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'i am not a tourist'. – Why collaborative service design may be the key to developing sustainable cultural & rural visitor economies, with the help of ICT, social media and crowdsourcing.

Κρήτη μου

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Abstract: This paper will outline how the practice of Service Design can facilitate the creation of sustainable cultural and rural visitor economies, with the help of ICT, social media and crowd sourcing. This paper is not written to be 'value-neutral', but is motivated by the author's belief that academic activism in tourism *'must be with the communities and not for them: solidarity is the basis where our common concern is mutual empowerment, self-determination and emancipation.' (Hales et al.,2013, p17)* The aim of the paper is to identify how Service Design and its processes, such as co-creation, have the potential to develop cultural and rural tourism economies, which are community centric and allow the often-narrow role of the tourist to be humanised and democratised. Service Design will be discussed on the on the basis that *'Design has shown itself to be an efficient way of improving a business's profitability at a practical level, but when we recognize its capacity to transform environments and people's lives, it also becomes a catalyst for social change.'* (Viladas 2011, p26) The paper will touch on the need for a democratically supported strategic framework, which *'incorporates a broader set of values beyond economic growth'* (Hales et al., 2013, p12), and that design thinking has the ability to effect economic and cultural sustainability through co-creation and technology.

Service Design thinking can be help define values and identities, that further the concept of tourism in a societal and economic context, by taking advantage of opportunities created in the digital realm by crowdsourcing and social media. The knowledge base of the author's professional background is design and advertising, and the paper will aim to make sense of this knowledge in relation to sustainable tourism. In the latter part it will focus on the island of Crete to discuss how some of the Service Design and Advertising principles may be applied in practice and why a holistic service design strategy may be particularly suitable for community centered cultural and rural tourism on Crete.

Keywords: *Service Design, Advertising, Sustainable Cultural and Rural Tourism, Visitor Economies, Crowdsourcing, Social Media, Design thinking, Citizenship, Democracy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Design thinking and advertising have evolved skills perfectly honed for the creation of products, branding and effective trans-media communication strategies. Advertising in particular has seen a shift from mass to individually targeted communication, the fragmentation of the media channels only surpassed by the segmentation of the audiences.

Design has witnessed the emergence of *'the consumer as creator' movement'* which *'has led to a number of recent and high profile, brand success stories,'* (Ernst&Young 2012, p3) This opens up a lot of exciting and new opportunities, which cultural rural tourism is perfectly

1

placed to take full advantage of. What is needed is the creation of quality digital platforms and cohesive community centered strategies, enabled by local government and Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Planning and implementing such strategies may be perceived as difficult, due to the sheer complexity of all the technological, marketing & branding, social media and digital issues which require consideration. *'This upheaval has come so fast that many organizations are struggling to adapt their business models to keep up with the evolving demands of consumers and the escalating potential of technology.'* (Ernst&Young 2012, p1) It is easy enough to talk about the need for integrated, regional ICT strategies, but how can it be ensured that they are equally meaningful to the visitor and to the host communities & their SMEs.

The proposition is to utilise Service Design processes that treat all stakeholders as co-creators and to work from a basis of a community centered framework that fosters cultural integrity.

Briassoulis (2003, p110) argues that responsible tourism has the duty to minimise cultural alteration, such as loss of traditional values and authenticity. This has to be a priority of any sustainable commodification and commercialisation of rural culture. This is not just vital for fundamental ethical reasons, but also because rural cultural tourism will otherwise economically canibalise its viability and "raison d'être".

2. SERVICE DESIGN AND CULTURAL RURAL TOURISM

SERVICE DESIGN
Schneider and Stickdorn (2010, p15) state that Service design is *'an interdisciplinary approach, different people teach and learn service design in different ways; all of them with their individual backgrounds and motivations.'* At the core of service design are many skills that are well-established professional design practices, honed over decades of servicing clients' brands, developing products and growing businesses. *'Service design is the application of established design processes and skills to the development of services. It is a creative and practical way to improve existing services and innovate new ones'.* (Schneider & Stickdorn, 2010, p33) Service design is an iterative process that brings together a variety of practices from marketing, design, advertising, social science and any number of suitable others, depending on the task at hand. It is, in its truest form an inherently collaborative, open-ended process, involving all stakeholders. (Schneider & Stickdorn 2010) It offers a 21st century design practice, which takes into account consumers desire *'... to be active co-creators, not passive consumers.'* (Ernst&Young 2012, p1)

Service design is described as a practice that *'generally results in the design of systems and processes aimed at providing a holistic service to the user'* (Schneider & Stickdorn 2010,p32) and as a design process that aims to help *'develop and deliver great services. Service design projects improve factors like ease of use, satisfaction, loyalty and efficiency right across areas such as environments, communication and products –and not forgetting the people who deliver the service.'* (Schneider & Stickdorn 2010,p32) The success of any outcome will, self-evidently be determined by the processes and environments of any particular project, but defining the aims and values of any design process plays an important part in enabling goals to be achieved and of outcomes tested against it.

