guests are producing significant transformations in host communities.

Originality/value – This paper contributes toward understandings of Airbnb and its impacts on destinations around the world. It, for the first time, links Airbnb guests’ travel motivations with Airbnb’s community impacts, and in doing so demonstrates parallels with past critiques of alternative tourism. This paper is also one of the first to examine Airbnb from the perspective of the experience economy.

Keywords Authenticity, Experience economy, Sharing economy, Airbnb, Short-term rental, Tourism impacts

Paper type Trend paper

The act of tourism is essentially a collecting of experiences, and the quest for authentic, unique, and memorable experiences long has been recognized as an integral driver of modern day travel. For example, in his seminal work on the authenticity of tourism experiences, MacCannell (1976) wrote, “The value of such things as [trips, events, and sights] is not determined by the amount of labor required for their production. Their value is a function of the quality and quantity of experience they promise” (italics in the original) (p. 23). The importance of such experience-making is arguably greater today than ever before, as evidenced by the abundance of travel suppliers branding their (sometimes fairly mundane) services as “experiences” (Sheivachman, 2018). This ongoing shift toward an experience-oriented paradigm, which looks to continue well into the future, is particularly obvious in the lodging sector. In fact, Gilmore and Pine (2002), originators of the “experience economy” concept, specifically described how the lodging sector was ripe for an experiential overhaul because it had become characterized by a high degree of commoditization. Gilmore and Pine (2002) offered various examples of hotels striving to create more experiential stays, and many more examples abound today. For instance, Marriott’s recently launched Moxy brand consists of “experiential hotel[s]” that encourage “communal engagement” (Marriott International, 2018); Wyndham is incentivizing its guests to be phone-free (and therefore more socially interactive) at its hotel pools (Williams, 2018); myriad luxury hotels have begun offering cultural and artistic programming (Shankman, 2019); and numerous hotel companies, including Four Seasons and Hilton, have begun offering curated excursions.

Despite such developments in the hotel industry, discussions about memorable tourism lodging experiences frequently revolve around Airbnb, the largest and most prominent company in the
quickly growing peer-to-peer short-term rental industry (Ting, 2019). In fact, hotels’ forays into experience-making are often perceived as reactions to Airbnb’s rise because experiential lodging is intrinsic to Airbnb’s brand and product DNA in a way that it is not with hotels (Bearne, 2018). Rather than staying in a potentially bland and generic hotel room, Airbnb accommodations can offer the prospect of staying in a local’s home, being based in a residential neighborhood, and interacting with a local “host.” As Airbnb co-founder Nathan Blecharczyk stated several years back, “We’re not just a provider of accommodation, we’re a provider of experiences. And so we’re thinking about, ‘How do we make those experiences meaningful in terms of being local, authentic?’” (Fung, 2013). The opportunity to experience a destination like a local is central to Airbnb’s branding (Yannopoulou et al., 2013) and is flaunted throughout its marketing. For example, a recent Airbnb ad campaign featured the tagline “Don’t go there. Live there,” and Airbnb’s Chief Marketing Officer described the campaign as tapping into travelers’ desire for unique local experiences (Richards, 2016). Moreover, Airbnb’s logo signifies “Belong anywhere,” and for publicity Airbnb frequently holds contests to give away extraordinary lodging experiences, like spending a night beneath the Louvre’s glass pyramid. Furthermore, like some hotels, Airbnb recently began offering tours and activities, dubbed “Airbnb Experiences.”

Research on Airbnb has confirmed the importance of its ability to foster authentic and memorable experiences. For example, Birinci et al. (2018) surveyed both Airbnb and hotel guests, and found the former felt they had a more authentic experience. Guttentag et al. (2018) and Paulauskaite et al. (2017) both found Airbnb guests were primarily motivated by practical considerations (e.g. cost and location), but the guests’ desire for authentic and novel experiences was important as well. Paulauskaite et al. concluded authentic experiences via Airbnb related to three themes – the lodging, the host interaction, and the local culture. As one of their interviewees stated, “[Airbnb] contributes to more colourful and unforgettable experience[s]” (p. 624). Likewise, Johnson and Neuhofer (2017) and Camilleri and Neuhofer (2017) examined Airbnb through the lens of value co-creation and highlighted the value derived from various experiential facets of Airbnb, including interacting with the host and surrounding community, traveling like a local, and engaging in cultural learning.

Experience-making clearly is increasingly important in tourism lodging, and Airbnb clearly is well-suited to facilitate memorable lodging experiences. However, Pine and Gilmore’s more recent iteration of their “Progression of Economic Value” model (from commodities to goods to services to experiences) has added a fifth and final level—transformations” (Pine and Gilmore, 2013). Transformative experiences are those that foster self-actualization and change the customer in a qualitative way (Pine and Gilmore, 2013), and modern consumers are increasingly drawn to products promoting such personal transformations (Oskam and Boswijk, 2016). This ongoing evolution in customer attitudes is directly related to tourism because travel has long been valued for its transformative potential (Robledo and Batle, 2017), and modern travel brands are increasingly highlighting this potential in their messaging (Oates, 2017). As Pine remarked in an interview, “[The travel industry] is now using experiences as the raw material to guide people to change and evolve,” and travel brands are shifting from a focus on the external journey to the internal journey (Oates, 2017). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Airbnb is one travel brand that has incorporated the allure of “transformation” into its branding; for example, a recent Airbnb press release described new product features as “designed to bring the transformative benefits of local, personal and authentic travel to every type of traveler” (Airbnb, 2018).

However, the degree to which Airbnb actually can foster personal transformation is questionable. Although tourists seeking transformative experiences may be attracted to Airbnb, and Airbnb stays may contribute toward broader transformative travel experiences, transformational travel is a holistic experience (Robledo and Batle, 2017) that should generally require more than a particular type of lodging. In other words, whereas Airbnb lodging may provide memorable experiences on its own, the lodging typically should only play a contributing role (at most) toward a genuinely transformative experience. Moreover, the potential for many Airbnb units to contribute toward transformative experiences any more so than other types of lodging is dubious. The majority of Airbnb units are entire homes in which social interaction with the host will be limited or nonexistent, and a sizable percentage of Airbnb units are available for over 90 days per year and/or owned by a host with multiple listings, meaning the units probably are not hosts’
primary residences and therefore will not exhibit the local authenticity of an actual home (Abdar and Yen, 2017; Crommelin et al., 2018). Moreover, Airbnb’s future evolution seems to entail a shift toward greater professionalization, which similarly will make the lodgings less unique and, in turn, even less transformative.

While Airbnb may not typically transform its guests, there is little doubt that the guests seeking memorable and transformative experiences via Airbnb are beginning to transform many host communities, as Airbnb is injecting its guests directly into residential neighborhoods and buildings in a way that hotels never have. Several decades back, in his critique of alternative tourism, Butler (1990) elucidated the concerns surrounding tourism that places tourists and locals in such high proximity. Butler labeled alternative tourism a “Trojan horse” that was being uncritically welcomed even though tourism is inevitably an agent of change and “alternative forms of tourism penetrate further into the personal space of residents, [involving] them to a much greater degree” (p. 41). Any negative impacts of tourism therefore are amplified in such close quarters. The parallels with Airbnb are obvious and the warnings for the future are clear, as the company has swathed itself in the positive rhetoric of sharing and sustainability, yet is penetrating deep into residential spheres and unleashing various transformative negative impacts on host communities (O’Regan and Choe, 2017).

