Xperience the CITY: The City of Destination as an Integrator and Its Role in Co-creating Travel Experiences

Evangelia G. Dougali, Sicco C. Santema, and W.W.A. Beelaerts van Blokland

Abstract Fast changing trends within a technology driven society and the context of new economic landscape call for new innovative approaches and reconfiguration of roles in existing supply and value chains. Xperience the CITY, is a project aiming to change the way we travel so far, by changing the existing tourism supply chain and taking the City of Destination from a passive to a more active role, acting as an integrator among demand and supply. At the same time it calls for co-creation and invites travelers to co-create travel experiences. Building upon the premises of service-dominant logic that the customer is a co-creator of value and the essence of the experience economy, this project attempts to explore innovative ways where traveling is approached holistically as an end-to-end service. Following an extensive review of literature and an Explorative Research (qualitative), a preliminary model along with a proposed service is developed. In order for this model to be tested and validated, a Validation Research (quantitative) was designed addressing all major stakeholders. By this research the authors obtained valuable insights from 514 Passengers, 42 Hotels, 6 Airlines and 6 Airports, regarding current practices and an almost catholic validation of the preliminary model. Not only passengers are deeply interested in thematic traveling and are ready to co-create with the industry and benefit from such strategies, but Airlines and Airports would be ready to fully incorporate such service into their practices.

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1 Introduction

Involving a wide range of stakeholders, both on private and public sector, Tourism Supply Chain (TSC) constitutes a network of tourism organizations engaged in information, combination and travel arrangement services provision (Buhalis & Laws, 2001). It is not only about the supply of tourism products and services but also the marketing of those as well as the creation of new markets—or expending already existing ones—towards greater profits (Zhang et al., 2009). As the main characteristic of the tourism industry lies in the high interdependencies among the various players, in order for value to be added they all need to work together as a value chain when delivering the final tourism service or product to the customer (Yilmaz & Bititci, 2006a, 2006b).

The main stakeholders here are those providing the facilities at destination—suppliers (Hotels, Entertainment Industry, etc.), those facilitating the transportation between the City of Origin and the City of Destination (e.g. Airlines, Airports, etc.), those facilitating the distribution and purchase of the tourism services (e.g. wholesalers, GDSs, travel agencies, etc.) and the City of Destination itself. Within this highly dynamic Tourism Industry, the final customer (or passenger) cannot but be a key stakeholder.

In today's fast changing world, trends in tourism follow the changes in consumer behavior, calling for changes in the current travel and marketing practices—both on services delivered and the way tourism suppliers reach the travelers. Turning their back to mass produced travel services in search of authentic and personalized experiences, travelers now look for these customized offers that can provide them with those unique and memorable experiences. Moreover passengers now have a need to step in and co-create their own value. Reprioritizing authenticity, both travelers and innovative providers, are keep looking for new horizons in the travel concept and new unexplored destinations; event and adventure traveling and the need for local knowledge through sophisticated web-based rental services are few examples of the new landscape in traveling (Dixit, 2013; IPK International, 2012; Travel and Leisure Staff, 2013). Consumer technology is changing traveler behavior, as well as the way people interact and share (Ali, Schaal, & Shankman, 2013), and it is the large amount of personal information available through the wide use of information and communication technology (ICT) such as internet and social media that make it possible for companies to move from impersonal, mass travel solutions to more passenger focused, end-to-end services where the later have an active, co-creating role.

Despite the changes emerging in technology and distribution though—who controls the information, who combines and delivers the travel product or service and how the traveler acquires it—the tourism distribution stays quite the same. In

Fig. 1 Existing model—push strategy

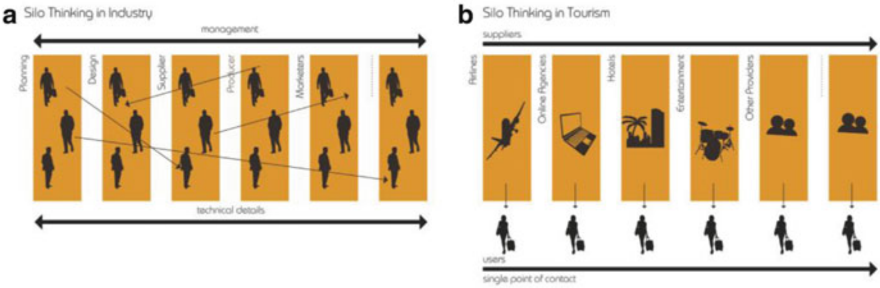

Fig. 2 (**a**) Silo thinking in industry (general); (**b**) silo thinking in tourism industry