Schneider and Stickdorn (2010, p15) outline the 5 principles of Service Design as follows:
1. USER-CENTRED
Sevices should be experienced through the customer's eyes.
2. CO-CREATIVE
All stakeholders should be included in the service design process.
3. SEQUENCING
The service should be visualized as a sequence of interrelated actions.
4. EVIDENCING
Intangible services should be visualized in terms of physical artifacts.
5. HOLISTIC
The entire environment of a service should be considered.

There are other variations of these principle processes, but the above offer, in the author's opinion, a concise and clear overview.

Viladas (2011, p30) also differentiates Service Design into two different approaches:
1. Service Design for pure commercial gain
2. Service Design for the solving of collective problems

The latter is described as 'social' or *'public' design, 'a process of 'co-creation' resulting in the common good by means of sustainable solutions.'* (Viladas 2011, P31)

She also states that these two approaches are currently converging because technology and its logic of networks not only permits but encourages co-creation and *'rather than just being limited to the public sphere, the social aspect of sustainability is becoming a widely shared objective.'* (Viladas 2011, P32)

In the context of this paper, Service Design for the solving of collective problems will be considered central, with commercial gain being an inclusive, but not 'all defining' aspect.

SERVICE DESIGN FOR TOURISM

According to Frischhut and Stickdorn (2012), Service Design for tourism is becoming an expanding area of expertise, which can enable the tourism sector to benefit from the design thinking and communication skills residing in the design community. Whilst service design is useful for the implementation of services that are controllable and defined, there are certain limitation when applying this practice to the tourism product. The tourist product is infinitely complex and dependent on a multitude of factors, which can be difficult to control and account for. *'Despite the tourism sector being driven by customer experiences, it is hard to identify the component of the tourism experience.'* (Frischhut & Stickdorn 2012, p36.)

Complete and defined control over a specific outcome may not even be necessary for a design to be considered successful, as *'in today's unltranetworked world, it makes more sense to think of design as a process that continuously defines a system's rule rather than its outcomes.'* (Viladas 2011, P29)

Ethnographic research in service design for tourism suggests, that the much coveted "peak experience" often occurs in settings entirely removed from the controlled and designed settings of the tourism product. Speaking of these "highs", research using mobile ethnographic research tools found that *'this* (the peak experience) *related mostly to very simple things, such as a sales person remembering a former customer or a small welcome present form the landlord'.* (Frischhut & Stickdorn 2012, p56.) This is an essential insight into how the most valued human experience is often small and has an emotional resonance. This can be difficult to create in often-frigid corporate planning strategies and in *'what he refers to as moments of hospitality, Bell (2007) illustrates the social significance of mundane moments of hospitality in daily life that determine the ethics of social relations'.*(Wee2013,p1)

Advertising and marketing have long identified these human interactions points as essential to the positive perception of a brand experience. The aim of any branding and positioning strategy is for the brand to achieve an authenticity of voice, which the consumer is genuinely convinced and engaged by. Sales staff, holiday reps and any other professional customer service personal have long undergone customer service training, which utilises anything from scripts, role plays, honed communication skills, emotional intelligence strategies, etc. in order to ensure that frontline staff communicate the tone of voice and values a brand desires to be associated with.

Fundamentally undermining these endeavors is the basic, but keen, human skill of evaluating authenticity and integrity in others, in order to ascertain trustworthiness and meaning when participating in human interaction. Only experiences that are judged as truly authentic to all participants are evaluated as meaningful and noteworthy.

Some brands have been more successful than others in providing human sales interactions, which are judged as authentic and which in return fosters great consumer loyalty. In the UK the Hi-fi retailer 'Richer Sounds' is regarded as such a past success story (Crainer and Dearlove 2000). Like other brands, successful in terms of brand integrity, Richer Sounds has at its core strategies that aim to humanise the brand to all stakeholders alike. This includes the customer and employee alike, thus ensuring that the values communicated are intrinsic brand values and rather than just extrinsic brand messages. Some of these strategies include methods such as profit sharing and other incentive schemes, but 'Richer Sounds' also established staff

think tanks and fostered a sense of belonging amongst its employees, long before these business strategies were made fashionable by companies like Google, Facebook or eBay. Tellingly, the values strived for are often described as 'extended family values', trust and believe in the brand by both customer and employee. These are emotional, human values and in relation to tourism Higgins-Desboilles (2006, p1205) states that '"It is imperative that the concern for tourism development and promotion is returned to its purposes of fulfilling human values and human needs…' (Fadini 2013, p1)

This chimes with the insight that in the tourist product the "peak" experience is often small, but ultimately human centered. Tourism is very much dependent on the host communities ability to deliver these peak experiences, connected to moments of authentic hospitality. One could thus argue that only host communities that are fully engaged with, and empowered by, the nature of their local tourism product (much like the previously mentioned community of employees), will be willing and able to provide peak experiences consistently and authentically.

