In-between tourism spaces and places: The dynamic design of tourist experiences

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Abstract
The experience economy’s upcoming with Pine & Gilmore, further development by Prahalad & Ramashamy and maturing with Boswijk et al. has continuously prioritised the supply side. The users, consumers, tourists etc. have played a minor role in most studies. The same applies to the concepts of tourism spaces and tourist places. The investigation of the workings of tourist places (or hotspots, precincts or bubbles) has been from a supply perspective. The concepts of tourismscapes and experiencescapes, based on the notion of the servicescape, have been a primary way of talking about tourists’ experience of places. The concept of the scape has proved useful to describe other sensuous scapes as well. With these different studies, the focus has been on the designed and developed scapes, such as leisure parks, concept stores, brandworlds, service settings etc. The most dominant examples of the experience economy have been the heavily designed environments of Disneyworld and Starbucks.

This paper builds on two important points: Firstly, the user has largely been neglected in favour of a focus on the designed and developed places of the experience economy. Secondly, because of this focus, the dynamic between the concepts of space and place, and the richness this potentially offer to tourism analysis, has been neglected. It is argued that, building on discussions of space and place, tourist experiences become in a dynamic way both within and outside the designed tourismscapes. Using examples from different empirical studies, the notion of in-between experiences works as a catalyst to argue that tourist experiences happen in a dynamic and unmanageable way.

Key Words: Touristscapes, experiencescapes, servicescapes, scapes, sensuous scapes, experience economy, experience design, experiences, in-between experience.

1. Introduction

Alice, Eleanor, Lucy and Thomas had lived as exchange students in Copenhagen for a period of around one month when I interviewed them about their experiences of coming to and living as temporary citizens in Copenhagen. Halfway into an informal, semi-structured, two-hour group interview, I asked them to take a city map of Copenhagen and mark where they had been in the city during their first month in Copenhagen. I asked them to mark everywhere they had been: neighbourhoods, areas, streets,
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squares, shops, cafes etc. After five minutes, I expected that they had filled their maps of Copenhagen to with X’s, lines and circles. In reality, the results showed a very limited number of X’s, lines and circles. It turned out that their places of visits were largely limited to the area in which they respectively were living and the inner City of Copenhagen (where their school is located). I was very surprised and, I must admit, disappointed.

The introduction of the experience economy as a paradigm and concept is one of the most dominant developments within tourism in the last ten-fifteen years. Pine and Gilmore first introduced the concept of the experience economy with their theatre metaphor, focusing on what the company can do to stage memorable events and engage the customer. Prahalad and Ramaswamy took the paradigm and concept to a second stage with the introduction of the concept of co-creation, talking about the consumer as a co-creator of experiences together with the company. Boswijk et al., in what they themselves coined as the third generation of the experience economy, place their attention and their research on the customer itself, introducing the concept of self-direction. In this third generation, the emphasis is on the customer and the customer is the starting point of any experience.

However, what is common for these three different generations, albeit their different keywords, is a focus on developed and designed experiences. Although the customer gradually receives more and more attention from one generation to another, there is common assumption that tourists, experience-seeking consumers, customers in general look and search for, and pay for, developed experiences. This is essentially what tourism and the experience economy is all about. In fact, as different authors have pointed out, Disneyland and Starbuck’s and their heavily developed experiences have become the main examples of the experience economy, whatever generation we are talking about. Bryman’s arguments around the Disneyzation of society also support this stance. The experience-scapes of the experience economy are indeed difficult to escape when the topic is tourist experiences.

Using these main points about the development and characteristics of the experience economy as a starting point, this paper consists of a three sections. Firstly, this introduction establishes the framework and methodology of the research project this paper builds upon. Second, the paper discusses the differences between the focus on experience-scapes and tourist-scapes on the one hand and city-scapes and urban precincts on the other hand. Thirdly, the concepts of, and relations between, space and place is discussed to further a discussion around the notion of in-between experiences. Some perspectives on space and place are used to discuss how space and place can give a deeper and broader understanding of how tourist experiences become in dynamic relations between space and place, supplier and consumer, locals and tourists.
The short vignette that opens the paper is an example of one of many attempts by the author to capture the complex workings of tourist experiences of a city. Other examples include shadowing and observations at different locations in the city, survey data, desk research on social media, an auto-ethnographic study of a 2.5 months stay as a temporary citizen in Melbourne (Australia), 24 in-depth interviews with tourism stakeholders and a comprehensive study of Airbnb based on reports, interviews, observations, autoethnography etc. The research project is both cross-methodological, as seen above, and cross-disciplinary, drawing on insights from tourism, urban studies, geography, design, branding, economics, anthropology, consumer behaviour etc.

