

# Marketing of touristic districts - viable systems in the experience economy

Back to the future

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## 1. Introduction

In the extant managerial literature, the recent contribution by J. Pine II and J.H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy Goes Beyond Service*, has attracted our attention because it offers so much food for thought regarding the possible evolutionary pathways that advanced societies' consumption models could follow and the consequent strategic challenges that businesses will have to face in order to meet their clients' new needs and to successfully adapt to market changes. Based on their observations of American society, certainly that with the greatest propensity toward consumption, and starting from the implicit hypothesis that demand is constantly on the lookout for new objects and forms of consumption, for new emotions and sensations, and with greater consumer expectations (Ritzer, 2000), the two scholars suggest the provocative thesis that, by now, *the era of services is on its way out to make way for the experience economy*. In this new scenario, in which there is little or nothing left to purchase, *for the extremely demanding and aware consumer, value is created by the enterprise that offers experiences<sup>1</sup>, rather than goods and services*. In the American authors' view, experiences represent economic proposals that differ greatly from services, at least to the same extent that services differs from goods; nevertheless, they still represent 'products' which, like goods and services, can be offered to the client either singly or in combination with other outputs (good, services) in the form of 'packages'. Moreover, compared to services, experiences stand out for their uniqueness and capacity to be *personal*, instead of personalized, in addition to the fact that they are 'staged' and not simply handed out. This implies that enterprises must undergo a transformation from being mere providers of services or sellers of goods to becoming 'stage directors' of experiences for the client who, in the new perspective, is called 'guest'. By the same token, writes Rifkin, the economy is being transformed, from "gigantic factory" to "endless theater" and now "every business is show business" (Rifkin, 2000, p. 219).

Consumer satisfaction and loyalty are determined by the ability of organizations to go *beyond* the normal capacity to satisfy demand, trying to transcend expectations through new and completely unexpected offerings for the clientele; it is a matter of *staging surprises*, thus widening the gap between what the client perceives and what s/he expects to get (Pine and Gilmore, p. 117).

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<sup>1</sup> According to Toffler (1988, p. 236), "we will become the first civilization in history to utilize highly advanced technology to produce the most transitory and, at the same time, the most enduring of products: the human experience".

The experience economy model, which came out in the U.S. in parallel with numerous other managerial theories and models in support of the *'theatricalization of economic activities'* (Grove, Fisk, and Bitner, 1997), seemed, to us, particularly applicable to the tourism industry and especially to tourism districts. The latter are territories in which it is a daily task of tourism operators to *formulate offerings that are often inspired by the logic of providing the clientele with a more or less integrated mix of goods and services in which, however, there is an experiential dimension that is purely casual, spontaneous, and unintended, with no real economic or marketing objective.*

In a context of *entertainment* economy (Bird, 2002), the evolution of tourist demand towards forms of demand for experiences actually *forces* agents in the sector, if they are to remain competitive, to develop a new conceptual framework and adopt original managerial tools for fulfilling this demand. In other words, if consumers tend to essentially purchase emotions and experiences, then the supply side must be populated with producers and sellers of 'memories' (Valdani and Guenzi, 1998), and the marketing of services and of experiences must use the theater model as its point of reference (Grove, Fisk, and Bitner, 1997).

The aim of this article is to propose an application of the experience economy model to tourism and, in particular, to *tourist districts* (Pencarelli, 2001), interpreted as a *paradigm of the Viable Systems Approach (VSA)* (Golinelli, 2000). This concept has allowed us to discern what type of districts, otherwise labeled as touristic systems, local tourist offering systems and so on in the literature, fit the concept of 'system' in a narrow sense and what the prerequisites are, therefore, that a district must meet in order to qualify as a viable system. From this work it emerges that, among the various factors needed for a district (in the strictest sense) to fall within the viable systemic concept, there must be the indispensable presence of a *governing body*, to which we refer in our proposal for possible tourist district market-oriented management tools. We propose applying the *marketing concept* to tourist districts with all due conceptual caution, aware of the limitations inherent in both theory and managerial actions, in undertaking to shift into territorial contexts paradigms and tools that were developed with reference to organizational systems.

The marketing paradigm most effective for our purposes is that of *total relationship marketing* (Gummesson, 1999), which goes beyond the traditional framework of *marketing management* to move toward the concept of *marketing-oriented management*. Total relationship marketing is based on a holistic approach which aims to build and maintain long-term, positive relationships with single clients and other stakeholders, and which recognizes that the end value for the client is co-created with all of the parties involved. From this standpoint, Gummesson's thesis, analogous to the relationship marketing approach put forward by Peck, Christopher, Payne, and Clark (1999), promotes the idea that relationship marketing represents the convergence of the marketing paradigm and that of total quality (Cozzi, Ferrero, 2000), and focuses on *customer satisfaction and customer service*. In other words, it is a question of *adopting an integrated managerial perspective that is widely diffused organization-wide and*

*culturally holistic, in keeping with the viable system concept. What is to be avoided is the logic of focusing the marketing only on the final client thereby falling into a near-sighted approach that underestimates the importance of truly satisfying an audience when all of the theater components have worked together well.* Indeed, concentrating exclusively on the external consumer means ignoring the fact that, in an organizational system, there are stakeholders (internal clients, distributors, suppliers, financial backers, public institutions, mass media, etc.) whose complete satisfaction is an indispensable condition for satisfying the final client and for long-term competitive success.

Finally, from our work there emerges, alongside the indisputable merits of providing innovative and holistic elements for reflection and action for the governance of tourist districts in the new consumption scenario, that the experience economy model also presents some negative aspects. These aspects should not be overlooked in the governance of touristic systems when, for instance, following in the wake of a strong theme, the choice is made to stage experiences aimed at enhancing existing facets of the territory or region (in terms of both *front region* and *back region*) and build artificial touristic spaces that tourists must pay for in an area where a real experience could be enjoyed for free. We allude, in particular, to the danger that in an effort to make an offering so spectacular in terms of providing tourists with experiences, emotions, memories, dreams come true, or other forms of entertainment, it risks becoming excessively trite and overly commercialized<sup>2</sup>, thus creating desensitized clients who are even resentful of the various forms of experience-tourism and are less apt to be amazed, awed, and surprised. Pushing too hard or inappropriately on the spectacular experience lever can actually make people want to run from anything that makes their free time, which should be for creative and recreational activities of choice, become 'mandated time' geared toward forced consumption. Ultimately, time is manipulated so that it no longer enriches and relaxes but rather, impoverishes and tires individuals, negatively impacting on their quality of life (Rifkin, 2000, p. 201; Pratesi, 2002, pp. 73-74).

The experience economy model must therefore be adopted prudently, avoiding interpretations that are totally uncritical which can occasionally be seen in Pine and Gilmore; instead, it would be preferable to follow the suggestions of Grove, Frisk, and Bitner (1997) according to whom, when management embraces the theater metaphor, it is essential that a staging of experiences be authentic (tourists can tell immediately when a situation or an attitude is fake and they usually do not appreciate it), adaptable, and appropriate (every performance must be adapted to the situation, to the client, etc.), as well as be sufficiently applicable to the context being managed.

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<sup>2</sup> At its most extreme, the experience economy approach leads significant segments of public goods (museums, natural resources, traditions, etc.) to take part in cultural productions in which culture is brought to the market to offer entertainment and experiences to tourists (Rifkin, 2000, p. 201).

## 2. Tourism demand within the experience economy perspective

Over the last two decades the number of people who habitually spend their free time engaged in touristic activities has grown enormously. Tourism has progressively evolved from an elitist phenomenon to *widespread mass behavior* (Metallo, 1984, p. 27), thus involving wider and more diverse segments of the world's population to become a *good of citizenship* in industrialized societies (Alberoni, 1964; Becheri and Manente, 2001). In parallel to the quantitative growth of tourism, there has also been an expansion in the variety and variability of touristic consumption behaviors, just as there has been a multiplication of the opportunities for and forms of enjoyment of free time (Resciniti, 2002).

In this altered scenario, it has become more and more difficult to identify 'typical'<sup>3</sup> tourist behavior, particularly in the area of leisure tourism, referred to in the follow-up publication. It can be said that tourist behavior originates from a multitude of needs that merge into the desire for temporary existential variety (or the need to 'get away') of people willing to invest resources of time, energy, and money for travel (Vicari, 1983; Metallo, 1984; Sancetta, 1995; Rispoli and Tamma, 1996), considered to be a good way to re-balance or to satisfy psychological needs of which the tourist is sometimes even unaware.

According to the current view (Borghesi, 1994, p. 17; Rispoli and Tamma, 1996, p. 53; Casarin, 1996, p. 78), the various needs of travelers are satisfied through a wide range of tourism products deriving from different combinations of goods, services, and other contextual and environmental factors put in place by the offering. The objective is to utilize, to varying degrees, informational support in order to bring into alignment the differing perspectives on the demand side (global perspective) and on the supply side (specific perspective)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The multiform reality of tourists can be represented by a continuum of situations falling between two extremes (Poon, 1993; Pencarelli, 2001): On one side, there is the "expert clientele" made up of people who have travelled extensively, who are informed, and who know how to get informed. These persons usually know what they are looking for and are able to get themselves organized and put together their own trip relatively easily. On the other side, there is the "non-expert clientele" made up of individuals who started vacationing relatively late in life, who struggle to find information that is not in a standardized format, who cannot specify their preferences, and who prefer a package deal to a do-it-yourself trip. These persons are generally attracted to highly standardized, tried-and-true travel formulas. For more information on types of tourism, see also Corrigan (1999), Martinengo and Savoja (1998), Cohen (1979), Casarin (1996), and Della Corte (2000).

<sup>4</sup> For a touristic producer, the touristic product (specific) is "an integrated set of varying types of services whose central core characterizes both the product and the type of tourist organization offering it" (Casarin, 1996, p. 52). For a tourist, the touristic product (global) (p. 47) is "a set of environmental and instrumental factors defined as a global touristic product in which a combination of elements all come together; they are the attraction features of the destination and transit areas, the services and facilities at the destination and in the transit areas, the accessibility of the destination, the image of the destination and the information regarding it".

