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## Development of Tourism Products and the Concept of Experience Economy

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The aim of this research is to show the relationships between the process of development of tourist services and the concept of experience economy. The theoretical assumption was made that the value of a tourist product is based on the tourist's experiencing it in the act or process of consumption; experience is an important factor for the modern customer-tourist in assessing the consumed service. The article attempts to identify the relationships between the development of tourist services and the assumptions of experience economy, which constitute the theoretical foundations of contemporary consumption in society.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The research methods applied in the presented study comprise critical analysis of the literature, including available secondary sources discussing the results of research on the development of tourism services with reference to the tourists' experiences as a source of the value acquired by them. Therefore, reference was also made to the role of the tourist's experiences as a significant marketing determinant. Examples from observations were also provided.

**Findings:** In tourism, where experiences, impressions, or emotions often constitute a key value for the customer and are often the core of the realized product, there are feedback loops that shape these relationships.

**Practical implications:** The research results reveal to tourism managers a specific aspect of the tourism product – the expected and post-consumption experience; its natural symbiosis with the tourism product is a challenge for tourism service providers, which determines the directions of product development.

**Originality/Value:** The originality of the presented research lies in showing the development of tourism products in the context of the theoretical assumptions of the experience economy as a determinant of progress in meeting tourist needs and market expectations.

**Keywords:** Tourist services, experience, experience economy.

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism as a special area of human leisure activity occupies an important place in the hierarchy of values. The goals of this activity are often inconsistent with the aspirations of tourist entities, especially commercial ones aiming to maximize income from their activities. Due to ongoing changes in lifestyle and other environmental conditions, modern tourists are increasingly demanding, aware of their rights, and at the same time capricious, picky, and unpredictable (Kaczmarek *et al.*, 2010; Adamopoulos and Thalassinou, 2020).

The tourist offer is becoming more and more sophisticated and emphasizes specific elements that must meet the tourists' requirements. One can find offers not only of peaceful relaxation or getting to know new places, but also those focused on a holiday adventure, refined pleasure, or strong emotions. Tourists expect to stay in a unique place that will provide them with authentic, vivid emotions, unique personal experiences and unique memories that will long stay in their minds and that they will be able to impress their friends with after returning from the trip (Stasiak, 2016; Lončarić *et al.*, 2021).

Tourism in many societies has become a way of satisfying higher-order needs: the desire to stand out from the crowd, to emphasize one's distinctiveness and personality, to confirm one's social status, to manifest one's own beliefs and views, to lead a desired lifestyle. The growing importance of post-consumer experiences and their value for humans at the current stage of socio-economic development is a feature of many other industries – not only tourism. According to B.J. Pine and J.H. Gilmore (1999), we live in an era of a completely new, advanced economy, which is still based on services, but whose foundation is to provide customers with experiences strongly marked by emotions.

The degree to which customer's needs are met determines satisfaction with consumption. There is no doubt that offers that guarantee the satisfaction of expectations, or even exceed them, that surprise and leave unique, long-remembered experiences, can be a source of the highest quality – as perceived by the customer.

From an economic point of view, it is important to notice that experiences are a new source of value; both they themselves and the value are created in a kind of "symbiosis" with the three basic forms of products on the market: raw materials, goods and services. Today, we should also notice the significant place of information as a separate offer that creates specific experiences – customer expectations. Therefore, the economic potential of experiences – designed and created in the production process – is activated thanks to acts of consumption, which give products a special character related to their susceptibility to individualization.

Therefore, the theoretical framework of the experience economy provides a solid foundation for creating enriched tourism products and managing them with attention

to new quality (Chang, 2018; Gilbert-Jones *et al.*, 2024). Tourism – alongside sports, culture and media – has a natural predisposition to creating unique, highly emotional experiences and clearly belongs to the experience economy. It has long been noticed that tourism mainly sells dreams (Altkorn, 1994).

However, it was only the global popularity of Pine and Gilmore's (1999) concept that reawakened researchers' interest in tourist experiences (Marciszewska, 2010; Stasiak, 2020). Previously, the issue of experiences was also addressed by D. MacCannell (1976; 2005), E. Cohen (1979), and J. Urry (1990; 2007).

