

MARKETING THE INBETWEENNESS: TANGIBLES AND INTANGIBLES IN TOURISM

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Abstract

The inbetweenness refers to boundaries that, instead of separating, serve as a means for interaction and confluence. In tourism such cases can be observed on many levels, whereby there exists a 'gray' area between the coverage of various scientific disciplines: it is about the general ambiance, the normal daily life and cultural heritage of a place, which exists at a destination anyway with or without the presence of tourists. For many, what cannot be made tangible economically, is located outside the boundaries of the economy and is therefore denied. However in areas of tourism where disciplines such as economy, sociology, anthropology or social-psychology meet a rich encounter takes place that embraces a broad array of sources and clues for experiences. This means that the promotion of a tourism destination based on a multi-disciplinary approach that communicates values on socio-cultural or anthropological levels can parallel traditional marketing strategies, opening even more channels for communication, not so much for selling purposes, but for drawing the attention to the storehouses of meanings and experience clues that represent daily life at any destination: the marketing of the inbetweenness.

Keywords: *liminality; marketing; multi-disciplinary approach; tourism; tourist experience*

JEL Classification: *L19, L 83, M83*

I. INTRODUCTION

Marketing in general relates to the process of communicating the value of a product or service to customers for selling purposes. On the surface, the case of tourism is not any different and the term product usually refers to tangibles (such as souvenirs or food) or services such as hospitality. However, any tourism destination in itself can be a source of interest for tourists, including all that is there with or without the presence of tourists: local daily life, infrastructure or architecture. Tourists do not pay for these possible experience sources, meaning that no direct market value is involved and their marketing turns into a difficult enterprise. Additionally tourists find themselves with a dual role to play: that of customers of products and services they paid for, while enjoying objects and phenomena that leave them in the role of consumers without being clients. The inbetweenness of experience sources forming a means for interaction and confluence as well as the ambiguity from a market technical perspective of a tourist's stay at a holiday destination are described in this article and it is argued that in tourism nowadays marketing should concern not only societal relations and branding, but also the marketing of this inbetweenness, referring to communicating objects and phenomena without direct economic value in tourism to visitors who may be consumers but not customers.

II. CLUES TO EXPERIENCES

Tourists get their sensory intake from sources, called impact sources (Gisolf, 2009). Similarly, other terms used are 'toured objects' (Wang, 1999) or 'experience clues' (Schmitt, 1999, Carbone, 2004, Kozak and Baloglu, 2011). All clues at a destination can be viewed as an amalgamation of places generating experiences or as storehouses of meanings that capture value in use and frame expectations for experiences (Snepenger, Snepenger, et al., 2007).

These storehouses or impact sources can be differentiated from others on the basis of economic value. Tourism destinations consist of tourism services, such as hotels or restaurants, and also of tourist attractions, whereby a distinction can be made between the main attraction embodying the destination's pulling power and side attractions taking advantage of the tourists' presence. The former can also be called a main impact source and the latter side impact sources (Gisolf, 2009). For those attractions that are specifically developed or adapted for tourism, visitors will have to pay – in other words these sources represent economic value and are market dependent.

Next there is the general ambiance of a place with its normal daily life and cultural heritage, aspects that are present anyway whether tourists are there or not. The destination shares these impact sources or experience

clues with tourists and hence they can be called Shared Impact Sources (Gisolf, 2009) and they form the basic ingredient of any (tourism) destination. One characteristic is that tourists do not pay for their use and therefore they do not represent direct economic value in tourism. In most cases locals do not receive money for the tourists' presence either, other than from additional economic activities such as selling souvenirs or by improved local infrastructure, for example. It must also be clear that main or side tourism attractions are just expressions of a destination's culture and not its embodiment. This is an important observation, since it is in contrast to most marketing techniques following the ruling economic approach, whereby marketing is restricted to these impact sources with economic value, while the rolling hills, neat little churches or the colourful apparel of the local people are used as background for the promotion of specific tourism attractions. In marketing, what matters to the local people – their daily life and surroundings – is pushed backstage (MacCannell, 1976) to create opportunities for visitors to spend. Beach destinations form another interesting example: although their presence does not involve a previous investment and their access is free (in most countries), they are used as background for the well-developed infrastructure in their vicinity.

