

Luxury tourism in sustainable accommodation - what can compromise the tourist experience? An analysis of glamping in Italy

Received
24th May 2022

Revised
08th June 2022

Accepted
21st December 2022

Antonella Angelini

Abstract

Frame of the researcher: *The growing demand for luxury tourist experiences in sustainable locations and in close contact with nature has favoured the emergence of new proposals with specific connotations and service-mix to better satisfy a demanding customers.*

Purpose of the study: *Glamping (short for glamorous camping) is a type of guest accommodation that has comfort/luxury and nature/sustainability at the core of its value proposition. It can be quite challenging to combine luxury and camping in an accommodation offer, because it can be difficult for the service provider to achieve high levels of comfort in environments in close contact with nature. Guests can therefore identify critical issues during their stay. This study aims to identify and classify the causes of dissatisfaction associated with this type of accommodation.*

Methodology: *An exploratory qualitative study was conducted. In light of the objective of the analysis, negative reviews of 18 glamping sites located in Italy that Booking.com classifies in its Travel Sustainable program were considered. The analysis used an Ishikawa diagram to classify the causes of dissatisfaction and provides an overview of these.*

Findings: *Most visitors look for a well-kept indoor and outdoor environment and a professional, non-improvised service, in line with offers in the luxury category. The review analysis enabled the researcher to identify the causes of dissatisfaction, which are classified in four categories: structural aspects, relations with owners and/or managers, the external environment, and situational factors. Some of these causes are under the control of the accommodation provider while others are not, making it difficult to implement improvements.*

Research limitations: *It might be useful to consider a larger number of glamping sites (including those that are not part of the Travel Sustainable program) and divide the reviews by considering different customer segments (such as couples, families, single travelers, groups of friends, or business travelers) and nationality. It could also add value to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews with owners and/or employees to understand the difficulties around implementing actions to improve guests' experience from a management perspective.*

Practical implications: *Particular attention should be given to the relational aspect and the tangible part of the service, both inside and outside accommodation facilities. A customer-oriented strategic approach is essential, including monitoring the causes of dissatisfaction in order to deal with them timeously.*

Originality of the study: *The study considers a particular type of accommodation that is growing, considering the mega trend toward authentic and sustainable tourism.*

1. Introduction

Sustainable tourism has grown steadily in recent years, with projected further growth, from USD 181.1 billion in 2019 to USD 333.8 billion in 2027 (Statista). This is determined by the increased awareness of the need for travelers to adopt environmentally friendly behaviors. From 2016 to 2021, the percentage of people who intended to stay in an eco-friendly or green accommodation facility at least once has increased from 62% to 81%. Generation Z showed the most sensitivity to this aspect, with 56% considering it important to choose an environmentally friendly structure (January 2020). For millennials, generation X and baby boomers the percentage is respectively 51%, 49%, and 46% (Statista). This requires hospitality businesses to increasingly adopt green and more sustainable solutions, focused on preserving the environment and cultures of local communities while satisfying visitors' needs and allowing good business performance in the medium and long term (Dinan and Sargeant, 2000).

Travelers in general have become more concerned about the environment (Brochado and Brochado, 2019) and they are willing to pay more to stay and have enjoyable experiences at environmentally sustainable destinations (Petrosillo *et al.*, 2007). The concept of service experience is crucial. With services, people do not buy a product, but rather an experience without any transfer of ownership. Considering luxury services, Wirtz and co-authors have stated that we should talk about "extraordinary hedonic experiences that are exclusive" (Wirtz *et al.*, 2020, p. 682). To achieve the goal of exclusivity, establishments that offer luxury services are trying to propose original solutions where naturalistic and sustainability aspects play a central role.

In this scenario, new accommodation options are appearing on the market. Among these, glamping (short for glamorous camping) aims to give guests an experience of nature and authenticity without sacrificing comfort. The combination of comfort and luxury can range from more accessible solutions to very exclusive proposals. This innovative accommodation formula is aimed at guests who are increasingly demanding green accommodation (Botha *et al.*, 2016). Glamping was first offered in warmer regions such as Africa and Australia and then spread to European countries with colder climates¹. In Italy it is a fairly recent phenomenon that is growing rapidly. Guests can sleep on comfortable beds inside structures with a low environmental impact that are often made of eco-sustainable materials, qualifying as sustainable structures. The housing solutions can vary, such as tents, huts, teepees, trailers, tree houses, safari and eco-lodges, campervans, cabooses (freight-train cars), barns, and cabins. They can receive quality services, many of which are aimed at discovering the place, its culture and customs.

¹ <https://www.idealista.it/news/vacanze/mete-turistiche/2018/09/13/127710-Glamping-che-cose> (accessed on May 12, 2022)

To be able to propose an accommodation offer that is classified as luxurious in an environmentally friendly camping site seems challenging. How much is a customer willing to pay for an exclusive, luxurious, environmentally friendly experience? It can be difficult for a glamping facility to find the optimal mix of luxury and camping that customers desire. As a consequence, guests may experience disruptions or feel that some elements of the customer journey² are negative or inadequate. Such factors may compromise the overall experience and impact the level of customer satisfaction.

This study aims to identify and classify this type of accommodation's causes of dissatisfaction from customers' point of view in order to allow owners and/or employees to improve the perceived value of their service. The research questions can be summarized as follows:

RQ1. What elements of the experience did customers perceive as critical?

RQ2. Are the critical issues encountered under the control of the accommodation provider or are they external elements that the establishment will find difficult to change?