In this article it is assumed that tourism demand, similarly to the majority of consumption behaviors in western society, is becoming more and more 'experience demand' in the sense attributed to the term by Pine and Gilmore (2000, p. 14); according to them, every experience happens at all levels - emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual - within each single individual, and it derives from "the interaction between the staged event and the previous mental and existential condition of the individual". This is why two individuals cannot have the same experience. *This is why the new competitive challenge for tourism enterprises consists in offering clients something that goes beyond goods and services.* In fact, the American scholars go on to state that:

Experiences are a fourth economic offering, as distinct from services as services are from goods, but one that has until now gone largely unrecognized. Experiences have always been around, but consumers, businesses, and economists lumped them into the service sector along with such uneventful activities as dry cleaning, auto repair, wholesale distribution, and telephone access. When a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages - as in a theatrical play - to engage him in a personal way (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 2).

The conceptual perspective of the two authors thus widens the traditional range and typology of products that organizations offer on the market (raw materials, goods, and services), indicating that they can propose types of economic offers that go '*beyond the service*', such as experience-products and transformation-products.

Therefore, it is possible to take a step forward in the debate on the relationship between touristic demand and touristic offering and, in particular, on the medium of exchange, i.e., the touristic product. Without touching on the differing perspectives of the producer and the consumer, the touristic product can be considered a composite offer made up of goods, services, information, and contextual elements targeted to the creation of engaging and memorable experiences.

When tourists travel for pleasure, there is always the more or less conscious search for an *experience*. For the tourism industry, therefore, it is a question of putting this experience requirement *at the center of their managerial actions* in order to provide the clientele with economic proposals that go *beyond the simple mix of goods and services* and that are geared more purposefully and consciously toward offering experiences designed to entertain, engage emotionally, and transform tourists. This challenge is felt by all levels and sectors of the tourism industry, whether single organizations, a group, or a system (district or place).

### 3. The basic assumptions of the Pine and Gilmore model

The core of the economic vision proposed by Pine and Gilmore is the model for an evolving market demand (model of the progression of economic value). According to this model, market demand inevitably

becomes saturated by a wider and wider demand and at decreasing costs (massification) but, at the same time, a new 'superior' type of demand is formed.

Within the context of American society as their point of reference, the authors assert that the massification of commodities and the shift to an economy founded on the offer of goods, as well as the massification of goods and the shift to an economy based on the provision of services have already occurred. Furthermore, they believe that a strong massification of services is currently underway and, at the same time, there is a hefty upsurge in the demand for experiences. It is Pine and Gilmore's hypothesis that the twenty-first century will be marked by the passage from the service economy to one based on staged experiences. The authors posit, as shown in Table 1, that the continual quest for variety on the demand side makes it highly likely that, in the foreseeable future, the economic offering will go beyond the experiences themselves, to become transformations. These will follow experiences and will be the answer to the predictable massification of experiences.

Tab. 1: Table of economic distinctions

Economic Offering	Commodities	Goods	Services	Experiences	Trans-formations
Economy	Agrarian	Industrial	Service	Experience	Transformation
Economic Function	Extract	Make	Deliver	Stage	Lead
Nature of offering	Fungible	Tangible	Intangible	Memorable	Effective
Key Attribute	Natural	Standardized	Customized	Personal	Individual
Method of Supply	Stored in bulk	Inventoried after production	Delivered on demand	Revealed over a duration	Lasting over time
Seller	Trader	Manufacturer	Provider	Stager	Generator
Buyer	Market	User	Client	Guest	Aspiring Transformees
Factors of demand	Characteristics	Features	Benefits	Sensations	Effects

Source: Pine and Gilmore (2000, p. 212)

According to Pine and Gilmore:

- *commodities* are functional materials extracted from the natural world;
- *goods* are tangible products that can be standardized and warehoused;
- *services* are intangible activities that can be personalized for the individual requests of known clients. Service providers use goods to service a client (e.g. a haircut) or goods owned by the client (e.g. computer repair). In general, clients place greater value in the services than in the goods needed to provide them; in other words, *services fulfill specific tasks clients wish to see accomplished but do not want to do themselves* and goods simply provide the means;
- *experiences are memorable events that engage the individual on a personal level*. The economic offering of experiences happens every time that an organization *intentionally* uses services as the stage and goods as the

support to engage an individual. Those who buy an experience attribute value to their involvement in something that the organization reveals over time;

- *transformations are individual and effective changes worked on the individual.* The offering of transformations consists in leading the individual through a series of experiences that will transform the very essence of the aspiring transformee, guiding him/her toward the objective.

In the authors' view, the shift from the business of offering commodities to that of transformations occurs in an economic value progression pyramid in which the offers of a certain value (commodities) are positioned at the base and those of greater value (transformations) are positioned at the top.

Those who generate transformations must precisely establish the series of experiences needed to guide the aspiring transformees toward their goals over a set time period. Those who stage experiences must describe the services that engage the guest and then, manage them in such a way as to create a memorable event. The service providers, in turn, must come up with the right configuration of goods that will allow them to provide a series of activities and offers with a high content of intangibles desired by the client. Finally, the manufacturers must discern which commodities to use as raw materials for the tangible products they create for users.

According to the logic adopted by Pine and Gilmore, one can say that *the economic proposal that an organization is actually offering corresponds to that for which it is being paid.* Therefore,

- if clients pay for the extracted material, then they desire commodities, and the company that commercializes them is in the commodities business;
- if clients pay for manufacturing, then they desire goods, and the company that makes them is in the goods business;
- if clients pay for activities carried out for them, then they desire services, and the company that provides them is in the services business;
- if clients pay for the time they spend and the chance to experience emotions, then they desire experiences, and the company that stages them is in the experiences business;
- if clients pay for the results of changes undergone, then they desire transformations, and the company that guides them is in the transformations business.

*Given the progression of economic value and the economic value pyramid, enterprises can decide which demand to refer to, thus choosing which business to compete in and which offering to produce.* Such a choice must be made based on the proper analysis of the demand and on the careful evaluation of one's capabilities and competences. The economic value progression indicates that superior offerings are more attractive to the demand side; consequently, they make it possible to set higher prices and allow for differentiated competitive positions. However, they require specific capabilities and competences on the supply side in order to be proposed and imply some form of superiority compared to the competition in order to be sustainable in the long term.

In our application of such a model to leisure tourism, we refer in particular to the offer of experiences. In fact, while touristic experiences do

contain transformation elements, they are not characterized as so intensely change-causing for this to be considered their final and purposeful objective in the touristic system. We believe it to be worthy of note, however, that in the future some tourism enterprises may deliberately choose to focus on the business of transformations, offering pathways for individual change generated by a concatenation of recurring experiences which, over time, grow in intensity and complexity.

#### **4. Tourism as an experience: innovation in continuity**

Associating tourism with the concept of experience is nothing new in studies on tourism phenomena. In fact, many authors use the term 'experiences' when describing the process of utilizing tourism services or the concept of the touristic product from the consumer's viewpoint (e.g. Rispoli and Tamma, 1996; Valdani and Guenzi, 1998; Sertorio, 1998; Brunetti, 1999; Rifkin, 2000; Middleton, 2001)

One must therefore ask oneself what conceptual innovation the experience economy perspective brings, from a managerial point of view, to the study of touristic phenomena. It bears remembering that it is thanks to Thomas Cook, who invented the first package tours, that tourism is nothing more than a "paid-for experience" (Rifkin, 2000, p. 196).

Pine and Gilmore's work stands out first of all for shedding light on consumer trends in industrialized societies, providing a useful key for understanding the evolution of tourist consumption behaviors, constantly oriented toward finding situations that are always new and surprising, or essentially, unique and memorable experiences.

In consideration of the huge debate underway, in our opinion, the most significant conceptual advancement made by the Pine and Gilmore study has to do with the offering, where they stress how critical it is for organizations working in a hyper-consumeristic context to formulate economic proposals (outputs) that are richer and able to create greater value for clients compared to what traditional goods and services are able to offer. Following along the path led by those studies that deal with the spectacularization of economic activities and the use of the theater and drama metaphor to describe and guide the management of service organizations (Grove *et al.*, 1997), the driving concept of the American scholars' model is that in order to satisfy the expectations of evermore demanding clients and distinguish oneself from the competition, companies must aim to produce offers with a higher economic value, such as experiences, using the theater model (and metaphor) as their managerial reference point.

This implies, from a management perspective, that the offering must be able to provide highly innovative answers to tourists' emerging need for experiences, *answers able to create spectacular situations in which the touristic organization or place work just like a theater*. In this spectacularization of the touristic offering, the touristic organizations or systems with a governing body become directors of experiences; the personnel and the local community become the cast of the show; and



the members of the audience are the guests. Nevertheless, in contrast to what happens in the so-called “society of the spectacle” where people do not directly take part in the spectacle but only watch passively (Ritzer, 2000, p. 115), in the touristic experience economy tourists are *engaged spectator-actors, active subjects*, guests who participate fully in the theater performance. Moreover, client participation tends to be more and more *collective*, since tourism cannot exist without the presence of other tourist-consumers (temporary community) with whom dynamic interactions take place and that sometimes lead to the birth of post travel relationships. The existence of communities of clients with similar interests inherently implies managerial challenges linked to the staging of experiences and the creation of long-term bonds with clients as single individuals but also as groups: *the value of the individual's experience is often dependent on the quality of the network of relationships ensured by the offer.*

It is obvious, nonetheless, that if carried to the extreme or, to put it differently, if the staging is blatantly inauthentic and totally unrealistic, one risks generating experiences that are not at all credible and thus, ineffective, particularly in instances of contact between guests and local communities. In the presence of models that are excessively formatted, the behavior of the hosting population could be guided by the desire to *not* mix one's own authentic and traditional culture with that of the visiting guests. Consequently, the local population would not spontaneously participate in the staged performance but rather, would tend to recite pre-determined scripts and stage “pseudo-events” (Sertorio, 1998, p. 12). These artificial situations and simulations do not foster enriching exchanges but risk banality and transformation into new forms of *commoditization*, into insipid events that are incapable of generating gratifying existential experiences.

The study of touristic phenomena from the perspective of the experience economy allows us to take a step forward vis-à-vis the traditional assimilation of the trip to the experience; it sheds light on how traveling, compared to services, is associated with situations that generate additional and profoundly different needs which the tourism industry but acknowledge and meet. The simple offer of goods and services is insufficient to guarantee tourist satisfaction; “the emotions and experiences lived” constitute the new foundation for value creation and thus, the tourism industry is called to provide tourism consumers with the experiences that they are constantly after.

