

Social Systems and Tourism Design

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Abstract Tourism destinations represent both social systems and a bundle of products and services that constitute the overall customer experience. However, destination management challenges strongly differ between corporate- and community-model destinations. The latter are guided and marketed by a destination management organization (DMO) which attempts to stimulate tourism development processes through cooperation and collaboration initiatives. Service design is proposed as a major attitude and behavior of stakeholders in the tourism destination. It enables a constant discussion and on-going process of co-development and co-production and is finally labeled as “tourism design”. This chapter highlights the need for tourism design thinking in tourism destinations and discusses the stimulus of tourism design activities for cooperative behavior and tourism chain optimization processes. Customer-orientation of all stakeholders in the destination can be increased and will lead to a strong consistent tourism value chain. Future research should gather empirical evidence through action research and or case studies in community-model destinations.

Keywords Service design thinking • Tourism design • Community-model destination • Value chain

1 Introduction

Tourism destinations are complex constructs aiming at creating an ideal tourist experience. According to Flagestad and Hope (2001) such tourism destinations can be characterized either as community- or corporate-model destinations. The community model can be found in Europe, where for political and structural reasons, a local destination management organization (DMO) is trying to promote cooperation between the suppliers and other stakeholders (Flagestad and Hope 2001, p. 452). The corporate model dominates in U.S. American and Canadian resorts,

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where a strong business corporation manages the destination and the role of the DMO is much more customer process oriented.

Much has been written about the management of destinations' complex service and product bundles, which in the tourist's final evaluation are interpreted as a holistic package and experience. On the one hand authors refer to the understanding of a tourism product as a service product (Smith 1994). On the other hand researchers apply Porter's value chain concept (Porter 1990) and transferred it into a tourism value chain highlighting the need for consistency and the challenge of supplier and resource diversity in destinations (Weiermair 2006). European tourism researchers address the problems of the community-model destination: the value chain discussion together with the need to optimize service quality were the beginning of a demand-side oriented tourism design thinking accompanied by new insights into destination governance (Beritelli et al. 2007). All this culminates in today's call for product development and service design activities on a destination level which forces destination stakeholder groups to closely work together (Peters and Siller 2014; Untersteiner 2015). Service design covers "the hand-on activities to describe and detail a service, the service system and the service delivery process." (Gummesson 1994, p. 85). In the context of tourism destinations, "tourism design" is defined as an on-going process of designing and further developing holistic and systematic tourism destination experiences (Zehrer 2009).

Service design thinking on the European destination level is challenged by the fact that various stakeholder groups (co-)produce and consume tourism. Tourism is staged within locals' everyday living environment instead of being produced in a resort or zoned tourism space (Edensor 2001). Despite this reality, tourism research has scarcely looked into the influence of social destination systems on tourism design patterns. Community-model destinations were analyzed to understand governance processes, however, it is still in need of more insights about the formation of social structures and patterns of social behaviors in these tourism destinations. Social systems in community-based destinations are deep-rooted, especially in rural tourism destinations. A social system can be described as the organization or structure of individuals into (stakeholder) groups. A social system is defined by (inter-)actions and/or communication behavior (Talcott 1951). Service design processes are interactive and therefore influence social behavior between destination stakeholders (Stickdorn and Zehrer 2009).

This paper attempts to shed more light upon both the effect of tourism design activities on social interactions between stakeholders in destinations. Furthermore, this paper discusses dynamic processes of tourism design within community-model destinations. The chapter will answer the following research question: "What are interdependencies between tourism design processes and a tourism destination's social system?" The paper is structured as follows: First, the concept of the tourism value chain and its interpretation in the tourism research literature will be presented to highlight the need for cooperative tourism development initiatives in both community-model and corporate-model destinations. Second, the construct of "tourism design" will be introduced as a concept of service design thinking in the context of tourism destination. It will be shown that service design thinking is both

determined by social behavior patterns but also influences the social system of the tourism destination. Third, the paper develops propositions about the relationship between tourism destination systems and tourism design. The latter allows deriving research paths for the future of tourism destination research.