this current model, two kinds of roles can be distinguished: the active and the passive one. Trying to serve the customer, tourism distributers gather, combine and supply tourism products. In this model the distributers (active role) act and guide tourists towards the City of Destination (passive role). The role of the current passive City of Destination is therefore to—by various marketing strategies or facilities developed—make itself attractive to the travelers. By making so and increasing demand, tourism distributors and suppliers will then come to take advantage of this market and provide all the necessary infrastructure and links to the destination—push strategy (Fig. 1). In continue the traveler will be then pushed to a destination.

Like most of the existing supply chains, the TSC is also characterized by silos—companies (or departments within them) working in their own silo for their own profit (Fig. 2a). Within the tourism ecosystem we see suppliers (e.g. Airlines, Hotels, etc.) often narrowing down their focus into their own silo; instead of an overall travel experience, they form single points of contact with their customers simply supplying a product or service (Fig. 2b). And even though vertical integration (e.g. collaboration between airlines and hotels) is generally apparent, this again is only focused on the product/service provision at a (passive) City of Destination (e.g. airline ticket–hotel room), not an overall co-created experience within an active one.

However, it is only by resource interaction through interactivity and networking that value can be created (Grönroos, 2006; Gummesson, 2008; Normann, 2001). Figure 3a shows how value can be created through integration among the tourism

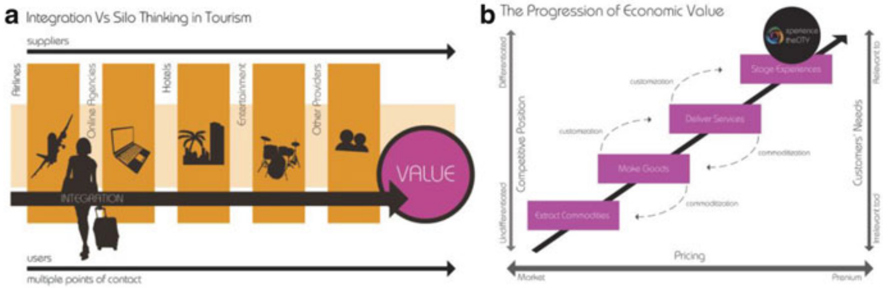

Fig. 3 (**a**) Integration vs. silo thinking in tourism; (**b**) xperience the CITY within the progression of economic value (source: Pine & Gilmore, 1999)

suppliers. Instead of silos and single points of contact, we move towards multiple contacts points through integration and resource interaction (suppliers–suppliers, suppliers–customers); suppliers' silos become more abstract and more flexible as the later interact towards value creation.

Xperience the CITY, is a project aiming to change the way we travel so far, by changing the existing tourism supply chain, taking the City of Destination from a passive to a more active role by directly managing its sources (tourism infrastructure), and addressing the end-users and actively co-creating travel experiences with travelers. Instead of a destination push strategy, a destination pull strategy is proposed. The City of Destination is now being called to not just brand and promote itself and its facilities but make targeted offers and bring customers/tourists through co-creation and key collaborations with tourism stakeholders (airports, airlines, hotels, entertainment industry). As seen in Fig. 3b, the emphasis now on the economic value moves from the tourism service itself to the upper level, that of staging experiences (see Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Central role in this concept is therefore the unique and personalized experiences an active traveler can have and co-create at destination towards added value.

Xperience the CITY suggests an innovative strategy where the CITY acts as an integrator between demand (customers) and supply (tourism stakeholders), and co-creates with them. The proposed project takes city and service marketing a step further, directly engaging travelers into peer-to-peer marketing. The later, not only co-create with the City in terms of travel content but they are also called to engage in an active dialogue, altogether aiming in chances of experiencing a City of Destination in a unique way. Throughout this project, new ways of co-creation between the various stakeholders involved in the traveling process—all the three stages (pre-delivery, delivery and post-delivery)—were investigated from a passenger centric approach. The final outcome is a new service and a new strategy towards better ways to experience the City of Destination, with multiple benefits for everyone involved. The project presented here resulted in both a back-end strategy and a front-end service, fully integrated with social media.