The peak experience itself is reliant on a complex variety of factors and 'without the supporting experience, it cannot happen' (Frischhut & Stickdorn 2012, p39). The peak and the supporting experiences would in the service design practice be described as 'Service Moments' (Schneider & Stickdorn 2010, p40). As the supporting experience can encompass anything from airport design to air quality or weather it may often be largely out of the host communities immediate control and due to the complexity of these service moments, service design cannot be applied to tourism in the same way as it might be applied to other more closed circle customer or service experiences.

Service design is capable of creating opportunities, identifying and solving problems and can enable the design of a framework in which peak experiences can occur. Although it may not be able to completely control the delivery of these experiences, this may offer in itself an opportunity to maintain the authenticity of these peak experiences or service-moments. If it can create a framework of micro-supporting experiences that create conditions conducive to the 'natural' occurrence of peak experiences, these peaks may more likely to be judged as having the authenticity and integrity so valued by visitors.

> 'Caused by rising importance of positive service experiences and the necessity for a conscious creation and communication of services, service design offers a possibility to make tourism services fit for the future'
> 'based on a customer-centred perspective, the approach reveals the need for collaboration of different players involved in the development of the tourism products and its service ecosystems.' (Frischhut & Stickdorn 2012, p39).

With view to sustainable tourism, it may be necessary to replace the term customer-centred perspective, with community centric. When discussing the concept of moving from tourism-centric to community-centric approach one researcher recalls being accused of espousing anti-tourism views. (Hales et al.,2013, p10&11) Rather than interpreting the term community-centric as meaning primarily the host community, when considering that '"community' is not a monolithic entity with one identity'.(Torres Feijo 2013, p.1) it could be suggested that community-centric may also be interpreted as also encompassing the visitor community. This is particularly relevant when speaking of the possibility of turning visitors into 'allies'. (Fardini 2013) of the host-community and we are thinking of responsible tourism as a form of tourism which is aimed at '"creating better places to live in and visit, for those who host and those who are hosted"(Goodwin, 2009; 2010)' (Fardini 2013, p5)

CULTURAL AND RURAL TOURISM AND CO-CREATION
According to Frischhut and Stickdorn (2012), service design is so far only used by very few, mainly large multi-national companies, 'since small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) lack the resources to hire external agencies.' They also assert that despite this, it is often the tourism entrepreneurs of these SMEs who' already live the basics of service design thinking in their daily lifes'. (Frischhut & Stickdorn 2012, p39) It is suggested that they already live Service Design thinking due to the direct human involvement they have with their customers and their personal investment through their constant problem solving and creation of experiences for their guests. Briassoulis (2006) speaks of the need for harnessing the tradition of this informality and turning it 'into a valuable tourist resource and a promising mechanism for flexibility and adaptation to changing socioeconomic circumstances.' (Briassoulis 2006,

p112) As this form of individual entrepreneurial service design thinking is likely to be done in ad-hoc and non-strategic approach, its effectiveness may be limited. What is often lacking is an effective, larger framework in which these efforts can be situated in and *'service design can be a very valuable approach'*, when it comes to enabling the *working together with other stakeholders within their service ecosystem, e.g. their destination in order to create a larger framework in which individual entrepreneurial efforts can flourish.* (Frischhut & Stickdorn 2012, p124)

The tourism sector is full of these individual entrepreneurs, but their relative economic and strategic isolation often means that there is little opportunity for them to feed into any regional tourism strategies in a meaningful way. Yet these individual entrepreneurs are often pivotal in the delivery of the peak experience and have valuable experience and ideas to contribute to the general discourse of regional tourism strategies.

Through its principles and processes, Service Design can provide frameworks that enable the inclusion of these individual entrepreneurs when strategies are developed and harness their often-intimate knowledge of their customers and their existing relationships, as these are valuable assets yet to be fully explored. This would also foster the sense of ownership over the wider regional tourism product and support its positive engagement with it.

It is very likely that co-creation between individual entrepreneurs and their customers is already happening on quite a large scale, as these individual use their knowledge of the specific visitor to help tailor their own offering or recommend other aspects of the regional tourism product, relevant to their customer. As Phillip Duke (2007) puts it, when reflecting on the tourist experience in relation to culture on Crete: *'I also cannot ignore the Cretans themselves, the people who work in hotels and bars or drive taxis and tour buses, and so on – the people of the island without whom the service industry would quickly collapse.'* (Phillip Duke 2007, p30) He goes on to talk about how these people often informally provide information and very much influence not only what the tourists will see, but also how they will see it. Co-creation that includes local people and visitors should be considered essential when developing regional strategies.

CROWDSOURCING AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN CULTURAL & RURAL TOURISM.

If co-creation is the process, crowd sourcing and social media can be utilised as some of the methods by which this process is facilitated.