In recent years, several publications have appeared on research on the essence of memorable tourist experiences (Tung and Ritchie, 2011; Kim, 2014; Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018). Issues related to the process of co-creation of experiences are also discussed (Grisseemann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Campos *et al.*, 2016; Mathis *et al.*, 2016; Lončarić *et al.*, 2017). Interesting approaches to experience appear in various forms of travel, e.g., in culinary tourism (Stone *et al.*, 2017; Sthapit, 2019). The literature on the management of tourist areas (Cetin *et al.*, 2017) or tourist attractions (Taylor *et al.*, 2017; Żemła, 2014) also includes subjects concerning unique experiences.

## **2. Origin of the Research Problem**

The main assumption of the undertaken research is that for the modern customer one of the most important factors in the evaluation of a product is the value based on experience. The article attempts to demonstrate that tourist services have become part of the assumptions of the concept of experience economy. This is related to the specificity of tourist activity, in which experiences, impressions, emotions remain in memory the longest, often constituting the key value of the product purchased by the tourist.

This article attempts to answer the question: is the development of tourist services in modern societies a reflection, an exemplification of the assumptions of the experience economy? The following assumptions were made in the research process:

- tourists' positive experiences resulting from the consumption of purchased goods and services influence their satisfaction and decisions to return to this consumption in the future;
- tourists' experiences resulting from the consumption of services with a high intensity of intangible features are a value in themselves and constitute an important component of tourist products used by their creators and desired by the consumers themselves, i.e., the tourists.

The article was based on literature studies (Polish and foreign scientific publications), the results of the authors' previous empirical research on tourists'

experiences (Marciszewska, 2010; Marciszewska and Wanagos, 2022) and their own observations of phenomena and processes occurring in the tourism market.

In the literature on the subject, tourist services are analyzed with reference to various aspects of the tourist offer. A tourist product can be assessed, among others, through the prism of the tourist attractiveness of the place (Gajewska and Kurowska-Pysz, 2013; Gołembski, 1999; Kachniewska, 2006; Rapacz and Gryszel, 2010; Seweryn, 2005; Tung and Ritchie, 2011).

Other authors (Marciszewska, 2010; Panasiuk, 2007; Żemła, 2017) focus on separate components of an integrated tourism product, e.g., the offer of tourist carriers, hotels and restaurants, or travel agencies. Tourist services are also analyzed from the point of view of the possibility of their evaluation (Grobelna and Marciszewska, 2013; Olszewski, 2008; Panasiuk, 2007) and management (Kachniewska, 2002; 2006), or marketing communication (Wanagos, 2019; 2022).

The review of literature regarding tourism services indicates a rather scanty scientific discussion on the relationship between tourism services as a phenomenon (product) and the process of their improvement. One of the ways of improvement is to use the assumptions of the experience economy. This gap constitutes a premise for formulating the research problem undertaken in the present study: can the development of tourism services and the process of their improvement be analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework of the experience economy?

Customer satisfaction will reflect satisfaction with the entire stay – from the moment of departure from home to the moment of arrival back home. It follows that customer satisfaction consists of many elements of the tourism product, shaped by many entities. During the implementation of the trip, the tourist can experience product elements strictly planned by providers, as well as those that are created independently of the providers (Wanagos and Marciszewska, 2018). Each type of experience has an impact on the tourist's final satisfaction.

Therefore, an assessment of a tourism product, which is closely dependent on the tourist's post-consumption experiences, can be analyzed within the framework of the experience economy. The concept of the experience economy seems to be fundamental for application in the tourism economy, both by tour operators, hoteliers, administrators of tourist attractions and representatives of local governments.

### **3. Tourism Consumption and the Experience Economy**

The creators of the concept of the experience economy called experience all situations and feelings that the consumer considers unique, personal, unforgettable and lasting, which engage them on an emotional, physical, intellectual and even spiritual level (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

The authors also provided a certain equation presenting it as a synergy between three components: action + situation + ingenuity, thanks to which a specific event triggers reactions and is encoded in memory creating an experience.

