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Key drivers of tourism experience

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Introduction

Exploring tourist motivations is a difficult task that has been undertaken, over a long period and under various aspects, by many scholars. The first studies on the motivations of tourists often highlighted only one main motivation to undertake travel. From the first tourist studies on the motivations of tourists, authenticity certainly emerges as the most important concept, the first fundamental pillar. As the tourism phenomenon grows and evolves into increasingly complex forms, the studies begin to focus on the factors that stimulate demand, often called push factors. In this phase, the stimuli coming from the offer, from the places and from the actors of the tourism sector, although recognized, do not reveal much. Yet, the originality and uniqueness of the tourist experience, the attempt to continually shape and improve the offer, become crucial at the present time.

New paradigms arise, still in many ways to be observed in their different aspects, such as experience, co-production and, finally, the co-creation of the tourist system, in which the local community and visitors continuously interact, stimulating mutual knowledge with an adaptive process that aims at maximum satisfaction both for demand and for supply.

Some early attempts to frame the motivations of tourists: the quest for authenticity

One of the earliest and most influential attempts to examine tourist motivations is the concept of ‘authenticity’ developed by MacCannell (1973). The basic premise of his position is that tourist behavior is widely shaped by an implicit search for authentic experiences as an antidote to the inauthentic and superficial qualities of modern life.

The notion that tourists are essentially motivated by a quest for authentic experiences has been significantly challenged, starting from the consideration that tourists are more and more informed, more recently thanks to the spread of social media, and are aware of what they expect to see in the place they will visit.

Wang (1999) states that the issue about the authenticity of the tourist destination is irrelevant or less relevant. The author classifies three types of authenticity: ‘objective authenticity’ (the true, material and intrinsic authenticity of the place); ‘constructed authenticity’
(the so-called staged authenticity according to MacCannell); finally, ‘existential authenticity’, subjective and personal, generated by the interaction of the visitor with the vacation place. Therefore, the author postulates that the concept of existential authenticity can explain a wider spectrum of tourist phenomena than the conventional concept of authenticity.

Wang (2000) offers a useful elaboration on the themes of modernity and a continued discussion of authenticity in tourism. Lamenting the weaknesses of economic and psychological explanations of tourism motivation, Wang (2000) frames tourist motivation in terms of wider social changes and structures. Tourism, especially mass tourism, is not a universal phenomenon but a contemporary one that reflects what Wang characterizes as the ambivalence of modernity. Although modernity has a ‘love side’ in the form of material, intellectual and organizational miracles, it also has a ‘dark side’ by way of inauthenticity, loss of nature, helplessness, routinization, stress and exclusion. The author, for instance, explains that nature-based tourism is a response to the deterioration of the physical environment or the loss of nature, a dark side of the intellectual dimension (technology and sciences) of modernity.

Olsen (2002) reverses the perspective of authenticity, observing how in many studies the role of the tourist represents modernity that seeks to destroy the past that is the true essence of places. According to the author, the very role of the traditional tourist must be questioned, in order to be able to reach a real experience of places. Authenticity thus becomes a cultural value that is constantly created, reinvented and negotiated through social processes. Therefore, in many situations there is no single, authentic form of experience but a plurality of expressions and perceptions of the authentic.

The dual motivational hypotheses

Looking for a single factor to explain visitors’ desire to travel over time has become less feasible, considering the complexity of reality. Thus, different dual motivational models have been proposed, such as those formed by: psychocentric and allocentric factors (Plog 1974); escape and seeking factors (Iso-Ahola 1982); and push and pull factors (Dann 1981). Many other dichotomies have been elaborated over the years, not always providing an adequate motivational understanding of experiential reality.

