

The Concept of Experience Applied to Tourist Products Commercialized in São Luis (Maranhão, Brazil)

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Abstract

Analysis of the importance of applying the concept of experience in tourism products and services as a way to add value to tourism. Its objective is to verify if the dimensions of the tourist experience are applied to tourism products and services marketed, in the city of São Luís, Maranhão, with the object of analysis being the Historical Soiree Project of the Municipal Tourism Secretariat of São Luís, Maranhão, Brazil. Strategy of promotion of tourism in the region based on playful work and interaction with the viewer. The research was characterized as exploratory-descriptive, carried out by means of bibliographic and documentary research and field research, having as a data collection instrument interviews with tourists and visitors from January to February 2019. It discusses the concept of experience in its multiple meanings and how tourist experiences can provide memorable moments for tourists. It highlights the concept of experience tourism or experiential tourism when listed in tourism products and services. It characterizes

the Historical Soiree, showing how this action is performed to provide interaction with visitors, aligning the discussions of the dimensions of the experience with the reports of the participants.

Keywords: Experience in tourism; Tourist service providers; Historical Soiree; Touristic experience in São Luís, Maranhão, Brazil.

1. Introduction

As a socio-spatial, historical and cultural phenomenon, or tourism, we are following dynamic processes underway in many sectors, highlighting two or two profiles for two tourists and worshipping unplanned technologies and offering non-market tourism products and services. A new perspective is linked to tourism, in which destinations tend to add value to their offer of attractions, routes and services, in order to provide visitors with the consumption of products and experiences perceived as unique and provocative of the senses, based on motives, sensations and emotions.

As a result, there is the emergence of an economy of experience, which is based on the planning and organization of products and services with strong emotional appeal, linking sensory territorial experiences that involve greater interaction between tourists and destinations and the role of communities. In this sense, the constituent elements of the cultural heritage of a given region, such as popular festivals and celebrations, local ways of life, music, legends, gastronomy, handicrafts, not only add value to the tourist offer, defining the personality of the place to be visited, but they become important competitive advantages in the tourist market.

The stimulus to the creativity of the social actors is reflected in the creation of innovative tourist destinations that provide the expansion of the positive impacts of this activity, such as, for example, the conservation of the environment and greater connection of the communities with their heritage. Therefore, tourism, economy and memorable experiences are associated.

The experience is intrinsically related to the subconscious elements, triggered by a flavor, aroma, among other stimuli (Benjamin, 1989; Sousa, 2010). This is associated with memory, events and shared experiences that make them unforgettable. Tourism has a multiple and complex nature, having a direct relationship with services, economic activities, and an interpretative human activity of the world, resulting in situations of learning, leisure, business and entertainment. Added to these situations is the experience that the tourist adds and the knowledge resulting from them.

The tourist, as a subject, would be becoming more emotional, in search of a deeper relationship with the communities and with the scenery of their travels, having a more direct interaction with the local culture and customs. For tourists, the memory of an experience lived in a destination can be eternal. There are countless reasons that can cause pleasant emotions and sensations for travelers, and tourist products designed, planned, marketed and offered with the purpose of providing unique experiences for tourists, can be a determining factor for their loyalty and provides you with memorable moments.

Based on the above, this article aims to verify whether the dimensions of the tourist experience are applied to tourism products and services marketed in the city of São Luís, Maranhão, having as object of study the “Historical Soiree” tourism project, promoted by Municipal Secretary of Tourism of the city of São Luís,

Maranhão, Brazil. This action consists of a strategy to promote tourism in the region based on playful work and interaction with the viewer.

The central question was, therefore, to realize if the concept of experience is properly valued and applied in the construction of the local tourist offer. In order to operationalize the general objective, the following specific objectives were outlined: to understand the context that enabled the emergence of new forms of production and consumption of tourism products. Understand the experience as a factor of attractiveness of tourist destinations and identify the products and services offered in São Luís, Maranhão, and verify if and how they apply the dimensions of experience tourism.