Airbnb has expanded extremely swiftly since its launch just over ten years ago, with the company recently reporting that it had six million listings around the world and had hosted 500m stays (Airbnb, 2019). These numbers, however, soon will be outdated, as Airbnb’s rapid growth is nearly guaranteed to continue at least into the near future. Airbnb’s six million listings not only exceed the room capacity of the top five worldwide hotel companies combined (Hartmans, 2017), they also are geographically distinct from hotels. Like hotels, Airbnb listings often concentrate in city centers and tourist districts, but Airbnb’s inventory frequently penetrates deeper into residential areas (Alizadeh et al., 2018; Gutiérrez et al., 2017; Ioannides et al., 2018). For example, based on their analysis of Airbnb’s geographic dispersion in Utrecht, Netherlands, Ioannides et al. concluded that Airbnb “can be an important force of further touristification” in neighborhoods outside the traditional “tourist bubbles” (p. 7).

This touristification process involves the transformation of housing from residential homes to short-term tourist rentals, as rent increases price out long-term residents, investors purchase housing units (which can be rented out most lucratively as short-term rentals), and locals further leave due to disenchantment with the hollowing out of their neighborhoods and the daily disruptions that accompany the tourists (Gant, 2016). In short time, the scale of Airbnb’s footprint in some high-density neighborhoods has become quite significant; for example, Gant (2016) found that in some parts of Barcelona, like the Gothic Quarter, Airbnb rentals represented up to 17 percent of homes, and Perkins (2019) reported that in some areas of New Orleans Airbnb was present on 45 percent of parcels. As a consequence, the number of actual permanent residents can drop – Mead (2019) reported that the number of residents living in the Gothic Quarter had decreased by 45 percent in 12 years, and the mayor of Paris has partly blamed short-term rentals for population declines in several central arrondissements (Griswold, 2017).

This touristification of residential areas in turn is transforming the fabric of these communities. For example, Jordan and Moore (2018) interviewed Hawaiians about the impacts of vacation rentals and found damage to the sense of community was the most frequently mentioned negative impact. As one interviewee remarked, “I care about having a neighbor, I care about knowing who’s next to me and what their name is, where do they work, you know? […] This thing is changing the sense of place of the neighborhood. It’s changing the feel of it with almost a revolving door of strangers” (p. 96). This issue also has featured heavily in media stories about Airbnb’s impacts. For example, in explaining Airbnb’s impact on New Orleans’ historic and traditionally African American Treme neighborhood, Perkins (2019) described, “Now Treme moves in an unnatural rhythm. For about half of each week, the number of tourists drops and many blocks are ‘like a ghost town,’ [one resident] said. Each Thursday, the tourists return, filling hundreds of units. Suddenly, Treme is alive with groups of drunk, mostly white college-aged kids.” As this example highlights, not only is Airbnb transforming communities in terms of the people and the local businesses that cater to them, but the presence of tourists is also
disrupting some residents’ everyday lives. Daily nuisances commonly associated with Airbnb include parties, noise, trash accumulation, traffic, and parking (Guttentag, 2017; Gurran and Phibbs, 2017). Given such issues, it is unsurprising that some host community residents are increasingly displeased with the proliferation of Airbnb. Research has demonstrated that residents’ proximity to tourism can exacerbate perceptions of its negative externalities (Faulkner and Tideswell, 1997), and rapid community transformations involving social disruption exert a negative impact on residents’ perceived quality of life (Perdue et al., 1999). In other words, it is the nature of Airbnb tourism, rather than its volume per se, that makes its impacts so acute. Airbnb predictably is becoming a significant and contentious policy topic in destinations around the world, from Auckland to Bangkok to Cape Town to Denver to Edinburgh to Frankfurt to Geneva to Hong Kong, and beyond. However, while short-term rental regulation is becoming an increasingly important component of destination management, actually managing the short-term rental industry is proving particularly challenging because the rentals are so easy for hosts to establish and so difficult to accurately monitor (Guttentag, 2017). Somewhat ironically then, much like tourism itself has been criticized along similar lines, as Airbnb continues to grow it could be blamed in the future for cannibalizing the authentic local experiences it is meant to deliver, as neighborhoods brimming with Airbnb rentals may lose the local authenticity that Airbnb guests are seeking out in the first place.

While this paper has focused on some of the challenges associated with Airbnb’s transformative impacts, it is important to recognize that Airbnb experiences can bring many benefits as well. In particular, Airbnb provides hosts with financial support, it can foster intercultural social interaction (Karlsson and Dolnicar, 2016), and it spreads tourism spending to some residential areas that have not historically enjoyed such spending. Moreover, some issues blamed on Airbnb may result from excessive tourism more generally, and Mody (2018) found that residents’ attitudes toward Airbnb were not as negative as media stories often suggest. Nevertheless, the concerns and issues arising from Airbnb deserve thoughtful future consideration by academics, industry practitioners, and policymakers, as these issues will become increasingly important as Airbnb continues to grow, and as more destinations begin to resist the consequences of overtourism more generally. A combination of short-term rental monitoring software and more aggressive legal maneuvering likely will allow destinations to better manage Airbnb in the future, yet it also seems inevitable that Airbnb will evolve from its current status as a disruptive and contentious startup, to eventually be accepted as a more traditional segment of the tourism lodging sector. However, in doing so, Airbnb inevitably also will become a more traditional and accepted feature of communities around the world. By catering to tourists’ demand for memorable and transformative experiences deep within host communities, Airbnb will continue eroding the invisible barriers between the tourist sphere and the residential sphere, and will make tourism a more visible and tangible feature of many host community residents’ everyday lives.

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Mody (2018), “Residents’ attitudes toward Airbnb were not as negative as media stories often suggest.”


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Cities in the experience economy: the rise and the future of urban leisure formats

Piotr Zmyslony and Karolina Anna Wędrowicz

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to discuss the rise and the future of urban leisure format (ULF), i.e. local seasonal short-lived and repeatable small-scale place-time-based staging urban leisure experiences which become the focus of recreation and tourism development in many cities. It aims to analyse the structure of the ULF by identifying its main features and also to propose the future developments of the concept.

Design/methodology/approach – The study is based on the experience economy principles. It develops the models for structured experiences/experienscape by adding the analogy with television programme formats to propose the general logic of constructing, organising and packetizing urban leisure experiences that are multiplied effectively to other urban time-spaces.

Findings – The ULF’s future potential lies in its ability to adopt local components, i.e. people and urban resources, to global trends using a structured experiences/experience logic which makes the ULF formatable, i.e. with the capacity to get informally standardised, then repeated and adapted to other cities’ contexts.

Research limitations/implications – The paper provides a conceptual framework for formatting the leisure events and places under the framework of the structured experience, will be carefully adapted to the micro-local level, i.e. community activities sphere. The ULF is a theoretical concept and needs empirical research to verify its validity.

Practical implications – The ULF provides urban managers with a framework for replicating, multiplying and adapting urban leisure events and sites within the structured experiences (SE) designing framework.

Originality/value – The study contributes to the scientific discussion on the experience economy by introducing the ULF concept which can be adapted to various urban conditions.