All those services that tourists spend money on are generally called tourism products and include lodging, restaurants, local transport, tourism attractions, guide services or the sales of souvenirs. These products are offered at the holiday destination and the person buying them becomes a client and maybe labelled guest, visitor, diner, passenger or participant. Since the primary relation of this individual with the tourism destination is based on economic transactions, the model of tourists as clients applies in most cases. The services and products bought by tourists will provide a sensory intake to be 'digested' and formed into possible experiences.

However the many objects or phenomena that serve as experience clues and for which a tourist does not pay cannot be labelled as products and therefore tourists cannot play the part of client either: they are just tourists (visitors/travelers) and nothing else. Actually, the status of tourists is ambiguous: upon arrival at the holiday destination they temporarily abandon social status and home environmental influences and this can be described as a time of transition and transformation (Turner, 1969). It is like living in-between two realities: the home environment, which has been left behind, and the destination, where a tourist finds himself physically, but he does not form part of it. It is a situation of a betwixt and between and is also called liminal. Tourists enter into the unknown, where they do not participate in daily routine activities and slide into a world where their "rules" no longer apply. It is this inbetweenness in space related as well as social levels that may form an important part of the holiday experience, however, it is often ignored by most marketing activities.

Those impact sources that do not represent direct economic value in tourism usually form the backbone of any tourism destination, but they are not part of the tourism supply as presented by tour operators or the like. The inbetweenness of these shared impact sources – being there but economically denied – is therefore a major problem to be marketed: how to market something that has no direct economic value to people in a liminal situation. In practice, for many people working in tourism, these so-called shared impact sources simply do not exist. For example Kozak and Baloglu (2011: p.154) state that “tourism destinations consist of distinct and interrelated products and services under a brand name and generally are considered a geographical area.”

Discarding everything with direct economic value in tourism leaves a destination with a series of experience clues based primarily on socio-cultural or environmental characteristics. Additionally, when considering the tourists' status at a holiday destination as being liminal, societal relations and the 'local storehouses of meanings' may frame expectations, but for experiences independent of these economic and social relations. Stripping a destination from all those impact sources that represent economic value in tourism and their subsequent social relations leaves this destination with a basic set of characteristics and setting up their inventory is a necessary exercise for any destination when involving tourism.

Additionally, there is more to it than just this difference on the basis of economic relations between main and shared impact sources: it also embodies different sets of expectations that tourists foster before setting out on their journey or even before deciding where to go.

III. EXPECTING CLUES

The distinction between the various experience clues based on their possible economic value for tourism leads to a differentiation of expectations among tourists. These expectations are developed on the basis of underlying travel needs and motivations. It is a long path a tourist has had to follow to reach this moment of encounter with the holiday destination, starting with the generation of the first travel needs, motivations and subsequent expectations. A tourist to be considered as such has to travel to an area that is different from his own environment, which means there is some degree of uncertainty – containing the elements of the unknown - that in turn spark off expectations. With an expectation a person thinks that he knows beforehand what something may look like or how an experience may turn out and what can be considered most likely to happen. Expectations are based for the most part on images and for a smaller part on verbal expressions or simple facts. These images and information may be stored in our memory because from childhood onwards they have been received from many different sources (García-Mas, 2005). From the start, expectations feed on what is already stored in our memory,

which includes previous experiences and fixed ideas that may include prejudices; afterwards external sources, such as travel guides, books, films or television programmes start feeding the expectations, including the verbal sources from family members, friends or colleagues; finally there are the background images or associations, which may form and influence our expectations (Gunn 1988; Taski and Gartner, 2007; Zahra, 2012).

