Grounding Tourism Experience Design in Experience Theory

Juergen Gnoth
University of Otago

Cite as:
Gnoth Juergen (2020), Grounding Tourism Experience Design in Experience Theory. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 49th, (63815)

Paper from the 49th Annual EMAC Conference, Budapest, May 26-29, 2020.

Grounding Tourism Experience Design in Experience Theory

Abstract

This study proposes a theory-based, experience-centric model for tourists' well-being development that assists service and tourism experience designers in how to align their resources, and optimise their chances to create strong relationships, and tourists to bond with the destination. The Tourism Experience Model TEM reveals four ideal classes (Weber, 1949) of value-propositions to help optimise tourism experience design and therefore well-being outcomes. Expanding on well-being theory and SDLogic, the neo-Kantian model of perception details how two simple questions of tourists' behaviour can reveal indicative information of the dominant mode of experiencing. Each mode forms a class, determining how ideal constellations of resources will be framed, based on the variables of autonomy, competence and relationship needs, motivations, attitudes and values, and emotional orientation. The TEM encompasses all tourism experience and details how to increase eudaimonic happiness.

Keywords

Experience Design Well-Being

Track

Tourism Marketing

Grounding Tourism Experience Design in Experience Theory

1. Introduction

Holiday tourism is for working people to take time off to travel, for leisure and recreation, and interest in 'the other'. It is usually facilitated by heterogeneous services that combine into a system, which works best if designed to respond to the tourist's desire for well-being. This study suggests a theory-based, experience-centric model for tourist well-being that assists tourism experience designers to align their resources. It reveals four ideal classes (Weber, 1949) of value-propositions to help optimise tourism experience design and therefore well-being outcomes. These outcomes go often beyond the immediate reach of individual firms, unless they serve the same goals as the tourism experience, namely well-being. If so, both tourism experience and main-stream service designers end up with the same problem should they seek to be competitive, and wish to serve beyond mere functional needs. The problem thus is, 'how can designers anticipate solutions tourists seek for their well-being, and optimally align their resources?'

This question first requires theory development, based around the central concepts of well-being and experience, before designers can truly succeed. Good theory is generalizable, simple, and predictive, and needs to explain a reasonable number of outcomes (Hawking, 1988). Unfortunately, the underlying theories that may help create a solution, here the SDL or Service Dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2016), and well-being (Parsons, 1951; Heidegger, 1962; Ryan and Deci, 2001; Kahnemann et al. 2004) are themselves high-level theories still awaiting operationalisation, before solutions can be implemented in interactions and trusted to solve problems comprehensively (Nilsen, 2015). The qualitative gap between high-level and substantive or case-based application creates similar problems of adequacy. The development of high-level theory from case-based applications such as in service and experience design (Edvardsson et al. 2014; Yu and Sangiorgi, 2018; Tussyadiah, 2014) runs the risk of not covering all of the experiences desired or hoped for, thus lacking in generalisability. We will therefore be discussing first, the emerging role of service design in the operationalisation of the Service Dominant Logic or SDL (Vargo and Lusch, 2016), followed by a discussion of well-being theory, and how its lack of operationalisation to date poses problems for tourism experience design. This will lead to the presentation of the Tourism Experience Model and a discussion of its role in service and experience design.

2. Service Design

Ever since it has become apparent in main-stream service marketing, that services are co-creations in which ultimately only the customer perceives their true value, the question arose, how can a service firm provide for something it ultimately cannot know but only imagine, and propose as the best solution (MacDonalds et al 2016)? To solve this problem, Edvardsson et al. (2014), point towards customers' motivations and practices as the key, when they emphasize the need for organisations' resource integration mechanisms to align their aim and resources to customers' value creation processes. This advice follows Groenroos and Voima's (2013) analysis, which found that value-creation occurs not only in the customer's perception but also in the interaction between company and customer, as well as within the service firm itself when it creates the resources that can be used in the interaction. The firm can therefore base part of the design of resource constellations they need for co-creations in-house. They design those constellations by observing repeated firm-customer interactions in anticipation that they reflect solutions most desired. Yet, how much can a service provider anticipate the true design desired by the customer, let alone in the context of international tourism? What might be guiding principles?