2 Tourism Destination Value Chain and the Need for Cooperation

Tourists have always travelled around destinations and places to long for exceptional experiences. Attractions or events can generate memorable experiences and artificially created experience worlds are a special form of attractions, which according to their relevance can be interpreted as basic elements of the tourism system (Bieger and Beritelli 2013, p. 14). From the perspective of the tourist enterprise as one main element of the tourism system and tourism value chain, it is essential to anticipate customer needs and hence their desire for adventures. Porter's value chain concept was used by a number of tourism researchers to underline the importance of producing one tourism or holiday product instead of producing individual single services and products e.g. in a tourism destination. The tourism value chain supports the analysis of the "various steps of a tourism product including all service providers" (Weiermair 2006, p. 64). A tourism value chain shows the bundle of primary and secondary elements, which finally creates the experiences or values for tourists. The profit margin depends upon the price that tourists are willing to pay for consuming this valuable service and product bundle. Therefore the tourism value chain is quite different from the originally developed value chain of Porter (1990). Especially the definition of tourists as prosumers and the challenges in supporting chain elements ask for a more detailed analysis of this concept.

The full range of activities that are relevant to produce the tourism product can be analyzed with the help of the value chain concept. In tourism research the concept was adapted and introduced at the end of the eighties, mainly to conceptualize and understand the complexity of the tourism product. The Swiss school of tourism research (e.g. Bieger and Beritelli 2013; Kaspar 1994; Krippendorf 1986) discussed tourism systems and tourism destination systems and therefore used Porter's model to understand both the composition and balance of a destination's tourism product bundle and to derive implications for further product development. The latter led to a strong call for cooperation between various stakeholders in the tourism destination. Porter and Millar (1985) describe a company's value chain as a "system of interdependent activities, which are connected by linkages." These linkages also need to be coordinated or managed and can therefore also provide competitive advantages in an industry. For instance, within a company human resource management, they can optimize the overall value chain by coordinating job enrichment or career path models. The value chain is embedded in a value

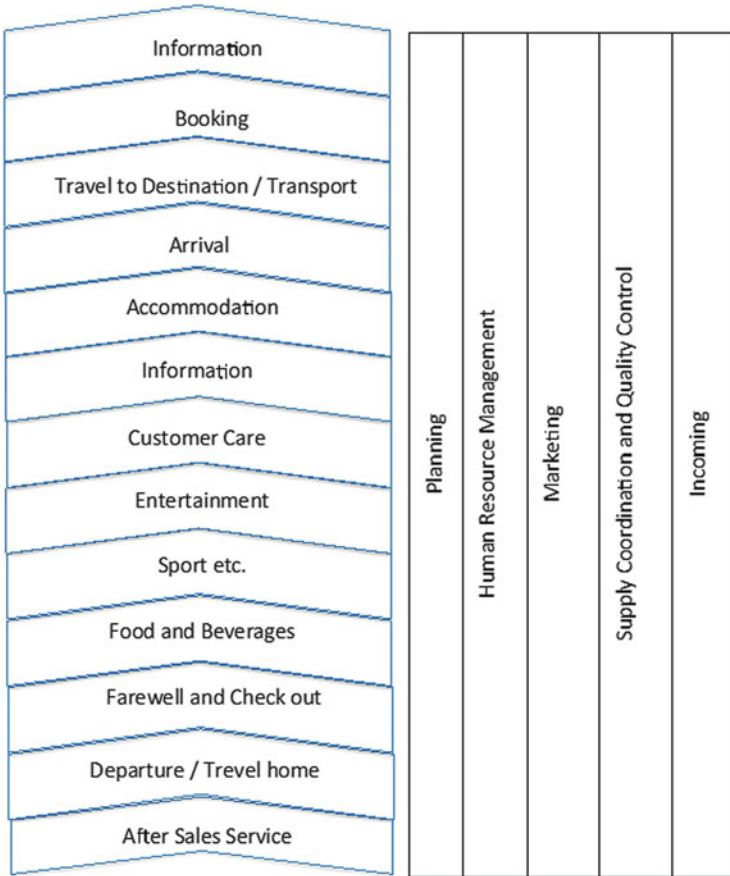


Fig. 1 Service value chain in Alpine tourism (Bieger and Beritelli 2013, p. 59)

system that includes value chains of suppliers and buyers. Porter’s value chain concept is therefore just one part in the industry analysis and should be interpreted in the context of his five forces model.

Tourism value chain analysis does not only focus on one company embedded in a value system, for a bundle of companies can also form the tourism destination value chain. From a consumer perspective the primary elements of the tourism value chain start with the decision-making process phase and ends with the so-called after-sales services. Bieger and Beritelli (2013) defined the service value chain in Alpine tourism and added secondary or supporting elements such as planning, human resource management, marketing, supply coordination and quality control or incoming (see Fig. 1).

The tourism value chain in tourism certainly can be provided through one company only: e.g. large hotel resorts are able to provide all the primary elements and implement a type of management which is able to internalize the most valuable

supporting or secondary activities. This holds true for destinations which function as corporations such as the corporate model of Canadian or US American ski resorts. On the contrary, many destinations are operated by a number of diverse enterprises in different industries, with various levels of quality management. Furthermore, in this community destination model, many of these enterprises are only operating in one of the above-presented areas (e.g. accommodation) of the tourism value chain and hardly understand the linkages between the value chain components.