If one looks to the experience economy as the new key to deciphering the tourism phenomenon, one can conclude by affirming that:

- the tourist, when traveling and sojourning, does not simply demand individual touristic goods and services (unbundled approach) or package deals (bundled approach), but wants touristic experiences that are complex, engaging, and that can be lived in a personal and participatory way;
- the touristic experience derives from the whole set of socioeconomic relationships that develop between a guest and the complex system of actors and interactions that are somehow connected to the territory where the “tourism performance” is staged;
- the touristic experience entails, for the tourist, spatial and experiential

transitions that lead to more or less lasting transformations, depending on the quality/intensity of the experience itself. All tourists, regardless of how superficial or distracted they are, will have etched into their minds images, memories, and thoughts of what they experienced while on vacation. These are personal acquisitions that have, to a certain degree, “changed the life” of the tourist, making him/her (at least in the more favorable circumstances) less ethnocentric, more able to understand diversity, capable of more cultural relativism, and less likely to be judgmental (Sertorio, 1998, p. 15).

- ultimately, the tourism industry is a natural and ideal “stage” upon which to offer economic experiences that can not only engage but also transform clients. For those who work in the tourism sector, tourist-guests are also partner-actors and the real product lies within the guest; in other words, it is the sensations and the emotions experienced by the client that represent the final output. Therefore, in designing an experience, the question must be asked: “What set of stimuli will engage the guest in memorable experiences?” and, just as in a theater performance, the dimensions upon which the experience is structured, the so-called “experience realms” (Figure 1) must be utilized.

## 5. An experience analysis model for tourism management

If one considers experiences as a source for the creation of value, then it becomes necessary for tourism operators to be aware of this new type of product being demanded. The tourism industry cannot offer goods and services alone, but must offer an experience that is co-created with the client-guest (Pine and Gilmore, 2000, p. 34). It is clearly evident that today’s most spectacular examples of touristic experiences are tied to the entertainment industry (e.g., theme parks, themed restaurants, etc.), but one must not stop at the idea that staging experiences just means adding an entertainment component to existing offers.

The authors of the experience economy insist on this aspect, because they believe that *the personal involvement of guests is the basis of the new economy*. Thus, they strongly underscore the idea that *staging experiences does not mean entertaining clients, it means engaging them*.

In order to design, produce, and consciously provide this new economic offer, the producer of touristic experiences must therefore know how an experience is structured overall. To this end, Pine and Gilmore have diagrammed the process of engaging a client/guest, using the two most dimensions of the experience, in a model of experience realms (Figure 1).

The first dimension is the level of guest participation, represented as a continuum along the horizontal axis between two extremes:

*Passive participation*, in which clients neither act in nor directly influence the performance (e.g., classical music concert goers who simply listen).

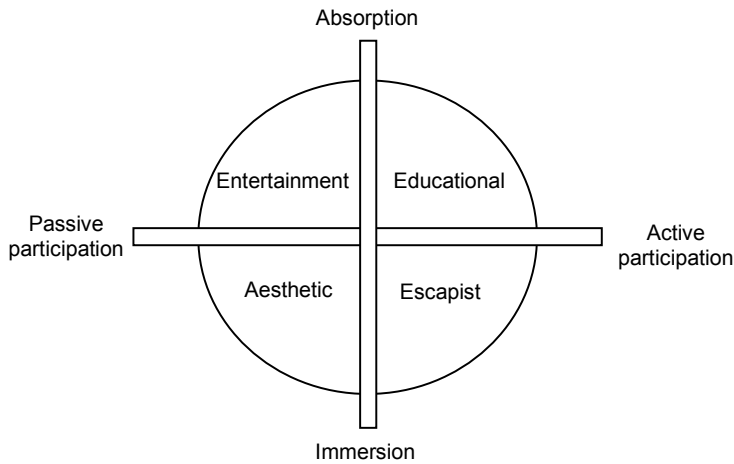
*Active participation*, in which clients personally act in the performance or the event that produces the experience (e.g., sports enthusiasts who actively participate in the creation of their personal experience).

The second dimension describe the type of contextual connection or involvement that links clients to the event or the performance, represented as a continuum along the vertical axis between two extremes:

*Absorption*, in which the experience ‘penetrates’ into the person through the mind (e.g., watching a film on TV, listening to a lecture on chemical theory).

*Immersion*, in which the person ‘dives into’ the experience by physically or virtually taking part in the experience itself (e.g., watching a film at the cinema along with other spectators, on a wide screen or with virtual reality simulation, taking part in a chemical laboratory experiment).

Fig. 1: Experience realms



Source: Pine and Gilmore (2000, p. 35)

The sum of these dimensions defines the *four realms* of an experience; they are categorized, according to level of client involvement, as: entertainment, educational, aesthetic, and escapist. These fields are combined in differing degrees and proportion, depending on the type of experience and guest involved, thus contributing to the creation of unique, personal, and non-repeatable events.

The degree of final involvement of the client/guest depends on both the person enjoying the experience (high or low propensity to engage in any given event) and on the organization staging the event (degree of involvement it requires).

We proceed with a description, below, of the individual realms taken separately, despite our awareness of the fact that they rarely present themselves as such, but we believe that this process of synthesizing a complex reality is indispensable to having the necessary knowledge for staging an engaging experience.

1. *The realm of entertainment*: is so classified when people passively absorb experiences through their senses, as usually happens when they watch a performance, listen to music, or read for pleasure. The entertainment field is certainly the most developed in today's world (in fact, there is an

entertainment industry), but as the experience economy grows, people will look for more and more unusual and complex experiences. By the same token, however, very few of these experiences will not include at least one entertaining moment designed to make people smile, laugh, or have fun.

2. *The realm of education experience*: even during educational experiences, the guest (for example, a student) absorbs the events unfolding before him/her, but differently from pure entertainment, education requires the active participation of the individual. In the formation process of increasing the knowledge or skills of a person, educational events must actively engage the mind (for intellectual education) and/or the body (for physical training).
3. *The realm of aesthetic experience*: in these types of experiences individuals immerse themselves in an event or a context where they have little or no influence on the latter, leaving it (but not themselves) untouched. The typical aesthetic experiences are touristic, such as standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon, visiting an art gallery or a museum, sitting in a café in St. Mark's Square in Venice, etc. The aesthetic aspect of an experience could be completely natural (e.g., a National Park), artificial, i.e., man-made (e.g., a Theme Park), or something in between. However, *there is no such thing as an artificial experience*; every experience created in an individual is real, regardless of whether the source is natural or simulated.
4. *The realm of escape*: escapist experiences imply the deep immersion and active behavior of the person. Compared to entertainment and educational experiences, in this case the guest is entirely immersed in them, just as for aesthetic experiences, but instead of playing the passive role of the couch potato, the guest becomes an actor capable of having a role in the actual performance. Guests who participate in escapist experiences not only *come from* but *travel towards* a specific place or activities that are worth their time. Typical examples of this are vacationers who are not content to simply lie in the sun or watch the scenery, but get involved in physical activities such as extreme sports, mountain climbing, or kayaking down river rapids. Another example is cyberspace which, for many, offers a break from real life, a chance to unplug from one's boring daily routine.

When guests take part in an *aesthetic* experience they want "to be" there, in the situation; in an *entertainment* experience they want "to stay", to watch and contemplate; during an *escape* experience they want "to do", to try something, get good at it; finally, in an *educational* experience, they want "to learn".

The richest, most engaging and memorable experiences contain aspects from all four realms and are most intense at the central point of Figure 1 where the various possible experiential realms intersect. When a memorable, enthralling, and engaging experience is staged, the guest cannot, in fact, be confined to a single realm. One must adopt the experiential structure (Figure 1) like a set of potential stimuli that can serve as a guide in setting the stage, as it were, and clients experience the performance in a more engaging way.

In the analysis of touristic phenomena, also, it is important to consider all four realms of experiences. Moreover, tourism involves people moving from their place of residence to a place they do not habitually go and spending a finite period of time there, so it is a consumption context in which the fields of experiences find wide application. The managerial problem that presents itself is how to be strategically aware in setting up economic proposals centered on effective experiences.

Tourism has the peculiar feature of always nurturing the *aesthetic experience* of tourists, regardless of their desire to participate or not. The aesthetic dimension of the experience is what makes guests want to come and stay in a specific place; in other words, it is tied to the “atmosphere” of the vacation.

*Entertainment* is one of the key components of leisure tourism. Even in those cases where guests are seeking complex and challenging experiences, they nevertheless enjoy relaxing moments of fun.

Guests often want to improve on, try, or experience all of those things that allow them to *escape* from their routine. Providers of these experiences have the opportunity to more fully engage tourists by offering them the “trial offer” in which *the tourist’s enjoyment does not come from having done something well, but in having tried it*.

The purely educational component of the experience is the one least likely to appear among the list of tourists’ explicit requests. It is, however, one of the most normal implicit desires, given that the combination of the aesthetic, entertainment, and escape components of a vacation creates in people the desire and even allows them to gain a fuller knowledge of their surroundings. In the future, one could foresee an increase in educational tourism as an “intelligent” use of one’s leisure time.

If, in principal, tourism represents a consumption context that more “naturally” lends itself to exploring the four fields of experience for the clientele, it cannot be taken for granted that those who work in the sector are fully aware of this, nor can it be assumed that they are able to appreciate the economic and managerial implications of such a situation. In order to grasp the opportunities that the experience economy can offer to those in the leisure time and tourism business, *the physical places of hospitality, transportation, restoration, the tourism industry in general, as well as of the destinations and touristic systems must become “special places”, original platforms upon which to consciously stage significant experiences that contain elements of entertainment, escape, education, and aesthetic contemplation*.

It can therefore be hypothesized that those organizations and touristic systems that are able to provide experiences capable of engaging guests by leveraging on the four experiential realms and by adapting and “dosing” them according to the target audience will be those that will gain long-lasting competitive advantage. The offering must, however, adopt a creative approach to staging their experience products, aware that *they are not simple outputs to offer consumers, but rather, are inputs for creating value for the client who must be considered a creator not a destroyer of value* (Normann, 2002, p. 111).