One of the first works, but still to be considered one of the most interesting, in the context of dual motivational models, is that of Plog (1974). The model conceived examines two categories of visitors, completely different and opposed to each other, but essentially two ends of a continuum: psychocentric and allocentric; between these two extreme positions, there are two moderate variants of each one (called ‘near’) and the so-called mid-centric. The author has revised his position more recently (Plog 2001), in an attempt to grasp the personality traits of the different types of tourists. Therefore, Plog (2001) makes psychocentrics coincide with dependable personalities, cautious and conservative in their daily life, restrictive in spending discretionary incomes, preferring to be surrounded by relatives and friends and liking the routine of their lifestyle. On the contrary, allocentrics coincide with venturers’ personalities; they are intellectually curious, liking to choose new products in everyday life, preferring a daily life with varying activities and challenges and preferring to be alone and somewhat meditative. Many authors argued that the concept fails to account for the fact that tourists travel with different motivations on different occasions (Litvin 2006). As argued by Chen Y. et al. (2011), travel personality seems to be a meta-motivation or a premise by which other motivation paradigms and tourist behavior patterns can be discussed. Travel personality can be applied to other forms of consumption and importantly can be viewed as a fundamental force in determining holistic consumer behavior patterns from motivation through to decision.
The dual motivational model proposed by Iso-Ahola (1982) starts from the observation that the satisfaction that individuals expect to derive from involvement in a leisure activity is linked to two motivational forces: approach (seeking) and avoidance (escape). In other words, individuals perceive a leisure activity as a potential satisfaction-producer for two major reasons: it provides certain intrinsic rewards, such as feelings of mastery and competence and it helps them leave the routine environment behind them. According to the author, tourists may escape the personal world (with its troubles and problems) and/or the interpersonal world (formed by relatives and friends) and they may seek personal rewards (simple rest and relaxation, desire to learn new cultures, increase of personal prestige) and/or interpersonal rewards (varied and increased social interaction). In a subsequent reflection on this model, it is observed that recent trends toward more frequent, but shorter, vacations suggest that the escape dimension is a more important motivational force than the seeking dimension for tourism (Mannell and Iso-Ahola 1987). Jamal and Lee (2003) criticize Iso-Ahola’s model because it is too tied to psychology at the micro-level to permit the necessary inclusion of a macro-sociological analysis; the authors aim to study both the micro and macro factors that influence tourist motivations. Thus, studies on macro factors focus on the broad social forces that motivate people to take vacations, and the studies on micro factors focus on the internal psychological forces that also motivate them. According to Jamal and Lee (2003), tourist motivation study has to be situated within the wider society and historically situated social changes including modernization, industrialization and urbanization, as well as within spheres of everyday life such as work, family and neighborhood.

Dann (1981) offers an interesting analysis of tourist motivations, classifying them as push and pull factors. In his early studies (Dann 1977) the author focuses on push factors, identifying two types of tourist, the anomic tourist and the ego-enhancement tourist; in both cases, among the factors that stimulate tourism, the author emphasizes the central role of fantasy. On one side, Dann claims that a possible push factor for travel, therefore, lies in the desire to transcend the feeling of isolation and anomie in everyday life, where the tourist simply wishes to get away from it all. On the other side, the tourist, the mirror image of the former, can enhance his/her desire of going to a place where his/her social position is unknown and where he/she can feel superior thanks to this lack of knowledge in those around him/her. Additionally, on return, a further boost can be given to the tourist ego in the recounting of holiday experiences. Pull factors represents the specific attractions of the destination, which induce the traveler to go there once the prior decision to travel has been made (Dann 1981). This theory suggests that people travel because they are ‘pushed’ by internal forces and ‘pulled’ by external forces. In other words, these forces describe how individuals are pushed by motivational variables into making a travel decision and how they are pulled or attracted by the destination area.