> ***crowdsourcing:*** *the practice of obtaining needed services, ideas or content by soliciting contributions from an online community, rather than traditional employees or suppliers*
> Merriam-Webster Dictionary

> ***social media:*** *forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos)*
> Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Crowdsourcing and social-media are inherently dependent on community. When discussing community-centric tourism as encompassing both the host community and the visitor community, the issues needing to be considered are complex and multidimensional.

Host communities have an often-ambivalent relationship with the tourism industry. Although many communities welcome any tourism development as a means of generating income and offering business opportunities, the tourist lifecycle can mean that they pay a high long term price for relatively short term economic gains. Their original tourism offering and natural resources may be depleted and ownership and control moved from local ownership to multinational corporations, leaving little meaningful involvement and power in the hands of the community as a whole. (Andriotis 2000)(Briassoulis 2006)

Any new touristic development should thus be carefully considered with a long-term view to the maintenance of cultural integrity and sustainable use of local resources. Values need to be agreed on and respected by host and visitor communities alike. Such a framework should be considered essential for all sustainable tourism development activity, whilst the individual offering within this framework needs to be able to maintain autonomy. This can only be achieved by a human centered approach. Cultural, social and inter-generational values and discourse need to be at the core of any new business development for the responsible tourism

sector in order to achieve long-term sustainability. Design can easily visualise frameworks and communicate identity and values, but *'how we deal with the inherent contradictions that govern the staging and construction of identities need to be considered in view of the ownership of experience and the cultivation of belonging.'* (Wee 2013, p2)

Through technology and the creation of social networks not bound by time or place, the construction of identity has undergone a rapid transformation and an overall shift, from passive consumption of identity to the expressed desire of the individual to co-create identity has been observed. According to North V.P. (2007) consumers *'spend more and more time controlling, uploading, downloading, filming, recording and sharing their own personal experiences with products, services and brands,...'* (North V.P. 2007, p2) and this behavior influences the creation of identity and the formation of like-minded networks. The Internet is the reason where new terms such as crowdsourcing have been coined, but society is the place where this is enacted, even if its visibility and enablement is dependent on the digital realm.

> *"Whilst crowdsourcing is intertwined with the Internet, it is not at its essence about technology. – Far more important and interesting are the human behaviors technology engenders, especially the potential for the Internet to weave the mass of humanity together into a thriving, infinitely powerful organism."* (Howe 2009, p11)

The ability to weave together disparate groups of people, based on their values, interests and preferences means that host-communities and visitor-communities can transcend the traditional market place apparent in tourism where tour operators act as intermediaries that not only find the end-user/consumer (Apostolou and Karagiannis 2010, p 526) but often also narrowly define the products and values created. By coming together to define shared values, interests and meaning, these communities have the power to challenge what Hales et al. (2013) call the *'the blind acceptance of neoliberalism in the politics of tourism'* (Hales et al. 2013, p6) and can choose to exclude any intermediaries not sensitive to their cause.

Social media is where the power of peer opinion plays a central role and *'people trust their friends and family much more than they trust corporate marketing media.'* (Ernst&Young 2012, p10) and this reiterates the previously mentioned need for the creation of emotional, human centered values in tourism. Via the internet and social media, host and visitor communities can play an active part in destination marketing, which apart from encouraging visits, can help visitors in forming *'a compelling personal narrative about the country,* [or about a specific regional tourism offering] *which enhances their powers as 'viral agents' or informal advocates for the country's* [or the region's] *brand once they return home.'* (British Tourism Framework review 2009, p20)

2. CRETE - CULTURAL VALUES AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS

THE CRETAN CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT
This part of the paper it will be discussing how particular cultural attributes pertinent to Crete offer a manifold of potential for the development of a sustainable cultural and rural tourism offerings, through the application of design thinking and service design. Although these examples will be centered on Crete, because of the author's affinity and knowledge of the island, the idea is ultimately that the concepts presented are easily transferable to other equally culturally rich settings.

> *'With respect to the tourism life cycle of its tourist product, the island as a whole approaches the stage of consolidation with differences between regions.*
> *Regional authorities and the local business community are very concerned about the sustainability of the island's economy as well as the role of tourism in its further development.'* (Karagiannis and Tsoukatos 2003, p2)

Crete is a place steeped in history, rich in natural assets and local culture. Despite decades of touristic exploitation of the island, at its core it still has an authentic, living culture with many of its natural assets still intact, though this is ultimately threatened and the irretrievable

intergenerational loss of heritage and culture may ultimately arrive very quickly if the local communities are not empowered to value and sustain their identities.

