



ECONOMY

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TERRITORIAL WELL-BEING AT THE HEART OF EXPERIENTIAL STRATEGIES

HOW TO DESIGN TOWNS AND CITIES THAT LEAVE A POSITIVE IMPRESSION OF WELL-BEING ON VISITORS? THE ANSWER REMAINS VERY COMPLEX, BUT ALSO ESSENTIAL. IT REQUIRES THE INVOLVEMENT OF NUMEROUS STAKEHOLDERS AND THE USE OF A METHODOLOGY THAT FACILITATES COLLABORATIVE WORK. APPROACHES BASED ON THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY PROVIDE MEASURING AND STEERING TECHNIQUES OF GREAT USE TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THEIR PARTNERS AS WELL AS TO PLANNERS OR PRIVATE INVESTORS.

For a long time, globalisation forced world cities to deal with increased competition between them, thereby engaging in a race to enhance their attractiveness seen as the key to economic development. The result was over-investment in economic development, which did not necessarily meet the expectations of their inhabitants more focused on the overall quality of life. In response, policy-makers are putting the human being at the heart of urban design. Local governments have redefined their attractiveness-enhancing strategies, notably by implementing the principles of the experiential marketing. Formerly, they focused on “the product”, in line with the 4Ps principle: product, price, place and promotion. Today, their approach starts from the inhabitants' life and experience. A territory is perceived as the scene of powerful subjective and emotional experiences felt by residents, entrepreneurs, tourists, conference delegates, employees or students [Gollain, 2017].

By highlighting some exemplary initiatives in France and abroad, this Note introduces a number of new experiential approaches that aim to enhance the well-being of people when they visit and experience downtowns, economic locations, tourist resorts, etc. for personal, professional or non-profit activities. This article provides reliable methodologies and techniques to stimulate, or even positively transform what people experience. This approach is of key importance to professionals who “create, lead and promote” territories. Providing people with positive or even unique territorial experiences gives the territories concerned a sustainable and distinctive competitive advantage.



A NEW PARADIGM: THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

As explained by Wided Batat [Batat, 2016], an international professor and researcher expert in digital and experiential marketing, the rise of the experiential approach refers to a shift from a functional



1. Las Vegas (USA): a fascinating immersive experience on Fremont Street, which completely renovated overhead screen forms a glass roof. Visitors to Las Vegas generally become the city's best ambassadors.

2. The zoo in La Flèche (Sarthe, France): the lodges in the zoo are very popular with the public, who reserve them at least several months beforehand. This is due to the experience of sharing the life of animals.

3. La rue de la Flandre (Paris 18th district): the Flanders's tourist office organised the first pop-up street in Paris, which lasted five days. The WAF agency temporarily turned rue Androuet into "rue de la Flandre" in order to provide a completely different street experience by organising events and dedicated spaces.

4. Hangar 32: more and more often, major urban development projects such as l'île de Nantes (France) are presented to the public by means of exhibitions in the form of learning showrooms.

A GENERIC DEFINITION OF "EXPERIENCE"

Experience can be defined as the acquisition, whether deliberate or not, of the understanding of human beings and things through their practices in the real world, and thus its contribution to the development of knowledge (...). The experience is, therefore, important to develop a strong emotional connection between the territory and its publics, which can enhance their loyalty, and consequently lead to the dissemination of a positive image of the territory via word-of-mouth offline and online [adapted from Batat, 2018].

territory-centred "spatial" perception of a territory to a more emotional subjective "perception". This change of paradigm characteristic of the experience economy has allowed a shift from a logic based on producing a new and functional offering to a logic based on creating goods and services centred on meaning, emotion, and past experience. These approaches, which were introduced in the tourism and leisure sectors in the 1980s, are now spreading rapidly internationally in the various fields of activity of the players involved in urban planning and development.

ORIGIN AND OUTCOMES

The concept of "experience" as used today (see the box opposite) is at the heart of academic work that originated in the 1960s in various disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, anthropology, marketing or design. One of the best-known examples is an article by Pine and Gilmore published in 1998 in the *Harvard Business Review*. It closely links the concept of experience with that of territorial attractiveness in residential and tourism terms. It gave rise to numerous other articles on these topics and to many initiatives across the world aimed at transforming the visitors' experience in both public and private spaces, such as: Fremont Street in Las Vegas, West Edmonton Mall in Canada, Hard Rock Cafe, "Esprit de Picardie" tourism marketing in France and the urban design of the Zuidas quarter in Amsterdam.