Uysal (1998) examines the reciprocal interaction between the two phenomena of push and pull items of motivation in the same context to better understand tourist behavior that, in its simplest form, consists of an origin and a destination. The push factors are the behavioral results of an inner emotional state and pose opportunities for interaction and participation; the level of satisfaction, the level of expectation and the eventual need deficiency create a situation of equilibrium or disequilibrium that stimulates the push factors (like motivations, demographic factors, awareness of opportunities, social trends), initially forming a potential demand and, therefore, the current demand, filtering from the first the opportunities and impediments due to economic, sociopsychological and other exogenous determinants (linked to environmental contexts). The responses to the demand side or pull factors, including benefits sought at the destination or desired features in a hotel, would then
naturally represent the supply side of travel experience. The quality and availability of tourism supply resources are a critical element in meeting the needs of the ever-changing and growing tourism market. So, it is important that destination managements monitor visitors’ satisfaction with pull factors such as facilities, programs and services, in order to maintain a sustained and expanding business.

Uysal et al. (2008) focus on a review of the different studies that have tried to identify the push and pull factors that affect the motivation of tourists. In general, according to the authors, all the empirical studies reviewed support and confirm the hypothesis that the factors of push and pull share a common variance that can easily be captured and capitalized on to develop ‘product bundles’ as implied by the shared variance and create segments by assigning individuals to the common variance that exists between the two. Examples of market segments that have been identified include the studies of Oh H.C. et al. (1995) and Baloglu and Uysal (1996). The first study highlights four overlapping market segments, that is: safety/comfort seekers, culture/history seekers, novelty/adventure seekers and luxury seekers. The second one, similarly, groups tourists into another four overlapping segments: sports/activity seekers; novelty seekers; urban-life seekers; beach-resort seekers. Thus, the examination of push and pull motivation studies also revealed that the number of pull factors included in the studies seem to be larger than the number of push factors, probably due to the fact that pull items could be as large as the scope and nature of attributes that are associated with destinations and amenities.

The multi-motivational hypotheses

As can be noted, the spectrum of motivations has been increased more and more by different elements and features, parallel to the complexification of tourist systems. Several authors in recent times have tried to establish multi-motivational hypotheses to try to frame the drivers of travel in the light of the greater complexification of tourist systems.

In one of the earlier studies of this kind, Cohen (1979) distinguishes five main modes of touristic experiences: recreational mode; diversionary mode; experiential mode; experimental mode; existential mode. Cohen conceptualizes the search for meanings in terms of the ‘quest for a center’, while stressing the notion of ‘center’ as the zone of sacred moral values that exists in every society. Accordingly, the five modes of tourist experiences suggested by Cohen are characterized by the meanings assigned by tourists to both the ‘center’ of their own societies in everyday life and their quest for the ‘centers’ of other cultures during their excursions. The first two modes involve people committed to the ‘center’ of their own societies, seeking only mere pleasure; on the contrary, the last three modes relate to people who are alienated from their own society’s center, so they search for meaning in other cultures centers’ while traveling. The recreational mode serves the need for taking a break from the pressures of daily living in order to restore the strength needed to cope with entertaining, but shallow activities. The recreational mode is associated with those who perceive their daily life as meaningful, while the diversionary mode refers to those alienated from the goals and values of their everyday existence. The experiential mode is compatible with MacCannell’s notion regarding the quest for authenticity. This type of tourist enjoys observing the ‘authentic life’ of ‘others’ without any attempt to be converted or even engaged in their life. The experimental mode refers to those who do try out the authentic life of ‘others’, as part of their pursuit for an alternative to the ‘center’ of their own culture. Finally, the last mode, the existential one, refers to individuals already committed to an ‘elective center’ that is culturally and geographically external to their own society; while
these individuals live their daily routine in a ‘spiritual exile’ for practical reasons, their travel to a remote ‘center’ serves their desire to actualize and sustain their spiritual existence.

Uriely et al. (2002) add a sixth mode to the scheme suggested by Cohen, the humanistic mode, which includes those who may seek meaningful experiences in the centers of other cultures without being alienated from their own.