Especially in the recent past, tourism researchers used the tourism value chain as a starting point or framework for their analysis, for instance to understand tourism governance patterns (Adriana 2009; Song et al. 2012) or innovation processes in destinations (Weiermair 2006) or to explore performance measurement in tourism (Yilmaz and Bititci 2006a, b). In the community model, where destination management consists of transactional and personal relationships in networks, the tourism value chain is provided by various independent businesses. The corporate model often performs better than the community one in cultivating customer satisfaction, product development and strategic management (Flagestad and Hope 2001); strategic management is as professionalized as in business organizations. Due to their small-sized value chain structure, community model destinations lack strategy and professionalism (Hjalager 2002; Pikkemaat 2008). As a consequence, the role of the destination management organization (DMO) in these two different models tourism destinations is very different. The DMO is mainly a marketing organization in the corporate model. In the community model it is also an important stakeholder in the governance of tourism destinations and plays an integrative role.

One major imperative of community model destinations is cooperation between actors of all kinds to innovate and develop or maintain value for the visitors (Pikkemaat and Weiermair 2007). Wang and Fesenmaier (2007) point out that “the fragmented nature of the tourism industry requires a substantial degree of coordination and collaboration of different players” (p. 863) in tourism destinations. However, cooperation between small-sized market players, which are often family businesses, is interpreted as a major barrier of tourism development. A major function of the DMO in community model destinations, aside from marketing and branding, is the initiation of cooperation and collaboration between businesses within the destination. Although, the major goal is to enhance destination competitiveness, additional outcomes of collaboration are organization-learning and social capital-oriented. While learning-oriented outcomes describe knowledge transfer and improvement and diffusion of skills, social capital-oriented outcomes are relationship and trust building processes among the stakeholders in the destination (Wang and Fesenmaier 2007, p. 873). In the tourism value chain we find many owner managers and entrepreneurs who often are connected with each other through strong or weak ties (Strobl and Peters 2013). These relationships or ties are determined by the frequency of contact, emotional intensity, trust and reciprocity of a relationship (Granovetter 1983). Strong ties are important for a destination to manage innovations and create a destination network core, however weak ties are

also important as they link different network cores with each other (Jack 2005). Tourism researchers have analyzed networks of entrepreneurs and leaders in tourism destinations worldwide and explored patterns of destination governance (Beritelli et al. 2013; Pechlaner et al. 2014, 2015; Strobl and Peters 2013). In this research stream entrepreneurs and leader personalities as well as DMO representatives have been identified as crucial for competitive tourism development (Pechlaner et al. 2014; Strobl and Peters 2013). However, cooperation can only be initiated through the DMO in a tourism destination when

- they create a cooperation vehicle that consequently defines clear benefits, goals and outcomes: Projects such as local events or festivals, the implementation of a quality control instrument but also clearly structured strategic tourism planning processes initiate collaboration between actors in the destination. A stimulus is needed to motivate individual actors to consider collaboration with others in the destination.
- trust and understanding exists among actors. Cooperative behaviour is interpersonal and therefore the DMO should carefully identify communication patterns between stakeholders in the destination, as intense communication is a characteristic of existing trust and understanding between certain actors (Beritelli 2011).
- they understand relationships, interdependencies and resource allocation among actors: Beritelli (2011) highlights that “cooperation processes require reciprocal sympathy” (p. 624). Interdependencies lead to sympathy, which is a prerequisite for cooperation between actors, especially in community-structure tourism destinations.

Finally, it is obvious that a tourism destination can also be interpreted as a social system or social network in which an individual gains social capital. It is defined as the overall sum of “actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from a network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit” (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998, p. 243). In tourism social capital theory has been studied to understand small business development (Zhao et al. 2011), tourism community residents behavior (Park et al. 2012), and tourism destination’s life cycle (Nordin and Westlund 2009). Again, it can be concluded that the role of the DMO has changed from a purely marketing-oriented association towards a co-producer and initiator of tourism innovation and competitiveness. In doing so, the DMO must understand how actors perceive their resources and how these actors are related to each other. Therefore, the DMO should attempt to manage integration and communication within the destination in order to foster cooperative behavior. The next section elaborates on service design thinking and it will be argued that the DMO can use service design to initiate sustainable cooperative behaviors in the tourism destination.