Hence, it is necessary to maximize the degree of tourist involvement in the creation of value, through the dual dimensions of mode (physical,

intellectual, and emotional) and function (needs analysis, production, quality control, preservation of ethical value, development, marketing, etc.). In other words, the tourist is not merely a passive spectator but is a protagonist (actor) in the touristic spectacle being staged (by a single enterprise or a touristic system). The direct involvement of the tourist occurs all along the process of touristic consumption, starting from the awareness of a need phase all the way to the activities carried out after the vacation is over (Casarin, 1996, p. 127; Savoja, 1998, p. 167). The tourist purchases and consumes (lives) the experience along with the entire set of goods, services, information, elements of historical, cultural, environmental, and anthropological significance as well as other tangible and intangible factors which he/she, as a user, puts together during the vacation. How this is done will depend on the user's own motivations, culture, value system, personality, and socio-economic condition. This notwithstanding, the elements that constitute the travel experience should not be considered on the same plane because they are prioritized, starting from a core of "essentials" to a set of "optionals" that are further removed from the tourist's primary interests. In conclusion, if one takes the theater as the experience management model, we can define both travelers and hosts<sup>5</sup> as actors in the same performance. This performance is founded on and carried out in the various moments of truth (Normann and Ramirez, 1995; Normann, 2002) that arise between the numerous subjects in the touristic offering (including the local community) and the clientele, set against the background of a context made up of signs, images, cultures, and groups of tourists participating in the "event" and who are, in turn, the *co-producers and influencers* of the experiences. The location of the stage performance thus identifies a *system of experience offers that produces value, based on the simultaneous and interdependent logics of a constellation of value*. Within the value constellation, the enterprise and the other subjects in the touristic offering are part of a series of co-production relationships that are characterized by high participation and involvement.

The economic actors no longer relate to each another according to the simple, unidirectional, and sequential model inherent in the notion of the value chain. The relationship between the two actors tends to be much more complex than what would be conceptually apparent from the unidirectional 'make/buy' model subordinate to the value chain. Instead of 'adding' various level of value one after the other, the partners in the production of the offering work together to co-create value through various 'co-production' relationships (Normann and Ramirez, 1995, p. 27).

The challenge for touristic management lies, therefore, in 'directing' a performance in such a way as to enhance the theatrical contribution not only of those who, like a professional cast, intentionally play a part in order to reach the audience (e.g., workers and other people who contribute to touristic production), but also of those who contribute to the performance in the role of spectators who are directly involved (e.g., tourists and their

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<sup>5</sup> From the Zanichelli Dictionary: "Host: 1- A person who hosts others. 2- A person who is hosted". In Italian, the same word, host, is used for both of the key roles played by actors involved the vacation context, serving to confirm the deep connection between the two figures.

interactions), keeping in mind their dissimilar propensity or capacity for direct participation.

## 6. The touristic district as a theater for touristic experiences: moving towards a viable system

We delineate here the setting for the staging of touristic experiences (the theater). In fact, there are a multitude of “venues” (single enterprises and multiple enterprises, single locations and multiple locations, touristic systems, etc.) that are suitable for staging events for the entertainment of guests.

The perspective adopted here is district-systemic, which starts from the hypothesis that if, in tourism, the product demanded and offered is an experience that will transform clients according to their specific aspirations, then the most significant competition and strategic priority for the tourism industry in a given territory is *more and more often among touristic districts* (territorial systems geared towards tourism) rather than among individual tourism enterprises. The latter compete amongst themselves within a territory and within their respective demand segments, but at the same time, they collaborate and compete more or less consciously (along with all of the other actors operating in a particular place or touristic district) in creating the offer of experiences in a given tourist destination. Personnel who work for individual enterprises that provide services and who come into direct contact with the public may consider themselves the product (Bateson, Hoffman, 2000, p. 26); similarly, the various members and people rooted in the touristic area may be seen as the *real product* that distinguishes one offer of experiences from another. The fact that the touristic product derives from the vast contributions of a multitude of *subjects belonging to a local community who act more or less consciously in the staging of touristic experiences*, emerges from several studies and from recent legislation on this topic, all aimed at identifying the territorial and organizational confines of a touristic area located in a given territorial system (e.g. Brunetti, 1999; Tamma, 1999; Della Corte, 2000).

Italian legislation (Law no.135 of 29th March 2001) introduced the concept of *Local touristic systems (Sistemi turistici locali)* defining them as follows (art. 5):

1. Local touristic systems are defined as homogeneous or integrated touristic contexts that can also include territories belonging to different regions, characterized by an offering that incorporates cultural goods, scenic environments, and touristic attractions along with typical, local food and craft products or by the widespread presence of individual or associations of tourism enterprises.
2. Local entities or private subjects, both individual and associated, promote the local touristic systems through forms of collaboration with specific entities, with trade associations competing in the tourism offering, as well as with interested public and private subjects.

In one of our prior works (Pencarelli, 2001, p. 147), the concept of touristic district was introduced as follows:

The term touristic district is used to refer to the sum of touristic enterprises and resources (environmental, historical, cultural, scenic, etc.) located within areas

that are territorially, socially, economically, and culturally homogeneous, and that present connotations that tend to be uniform from the standpoint of the offering and the demand being served. In other words, the touristic territory represents a homogeneous touristic hub that is specialized in the production-delivery of a global touristic product. The touristic district therefore defines a territorial context that has variable borders but that is a sufficiently shared reference point for both the offering and the demand. It is characterized by one or more factors of attraction perceived by tourists as distinguishing features compared to other destinations competing for the choice of where to spend their vacation, and are offered to the market in a unitary manner (more or less consciously) by the territorial actors.

The various works mentioned above refer to concepts (offering configurations, local systems of touristic offerings, districts) which imply that within a territorially defined context there exists a set of enterprises and resources specialized for tourism and connected to one another so that the final value of the totality of their activities is greater than the sum of their parts.

The various approaches recognize, though, that *not all methods are created equal*. For example, Brunetti (1999, p. 226) describes four configurations of offering: sector (primarily casual and spontaneous relationships among actors of the offer); system (more aware relationships compared to the sector ones but not highly structured); network; and constellation (aware and structured relationships, such that the offer - especially the constellation type - is governed singly). Martini (1996) and Tamma (1999) refer, instead, to a three-pronged key for interpreting a destination: fragmented (entrepreneurial spontaneity dominates and there is little integration among subject in the offer); dependent (the action of actors that demand packaged tourism is predominant and the supply side relinquishes significant quotas of power and added value); and integrated (medium to long-term collaboration between operators prevails).

From our point of view, touristic districts can be classified into two different categories so defined based on the following variables:

- the *degree of awareness* of the district actors that they are components of a more complex performance (experience) staged in a touristically significant area;
- the *level of confidence* that the touristic district subject feels vis-à-vis the overall territorial system where this confidence is often a decisive factor in building and maintaining inter- and intra-organizational relationships;
- the *willingness to collaborate* felt by touristic producers, public institutions, non-profit organizations, and local communities operating in the district. It is plausible that as confidence rises so, too, does the intent to collaborate, but this may not always be true; there could also be cases in which cooperation does not derive from high levels of confidence, but is driven by economic interest and competitiveness among partners;
- the *presence or lack thereof of one or more leading figures able to strategically govern the district*, establishing survival techniques and guidelines for long-term development.



As awareness, confidence, and collaboration increase, and strategic *metamanagers* appear on the scene, touristic districts evolve from *spontaneous and casual* forms (districts in the casual or broad sense) to ones that are *more aware, more organizationally structured, and governed in a unitary logic* (districts in the narrow sense). By the same token, the reverse also happens as confidence, the propensity to collaborate, and unitary governance methods diminish, de facto districts tend to dissolve and revert back to spontaneous forms that are devoid of structure and unitary governability.

When district actors are unaware (or don't want to know) that they can contribute to producing a unitary experience that the consumer takes into consideration from among the various alternatives, and when there is no metamanager who can guide and set up strategic paths for the area, then it cannot properly be called a district in the narrow sense. Instead, it could be labeled a *casual district* (informal network of weak ties with no individual governance center), even though it could be perceived by the demand side as something similar to a district because it does hold elements of attraction to a specific touristic area despite the inability of the supply side to understand and govern them.

From the supply side perspective, a territory identifies a *touristic district* as such when the subjects that belong to the area are *sufficiently aware of acting in a concerted effort to produce a unitary touristic product-experience* and align their individual behaviors with this awareness (strategic intentionality), looking to find stable forms of cooperation, if possible, that follow networking formulas with or without a strategic pivot but that are somehow aimed at the unitary evolution of their structural components. Thus, the district reveals a cultural imprint and a way of carrying out and managing touristic activities that are highly convergent, so as to avoid all tendency toward spontaneous and fragmented initiatives. Districts, in the narrow sense, can arise from two different relational structures: the distributed *network* and the *constellation or aristocratic network*.

The distributed *network* environment is intentionally collaborative and characterized by mutual confidence; the actors are highly aware that they are producing a particular product whose competitiveness depends on the ability of the district subjects to act collectively towards achieving common shared goals. The connection between and among actors is no longer merely random or casual, but appears to be more deliberate; it is the fruit of behavior that is intentionally geared towards consciously activating relational structures. This type of district is called a network when each actor is equally placed in relation to the others, and when there is no recognized, stable strategic leader or director that emerges in the competitive situation. The network is a configuration in which all of the actors are connected equally, horizontally, and all of their objectives converge toward common goals. It is potentially the richer of the two configurations because the various actors each contribute with a superior degree of entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, the network is the more difficult of the two to establish successfully, given that it is generally no easy feat for numerous and heterogeneous subjects to fully share and achieve common goals.

The *constellation* environment, like the distributed network, is also intentionally collaborative and characterized by mutual confidence; in this

case, too, the actors are highly aware that they are producing a particular product whose competitiveness depends on the ability of the district subjects to act collectively towards achieving common shared goals. In the *aristocratic network*, though, there is greater asymmetry among the members, in that there is one subject that stands out in a different position vis-à-vis the others in terms of function or role. This subject acts as the guide or coordinator of the constellation, fulfilling a strategic governance role and guiding the group's basic choices that are decided collegially through reciprocal interactions.

*Artificial districts (resorts and vacation-resorts)* are an extreme type of constellation. In this case, the territory is monopolized by a single subject. There is no fragmentation of the ownership among independent operators, which is typical of spontaneous tourism or of bottom-up constellations, but there is only one subject that has designed and built the district top-down and that maintains control and decisional power over the entire organization. In this situation, similarly to what happens within an enterprise, internal relations disappear and are replaced by hierarchical relationships. The operators' awareness and the governability of the system are thus guaranteed by the very structure of the hierarchical relationships that center around single ownership. The local community plays practically no independent role, and confidence and collaboration are not spontaneous as they are governed by the management through more or less sophisticated internal marketing techniques.