This article builds upon the relevant literature of supply chain issues, service-dominant logic, co-creation of value, tourism value chain, innovation, service marketing and marketing strategies. Forming two main research sub-questions—"What value can the passenger add to the co-creation of value process?" and "What info can the passenger deliver depending on their specific interests and the way they want to experience traveling?"—the authors attempted to explore the status quo of the tourism industry as well as the way stakeholders interact with each other, and how that could lead in co-creation opportunities.

Towards that, as part of the methodology, an Explorative Research (qualitative) and Validation Research (quantitative) were organized. Looking for insights on how business is currently done, key stakeholders were interviewed. The analysis of these first insights along with literature, trends and industry analysis provided a more holistic view on the subject researched (traveling practices, traveling industry, co-creation, services etc.) and led to key issues to be investigated (Synthesis). In continue a preliminary model was designed (Concept and Preliminary Model) to be validated via a big scale quantitative online survey (Validation Research with passengers, hotels, airlines and airports). All stakeholders in their great majority came to validate the concept, leading to the development of a new innovative strategy and the design of a new air-traveling service (Implementation).

The article starts with the theoretical framework the concept built upon. We later present the concept of xperience the CITY and the preliminary model to continue with the research methodology. Our article then continues with the results and sections in which the discussion of the results and the conclusions of the article are presented. The article presented here consists part of a graduation project for the MSc in Strategic Product Design, TU Delft as a case study for Athens (Greece) and Amsterdam (Netherlands), submitted in July 2013.

2 Theoretical Framework

Service-Dominant Logic and Co-creation of Value

The Service-Dominant (S-D) logic in marketing, is built around an increasingly acknowledged view that the customer can be a co-creator of value and that service is the common denominator in exchange and not some special form of exchange; value-creation occurs when a customer consumes, or uses, a product or service (Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008). These emerged personalized experiences through dialog and interactions towards value creation, are central to a holistic perspective of co-creation that calls for evolution and transformation of customers from "passive audiences" to "active players" (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b).

In addition to the plural "goods" in Goods-Dominant Logic (G-D logic) that implies "units of output", the use of singular "service" in S-D logic comes to indicate the "process of doing something to someone" (Lusch & Vargo, 2006); while G-D logic focuses in the exchange of tangible goods (products), S-D logic emphasizes on the exchange of intangible specialized competences and processes (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). This resource-integration function or interactivity

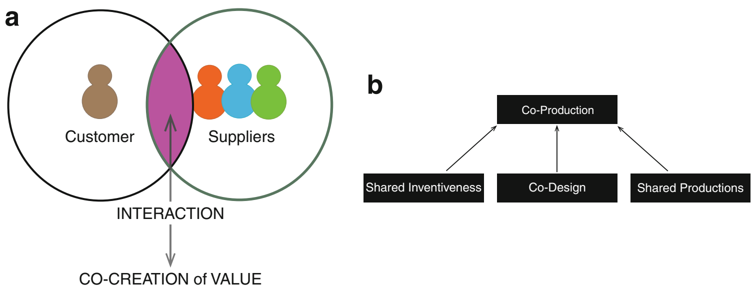

Fig. 4 (**a**) Co-creation of value (Grönroos, 2006; Lusch & Vargo, 2006; Payne et al., 2008); (**b**) co-production (Vargo & Lusch, 2004)

and networking approach comes in complete alignment with S-D logic's concept of value creation through resource integration (Grönroos, 2006; Gummesson, 2008; Normann, 2001; Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

Value co-creation in the S-D logic context can be seen as consisting of two main components: Co-creation of Value and Co-Production. While in G-D logic, value is added to the products while exchanged (value-in-exchange), for S-D logic, value occurs when customers and suppliers interact (value-in-use) (see Fig. 4a) (Grönroos, 2006; Lusch & Vargo, 2006; Payne et al., 2008).

So far, emphasis on value creation research is given upon the necessity for S-D logic to be adopted in order for innovative services to be offered towards memorable consumer experiences (Chathoth, Altinay, Harrington, Okumus, & Chan, 2013; Grönroos, 2008; Lusch, Vargo, & O'Brien, 2007, Payne et al., 2008). But what exactly can be seen as co-creation? Payne et al. (2008) summarize the related literature on co-creation in five indicative examples: Emotional engagement of customers through advertising and promotional activities, self-service or labor-transfer to the customer, the provision of experiences where the customer becomes part of the context, self-selection by the customers following supplier's prescribed processes, and customer's engagement in products co-designing. In addition, co-production occurs when the user participates in the creation of the offered service, either by shared inventiveness, co-design or shared productions in the value network (Fig. 4b). Central to S-D logic and value creation are the networks and all the interactions between central players (Lusch & Vargo, 2006) (Fig. 5b).