Briassoulis (2006) states that *'the island's overall self-reliance has weakened, whilst pressures from tour operators and competition from other destinations have increased'.* (Briassoulis 2006, p113)

In the threatened loss of cultural authenticity, Torres Feijo (2013) speaks of the 'Trojan' effect as having been identified as a potential catalyst and accelerator for this deterioration. A well-designed, culturally sensitive and controlled framework would have the ability to strengthen Cretan local cultural integrity and to counteract the 'Trojan' effect. Careful targeting and growing a tourist audience which brings complimentary values and interests to the host community is achievable, providing the right methods are deployed and as Fadini (2013) points out: *'Tourists who behave in an ethical and respectful manner are, without doubt, an important resource in changing the nature of tourism ...'* (Fadini 2013, p6)

'A strong relationship between tourism and culture can help destinations become more attractive as well as more competitive. (Apostolakis,2003 Arzeni, 2009)'(Bakas, Kladou, Kladou 2013, p2) In order for this to happen the host community has to have a strong sense of its own identity and interests, and nurture these in a supportive framework which allows for customisation and individual freedom of expression of all stakeholders. A particular brand of localism, which is not protectionist may be needed to allow for such an environment, Yang, Ryan and Zhang (2013) speak of the opportunity to *turn the visitor into an ally of its economic, social, cultural sustainability,* by local communities establishing sustainable levels of identity. They go on to say that *'it is the sum of the elements that build the sustainable identity or makes conflict.'* (Torres 2013, p7) Service design can define the sum of the elements and facilitate the creation of these sustainable identities.

DIFFERENTIATING THE CRETAN CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT

In design and advertising the creation of identity is governed by the practice of branding design. The goal of any branding exercise is to allow the consumer to easily differentiate one brand, and its values, from another. All branding strategies aim to engage their target audience, win their loyalty and influence their buying behavior through the creation of a brand which the consumer can identify as being closely aligned with their own desires, values and interest, e.g. their overall lifestyle.

In Adverting differentiation is everything and most brands spend the majority of their advertising budgets on distinguishing their products through branding, from another companies almost identical offering. Since the advent of mass-production, this differentiation is mostly based on the creation of "emotional selling points", generated by branding and advertising. "Unique selling points" (where the product is distinctly different from any other product) are hard to come by in today's overcrowded market. The Cretan cultural heritage can offer many Unique Selling Points, but linking these to emotional selling points should still be seen as desirable, because Emotional Selling Points are extremely effective when communicating with a target audience and further help differentiation. Briassoulis (2006) argues that development should be managed to differentiate the Cretan tourist product and to integrate the economy and tourist sector. She goes on to say that this would thereby provide a *'long-term safety valves against the uncertainty of external factors as competition form other destinations and unfavourable future socioeconomic developments.'* (Briassoulis 2006, p112)

It could be argued that through its unique cultural and rural heritage, market differentiation should come naturally to the island of Crete. The desire to develop alternative tourism products based on Crete's rich heritage in order to attract a specialised is not new, but is threatened by decades of mass tourism that have led to an ever-increasing homogenization of the tourism product and have also started to lead to *"cultural alteration, such as loss of traditional values and authenticity, the commercialisation of culture, and attitudes that are pro-development whatever the cost."* (Briassoulis 2006, p110)

This undermines the local tourism industries' ability to generate customer loyalty. The package tourism industries' early strategy of using Crete *'as a cheap sea, sun and sand destination'* (Andriotis 2000, p.127) has lead to high dependence on mass tourism, tour

operators as intermediaries, high seasonality, an over -concentration in north coast resort and a degradation of natural resources. *'Crete today is dominated by package tourism.'* (Andriotis 2000, p.99) The fundamental problem with 'sun, sand and sea' is that, especially if sold in a homogenized and culturally divorced setting, these commodities are equally on offer elsewhere. As economic climates shift, low exchange rates and price differentiation become the only determining factor in beating the competition and these are very difficult economic factors to counteract sustainably. The fickle nature of a culturally bland 'sun, sand and sea' tourism market, ultimately feeds the creation of a downward spiraling tourism lifecycle. It does not support the creation of consumer loyalty based on a culturally differentiated product.

DIFFERENTIATION THROUGH THE STRENGTHENING OF LOCAL CRETAN CULTURE

> *'Cultural assets become tourism assets as soon as they start attracting tourists to the destination or create motivation to extend one's stay (Mc Kercher et al, 2004). In order for tourists to appreciate specific cultural assets, they should be attractive outside the local community, while their uniqueness must also be emphasized (Mc Kercher & Du Cros, 2003). Moreover, cultural tourist assets effectively tell a story, are accessible, qualitative, and offer a sense of authenticity and experience (Mc Kercher et al 2004).*
> (Bakas, Kladou, Kladou 2013, p.7)

Service design and design thinking, can offer strategies that can strengthen local culture and help innovate tourist offerings, by using their inherently co-creative processes and user-centred approaches. The core message has to be that cultural differentiation is equally as desirable for cultural heritage and as it is for the sustainable tourism product. To make cultural differentiation work, authenticity has to be preserved and culture inhabited by the community.