The model elaborated by Crompton (1979) states that the essence of a vacation is a ‘break from routine’; it appears to resolve different types of disequilibrium as ‘short-term disequilibrium’, reflecting a particular set of circumstances or events which are temporal disruptions (called ‘pressures’), or as long-term states of disequilibrium, which cannot usually be satisfied by a single pleasure vacation. An initial overt manifestation of disequilibrium leads to a break from routine, so there are three possible alternative behaviors: stay at home, go on a pleasure vacation or travel for other purposes such as visiting friends and relatives or going on a business trip. According to the author, it is possible to classify primarily either sociopsychological or cultural motives which determine the nature and destination of the pleasure vacation if that alternative is chosen. Among the sociopsychological motives, Crompton counts: escape from a perceived mundane environment; exploration and evaluation of self; relaxation; prestige; regression (meaning an opportunity to do things which were inconceivable within the context of their usual lifestyles); enhancement of kinship relationships; and facilitation of social interaction. Among the cultural factors, the author considers novelty and education. The author, therefore, did not develop in depth the cultural factors as much as the sociopsychological ones; in effect, he states that the tourist industry could usefully give more attention to sociopsychological disequilibrium when developing its product and promotion strategies. Consumers motivated by sociopsychological motives were not looking for uniqueness in the product; that is, some specific attribute it possessed which other destinations did not have. Cultural disequilibrium, on the other hand, refers to the desire to see new places or do things in a different environment. Crompton sustains that ‘novelty’ implies that there was no desire to return to a previously visited destination, no matter how successful the vacation. There is, therefore, a lack of brand loyalty.

Pearce (1988) proposes the idea of a travel career ladder to interpret tourist motivation that changes over time. The author classified tourist motivation into five hierarchical levels, or a ‘ladder’, with ‘relaxation’ needs at the lowest level, followed in sequence by ‘stimulation’, ‘relationship’ and ‘self-esteem and development’ needs and ‘self-actualization/fulfillment’ at the highest level. The logic of this idea lies in one’s recognition that different motivations are the result of different travel experiences, which are determined by an individual’s life span. This travel career model suggests that people commence their travel with a relatively low goal such as relaxation and pursue higher goals as they become more experienced travelers, until they reach the highest level of self-actualization/fulfillment. Recently, the author reviewed his model by replacing the ‘ladder’ with a travel career pattern (TCP) approach in which it is the dynamic, multilevel motivational structure that is seen as critical in understanding travel motivation, and it is these patterns that reflect and define careers (Pearce and Lee 2005).

**Some recent theoretical approaches**

The theoretical schemes shown, although in some cases criticized for some of their aspects, constitute an important starting point, each highlighting some relevant characteristics in the construction of tourism drivers.
In this sense, Chen Y. et al. (2011) tried to construct an integrated motivation framework to explain various tourist behavior patterns, including tourists’ destination choices, travel experiences and reactions to distance (distance decaying effects). According to their scheme, the authors state that if the life span of an individual is considered, the distance decaying effect can be reinterpreted by categorizing short-haul tourists as young and first-time visitors with little travel experience, whereas long-haul tourists are more likely to be the elderly and repeat visitors.

Moreover, in recent years, the observation point is increasingly shifting from the intrinsic motivations of the tourist to the creation of experiences for the visitor. Thus Crompton’s ‘break from routine’ must no longer necessarily be satisfied by the ‘authenticity’ of the location, but by its ‘creativity’ in renewing itself, by the implementation of the ‘fantasy’, Dann’s key concept.

Relevant from a theoretical point of view in this sense, are the experiential realms of Pine and Gilmore (1999) as a starting point for new studies on tourism, modulated according to the dual passive/active participation and absorption/immersion dualism: entertainment, esthetic, educational and escapist.

According to Quan and Wang (2004), the tourist experience consists of two dimensions, namely, the dimension of the peak touristic experience and the dimension of the supporting consumer experience. If the attractions that constitute the major motivation to pleasure travel are disappointing, then even the high quality of other consumer services such as accommodation cannot fully compensate for this deficiency. However, the experience of an attraction, as a peak touristic experience, cannot replace supporting consumer experience.