Keywords Trends, Urban leisure, Urban tourism, City tourism, Structured experiences concept, Experienscape, Experience economy

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

Since human and creative capital became the theoretical background of urban development, consumption, leisure and tourism have been recognised as crucial drivers of city competitiveness and regeneration of urban space (cf. Clark, 2004; Florida, 2002). It has been manifested by developing spectacular commercial leisure spaces and cultural investment projects aimed at attracting mobile global capital (cf. Dziembowska-Kowalska and Funck, 1999; Silk and Andrews, 2006), re-enchanting of up-scale urban leisure settings (Ritzer, 2005) as well as at establishing semi-formal creative quarters and entertainment zones (Pappalepore et al., 2014; Roberts and Eldridge, 2012) and producing public-driven urban spectacles (Gotham, 2005).

Inconclusive experiences resulting from these changes (cf. Florida, 2017; Gravari-Barbas and Guinand, 2017; Zukin, 2008) have shifted the urban focus towards local seasonal short-lived and repeatable small-scale place-time-based staging leisure experiences. The examples are showcase festivals; organised meetings spots; culinary events; outdoor dance zones; transitory waterfront objects and serious leisure events. They are much less interfering with space and less disruptive concerning the existing urban landscape than the previous urban leisure forms.

However, the local manner of producing these leisure forms does not imply their local, authentic nature. This is because their rise is also demand-driven. It has resulted from globalised attitudes of...
modern urban consumers – both residents and visitors – as regards the ways to spend leisure time as well as their striving for maximising the value of experience they obtain while reducing their efforts relating to the process of designing them thanks to information technology revolution (cf. Angus and Westbrook, 2019; Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019; Croce, 2018; Dujmović and Vitasović, 2015).

We argue that a “light” formula and an ability to design the structured experiences (SE) within the new leisure forms make them formattable, i.e. with the capacity to get informally standardised, then repeated and adapted to other cities’ contexts, even though they are locally organised. Eventually, they are replicated transnationally, following the logic known from media industry as television programme format (Chalaby, 2012; Moran, 2009), in which localism is not a resource to preserve but a context to adapt to the central theme. Therefore, we propose the “urban leisure format” (ULF) term to reflect these specific forms of interactive social spaces.

This viewpoint paper aims to analyse the conceptual structure of the ULF by identifying its main features and also to propose the future developments of the concept. We argue that this is a staging SE logic (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) within the local context and not a taste of local authenticity (cf. Zukin, 2008) or significant investment projects which makes the ULF a scheme of making urban space-time attractive for residents and tourists; the scheme capable of being standardised and replicated in other cities. Thus, we apply the framework of the SE (Duerden et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2019), the model of staging recreational encounters (Ellis and Rossman, 2008) and experienscape concept (Pizam and Tasci, 2019) as a theoretical framework for analysing the ULF’s structure, and the television format scheme (Chalaby, 2012; Moran, 2009) to discuss its formatting potential.

The paper is addressed to the academics interested in the experience economy concepts within urban leisure context. Moreover, local associations and activists can use the ULF framework to discuss their ideas for attracting urban time-space in their city.

Theoretical and conceptual foundations

Three aspects should be highlighted as a theoretical background of the study: changes in consumer behaviour; staging structured experiences; and TV format mechanism.

Changes in consumer behaviour in leisure time

The rolling revolution of technology and accompanying changes in consumer lifestyles have led to the technological shift which affects, primarily, Y and Z generations; however, it impacts all modern societies (Angus and Westbrook, 2019; Croce, 2018; Dujmović and Vitasović, 2015; Haddouche and Salomone, 2018; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Leisure time consumers are networked, active and well informed, so they evince a need to spend it consciously due to maximising the value of the experience they obtain. Prioritising experiences becomes the central value of consumers’ buying decisions and the capital of their social identity shaped in real-time via social media (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019; Nedra et al., 2019). Places they visit and events they have experienced become the components of their “spatial selves” (Schwartz and Halegoua, 2015) that are created to be positively received and compared by others. Technology has also made consumers reduce the personal opportunity costs relating to the process of designing their experiences in favour of an anticipation of organised and packetized urban leisure offering which they could consume in their leisure time (Angus and Westbrook, 2019).

Staging structured experiences

In line with the experience economy logic (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), experiences take a form of co-produced affairs where participants are perceived as active agents and not passive spectators (Ellis and Rossman, 2008). Duerden et al. (2015) conceptualise SE concept which consists of two dimensions: the experience co-creation process referring to objective, interactive encounters among consumers and provider-manipulated framework as well as the participant’s subjective outcomes of experiences; experience phases referring to anticipation, participation, and reflection and integration processes which happen to the participants (Duerden et al., 2015). Ellis et al. (2019) extend the concept into a theory by proposing a set of
experiential results felt by participants at the time of staging, i.e. immersion, absorption, engagement, which can all be “invited” but not controlled by providers, and result in deeply-structured experiences. They also add an evaluated experience component which is built individually by participants after an encounter and which refers to the perceived value of experience, affect, and delight.

The model of staging recreational experiences (SRE) proposed by Ellis and Rossman (2008, p. 4) refers to “economic offerings in which guests exchange something of value from a variety of opportunity costs to receive a valued emotional and motivational experience[s]”. The additional benefits are long-term cherished memories and educational, therapeutic, or developmental transformations of participants (Ellis and Rossman, 2008). According to the model, successful staging experiences by providers require designing technical performance and artistic performance of an encounter in order to facilitate and yield individual experiences, “preserving the autonomy of the participant to help create the leisure experience as well as the freedom to do so” (Ellis and Rossman, 2008, p. 13).

The experienscape concept characterised by Pizam and Tasci (2019) develops an established and widely researched servicescape concept (cf. Tumbat and Belk, 2013; Wakefield and Blodgett, 1996) by adding the multistakeholder approach and focusing on experiential consumption framework. Experienscape refers to “the sensory, functional, social, natural, and cultural stimuli in a product or service environment, surmounted with a culture of hospitality, all of which accrue to an experience for consumers, employees, and other stakeholders and result in positive or negative cognitive, affective, and behavioural reactions towards products, services, brands, and firms” (Pizam and Tasci, 2019, p. 34).

**TV format**

According to Moran (2009, pp. 115-116), a TV programme format refers to “a method of practising television whereby a kind of unspecific, universal or denationalised programme template or recipe is developed, which in turn can be customised and domesticated for reception and consumption by specific audiences in local or national contexts”. As the TV programme format is franchised, it transfers the expertise written in detailed format rules, which are designed to create dramatic arcs and produce storylines. The rules are divided into those that determine the format core and thus are fixed and those which enable to tailor the programme to local audiences and apply the local knowledge (Chalaby, 2011). The distinct feature of the TV formats is transnationalism, which is “underlined by their hybrid nature since they adapt as they travel. In many instances, the knowledge acquired in different territories helps to refine the rules that make a format a unique show” (Chalaby, 2011, p. 296).

**The essence of urban leisure format**

The ULF is a temporary (usually seasonal) short and repeating small-scale and low-budget-organised outdoor area or event, aimed at creating a replicable, thematic, structured and place-time-based staging leisure experiences. Thus, these areas or events are usually locally organised and community-driven or owned (by neighbourhood associations, urban social movements or local entrepreneurs and activists) with participation, commission or permit from local government agencies as they take place and are set in a public space. Table I presents the most popular types of the ULF and their main components.