To acquire useful information for this study, the online reviews of people who stayed at glamping facilities in Italy from January 2021 until October 2022 were analyzed, focusing on negative reviews pertaining to the research questions. The study identified the main causes of dissatisfaction that deserve attention from service providers. Using an Ishikawa diagram, the causes were mapped to provide an immediate overview. This facilitated their analysis and will allow owners and/or employees to focus on critical service elements so that viable solutions can be identified. Based on the results, the managerial implications are described, followed by the limitations of the study and possible further research avenues.

2. Customer experience in sustainable tourism

Tourism-related requirements have evolved over the last few years, and today people are increasingly looking for authentic experiences in a sustainability-oriented context. In response to this trend, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has emphasized the importance of developing authentic tourism proposals that can contribute to understanding the culture of a territory and its inhabitants (Almuhzzi and Al-Azri, 2019). Visitors are increasingly seeking luxurious, multicultural, and innovative yet consistent hospitality experiences (Scott *et al.*, 2009; Miao, 2011). This has led to a change in the luxury tourism concept itself, which has expanded to include not only traditional luxury tourism products, such as resorts that offer exclusive accommodation with superior service, but a range of unique and authentic experiences (Kiessling *et al.*, 2009; Veríssimo and Loureiro, 2013).

² The customer journey can be defined as “the process a customer goes through, across all stages and touch points, that makes up the customer experience” (Lemon K. and Verhoef P., 2016, p. 71).

These expectations of contemporary, heterogenic, luxury tourism consumers have led to expansions on the supply side (Heyes and Aluri, 2018; Thomsen *et al.*, 2020; Uriely, 2005). It involves aspects other than the expensive material factors that are traditionally part of luxury tourism proposals (Bauer *et al.*, 2011; Harkison *et al.*, 2018). In fact, it has been observed that for services it is not possible to speak of luxury only by referring to physical elements. It is necessary to take into account subjective perceptions based on a customer's situational interpretation of the experience, processes, and tangible cues (Wirtz *et al.*, 2020). Hotels and other accommodation providers have therefore started paying attention to experiences, in addition to physical service components (Knutson *et al.*, 2006).

Glamping fits into this scenario and contributes to reducing overtourism (Goodwin, 2016) and negative consequences on a territory and its inhabitants. This works in tandem with other sustainable initiatives that are being developed and implemented, such as the *Albergo Diffuso* in Italy (Dall'Ara, 2015). In addition, it is aimed at visitors who wish to have an experience that is close to nature but is placed in a luxury environment, without sacrificing comfort. These innovative accommodation facilities are mostly aimed at sustainability-conscious people. Asli and co-authors (2022) have pointed out that people who consider themselves to be sustainable consumers tend to be more feminine and more liberal, show concern for environmental and social issues and prefer alternative forms of tourism over mass tourism. Therefore, people who decide to have a glamping experience will most likely want a holistic, multidimensional experience in an environment outside the usual routes because it will be more in line with their personality, values, and interests. It was highlighted that in nature-based tourism the levels of environmental quality and suitable levels of customer service play a key role in customer satisfaction (Brochado, 2019). Considering guests' experience at glamping sites in Portugal, Brochado and Brochado (2019) observed that their reviews focused on various themes, such as experience, hotel, learn(ing), host, camping, nature, food, ingredients, difference, eco(logy), and yoga.

This is aligned to positive expressive dimensions (Otto and Ritchie, 1996), describing the ecotourism Chan and Baum (2007) identified. These are hedonic features, interactions, novelty, comfort, stimulation, and personal safety. The owners and/or employees of glamping facilities are therefore called upon to put together an "articulated package of activities and services" such as free wi-fi, yoga classes, in-room aperitifs, excursions, and breakfast with local products. This would be aimed at visitors who want a unique and memorable experience in an environment immersed in nature, without sacrificing comfort (Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011).

Positive experiences create loyal customers and improve the attractiveness of locations and accommodation facilities to new customers thanks to valuable word of mouth (Walls *et al.*, 2011). Tourism companies can use online reviews to improve their value by identifying desirable features or even pointing out flaws (Zhang *et al.*, 2016). The information gained from online reviews can impact trust in service providers and affect purchase intentions positively (Kim *et al.*, 2017). Glamping accommodation

facilities must therefore pay particular attention to tangible elements but must also take note of other service drivers that guests evaluate and that influence their experience.

The topic of customer experience is particularly relevant for services, especially for experience-oriented hospitality products (Williams, 2006; Cetin and Walls, 2016). This topic originated in the 1990s when Pine and Gilmore (1998) viewed the experience economy as the final phase of an economic progression that has evolved through the stages of commodities, goods, and services economies (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). They pointed out that the “experiences are a distinct economic offering, as different from services as services are from goods” (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, p. 97) They described the experiences as “events that engage the individual in a personal way” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.12).

When considering experiences, marketing strategies have to change. Experiential marketing involves a set of managerial tools used to enrich a purchase and highlight goods or services with emotional content and meaning (Schmitt, 1999a, 1999b). Schmitt (1998, p. 11) pointed out that “experiences are private - and sometimes intimate - events that may involve the entire living being: the senses, the feelings, the intellect and the body”. Recently Batat (2019) suggested using the 7 Es (having evolved from the 7 Ps) for customer evaluation: experience, exchange, emphasis, extension, empathy capital, emotional touchpoints, and the emic/etic process³

Based on these elements, Batat developed the ExQual tool, which is useful for measuring the perceived quality of the customer experience (Batat, 2019, p. 127). The ExQual tool considers four dimensions - human, product/service offering, environment, and value. Each dimension has different elements, shown in Table 1.