This change meets the public's new expectations, which can be summarised under four headings: the search for meaning and ethics; the integration of digital solutions with interactivity in daily life; environmental concern; and the search for strong emotions in pursuit of leisure and consumption practices.

For example, regarding a territory, the visitor's experience is not limited to a single field of activity but features a set of interactions (place of arrival, accommodation, domestic transport, sights, restaurants, services received, etc.), which some

specialists describe as a «meta-experience». Thus, the positive and negative aspects of attendance at a professional congress, when combined, will make up the individual participant's total experience, which it is essential to assess in order to be able subsequently to act on it.

AN EXPERIENCE THAT IS BOTH TRANSFORMING AND TRANSFORMED

Several sociology studies of businesses and territories have shown that a person who has had a successful experience is transformed, especially if this experience has fully met his/her expectations and aspirations. Thus, ensuring the right conditions for achieving such satisfaction is a major condition for enhancing a territory's attractiveness. This explains, for example, the successful creation of lodges inside the zoo in La Flèche (Sarthe, France), where visitors may spend an unusual and highly emotional night observing and interacting with animals. As a result, each visitor who spends a night on the spot becomes a new ambassador for the zoo because of the intensity of this unique experience.

This experience also features a time dimension: a succession of negative and more positive moments throughout three major phases, i.e. before, during and after an on-site stay [Gollain *et al.*, 2018]. Before the visit, the public forges its **pre-planned experience** based on opinions collected and a search for information. The **lived experience** results from satisfactions and dissatisfactions experienced during the stay. Finally, the **memorised experience** is what remains after the stay. Thus, the intensity of the experience felt by visitors is not limited to the actual duration of the visit. This observation was also illustrated in a study by L'Institut Paris Region (ex IAU ÎdF) of the experience of certain tourists to Auvers-sur-Oise, a village in the Val-d'Oise county (France) immortalised by the Impressionist painters including Vincent Van Gogh, who painted 70 of his works there.

The conclusions that may be drawn from all this are that to improve the public's overall experience



Richard Barroques/walagency



Vincent Jacques/Sama a

it is necessary to intensify digital interactions prior to their visits and to extend the connection with them after their visits by using loyalty-enhancing techniques.

PERSONA DESCRIPTIONS FOR A BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND MEASURING OF TERRITORIAL EXPERIENCE

Measuring the experiences of different people in a given place is crucial. The “persona” technique has turned out to be particularly effective for understanding a territory’s ability to generate positive experiences. In the field of territorial marketing, a persona is an imaginary person who represents a target group or segment of the population. On the basis of market research (notably ethnographic or netnographic¹), certain personality traits are attributed to these imaginary persons, describing various aspects of their personality, tastes, preferences or concerns and irritants. This then allows influencing the person’s behaviour and obtaining a 360-degree view of the positive and negative aspects of their experience, ranging from the most basic elements, such as signage, to the service offering and physical sensations.

Another example is to study the experience of new entrepreneurs as they go through the 14 key steps in the business creation process (see the flow chart opposite). This helps assess the economic attractiveness of a territory. Indeed, creating a business is a project that requires a great deal of preparation and important decision-making on the part of the entrepreneur. At most stages recommended by business creation coaches such as Le Coin des Entrepreneurs shown here, the emphasis is on the entrepreneur’s ability to obtain information, services or support. However, there are marked differences between territories in terms of the quality of this experience. In some cases, the quality of the relationship with an advisor and the timely delivery of information or support will have a positive impact on the decision to locate in a particular town or city. Conversely, finding it

difficult to make useful contacts or a failed visit to a business site will reduce the chances of welcoming the business concerned.

MANAGING THE TERRITORIAL EXPERIENCE USING THE “7ES TOOL”

Once the situation has been assessed, the actions and means are put in place to define and steer the territorial experience. First of all, the purpose will be to create an attractive narrative, most often collectively, about the selected place. This storytelling technique has been successfully used for numerous sites, such as the Val-Thorens ski resort: under its shared Live United brand, it has managed deftly to promote the total experience it offers.