At this point is important to distinct co-creation from customization: their difference lies in the degree of customers' involvement—the role of customers in co-creation is more active than the one in customization (Kristensson, Matthing, & Johansson, 2008). What also differs is the point of their engagement in the innovation process: while in co-creation the user is involved right from the start, in customization the customer is introduced at the end (Fig. 5a).

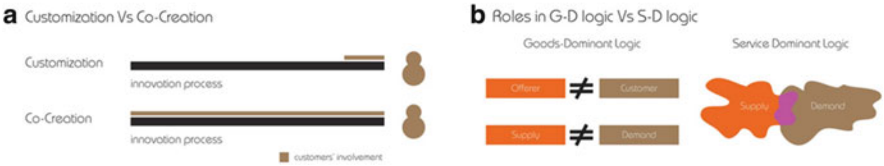

Fig. 5 (**a**) Customization vs. co-creation; (**b**) roles in G-D logic vs. S-D logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2006)

Meanings and Experiences as Competitive Advantage: The Experience Economy

Moving further from S-D logic's notion that service is a competitive advantage as customers do not look to purchase products, rather than benefit from the service that they offer (Lusch et al., 2007; Payne et al., 2008; Sawhney, 2006; Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2006, 2008), Verganti (2008, 2009) suggests that people buy meanings and only by radically innovating what things mean, one can change the rules of competition. For Verganti, Design-Driven Innovation is to "compete through products and services that have a radical new meaning; those that convey a completely new reason for customers to buy them" (Verganti, 2009).

Pine and Gilmore (1999) go a step further; they distinct services from experiences (the same way as services distinct from product) and they talk about the importance of "experience": "while commodities are fungible, goods are tangible and services intangible, experiences are memorable". As a result, consumer value can be defined as an "interactive relativistic preference experience"; it is the experience that defines what is valuable to a customer (Payne et al., 2008). In an era where there is such a plethora of products and services available that they tend to be commodities, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) support that it is only by high-quality interactions between customers and companies that unique experiences can be co-created leading to new sources of competitive advantage. In that way, companies are called to engage customers and use their services to stage memorable experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Introducing the concept of "Experience Economy", Pine and Gilmore elaborate on how can a company move from commodities to goods, manage to deliver a service and finally add value to their offerings by staging experiences (Progression of Economic Value, see Fig. 3b).

Tourism Supply Chain Management and the Interdependent Nature of Tourism

In the literature of the Supply Chain Management (SCM) in general and the Tourism Supply Chain Management (TSCM) in specific, emphasis is given on the high interdependencies between the various players among the tourism industry (suppliers as accommodators and carriers, distributors and intermediaries, passengers and other stakeholders) and the need of vertical integration towards best practices and value creation (Buhalis & Laws, 2001; Kuijpers, 2009; Lafferty & Fossen, 2001; Yilmaz & Bititci, 2006a, 2006b; Zhang et al., 2009). This

Fig. 6 The three stages of TVC

interdependent feature of the tourism industry lays upon the four main characteristics of the tourism products and services: intangibility, perishability, inseparability (of production and consumption) and interdependency (Calantone & Mazanec, 1991; Yilmaz & Bititci, 2006b). All in all, it is this inseparability that makes companies depend upon each other, directly affecting the overall customer satisfaction (Yilmaz and Bititci, 2006a).

Innovating in the Tourism Value Chain

The Tourism Value Chain (TVC) starts with the customer order. In order for the tourism product to be managed as an end-to-end seamless product, this TVC can be seen as consisting of three interconnected stages, as tourist—customers—evaluate their travel experiences as a whole (Fig. 6) (Yilmaz & Bititci, 2006a):

1. Pre-delivery Stage: All the required activities before departure (destination info, visas, hotel/airline reservations etc.)
2. Delivery stage: Tourism Product Consumption. Supplier delivers products/services to the consumer.
3. Post-delivery stage: Customer satisfaction is measured. Validation of tourism value chain.

Tourism cannot but be seen as a system and be approached holistically as an end-to-end seamless product (Yilmaz & Bititci, 2006a) and as a "tourism stakeholders system" (von Friedrichs Grängsjö, 2003); in order for stakeholders to innovate there, they need to reconfigure the existing value chain (van Blokland & Santema, 2006). But what is the value chain and how can it be perceived within the innovation process?