Oh H. et al. (2007) offer a first concrete interpretation of Pine and Gilmore’s work, pointing out that once the original ‘push factors’ coalesce, a set of relevant destinations is evoked along with the tourist’s attitude associated with each destination in the set. At this point, the expected values of the experience from a destination (‘pull factors’) often solidify or weaken the tourist’s intention to choose the destination.

Volo (2009) states that a ‘tourist experience’ can be defined as any occurrence that happens to a person outside the usual environment and the contracted time for which a sequence of the following events happens: energy reflecting the state of the environment impinges on sensory organs, the energy pattern is transmitted centrally and is interpreted and categorized according to one’s knowledge acquired through time and is integrated and may be stored in the form of memory under some conditions (and thus some learning will occur).

Tung and Ritchie (2011) tried to find the determinants of a ‘memorable experience’, focusing on four dimensions: affect, expectations, consequentiality and recollection. The authors state that it is necessary to continue reinventing destination by promoting new experiences that tourists can expect when they return, and new memories that they can take home through the development of new memory points throughout the experience.

Chen J.S. et al. (2014) concentrate on dynamic drivers of tourist experiences, focusing on three types: personal, environmental and interactive ones. These drivers change and evolve during and after the trip, reflecting personal responses to emotional inputs received during the visit period. The authors propose five types of experience that can be illuminated by an experience spectrum: disastrous experience, regretful experience, monotonous experience, memorable experience and extraordinary experience. Thus, the drivers may be exploited, in an individual or collective fashion, to transform unfulfilling experiences into memorable ones.

The interactive drivers especially, which stimulate the sociality of the journey, lead to the concepts of co-production and co-construction of tourist experiences (Chathoth et al. 2013), highlighting how the driver formation process is continuous and even able to shape the
output of the visit itself. Co-production means that the customers participate in creating the core offering themselves through shared inventiveness and co-design, but co-creation is closely tied to usage, consumption, value-in-use and the premise that value can be determined only by the customer.

Case study 3.1: War and tourism. The Case of ‘Trentino Grande Guerra’ in Trentino-Alto Adige (Italy)

War tourism is a peculiar form of memory tourism, which developed mainly following the events of the two world wars, due to the need of relatives and survivors to commemorate the places of the battles, often distant and unknown from those of birth and residence (Dunkley et al. 2011).

The tourist experience of the war landscapes requires the visitors to take an active role, as they have to interpret historical and technical information related to the battlefields, take part in commemorative practices and write their own impressions and memories in visitors’ books (Winter 2009).

On the one hand, tourism related to war events becomes a form of heritage tourism (Butler and Suntikul 2013), while on the other it goes back to factors connected with the emotions of individuals, as it is linked with the attractiveness of death and its symbolism, namely thanatourism (Seaton 1996) and dark tourism (Stone and Sharpley 2008).

In summary, there are pull factors based on the individual emotions of each visitor and push factors of a cognitive and situational nature, linked to the monumental and symbolic artifacts of war (Yuill 2003).

The autonomous region of Trentino-Alto Adige is one of the most important territories for tourism in Italy, thanks to its natural environment, its heritage and its sports facilities, especially winter sports: despite being one of the smallest regions in Italy (with about 2 percent of the national population), it is second in terms of total tourist numbers, with 12 percent of the total.

In an entrepreneurial context marked by small and family-run businesses (Tizzoni 2016), it was possible to develop a very participatory territorial community environment, in which the networks of connections between the territorial actors can orient tourist policies and offer new segments of activities, in which tourists can dynamically participate and interact.

Strengthened by a receptive system already relevant and well-structured for every period of the year, in recent times tourism actors in Trentino-Alto Adige have begun to open up to a new tourism channel, linked to the memories of the First World War.

Trentino and Alto Adige were among the most important battle theaters of the First World War, especially due to the ruggedness of the mountains, with fortification systems and trenches that were positioned above 3,000 metres during the so-called ‘White War’.