In sum, relationships within a touristic territory can develop and/or evolve along a continuum that goes from casual districts to constellations and, in the most extreme forms, to artificial districts. Similarly, the progression can go from evolution to involution when certain typologies of district weaken the degree of unitary governability and implode, becoming less well defined and morphing into situations of sectorial spontaneity.

In order to further hone the definition of the conceptual and operational scope of the touristic district model adopted in this work, and to pinpoint the meaning of the term *system*, so widely used in tourism literature and legislation, it would serve our purposes to ask if and to what degree the notions of touristic district or of touristic system represent viable systems according to the paradigms of the systemic approach to studying enterprises. To this end, we look to Golinelli (2000) who offers the following definitions:

- *system* (p. 85): "a physical structure, equipped with physical components qualified as predefined, logical and interactive components, which is oriented towards a specific purpose";
- *viable system* (p. 110): "a system that survives, remains unified, intact, and homeostatically balanced both internally and externally, and which possesses mechanisms and opportunity for growth and learning, for development and adaptation, i.e., for becoming ever more effective in its context";
- *the context outside of the enterprise viable system* (p. 185): "a set of external viable systems that can present the following features:
  1. *embryonic systems* (markets), where it is not possible to identify a governing body capable of influencing the behaviors of the subjects in

- the system that is therefore not vital;
2. *developing systems*, where the viable system identity can emerge in the presence of a governing body capable of guiding and influencing the evolution of the system to ensure its survival;
  3. *viable systems*, where their identity as such is clear and there is a governing body in place to guide and establish the evolutionary pathways of the operating structure”.

In the wake of Golinelli's work (2000) we can observe that the here proposed typologies of touristic district configure the context that lies outside of touristic enterprise viable systems; it can be defined as both a *significant* and an *influential* (p. 171) super-system by virtue of the fact that it holds and constrains resources (territory, information, public funds, etc.) that are critical for the survival of individual enterprises. In particular, the district model can dovetail with the concept of *embryonic system* when referring to casual districts in a broad sense because in neither case is there any subject leading the unitary governance of the entity in question. When referring to the concept of district in the narrow sense, instead, we adopt the notion of *developing system*. In it, the evolutionary pathways of the network could be bottom up, as relationships are progressively formed among enterprises so as to create distributed networks or aristocratic networks (constellations) having, for a time, governance entities capable of overseeing the activities of the system's operating structure, or they could be top down, as a given enterprise (the one that designed and created the network) establishes itself more permanently as the governing body (as in the case of artificial districts). This said, the concept of a district in the narrow sense can also mesh with the model of a *viable system* when “*the governing body clearly emerges and builds itself up, makes the internal operating structure powerful (i.e., well-integrated), and contributes to the identity of the whole*”. This is the model that serves as inspiration for the market-oriented district governance proposal outlined in the paragraphs that follow. We are well aware that in a touristic area the components of the operating structure (tourism enterprises, territory, context features, etc.) are not governable *in the same way* as the production factors of an enterprise viable system are, but that in adopting the perspective of a viable system one should act *as if* they were, so as to guide the evolution of the district from developing system to viable system.

In light of these observations, one can further note that the notion of touristic systems in the extant literature does not always refer to the systemic paradigm recapped here, but uses as its point of reference a non-viable system (Della Corte, 2000, p. 126). In the viable system paradigm, a system is viable if: a) it is open; b) there is a governing body and an operating structure (a set of real, financial, social, cognitive, and temporal elements); c) achieving the objectives and ensuring survival is strongly influenced by the dynamics and dialectics of the relationship between the governing body and the major super-systems (for touristic systems these can be political-administrative systems at the provincial, regional, national, or European community level, financial systems, distribution systems, etc.); d) there exists the possibility of dovetailing with one or more super-systems based on whether the conditions exist for compatibility and integration.

## 7. Governing body and operating structure of touristic districts from a viable system perspective: who governs what?

### 7.1 *The governing body in the district*

In light of what has been discussed above one can state that, in Italy, many of the territorial areas that are touristic destinations can be classified as casual districts, or embryonic systems. This is due to both the meagerness of awareness, confidence, and collaborative spirit among the subjects operating within the territory, as well as and above all, to the lack of a governing body able and capable of defining and setting a strategic course for all of the elements that constitute the physical and operating structure of the system (Pencarelli and Civitarese, 2000; Costa, 2002). Italian tourism, as a matter of fact, is administered by public entities operating nationally (Organizzazione Turistica Pubblica-OTP: *Public Tourism Organization*), regionally (Organizzazione Turistica Pubblica Regionale-OTPR: *Regional Public Tourism Organization*), and locally (Organizzazione Turistica Pubblica Locale-OTPL: *Local Public Tourism Organization*). Nevertheless, these bodies and institutions are not governing bodies per se that are nominated by the express will of owners or 'strong social interlocutors' as it were, able to both nominate and revoke administrators according to the results achieved by the system and especially in the position to direct and determine development pathways, aware of the intricacies of the operating structure (in terms of the various operators and district resources available), tied to the system only by a generic and weak 'sense of belonging'. Actually, in many cases, territorial areas include enterprises, resources, and contextual factors that represent an aggregate (set) of elements having a certain degree of homogeneity; they lack, however, *the structural requisites of a viable system because there is no specification and sharing of the role that each element plays in the systemic whole - in other words, it is not possible to discern a complex unit made up of various components and the relationships among them* (Golinelli, 2000, p. 82).

The tasks of the governing body are to achieve "an overall level of importance deriving from the combined importance of the super- and sub-system components" and to "ensure that the system develops as a unit in the aim of gaining the competitive advantage that will offer a greater guarantee of survival to the system itself, thus increasing its degree of vitality" (Golinelli, 2000, p. 213). In order to attain these objectives, the governing body must *possess high entrepreneurial competences associated with the power to design, redesign, control, and integrate the structural elements of the system (individual enterprises and institutions, territory, attractiveness factors, context, etc. and their organizational relationships) based on their consonance with and relevance to the area super-systems (demand, legislative, financial, labor market, etc.) or with the area sub-systems of the operating structure*. The governing body acts as a filter for the influences, the constraints, and the expectations coming from the super-systems and the sub-systems, and it seeks opportune conciliation and dovetailing of the conditions deriving from both intersystem levels. Such crucial actions by the governing body greatly facilitate the achievement

of a high level of distinction and systemic effectiveness and help ensure the long-term survival of the system.

It is clear that, although Italian public tourism organizations do regulate, stimulate, and coordinate the subjects involved in producing the touristic product, they cannot exactly qualify as governing bodies of a district/viable touristic system because, among other reasons, they have no institutional role in marketing the touristic product which is undertaken by private entities. In the aim of obtaining a district configuration, then, it would be useful to endow districts that are being newly instituted and, particularly, the many casual districts spread throughout the touristic areas with a *governing body* that displays real leadership capacity and *meta-management* skills, including marketing which has not been traditionally undertaken by public entities in charge of coordinating tourism destinations (Pencarelli and Civitarese, 2000; Molteni and Sainaghi, 1997, p. 93).

In order to carry out its highly complex and multi-faceted governance functions (design, coordination, support, consultancy, training, monitoring, marketing, promotion, etc.), the leader-subject should not only possess quite variegated competences but also be acknowledged as such by the district member subjects. For this reason, the role of architect and coordinator of the touristic district system should be carried out by a management figure emanating from a *mixed subject*, composed of both public and private entities and supported by private juridical forms suitable for fostering ownership. The presence of the public is important for facilitating the acquisition of resources (especially financial ones) and the modification of contextual and infrastructure factors (territory, roads, maritime ports, airports, etc.), and for obtaining the proper consensus and involvement of local entities as well as other social interlocutors within the territory. Moreover, one should keep in mind that *touristic districts are systems that are characterized by strong public regulation and that count, among their structural components, multiple public goods*; therefore, the setting up of systemic offerings cannot overlook or do without the public organizational component, often a *decisive factor in determining competitive advantage*. The presence of private entities in the ownership balance is important in favoring the involvement of private tourism organization managers and in enhancing the entrepreneurial and managerial competences of those who are in direct contact with tourists in the moments of truth. The governing body (board of directors) should be lean, composed of few actors with clear duties and responsibilities mandated by the numerous and varied components of the public/private owner-subject and enabled to act rapidly and effectively.

In sum, it is a question of imagining and managing the touristic area by fully adopting the viable system approach, in which the governing body exists and “really does govern” as it has the capability and ability to plan, enact, control, and fine-tune the district’s and its structural components<sup>6</sup> strategic pathways while fulfilling their need for survival and competitive

<sup>6</sup> Management of the structural components of a touristic destination-viable system will differ based on the degree of legitimacy and authority that the governing body holds over them. For example, while influence over touristic enterprises is limited to orientation and unitary strategic action, initiatives concerning territorial infrastructure or macro marketing will have a greater impact.

strength. In the experience economy perspective, the governing body needs to take on the directorship of the performances that will be staged for guests in the territorial theater where the touristic district comes into being.

### *7.2 The components of the operating structure*

Once it has been determined who governs, one must then ask what the object of the activity is, or rather, what the *structural components* are that qualify the collection of capabilities incorporated into the system (operating structure, from the viable system viewpoint) that are apt to actually produce the offering. To provide an answer to this query, and in order to govern a touristic system from a marketing perspective, the first step must be to identify *the experience product to be offered* (through the market analysis of experiences, and through the definition of the market segment and of market positioning); *and this products must be associated with a touristically significant territory*, one that has the necessary features to be a candidate for the staging of offering on the significant and distinctive touristic experiences market. The subsequent step is to arrive at a set of features that a touristic system should have (or should procure) in order to stage experiences that are able to engage consumers in all four experience fields described above.

The object of the targeted activities is tied to the product of the touristic system, i.e., the touristic experience which is a unique and one-of-a-kind event that takes place at a certain time and in a certain place (the stage), fruit of the interaction (co-production) among the guests, the hosting community, and the context. The ability of the touristic district to satisfy the changing and varied expectations from the demand side will depend on the fundamental capabilities linked to certain specific structural factors and on the compound capabilities deriving from the intra- and inter-systemic interactions. They further depend on the degree of flexibility and adaptability of the district (Golinelli, Gatti, and Vagnani, 2002).