Marketing a holiday destination's pulling power consists of communicating its main tourism attractions, often emblematic for a town or region and well defined in tourism terms. Expectations can be set accordingly and tourists have a fair idea of costs and logistics involved. Therefore, in the case of main and side tourism attractions, expectation levels are as high as the motivational energy that pushes a potential tourist. While main tourism attractions are usually widely publicized, it is the element of the unknown that may intrigue certain tourists. The lack of clear expectations, not knowing what will happen, the lack of anticipation or the vagueness of the type of experiences that may be generated, are elementary in the case of shared impact sources. This lack of information and clear cut expectations can be remedied partially in a different way. There is another internal source feeding our expectations: our imagination. Imagination as a projection of possibilities can bring people to the point where they go in search for sensory experiences that have been consigned in everyday life to the margins or rejected altogether (Lengkeek, 2001). The imagination may lead to metaphors, and the latter are crucial for the theory of imagination, whereby existing notions can be given new interpretations and their significance and value extended. In tourism many types of metaphors and narratives can be found, which in turn can be considered as metaphorical re-descriptions of reality (Lengkeek, 2001). The connections which are created between tourists and their destinations in this way simplify the temporary holiday context and form a way of proceeding from the known to the unknown (Trubshaw, 1995).

Expectations therefore are often based on metaphors that help grasp more easily the unknown of a situation to confront. Some possible holiday destinations may strike the imagination, while others evoke fixed ideas, such as the case of the idea of romanticism in Paris during springtime. “Caribbean atmosphere”, “green season” or “cloud forest” are all metaphorical utterances commonly used in marketing to fuel the imagination and possibly the expectations. Another example of a metaphor is “tourism industry” with the interesting observation that what was intended to be a figure of speech – the terms “green industry” and “industry without chimneys” were first coined during the early 1970s – has now been incorporated into the everyday narrative.

While all those experience clues that represent market value in tourism are well documented and serve as a source for well-defined expectations, shared impact sources represent only a little pulling power, they are less documented and travelers depend therefore more on their imagination.

IV. SENSING CLUES

Expectations do not just refer to what may happen or how objects may look. There is another unknown factor involved once a tourist arrives at his holiday destination: how a tourist lives experiences under the destination's conditions. The question regarding which senses play a dominant role and to what extent may not be of much importance for the average beach vacationer, but holiday arrangements involving more complicated itineraries do pose this issue. Marketing has a lot to do with it: the communication it intends is presented mostly in language and visual images. Main and side tourism attractions are shown through images (still or moving) with the use of spoken and written language as support. It also means that for many, experiencing main tourism attractions is initially dominated by visual observation.

However, the moment of experiencing the general ambiance of a place or local daily life involves much more than just the visual aspect. Local smells and noises, range of temperatures or tasty dishes form an intrinsic part of the encounter of a tourist and his holiday destination. Marketing smells is a hard job to accomplish, although precisely it is smell that produces stimuli with the greatest capacity to generate lasting memories; these in turn are associated with different levels of sensations and emotions (García-Mas, 2005). Being in New Delhi in June may generate lifelong memories of its suffocating heat and smells. Not only is local life ignored in the “tourism industry” for lack of a direct market value, the impossibility of communicating which of the senses are in play and the type of sensory intake that can be expected and may dominate, make shared impact sources even harder “to sell”.

The extent to which the senses are used by tourists at their holiday destination and the intensity of their use are mainly psychological factors and this depends on the person. The same holds true for the extent tourists want to involve themselves in the locals' everyday life and it should become clear that the use of shared impact sources is not clear cut for all tourists.