2. Materials and Methods

In view of the nature of the investigation, the qualitative approach of a descriptive character proved to be the most adequate to achieve the proposed objectives. Qualitative research develops in a natural situation, has rich data to be described, focusing on reality in a complex and contextualized way, where the researcher enters the natural environment of the research and obtains direct data from the source, looking for the real meaning that the research participant gives his life and things (Lüdke and André, 1986).

As data collection procedures, bibliographic research and field research, of an exploratory-descriptive character, were carried out. The bibliographic research allowed the theoretical basis on the subject in question, as well as the definition of the categories of analysis that would be prioritized by the investigation. During the field research phase, initially the mapping of practices, products and services in the city of São Luís, Maranhão, was carried out, which take experience as the basis for its formatting; subsequently, data collection was carried out, using semi-structured interviews as instrumental to tourists. The local community and tourist service providers, in a total of 50 interviews with tourists and 50 interviews with people in the community. In addition to interviews with the managers of the State and Municipal Tourism Secretariat.

3. Results and Discussion

The economy of experience has been impacted different sectors in societies, among which tourism stands out. Throughout its development and consolidation, tourism activity has undergone changes in spite of the incorporation of new technologies, the emergence of social media, which expand the possibilities of consumption of spaces, products and services, reflecting on new models of planning and management of tourist destinations in the market. Furthermore, it is observed that the change in the behavior of tourists has redirected the focus to the creation of tourism products with a strong appeal to the emotions of visitors; such movement has been called experience tourism or experiential tourism. In order to understand its meaning, it is necessary to define the concept of experience and tourist experience.

The concept of experience includes multiple meanings, becoming complex and variable according to the theoretical perspective adopted - anthropological, sociological, psychological and geographical. A first approach on the subject refers to experience as knowledge or expertise related to daily tasks, uninterrupted or habitual, which occur in a continuous flow (Hennes, 2002; Schmitt, 2000); the second perspective refers to experience as the process of experiencing different or unusual situations, which can cause feelings of

discomfort or pleasure (Turner, 1974; Pezzi and Santos, 2012). Other approaches (Pine II and Gilmore, 1999; Oh, Fiore and Jeong, 2007; Matos, 2014) consider the experience a phenomenon that occurs in the consumer's mind when he is subjected to different types of physical, emotional or intellectual interactions: "The experience is manifested in an emotional interpretation of what is seen, heard, smelled or felt" (Pitkänen and Tuohino, 2003, p. 12).

It is understood that the experience emerges as a particular event that occurs in response to certain stimuli and involves the totality of the being that feels it, be it real, unreal or virtual, and results from direct observation or participation in a certain event (Andres et al, 2006). The concept of experience is inseparable from the concept of memory. At this level, we resort to the thought of Benjamin (1983), for whom the experience is related to memory and tradition. When discussing the meaning of experience in the appreciation of works of art in modern times, the author points out that an event to be considered an experience, must refer to deeper meanings, which enable a connection between the subject and history, otherwise the event will be in the level of an experience, which does not lead to a deeper recording in memory:

The structure of memory is considered a decisive for the philosophical structure of experience. In fact, experience is a fact of tradition, both in collective and private life. It consists not so much in isolated events fixed exactly in memory, as in accumulated data, often unconscious, that converge in memory (Benjamin, 1983, p.30).

In the market context, the experience is related to the perceptions and feelings of consumers in their consumption practices, having an individual character: "[...] the experiences are inherently personal, there is only in the mind of an individual who has been entangled in a emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level. Therefore, there is no way for two people to go through the same experience, because each experience results from the interaction between the stage of the event (like a play) and the stage of each mind" (Pines II; Gilmore, 1998, p. 89). The experiences also vary according to the situational context, since "each experience derives from the interaction between the event that happened, and the individual's state of mind (his thoughts, his sensations)" (PINE II and GILMORE 1999, p. 12). According to these authors, the concept of experience encompasses four dimensions: a) entertainment; b) education; c) escapism; and d) aesthetics, varying in the intensity of the consumer's participation (passive or active) (Figure 1).