Consisted by primary and support activities, the classic value chain defined by Porter (1985)—where value was generated and pushed by (mass) production and marketing—did not include the customer in. However, in a fast changing and globalized world, this model is now giving the floor to network and multilateral systems, with technology holding a key role in connecting partners towards a new innovation perspective (van Blokland & Santema, 2006). In today's dynamic networks that are driven by demand, partners' co-ordination, both horizontal and vertical, is of key importance (Kumar, 2001). Technology, finance and e-driven infrastructure are now becoming the primary activities and competition moves from company level to supply chain level (Kumar, 2001; van Blokland et al., 2012).

While the traditional value chain is based upon "push", the lean value chain now calls for "pull" strategies, mass customization instead of mass production and a company's forward movement towards the end of the value chain in order to meet

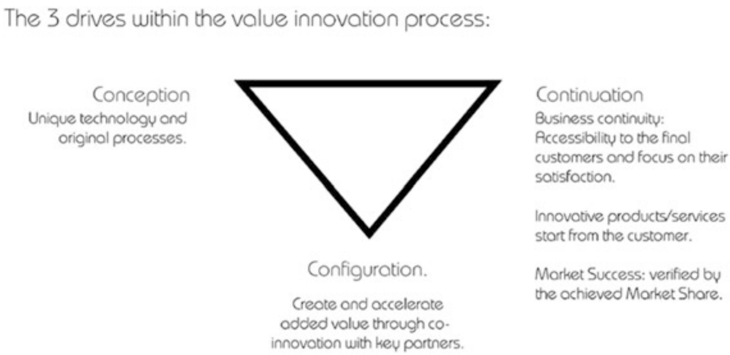

Fig. 7 The three drivers within the value innovation process (source: van Blokland & Santema, 2006)

the customer demand (van Blokland, Fiksinski, Amoa, & Santema, 2008). Profitable value requires a company balancing three different chains: demand chain (what customers want), own chain (own value) and supply chain (van Blokland et al., 2012).

Looking within product and value chain innovation, van Blokland and Santema (2006) combined key literature and came up with a framework of three drives within the value innovation process: Continuation, Conception and Configuration (Fig. 7). These drivers have the power to drive profitable innovation by improving the innovation capacity throughout the value chain. According to van Blokland and Santema (2006), it is the introduction of the customer (Continuity) into the value chain process that can connect technology (Conception) and partners (Configuration) towards innovation and therefore competitive advantage and high market shares.

Xperience the CITY: Concept and Preliminary Model

Building upon the previous research (literature, industry and travel trends reviews and the findings from the Exploration Research) the xperience the CITY concept was designed. Central to that were five pillars:

1. The need for unique experiences,
2. The need to reconfigure the roles in TSC and create pull strategies in order to innovate,
3. The need for an active City of Destination
4. The need for industry integration and multiple contact points with customers, and
5. The need to utilize industry's spare capacity.

The focus of this concept of co-creation is not industry specific, rather value-centered (Fig. 8a). In other words the focus lies on the value within the TSC and the supplied tourism services become the means to an end—passengers' travel experience.

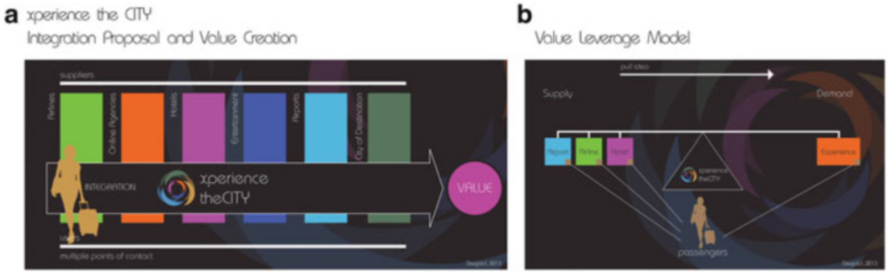

Fig. 8 (**a**) Xperience the CITY—integration towards value creation; (**b**) xperience the CITY—value leverage model

Reconfiguring the current roles in the TSC and stepping into the value chain, the City of Destination is now actively marketing itself, it calls for co-creation and motivates people to travel towards it, inviting travelers to co-create travel experiences.