Tab. 1: Dimensions and elements of the ExQual tool

Dimensions	Elements
Human	Empathy, courtesy, competence, reliability, assurance, responsiveness
Offering (product/service)	Tangibility, efficiency, credibility, access, security
Environment	External elements
Value	Customers’ perceptions of an accommodation provider’s ability to show and express social justice and ecofriendly behavior, also through employees’ skills and abilities

Source: Our elaboration on Batat (2019)

The model allows the consideration of a range of consumer needs: functional, emotional, and social needs (human dimension), cognitive, rational, and functional needs (product/service offering dimension), sensory and physical needs (environmental dimension) and spiritual needs (value dimension). A complex set of consumer needs can be taken into account, providing a comprehensive view of customers’ experience and their perception of an establishment’s ability to meet their various

³ The emic/ethical process considers consumer behaviour from both an ‘internal and external’ point of view, to take into account specific cultures and subcultures.

needs. Every hospitality service provider has to manage all these elements optimally to ensure that its customers have a positive and satisfying experience, including their rational, emotional, and spiritual side, by putting together a unique experience (Uriely, 2005; Williams, 2006).

Considering the type of activity examined, which represents a mix between camping and luxury, the offer is articulated, with aspects that owners and/or employees do not always find easy to combine. This study therefore aims to identify and analyze factors that have had a negative impact on guests' experience, compromising their level of satisfaction. The further objective is to deepen the analysis of these factors in order to understand if improvement actions can be undertaken, which ones, and how easy or difficult implementation will be. This is linked to the degree of control guests have perceived service providers to have over specific critical factors.

3. Methodology

To acquire information about people's glamping experiences, reviews they wrote on the Booking.com portal were used. This is a primary source of data collection that is very reliable for qualitative analyses. An opinion mining approach was adopted, based on a textual analysis of the opinions. This analysis of user-generated content (Au *et al.*, 2014) represents a useful qualitative research method in the tourism sector, as it allows researchers to identify factors at the origin of a given level of customer satisfaction. This takes into account their expectations in relation to a specific accommodation facility and its value proposition (Kongthon *et al.*, 2010).

The online customer reviews and ratings can be treated as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Lu and Stepchenkova, 2012; Zhang and Cole, 2016), which is considered an important source of information for travelers (Litvin *et al.*, 2008). In their customer journey, many potential visitors consider this information before making a final accommodation choice. Customer reviews are a way for businesses (but also for potential customers) to listen to the customers' voices in an attempt to understand what they have perceived about the service they received. What has been said becomes particularly relevant if there is an effort to identify the causes of dissatisfaction, linked to inadequately managed episodes of inefficiency. Customers who write negative reviews often do so not only because they believe they have suffered a disservice but also because a complaint did not receive a rapid and decisive response that might have generated a paradox of recovery⁴ (Michel and Meuter, 2008), positively impacting satisfaction levels (Aksoy and Yilmaz, 2022). This will also most likely boost the attractiveness of an accommodation facility to potential new customers, as a result of positive physical and/or digital word of mouth provided by satisfied customers.

⁴ The service recovery paradox is the phenomenon whereby a customer is more satisfied and more likely to repurchase after a business and/or service provider has taken action to promptly and effectively resolve a problem with the service or product than if no problem had occurred. For more details, see McCollough and Bharadwaj, 1992, p.119 and/or See *et.al.*, 1990, pp.148-56.

The causes of dissatisfaction were used to construct an Ishikawa diagram, also known as a cause-and-effect (CED) or fishbone diagram. For Ishikawa (1968, 1976, 1982, 1985), the diagram allows depicting quality control factors from a process perspective in order to identify causes and eliminate them. Ishikawa (1985) indicated that “this type of diagram shows the relationship between quality characteristics and causal factors”. The graphic representation of these causes is a useful operational tool to start improving the process by removing the critical elements that customers identified in order to generate positive customer experiences.

The reviews included in the analysis came from 18 glamping facilities in Booking.com’s Travel Sustainable program (Table). An accommodation facility can be classified as sustainable if it follows a set of sustainable practices in five key areas: waste, energy and greenhouse gases, water, support to local communities, and nature conservation. This framework is divided into 32 specific sustainability practices that include “everything from eliminating single-use plastic toiletries or switching to LED light fixtures to running on 100% renewable energy sources or investing a certain percentage of profits into local community and conservation projects”⁵. To obtain the badge that certifies membership of the program, the accommodation facility must have reached the required impact threshold.

Booking.com’s director of sustainability recently stated that their Travel Sustainable program and the badge recognize the sustainability efforts of properties worldwide “in a way that is credible and transparent to consumers”⁶. In addition to encouraging properties to earn the sustainable travel badge, Booking.com thinks it is important to demonstrate various sustainability positions and showing “the growing number of properties that are at various stages of their sustainability journey”⁷.

To date there are 11,946 glamping sites on Booking.com, of which 28 are in the abovementioned program in Italy, with 10 of them having no negative reviews on that portal. The analysis therefore considered the reviews of all glamping sites in the Travel Sustainable program in Italy with at least one negative Booking.com review. The reviews refer to the period January 2021 to October 2022 and were mainly (62%) written by couples who stayed at the various facilities, 83% of the visitors being Italian. Smaller groups who frequented the facilities were single travelers and groups of friends.