The global market, despite the influence of many conditions of variability and uncertainty, is still influenced by human experiences – both as a demand-generating factor and as a factor shaping the supply of products. Therefore, this important component of social development is equally significant for modern economies, as it stimulates the introduction of changes to production processes, which, combined with the innovation of management solutions, are aimed at activating and "restructuring" consumption.

The discussion on the role of experiences in economics initiated by Pine and Gilmore (1999) opened up new research directions aimed at verifying the importance of human experiences for improving the paths of multi-faceted development of societies and economies, as well as verifying their relevance as determinants of production, exchange and consumption (Andersson, 2007; Marciszewska, 2008; Mei, 2023; Xie and Yu, 2022).

It is important to notice that experiences are a new source of value. Nowadays, information has the character of a separate offer that creates specific experiences – customer expectations. Therefore, the economic potential of experiences – designed and created in the production process – is activated thanks to acts of consumption, which give supply a special character, related to their susceptibility to individualization at every stage of creating the offer.

The special role of experiences in product consumption is related to the assumptions of the experience economy. Its essence is to understand how society manages its resources, and what factors influence the allocation of these resources, products enriched with experiences. It can be defined as a socio-economic human activity in which sellers (and creators of experiences) offer experiences on the market in symbiosis with selected product forms. Thanks to them, impressions and experiences are imprinted in consumers' minds which in the future become a factor in subsequent purchasing decisions and consumption.

Tourism as a branch of the economy based on a creative approach to constructing an offer requires adopting the customer's perspective for mutual success. Similarly to culture, in tourism "mass adaptation of products to the individual needs of the customer automatically transforms a good into a service. Mass adaptation of services to the individual needs of the customer transforms them in turn into experiences" (Brunner, 2017). Thus, experience becomes a "co-creator" of tourist offers and enriches them from the consumer's perspective: the tourist acquires "something," among others, for intangible benefits of spending free time.

Other researchers emphasize that “experience is the last stage of the evolution of the economy whose aim is to obtain the maximum value from the market and it can constitute a competitive advantage of products” (Spychalska-Wojtkiewicz and Klein, 2020). Tourist experience – positive one – undoubtedly builds a competitive advantage of the sector, but its development does not indicate that it is a special type of offer and that it determines the last stage of the evolution of economy. The surrounding conditions of uncertainty force us to search for new economic solutions both in terms of tourism supply and demand for goods in this industry.

Tourism as a sector of economy is therefore consistent with the theoretical assumptions of the experience economy, because the phenomena and processes occurring in it depend on human experiences, impressions and emotions. These are factors of an intangible and subjective nature, which in the process of shaping the demand and supply of tourism products are emerging in the current perspective (post-pandemic and war) as important predictors of the revival and renewal of the tourism sector.

The analysis of tourists’ emotions and experiences is an important component of the process of improving tourism products, and at the same time a determinant of tourism demand. The characteristics and analysis of the main elements of the market (supply and demand) in the new approach should be based not only on the criterion of choosing the tourist offer, but also on the analysis of experience as a source of creating market value and a determinant of its assessment.

Undoubtedly, the analysis of the environment in the context of the tourist’s experience (current and expected) is a difficult challenge in the face of dynamic changes and uncertainty. Therefore, there is a logical and economic justification for the fact that "Today, researchers and theorists go a step further and propose a new solution – the experience economy" (Kobza, 2012).

#### **4. Tourist Experiences and Marketing**

The Polish literature is increasingly discussing the tourist experience in various aspects. The issue of experience is analyzed from the perspective of economics, marketing, management, geography, physical culture sciences, etc., (Marciszewska, 2010; Niezgoda, 2013a; 2013b; Stasiak, 2013; 2015; 2016; 2019; 2020; Gryszel, 2018; Bosiacki and Hołderna-Mielcarek, 2017).

Among others, the role of experiences is related to the fact that they form an integral part of every product (tangible and intangible). They are most often a prerequisite for customers’ purchasing decisions. This is where the approach to experiences as the fourth form of offer on the market comes from (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), without which consumption could not evolve. This approach introduces a new depiction of value to management, which is of particular importance in the use of marketing strategies by tourism organizations.