The ULF is an emerging concept so it will remain flexible and its standards and practices will be shaped in the future. Moreover, the examples presented in Table I certainly do not exhaust the possibilities and the potential development forms that the concept creates. The types could also be mixed as they establish a core experience. However, it is possible to define its key attributes.

**A permanent set of complementary leisure activities formed an encounter core experience**

Every type of the ULF is based on a specific principle value; however, what constitutes a format is a bundle of complementary elements of an offering composed around it that structure consumers’ experiences. Therefore, the offering is designed with both experiential and spatial logic, forming zones separated formally or symbolically from one other, i.e. catering zone, meeting
zone, merchandising zone, relax zone, sanitary and first-aid zone. They are all staged as one so that the consumers, regardless of the core they are interested in and the city where the event is located, can expect the availability of a specific infrastructure and services in the designated area.

Parallel individualisation and standardisation of experience

The design of the ULF focuses on the maximisation of a participant’s personal experience which co-creates its utility, and the final success of both the format and the participants’ performed and shared life events. According to the experience theory principles (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), participants are given a “manipulated” free choice; providers intentionally offer a design of staging encounters, and the participants compose their overall individual experience, determining when, what, and what form their experience assumes. Thus, the ULF proposes a framework that enables participants to perform their social identities or “spatial self” (cf. Schwartz and Halegoua, 2015) as a co-created part of the ULF. The individualisation of experience is provided together with satisfying the participants’ need to receive a design of SE corresponding to the ULF type arranged according to a specific value staging scheme. Thus, participants are even more aimed at SE intentionally staged by local providers.

Temporality and interlocking forms of spending leisure time

The ULFs are temporal, i.e. most often of seasonal nature. Recreants most often get involved in the ULF for two reasons: driven by the principal value or attracted by other participants’ shared experience and feedback. The values that universally specify the ULF is socialising as well as spending time with friends and family and meeting new people. Thus, the ULF is based on collective experience built during the co-creation process among participants, providers and the city. That is why several leisure activities and experiences take place simultaneously (e.g. concert, meeting zone, gastronomy, merchandising), intentionally manipulated by providers and co-created by participants.

Informally separated space and lack of hard architecture

Most of the ULF forms are organised outdoors or at least partly outdoors. Most often, for the duration of a given event or staging an encounter offering, informally or symbolically but clearly separated space is created, and the elements of the necessary infrastructure of a temporary character are built (e.g. platforms, routes, sanitary facilities, food tracks, urban furniture, seats and hammocks).
Flexible time spent at a place/event

Even though SE have definable beginning and ending points (Ellis et al., 2019), the time of participation in an ULF is not dependent on the duration of its performing or functioning. Choosing to participate in a given ULF, a guest takes part not only in the core event but also experiences other available forms of leisure before and after. The specific time that participants intend to spend at an ULF event is not usually top-down determined or set in advance. The ULF events last relatively longer as compared to traditional events. Therefore, the ULF experience is designed by the local providers in such a way as to induce respondents to co-create the duration of their experiences.

Local and participant communities focused around a given format

The ULF is generally co-created by both local social associations and urban activists or entrepreneur groups and also by its “community” of fans or supporters who are visible both at the place and in social media. These groups often gain a certain level of homogeneity as the participation is often associated with a specific lifestyle and professed values, and taking part in a given ULF becomes an opportunity to manifest them. However, the ULF is regarded to be an interspace between residents’ and visitors’ global community. Also, the participants can be seriously involved in it and show their interest not only throughout its duration but also before and after it is over. The existence of a community facilitates useful feedback and the ULF experience co-creation through interactive communication between the organisers and participants through social media.

Repeatability, replicability and adaptability

Each ULF type is a kind of a characteristic event organisation pattern, based on a given core and complementary services, offered in a characteristic manner and setting, at a specific time and place. This scheme can be freely repeated in time and space by organising subsequent editions of an event, replicating in other cities or adapting it by enriching the core so that the event gains a new central theme. None of these changes, however, affect the clarity of the theme and organisational principles characterising the format. The ULF participants, regardless of the place, time or subject of an event, can navigate their individual “route” or “board”, feeling confident about what to expect. Nevertheless, it is every city’s identity and heritage that make the ULF flexible.

Discussion and implications: the present and future of ULF

The ULF concept has a practical origin as it derived from critical observation and anticipation of the evolution of leisure initiatives developing nowadays in European urban areas as well as from the need to find a scientific framework to explain this phenomenon. Therefore, its potential utility is possible after the verification of its reference to the models and theories described as its theoretical and conceptual framework.

Table II collates the following ULF’s attributes with specific elements of the SRE model (Ellis and Rossman, 2008); the SE concept (Duerden et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2019); and the experienscape model (Pizam and Tasci, 2019). Each of these attributes can be at least theoretically explained and, in most cases, even managerially applied, using the logic of experience economy principles. In particular, the SRE and experienscape frameworks suggest the components that should be used to emphasise each ULF attribute. At the same time, the SE concept provides a logical explanation of the impact of the attributes on the participants’ behaviours and reactions.

Adapting the SE frameworks into an urban context on a micro scale, the ULF scheme reverses the previous logic of enhancing and utilising local attractiveness (cf. Zukin, 2008). In this case, it is not about putting a sense of local authenticity in the core of the ULF, but about adopting localities to transnational trends which make it formattable. According to Table II, cities will be able to impress their local peculiarities and uniqueness forming the format-flexible components (i.e. unanticipated value or interpersonal performance) presented in repeatability, replicability and adaptability features of the ULF. However, the condition is to meet global consumer expectations regarding the experiences and structure of services described as other features. Raising consumers’ expectations towards the structuring of the
offering will be a rationale for the constant format development, both formally and informally. It will also deepen participants’ absorption and engagement into an event by strengthening the sense of physical, social or psychological security and familiarisation with the event while participating in it even during the first-time visit in a city. Thus, the authenticity of locality will tailor the ULF and not format its core.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features of ULF/reference areas</th>
<th>Staging recreational experiences model (Ellis and Rossman, 2008)</th>
<th>Structured experiences concept/theory (Duerden et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2019)</th>
<th>Experienscape concept (Pizam and Tasci, 2019)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A permanent set of complementary leisure activities formed an encounter core experience</td>
<td>Theme performance Multi-sensory staging performance Unanticipated value performance Setting performance Interpersonal performance</td>
<td>Impact on participants’ immersion, absorption, engagement, and – consequently – the overall participants’ evaluated experiences, i.e. the perceived value of an event, affect and delight</td>
<td>Sensory component Functional component Hospitality culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallel individualisation and standardisation of experience</td>
<td>Theme performance Technical skills performance Multi-sensory staging performance</td>
<td>Influence on all experience phases: anticipation, participation/consumption, reflection and integration, both at the place of event or via social media</td>
<td>Social component Functional component Sensory component Impact on response operators (personal and situational)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporality and interlocking forms of spending leisure time</td>
<td>Multi-sensory staging performance Interpersonal performance Setting performance</td>
<td>Influence on the intensity of participants’ lived and evaluated experiences</td>
<td>Sensory component Functional component Natural component Cultural component Hospitality culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informally separated space and lack of hard architecture</td>
<td>Technical skills performance Setting performance Multi-sensory staging performance</td>
<td>Provider’s components, especially service quality components influencing the level on participants’ absorption and engagement</td>
<td>Sensory component Functional component Natural component</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible time spent at a place</td>
<td>Determined individually by an impact of others participants’ co-created and shared experiences Interpersonal performance</td>
<td>Determined individually by an intensity of an individual’s level of immersion, absorption and engagement</td>
<td>Determined by emerging of a stimuli and their response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeatability, replicability and adaptability</td>
<td>Format-determined components explained by: Theme performance Technical skills performance Multi-sensory staging performance Setting performance Format-flexible components determined by: Unanticipated value performance Interpersonal performance Multi-sensory staging performance</td>
<td>Determined by co-creation process Determined by technical performance, structure, animation and setting components delivered by providers due to the direct control over the participants’ leisure experiences during the participation phase</td>
<td>Social component Repeatability and replicability elements determined by: Functional component Social component Adaptability element determined by: Sensory component Cultural component Hospitality culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local and participant communities focused around a given format</td>
<td>Unanticipated value performance Interpersonal performance Theme performance</td>
<td>Based on feedback loops interactions: each perceived experience during the event influences participants’ relationships, thoughts, emotions, activities and memories they will bring and stage in the event: providers modify experience elements based upon participants’ feedback in order to improve the event; participants share their perceived experiences with peers via social networks and thus these peers must be perceived as indirect participants whose attitudes and opinions about the provided and shared experience also influence the co-creation process of the event</td>
<td>Social component Hospitality culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen in Table II, the performance of each of the ULF attributes is dependent upon the broad context of the co-creation process between local providers and consumers. Considering the formerly presented directions of the changes in consumer behaviour, adapting global themes and staging structured encounters, into which the local context will be pressed, will be more important than the creation of strictly local experiences that carry the risk of failing to reach a wide, universal audience of visitors and residents. In the near future, new types of the ULF will emerge that promise an elastic core and formattable structure of the ULF. Their origin will vary as it was in the case of outdoor dance zones called milongas which were born in Latin America cities and spread worldwide.