Questioning traditional conceptualisations of service, SDL revealed that customers determine the value of a service phenomenologically. In other words, after decades of insisting that companies create value by offering a service, and that customer satisfaction depends on its quality, the new perspective has become more refined, saying that customers engage in co-creative acts by aligning resources to fit their needs, and that firms can help co-create this fit, if capable of designing their service appropriately. This reveals that co-creation thrives on interaction, to the extent that the customer's alignment of the company's and his/her own resources becomes a negotiation between what the service provider has to offer, and how the customer can best mould those resources to their purpose. The use of the term phenomenology or 'experiencing in context' signals highly idiosyncratic constellations of how a tourist attraction and related service fits into this experience and how the tourist prefers the appropriate resources to be aligned.

Overall, it signals that the customer might have to compromise in designing their solution, and at best be satisfied with generic need satisfaction; unless they are willing and capable of adapting, and able to shift anchors of expectations to fit the situation. Or they may actively engage with the firm to co-create an outcome able to generate delight, nonetheless. Similarly,

Tussyiadiah (2014) discerns three approaches to conceptualising design. Design may be a unique proposition embedded in products and services, a state of mind, or characterising the process of new product development, including outcomes of co-creation. Yet all of these contingencies do not address the 'excluded middle' that occurs during the interaction, 'how does the tourist experience an encounter and how do resources need to be aligned (to achieve a given goal)?'

The mainstream view on service design, is however, not without its critics amongst tourism researchers. They argue that tourism is more complex than current discussions in service research are concerned with, as it usually includes not only a bundle of heterogeneous services but also experiences which cannot be categorised as such (e.g., Tussyiadiah, 2014; Volo, 2009). All of these become important in the total design of holiday outcomes (well-being), nonetheless. These critics therefore suggest that the concept of service design is better conceived of as tourism experience design (Tussyadiah, 2014; Fesenmaier and Xiang, 2017).

3. Well Being

Tourists interrupt their every-day-life to travel, yet it remains part of their continuously lived experience. To gain insight into lived experience, we need to study it both as action (Weber, 1949) and as a psychic event. Only both can reveal how moment-by-moment experiences create the transition to the elusive, latent state of happiness, and how this involves experience designers.

Ryan and Deci generalise well-being as "optimal functioning and experience" (2001:142), while Kahneman et al (2004) substantiate it as the accumulation of pleasurable moments. Seligman (2002; 2012) views it as a general evaluation of life in terms of meaningfulness, positive emotions, engagement and satisfaction, as well as relationships and success. All of these dimensions are widely accepted and further refined by the concepts of value (utility) and health (e.g., Raz 2004; Bruelde 2007; Bartels 2015). There remains, however, not only theoretical tension between how case-specific and momentary happiness aligns with overall well-being as a retrospective evaluation. It also begs the question, how it aligns with experience needs during the extra-ordinary situation outside of the dull drone of the other-controlled every-day-and the autonomy experienced on holidays?

For Western cultures, the debate on what is well-being harks back to Aristotle, the Hellenistic period, and the history of Christian morality, which centred on the nature of happiness,

primarily in relation to the meaning of life and its ethics. Ryff (1989) reports that today, some of the confusion around the term and its interpretation rests with the translation of Aristotle's hedonia and eudemonia, as one of its sources. There thus exist two related but ultimately converging understandings of what is involved in generating subjective well-being; these are, pleasure (hedonia) and 'good spirit' (eudaimonia) that comes with virtuous self-fulfilment. It is generally difficult to establish boundaries between them, so that the presence of both are suggested to be the optimal form of well-being and of experiencing the world (see e.g., Huta and Ryan 2010).