In order to convey different experiences related to the Great War, in 2010 Trentino-Alto Adige, with a regional law, created a ‘Trentino Grande Guerra’ network formed by public and private operators to celebrate the First World War Centenary (Irimiás 2014; Tizzoni 2016; Franch et al. 2017).

The network has several channels to elicit an authentic experience for visitors and to immerse them as much as possible in the history of the territory during the First World War.

Certainly the material cultural heritage would in itself have been an important attractor on its own, in part due to the natural landscape context in which the network is located, but given
that the memories of the Great War tend to disappear after a century, it was decided that messages that stimulate the immaterial and personal needs of visitors could also be conveyed.

The first aspect of the ‘Trentino Grande Guerra’ network consists of the territories, grouped into eight areas (mostly valleys, plateaus and the city of Trento itself); the greatest testimony is constituted by the fortification works (with 18 main works, especially forts and batteries) still present today, in which restoration works have been started for the use of visitors.

To connect the material network of forts and trenches, different itineraries have been prepared with excursions (sometimes guided) of different levels of difficulty, to satisfy even adventure and sports tourists. Overall, the network of routes has been grouped into the ‘Path of Peace’, a route that joins the places of memory, in what was the western sector of the Italian-Austrian war, fought between 1915 and 1918.

The route winds for about 604 km, from the Stelvio Pass to the Marmolada, connecting the peaks of the glaciers to the Alpine valley bottoms and creating a wide network of paths that allows the hiker to reach forts, strongholds, military roads and trenches.

The connection between the physical and the memory substrate is then given by military cemeteries and shrines.

The fundamental pivot is given by the network of 18 museums, which host a number of exhibitions and events (often for families, with the intention of transmitting to children and young people the memory of events and promoting a message of peace). The earliest museum to be concerned with First World War remembrance dates back to the 1920s (the War Museum in Rovereto opened in 1921), but most of them were inaugurated recently. Their permanent collections generally illustrate everyday life in the trenches by exhibiting artifacts and relics and showing reconstructions of battlefields and military high mountain buildings via multimedia devices.

Finally, the activities and services supply often includes guided tours, sometimes in collaboration with local associations; other services include edutainment and research activities, where archive materials and thematic libraries are provided; many sites host temporary exhibitions (Tizzoni 2016).

Ultimately, the construction of the First World War tourism network in Trentino-Alto Adige should be read as the overlapping of different layers of tourist products, usable by different types of visitors, with different individual motivations (memory, education for children, family ties, curiosity, adventure, nature and so on), in order to create an experience that can last over time.

Some concluding remarks

Dwyer et al. (2009) frame six global drivers, political, economic, social, technological, demographic and environmental, to identify the main drivers of future tourism supply and demand. The authors warn that in an increasingly turbulent and rapidly changing world, innovation and development driven by both internal and external circumstances will continue, but destinations and firms not adjusting their strategies as their environments change will have difficulty maintaining competitive advantage.

The classic tourist system was formed by visitors with few expectations and goals in front of a standardized, simple and often repetitive tourist offer. In modern times there is a growing knowledge about tourists especially thanks to the new information and communication technologies, with sophisticated database management systems providing the tools to respond to individual preferences and stimulate tourism purchases.
The advent of technological platforms to engage customers at a superior level prior to travel and during/post-travel phases has led to the emergence of co-creative tourism processes and modalities.

Thus, the debate in literature has shifted from push factors to pull factors, to the feelings that tourists have in visited places and the need to always renew the experience so that it is always memorable and not repetitive.

Experience value is created as a result of mutual exchange throughout the whole experience process. Tourists continually shape their tourism product, becoming interactive with the holiday resort and being an active part of the co-creation of experiences. So, it is necessary that a mature tourist system, like the one briefly shown in the case study, should necessarily evolve to anticipate the needs of potential users.

Tourism organizations and destinations would need to exploit all of their resources in order to move toward a higher level of customer engagement while focusing on tourists’ experiences, rather than satisfaction alone.

References