> *'Understanding the social and economic gains from tourism development, is an important consideration when planning for sustainable tourism development, as stakeholders such as local tourism entrepreneurs are very much part of the "tourism product" (Deery, JAgo & Fredline 2012). In fact, Buhalis (2000) argues that marketing of destinations should balance the strategic objectives of stakeholders with the sustainability of local resources, which is where culture plays a significant role.'* (Bakas, Kladou, Kladou 2013, p.5)

Rural communities are particularly suitable for cultural differentiation, as their relative isolation often means that their traditional cultural values and practices are still relatively intact and *'although it is claimed that because of tourism expansion host communities lose their authenticity and their customs, the Cretans have kept many of their local habits and tradition, (Areaia, 1996) …'* (Andriotis 2000, p.122) These lived local habits and traditions provide a solid base from which cultural identities and interests can be strengthened and re-established. Torres speaks of *habitability; i.e. an identity set has to be habitable and available in order to be sustainable.* (Torres Feijo 2013 p.3)

The awareness, that a strengthening of culture is important for the development of sustainable tourism and that local culture needs to be inhabited by citizens, has already been observed on Crete. In the district of Rethymnon, local cultural and tourism authorities have reportedly been re-considering their tourism approach, in order to attract more tourists that are interested in Rethymnons' local history and culture. Part of their strategy for attracting these tourists is to invest in local culture by for example*, 'funding museums to organize events which provide learning experiences to residents. This has a dual result. First, inhabitants learn more about their local culture and second, local people are actively involved in the cultural field as entrepreneurs and educators'.* (Bakas, Kladou, Kladou 2013, p6). A nascent shift from a tourism centric approach to a community centric one may be detectable, as research suggests that in their sustainable tourism plans the local authorities *'focused more on local residents than on tourists and paid significant attention to the support of traditional art.'* (Bakas, Kladou, Kladou 2013, p1)

These are positive signs of a change of attitudes and values, supported by local governmental strategies, which may eventually lead to a complete overhaul of how things used to done until recently. In 2000 Andriotis reported that no attempt were being made *'to incorporate the opinions of the Cretan community in the tourism planning process, but developers and planners choose top-down planning that leaves host communities with little*

input over the development of their community.' (Andriotis 2000, p153) Although culturally educating local inhabitants is not the same as planning via co-creation, these are important steps in the right direction. Evidence of a very deliberate co-creative planning approach can however be found in a 2012 MedStrategy Project report by the Archanon Asteriousion Municipality:

> *'The local stakeholders involved in the participation process, were engaged to build a shared vision of the rural development aimed at starting up a new model of governance for Sustainable Rural Development of the territory'.*
> *MedStrategy Project –Integrated Strategy for Sustainable development of Mediterranean Rural Areas.*

This is very encouraging indeed, as it is a clear indication of inclusive and co-creative local governmental planning strategies. However, what is needed in the long run is not just inclusive planning, but frameworks and mechanisms, which allow for co-creation as part of the everyday activities of the community.

PERSONALISING THE CRETAN CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT

Considering the importance of differentiating a cultural and rural tourism product, personalising the visitor's experience of the product can further increase its effectiveness in inspiring loyalty. Personalisation increases the effectiveness of emotional selling points and is a powerful tool in targeting segmented audiences. Traditional segmentation however is not without its difficulties:

> *'...the constantly changing persona of todays consumer means that they defy traditional market segmentation. This consumer has conflicting preferences and facets: shops online, but demands the human touch, insists on individualized service but communicates in packs.'* (Ernst&Young 2012, p2)

As general trends strongly point to the immergence of a 'maker' society, fuelled by internet driven co-creation opportunities, the role of the tourist as a passive recipient of the finished tourism product is outdated, last century mass consumption based and lacking meaning.

Greater personalisation of service and product is the gold standard for many companies and there is no reason to expect the consumers of a tourism product to be any different in their wants and needs. Current industry themes such as moving from a 'tourism to a visitor' economy may sound like semantics, but they highlight the need for the re-thinking of the roles stakeholders are assigned to. In relation to sustainable cultural and rural tourism, the assertion 'i am not a tourist', is based on the insight that in order to attract visitors that will act as *'allies' to its host communities economic, social, cultural sustainability,'*(Yang, Ryan and Zhang 2013) the desire of these visitors to not be reduced to a homogenous inter-changeable commodity, needs to be acknowledged and addressed. *'It is worth keeping in mind Mac Cannell's (1976) reminder that tourists are actual people and not just sociological subject.* (Duke 2007, p57)