This proposition has been confirmed by a psycho-linguistic analysis of independently written reports by 1000 tourists (Rahmani et al. 2018), showing that the more tourists use words and weighted expressions of eudaimonia, the more they also use those words expressing pleasure. These results also confirm Heidegger's (1962) philosophical model that, the more humans are able to express themselves to the fullest of their capabilities, the more they experience themselves existentially. Similarly abstract to Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world', Ryan and Deci (2001: 142) call this peak of experiencing and well-being, "optimal psychological function and experience". A further high-level insight derives from Talcott Parsons' functionalism (1951) determining well-being as 'equilibrium', allowing working people to be productive again.

Ryan and Deci further inform us that optimal well-being coincides with feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness, harking back to humanist conceptualisations in literature from Homer to Petrarch, Shakespeare or Goethe. There is thus a clear overlap in the semantics used by different disciplines. The psychologists' notion of optimal functioning and experience rephrases sociology's established notion of 'equilibrium' as the goal of free time and recreation (Parsons 1951). They similarly capture Heidegger's (1962) notion of 'being-in-the-world' as the optimal experiential state the individual can feel and be in to self-actualise. Between them, they express well-being as the experience of tourism objects to the best of the tourist's ability. However, for tourism experience designers, theoretical tensions remain because we need to reconcile apparent multitudes of different behaviour with this ephemeral notion of well-being.

4. An Experience Model for Tourism

Researchers often treat the tourist either as a person or as an existential human being but rarely as both, thereby muddying the difference that has people act either as autonomous

individuals, or as externally motivated and guided persons. We all enter this world as human beings and then grow to become persons. Persons are social beings as they learn to exist by learning to conform to norms and standards, by which they experience 'difference', and compare and contrast what is 'right' or 'wrong'. As the person grows , they become aware of their existential self as human beings which struggles to belong, and who seeks convergence with 'the other', overcomes felt hurdles, and forms an inner sense of self.

This brief summary does no justice to the person nor to the existential self, yet for the mid-level of theory of the Tourism Experience Model (TEM), we require detail on how the mind experiences its action. Following the neo-Kantian view of perception, we focus on mind and activity separately, and theoretically reduce the mind to what it can become conscious or aware of. Notably, consciousness or awareness itself has no memory but thinks or operates only with what is at hand. This 'what-is-at-hand' is awareness of either, an external or an internal stimulus, an association or a thought in reflection. The mind thereby sources from its memory of either predominantly socially acquired knowledge of norms and expectations, or humanist, or existential self-knowledge. These sources also help define the nature of tourist's motivations as either extrinsic or intrinsic orientations and co-determine responses to service or attraction design features.

Apart from thus polarising the sources of knowledge that the mind draws on, the TEM also reduces all activity the individual can engage in to its basic functions: practicing versus exploring. All living entities need to explore and learn in order to be able to adapt; and they need to hone what they learn, in order to survive, and to create capacity for new learning. Both repeated practice and exploration involve themselves with what the tourist encounters (outside stimulus) and with what s/he has learned. Motives and situational understanding are the sources of knowledge that help form motivations and expectations reflexively (see Gnoth 1997). In this self-reflexive way the mind creates meaning and forms experience. Incidentally, repeating successful acts consolidates skill but also familiarity, sense of self, habit and memory, while exploratory activity creates learning and the appreciation of 'the other', including bonding with a place (Hammit et al. 2006), and growth of self.

Tourists begin their holidays with varying levels of energy, interest and knowledge. In turn, this 'state of being' crucially determines how the tourist experiences, or is emotionally disposed (Scherer 2005). To understand how the tourist experiences, the TEM therefore asks two focal questions:

(1) Has the activity the tourist engages in been practiced before and is it well known (is it a repetition), or is it a new activity (an exploration) and might involve new skills or knowledge?

(2) What motivates the activity? Does it involve the existential self, or the social self as source of drive and knowledge (is it intrinsically or extrinsically motivated; or have extrinsic motivations become internalised and similar to intrinsic motivations)?