Gathering information about available tourism (e.g. flights and hotels) and cultural and entertainment services (e.g. museums, exhibitions, festivals, music events, activities, etc.) on the one hand, and information on what people like—their interests and experiences they might look for (e.g. sun, culture, romance etc.) on the other, the City of Destination personally invites—pulls—people towards it. All that possible through integration and co-creation with the suppliers (industry orientation) and travelers (customer orientation).

Connecting supply (Airports, Airlines, Hotels, etc.) and demand (travel experiences), the City of Destination within the xperience the CITY concept can act as a lever between them with a passenger focus (Fig. 8b). By doing so, the City of Destination can now create a new market (experience traveling) and therefore utilize industry's spare capacity towards impulse and experience traveling with multiple economic benefits for everyone involved. Key factor on this are the new technologies and the social media.

3 Research Method

Explorative Research

The aim of Explorative Research, was to explore current mindsets, strategies and practices in the tourism industry by interviewing key stakeholders. The goal of this part was to gain an as holistic as possible view of the subject that would eventually lead to a specific framework for the final proposition regarding a service for air-traveling from a co-creating perspective. Key stakeholders at this point were Airlines, Hotels and Airports, Travel Agencies and the City of Destination (Athens, Greece).

As the key stakeholders were identified, the skeleton of the research was formed; what were the subjects to be discussed in order to provide as much insights as possible. For that purposes, personal open interviews were chosen as the best way to gain the deeper knowledge desired. Based on the same core of subjects (e.g. position within the travel industry, products/services offered, collaborations, marketing strategies, innovation etc.), interview skeletons were then customized for each stakeholder interviewed.

After the possible participants were contacted, the stakeholders that were finally able to take part were a hotel at the center of Athens, a big European online travel agency and a social media engineering company. Though the later did not belong in the tourism industry, their insights would be valuable regarding new technologies and social media integration of the service to be developed within a co-creation travel concept.

Validation Research

Consisting of four distinct surveys, the Validation Research was a big-scale quantitative research addressing all the main stakeholders involved in the TSC: Passengers, Airlines, Hotels and Airports. This research concentrated in two main aspects: the exploration of how things are done so far (travel habits, business processes) and validation of the xperience the CITY concept and preliminary model.

The survey was conducted online between April and May 2013. All the questions were of multiple choice, and where necessary a five-level Likert Scale of interest was chosen (Very Interesting, Quite Interesting, Neither Neutral, Not so Interesting, Not Interesting at all). The survey was designed using a free online survey tool. In order for the xperience the CITY project and survey to be promoted a website and a Facebook page were created.

Finally the survey closed with 514 Passengers across the world (mostly concentrated in Greece and the Netherlands) with the majority of the sample ranging between the age of 25–30 years old (50.1 %) followed by those in the age of 31–40 (21.1 %), 42 Hotels, 6 Airlines (5 traditional carriers and 1 low cost carrier, 2 located in Greece, 1 in Netherlands and 3 in the rest of Europe), and 6 International Airports (Athens, Amsterdam, Germany) (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9 Overall participants

4 Results

All the four surveys resulted in very interesting findings regarding how people travel so far and how they would like to do so in the future and how suppliers operate towards service provision. All in all the size of this research was of big significance for the insights provided. Due to the extent of the Validation Research, not all the results can be presented in this article; presented below are the most important ones.

Passenger Survey Results
According to data, some differences can be seen regarding the way people currently choose their travel destination and the way they would like to do so in the future. While currently the majority of travelers choose their destination either by first selecting the City of Destination (36.76 %) or the Country of Destination (31.62 %), both of these percentages decrease compared to how people would like to choose their destination in the future (City of Destination, 24.26 % and Country of Destination, 27.94 %). What is interesting is that while presently the percentage of people choosing their destination According to Activities Offered by a City (e.g. Museums, Sightseeing, Nightlife, etc.) is 18.38 %, for the future that percentage goes up by almost 7 % reaching a percentage of 25.25 %. In the same way, while the percentage of those now choosing their destination Thematically (e.g. Concert, Event, Cocktails, Rock Bars, Things You like, etc.) is only 6.86 %, it goes up almost three times for the future, reaching a percentage of 18.87 %.

While about 50 % of participants look for travel information in "traditional means"—Travel Web Sites (24.32 %), City Web Sites and City Web Guides (15.44 %) and less into printed City Guide Books (10.89 %)—the other half is looking for customized, traveler-to-traveler tips turning to Friends (23.55 %), Social Media Reviews (9.73 %), Locals (7.18 %) and travel apps (6.25 %).

