

Theoretical Reflection on the Concept of Hostmanship in the Light of Two Emerging Tourism Regions.

Gelter, Hans, Luleå University of Technology

Introduction

This paper explores the potential of shifting from providing services to producing experiences in emerging tourism destinations such as the Barents and the Adriatic Sea Regions. It is based on a theoretical reflection and personal experiences of service and hospitality in these areas.

It explores the progression of offerings in the experience economy as a means for destination development. In the light of three main ways of product development for experience offerings, the "soft" dimensions of hospitality and hostmanship will be discussed, and how the experience economy can transform unique selling points to experiential value promises.

Background

Emerging tourism areas and new destinations, such as the Barents Region and the Adrian Sea region, have demanding challenges to find a competitive position on the world tourism map. These challenges include identifying and defining tourist attractions as unique selling points, finding a brand and core value of the destination, identifying markets and target groups, developing tourism infrastructure such as transportation, lodging etc., attracting investors and finding funding for tourism development, and packing the tourism resources into attractive tourist products and experiences.

Although these "hard" dimensions of tourism development are challenging to managing for both public and private stakeholders, even more difficult to manage are the "soft" dimensions, consisting of the human resources of a destination. These include among many dimensions, attitudes towards tourists among locals and tourism employees, service quality and hospitality, competence and education levels among tourist operators and employees, and their understanding of the complexity of the tourist experience. In a time where tourism is shifting focus from the traditional "tourist gaze" and consuming places (Urry 1995, 2002) towards consuming experiences and even demanding personal transformations and personal growth through experiences (Pine & Gilmore 1999), the human resources and "soft" dimensions of a destination will play an increasing significance in destination branding in addition to the "hard" tangible dimensions.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) in their paradigm shifting book "*The Experience Economy*" explained this development towards experiences as a new economic offering. Applying their model of

progression of the economic value on tourism, we can regard “commodities” as the natural and cultural heritage resources of a destination, which *per se* usually have low market price and competitive position. For example, the Sámi culture and boreal forest of Sweden is basically the same as in Norway, Finland and Russia. “Goods” can be regarded as tourism facilities such as hotels and resorts, which are still fairly similar globally in price and differentiation. “Services” are the tourist products and tourism offerings, such as snowmobiling through the forest, which can differentiate the Barents from other global destinations, but within the Barents area, are moderately differentiated, mainly in service quality and hospitality management. However, staged experiences, according to Pine and Gilmore, will have both a stronger competitive position and higher pricing. Here, customers become “guests” and service and hospitality are transformed into personal “hostmanship” (for definition, see below) (Gunnarsson & Blohm 2008). This means more personalized experiences than within the service sector. Even a higher level of economic offerings, not yet theoretically explored in a tourism context (Gelter 2011) are the offerings of personally guided transformations through transformative experiences, where guests are called “aspirant” and the seller “elictor” and the offering “a guided transformation” (Pine & Gilmore 1999, p170).

Interestingly, in the forewords of their updated edition of their book (2011, p. ix), Pine and Gilmore write “Although the book has since been published in fifteen languages and purchased by more than three hundred thousand people world-wide, the book’s thesis has not sufficiently penetrated the minds of enough business leaders (and policy makers) to give full bloom to a truly new – and desperately needed – economic order.” Therefore, new destinations such as the Barents and Adriatic Sea regions have a possibility to find a competitive position within global tourism by adopting these new business concepts of experience production and guiding transformations.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the “soft” dimensions of destination development in the perspective of the experience economy, in the light of the Barents and Adrian Sea area destination development. The background to this paper was an assignment for a benchmarking trip to destinations in Montenegro and southern Italy within the ENPI CBC Kolarctic project Public-Private Partnership in Barents Region Tourism (BART). The aim of the benchmarking trip was to learn about cross-border cooperation within a similar project in the Adriatic Sea region, the project “Integrated actions to promote sustainable tourist development” of Adriatic IPA Cross Border Cooperation funding, with the aim of sustainable cross-border tourism development between southern Italy, Greece, Albania and Montenegro. The benchmarking trip revealed similar challenges and problems in both the Barents Region and Adriatic Sea area in regard to the “soft” dimensions of destination development.