But there is much more to a territorial experience than a narrative. It is also and especially based on the implementation of concrete actions aimed at facilitating the complete immersion and involvement of the targeted audiences. Such actions should be implemented in the early phase of the customer pathway and should end after the visit. In order to identify the best courses of action, the method known as the “7Es” makes it possible to manage the territorial experience of various sections of the public through the following seven levers [Batat, 2019]:

- **Experience:** transforming the experiences of members of the public on their occasional or regular visits to the site concerned. The potential actions are numerous: designing an attractive website; good arrangements for the reception of new inhabitants; the provision of a range of services; user-friendly public spaces, etc.
- **Exchange:** arrangements for the involvement of sections of the public in the co-construction of their experience and in setting the price they are prepared to pay. Fairgrounds, by offering free and open access, unlike amusement parks, seek to capitalise on the public’s enthusiasm for restaurants, games, thrills and attractions to generate a powerful experience as well as the expected financial revenue.

The 14 key stages in starting a business



- **Extension:** this involves actions that ease the promotion/prospecting of the experience offered by a site/venue: raising the awareness of prescribers and influencers; marketing actions; live performances, etc. For example, the event organised in July 2016 by the Flanders Tourist Office in Paris consisted of renaming Androuet street in Montmartre as “rue de la Flandre” to create a Belgian atmosphere and of allowing visitors to taste Belgian beer and chips, visit bicycle workshops, fashion spaces and art galleries and attend lectures, concerts, DJ sets, etc.
- **Emphasis:** this consists of communication efforts and tools, including those used by brands (such as Disneyland Paris, Puy du Fou, Station F, Foire de Paris, etc.), to draw the public’s attention to the proposed experience. For example, the Beale Street website in Memphis, Tennessee, is reputed to be a particularly effective communication tool for attracting visitors to the city centre.
- **Empathy capital:** this concept refers to all the actions taken to improve the quality of the relationship between the public and a territory’s “contact persons”. For example, in anticipation of the 2024 Olympic Games, under the Ambition 2024 programme, the Aéroports de Paris Group and the Paris Region Council are deploying a joint strategy to improve the way visitors are welcomed at Paris Region airports.
- **Emotional touchpoints:** when members of the public interact with contact points (digital, call centres, call points, etc.) during the preparation of their trips and during their stays, the aim is to provide a strong emotional dimension in addition to the quality of the proposed offer. The following is an example of a good practice: since 2004, Hangar 32, a former port hangar, has been home to a permanent exhibition on the Ile de Nantes urban project. This exhibition and educational space have presented the various phases of this project and have played an important role in attracting new inhabitants by helping them imagine their future lives in the neighbourhood. Since the summer of 2017, a tactile and interactive 3D model on a large screen is available to allow visitors to review the projects which have been delivered or are in progress or are planned. A virtual visit of Hangar 32 and of the exhibition is also possible *via* the internet.
- **Emic/Etic process:** these two anthropological approaches make it easier to continually monitor and manage the public’s experience, either by adopting the group’s internal point of view (Emic process), or by adopting the point of view of an observer (Etic process). For example, when applied to a site such as a leisure centre, these techniques aim to improve the design of the spaces made available to families and also regularly to renew the sports or leisure offerings that meet the expectations and aspirations of the visitors. If well used, these techniques also foster sports behaviour experienced positively by the users while helping to improve standards of public health.

Although initially developed in the worlds of business and tourism, the experience economy is now relevant to all areas of urban planning and development. The physical and sensory dimension is of equally fundamental importance and may be stimulated in public space by successfully combining “user-friendly objects” that can significantly improve the living environment. A study by L’Institut Paris Region (ex IAU îdF) [Leroi, 2019] distinguishes between ten families of “user-friendly objects”: art, trade, events, urban furniture, active mobility, nature, digital, sensory, sport-games and sharing. Other features include experimental urban furniture, the pop-up economy, transitional urban planning, temporary exhibitions, street libraries, gift boxes, gymnastics equipment, etc. These context-sensitive urban design micro-projects testify to the sharing of construction of public space with its users. The local economy and social relationships greatly benefit from these urban amenities, which boost exchanges and meetings and result in a sharp decline in environmental degradation. ■

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co-founder of the B&C Consulting Group
Vincent Gollain, head of the Economics department of L’Institut Paris Region
and expert in territorial attractiveness

1. According to Yohan Bernard, a lecturer in management sciences at the University of Franche-Comté (France):“(…) a qualitative method of investigation that uses the internet as a data source based on virtual consumer communities.”

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