*According to the experience logic each touristic experience is unique and non-repeatable because it is generated by the interaction between a guest and the package of services, good, and commodities created by the system with the support of the contextual platform and the contribution of the guests themselves, the characterizing features of the experience production system are rooted in the territorial touristic system. The latter, as a mix of offerings and the object of acts of governance, must possess a series of requisites that make it attractive to target tourist groups. It must be: Attractive, Accessible, Hospitable, Appropriate (as a setting), and Lively.*

The *attractiveness* of a territory is determined by the presence of factors of attraction within the territory. These constitute the focus of the touristic experience offered, in that they are the core component around which the experience is built, and they represent the primary motivation for guests to travel to a specific territory. Nevertheless, no place is touristic on its own; it only becomes so following a series of cultural transformations and changes in collective thought processes due to the evolution of the image of a place in the consumer's mind.

The *accessibility* of the territorial touristic system indicates the ease with which guests can access and enjoy the experiences staged there. We believe that this feature can be broken down into the following three aspects of accessibility: physical, economic, and information.

The *hospitality* requisite indicates how coherent the territorial context is with the experience activities planned, or, in other words, how suitable the touristic activities are for serving as the background for the planned staging of the experience. Thus defined, hospitality implies the presence of all those goods and services that either support or facilitate the physical realization of the touristic experience in a given destination (accommodation, restoration, etc.).

The *appropriateness of the setting* expresses the ability of the territory that is home to the touristic system to “immerse” guests in the experience to be staged. As such, it is likely to be determined by the general landscape or environment (natural or man-made) of the territory. One cannot overstress the importance of even the smallest detail, because it is often due to small aspects in stark contrast with the general context that, alone, can compromise the credibility of a setting.

The *liveliness* factor represents the cultural and social liveliness of the territory that is either expected or required by the experience. Essentially, liveliness is tied to the human factor for it is determined by the numbers, crowding, and movement of people along with the liveliness and warmth of the social relationships that develop among them. Thus defined, liveliness is determined by the people that work in touristic facilities, but much more so by the local population and by tourists staying in the area itself.

Once it has been determined what features a territory must possess in order to be a suitable stage for a specific touristic experience, individual factors and/or resources that determine those characteristics must be identified. To this end, we propose a concise analytical framework to map the resources and competences needed to stage experiences (Table 2.3), providing the literature references for more detailed descriptions of the various structural components of the system.

Tab 2.3: Table of factors/resources of a territory dedicated to tourism

Territorial features		Factors and/or resources	
Attractiveness		Attractiveness factors	
Accessibility	Physical	Infrastructure and means of transportation	
	Economic	Economic burden (Cost)	
	Information	Communication tools	
Hospitality		Tourist services (Hotel, restaurants, ecc.)	
Appropriateness of Setting		Natural and man-made environment	
Liveliness		Local population and Tourists	

Source: Our data processing

The importance of the factors that are directly attributable to various territorial features has already been highlighted by the pertinent economics- and business-related literature (Della Corte, 2000). In confirmation

thereof, in an experiential perspective, we underscore the importance of 'transversal' factors/resources, to wit, Local Culture, Confidence, Information, and Image. We consider these to be transversal because they act on the perception of all five characteristics that define the ability of a territory to act as the staging area for touristic experiences:

- local culture is taken to be the set of norms and values that are the fruit of the history, traditions, and customs of a specific territory and its people. It denotes the territorial climate and guides the strategies and behaviors of individual actors. Trust makes up the real premise and the primary condition for the existence of inter-organizational cooperative relationships (Pencarelli, 1995, p. 143). "In fact, cooperative relationships are social ones for which trust is a stronger and more efficient unifying force than any hierarchical or market mechanism; the trust resource is therefore one of the key resources of every successful industrial district". (Pencarelli, 2001, p. 143);
- information represents a key resource for the governance of the operating structure in that it makes it possible to connect the various components of the system, thus increasing their awareness of the unitary evolutionary objective of the system. Externally, information facilitates the search for and the attainment of systemic consonance and resonance with the most important and influential super-systems in the touristic district. Image plays a fundamental role in staging experiences because it is both a filter that affects the perception of the quality of the experience (on the demand side, but also on the supply side within the territory) and a position management tool for the territory.

Based on the resources needed to stage the target experience, the governing body within the system can specify both the resources/constraints that are present and governable inside the structure of the system and those outside of it. This means that the entrepreneurial idea of a meta-manager must gradually evolve from a general and abstract vision toward a concrete one, as the connections and relationships that are necessary to acquire the capabilities and systemic competences for staging experiences emerge from the whole structure of the system (Golinelli, 2002).

In a touristic territory, depending on the type of experience that is being staged, there should be a *coherent and organized combination of key factors that qualify the operating system as a viable system*. Such structural components should therefore not only represent constraints for strategic action (static factor in the resource based view), but should also be the objective of any project geared toward qualifying a territorial area as touristic, from the standpoint of economic governance according to viable system logics. Consequently, such elements should be linked by virtue of their complementarity in pursuit of common strategic goals. Should the structural components enter into conflict (e.g., high accessibility could be detrimental to environmental quality, or overly numerous and active tourists could provoke resentment in the local population, or an overly positive image could create excessive expectations on the demand side, and so on), a better combination and blending of these elements becomes necessary. Depending on the experience that one aims to offer guests, various elements will be harmoniously combined, emphasizing the



information, the image, and the culture factors (model for the conscious management of the experience produced) and avoiding conflicts, and trying to make sure they all support one another. This is why the governing body is called to formulate and implement a territorial tourism marketing plan that is capable of enhancing, selecting, and mobilizing the components of the district operating structure in a viable system approach.

### 7.3 *The geographic extension of the district*

Once the territorial elements needed to stage experiences have been defined, the *territorial boundaries of the touristic system to be governed must also be defined*.

The size of the touristic territory will, in fact, influence the qualitative and quantitative composition of the economic and touristic operators, of the tourist attractions, of the public entities, of the populations involved, and of all the other contextual factors.

The size of the district is a relevant factor for both the supply and the demand sides.

*On the supply side, identifying the territorial context that has the potential to produce certain touristic experiences and that is also governable as a unit* is a key factor in setting up touristic systems. Delineating the territory of the system of reference is fundamental for giving the actors the awareness they need to be motivated to invest their resources, their efforts, and especially, their confidence into activating cooperative actions to stage experiences in any given territory.

Along these lines one can adopt the view proposed by Brunetti (1999, p. 183), according to whom:

A possible criterion for delineating the *minimum extension of the territorial unit* that is touristically significant seems to be the presence of at least one *factor of attractiveness* that defines a certain place, along with *activities and tourist services* that make enjoyment of it possible, as well as a certain amount of *information* that contributes to enhancing its visibility. The main requisite consists in the attractiveness factor, or combination of attractiveness factors, being of such intensity to suffice in justifying, in principle, a stay in the place where it is located.

Identifying the territorial homogeneity, environmental, anthropic, cultural and touristic attractiveness factors should nevertheless, in our opinion, be carried out not only looking at whether a district aggregation is able to actually produce a touristic experience, but also approaching it from the point of view of final demand. It is opportune to also pay attention to the *marketing potential of the offering in national and international distribution channels*. Indeed, one cannot overlook the fact that, when a very limited portfolio is proposed on the market (sometimes only one product can be offered, targeted toward very narrow segments of world demand), both attractiveness and contracting power with commercial intermediaries are lost. In cases of touristic systems offering a single product or a range of products that is narrow and shallow, it would seem preferable to *keep the production aspects, where the territorial size of the district is also modest, separate from the distribution ones*, which are on a greater scale and the range of products offered is wider and more varied.

From the standpoint of demand, the geographic extension of the district is also important in light of the fact that touristic demand usually identifies touristic products (experiences) as *multi-level products*; in other words, they are perceived as equally legitimate products at different possible degrees of territorial aggregation (Brunetti, 1999, p. 183; Pencarelli and Civitarese, 2000).

On the demand side, in fact, the demarcation of the territorial boundaries is linked to tourists' ability to associate a given area - having specific attractiveness factors for one or more touristically significant places - with a *particular touristic product* (e.g., the Montefeltro district, an area that includes territories and places in the Marches, Tuscany, and Emilia that share a common history, landscape features, and relatively uniform contextual factors). This ability may depend on *how well-known* the district is on the tourism market thanks to predetermined *communication policies* or *word of mouth* that has spread because of past tourist flows through the area. Name recognition is therefore a function of the actions undertaken by the tourism industry to build and communicate signs and messages to consumers and it is also a by-product of the holiday experiences had by other tourists in the touristic district. This fact, in turn, may depend on the length of time that the place has been a proposed destination and also on how far it lies from the source of major demand flows.

The various levels of perception of a territory as a stage for touristic experiences can thus be discerned according to:

- *proximity* to the areas of provenance of the demand;
- degree of *name recognition* achieved;
- length of *time* on the market.

From the demand's point of view, as fame, time on the market, and proximity increase the extension of the territorial confines of the touristic district shrink. Therefore, one can state that the problem of identifying the territory of reference for the touristic system can be faced in two interrelated phases.

The first consists in taking into consideration the issue of the *market relevance of the touristic district*, in terms of its ability to put on performances (stage experiences) that can satisfy the needs of guests belonging to the targeted demand segment(s) better than other competing touristic systems. The territory around which the touristic systems pivots can be considered a relevant stage, in terms of market-oriented governance (Grönroos, 1994), for the staging of complete touristic experiences if it possesses one or more distinctive factors of attraction (Attractiveness) that make it visible and enticing for a sufficiently high number of potential tourists to satisfy the necessary requirements of the target market(s).

The territory must also possess complementary and auxiliary factors in order to meet the *core needs* of the reference target for the experience (Accessibility, Economic Activities, Environment/Context, and Liveliness). That is to say, it must satisfy what Brunetti identifies as the key requirement of a district: "The key requisite consists, then, in the fact that the attraction factor or set of attraction factors are of such intensity as to suffice, alone, to justify, in principle, a stay in a place where it is located".

Contrary to Brunetti, however, *we do not consider this requisite the key aspect of a district, but see it as the critical aspect of the touristic experience*. In other words, every experience is pulled by an attraction factor (an obvious one) and subsequently needs a whole series of complementary and auxiliary factors present in the district to allow additional and different performances.