The tourist product is particularly sensitive to experiences, as experiences shape customers' purchasing decisions, and consequently, experiences become an integral part of the tourist service. This special role of experiences in building a tourist product results, among others, from the fact that it is usually consumed in the customer's free time, who would not buy the product if they did not expect positive experiences from it.

Introducing experience as a purchasing value into the management process requires a special approach and linking the customer's experiences and emotions with the product. Therefore, marketing plays an important role here. Creating experiences is conditioned by a special human activity aimed at giving the product a new dimension: immateriality and elusiveness as an object of market exchange. These features contained in the experience result from its "inseparability" from the forms of products present on the market: raw materials, goods, services, information.

Therefore, recognizing experiences as exchangeable goods means that specific goods are purchased to the extent that they provide a chance to create expected experiences (impressions) – most often positive ones (Marciszewska, 2010). Consumer may have very individualized expectations of experiences, depending on their age, gender, social status, but also on personality, spiritual needs and many other factors (Kim *et al.*, 2015).

In contemporary literature, there is a discussion on the importance of experiences in marketing in various aspects (Gentile *et al.*, 2007). Among others, it concerns the problems of tourist loyalty and satisfaction, or a tendency to recommend products to others (Prayag *et al.*, 2017; Chang *et al.*, 2018). It is worth noting, however, that from the point of view of marketing, post-consumption experience plays yet another role. In marketing, experience is treated as a tool or technique for acquiring and retaining customers (Olearnik, 2016).

Both acquired and expected experiences increase the product value in the customer's eyes and encourages purchase. In relation to experience in tourism, the perspective of perceiving its importance in marketing should be broadened. Experience often becomes the essence of planned consumption – not only an element of the product itself. It is something that the tourist acquires as an integral part of the product (Olearnik, 2016; Stasiak, 2020). Many definitions of a tourism product emphasize that it is: "an experience available for a specific price" (Middleton, 1996), "the entirety of the experience from the moment of leaving home to the moment of return" (Medlik, 1995).

Tourism sells emotions, impressions, adventures and memories related to travel and leisure. It should be noted, however, that tourist experience is created not only during the customer's contact with a company or a tourist product, but also during contact with the tourist space or during meetings with residents of the visited region

(often completely independently of the tour operator's intentions and actions) (Stasiak, 2020).

Stasiak (2019) attempted to organize the multitude of potentially existing tourist experiences. For example, considering the way in which tourist experiences are created (genesis), we can distinguish: 1) involuntary experiences (incidental, spontaneous), 2) planned experiences (intentional, organized), which are prepared in advance with tourists in mind, e.g., interactive shows, historical reconstructions, small theatrical forms. The latter are a subject of the management process in tourism, also taking into account the possibility of unplanned negative experiences – not only positive ones.

The individual stages of the tourism management process, i.e., creating a tourist product, its promotion and sale, or implementation are usually based on the value of the customer's experience. In tourism marketing, all forms of communication are dependent on customers' opinions and feelings. Modern marketing is based on research on both the opinions and behaviors of tourists.

Knowledge about the tourists' experience becomes crucial in further decisions regarding product development. A model approach to research on the impact of unforgettable experiences on behavioral intentions in tourism is also proposed by J.H. Kim, J.R.B. Ritchie and V.W.S. Tung (2010).

Companies in marketing management use Customer Experience (CX), interpreted as the sum of all impressions that the customer has in all possible contact channels and points of contact with the product and the company, throughout the duration of their relationship (Shaw and Ivens, 2005). It can be said that it is the sum of experiences that affect the consumer's perception of the company.

Identifying "touch points" where the consumer encounters problems and where negative experiences appear becomes crucial when modifying and changing the offer. If the tourist's experiences prove to be different from what the offeror expects, these elements can be eliminated after identification. In the case of tourist services, there can be many such negative points of contact. Conducting conscious activity in the field of CX tourism becomes special and unique.

Analyzing the problem of experience in the tourist offer from the point of view of marketing, it is necessary to raise the issues related to communication. Experience is most often expressed already at the stage of information about the product. The most common advertising slogans in tourism are closely related to experience, e.g. "You will experience an adventure", "A dream journey", "Unique moments", "History as if alive", etc. The service then becomes more interesting and noteworthy.