Regarding the time of their traveling, while almost 38 % of participants choose to travel during specific times of the year (19.52 % During Summertime and 5.6 % During Wintertime) or during specific holidays (12.39 %), the greatest total percentage of 32.43 % just travels regardless the time, simply following the need for traveling. Following comes a 16.47 % of those travel depending on cheap flight tickets and a significant 13.58 % of "event-travelers", ready to travel whenever there is something interesting going on at destination, like exhibitions and concerts.

The great majority of people usually travel in groups of two (58.17 %), instead of larger groups and a significant 17.08 % are lonely travelers. In continue, almost everyone nowadays plan their trips individually (Individual Holidays, 94.07 %), with only a very small percentage of 5.93 % visit a travel agent choosing Package Holidays. When it comes to flight and hotel booking, 80 % and 73.3 % respectively use online travel agencies that offer plenty of different choices.

Finally, even though 53.22 % would plan their trip 1 month in advance (following a common belief that the sooner the air tickets are booked the more affordable they would be), almost everyone (92.83 %) would be interested in flying low cost, taking advantage of "last minute" offers by the airlines towards specific destinations.

Specific to the project, the relevant questions revealed a great interest towards the xperience the City concept and the proposed service on behalf of travelers. As the results revealed, 87 % of them would be interested in a service that could gather, map and do travelling suggestions according to specific things they like (for example: Music Concerts, Events, Bars, etc.) and 75 % of them would like a service that could make complete travel suggestions (air tickets, accommodation, entertainment activities, etc.) according to things they like (interests, music, bars, food, museums, etc.) for traveling around the world. 75 % of them would like the integration of such service with social media and finally 89.4 % would be interested in weekend customized travel offers that could come at a 20–60 % off the original price, even if they could only be informed about that the last 48–24 h.

Hotel Survey Results

According to data, 57.14 % of businesses taking part were located in Greece and 42.86 % in the Netherlands. While the survey's sample seems to be diverse, with businesses equally spread throughout all kinds of Hotel classification, the majority of them were three-star Hotels (30.56 %, 11 Hotels), followed by four-stars at a percentage of 27.78 %. While half of them attract customers both from their country and abroad, a 38.89 % mostly targets foreign tourists.

While the Tourism Industry is seen as a highly competitive one (96.87 %), collaboration between Hotels and Airlines towards more incoming customers for the later is not such a key aspect for Hotels in Greece and Netherlands; only 6.3 % claimed to have such collaboration in their core business. However, 78.1 % would be interested in developing such collaborations in order to improve utilization of their spare capacity. What is more, 81.3 % would be very interested in collaborating and co-creating with various key stakeholders—both local and foreigners—(e.g. other hotels, airlines, airports and the City) towards joined forces and strategies/services that could result in the possibility better practices, better marketing and more tourists. Finally, the majority of Hotels (56.25 %) seem not to be completely satisfied with the effort their City is paying on increasing tourism rates, and as a result everyone (100 %) would like their City (municipality) to become more active on promoting its facilities and creating more of them, in order for it to become more attractive as destination, resulting in more tourists and increased profit for the Hotel Industry.

Specific to the project, the relevant questions revealed also a great interest towards the xperience the City concept on behalf of the Hotel Industry, which in its total acknowledged the importance of the overall experience a tourist would expect from the City of Destination in order to be chosen as a holiday destination. As the results revealed that in their total, Greek and Dutch Hotels would be very interested in a service that could gather, map and make travelling suggestions to travelers according to specific things each tourist would like and 93.8 % would find it very interesting if that service for customized travelling suggestions would be combined with last minute air-tickets and other services (events, entertainment), in order for weekend vacations towards their City and their Hotel to be organized, motivating people (who may not think to travel otherwise) to travel on lower prices.

Airline Survey Results

In their total, the Airline Industry would be interested in a service that could gather, map and make travelling suggestions to travelers according to specific things each tourist would like, incorporating their airline and all the airlines would be interested in a service that could motivate people to book air tickets on a last minute basis, helping them fly full capacity. One hundred percent of the participating airlines would be interested in incorporating such a service in their practices and would consider new ways of collaboration and co-creation with stakeholders in the Tourism Supply Chain and the City of Destination itself in order to increase travel demand and therefore guarantee their full capacity.