Furthermore, this paper, and the research project that the paper builds upon, tries to contribute to the debate on the researcher’s role in research. This quote by Ren, Pritchard and Morgan gives an idea of the author’s stance in this debate, if the vignettes themselves that open each section are not sufficient:

By refusing to consign mundane experiences and practices to the realm of the personal we seek further a deconstruction and weakening of the object/subject divide and endeavour to contribute to debates of what is relevant to research and what is not.\(^9\)

2. Escaping the scapes: service-scapes, experience-scapes, city-scapes

Very few tourists have a specific attraction, a specific event or a specific accommodation unit as one of their reasons-to-go when travelling. Instead, tourists travel to a city because of the atmosphere, the architecture and design of the city, the history, to relax and to spend time with close ones. I found this through a major study of more than 5,000 tourists back in 2008.\(^10\) And this finding, that still puzzles my brain, is something that have led me into doing research today. The finding itself is not as surprising as the fact that the tourism industry and most tourism research still over-emphasises the developed experiences, the scapes. This is done even though the top 10 reasons-to-go have to do with the city in a more general sense and not with tourist-scapes in a more specific way.\(^11\)

Since Bitner introduced the notion of the service-scape more than 20 years ago\(^12\), the notion of the scape has been used to describe the settings within which a service takes place (service-scape) and, later, how an experience happens (experience-scape).\(^13\) The tourist-scape has also been used to describe tourist areas.\(^14\) In Bitner’s definition, the service-scape consists of three composite conditions: ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality, and signs, symbols and artefacts.\(^15\) These
conditions are all characterised by the fact that the service-supplier can design and develop them for a tourist. When the notion of the experience-scape is coined more than ten years later, the notion is coined in a more critical approach with a focus on experiences as ‘... highly personal, subjectively perceived, intangible, ever fleeting and continuously on-going.’ However, arguably, some of the characteristics of the service-scape persist in the new concept of the experience-scape. Again, the problem is that these notions focus on the designed and developed experiences, not on the tourists’ own experiences.

In recent years, there has been a growing body of literature around the topic of alternative and creative tourism and around tourism in the outer areas of cities (off the beaten track). Instead of analysing the tourism areas, the tourism bubbles. What these contributions seem to have in common, from a spatial perspective, is that they shift the focus away from the designed tourist-scapes towards the more dynamic and organic city-scapes. Both creative tourism and off the beaten track activities build on the statement that tourists today seek for more local, authentic and everyday experiences of a city and its atmosphere. Within the performance turn within tourism, this has led to the statement that there is a need to de-exotise tourism theory. This, this paper argue, is also true for discussions around place and space in relation to tourism.

Still, there is a tendency both in theory and in practice to discuss tourism and tourist experiences in the light of specific tourist places that can be defined (and designed) in time and space. This type of concept freezes the dynamic workings of experiences within a specific setting at a specific time. There is a need to deconstruct experiences, and how they take place, to embrace this dynamic. The next section will try to deconstruct the notion of the tourist-scape and experience-scape by using the notion of in-between experiences as well as statements around the relation between space and place from different scholars.

3. In-between tourism spaces and tourist places

At first sight, I thought that I quickly discovered what goes around at the site of The little Mermaid. I saw almost identical phases of a scaped tourist experience that could be divided into five phases. One, people arrive to the site, by bus, bike, feet or boat. Two, people try to localise the relatively small statue. Three, people approach the statue to take pictures, many while posing next to or even on top of it. Four, people check their photo device to see if the quality of the photo(s) is okay. Five, people (sit down to) negotiate on what to do next. If this was the whole truth, everything could be easily designed and developed. But, unfortunately (for planners), there is much more to it: There is many social interactions between locals and tourists as well as between tourists and other tourists. You will hear
humorous statements regarding the size of the statue. People wave at each other between the canal boat and the people standing on land, for a short period of time making the statue of secondary interest. Some tourists are visibly annoyed by other tourists. A few people end up being (almost) run down by bicycles. The big differences in weather also affect the experience in diverse ways.\textsuperscript{24}

What is highlighted in the short excerpt of a longer vignette above is the dynamic relation between what could be termed as the city-scape and the tourist-scape. In a recent contribution, Metro-Roland is using these terms and their symbiotic relation to each other when she is talking about the relation between the everyday space and the must see (extraordinary) places, termed as the tourist-scape.

In the spaces between the “important” must sees, the banal objects of the everyday play a larger role in the creation of a sense of place than has been surmised in the tourism literature.\textsuperscript{25}

Instead of treating the two concepts as diametrical opposites, Metro-Roland calls for a more symbiotic relation, where a tourist is not seen as either someone looking for the tourist-scapes or looking for the city-scapes. Instead, they are in fact looking for and finding both, both in the tourist-scape and in the city-scape.

Metro-Roland’s perspective can be used to criticise the recent developments within the area of creative tourism and off-the-beaten-track activities (see above). They shift the focus away from the inner city, away from mass tourism, away from cultural tourism, but in doing so, and in focusing on the opposites and alternatives, they dichotomies are maintained and furthered. Instead of using an either-or perspective, the rest of this section will use a both-and perspective, highlighting the importance of dealing both with the tourist-scapes (the specific places) and with the city-scape (the more abstract space of the city) at the same time.