⁵ <https://news.booking.com/bookingcom-launches-first-of-its-kind-travel-sustainable-badge--to-lead-industry-in-showcasing-a-wider-variety-of-sustainable-stays-en/> (accessed on October 15, 2022)

⁶ <https://biopianeta.it/2021/11/booking-com-lancia-il-programma-viaggi-sostenibili/> (accessed on 18 February, 2022)

⁷ <https://www.gstcouncil.org/booking-com-unveils-travel-sustainable-badge> (accessed on October 15, 2022)

Tab. 2: Glamping considered in the analysis

	Glamping facility	Rating	Total number of reviews	Number of negative reviews
1	Yurta Flora	8,5	12	5
2	Glamping Pian delle Ginestre	9,3	156	17
3	Glamping Abruzzo (The Yurt)	9,5	115	6
4	Glamping in Tuscany (luxury tents in agriturismo biologico)	9,2	5	1
5	Hexagon	9,7	21	1
6	Glamping Prataccio	9,3	8	2
7	Cerchio del Desiderio Glamping Retreat	9	280	53
8	Tenuta Poggio Rosso Glamping	9,3	89	12
9	Happy Glamping Madonie	10	30	3
10	BorgoGuerzano77	9,7	59	1
11	Bubble Room Under The Tuscan Stars Bubble	8,6	46	5
12	La Valle degli Orti	9,7	16	2
13	Pigna Felice Punta Ala	7,8	143	54
14	Yurta Gaia	9,6	10	2
15	EcoVita agri-glamping	9,8	12	2
16	Farm glamping tent on Acquaviva Bay	7,1	18	5
17	Glamping Debbiare	9,3	15	3
18	Yogaville Sardegna	7,4	14	5
		9,0	1.051	179

Source: Our elaboration on Booking.com (October 2022)

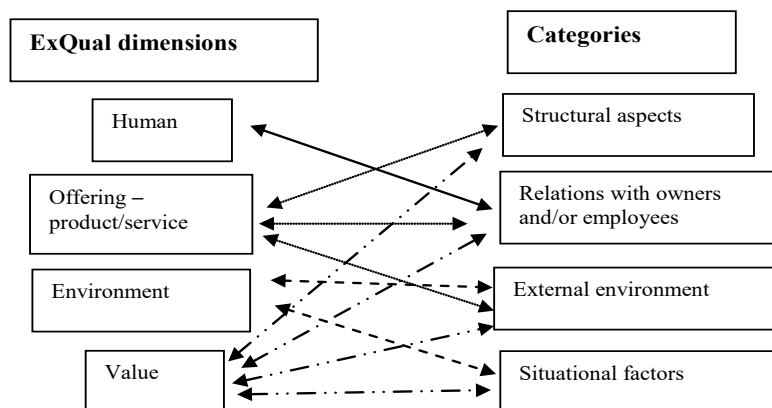
4. Results

An analysis of the reviews showed an overall appreciation for the glamping experience, with an average satisfaction score of 9.0. Of the 1,051 reviews, 179 highlighted aspects that guests considered negative (17.0%). There were several causes of dissatisfaction, which can be grouped in four categories:

- Structural aspects
- Relations with owners and/or employees
- External environment
- Situational factors

This classification was done considering the content of the reviews and the words used most frequently (obtained via NVivo software). The four categories are linked to the ExQual dimensions (human, product/service offering, environment, and value) of Batat (2019), as stated in Figure 1.

Fig. 1: Link between the ExQual dimensions and the identified categories



Source: Our elaboration

The human dimension is linked to the category “Relations with owners and/or employees” because that is how customers can obtain useful and detailed information about the service and other aspects of the offering that may be relevant to having a satisfactory experience. It is also through such relations that the owner and employees can improve their customer knowledge, enabling them to customize their service and provide support for a better understanding of the area and landscape. This aspect is particularly important in glamping, as these accommodation facilities are often located in places close to nature and far from inhabited areas. These areas can then be explored and appreciated through excursions or direct contact, supported by information provided on site.

The offering (product/service) dimension is linked to structural aspects, relations, and the external environment. This is because the offering requires consideration of tangible aspects, which in the case of glamping refers above all to the accommodation and outdoor facilities (such as a swimming pool and park). The relationships are also important, as it is with these that a focused and personalized service can be provided. The role of frontline employees is crucial, as they form the touch points in the customer journey that guests will take into account when assessing the entire experience.

The environmental dimension is clearly connected to the external environment category, even if in the ExQual tool the focus is on sensory aspects generated by the environment rather than tangible environmental elements. We believe this dimension is also linked to situational factors in the external environment, although they are often not directly under the control of the accommodation provider.

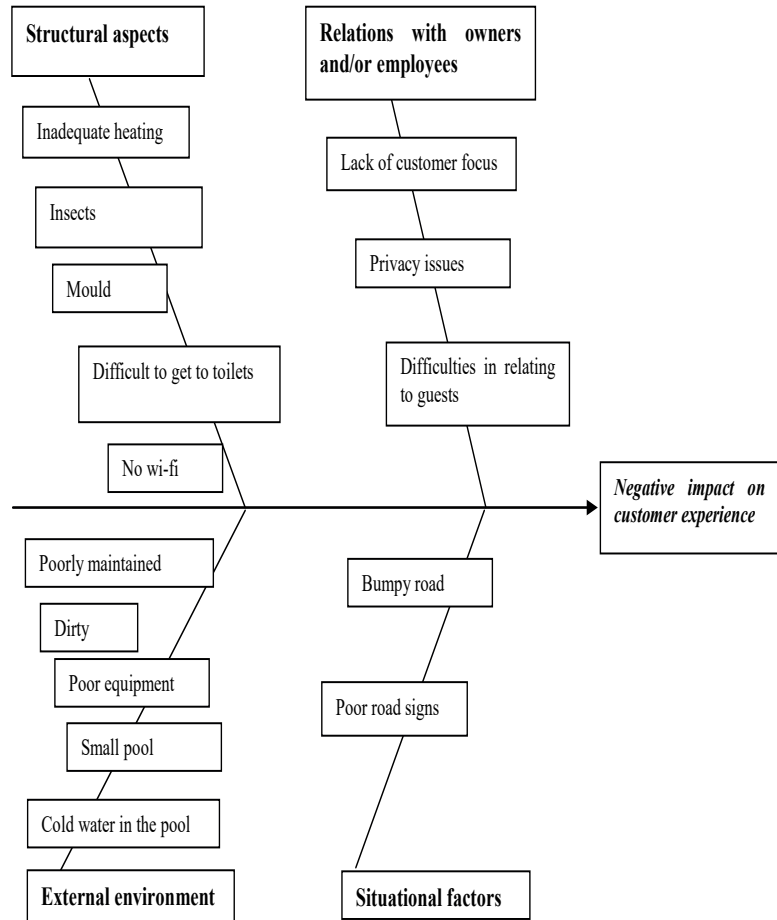
Finally, the value dimension is linked to each of the categories identified because all of them contribute, with varying intensity, to the generation of value around social, ecological, and relational aspects.