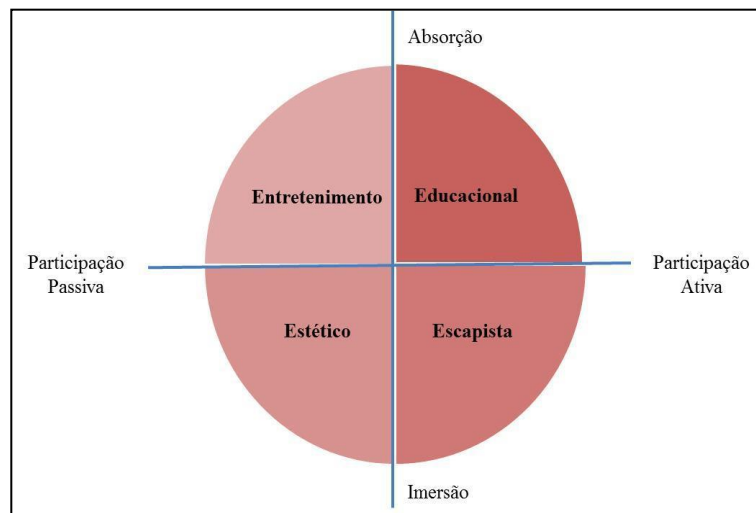


Figure 1. Dimensions of Experience.

Source: Adapted from Pine and Gilmore (2019).

In the model proposed by Pine Gilmore (1999), it is observed that at the level of consumer participation there are two possibilities: absorption refers to the attention that is given to the experience and immersion consists of a direct involvement or participation in the experience. The first highlighted category, entertainment, happens passively and retains attention, being the most common form of experience. Learning is portrayed by the education category, in which knowledge construction occurs through the attention and active participation of individuals. The third category is aesthetics, in which the viewer acts passively, only at the level of contemplating the experience; and the last category refers to escapism / evasion, in which the customer / consumer is in a phase of total immersion in the experience.

This perspective is focused on consumer behavior and emphasizes experiences as a differentiation strategy, increased competitiveness of companies and customer loyalty in relation to other products and services offered in the market, through active consumer participation throughout the process. Thus, the economic value of the experience lies in the perception attributed by the consumer to the event, which must be unique, distinct, individualized and, therefore, unforgettable (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

In the economy of experience, the stimulus to the five senses increases the potential for differentiating offers, while involving consumers in the event or scenario produced, eliciting unique emotions. Some theorists (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Pine and Gilmore, 1999), have emphasized the importance of aesthetics, hedonism, fun as values that guide consumer decisions and behavior in contemporary times. In the so-called dream society (Jensen, 2001), the emphasis is on the emotional value of products, goods and services; consumers look for stories and emotions in them, in addition to active participation and greater interactivity, seeking greater autonomy and protagonism of emotions and lived experiences.

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experience is an event of the past, strong enough to remain in the memory of a long time” (Larsen, 2007, p. 15).

Considered a socio-spatial phenomenon, tourism is understood as the set of interactions that are established between visitors and hosts in the destination region, that is, “a complex combination of interrelationships between production and services, integrating a culturally based social practice, with historical heritage to a diverse environment (Moesch, 2000). Tourism implies the reorganization of territorial spaces based on the implantation or improvement of infrastructure, equipment and attractions, of the commercial and hospitality relations involved in tourism practice.