3 Service Design Thinking

As indicated above the tourism value chain is a systematic tool that helps identify areas of creating and maintaining competitive advantages in the industry. Porter and Millar (1985) already used a process view to present their value chain referring to the supply chain in manufacturing industries. However, the adaptation of the value chain in services has become very popular both because of its process orientation and its focus on customer value creation. This process orientation was also mandatory for understanding the customer experience and early instruments such as the flowchart. Furthermore, service blueprinting helped to systematically structure and understand customer experiences in order to provide the right resources at the right time in the right manner (Shostack 1982). Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) define service blueprint as a visualized picture or map that helps all those involved to understand and handle it objectively. Moments of truth and failures could be identified with these methods which became popular in service quality control but also in new service development processes (Gummesson 1994). Furthermore, blueprinting increases service provision efficiency (e.g. by optimizing information management) and the efficiency of factor combination management (Fließ and Kleinaltenkamp 2004).

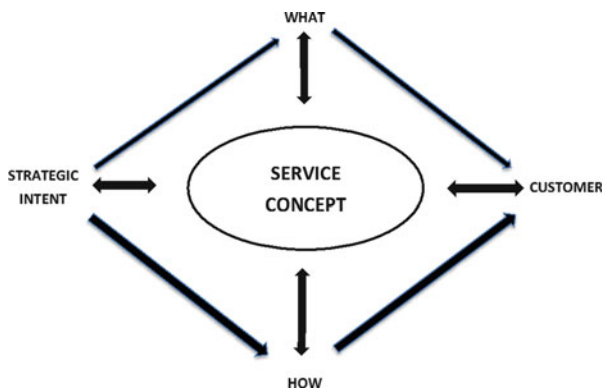
Already in 1982, Shostack discussed the term blueprinting in the context of designing a service. This stream of literature uses sequential or process models in certain phases of the new service development process to (pre-)test potential services. Gummesson (1994) defined service design as activities that “describe and detail a service, the service system and the service delivery system” (p. 85). Until today service design is understood as a set of activities which help service providers develop and further improve their product (Stickdorn and Schneider 2012).

Service design describes activities and therefore the starting point for any service design activity is the service concept. Described as the “missing link” (Goldstein et al. 2002) in service design research the service concept is concretely describing the nature of the service. A service concept links the operating strategy with the target market segmentation and is not defined “in terms of products and services but in terms of results produced for customers” (Heskett et al. 1990, p. 20). The service provider has to answer the question: “What are important elements of the service to be provided?” (Heskett et al. 1990, p. 21). The service concept “not only defines the *how* and the *what* of service design, but also ensures integration between the *how* and *what*” (Goldstein et al. 2002) (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2 describes the mismatch between strategic intent and customer needs, but also between the *what* and the *how*! Any service designer needs to clarify these relationships before activities are planned. Once the service concept is clarified, then the following four steps can be proposed to design service experiences:

- Training and education: a prerequisite for any service design is customer-orientation and the acquisition of skills to design services in cross-functional teams.

Fig. 2 Strategic intent
 [Source: Goldstein
 et al. (2002, p. 124)]



- Relevant data needs to be collected and analyzed both from the supply and the demand side. The focus lies on the perception of customer experiences and their reactions to the overall service experience provided.
- Customer journeys or blueprints need to be developed to understand single phases of the service experience and their relationship to each other both from the customer side and supply side.
- Furthermore, certain “clues”, a term defined by Haeckel et al. (2003) as ‘perceptions and sensations’, need to be categorized into three types: clues “that should have been implemented yesterday, those that can be implemented today, and those that must be held for the future” (Zehrer 2009, p. 339). This is especially important to attract loyal customers and tourists.

Tourism DMO can use these design steps to initiate tourism design in their destination. The term “tourism design” is adapting service design in the context of a tourism destination. Zehrer (2009) argues that small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) in tourism should apply service design in order to overcome (mental) barriers of cooperation and to better understand the holistic and complex tourism product. Service design helps both to place oneself in the “shoes of the customer” and to increase efficiency in tourism service production. The following chapter underlines this and proposes the implementation of the tourism destination triad to improve the value of the tourism product.