Mismanagement of the elements that contribute to the customer experience in one or more of the four identified categories seems to trigger a negative reaction. Visitors respond to this by writing negative reviews,

which impact image, customer loyalty, and the capacity to attract new customers.

It is also possible to identify several causes in each category that were used to construct the fishbone diagram (Figure 2). Below, we describe each category with the specific causes of dissatisfaction identified by analyzing the review content.

Fig. 2: Fishbone diagram showing the causes of dissatisfaction guests pointed out



Source: Our elaboration

4.1 Structural aspects

From comments about the accommodation structure, it is clear that guests have high expectations - although the structure falls in the camping category, it is part of a luxury proposal. Customers do not tolerate mediocrity when it comes to the tangible elements, which have to be of superior quality to ensure a memorable experience. Therefore, although the accommodation structures are often surrounded by nature and built

with respect for sustainability, guests will not tolerate insects. They also expect comfortable temperatures inside their accommodation (tent, wooden house, sphere, etc.), essential services that are easy to use, and no unpleasant odors. Some reviews specifically mentioned those aspects:

“The tents or spheres were not properly insulated, which made it easy for insects to enter; despite having a closed zipped entrance, we found about 30 bugs in the tent. The staff did what they could to take them out but it didn't help much as they kept coming in. The staff also asked us not to use the heater (even though at night the temperature outside was 5 or 6 degrees Celsius), and the heat pump alone could not create an acceptable temperature”.

“The bathroom was detached, and the pathway leading there was not clearly visible”.

“The tents and kitchen were not clean - we found scorpions on the dishes”.

Some reviews also mentioned the internet. Customers felt that it should have functioned well, especially for security reasons. This type of accommodation is often in areas with poor reception and access to reliable wi-fi in the accommodation increases the level of security for guests, especially at night.

4.2 Relations with owners and/or employees

In the hospitality industry, the relational aspect is very important. Guests need to interact with the contact personnel to get an idea of the offering's value aspect. The ability to explain the characteristics of the accommodation facility and its location is therefore important. In the context of sustainable tourism, authenticity is a sought-after objective: “In many people's minds the past, authenticity, and real experiences can still be found on the peripheries of the modern world, where nature, wilderness, and indigenous or other cultural groups untouched by modernity are situated” (Saarinen, 2004, p. 438).

The facility's staff should be knowledgeable about the place and should be able to explain it to visitors. This will improve the perceived value of their proposal as well as the experience guests can have during their stay. Relations between guests and staff are an important touch point in the customer journey (Steward *et al.*, 2019) - this is where the customer experience develops. It has been pointed out that employees in the tourism industry believe that customers should have memorable experiences (Cornelisse, 2020). These relations are essential in acquiring useful information about which services are offered and whether they are included in the price, as well as about the activities and excursions that will be available to visitors during their stay. Below are reviews related to this category:

“In my opinion they should pay more attention to customer relations, such as providing information about places to discover and where to go for authentic shopping - the exclusivity of the place demands it!”

“The owner entered the room while we were not present to remove the second radiator I had installed in the vain hope of making the room warm”.

“More information on services that are available or not is important. Something like rearranging the room, or rather the tent, was not included and we found out that we had to pay for this only at the end of our stay. Providing information on how glamping works could prevent unfulfilled expectations”.

4.3 External environment

The glamping experience is mainly outdoors, in an environment that is often isolated and close to nature. The environment outside the accommodation where guests stay must therefore be cared for and managed on the same level as the tangible parts inside the accommodation and the services that are provided. External spaces must be clean and adequately equipped in terms of quantity and quality, in line with most people’s expectations. If this is not the case, some guests’ expectations will not have been met and they might leave negative comments. The following two reviews deal with these aspects:

“The space around the pool was not adequate for the number of guests. Four deck chairs were definitely not enough. The pool was also very small”.

“They decided to clean the swimming pool, which was nothing more than a spring water pool, the day after we arrived, therefore we could not use it. This was disappointing, as it was 40 degrees Celsius and we had paid for it. A little more care and hygiene would also not have gone amiss”.

4.4 Situational factors

Situational factors can also influence customer satisfaction. There are uncontrollable situational factors, such as weather conditions and experiences driving to and from the destination (Oliver, 1993). Satisfaction is a broader concept than quality, within which service quality is assessed by considering the five dimensions of service - reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1994). The analysis of negative reviews highlighted the fact that these facilities are often difficult to reach because road signs are poor or not easily visible. In addition, some roads are uneven and can be an obstacle en route to the destination.

Below are two reviews related to this category:

“There must clear signs along the way to get to the facility because we got lost many times in the narrow streets”.

“There are two or three routes to the place, with the last kilometres unpaved. One of these routes has an ugly stretch that could be a bit dangerous. All it would take is a warning not to take that road and communicating that there are two other routes to the place”.

5. Managerial implications

When luxury is part of the offering, every aspect of the value proposition must be of superior quality, inspired by the goal of sustainability. This applies to tangible elements inside as well as outside the accommodation

facilities, as well as to service quality. This emerged from analyzing the reviews of customers who stayed in one of the 18 glamping sites that formed part of the study.