With these questions, the TEM breaks the core theory down into four logical modes or ideal classes of experience (see Fig. 1). Each mode's simple descriptors of mind and activity are on sliding scales and help frame and predict the dominant characteristics of the experience (motivations and expectations; values and attitudes; self-determination correlates). From a humanist, hermeneutic perspective, many of the constellations underlying each individual mode are predictable to an extent, including tourist's attitudes towards their destination and attraction, because the model helps qualify how the tourist is likely to react. For example, a worker suffering from physical exhaustion or lack of self-esteem is unlikely to engage in exploratory activity but adopts previous practice they know to be successful, including towards objects they are not familiar with (Luhmann 2000). If their activity is extrinsically motivated it is focused back at the norms and expectations of important others; the activity will be performance-oriented, i.e., is socially normed or authenticated, and creating a sensuous experience of difference (e.g. lying by the pool rather than being at a desk or operating a machine). If intrinsically motivated, the worker is likely to also put effort into an activity that permits flow, or an existentially grounded sense of being as outcome (swimming lengths of the pool until there is only swimming as meditation). Service design can therefore respond by merely providing the resources to help tourists satisfy immediate needs, or they can plant ideas that will end up with the tourist picking up a challenge and explore the destination on its own terms.

The achievement of either of the four ideal classes produces happiness, however, substantively different in kind. Apart from the Re-Discoverer's flow already explained, the Pleasure Seeker indulges in extrinsically learned and motivated activities that have been practiced before, and are socially sanctioned. Activities in both forms of experience are focused on 'being' and the consolidation of previously acquired values particularly including esteem-needs (see Gnoth and Matteucci 2104). Although competence in terms of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci 2000) is important here, it takes on predictably

different characteristics, depending on whether intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. Similarly predictable differences will occur to the qualities of relatedness sought by tourists, while autonomy seeking 'being' is a given, with the decision to travel and to experience activities that promote 'being'. If tourists engage in exploratory activities, autonomy takes on an aspirational shape that influences how the tourist interacts, engages and defers to tourism objects. Such shifts towards being autonomous and competent can be encouraged by a service design that interacts with tourists so they are able to negotiate difficulties according to their current ability.

Importantly, only if tourists can achieve the experience of *all modes* easily are they in equilibrium, feel truly well or happy. This means that they can feel pleasure, rediscover themselves and enjoy their state of being; but also that they can easily acquire new knowledge and insights, including those that make them learn, grow, and feel a new sense of belonging, mastery and achievement (see Fig. 1; more detail in the conference presentation). Existential transformation occurs when tourists adopt values and behaviour of 'the other'. It happens if the tourist appreciates 'the other' for its own values and accepted holistically.

5. Conclusions

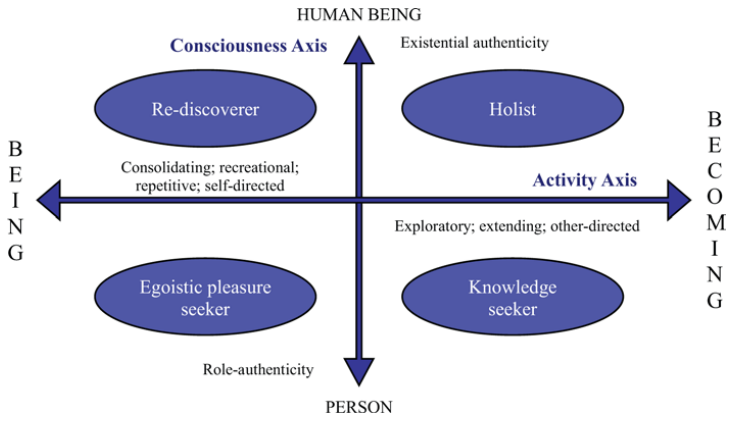
The TEM reveals to host communities that tourists who focus on experiences which promote 'being' are not truly interested in the community, unless tourists are helped to regain their equilibrium if needed, and can be opened up to share the local community's uniqueness. As the tourist regains equilibrium, experience designers can influence how destination objects and actors can increasingly influence their motivation, and by managing double contingency during interactions (Luhmann 1995). The better service designers understand how they can communicate with the tourist based on an understanding of their expectations as reflect by answers to the two questions underlying the TEM, the more will they be able to achieve optimally negotiated outcomes. Both performance studies and humanist understanding will help guide interactions and communication strategies. The challenge lies with creating appropriate value propositions that co-create well-being (Anderson and Ostrom 2015).