Method

This paper is based on a theoretical reflection on the emerging theory of experience economy, framed by my personal experiences and observations of the service quality and experience production in the Barents Region and Adrian Sea area. Both areas are emerging tourism destinations with similar challenges regarding both hard and soft dimensions of destination development. This paper will not address the “hard” dimensions of attractions, infrastructure etc. in these regions, but focus on the potential of using the “soft” dimensions to gain competitive positions on the world tourism map. Through benchmarking within the BART project and involvement in other tourism projects, I have gained extensive personal experiences of tourism and tourism offerings within the Barents area and elsewhere. My experiential platform also includes experiences as a tour-leader at international destinations in Europe, Africa and Asia, my own business involvement as a tourism entrepreneur in Swedish Lapland, as well as being a chair and developer of the Bachelor programme of Experience Production at Luleå University of Technology, Sweden. A reliability weakness in my analysis is that benchmarking was not done in a systematic way according to theory, and empirical data were not collected systematically. This paper will not discuss the cultural differences between the areas in regard to the potential of developing hospitality and hostmanship. This paper is therefore based on a qualitative deductive analysis based on personal experiences and observations, framed within theoretical models.

Strategies for tourism product development in emerging destinations

Tourism businesses within emerging destination such as the Barents and Adrian Sea areas can use several different strategies for tourism service and product development, but the main strategies would be:

1. Copycatting – imitating others’ products and services
2. Benchmarking – cooperating with Best-in-Practice and adaptation.
3. Innovation – creative development and productification of new products and services.

There are several other options to improve or develop processes and products such as blueprinting, customer surveys, focus groups etc. (Kandampully *et al* 2001, Williams and Buswell 2003, and others), but I will here shortly reflect on these three main methods.

Copycatting is simply copying, imitating, replicating or repeating an innovation or a pioneering process, or others’ products or way of working. Although copycatting at first seems unethical and bad business practice, it appears to be the most applied, and in many cases the most successful strategy (Shenkar 2010). This is also my impression when looking at tourism offers in the Barents

Region. Looking, at for example, at winter products, we can see that copycatting appears to be a norm among activity businesses in the Barents area, finding the same set of activities such as dog sledging, snowmobile driving, snow-shoe hiking etc. at almost every winter destination. The higher we move up the ladder of Pine and Gilmore's economic progression, the harder the economic offerings will be to copycat. This is because they are to a higher degree based on the "soft" dimensions and human resources of the provider and the personal involvement of the buyer. This scenario is similar to the model by Boswijk et al. (2007) for actor's involvement in the experience production.

Boswijk et al. (2007) envision experience production as three "generations", where the first generation is the traditional "staging" of experiences. Here the suppliers arrange, design and provide the experience for the guest, who is more or less a passive consumer of the experience. In the second generation there is a co-creation of the experience by the supplier and the guest, and in the third generation the supplier only provides the conditions and prerequisites for the experience that is self-directed by the guest. Service and hospitality have to be staged and can be regarded as the first generation, and thus also easier to copy. Experience Production of the second and third generation will be more difficult to copy as a co-production such as in hostmanship depends of the human qualities of the provider.

Thus, if a destination seeks a competitive position, it should strive to develop second and third generation of Experience Production that will be distinctly differentiated from the general tourism service offerings. This seems to be the strategy in Swedish Lapland, where much effort (education, development projects etc.) is put into moving away from traditional tourism service provision to co-created hostmanship and experience production. In contrast, my impression is that Norway and Finland are still geared towards traditional tourism service, while in Russia even basic service quality management has to be developed in many places. The latter also applies to the Adriatic Sea area, where well-developed tourism areas are geared towards traditional tourism services.

The other way of developing products and services, which is similar to copycatting is *benchmarking*, a word that is sometimes sloppily used with the meaning "studying and copycatting" what others are doing. However, the theoretical framework for benchmarking is based on cooperation and reciprocal benefits between the *benchmarker* and the *benchmarker*, i.e. a co-creation (Pyo 2001). Its aim is a structured learning process that is formalized to find performance gaps that are identified and measured, and a commitment made to operational

processes to close the gap (Camp 1989). There are at least forty different models of benchmarking (Pyo 2001, p.11), but most are based on Deming's (1982) four stages of: plan, do, check and act. Criticism against benchmarking is that as with copycatting, it removes diversity and heterogeneity from within the industry and the best practices becomes a kind of standardization (Pyo 2001). Thus if Russia, for example, would benchmark Finish Lapland for their destination development, we would end up with fairly similar products in both destinations.