Considering their perception of the service they received, customers emphasized the importance of the relationship with frontline employees and/or owners. Frontline employees have a strategic role and “provide a link between the external customer and environment and the internal operations of the organization” (Wilson *et al.*, 2016, p.241). In the ExQual tool by Batat (2019), the human element refers to empathy, courtesy, competency, reliability, assurance, and responsiveness. It is essential to have a strong customer orientation that incorporates these aspects, with managerial techniques aimed at identifying and promptly removing possible causes of dissatisfaction.

Glamping customers demand privacy but at the same time require personalized and attentive care in line with luxury service expectations. Management should adopt every possible solution to ensure that these aspects are well-managed. In this regard, it is important to place the accommodation units at a sufficient distance from each other so that guests will have privacy and can relax. Modern technology allows interaction between employees and customers, enabling constant support without invading guests’ privacy. From this point of view, the analysis of comments customers left is a useful tool to generate ideas for service improvements and identify new services that may be of interest to target groups. After all, customers’ feedback indicates actions that could be taken and maximizes the chance of getting good reviews and referrals. Some actions aimed at eliminating causes of dissatisfaction can be implemented easily, while others require greater effort and will take longer. The analysis showed that there are numerous and varied causes that can impact customer experience negatively.

Regarding structural aspects, management could make an effort to improve internal heating during winter or enhance shaded areas in the warmer months. Several reviews highlighted problems with room temperature, which were either too low or too high. Despite staying at a campsite in areas close to nature, guests do not tolerate insects in their rooms. All possible measures should be put in place to minimize this inconvenience. The reviews also mentioned mould, and this is something else that can be resolved fairly easily by maintaining the structure properly.

If a glamping facility does not have reliable wi-fi due to technical reasons, management should be upfront about it. Customers should be able to find accurate and up-to-date information on the facility and its services on its website. Some guests mentioned in their reviews that the information about the accommodation facility was not detailed enough. To manage expectations, it is advisable to contact guests before they arrive to provide more information about the glamping site and to invite them to visit the website for further information. In addition, the online travel agency could add detail about the facility on its portal or invite people who have made a reservation to view the facility’s website before their stay.

Other causes of dissatisfaction that can be addressed easily because they are controlled by the accommodation facility are taking care of internal

and external spaces and checking the quality of equipment like chairs, deck chairs, and utensils.

Several other causes may be more difficult to address, as external input may be required that will impact the speed and feasibility of the intervention. A good example is improved road signs, which might require the collaboration of the relevant (and competent) public authority. An interim solution could be to point out poor signposting to visitors beforehand in an email or phone call, and provide clear directions on how to reach the destination without difficulty. Customers need to receive information through the accommodation facility's employees or other visitors, and well-informed guests tend to be more satisfied (Wilson, 2016).

The same approach can be adopted with regard to a bumpy road, which was also mentioned in the reviews. If visitors know about this beforehand, they can organize a vehicle that will be suitable for rough roads, with obvious positive effects on their customer experience and also the perceived risk level.

If an accommodation facility wants to improve its competitive advantage, it is important to adopt a proactive approach to change, based on customer feedback. This will enable it to plan the interventions that will theoretically have a constructive impact on the customer experience, resulting in word of mouth referrals and a positive business image.

6. Conclusion

The demand for unique and authentic travel experiences that respect the environment is growing. On the supply side, new proposals are appearing on the market that meet these needs and in luxury tourism there is a steady growth in solutions that are focused on sustainability.

Glamping forms part of sustainable luxury tourism with specific characteristics. By analyzing negative reviews, this study sought to understand the factors that compromised guests' experience. Glamping sites promise to provide exclusive, luxury experiences in facilities placed in the camping category. Finding an optimal balance between luxury and camping appears to be challenging. Excessive comfort could be interpreted as being out of touch with a naturalistic, sustainable experience, just as excessive reference to the nature of camping may not meet the expectations of tourists looking for a luxury experience, as the name suggests. The analysis of the reviews and the resulting Ishikawa diagram allowed the researcher to classify the main causes of dissatisfaction from guests' point of view. Owners and/or managers should take note of this information so that they can identify actions to improve their customers' experience and satisfaction level.

This study aimed to highlight the importance of monitoring customer experience, considering the expectations of guests who have had a glamping experience as well as the perception of the service quality. Concerning expectations, the importance of providing the target audience with in-depth information about the facility and the services it could provide became apparent. A glamping facility's website plays a fundamental role, as well as direct and personalized contact before guests come to stay.

7. Limitations and future research

Antonella Angelini
Luxury tourism in
sustainable accommodation
- what can compromise
the tourist experience? An
analysis of glamping in Italy

This study examined the negative reviews of 18 glamping sites in Italy as a source of information to identify service aspects that can be improved or refined in order to improve the customer experience. To deepen the analysis, the reviews could be divided in different customer segments (couples, families, single travelers, groups of friends, and business travelers) and different nationalities could be taken into account to obtain more detailed information. It might be useful to consider similar accommodation in other countries, aiming to identify best practices to improve service quality. The season during which a customer stayed at the accommodation will also be relevant, as climate conditions may have affected the experience.

A correlation between the location, the accommodation's score and the negative reviews will render a greater level of detail in the analysis and enable a better understanding of the examined issues. This kind of study will require more reviews, covering a larger number of glamping sites. In-depth semi-structured interviews will likely also add value, in order to understand the challenges around implementing actions to improve the customer experience from a management perspective.