In keeping the theater metaphor, one can affirm that a stage company that is meant to last over time cannot be built around a single performance. It is the combined talent of the actors, of the director, of the technicians, and all of the other company members, their mutual respect and trust, as well as the convergence and complementarity of their artistic and organizational skills that build the foundation for establishing a group. The company will put on various performances according to its artistic tastes and the desires of the audience. Ultimately, the same company may stage several performances and a single performance may be put on by several companies.

Now, for the second phase: this one *regards discerning the territorial dimension and the operating structure (the company) of the district which will allow the unitary governance of the territorial touristic system in a market-oriented approach*. One must establish which components are to be utilized by the governing body to stage the experiences that will satisfy the demand. The touristic system must then be extended so as to minimize the organizational and physical gap that exists between casual districts (embryonic systems) and districts in the narrow sense (developing systems and viable systems).

From our point of view, considering that the governability of a territory for touristic purposes increases proportionally as tourist service operators gain increased awareness of belonging to a territorial system and as their trust in the organization and/or rules that govern it increases, a touristic system must represent a territory that is not too large, one that already has a strong identity, a relational network, and where trust is widespread. In this way, relationships built among the various district subjects are both direct and personal, and therefore, more in keeping with the “local culture” concept that characterizes the Italian socio-economic system.

There remains the problem of which entity decides the size of a touristically significant territory. On this issue Italian lawmakers have passed the baton to the regions and to the tourism operators therein, thus allowing wide margins of freedom for spontaneous and bottom up initiatives. We believe that the delineation of the geographical confines of a touristic system should follow the viable system paradigm where a governing body, an operating structure, and a reference market are clearly present. This also serves to overcome the chronic problem of the *lack of strategic governance* that plagues Italian touristic districts.

For systemic effectiveness to be achieved it is not be assumed that the topmost strategic priority should be to first identify the market and then set up an offering that can satisfy demand (opportunity driven strategic approach). At times, and perhaps in most cases, the governing body must start with enhancing those ‘natural’ district operating structures that already exist and are not easily modified (starting from human and territorial resources), either because of financial constraints or for reasons tied to the ‘environmental sustainability’ of the intervention needed to strategically orient (reorient) a given territory (e.g., to streamline or augment the current

product portfolio). In this case one must look at which segments of world tourism demand could be attracted to the existing district system and then decide what to stage, keeping in mind and striving to maximize the potential of the available attraction factors (resource-based strategic approach) (Golinelli, Gatti and Siano, 2002). Finally, while this work aims to apply the marketing concept paradigms to the touristic district conceived as a viable system, we believe it is necessary to underscore the risk of *making conceptual* changes too lightly when taking principles of business administration and transferring them to much wider systems such as territorial and touristic ones. Therefore, having clear market segments as reference points for staging experiences is, in fact, a *priority in marketing touristic destinations*, which the extant literature on the subject has rightly stressed (Heath and Wall, 1992), but one cannot ignore or underestimate the importance of the presence of attraction factors in making decisions at the touristic system level (Caroli, 1999; Della Corte, 2000).

### **8. A holistic governance model for touristic districts: the total relationship marketing perspective**

To have the governance of an experience-staging touristic district be consciously market oriented requires a process of marketing planning (Cozzi and Ferrero, 2000) aimed at the final client. There must also be suitable policies in place that are geared towards connecting the internal and external actors for the optimum utilization and exchange of resources in the territory where the viable system is anchored.

Coming back to the theater metaphor (or management model), we could affirm that the viable system's governing body should take on the role of playwright and director of the territory that serves as a stage<sup>7</sup>, and, as such, should guide the company of actors or the cast (business operators, local population, and other subjects in the territory, including tourists) in staging the experiences that actively involve the public (guests) in a memorable way.

In order to adequately carry out its tasks, the governing body must possess diverse managerial skills so that it can integrate the consolidated marketing management tools into the more complex and broad problem of managing systemic relationships (in both sub-systems and super-systems). The managerial paradigm believed to be best suited to the types of issues to be dealt with is that of relationship marketing (Peck *et al.* 1999) and especially, Gummesson's holistic, total relationship marketing (Gummesson, 1999). This approach to marketing goes beyond the traditional *marketing management* perspective (management of the market), leaning towards the concept of *marketing oriented management* (management oriented to the market). Relationship marketing is 'marketing based on relationships, the network, and interaction.' It is assumed that marketing is immersed in the total management of the network of relationships, at the single enterprise

<sup>7</sup> In this article, we incorporate in the term stage not only the physical stage itself, but also the other components of the theater and of the *scenery* ("2. All of the scenery components mounted for a performance". Zingarelli Dictionary, Zanichelli, Bologna, 1973).

and organization level as well as at the market and society level. It aims to build, develop, and maintain relationships in the long term with all clients and all of the other stakeholders. According to this marketing concept, value is co-created by all parties involved. Consequently, the managerial approach adopted transcends the lines of demarcation between functions and specialized disciplines; it adopts a *holistic viewpoint* which, at the district level, implies a *network marketing* approach in which there are no buyers and sellers but rather, *partners who exchange resources to jointly undertake interrelated activities geared towards the staging of experiences*.

Basically, the total relationship marketing philosophy goes beyond the classic paradigm of the 4Ps of marketing management, incorporating it and orienting it towards a broader perspective that sees the end user as just one of many targets of marketing actions. According to this model, if marketing activities are to be completely effective, they must be aimed at the various subjects, both internal to (sub-systems) and external to (super-systems) the system, whether it is an enterprise or a district (network). In other words, an integrated, organizationally widespread, and culturally holistic managerial philosophy must be adopted; it must be suitable for system-wide application and therefore leaning away from myopic marketing logics that are only focused on the final client and ignore the interdependent contribution brought by all system (and/or subsystem) actors to the value creation process.

Finally, with reference to theater-inspired management of touristic systems, the task assigned to the governing body is to provide an answer to the questions *To whom?, Why?, What?, How?, Who?, and Where?* in the holistic management of the complex system of staging touristic experiences. Depending on what type of experience is being offered to guests, the director will have to harmoniously combine and enhance the available or procurable territorial resources in such a way as to not damage the ecosystem, and must not engage in an excessive spectacularization of the offering in order to avoid negative consequences for both the demand and the territory. It is for this reason that the governing body is called upon to formulate and implement a touristic relationship marketing plan that can enhance, select, and mobilize the components of the district operating system in a viable system perspective that is subordinated to the system's survival and sustainability over the long term. The total relationship marketing model, albeit with the transferability limitations inherent in any managerial model designed for enterprises, appears to be sufficiently apt for application to viable system touristic districts.

## **9. Applicability of the experience economy concept to tourism management: post-dated considerations**

Taking advantage of the translation into English of the original 2002 contribution, the text was thoroughly revised and a sizeable portion of the notes were eliminated (making it lighter and more readable); at the same time, the current literature was reviewed in order to shed light on whether and how the experience economy concept (Pine and Gilmore,

1998) has affected managerial studies on tourism. The question we sought to answer was: How much and how has the experience economy model that we adopted in 2002 as a conceptual approach to observing touristic phenomena become widespread in touristic management literature?

In order to answer this research question we opted to conduct a literature analysis by means of a “systematic review” (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003).

#### *Methodology chosen for the review*

An analytical review scheme is necessary for systematically evaluating the contribution of a given body of literature (Crossan and Apaydin, 2010). Systematic reviews are conventionally understood to have specific characteristics: an explicit study protocol, addressing a pre-specified, highly focused question(s); explicit methods for searching for studies; appraisal of studies to determine their scientific quality; and explicit methods, including descriptive summary or meta-analysis (where appropriate), to combine the findings across a range of studies (Dixon-Woods *et al.*, 2006). Although this methodology is not without challenges, such as difficulty of data synthesis from various disciplines, insufficient representation of books, and large amounts of material to review (Pittaway *et al.*, 2004), we felt it was important to have a methodology that could allow us to conduct the review in a solid way. A systematic review uses an explicit algorithm to perform a search and critical appraisal of the literature. Systematic reviews improve the quality of the review process and outcome by employing a transparent and reproducible procedure (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003).

#### *Description of the methodology*

We followed the three-stage procedure described by Tranfield *et al.* (2003, 215): 1) planning, 2) conducting, 3) reporting and dissemination.

During the planning stage, we defined the objectives of the research and identified the key data source. Our objective was intentionally broad and somewhat standard for such types of comprehensive reviews: to understand to what extent the *experience economy* concept was utilized in the literature. While fully aware of its limitations (Bakkalbasi *et al.*, 2006), the authors chose to use Google Scholar because it has a wider database (including peer-reviews and books), making it possible to find citations from “minor” journals published in languages other than English and not currently listed by “Scopus” or “Web of Science”. Another point that mitigates the limitations of this tool is that the material analyzed consists of recently published works (from 1998 onward). The analysis does not have start date; it ends with the last search in the study: 31st October 2016.

The second stage of our systematic review process, execution, consisted of five steps: identifying initial selection criteria - keywords and search terms; grouping-publications; compiling a consideration set; classifying the results; and synthesis. The first three steps pertain to the collection and organization of the data, and the last two steps involve data processing and analysis.

#### *Identifying Initial Selection Criteria: Keywords and Search Terms.*

A comprehensive search differentiates a systematic review from a traditional narrative review (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003).

The research was conducted using Google Scholar for the following search strings: “experience economy” pine gilmore, “economia delle esperienze”, “économie d’expérience”, “economía de la experiencia” with no limitations whatsoever regarding language, research area, or type of source.

The keywords were used as a selection criterion for the topic (title, keywords, or abstract), resulting in an initial sample of 180 publications. The search revealed the existence of contributions that use the term “experience economy” but then elaborate the work in other languages (especially Chinese and other Asian languages); these works were not explored for content by the authors, due to the language barrier.

This initial set was then fixed as the basis for all future analysis.

### Grouping Publications

The first subdivision was by language; the publications were classified into 4 groups (Table 3): 1) articles in English; 2) articles in Italian; 3) articles in French; 4) articles in Spanish.