Since the ULF is an emerging concept, the format rules of particular ULF types presented in Table I, now produced informally, will change into formal narrative dimension and expertise transfer. The ULF will gain formal replicability. It might lead to their homogenisation caused by standardisation processes described by Ritzer (2005) and commodifying the public spaces described by Zukin (2008). The further development of digital technology and the rising emphasis of dwellers and visitors on SE offerings will lead to a rationalisation of the ULF as leisure. ULFs will possibly be capitalised in the form of chain or franchising as it happened after liberalisation of alcohol trading in Great Britain in 1990 (cf. Roberts and Eldridge, 2012).

Conclusion

The study contributes to the scientific discussion on the experience economy by introducing the urban leisure format concept which can be adapted to various urban conditions. Its logic lies in the preparation of a universal composition with global coverage using local components, i.e. people and urban resources. The paper provides the ULF conceptual structure by discussing its main features. The structured experiences framework has been and will be transferred to the urban context; however, not to the urban space as w whole, but its individual places. We argue that this framework will be closely adapted to the micro-local level, i.e. community activities sphere, which causes global copying and spreading of temporal time-spaces, simultaneously attracting the sense of global consumer security and ensuring the local atmosphere of the city, both of them contained in a format idea. Therefore, we enter an era of the commodification of local structured experiences.

The ULF is a theoretical concept and needs empirical research to verify its validity. Moreover, the nature of the article did not allow for a comprehensive analysis of the potential adverse effects of the universalisation of the concept in cities. Further research should also focus on the consequences of dissemination of the ULF for the local neighbourhood.

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Historic buildings and the creation of experiencescapes: looking to the past for future success

Richard Tresidder and Emmie Louise Deakin

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify the role that the creative re-use of historic buildings can play in the future development of the experiences economy. The aesthetic attributes and the imbued historic connotation associated with the building help create unique and extraordinary “experiencescapes” within the contemporary tourism and hospitality industries.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper provides a conceptual insight into the creative re-use of historic buildings in the tourism and hospitality sectors, the work draws on two examples of re-use in the UK.

Findings – This work demonstrates how the creative re-use of historic buildings can help create experiences that are differentiated from the mainstream hospitality experiences. It also identifies that it adds an additional unquantifiable element that enables the shift to take place from servicescape to experiencescape.

Originality/value – There has been an ongoing debate as to the significance of heritage in hospitality and tourism. However, this paper provides an insight into how the practical re-use of buildings can help companies both benefit from and contribute to the experiences economy.

Keywords Servicescapes, Tourism, Hospitality, Historic buildings, Experiences economy, Architecture

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

The future of experiential travel relies on the continuous creation of innovative and unique experiences for tourists. When participating in the meaning-making process, people are still drawn to the heritage of destinations and this contributes to their understanding of both the present and future. The contribution of history and heritage to the future development of tourism has been well developed in this journal and was the focus of several authors in two Special Editions in 2017 “The future of city tourism” (Postma et al., 2017; Postma and Schmuecker, 2017) and, in 2018 “History of tourism” (Yeoman and McMahon-Beatte, 2018; Richard, 2018). When looking forward in the tourism industry we also often must look backwards, as the past contains a rich vein of resources upon which contemporary and future experiences can be based. The stock of disused or redundant historic buildings around the world provides an opportunity to create spaces that can offer unique and differentiated tourism and hospitality experiences for the experiential traveller. As such, historic buildings remain a valuable resource in the experience economy by enabling tourism and hospitality organisations to create distinctive “experiencescapes” that enhance the experiential aspect of tourism and hospitality products (Fuste-Forne, 2017; Matson-Barkat and Robert-Demontrond, 2018).

The development of successful “experiencescapes” requires more than just developing an effective and efficient servicescape. It can be argued that experiencescapes are in fact “servicescapes+”, this paper explores what constitutes this “+” and how the re-use of historic buildings for contemporary tourism and hospitality usage can be used to create contemporary experiencescapes and the opportunity for future tourism developments and sustainability of...
buildings (Postma et al., 2017; Postma and Schmuecker, 2017). Creative re-use is demonstrated in this paper by drawing on two unique and successful hospitality spaces; the Pitcher & Piano in Nottingham, UK (www.pitcherandpiano.com/where-are-we/nottingham) and the Malmaison Hotel in Oxford, UK (www.malmaison.com/locations/oxford/). The Malmaison was completed in 2006, has 86 bedrooms and is located in the former Oxford Jail which closed in 1987; it has won a number of prestigious architectural awards for its innovative design and use of space (ADP-Architecture, 2019). The castle was originally built by Robert D’Oilly, friend to William the Conqueror and has been home to kings, sheriffs and, latterly, convicts. The castle was subject to a £45m regeneration project in 2000 and is now the home to a Heritage and Education Centre, Various Commercial Premises, Apartments and various public spaces as well as the Malmaison Hotel (Oxford Preservation Trust, 2019). The Pitcher & Piano in the Lace Market area of Nottingham is in the deconsecrated Old High Pavement Unitarian Church, the church was built in 1876 in the Neo-Gothic style. However, by the Millennium it had fallen into disrepair, it was first converted to a Pitcher & Piano in 2006 before being refurbished in 2014 (National Design Academy, 2014).