References

- ALMUHRZI H.M., AL-AZRI H.I. (2019), "Conference report: second UNWTO/ UNESCO world conference on tourism and culture: fostering sustainable development", *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, vol. 13, n. 1, pp. 144-150.
- AKSOY M., YILMAZ Ö. (2022), "Consumer Complaints and Complaint Management in the Tourism Sector", Grima S., Özen E., Romanova I. (Ed.) *Managing Risk and Decision Making in Times of Economic Distress, Part A (Contemporary Studies in Economic and Financial Analysis, vol. 108A)*, Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 95-111.
- AU N., BUHALIS D., LAW R. (2014), "Online complaining behavior in mainland China hotels: the perception of Chinese and non-Chinese customers", *International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration*, vol. 15, n. 3, pp. 248-274.
- BATAT W. (2019), *Experiential marketing: consumer behavior*, Customer Experience and the 7Es, Routledge, London.
- BAUER M., WALLPACH S.V., HEMETSBERGER A. (2011), "My little luxury - A consumer-centred, experiential view", *Marketing*, vol. 33, n. 1, pp. 57-68.
- BOTHA E., ENGELBRECHT W.H. (2016), "Green as part of ecotourism to contribute to tourists' experiences: a destination planning approach", Sotiriadis M., Gursoy D. (Ed.) *The Handbook of Managing and Marketing Tourism Experiences*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 261-279.
- BROCHADO A. (2019), "Nature-based experiences in tree houses: guests' online reviews", *Tourism Review*, vol. 74 n. 3, pp. 310-326.
- BROCHADO A., BROCHADO F. (2019), "What makes a Glamping experience great", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, vol. 10 n. 1, pp. 15-27.

- CETIN G., WALLS A. (2016), "Understanding the customer experiences from the perspective of guests and hotel managers: empirical findings from luxury hotels in Istanbul, Turkey", *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, vol. 25, n. 4, pp. 395-424.
- CHAN J.K., BAUM T. (2007), "Ecotourists' perception of ecotourism experience in lower Kinabatangan, Sabah, Malaysia", *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 15, n. 5, pp. 574-590.
- CORNELISSE M. (2020), "Sustainability in Ylläs: one focus, various interpretations", *Journal of Tourism Futures*, vol. 6, n. 1, pp. 40-56.
- DALL'ARA G. (2015), *Manuale dell'Albergo Diffuso*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- DINAN C., SARGEANT A. (2000), "Social marketing and sustainable tourism - is there a match?", *International Journal Tourism Research*, vol. 2, pp. 1-14.
- GOODWIN, H. (2016), "Overtourism: what is it and how do we address it?", <https://responsibletourismpartnership.org/overtourism/> (accessed on April 26, 2022).
- HARKISON T., HEMMINGTON N., HYDE K.F. (2018), "Luxury accommodation - significantly different or just more expensive?", *Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management*, vol. 17 n.4, pp. 231-243.
- HEYES A., ALURI A. (2018), "How millennials perceive leisure luxury hotels in a sharing economy?", *Research in Hospitality Management*, vol. 7 n. 2, pp. 75-79.
- IJORANTA R., KOMPPULA R., (2022), "Service providers' prospective on the luxury tourist experience as a product", *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, vol. 22, n. 1, pp. 39-57.
- ISHIKAWA K. (1968), *Guide to Quality Control, Quality Resources*, White Plains, New York, NY.
- ISHIKAWA K. (1976), *Guide to Quality Control*, Asian Productivity Organization, Tokyo.
- ISHIKAWA K. (1982), *What is Quality Control?*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliff, New York, NY.
- ISHIKAWA K. (1985), *What is Total Quality Control?*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliff, New York, NY.
- KIESSLING G., BALEKJIAN C., OEHMICHEN A. (2009). "What credit crunch? More luxury for new money: European rising stars & established markets", *Journal of Retail and Leisure Property*, vol. 8, n. 1, pp. 3-23.
- KIM Y.S., KIM J.U., PARK S.C. (2017), "The effects of perceived value, website trust and hotel trust on online hotel booking intention", *Sustainability*, vol. 9, n. 12:2262, pp. 1-14.
- KNUTSON B., BECK J., HIM S., CHA, J. (2006), "Identifying the dimensions of the experience construct", *Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing*, vol. 15, n. 3, pp. 31-47.
- KONGTHON A.N., ANGKAWATTANAWIT C., SANGKEETTRAKARN P., PALINGOON C. HARUECHAIYASAK (2010), "Using an opinion mining approach to exploit Web content in order to improve customer relationship management", In *Proc. of the 2010 Portland International Conference on Management of Engineering and Technology (PICMET 2010)*, pp. 1355-1360.
- KUME H. (1985), *Statistical Methods for Quality Improvement*, AOTS, Chigoya Ku, Tokyo.