Tuan’s definition of the relation between space and place is a good starting point for this discussion. Tuan states at the beginning of his essay that ‘\textit{(t)he ideas “space” and “place” require each other for definition...}’ and that ‘\textit{space is more abstract than place.}’\textsuperscript{26} Hence, it should be impossible to talk about places (e.g. tourist-scapes) without talking about space (e.g. the city atmosphere) and the other way around. In a more concrete example, Tuan’s symbiotic definition of space and place is fruitful for a discussion on the relation between tourist-scapes and city-scapes.

Facts and events are readily told: we have no problem saying that we went to Crater Lake on a Sunday, with the children and two dogs, in a station wagon, and that it was a cold day. We know what to admire: the lake. We can point to it and take a picture so that it stays with us as a permanent and
The whole idea of what we see out of the corner of our eye – or what Metro-Roland called ‘the banal objects of the everyday’ above – is a central statement to the notion of in-between experiences as a way of talking about tourist-scapes and city-scapes in another way than both the contributions on scapes and the contributions on alternative tourism. Instead of using the dichotomies to make new positions, an in-between position is coined where it is not matter of either inner city or outer-city, either space or place, either mass tourism or alternative tourism. It is both the one and the other. These are just some of the dichotomies that the concept of in-between experiences challenge. The figure below illustrates some of the dichotomies that the concept of in-between experience positions itself in-between in a both-and perspective. Not an either-or perspective. Not a from-to perspective.

*Figure 1: In-between experiences*

As the figure suggests, the dichotomies associated with tourism are many and include all of the above and more. While the left side of the circle, with end-points such as scapes, mass tourism, tourist places, spectating, is certainly not what in-between experiences is about, in-between experiences are also not only about the right side of the circle either. It is a both-and perspective. In this sense the argument is inspired by this quote from Entrikin challenging dualisms, albeit different ones:
The closest that we come to addressing both sides of this divide is from a point in between, a point that leads us in into the vast realms of narrative forms. From this position we gain a view from both sides of the divide. (..) To ignore either aspect of this dualism is to misunderstand the modern experience of place.\textsuperscript{28}

In-between experiences are thus associated with the symbiotic perspectives on space and place from e.g. Tuan and Metro-Roland (see above). The perspective is different from Löfgren’s focus on tourists’ doing nothing.\textsuperscript{29} It is also different from Barenholdt et al.’s perspective on immobilities in their notion of in-between experience.\textsuperscript{30} Instead of doing what in done within the creative turn in tourism, where the focus shifts to outer areas instead of the inner city (e.g. Maitland\textsuperscript{31}), the focus is on the performance of the tourists when they are having in-between experiences that happen within the continuum depicted in figure 1 (above).

To finalise this paper, and to make a starting point for a further discussion of in-between experiences and the relation between space and place, Pons will work as a loophole. Pons’ use of the metaphor of dwelling (and his associated arguments) seems to be the perfect place to end, well, in-between, a conclusion and a perspective. Pons states that:

Doing tourism is not only a matter of being in space or representing the space. It is above all, a matter of practising space and practising through space (Crang, 1999; Crouch, 1999, 2002; de Certeau, 1988; Thrift, 1999). That is, tourists are not only in place, but also involved with the place, although not in the same manner that non-tourists are.\textsuperscript{32}

In-between experiences are, similar to dwelling, a performative, involving, engaging and relational notion of how tourists experience. However, dwelling seems to place an overemphasis on the first end of the dichotomy between doing and being, and on the first end of with the place and in the place. The notion of in-between experiences is used to be able to balance somewhere in the continuum in-between and both include doings and beings, space and places, planned and spontaneous experiences, city-scapes and tourist-scapes. In that sense, in-between experiences balances between the more abstract spaces and more specific places within which tourists do their city experience in performative, involving and relational ways.
This is an excerpt of the author’s short vignette on one of many empirical studies. This particular vignette is written based on a group interview with four exchange students that had come to Copenhagen to live and study for a few months.


8 Airbnb [www.airbnb.com](http://www.airbnb.com).


10 Ole Kjaer Mansfeldt, Ellen Marie Vestager and Marie Baek Iversen: *Experience design in city tourism* (Wonderful Copenhagen and Nordic Innovation Centre, 2008); 38.

11 This an excerpt of the author’s short vignette based on a personal story from previous work experience within tourism. In the author’s line of research, this is one of the most important preconditions for setting up the framework of the research. The vignette underlines the relevance of subjective experiences, both in past and present, for the development of an effective research design.


16 O’Dell, Management Strategies and the Need for Fun.

17 Ibid.; 12.


24 This is an excerpt of the author’s vignette based on three separate days of observations and short interviews at the site of The little Mermaid in Copenhagen. What at first hand seems like a scaped experience is also full of spontaneous and unmanageable in-between experiences in the sense of the word introduced later in this paper.

25 Michelle M. Metro-Roland: Tourists, Signs and the City. The Semiotics of Culture in an Urban Landscape, Ashgate 2011; 40.


27 Ibid.; 147.


30 Barenholdt et al.: Performing Tourist Places; 149.


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