In short, tourists focus on 'being' if engaged in previously practiced activities which, if entertained with a focus on the real or existential self, allow the tourist to rediscover themselves and experience flow (Csikzentmihalyi 1975). If the tourist applies socially acquired practices with ease rather than effort, they produce pleasure, whether sensuous pleasure, or via perception of social acceptance or both. Yet, designers need to satisfy 'being'

needs only to be able to entice tourists into ‘becoming’ (see Fig.1) for that is able to increase happiness and build relationships.

Tourists focus on ‘becoming’ if they are interested in ‘the other’ and seek to learn about their values and beliefs, and the ways they perform their rituals and daily life. These practices are studied or observed using tourists’ own socially acquired learning skills, or by simply copying how to practice skills from ‘the other’. Such practice can lead to new learning but also to new insights beyond just mere facts. They can disrupt existing knowledge and lead to changes in behaviour and adoption of new values. The latter describes a movement from a socially authenticated role-play into an existentially authentic role appreciation and transformation. Experience designers first need to assure tourists in their being to recreate equilibrium, before exploration of ‘the other’ can commence, learning and appreciation occur. If this can lead to the adoption of new values and behaviour, and tourists are able to practice these, existential transformation and lasting relationships can occur.

Fig. The Experience Model



Selected References

Anderson, L., Ostrom, A. L., Corus, C., Fisk, R. P., Gallan, A. S., Giraldo, M., Mende, M., Mulder, M., Rayburn, S. W., Rosenbaum, M. S., Shirahada, K. and Williams, J. D. (2013) “Transformative Service Research: An Agenda for the Future’’, *Journal of Business Research*, 66 (8), pp. 1203-1210.

Boniwell, I. (2012). Positive Psychology. *In A Nutshell : The Science Of Happiness.* PWBC:London.

Brülde, B. (2007). Happiness and the Good Life. Introduction and Conceptual Framework. *Journal of happiness studies,* 8(1), 1-14. doi:10.1007/s10902-006-9002-9.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990) *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, New York: Harper & Row.

Deleuze, G. (1994) *Difference and Repetition.* New York : Columbia University Press.

Gnoth, J. and Matteucci, X. (2014) "A phenomenological view of the behavioural tourism research literature", *Internal Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 8(1), pp. 3-21.

Hammitt, W. E., Backlund, E. A., & Bixler, R. D. (2006). Place bonding for recreation places: Conceptual and empirical development. *Leisure studies*, 25(1), 17-41.

Hawking, S. (1988). *A brief history of time*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

Heidegger, M. (1962) *Being and Time*. London and Southampton: SCM Press ltd.

Leiper, N. (1990) Tourist Attraction Systems. *Annals of tourism Research*, Vol. 17, pp. 367-384.

Luhmann, N. (1995), *Social systems*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.

Nilsen, P. (2015) Making sense of implementation theories, models and frameworks. *Implementation Science*. 10:53 DOI 10.1186/s13012-015-0242-0

Parsons, T. (1951), *The Social System*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

Peirce, C.S. (1902/ 1992). *The Essential Peirce*, 2 vols. Edited by Nathan Houser, Christian Kloesel, and the Peirce Edition Project (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1992, 1998).

Rahmani, K., Gnoth, J. and Mather, D. (2018) "Hedonic and eudaimonic well-being: A psycholinguistic view", *Tourism Management*, 69, pp. 155-166.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), 141–166.

Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069.

Swedberg, R. (1999) Max Weber as an Economist and as a Sociologist: Towards a Fuller Understanding of Weber's View of Economics. *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* Vol. 58, No. 4 (Oct., 1999), pp. 561-582

Wearing, S. (2001). *Volunteer tourism: Experiences that make a difference*. Wallingford: CABI.

Weber, M. (1949) *Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Glencoe: Free Press.