As a result of these moments of suspension from everyday life, there is the consumption of the tourist product, translated into the tangible and intangible aspects that materialize in the so-called tourist experience: “The trip is not just a geographical, cultural or social displacement, but an inner journey, which justifies being a fundamental experience in people's lives”(Trigo, 2010, p. 23). Based on the concepts of experience presented and, adopting an anthropological perspective, the tourist experience "aims to look at the individual in the interruption of his routine and repetitive behavior" (Pezzi and Vianna, 2015, p. 170); The tourist experience is seen as “a complex combination of objectives, but essentially subjective factors that shape the feelings of tourists” (PAGE and CONNELL, 2009, p. 483).

For the purposes of this research, the tourist experience is the “subjective evaluation of an individual (affective, cognitive and behavioral) and the experience of events related to his tourist activities before (planning and preparation), during (at the destination) and after the trip. (remembrance)” (RITCHIE; TUNG; RITCHIE, 2011, p.1369).

The tourist activity has an aesthetic dimension of the experience that is related to the consumption of the heritage, culture and environment of the places, often reinforced by marketing strategies. In the field of tourist consumption, the importance that experiences acquire in building the image and brand of destinations favors the diversification of attractions and possibilities of consumption of the tourist offer. Activities that generate feelings of entertainment, adventure, avoidance, and links with the history and culture of the places may be able to evoke positive or favorable memories in the minds of tourists / consumers, generating feedback from consumption.

Aho (2001) distinguishes four essential elements of a tourist experience: a) emotional experiences: they are present in most tourist experiences; b) learning or information experiences: those that are intentional or unintentional; c) practical experiences: those that present a variety of forms of professional experiences; d) transformation experiences: those that modify the body or the mind. If tourist service meetings are transformed into "experience meetings", integrating them into the tourism experience to which they are related, this will create added experiential value for tourists and increase the creation of knowledge about them for service providers (Sørensen; Jensen, 2015).

Consumer experiences can be translated into different sensations such as the pleasure of smelling the sea air on a boat trip or even co-piloting a boat, or having your sentimental memory stimulated by the experience of listening and participating in a soiree. As we can see, there are countless reasons in a tourist experience that can cause different emotions and pleasant feelings for the traveler, depending, of course, on how the tourist products are conceived, planned, marketed and offered to the tourist.

In the dimensions of a memorable tourist experience (MTE), several authors (Tung and Ritchie, 2011; Kim,

Ritchie and Mccornick, 2012, Kim, 2014; Aroeira, Dantas and Gosling, 2016) have investigated the relationship between personal, subjective factors and psychological factors of tourists and the environmental or external variables related to the tourist destination - such as the infrastructure and engagement of service providers and public managers, which affect the perception of the quality of products / services offered by tourists. In these studies, although with some differences, some elements are highlighted, such as emotion, knowledge, cultural heritage, accessibility, events, destination management. For these authors, it is necessary to take into account the entire context surrounding the creation of the experience since the existence of available equipment and services, the technical qualification of the service providers, preservation of the environment, and the relationship between tourists in the activities and their involvement with the local community.

The marketing perspective helps us to understand the process of building experiences by tourism service providers, since it allows the establishment of planning and management strategies for the customer / consumer experience through the customization and co-creation of activities (Pine ; Gilmore, 2011) and the generation of emotions and remarkable events (Schmitt, 2004) that promote the transformation of those involved. The positive offer of services can be established as a result of a beneficial relationship between what is projected to the tourist, through marketing work, as well as through a creative look (Hartley, 2005), aiming at local development:

[...] Local development is indispensable, since the actions established on the cultural and tourist level must have a direct impact on the lives of the inhabitants, on their economic and social conditions, on the future of the territories, with respect for the natural and human components (Mazuel, 2000, pp. 99-100).

