

The experience economy and creativity, towards the co-creation tourism experience?

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Background

Tourists as well as cities and regions are in search for alternatives to escape from the serial reproduction of culture, according to the introduction to the ATLAS annual conference of 2005 (www.atlas-euro.org/). With the concept of creativity, Richards and Wilson (forthcoming) do offer an alternative. Although still a complex, footloose and intangible concept, there are signs that creativity is becoming an increasingly important part of consumption as a whole, basically driven on the need for self development (ibid.). This need for self development or, as Giddens (1990) put it, the 'construction or narrative of the self' is what entrepreneurs of today's experience economy (Pina and Gilmore 1999) aim at to match with by creating experiences that could in the end lead to a desired transformation of the self. Numerous books about developments in society describe the changing relationship between customers and companies in favour of customers who are increasingly gaining power and control¹. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) present an alternative for the popular defence against competitive space in the form of product- and company centric led innovations to increase product variety. They argue for the co-creation experience as a basis for value and as the future of innovation.

For tourism being the greatest and ever growing source of experiences with which people as well as places construct their own unique narratives, consequently, a lot of what these books describe about today's society and its customers tells us about today's tourism and tourists. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003:14) already see glimpses of the co-creation and expansion of such experience spaces in a variety of realms. Strange enough, the biggest experiences generator, e.g., tourism, is not yet one of them; both in applications as well as in fundamental research it lacks behind. What does creativity in tourism experiences mean and how does it relate to the co-creation experience? Is creativity focused on a more interactive form of tourism, a *co-creation*, between tourism entrepreneur(s) and tourist(s) as to create unique value? Where does co-creation in tourism experiences actually occur and where could and should it occur?

¹ See, for instance, De ziconomie, Borg (2003); De verdragde tijd, Cornelis (1999); The attention economy, Davenport and Beck (2001); The dream society, Jensen (1999); De emotiemarkt, Piët (2004); The future of competition, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004); The age of access, Rifkin (2000); The support economy, Zuboff (2002), etc.

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Theoretical/ practical implications

This paper aims at exploring the co-creation tourism experience space as a future for innovation. The aim is to:

1. develop a research framework to study the co-creation tourism experience.
2. set a research agenda to fundamentally investigate the co-creation tourism *experience*.

Methods, data sources and findings

This paper is the result of an ongoing process of the study of literature, project case studies and input from discussions with several 'experience partners' in different fields inside as well as outside the area of tourism, like, among others, tourism and innovation consultancies, municipalities with their entrepreneurs working on creative tourism innovations, experience entrepreneurs and founding institutions of the experience economy. The paper will be of fundamental character highlighting current debates and examples and proposing a research framework for the study of co-creation tourism experience.