Cretan communities have long been successful in establishing meaningful relationships with their visitors and seem to, anecdotally speaking, have a knack for making tourists feel like they are 'actual people'. It may be significant that locally there is a strong cultural distinction made between a guest and a tourist. Many visitors have experienced this personalisation through contact with the local community, being shifted from being viewed as and feeling like a tourist, to becoming a 'guest-tourist' and this has in turn influenced their behavior and "brand loyalty". There is evidence that Crete benefits from a large proportion of return visitors, particularly outside of the main summer season and research suggests that people who visited Crete more than twice showed a greater appreciation of aspects of the Cretan culture, such as the Cretan diet. (Angelakis, Periklis and Proust 2009, p18.) Appreciation of the host communities' culture may also help induce peak experiences, as *'Local stakeholders also agree that respect towards local history and culture expressed by foreign tourist may increase a similar feeling of respect in local residents'.* (Bakas, Kladou, Kladou 2013, p6) and the development of mutual respect is a good condition for true moments of hospitality to occur, thus aiding the creation of authentic peak experiences and the promotion of brand loyalty. Service Design theory takes the importance of mutuality into account, when recognising as Viladas (2011) puts it that *'Given that both parties (provider and client) interact when the service is delivered, both of them influence its outcome.'* (Viladas 2011, p23) If inhabited cultural heritage offers a strong differentiation for the cultural tourism

product, one would argue that the host-communities are the place where personalisation of the visitor experience of the heritage occurs. Although personalisation of products is also possible, it this the emotional selling point created by the direct human personalisation of a shared (service) experience that may prove the more powerful factor.

TARGETING AUDIENCES FOR THE CRETAN CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT

If an appreciation of local culture by tourists can be agreed on as being a valuable asset, just aiming to attract *"better quality tourists"* (Andriotis 2000, p126) to Crete and avoiding a *"low-income mass market"* (Andriotis 2000, p131), is not the answer for sustainable cultural tourism per-se. There may be more important factors for the appreciation of local culture than the socio-economic background of the visitor.

And indeed, research in connection with the Cretan heritage site of Spinalonga showed that the majority of tourists, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, were concerned over the potential alteration to heritage assets for the sake of tourist exploitation and desired cultural heritage protection. Karagiannis and Tsoukatos (2003) concluded that this could be *'considered as reflecting the attitude of the majority of todays tourists toward cultural heritage.'* (Karagiannis and Tsoukatos 2003, p.5) So, whilst many tourism strategies aim to attract a more high-end market, this should be considered as a fallacy when it comes to achieving sustainability or effecting customer loyalty. Though the initial economic benefit may be greater, the long-term impact on natural resources of this kind of resource hungry tourism can potentially be devastating. There is no reason to believe that high-end, luxury based tourists, from high socio-economic backgrounds are any more appreciative of local culture or more brand loyal than a low-income tourists per se.

Briassoulis (2006) identifies that *'education remains always the longer-term mechanism for the value change needed to support sustainable development choices where tourism develops harmoniously with other sectors of the Cretan economy.'* (Briassoulis 2006, p112) One can therefor conclude that the education of the visitor community is as important as the education of the host community.

In order to be motivated to be educated, a tourist has to first be engaged. Advertising also aims to engage people in order to 'educate' them about a product offering. A common method of engaging an audience, and thereby gaining permission to communicate brand information, is to establish a commonality (either real or aspirational) between the brand and target audience. The brand aligns itself with existing interests of the target audience as a way of establishing commonality and relevance. These commonalities are often quite small and are communicated via basic human emotion. The human wants and needs it offers to fulfill may be situated anywhere from basic to complex on Maslow's' hierarchy of need.

Establishing commonalities and highlighting shared interests, between host and visitor communities, is an important opportunity to engage and then educate visitors. It may be that the host community and the visitor community have a common cultural interest that is quite small, such as cooking. By situating this interest in the cultural context of the host community, via a cultural experience offering, the visitor can learn to appreciate the local culture without any coercion.

It follows that to develop sustainable tourism it is not necessary to attract tourists who already have a specific interest in Cretan culture. A wider potential target audience can be 'grown' by a cultural tourism offering that is interest based and therefor emotionally relevant. Thereby a tourist can be moved from being un-engaged in Cretan cultural heritage, to interested and to brand loyal and finally, to becoming brand advocate.

The 'take-aways':

'I believe in you '– **How authenticity of cultural experiences can move a passive consumer to a brand advocate.**
Strengthening local culture can empower host community to inhabit their culture and thereby providing the opportunity for culturally authentic peak experiences. *'A happy holiday experience self-evidently has the power to change the 'brand image' of that country* [or

community], *quickly and forever, in the mind of the holidaymaker.'* (British Tourism Framework Review 2009, p20) and the co-creative visitor is likely to share their experiences within their own social networks and thus influence other peoples holiday planning. The British tourism strategy report states that especially if the holidaymakers are an influential demographic, the word of mouth factor *'is significant because people talk to other people about their holidays...'*(British Tourism Framework Review 2009, p20) And that over time this can measurably improve a country overall international image.(British Tourism Framework Review 2009, p20)

'You're one of a kind' – How building individual relationships between visitor and host communities can lead to "brand loyalty" resilient to variant economic climate.