Both buildings offer spaces that are differentiated from the mainstream hospitality product by virtue of their former uses, and unique architectural characteristics. Before being converted into hospitality spaces both buildings were disused, were falling into disrepair and were on the Historic England at risk register. What these two buildings demonstrate is how the creative re-use of historic buildings can contribute to the experience economy by offering distinctive spaces in which the contemporary tourism and hospitality industries can flourish while also allowing for a sustainable approach to portfolio development.

**From servicescapes to experiencescapes**

The idea of a servicescape has been well developed within tourism and hospitality studies (Otto and Ritchie, 1996; Turley and Fugate, 1992). However, over the past decade, there has been a shift in the language utilised which reflects a move in tourism and hospitality studies to discuss the concept of experiencescapes. O’Dell (2005) defines experiencescape as a place where human interactions, pleasure, entertainment and enjoyment can occur to create an experience. On the other hand, authors such as Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003) and Binkhorst and Dekker (2009) have identified that the experiencescape is co-created and is a result of visitor interactions. These definitions do not acknowledge the significance that the buildings play in elevating servicescapes to a higher or extraordinary level. Although Willson and McIntosh (2007) go some of the way to identifying the role historic buildings can play in forming what may be termed experiencescapes, their work does not explore how buildings can create future experiences for the experiential traveller. Yet, despite the ongoing debate in hospitality and tourism studies the phrases servicescapes and experiencescapes appear to be interchangeable and often used without a clear understanding of the difference between the two concepts.

The two examples utilised in this paper demonstrate how the development of imaginative hospitality experiences can take place in historic buildings, they draw on something that is intangible, but is linked somehow to an aesthetic that creates a unique experience that cannot be duplicated. The Pitcher & Piano and Malmaison can be thought of as offering a “servicescape+” that transforms tourism and hospitality spaces into extraordinary experiencescapes. For the purpose of this paper, servicescapes are the material representations of the tourism or hospitality product, that is, the design of the hotel, restaurant or tourist attraction (Matson-Barkat and Robert-Demontrond, 2018; Blumenthal and Jensen, 2019), its décor, music, art, the clothing of staff (Jemsdand et al., 2015), their behaviour, the level of formality of service and the link to particular cultures, times or societies (Tresidder, 2015).

In terms of understanding how these unique spaces have been created, it is important to blend two seminal pieces of work that have informed the way in which we use and understand spaces within the tourism and hospitality sectors in conjunction with the “+” factor. Kotler (1973) explored the intentional control and structuring of environmental cues and how these impacted upon customer’s perception of the space and their subsequent behaviour (Turley and Milliman, 2000; Turley and Chebat, 2002). Kotler (1973) explored these atmospheric cues in terms of the senses (i.e. visuals, smells and touch), these cues are of importance for the tourism and hospitality
industries in their search to create unique experiences. From Bitner’s (1992) seminal work on the environmental dimensions of retail atmospherics, it is possible to draw three elements that form important parts of any experiencescape. These are:

1. ambient conditions (lighting, temperature, etc.);
2. space (layout, design, flow, etc.); and
3. the signs, symbols and artefacts that are used to provide context and meaning to the experience.

What Kotler (1973) and Bitner (1992) both contribute to this debate is they recognise the significance of the multidimensional attributes a space must possess to have meaning within a specific consumption context. This view was quickly adopted by tourism and hospitality academics (Getz et al., 1994; Otto and Ritchie, 1996) as a means to understand how the performance aspect of the host/guest interaction was developed. Within both tourism and hospitality, the servicescape must transport the guest to another time and space that is different to their everyday lived experiences. As can be seen from Plates 1 and 2, both sites adopt an aesthetic that helps to create

Plate 1 The Pitcher & Piano, Nottingham, UK

Plate 2 Malmaison, Oxford, UK
a hospitality orientated space. The mixture of light, original form, function and design which affords the space informs how guests negotiate the experience. In short, the building influences the way in which the guest’s approach engages with and interprets the proffered experience. At a simplistic level, both the Malmaison and the Pitcher & Piano are buildings that have been converted from one use to another, and utilise a servicescape that allows them to function as a hotel or bar, yet it can be argued that the feelings, ambience and intangible characteristic create a “+” factor, that both heightens and creates unique and extraordinary experiences. If the design and use of space was transplanted into a modern building, the significance would be lost. It is the combination of atmospheric cues (Ballantine et al., 2010); environmental dimensions and the aesthetics of the historic building that help create unique contemporary experiencescapes.

The role of experiencescapes

In accepting that an experiencescape is a “servicescape+”, it is important to understand the role they play in communicating and creating the tourism or hospitality product. Building on the work of Pine and Gilmore (1999) and Hemmington (2007) identifies how companies that can capture an essence of theatre, performance and generosity within their product gain a competitive advantage by providing their guests with experiences that are personal, memorable and add value to their lives (Kozinets et al., 2004). The impact of creating effective experiencescapes can also be contextualised within Licciardi and Amirtahmasebi’s (2012) identification of how developments such as the Pitcher & Piano and Malmaison can both contribute to, and benefit from, engaging with “the economics of uniqueness”. Within the portfolio of hospitality businesses owned by Marston’s, they have developed a distinctive sub-brand that they identify as Destination and Premium Premises. These hotel, bars and restaurants are located within distinctive buildings and locations. In a challenging financial climate, Marston (2018) has increased the number of these Destination and Premium Premises in the UK, of which the Pitcher & Piano forms part, with underlying revenue increasing from £202.6m in 2017 to £210.7m in 2018. Likewise, in a crowded market place, the Malmaison in Oxford has an occupancy rate of approximately 90 per cent in 2017 (Oxford City Council 2018).

The concept of the experiencescape is more than an academic construct; it is an important aspect in creating successful and differentiated tourism and hospitality experiences. It is possible to think of experiencescapes as “commercially staged experiences” (Chronis et al., 2012) that supplements to the experience or consumption of the tourism or hospitality product. For example in the case of Malmaison, at the basic level it provides a place to sleep, eat and drink, it fulfils the same function as any other hotel; however, its conversion from prison to hotel was undertaken in a sympathetic manner so that the building provides comfort while keeping its uniqueness. From interviews by the authors of this paper with the developers, they were keen not to raise, for example, the height of doorways as requested by some potential hotel companies as they felt such structural changes would negatively impact upon the aesthetic of the building and the experience being generated. Consequently, their search for a tenant focused on companies such as Malmaison rather than other large chains who would have required that the buildings met their company standardisation of design, room dimensions and facilities. It was felt by the developers that Malmaison’s brand image and previous investment in unusual or historic buildings within the boutique hotel sector made them the perfect partners.

Both the Pitcher & Piano and Malmaison utilise buildings that may have negative, experiential, ethical or even theological connotations for some customers and as such may not appeal to all consumers. Yet for many, they offer creative liminal spaces in which people can find meaning “in the world” (McCracken, 1989) through engaging with differentiated experiences. Although experiencescapes are created by developers, designers, architects and tourism or hospitality companies (Jernsand et al., 2015), the success of these rely upon how individual customers negotiate or mediate (Aurier et al., 2005) them. As such, experiencescapes through their usage and host/guest interactions become a site of joint cultural production (see Peñaloza, 2000; Kozinets et al., 2004), or in other words, are co-created. However, the experience will differ according to each consumer according to their available resources (Tresidder, 2011). For example, the consumption, negotiation and interpretation of Malmaison by customers can be influenced by many factors including their relationship to Oxford, previous experience with the penal system or, through various television programmes for which it has been used as a filming location, for example...