Airport Survey Results

In their total, the Airport Industry would be quite interested in a service that could gather, map and make travelling suggestions to travelers according to specific things each tourist would like (for example: Music Concerts, Events, Bars, etc.), incorporating their airport. Again the majority (80 %) of the Airports would be interested in a service that could motivate people to book air tickets on a last minute basis, helping Airline fly full capacity and therefore increase their revenues. Finally, all the Airports would be interested in a service that would combine last minute air-tickets and other services (hotels, events, entertainment), organizing weekend vacations towards their Airport and their CITY, creating a trend of impulse and customized traveling.

5 Discussion

Besides the catholic validation of the xperience the CITY concept and the ideas it preserves, the four surveys and the large sample contacted came to offer valuable insights both on behalf of travelers (what they want) and suppliers (what more they could offer). These insights when clearly analyzed can be the basis and the driving force towards innovative changes within the TSC. Analyzing the Passenger Survey Results, an overall shift towards more thematic traveling can be seen. In this new model, the City goes down from number one choice on destination selection (present) to number three in the future, right behind choosing destination according to activities offered and closely followed by thematic traveling. As a result, in accordance with current social and consumer trends, people seem to be flirting with the idea of changing the way they travel so far, towards customized experiences.

In the same spirit of change, changes are also observed on the kind information desired when traveling and the way to acquire it. Under the need for authenticity and customization, people reject prior practices of shallow and mass-produced offers. Away from past practices and old means (e.g. static travel guides), travelers are now turning to peers, friends and locals when it comes to information search, once again looking for the hidden info and that specialized knowledge that would be able to provide them with unique, customized experiences. It is obvious that people, as part of a bigger trend, are turning their back into massively marketed holidays, looking for more tailored made chances to experience new things.

Coming to offer a chance for co-created experiences through integration with tourism stakeholders under an active City of Destination, where travelers get engaged right from the start (for example communicating what experience is important to them), xperience the CITY concept finds great supporters (an indicative 87 %). What is more, travelers are now ready to take advantage of suppliers' co-created services, travel impulsively and fill up spare capacity on the right price.

The fact that 3/4 of them would like the integration of such service with social media supports both the common belief that new technologies have completely entered our life opening up new possibilities, the notion that new media offer numerous of innovative possibilities in marketing and finally the findings from the industry s surveys (Hotels, Airlines) that social media play now a very important role in marketing their businesses and getting in touch with customers (e.g. 97 % of Hotels).

In this new era, the industry around tourism seems to slowly acknowledge that holding back to practices of the past will bring no future. Again, with some percentages reaching a total 100 %, hoteliers support the idea of an innovative TSC where co-creation and integration among tourism providers becomes the center of new strategies towards holistic travel approaches and unique travel experiences. All in all, Hotels, Airlines and Airports revealed their great interest in xperience the CITY and they are ready to implement such service in their practices.

6 Limitations

So far the stakeholder missing from the Validation Research is the actual City of Destination. The authors were of the belief that such concept could not be discussed with the later before being a solid one. It is that the nature of the city as an entity that such concepts cannot be fully exploited unless they present both the need, the opportunities and the entrepreneurial support. Having now all these facts supporting it, xperience the CITY is ready to open up and be presented to cities around the world.

7 Conclusions

In a fast changing world, practices of the past can no longer be viable. Innovation calls for new approaches and new ways of thinking away from silos and mono-meric, company-focused strategies. Towards value creation, entrepreneurs need to acknowledge that roles are no longer solid; they should be reconfigured and be able to change where necessary. Reconfiguration of the existing supply chains and the introduction of active customers within the co-creation of value is the only way towards innovation, better practices and greater profits. In that context, xperience the CITY calls for an entrepreneurialism approach of modern cities (risk taking, inventiveness, promotion and profit motivation (Kavaratzis, 2004) within a strong city brand and not just random marketing applications that lack a fully understanding of today's needs but also the great opportunities such holistic approaches can have for all stakeholders within and around a City. A City with a strong brand identity will then be able to attract not only visitors but strategic partners to co-create with.

The solid findings of this project, along with the research supporting it both on theoretical and practical level, provide us with confidence that under the right strategic scope innovation can indeed take place. Of course such changes cannot happen overnight; there is still a long road to walk before the new strategy is fully developed, adopted and successfully implemented with the front-end service developed.

Concluding, the authors believe that there are plenty of future research opportunities in the field in terms of co-creation and customer value creating processes, supplier value-creating processes and encounter processes in the traveling context as well as new marketing opportunities. It is up to the future researchers to go deeper and further on these subjects looking for improvements and new approaches.

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