True *innovation* is aiming towards completely new processes or products without using present structures. Innovation differs from *invention* in that innovation refers to the use of a better and, as a result, novel idea or method, whereas invention refers more directly to the creation of the idea or method itself. Innovation also differs from *improvements* (as from benchmarking) in that innovation refers to the notion of doing something different rather than doing the same thing better. Innovation has become a political buzzword, but in my opinion true creative innovations within tourism experiences are much rarer than the copycatting of existing products. Good examples from the Barents Region are the Icehotel (which has been extensively imitated in Norway and Finland), the Tree Hotel, the Ice Dome Concert Hall, the Santa Clause Village and the northern light thermo glass Igloo Village of Kakslauttanen in Saariselkä.

If a destination lacks highly attractive natural or cultural tourism attractions, copycatting or benchmarking of others' tourism products will not be good enough to attract global tourist attention. But according to Pine & Gilmore (1999), even an ordinary tourist service or product can be transformed into an attractive and expensive offering when transformed into a meaningful experience or transformative product. Thus copycatting and benchmarking world class destinations will not help developing destinations such as the Barents Region or the Adrian Sea Area. Rather these destinations should focus on innovative experience production and hostmanship, or even attempt to develop transformative experiences. The challenge for a destination is to develop products and services beyond expected service quality, and innovatively offer meaningful experiences.

Moving from service to experiences and hostmanship in product development

The most obvious contribution to the tourist experience besides the attractions *per se*, is the tourism services. And in my experience, service quality usually is of very varying quality in developing destinations such as the Barents area. I have even experienced "anti-service" at a hotel in Kandalaksha, where the hotel clerk for 5 minutes refused to pay attention to my request for a room, and then needed an additional 10 minutes of discussion before a hotel room could be offered. In other places such as Murmansk, hotel service had world quality. The aims of tourism

services are to fulfil different needs and expectations of the tourist (Grönroos 1984, Bergman & Klevsjö 2003, Williams & Buswell 2003), such as the need and expectation to obtain a room in a hotel. The extent to which such needs and expectations are fulfilled and the quality of the provided services determines the satisfaction of the tourist.

High-quality tourism service is a major source of competitive advantage, and a major differentiating element in tourism positioning according to Payne (1993), while bad service quality affects negatively the image of a destination (Grönroos 1984). One observation of bad tourism service resulting in a negative experience was a guided tour at some ruins in Montenegro. The tourist product, and its selling point, the historical remains, and the information provided about the ruins, held high quality. But the guide lacked all understanding of service quality and experience production. Having no interest in our perception, understanding or even hearing her “monologue” of information, even sometimes talking to herself according to her memorized script, the guide managed to completely “destroy” the experience of this old city. The guided tour was definitively not a memorable or meaningful experience of the place and its history, rather an annoying experience of bad guide performance. Had she added hospitality to her knowledge about the place, and interest in the tourist guests according to experience production, the guided tour could have become a very interesting, memorable and meaningful experience.

Thus, one way to increase the quality of a tourism product or service is to increase the quality of hospitality. *Hospitality* is a term usually defined in the narrow sense as the service provided in the tourism sector of ‘accommodation and catering’, i.e., the ‘hospitality industry’ (Lashley and Morrison 2000, 3), while in a broader sense it includes a social, private and commercial domain in the relationship between a host and guest: “To be effective, hospitality requires the guest to feel that the host is being hospitable through feelings of generosity, a desire to please, and a genuine regard for the guest as an individual.” (Lashley and Morrison 2000, 15). *Hospitableness* is the trait possessed by hospitable people that can be defined as including general virtues such as benevolence, public-spiritedness, compassion, and affectedness (Telfer 2000). The hospitality research discusses whether hospitableness can apply to the commercial host (Telfer 2000), i.e. can employees at a large hotel chain show real hospitableness or only through hospitality management put on a “show of staged hospitality” (Lashley and Morrison 2000)?

While traditional hospitality usually lies within the first generation experience production (Figure 2) where the host is “performing” (sometimes in a scripted way) for the guest, the Swedish concept of *Hostmanship* (*Värdskap*) is based on a true co-creation (second generation experience

production), where the private domain of genuine hospitableness is part of the business domain, and the host shows genuine concern for the guest's happiness, invites the guest not only to the business of the host, but invites the guest to share the life experiences of the host. Hostmanship is defined as the "art of getting people to feel welcome – too us as persons, to our business and to our places" (Gunnarsson. and Blohm 2008).