...
the British crime drama Lewis. The historic nature of a building and its design aesthetics generate various marketplace meanings (Thompson and Hayto, 1997; Arnould and Thompson, 2005) that are negotiated by consumers, thus experiencescapes will not have the same meaning for every consumer, and can be seen as offering, “[…] polysemic symbolic resources that allow for significant variation in consumer interpretation and use […].” (Holt, 1998, p. 334).

It is possible to think of the design of experiencescapes as an example of communicative staging: this idea has been developed by Arnould et al. (1998), who identify it as an important part of the marketing offer. Simultaneously, communicative staging can also be seen as an important part and example of Hemmington’s (2007) idea of performance. Historic buildings often provide spaces that can be re-used in creative ways and the architectural characteristics of the building such as high stained glass windows as in the case of the Pitcher & Piano, or, the regular rhythm of windows at Malmaison, which all contribute to a distinctive aesthetic. Subsequently, architectural and aesthetic features offer creative stages in which exceptional tourism and hospitality experiences can be developed. As can be seen from Plate 1, the Piano and Pitcher has managed to keep all the original ecclesiastical architectural characteristics of the building. They have preserved the essence of the church by incorporating some innovate building processes, for example introducing a frame that sits within the church but does not touch the walls or interfere with the windows and the light that emanates from them. This fits in with the conservation principle of minimum intervention where the minimum of historic fabric is removed from the historic building as is possible, and also provides a unique use of space that in turn generates an extraordinary experiencescape. However, we must not forget that communicative staging includes all communicative items that help constitute a servicescape and includes examples such as menu boards, interpretation boards, images (Matson-Barkat and Robert-Demontrond, 2018) and staff or employees (Bitner, 1992). In terms of personal interactions between the host and the guest, communicative staging can range from a highly scripted and commercial performance, to a more flexible and authentic dialogue. Not only do service delivery personnel bring the experience and the environment to life for participants through narrative framing and storytelling, but they also act to make it safe and magical (Arnould and Price, 1993). The staff in organisations help guide the customers in terms of co-creating experiences.

Although these aspects go some of the way to understanding experiencescapes, it is important to think how the “+” element is added to servicescapes. As can be seen from the two examples presented within this paper, the creative re-use of historic buildings adds an additional factor that can only be generated by the feelings the buildings generate. Building on the work of Kotler (1973) and Kim and Moon (2009) in identifying the significance of the senses in the retail environment, it is possible to argue that the tourism and hospitality industry has created a multi-sensational language of experience (formed from design cues and embedded hegemonic ideas of what constitutes successful tourism and hospitality experiences). These design cues are utilised in the marketing and development of hospitality and tourism experiences that is understood by consumers (Tresidder, 2011; Tresidder, 2015), and that this language directly underpins the construction of experiencescapes. Both the Piano and Pitcher and Malmaison utilise this language of hospitality; however, its negotiation and interpretation are contextualised by the buildings themselves. Subsequently, it is conceivable not just to think about how experiencescapes are defined by their décor, design or theme, but also how they impact upon the consumer’s senses and how meaning is constructed for them and communicated to them.

The experiencescape as a sensual construct

As identified above, experiencescapes provide a multi-sensual experience, whereby the consumer becomes immersed in a set of formulated experiences that reinforce the positive impact of the tourism/hospitality experience (Blumenthal and Jensen, 2019). It is possible to identify two different approaches to the utilisation of sensual incorporation in the sector; the first can be defined as “explicit incorporation” where the extraordinariness of the experience is based around sensual strategies. Examples of this include tourist attractions such as the Jorvik Viking Centre in the UK (http://jorvik-viking-centre.co.uk) where the smells and noises of Viking York are pumped into the attraction, thus creating a multi-sensual tourist experience. The Pitcher & Piano and Malmaison both offer examples of “implicit incorporation”, although still creating an intriguing
and extraordinary experiencescape it involves a more subtle strategy, where the feeling, ambiance or aesthetic of the building informs the experience. This is created by both the servicescape and the way in which light, space and the heritage collectively influence the nature of the hospitality performance and the way guests interpret it. Both the implicit and explicit incorporation of sensual strategies contribute to the transactional experiences of consumers (Trauer and Ryan, 2005). As Chronis et al. (2012, p. 263) comment:

[...] human perception privileges sensations felt through the body, they conceive imagination too as steeped in embodied perception. For them, perception is a synthetic experience. Consumers grasp the world directly through their multiple senses and by imaginary modes of embodiment.

The significance of senses in contributing to tourism and hospitality experiences is well charted (Pan and Ryan, 2009; Low, 2005; Law, 2001); however, little research has been undertaken in understanding the nature of the building and servicescapes in driving consumers interaction with sites. Nevertheless, Dann and Jacobsen (2003, p. 19) made a positive step forward by challenging the primacy gaze orientated research within the tourism field by offering an insight into the importance of multi-sensual strategies. As they state:

[...] the successful tourist destination, which otherwise could be regarded as something of a hybrid and living anachronism, blending ancient with post-modern, now can be the winning formula, precisely because it does not rely on sight alone.

Tourism and hospitality servicescapes offer a certain form of experience; however, it can be argued that the “+” element is the key to continuously engage the experienced traveller, this requires an understanding of how guests use their senses to negotiate tourism and hospitality experiences. In exploring the complexity of the relationship between senses and servicescapes and linking the consumer’s experiences to touch, smell, feel, etc., experiencescapes are largely multi-sensual, in trying to understand the significance of this, it is worth considering Sutton’s (2010, p. 217) concept of “synesthesia”. Synesthesia encompasses the notion that senses do not operate in isolation, but rather that they operate in relation with all the other senses. The significance of this is important when attempting to define and comprehend the multi-sensual experience offered in the experiencescapes of tourism and hospitality. For instance, Pan and Ryan (2009) identify the multisensory nature of tourism and its significance to the contemporary tourist. Senses have always been an important part of tourism, we can chart this back to Baudelaire’s (1863/1964) notion of the “flâneur” and the idea of exploring the city through a heightened sensual awareness of the environment. According to Biehl-Missal (2013), we need to consider the impact senses have on our understanding of the world and how it influences our behaviour. She states that we gather “[...] aesthetic experiences through our five senses create an embodied, tacit knowing that [...] can influence behavior” (2013, p. 5). The heightened experiences that are generated by historic buildings such as Malmaison and the Pitcher & Piano contribute to why people choose to visit these two sites over others. They offer a hospitality product (food, drink or accommodation) that does not differ from their competitors; however, the building differentiates the experience and elevates it to the extraordinary.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, when looking forward it is important not to forget the past. Every country has a stock of disused historic buildings, whether they be castles, prisons, churches, factories or warehouses; all of these provide the opportunity for companies to create unique and extraordinary experiencescapes that can draw from and contribute to “the economics of uniqueness”. The relationship between the experiencescapes of tourism and hospitality upon the behaviour and perception of the experience by guests cannot be underestimated. It is possible to think of the servicescape+ not only as a design exercise, but also as a psychological one that stimulates and engages consumers’ senses. Both the Pitcher & Piano and Malmaison offer a stage that elevates the hospitality experience to a higher level; this is achieved not through the menu or levels of service, but the context in which their product is delivered. It is difficult to really identify what historic buildings contribute and it is even more difficult to quantify it; however, the only thing that we are certain of is that they add something intangible to the tourism and hospitality experiences that elevate them to the level of the extraordinary. What these historically important sites achieve is to
create settings in which the experiential tourists can find something different from the mainstream; the consumption of these experiences attracts elevated levels of cultural capital that is traded with friends, family or peers. The ability to continually create unique experiences is not only important for the experiential tourist but also to continually generate new experiences for tourists.