The by Briassoulis (2006) highlighted *'tradition of informality'* and the Cretans skill of making visitors feel like guests, has the potential to humanise the tourism experience and to build long lasting friendships. The reverse gaze of the host community (*Gillespie 2006*) is a powerful opportunity for host and visitor community alike. The residents of the Cretan mountain village of Magoulas for example, reportedly liked offering their hospitality and *'to enter into dialogue with foreigners since the encounter brings new ideas into their lives (Greger, 1985)'* (Andriotis 2000, p118) Similarly relevant a researcher reported that whilst doing participant observation with Cretan artisan woman, skills and knowledge where shared freely and she reported that: *'participants taught me various skills such as crocheting, knitting, sewing, felting, weaving and potting, which enabled me to get a better understanding of their lived reality.'* (Bakas 2013,p6) These valuable human encounters enable the appreciation of cultural heritage in an authentic context, and can inspire a love for the culture and host community, that makes a variant economic climate almost irrelevant.

'I like you 24/7' – How tailored activity offerings have the potential to overcome the limitations of seasonality by motivating visitors to discover new interests or build on existing ones.

In order to tap-into a visitors existing interests, connections have to be made between these and lived cultural heritage of the host community. If for example a visitor has a passion for baking it may be that, by creating a tourism offering specifically linked to the Cretan baking culture, an emotional selling point can be established and build on. This goes back to the need for emotional selling points as well as product differentiation. ICT development can offer ever expanding opportunities for the engagement of visitors in rural culture through tailored offerings such as GPS used for themed walking apps, augmented reality for archaeological site, social media sites for sustained pre & post visit engagement etc. (ALI A., FREW A.J., 2013)

Having a tailored activity offering based on the visitors pre-existing interests would both familiarise the visitor with the Cretan culture and could make it attractive beyond its current core-offering of sun, sand and sea. Thus interest in the island could become less dependent on the peak summer season. This may also create a new hybrid labour market, considering that *'in Crete, many tourism employees have a second job mainly in agriculture,...'* (Andriotis 2000, p118) This could suggest that there may already be many dual skillsets out there, suitable for a hybrid labour market and inducing a reverse trend to the one where the tourist evolution resulted *'in the abandonment of traditional agricultural and craft-related occupations because tourism-related jobs were perceived as generating higher income and more attractive (Haralambopoulos and Pisam, 1996)'* (Andriotis 2000, p121)

'Surprise me' – How co-creation and crowdsourcing of cultural rural experiences can offer innovation and the regulation of supply/demand by stimulating active social capital development.

The creation of a multitude of flexible micro-offerings, based on the skills and knowledge inherent in Cretan culture, has the potential to attract visitor communities, which identify with these offerings based on their own skills and knowledge. For example an Internet based community of people interested in gardening may actively participate with the host community in the co-production of other relevant micro-offerings related to gardening. This would have the added benefit of developing social capital through the existing, digital or real-time, social networks these communities inhabit and could positively influence their social

media communications in order to gain further ideas, participants and advocacy. Self-segmentation, via an audiences online behavior and social media communication, is a valuable resource and although *'traditional segmentation still has a strong part to play in designing products and broad targeting, when it comes to micro-segmentation it is the consumers' own self segmentation that truly identifies them – and what they want.'* (Ernst&Young 2012, p22)

Writing for the observer newspaper the journalist Will Hutton outlines how, throughout history, economic upheaval has destroyed whole industries and created new ones. Analysing the threat of mass unemployment through automation, he identifies four broad areas in which there will be vast job opportunities, the first being micro-production. He predicts a huge rise in mini-creators, who will deploy the Internet and micro-production techniques to produce goods customized for individual tastes. This concept may prove just as relevant to Service Design and the creation of experiences. Potentially, the offering of micro-experiences that build on peoples pre-existing interests, could be particularly suitable for a sustainable Cretan cultural and rural tourism offering, as it would be by its nature, small, tailored and self-renewing.

3. CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined the benefits of adopting a collaborative strategy, involving all stakeholders, when planning sustainable tourism products. It also discussed why the practice of service-design is a particularly suitable approach for this and how, through co-creation, Service design can create segmented and differentiated services and products, whilst maintaining overall strategic integrity and focus.

Integrated Advertising strategies can sell even a segmented offering as one cohesive product by identifying and communicating shared values and goals, offered by a multitude of small producers to a fragmented and ever evolving target audience.

The overall proposition is to imagine and develop a new tourism lifecycle, which takes into account both host communities and visitors as co-creators of mutually satisfying and meaningful experiences. Based on human interaction and shared interests, a new model should tap into the creative potential of local individuals and their guests, whist utilising the digital realm to develop its products and engage new audiences via social media and crowdsourcing. This is ultimately a positivist approach to the manifold challenges faced by community centric cultural tourism, but there is a need to optimistically embrace the opportunity for a shared value oriented tourism product, so that creative momentum may be gained.

There are many exciting opportunities waiting to be explored and many inspiring communities still to be brought together. We need human centered systems and policies, which enable meaningful exchanges of knowledge and experiences, to fulfill balanced social, environmental and economic objectives, co-created and defined, by our friends and us.

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