- LEMON K., VERHOEF P. (2016), "Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 80, n. 6, pp. 69-96.
- LITVIN S.W., GOLDSMITH R.E., PAN B. (2008), "Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management", *Tourism Management*, vol. 29, n. 3, pp. 458-468.
- LU W., STEPCHENKOVA S. (2012), "Ecotourism experiences reported online: classification of satisfaction attributes", *Tourism Management*, vol. 33, n. 3, pp. 702-712.
- McCOLLOUGH M.A., BHARADWAJ S.G. (1992), *The recovery paradox: an examination of customer satisfaction in relation to disconfirmation, service quality and attribution based theories*, Marketing Theory and Applications, eds C.T. Allen et al. (Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association, 1992), p. 119.
- MEHMETOGLU M., ENGEN M. (2011), "Pine and Gilmore's Concept of Experience Economy and Its Dimensions: An Empirical Examination", *Tourism, Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism*, vol. 12, n. 4, pp. 237-255,
- MIAO L. (2011), "Guilty pleasure or pleasurable guilt? Affective experience of impulse buying in hedonic driven consumption", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, vol. 35, n. 1, pp. 79-101.
- MICHEL S., MEUTER M. (2008), "The service recovery paradox: true but overrated?", *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, vol. 19, n. 4, pp. 441-57.
- OLIVER R.L. (1993), "A conceptual model of service quality and service satisfaction: Comparative goals, different concepts", *Advances in Service Marketing and Management*, vol. 2, pp. 65-85.
- OTTO J.E., RITCHIE J. (1996), "The service experience in tourism", *Tourism Management*, vol. 17, n. 3, pp. 165-174.
- PARASURAMAN A., ZEITHAML V.A., BERRY L.L. (1994), "Reassessment of Expectations as a Comparison Standard in Measuring Service Quality: Implications for Further Research", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 58, n. 1, pp. 111-124.
- PETROSILLO I., ZURLINIG., CORLIANO M.E., ZACCARELLIN., DADAMO M. (2007), "Tourist perception of recreational environment and management in a marine protected area", *Landscape and Urban Planning*, vol. 79, pp. 29-37.
- PINE B., GILMORE J.H. (1998), "Welcome to the experience economy", *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 76, n. 4, pp. 97-105.
- PINE B., GILMORE J.H. (1999), *The experience economy*, MA: Harvard Boston, pp. 53-67.
- SAARINEN J. (2004), *Tourism and Touristic Representations of Nature: A Companion to Tourism*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pp. 438-49.
- SCHMITT B.H. (1999a), *Experiential Marketing: How to Get Customers to Sense, Feel, Think, Act and Relate to Your Company and Brands*, The Free Press, New York, NY.
- SCHMITT B.H. (1999b), "Experiential marketing", *Journal of Marketing Management*, vol. 15, n. 1/3.
- SCHMITT B.H. (1998), "The power of a luxury experience", *Luxury Briefing*, (October), p. 11.

- SCOTT N., LAWS E., BOKSBERGER P. (2009), "The marketing of hospitality and leisure experiences", *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, vol. 18, n. 2-3, pp. 99-110.
- SEE C.W., HART, HESKETT J.L., SASSER Jr W.E. (1990), "The profitable art of service recovery", *Harvard Business Review*, n. 68 (July-August), pp. 148-56
- STEWART M., NARUS J., ROEHM M., RITZ W. (2019), "From transactions to journeys and beyond: the evolution of B2B buying process modeling", *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 83 November, pp. 288-300.
- TASCI A.D.A., FYALL A., WOOSNAM K.M. (2022), "Sustainable tourism consumer: socio-demographic, psychographic and behavioral characteristics", *Tourism Review*, vol. 77, n. 2, pp. 341-375.
- THOMSEN T.U., HOLMQVIST J., VON WALLPACH S., HEMETSBERGER A., BELK R. W. (2020), "Conceptualizing unconventional luxury", *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 116, pp. 441-445.
- URIELY N. (2005), "The tourist experience", *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 32, n. 1, pp. 199-216.
- VERISSIMO M., LOUREIRO S.M.C. (2013), "Experience marketing and the luxury travel industry", *Tourism & Management Studies*, pp. 296-302.
- VOORHEES C.M., FOMBELLE P.W., GREGOIRE Y., BONE S., GUSTAFSSON A., SOUSA R., WALKOWIAK T. (2017), "Service encounters, experiences and the customer journey: defining the field and a call to expand our lens", *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 79, pp. 269-280
- WALLS A.R., OKUMUS F., WANG Y.R., KWUN D.J.W. (2011), "An epistemological view of consumer experiences", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, vol. 30, n. 1, pp. 10-21.
- WILLIAMS A. (2006), "Tourism and hospitality marketing: fantasy, feeling and fun", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, vol. 18, n. 6, pp. 482-495
- WILSON A., ZEITHMAL V.A., BITNER M.J., GREMLER D.D. (2016), *Service marketing*, Third European Edition, McGraw Hill.
- WIRTZ J., HOLMQVIST J., FRITZE M. P. (2020), "Luxury services", *Journal of Service Management*, vol. 31, n. 4, pp. 665-691.
- ZHANG Y., COLE S.T. (2016), "Dimensions of lodging guest satisfaction among guests with mobility challenges: a mixed-method analysis of web-based texts", *Tourism Management*, vol. 53, pp. 13-27.
- ZHANG D., ZHOU L., KEHOE J.L., KILIC I.Y. (2016), "What online reviewer behaviors really matter? Effects of verbal and nonverbal behaviors on detection of fake online reviews", *Journal of Management Information Systems*, vol. 33, n. 2, pp. 456-481.

Websites

- <https://biopianeta.it/2021/11/booking-com-lancia-il-programma-viaggi-sostenibili/>
(accessed on 18 February, 2022)
- <https://www.statista.com/> (accessed on May 5, 2022)
- <https://www.idealista.it/news/vacanze/mete-turistiche/2018/09/13/127710-Glamping-che-cose> (accessed on May 12, 2022)

<https://news.booking.com/bookingcom-launches-first-of-its-kind-travel-sustainable-badge--to-lead-industry-in-showcasing-a-wider-variety-of-sustainable-stays-en/> (accessed on October 15, 2022)
<https://www.gstcouncil.org/booking-com-unveils-travel-sustainable-badge/> (accessed on October 15, 2022)

Antonella Angelini
Luxury tourism in
sustainable accommodation
- what can compromise
the tourist experience? An
analysis of glamping in Italy

Academic or professional positions and contacts

Antonella Angelini
Associate Professor of Management
University of Pisa - Italy
e-mail: antonella.angelini@unipi.it

sinergie
italian journal of management

ISSN print 0393-5108
ISSN online 2785-549X
DOI 10.7433/s120.2023.02
pp. 21-39

 **FONDAZIONE
CUEIM**

 **S I
M A**

Italian Society of
MANAGEMENT