Bearing in mind that the experiences are individual and non-transferable (PINE and GILMORE, 1999), tourists are not only consumers, but creators of their own travel experiences. The emergence of a new profile of the tourist consumer also contributes to the emergence of memorable tourist offers, and to the thematization of destinations in favor of unique and significant experiences that add value to the product through local heritage, history, and culture:

The applicability of the economy of experience in the day-to-day life of companies should include the correct plot (strategy), the appropriate cast (personnel) and the action script (processes). All other departments arising from the metaphor of a play should “participate” in the production of the experience, revealing the theater that exists in each business and letting each one establish their stage of performance, including the client, who takes advantage of experiences to evolve, grow culturally, improvising and reforming, giving such value to experiences that one does not mind paying a premium price [...] this (is) the moment of assimilation of the progression of economic value, due to its potential added value, pointing out its capacity to behave and generate wealth and distinction among those who promote it (COELHO et al., 2015, p. 7).

Post-tourists seek products and destinations that combine entertainment, connection, hospitality, security,

personalization and education. Reflections of postmodern societies, this group of consumers crave peculiar, unique offers, to experience different sensory experiences through smell, sight, touch, hearing and taste. At the same time, post-tourists seek to interact with the local community. Coupled with new information and communication technologies, social media, tourism service providers can create and / or format products with high levels of emotional content and interactivity, enabling tourists to enjoy multisensory offers.

The emergence of a new tourism is related to the processes of globalization, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the new profile of tourists, which imply new models of management and organization of tourist spaces with a view to the consumption of memorable experiences: “the creation of events and shows that enable tourists to feel and live the emotion of the place, in a constant creative process of innovation, is one of the great challenges of tourist destinations” (Dalonso, Lourenço, Remoaldo and Netto, 105, p.114). From this scenario of transformations, information and experience emerge as strategic values of innovation and competitiveness of destinations in the market.

The result of these efforts consists of not only increasing the competitiveness of tourist destinations and differentiating the offer, but above all in the memorability and uniqueness of the experience. It is in a sense that experience tourism has been the target of interests and debates among tour planners, public and private managers, students and tourism and hospitality professionals as a vector for local and / or regional development and the strengthening of cultures and identities.

However, it is important to note, as explained by Trigo (2010), that not every trip becomes a tourist experience, and Coelho et al (2015, p.07) emphasize that “[...] with very few exceptions, companies are still in the process of incorporating concepts that lead them to search for a differential that can be justified as an experience strategy”(Figure 2).



Figure 2. The relationship between experience and tourism product.

Source: Adapted from Cooper (2005).

The approach on economy of experience and tourism leads us to reflect on the applicability of the dimensions of experience approached by Pine and Gilmore (1999) and encouraged by the tourism production chain of São Luís, Maranhão, as a way of differentiating and inserting this destination in the market national tourism. In the next section of the paper, the methodological procedures and the main results obtained during the investigation of experience and tourism in the city of São Luís, Maranhão are presented.

From the meaning of the participants' reports of these practices, it is possible to understand if and how the dimensions of the experience are applied. The first aspect pointed out by the interviewees who participated in the Historical Soiree and the Historical Serenade was the unique character of the experience, as can be

seen in the following statements: “I think the event has poetry, it has something playful and it also has an almost religious way. The tour is like a procession and I find it very interesting and different. My people, in Colombia, we don't do anything like that”(Informant 02). Yet, “Very beautiful, I've never seen anything like that. I really liked it, very good”(Informant 04).

An informant who underlined highlighted the memorable factor, the striking episode in the tourist's memory: “I am thrilled, I am amazed, delighted. Since the first time I came to São Luís, but I didn't see it here, it is the second time that I have the opportunity and I am extremely delighted” (Informant 06).

When asked about what kind of feelings caused by the participants, the interviewees were emphatic in affirming the aspects of education, sociability, relaxation and well-being, as pointed out by the following informants: “Tranquility, peace, coziness. To interact with other people”, “Gratitude. The question of love for my city” (Informant 08).