4 The Tourism Destination Triad Design, Value and Activities

Three propositions can be derived from the analysis. First of all, the advantages of the value chain analysis should motivate tourism stakeholders to carefully analyze given resources in the overall destination. Certainly, one single company can use the concept, but in a community-model destination it is of importance to gain an overall holistic overview of resources in primary and secondary elements in the

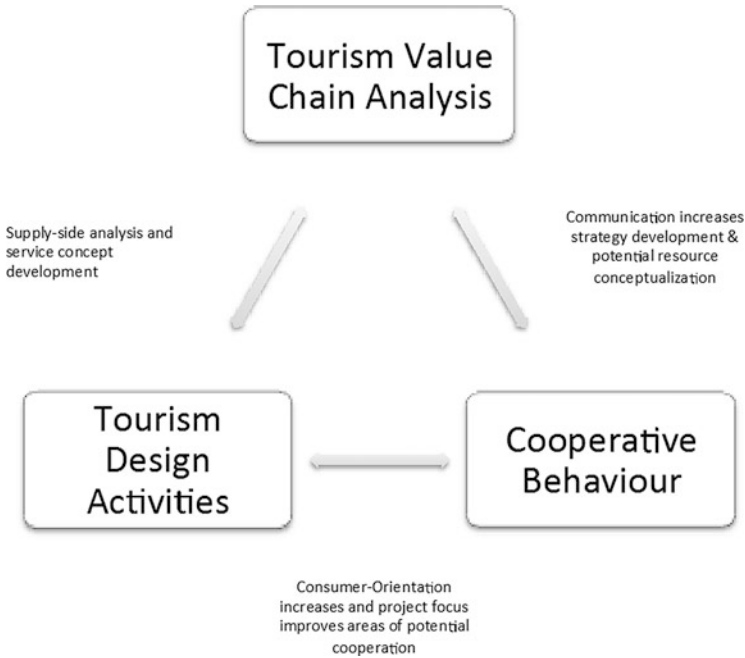


Fig. 3 Tourism design in destinations—a triad (Source: own illustration)

tourism value chain. With the help of the tourism value chain analysis, the DMO can initiate strategy development processes, which help formulate the service concept as a prerequisite for further service design initiatives. Figure 3 summarizes the three propositions: although normative, they highlight the relevance of integrative destination management activities in community-model destinations.

P1 Tourism destinations that use tourism value chain analysis effectively optimize their resource bundle; they are able to identify synergies, redundant resources, and cooperation areas in order to improve the destination’s competitiveness.

The service concept can be defined as a “driver of design planning” (Goldstein et al. 2002, p. 125). However, tourism destinations need to clearly define the value they want to provide for the target segment. Once stakeholders are able to agree on the destinations strategic goal then tourism design processes make sense. Especially in tourism, service design thinking is a prerequisite for the improvement of customer orientation in the destination. Therefore actions and initiatives need to be implemented by the DMO to integrate as many as possible relevant stakeholders in the tourism destination. Actions lead to a stronger awareness and understanding of customer journeys and help service providers to plan, control and develop their service from a holistic customer perspective.

P2 Tourism design activities increase destination stakeholders’ awareness of customer journeys and needs and initiate concrete projects or clues. Joint project

initiatives in a destination mobilize various stakeholders in the destination to work together. Usually these clearly defined initiatives lead to a greater communication between stakeholders and openness towards potential cooperation.

P3 Tourism design projects improve the overall communication and interaction of stakeholders in the tourism destination. As a consequence, cooperation intensity increases in the destination.

5 Closing Remarks

This chapter attempted to highlight the complexity of tourism destinations and showed that certain management tools can help to improve the creation of a common holistic destination product and service bundle. The discussion above postulates strong influences of tourism design thinking and action on destination stakeholder systems. Service design thinking and value chain analysis are two major success factors for service companies. This holds true for community-model tourism destinations, where on the one hand we often miss a sound resource analysis, and on the other hand fail to incorporate cooperative behavior of stakeholders. With the help of the tourism value chain, the DMO can develop the starting point for a resource identification process while service design thinking links this resource analysis with customer experiences. This resource analysis forms the basis for the formulation of the service concept. Stakeholders need to understand the strategic intent and should agree on how they want to use destination resources to attract tourists. Furthermore, being in the “shoes of the customer” and learning from customer journeys are key for the implementation of successful destination marketing strategies. Cooperative behavior can only result from commonly developed and agreed operative and tactical goals which can be derived from these analytical stages. Certainly, it is important that stakeholders anticipate positive benefits when participating in such a process (e.g. they see a option to influence decision-making in the destination) (for a detailed discussion of scope and intensity of collaboration in tourism see for instance Bramwell and Sharman 1999).

Future research needs to underline the above-formulated propositions. As Beritelli (2011) points out, cooperative behavior does not automatically result from an increasing information exchange. It also needs more empirical proof on whether the tourism value chain analysis helps redefine the destinations resource composition in the long run. No empirical evidence underlines that service design activities increase and improve communication in a destination. Aside from meetings, workshops and other occasions it remains unclear whether stakeholders change their communication habits with each other, aside from service design activities (e.g. workshop, meetings).

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