The uniqueness of historical buildings and their role in forming extraordinary experiencescapes provides a supply of destinations or touristic resources for the experiential traveller, they reflect regional or geographic differentiation, and offer an aesthetic experience that cannot be replicated by a newly built attraction or hotel. Consequently, what we can be certain of is that the use of the resources from our past provides opportunities to create experiences that transcend time and secure the future not only for the buildings but also for tourism and hospitality companies, cities and other destinations. The creative re-use of historic building offers companies the ability to differentiate themselves in a crowded market place, to gain a competitive advantage, to contribute to the protection and conservation of national heritage and most importantly to create unique experiencescapes. Sometimes the future relies on the past! As Bob Marley and Ford (1974) once said:

In this bright future you can’t forget your past.

References


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Argentinians on the Moon, or Hope for our Tomorrow

Edited by Sarah J. Montross
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The strength and the weakness of Past Futures: Science Fiction, Space Travel, and Postwar Art of the Americas (Montross, 2015) lie both in its hybrid character, embodied by robust essays on Pan-American fine arts exploring science fiction topics in the second half of the 1900s, from Outer Space to Utopia. First and foremost, the book is the catalog of a modern art retrospective curated by its editor, Sarah J. Montross, at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art in Brunswick, Maine, with essays by Montross herself, and by contributors Rodrigo Alfonso, Miguel Angel Fernandez Delgado, and Rory O’Dea. As such, this might have remained unrecorded in this journal and its reviews might have been featured in fine arts magazines. However, the co-publisher is MIT Press, with Roger Conover as executive editor. Hence, the book benefitted from the transfer of scientific charisma from MIT Press to all its titles. It might be seen as an unusual coincidence, however, from the specific viewpoint of this Journal of Tourism Futures, a lucky one in more than one aspect.

Past Futures: Science Fiction, Space Travel, and Postwar Art of the Americas has several merits on its own. Being the author of this review the former editor of an Italian national magazine in the fine arts sector, it is possible to mention that the artists covered and the artworks presented offer an enjoyable overview of Latin American visual culture in the 1960s. Even further, the introduction of contemporary projects, like the unusual hybrid auto-railway travel vehicle SEFT by Ivan Puig and Andres Padilla Domene (pp. 28-9) stretches the particular relevance of the book to today’s fine arts in the wider sense of the domain. Also, the presentation of specific projects by artists of international stature like Robert Smithson offers the opportunity to uncover less than obvious moments of his artistic journey, like his “anti-expedition” in the Yucatan region of Mexico, unplanned for the purpose of enacting a peculiar “travel at random” anti-positivist research strategy (O’Dea, in: Montross, 2015, p.108). Smithson a leading figure in international contemporary art, as documented by the likes of Ann Reynolds (2003), also published by MIT Press. Even more triggering, there is the possibility to uncover the intimate relationship that Smithson entertained with the visionary novels of J.G. Ballard (O’Dea, in: Montross, 2015, p. 109). Referring to the 1939 essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” by art critic and curator Clement Greenberg, O’Dea identifies science fiction as Smithson’s “mainline into modernism’s unconscious, desires, and secret logics” (p. 109). The status of science fiction, otherwise documented as lower art or minor literature, emerges from this detail of Smithson’s intellectual biography in its role of narrative conduit between high and low aesthetic and narrative expressions in modern and contemporary culture. And, in a sort of ideal parallel, the artists edited in this catalog might be described as “affiliated to the utopia” (Fernandez Delgado, in: Montross, 2015, p. 58), as science fiction writers are, according to a reference to the proposal for a sociology of knowledge by Karl Mannheim (Fernandez Delgado, in: Montross, 2015, note 41, p. 60).

Whereas the idea of utopia as emerged again after the 2008 crisis in New Left circles (Jameson, 2005, p. xii), it must be noted as a potential paradox that in the Cold War years this notion was associated with Stalinism, “designating a program which neglected human frailty […] and betrayed a will to uniformity and the ideal purity of a perfect system that always had to be imposed by force on its imperfect and resistant subjects” (Jameson, 2005, p. xi). The latter definition would perhaps better fit with the contemporary notion of dystopia, however, from the pages of Past Future what seems to emerge is the optimism and hope of a decade, the 1960s, that did believe in a better
future, as based on the Modernist worldview of “progress.” What truly matters is that both “utopia” and “science fiction” are first and foremost narrative genres of fictional narrative, where through the decades, the latter has expanded into a “hyperdiegesis” of transmedia world-building, across media, with participating audiences deferring narrative closure (Hassler-Forest, 2016, pp. 3-5). “Past Futures” might, therefore, be repositioned from modern art catalog to social sciences investigating the notion of the future, as it was articulated in a recent, however, distant past. From this viewpoint, it might be appropriate to mention the postmodernist effort to move beyond the positivist notion of scientific reporting to a palette of reporting formats informed by humanities, in what could be described as the “Literary” or “Poetic” turn in social sciences (Jacobsen et al., 2013, p. 3). A new galaxy of expressive potential might then open up for social scientists. Here, it is possible to establish a connection with the notion of social sciences as an agency of “world-making,” from “mirroring to making” (Gergen, 2014, p. 294), where “action research tools and methods might be misused for unethical purposes, like any tool might be abused, or any definition of ‘common good’ or ‘welfare’ might be ambiguous, as any constructed concept” (Bevolo and Gerrits, 2018, p. 39). Just like at the dawn of space exploration, the possibilities might feel endless.

Is there any direct or functional utility between this book and scholars or consultants who work in tourism futures? The answer to this question would objectively be negative because the text is structured according to the semiotic requirements of art critics and the imagery presents artworks that belong to the history of fine arts, not its future. However, this book might offer a number of important opportunities to reflect. First, one might appreciate the cultural bridges built in the past by Latin American artists toward the Western avant-garde, while maintaining an aesthetic and ideological autonomy. This might help to better understand the background of Argentina or Chile or Mexico as present and future tourist destinations, at a level of nation branding. Second, and most importantly, for all of us, the stories of artists, writers, curators, critics and intellectuals who dreamt of a bright future are very telling, because they feel close to the zeitgeist of these years of fake news and populist politics. In the midst of economic unrest and on the verge of military dictatorship, there were Argentinians who dreamt of reaching the moon while reverberating the socio-political climate of increasing darkness. They created their art for the world reaching the Venice Biennale, and beyond, and they produced their books and movies in dialog with masters like Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares. Looking at the current decade, this might feel somehow contemporary, and inspire a visionary ability, in futures research scholars and foresight practitioners, who engage in what Ton van Gool, Director of the STRP Biennale, thinking of the nature of the next science fiction to come, defined as “critical optimism.”

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