Tourist travel presupposes the interruption of the daily rhythm by the consumption of unique experiences and, in this sense; tourist experiences are created to strengthen the links between tourists / consumers and the images and brands of destinations. The Historical Soiree includes elements of experience design in the process of setting the spaces in the historic center, in the use of actors to perform performances, in the interaction of musicians with the public, and in the theme of the stories that are enacted throughout the script.

One of the informants reported the importance of learning about the history and culture of the city in a playful way, through the interaction between the actors, the heritage and the audience: “The event was very marked because of more knowledge than us are having. We also got to know the Historical Center a little yesterday, so we're getting to know it more through the Serenade” (Informant 05).

The interviewed informants pointed out as main characteristic the expansion of knowledge about the history and culture of the city, of its colonial past based on the staging and musicality, elements that activate the individual memory and articulate with the memory of the urban space. Araújo and Posenatto (2010, p.127) reinforce the potential of the arts for the development of tourism, pointing out that art plays “the function of an effective tool in the reproduction and propagation of the culture of any locality, because through it is possible to count the history of a people and reaffirm their cultural identity through differentiated and creative entertainment” and, thus, provoking new experiences in the city.

As Benjamim (1983) emphasizes, experience is linked to memory and tradition. The elements staged by the Historical Soiree (Figure 3) trigger elements of memory, enabling the apprehension of the experience, while allowing the emergence of different emotions, and private memories for tourists / visitors who consumed this product.

When asked about the type of feelings caused by the tour, an informant expressed it as follows: “It is nostalgic, despite not having lived at the time, but being from a long-lived family, so most of these songs that I listen to today, it takes me back to the time when my mother and great-aunts sang to me. So, for me, every time I listen to a song like that, by Catulo da Paixão Cearense and such, it is remote to the times, forty years ago, when I was cherished by these songs. So, I like it very much” (Informant 04).



Figure 3. Historical Soiree.

Source: Anonymous, 2019.

Tourism encourages the preservation and conservation of the areas where it develops, strengthens the community spirit, promotes the appreciation of the memory and history of a particular place. “The understanding that the tourist activity itself can function as a motivator for the maintenance of the local identity places tourism as one of the great current economic alternatives for urban centers [...]” (Simão, 2000, p. 04).

The Historical Center of São Luís keeps elements that evoke affective memories for the local community, it is a place-memory that evokes memories of a certain historical context. Initiatives such as Historical Soiree and Historic Serenade, Sunset at the Palace, contribute to the actions of revitalizing this tourist space, through the establishment of a collaboration network between public managers and private initiative.

4. Conclusion

By transforming the heritage as an object of the tourist look, this activity promotes innumerable relationships, causing significant transformations in the social, economic, environmental and cultural life of the receiving society. These effects can be both positive and negative. Regarding the positive effects of tourism on the culture visited, we have the renewal of the uses of heritage, the enhancement of the identity of the place and the strengthening of festivals and cultural traditions.

Another opportunity focuses on the recognition of local receptive agents on the importance that the experience tourism segment acquires for the city of São Luís. According to the municipal managers interviewed, tourists and visitors - despite the preferences and motivations that have an impact on the choice of the municipality as a holiday destination - they often show interest in knowing the local heritage and cultural aspects.

The possibility of formatting a thematic script based on traditional knowledge, practices and experiences, emerges as an alternative to diversify the options of products and services offered by local receptive agencies, while suggesting strategies for customer loyalty, “adding greater value to its tourist offer, emphasizing the authenticity of its natural and cultural scenarios, and the contact with the population of each place, that is, emphasizing what is called the 'sense of place' (Molina, 2015, p.56).

Tourism cannot be seen in an isolated or fragmented way. As pointed out by Beni (1998), tourism is a

system formed by several elements. This systemic vision is perceived and evaluated by tourists when they are visiting the destination, therefore, the joint work of all tourism professionals is essential to deliver to tourists a differentiating experience from their daily lives, with quality, ethics, responsibility and broad participation by the local community. Thus, tourism can be translated into an instrument for the achievement of sustainability and local development.

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