Today, thanks to developing technology, communication is a very dynamic process. And here comes the second thread in the field of communication, important for the



problem of experiences, i.e., the ability of the service provider to quickly respond to negative, often emotional comments from service recipients. It has long been proven that appropriate action after a poorly received service leaves a good impression, even if the complaint process is initiated (Wanagos, 2010; Hart, Nnachi and Doris, 2021).

In striving for customer satisfaction and building their loyalty in marketing activities, building product quality is of particular importance. As the analysis of literature shows, quality is a multidimensional and interdisciplinary concept. It is defined in philosophy, economics, and technical sciences.

Quality can be related to a specific object (product, process, system, etc.) (Juran, 1962) and to a set of features and properties characterizing a given object (Szczepeńska, 2010). In the marketing approach, quality refers to the degree to which the customer's expectations and requirements are met (Holloway and Robinson, 1997). The literature on the subject points out that product quality is also a value perceived by the customer (Łobejko, 2010), the level of customer requirements, closely related to cost (Dahlggaard *et al.*, 2000), a manifestation of product excellence (Malen and Adams, 2011; Kachniewska, 2006), or exceeding customer expectations (Trawnicka, 1997).

In tourism, demand is met by offering many services at the same time. These services are often complementary and inseparable. Usually, the customer uses ready-made offers from sellers in the form of service packages (Kaczmarek *et al.*, 2010). These packages are often modified and adjusted to the customers' needs, which is related to the rapidly changing marginal utility (Gołembski, 1999). Marginal utility (the increase in utility added as a result of consuming the last unit of a good) decreases as more and more of each good is consumed. In tourism, this utility decreases very quickly, forcing the product to be constantly modified and its quality improved, i.e. to adapt to new expectations.

Cooperation between entities in shaping the tourism product seems to be a key issue in shaping quality. Products of both the "company offer" and "area offer" type will have a feature of complementarity (Rapacz and Gryszel, 2010; Wanagos and Marciszewska, 2018).

The way of serving customers or the form of communicating with them undoubtedly constitutes the basis for the desired impression of the implementation of the tourist product. The specificity of the implementation of the tourist offer, which takes place during the consumption of a product, provides many opportunities to expand the tourist's experience tailored to their individual needs.

The essence here lies in the direct contact of the tourism employee with the tourist. Storytelling is an example of a technique introducing additional experiences and emotions in service. It is often used in the work of tour guides in towns, in museums or at exhibitions. Unusual, moving stories can become a primary element creating

the image of the company (product), its legend, and even the brand (Matthews and Wackerm, 2008; Fog *et al.*, 2011; Kosson, 2014; Aaker and Aaker, 2016).

Technological progress is also used to enrich the tourist's experience (Żemła, 2017; Stasiak, 2020; Wanagos, 2022). These tools include, among others, TGS (headset system), or the use of VR and AR to enrich the environment surrounding the tourist, combining with real-time geolocation, which enables, among others, multi-sensory (not only visual) experiences, reconstructions of various historical events, archaeological sites, and even the creation of interactive new-generation computer guides (Berebka, 2016), the use of modern devices to document and archive holiday experiences, e.g. a selfie in a museum (Chlebus-Grudzień 2018). Tools resulting from technological progress also include filming with drones, as well as the use of new means of transport, e.g. scooters and electric bikes, modern golf carts, etc.

With the development of tourism, managers increasingly take action to multiply and enhance tourists' experiences. Based on observations of what is happening on the tourism market, examples can be given of how experience is interwoven with the conscious creation of a tourism offer. Among others, creations of adaptation to the environment or new technologies enrich the tourism product, providing opportunities for stronger sensations and individualized experiences. In the context of their positive marketing impact, they may include, among others, such activities as:

- adaptation of architectural monuments for tourist, hotel and catering purposes as a process of making the product more attractive (e.g., the Ryn Castle Hotel in a castle, or the main seat of the Tytus Chałubiński Tatra Museum in a historic villa in the Zakopane style);
- modifications to the product by enriching it with new narrative forms, e.g. various museum tour paths, storytelling, interactivity in the tour process (e.g. interactive exploration of the Tatra National Park in the TPN Nature Education Centre in Zakopane);
- promotion of culture and cultural events in places frequented by tourists, which can stimulate not only future consumption of culture, but also enrich knowledge about it (e.g. photographic galleries on the main streets or promenades of Sopot, Zakopane, Krakow, etc.);
- new forms of communication with tourists during their stay, building and strengthening the relationship with the tourist (including: the use of QR codes, the use of VR – e.g., the Kartuzy Museum, or flying on a broom in the Legends Park in Nowa Słupia);
- recording the tourists' current experiences through classic forms of recording as well as using modern technologies to present expected future experiences (e.g. animations, 3D graphics, games, etc.);
- creating visual designs not only of new tourist products, but also "illustrations" or interactions between them and people (e.g., virtual sightseeing);

- others, e.g., accents referring to emotions (grief, love, joy, etc.) or values (patriotism, ecology, respect for life, etc.), including travel souvenirs that allow retaining emotions and experiences for many years.

Research is conducted to assess the impact of tourist experiences in various forms of service and the impact on tourist satisfaction and assessment. Recently published research (Stasiak, 2020; Wanagos, 2022) confirms the thesis that experience is an inseparable element of the tourist product and it determines tourist satisfaction.

The process of creating and exchanging tourist products in specific socio-economic conditions requires further research – including in terms of further enrichment of the tourist product by expanding its features that have a positive impact on the experiences of consumers and service staff.

This enrichment should include a fuller understanding of the essence of experiences (of both consumers and employees of tourist entities), as well as opinions, emotions, feelings, beliefs and new needs, which should be taken as a starting point for designing new products. Social premises for enriching the tourist product, among others, with mutual (offeror's and tourist's) experiences lead to product improvement and thus indicate that human experiences are a value – also in the economic sense, which is reflected in the assumptions of the experience economy.

## **5. Conclusions**

Based on the conducted review studies, it can be stated that:

- Experience is the essence of tourism services. It is one of the main motives and goals of purchasing a product. Positive experiences of a tourist, resulting from the consumption of purchased goods and services, influence decisions to return to this consumption in the future – this is the cognitive value of this article, as it indicates the tourist's post-consumption experience as a demand-generating factor in the future. Thus, it fits into the assumptions of the experience economy regarding the presence of a new offer on the market – in addition to raw materials, goods and services – experience, which determines the tourist's purchasing decisions;
- Experience is a component of a tourism product, determining the tourist's satisfaction and contentment. Tourist experiences resulting from the consumption of services with a high intensity of intangible features are a value in themselves and they increase consumer satisfaction. The higher the level of tourist satisfaction with the consumption of goods and services and with experiences, the greater the chances for a high assessment of the product by the tourist;
- Tourism experiences are created with various tools both in the sales phase (imagination) and in the implementation phase. This means that perceiving

the actual experience of the tourist as the subject of the market offer in the future constitutes the application value of this study. Because the tourist offer is attractive from the customer's point of view to the extent that it "promises" positive experiences. The need to create experiences desired and expected by the customer must, therefore, be realized by the manager of the tourist enterprise and then included in the product concept with the intention of its continuous improvement;

- The special role of experiences for the tourist product at all stages of social reproduction – production, exchange, consumption and distribution – does not result only from the development of expectations and attitudes of a given tourist. Their place in shaping tourist products is a reflection of social and economic changes on a large scale. Thus, the experience economy is a theory whose assumptions, on the one hand, provide the basis for the directions of development of tourist services, and on the other hand, the process of its evolution draws – in feedback – knowledge from the course of phenomena and processes in the tourism sector;
- Recognition of the tourists' expected experiences and identification of post-consumption experiences allow for increasing the chances of developing the experience economy and tourist products with greater efficiency. From a marketing point of view, thanks to the analysis of the tourist's experiences, it is possible to select the target market more accurately.

Due to the review nature of this article, the limited scope of own research, the theses presented in the article require empirical confirmation. The work can become an element of the discussion on supplementing the theoretical foundations of creating tourist services within the framework of the assumptions of the experience economy. The article presents a set of specific, detailed rules for creating unique tourist experiences.

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