In contrast to (staged) hospitality, hostmanship is a private value and attitude, a way of living, a proudness of one self, one's business and place, and how you see and value your guests. This can be exemplified by my taxi transfer from Dubrovnik Airport to Kotor in Montenegro, where the taxi driver did not say a word during the almost three-hour drive, leaving me in a vacuum of questions about where we were and what I saw, and giving me an insecure feeling, whereas there are many examples of proud taxi drivers in Swedish Lapland, that enthusiastically explain and promote their destination. Likewise, the dedicated local bus guide in Montenegro did not have the knowledge and values of proudness to get us to feel welcome to the destination and places we passed or visited. In contrast, a local guide at Lake Skadar provided genuine hostmanship during a wine-testing excursion..

According to Gunnarsson and Blohm (2008) hostmanship is based on six values, the value to serve and contribute to another person, a holistic view to be able to see yourself with the eyes of your guest, responsibility to act on every problem that appears, to trust and let lose your consideration to guests and coworkers, the values of dialogue, to listen and rather understand than be understood, and finally knowledge – to know your guest's habits and culture, to meet the guest in his or her conditions. In a larger business, there is a management concept of value your employees and make them proud, "When I feel I am worth something, I can be hostable". This management issues was very obvious in souvenir shops in Kotor, Montenegro, where in one the employed young girls had problems with basic service quality and hospitality, apparently with a very angry shop owner. In contrast, next door the staff had fun, were happy and provided not just good service and hospitality but genuine hostmanship.

Such value building by the management is expressed by the Fish! Concept developed by Johnny Yokoyama, owner of the now World Famous Pike Place Fish in Seattle, USA (Lundin et al 2000). He realized that by having fun and play at work, he created not just a great work place for this employees with a lot of energy, but also created an attraction of entertainment. He invited his employees to join a work culture with four messages: Choose your attitude – you can always choose how to feel about your work; Have Fun – joy and happiness creates energy, play at work;

Make Their Day –share your joy and engage your customers in the play (i.e. co-production); and Be There – focus on your customers, put all your attention on them. However, “having fun” must be genuine! I have tested a Swedish rafting company where their business idea was to be the “funniest rafters in Sweden” and released a cascade of scripted jokes during the rafting experience, which completely destroyed the total experience.

Quality of hospitality and hostmanship and the performance of the staff is a business management issue, and its values must be communicated to empower their staff to deliver such standards in their daily work. This can be illustrated by the Disney’s 10-point staff code (Table 1) to all employees based on Walt Disney’s legacy of creating happiness through imagination, attention to details, and an appreciation of people’s needs and desires. Staff are employed by a process of casting to test if they share the basic values of Disney (Williams & Buswell 2003, p 128).

Table 1. The Disney 10-point staff code.	
We-re committed to quality	We never say ‘no’
We’re friendly, helpful and courteous	We’re impeccable
We smile	We’re on stage and we know our role in the show
We are a team	We’re professional and efficient
We’re positive	We strive to be the best

Any of, or a combination of, the Disney staff code, the Fish! Concept and the Swedish hostmanship would by itself create great experiences for the guests, and thus contribute to a competitive edge of a business and destination. Traditionally, destination marketing and market communication have been focused on the *unique selling points* (USP) of a destination, which is a sales-driven, product-centered and outcome-focused view. But today’s consumers are not function driven, but rather value, experience and emotion driven, more interested in how an offering informs (transforms), entertains, and contributes to personal branding and self-fulfilment. Schmitt (2003) suggests replacing USP with ESP, the *experiential selling paradigm* with an experiential positioning and *experiential value promise* (EVP) for a destination. The new paradigm of the experience economy and the “critical turn” towards co-creation in tourism, such as in hostmanship, indicate that competence of experience production that gives guests not only unique, but rather meaningful experiences will be a critical prerequisite to succeed as a destination. Emerging tourism areas such as the Barents and the Adrian Sea areas, would therefore gain a competitive edge by focusing on the “soft” dimensions and EVP’s for the destinations.

Conclusions

I have here argued that for developing destinations to find an international competitive edge, copycatting products and good service quality will not be good enough. By moving into the

experience economy, adapting methods of innovative experience production, and stepping up from providing service to co-creation through genuine hostmanship, businesses and destinations in the Barents Region and the Adrian Sea area will be able to develop Experiential Value Promises in addition to their Unique Selling Points.

Having done informal benchmarking around the world, my feeling is that most tourism businesses still are within the framework of delivering service, i.e., the service economy. There is therefore a great opportunity for companies in developing destinations such as the Barents and Adrian Sea areas, to gain a competitive position by entering the Experience Economy, or as Pine & Gilmore (2011, p. ix) expressed "...to give full bloom to a truly new – and desperately needed – economic order".

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