Tab. 3: Works classified by language

Language	N. contributions	N. citations
English	153	15686
Italian	7	430
French	2	42
Spanish	18	130
Total	180	16288

Source: Our data processing

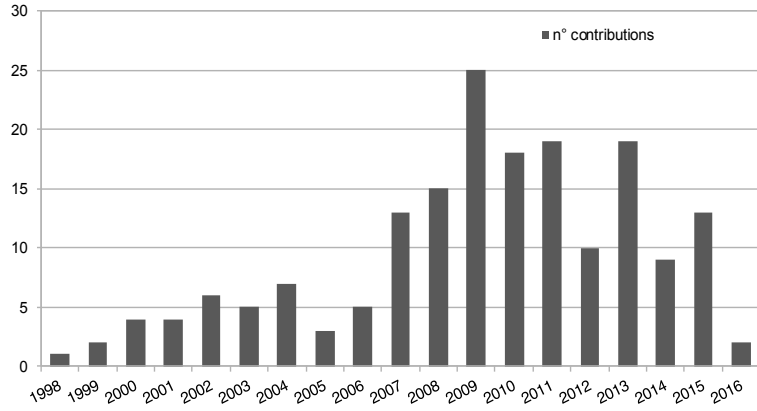
The second subdivision was by year so as to show the chronological order of contributions and related citations (Table 4; Figures 2 and 3).

Tab. 4: Works classified by year

Year	N. contributions	N. citations	Average citations
1998	1	3999	3999
1999	2	5720	2860
2000	4	189	122.25
2001	4	20	50
2002	6	501	83.5
2003	5	142	28.4
2004	7	538	76.86
2005	3	66	22
2006	8	261	52.2
2007	13	1221	93.92
2008	15	470	31.33
2009	25	1208	48.32
2010	18	250	13.89
2011	19	636	33.47
2013	19	237	12.47
2014	9	109	12.11
2015	13	78	6.00
2016	2	0	0.00
Total	180	16288	90.49

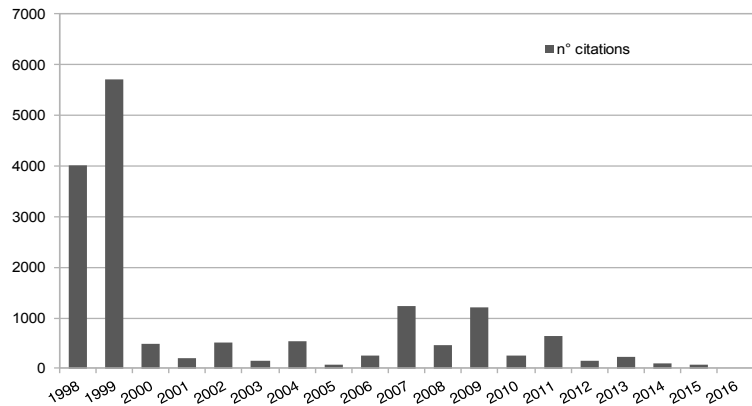
Source: Our data processing

Fig. 2: Works submitted per year



Source: Our data processing

Fig. 3: Citations received by year of publication



Source: Our data processing

The third subdivision was by number of citations (n), further classified into 4 groups (Table 5): 1)  $n < 10$ ; 2)  $9 < n < 50$ ; 3)  $49 < n < 100$  4)  $n > 100$ ;

Tab. 5: Works classified by number of citations

Classification	N. citations
$X < 10$	88
$9 < X < 50$	51
$50 < X < 100$	19
$X > 100$	22
Total	180

Source: Our data processing



The fourth subdivision was by reference to tourism in the work (title, keywords, abstract), further classified into 2 groups (Table 6): 1) tourism-related studies; 2) studies related to other fields.

Tab. 6: Works related to tourism

Language	Tourism	Other fields
English	35.70%	63.30%
Italian	14.00%	86.00%
French	0.00%	100.00%
Spanish	61.00%	39.00%
Total	37.00%	62.4%

Source: Our data processing

Finally, the last subdivision was for the most-cited works (at least 50 citations) were analyzed in order to discern the authors that were most influential in the international debate (Table 7).

Tab. 7: Most-cited authors (with at least 50 citations)

Most-cited authors (with at least 50 citations)	N. contributions	N. citations	%
Pine II B.J. and Gilmore J.H. (1998; 1999; 2000; 2000b; 2011) - Gilmore J.H. and Pine B.J. (2002; 2002b; 2002c)	8	10873	73.40%
Oh H., Fiore A.M. and Jeoung M. (2007)	1	548	3.70%
Hosany S. and Witham M. (2009)	1	259	1.75%
Poulsson S.H. and Kale S.H. (2004)	1	229	1.55%
Morgan M. (2004 2006)	2	215	1.45%
Boswijk A., Thijssen T. and Peelen E. (2007)	1	203	1.37%
Andersson T.D. (2007)	1	201	1.36%
Binkhorst E. and Den Dekker T. (2009)	1	197	1.33%
Richards G. (2001 2001)	2	186	1.26%
Petkus E. (2004)	1	151	1.02%
Pencarelli T. and Forlani F. (2002; 2006)	2	134	0.90%
Sundbo J. and Darmer P. (2008)	1	131	0.88%
Morgan M., Elbe J. and de Esteban Curiel J. (2009)	1	119	0.80%
Lorentzen A (2009)	1	117	0.79%
McLellan H. (2000)	1	101	0.68%
Ek R., Larsen J., Hornskov S.B., and Mansfeldt O.K. (2008)	1	101	0.68%
Hayes D. and Macleod N. (2007)	1	100	0.68%
Sundbo J. (2009)	1	91	0.61%
Kao Y., F. Huang L.S., and Wu C.H. (2008)	1	85	0.57%
Quadri-Felitti D. and Fiore A.M. (2012)	1	77	0.52%
Chang T.Y. and Horng S.C. (2010)	1	74	0.50%
Mehmetoglu M. and Engen M. (2011)	1	72	0.49%
Baum T. (2006)	1	71	0.48%
Wu W.Z. and Zhuang Z.M. (2003)	1	70	0.47%
Scott N., Laws E. and Boksberger P. (2009)	1	67	0.45%
Knutson B.J., Beck J.A., Kim S.H. and Cha J. (2007)	1	62	0.42%
Ellis G.D. and Rossman J.R. (2008)	1	62	0.42%
Moscardo G. (2009)	1	57	0.38%
Johansson M. and Kociatkiewicz J. (2011)	1	56	0.38%
Smith W.L. (2005)	1	53	0.36%
Yu H. and Fang W. (2009)	1	52	0.35%

Source: Our data processing

A subgroup was created for the Top 41 contributions having at least 50 citations, shown in 3 tables:

*Tab. 7.1: Works with more than 50 citations, grouped by language*

Language	En	It	Fr	Spa	Tot
N. contributions	37	3	0	1	41

Source: Our data processing

*Tab. 7.2: Impact of the main contributions on the whole*

Most-cited authors (Top 41)	N. citations
% Top 41 on total of whole contributions	22.78%
% citations Top 41 on total of whole citations	90.45%

Source: Our data processing

*Tab. 7.3: Top 41 works related to tourism*

Most-cited authors (Top 41)	N.	%
Tourism	22	53.66%
Other fields	19	46.34%
Total	41	100.00%

Source: Our data processing

### *Data synthesis*

The analysis revealed, first of all, that since 2000 the experience economy concept has become a significant facet of the managerial debate, as pointed out by Ferreira and Teixeira (2013). If we observe the number of works submitted per year (Table 4), it is plain to see that scholars' interest in the topic exploded between 2007 and 2009, and then leveled off in the years that followed. This data is in line with the findings of the Ferreira and Teixeira (2013, p. 15) study. These authors undertook an analysis of the "evolution of the number of citations of Pine and Gilmore's article (1999-2011)", and they pointed out how, in 2009, the number of yearly citations doubled and later, was consolidated. The years 2007 and 2009 are also those in which works were published by scholars other than Pine and Gilmore, and which brought the most citations (Oh *et al.*, (2007), in *Journal of Travel Research*; Andersson (2007), in *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*; Hayes and MacLeod (2007), in *Journal of Vacation Marketing*; Ek *et al.* (2008), in *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*; Binkhorst *et al.* (2009), in *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*; Hosany and Witham (2009), in *Journal of Travel Research*; Morgan *et al.* (2009), in *International Journal of Tourism Research*). This data highlights how 2007 was the year in which the "experience economy" concept was the object of numerous and qualified academic papers, thus laying the foundation for a new stream of managerial research in the field of tourism.

From the analysis of the three language areas, there emerged that among the various translations of Pine and Gilmore's 1999 book, "The experience economy: work is theatre & every business a stage", the only one to have a significant number of citations (among the Top 41) is the Italian version (285). Again, from a linguistic analysis perspective, it is interesting to note that the "experience economy" did not play any relevant role in France or in francophone countries (Pine and Gilmore's work was not even translated into French) whereas it was immediately used in both Italian (Pencarelli and Forlani, 2002; 2006) and Spanish (Richards, 2001). These contributions, albeit having won a fair amount of success in terms of attention and citations, essentially remained isolated cases that did not foster deeper studies or related research streams. As is apparent from the growth in the number of works written in different languages that the topic is currently most often published in English and Spanish language journals (although the latter do not generate a significant number of citations). This situation is probably due not only to the low significance of the topic in the area where other languages are used, but also to the tendency, in recent years, of Mediterranean countries to use English more and more in scientific debates.

Using the criterion of works classified by number of citations received, we highlight the following: 23% of the studies (which we call the Top 41) receive 90.5% of the citations (Table 7.2). When we look at the 41 articles that received at least 50 citations, we can see that 73.4% of these citations were received by the eight works written by Pine and Gilmore, of which 27% by the 1998 article published in the Harvard Business Review and 39% by the 1999 book published by Harvard Business Press.

Finally, while our analysis shows the multidisciplinary nature of the studies that utilize the "experience economy" concept - and this is in line with Ferreira and Teixeira (2013, p. 17) - it brings to light the fact that 37% of published works make explicit reference to tourism, which appears in the review or in the title of the article, the keywords, the abstract, or the title of the journal. For the purposes of our study however, there remains the significant fact that the topic of tourism accounts for 54% if we look exclusively at the 41 most cited works (Top 41). In confirmation of this tendency, it is worthy of note that if one excludes the works by Pine and Gilmore, then it is extremely clear to see how the works that have most heavily impacted the scientific community are those that focus on tourism-managerial studies.

To conclude, as of 2002 the model of the "experience economy" has become more and more consolidated, especially in the field of management and tourism marketing. In fact, the literature analysis shows how the concepts and the tools that have been developed within the framework of the experience economy find their highest recognition and realm of application in tourism and related fields such as entertainment, sports, and event planning (Ferreira and Teixeira, 2013).

The present work fits into this stream of research. The authors hope that this version, in English, may represent a valid theoretical contribution for the study of marketing and management of fragmented touristic destination.

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