V. CLUES FOR WHOM

Although the gamut of travel motives is as broad as the number of people travelling and hence the array of expectations covers almost any sociocultural expression, a number of general orientations can be distinguished. In

this context the concept of shared impact sources has another application: as a tool to help distinguish tourists from any other traveller. For the former it means that social status is temporarily abandoned, but other travellers remain socially the same, regardless of where they are. This also means that at a destination the tourists' gaze (Urry 1990) is different from that of any other visitor, who will look at their environment according to the own sociocultural status. In tourism the liminal status of tourists is voluntary just as their motivations and expectations; in contrast, travellers in general have an obligatory reason for moving from one place to another. Having personally enriching experiences is the primary source of motivation for tourists, but that is not usually the case with other travellers such as athletes, lecturers, business people or family visitors. There are many travellers that may fit into the 'official' category of tourists as set out by the UNWTO (WTO, 1995), but if they lack the element of liminality, one could arguably doubt to what extent they can be considered tourists or not. The reason for insisting on this difference is rooted precisely in the idea of being either oneself and respecting the other as such, or having the feeling of abandoning home societal constraints to enter the other's space and experience something new, as in the case of holidaymakers.

The tourist experience itself is a varied entwining of alienation of everyday life and longing for a different place. The extent to which one is inclined to *detach* from the familiar world (centre) and *attach* to a world elsewhere (centre-out-there) may vary significantly and results in a "continuum" of experiences (Elands and Lengkeek, 2012). The extent to which tourists let go of the orientation of their everyday world and enter a state of liminality depends on the extent to which the liminal experience can be weighed against persisting social structures (Thomassen, 2009). For people being in a position of liminality means foremost a withdrawal from social action and structures; actually the very structure of society is temporarily suspended (Turner, 1969). In liminal zones a liberation occurs from the social, intellectual and physical limiting factors inherent to working conditions in the Western world and this refers to the body as well as the emotional inner-person: the liminal experience refers precisely to the feeling of being more one's authentic self with a higher degree of freely expressing it (Wang 1999). Travel needs and motives differ highly among (potential) tourists revealing the importance of the mental distance in tourism rather than just a physical one.

Cohen (1979) followed a phenomenological reasoning in which he proceeded from the degree to which tourists let go of the orientation of their everyday world and focus on the Other and the Unknown. Based on Cohen's five orientations, Elands and Lengkeek (2012) set up a series of five modes as part of a quantitative study of people camping at nature sites, ranging from the amusements mode in which individuals step outside the ordinary in search for entertainment, to the dedication mode, whereby the estrangement from ordinary life is so strong that a new everyday reality is sought elsewhere. These shifts in modes or orientations come from both an alienation from everyday life as well as from a longing for being elsewhere and they relate to two other terms used in this respect: travel motives based on escape and search respectively (Dann, 1996; Lengkeek, 2001; Lanquar, 1985).

Table 1: Key characteristics per experience mode – adapted from Elands and Lengkeek (2012)

Mode:	Amusement	Change	Interest	Rapture	Dedication
Subjective Distance	Close by	Going away from	Going to	Far away	Immerse
Subjective Time	(short) Break	Another sense of time	As long as you can	Unanticipated	Permanent
Space	Familiar, symbolic and physical	Elsewhere	Vistas, Gaze, Liminal	Really different, high level of liminality	Backstage world
Sociality	Familiar social groups	Free oneself from home environment	Stories	Open to the unknown	Authentic otherness
Impact sources	Main Impact sources	Main & Side impact sources	Any experience clue	Mainly shared impact sources	Local life
Expectations	Specific – physically oriented	Well documented	Mixed	Broad	The unknown

The assumption relates to forming mental structures according to different distances from their usual everyday experiential worlds. There are people who remain close to their everyday circumstances, while others open themselves up to other worlds and styles of living.

Table 1 gives an adapted version Elands and Lengkeek's (2012) modes of experience, introducing impact sources and expectations instead of the 'tension of consciousness' and 'finite self' of the original.

VI. EXPERIENCE CLUES

Impact sources (or experience clues) themselves have been distinguished so far on the basis of their economic value in tourism, as well as the type of expectations and the way of experiencing inherent in the encounter of tourists and their tourism destination. For those impact sources that do not represent market value in tourism, the name ‘shared impact sources’ has been used. In fact one can imagine that some sort of distinction can be made between those impact sources that are directly visible and those that form an intrinsic part of local life and can only be encountered backstage. There is a grey area between those impact sources in which investments have been made but they are made available to the public for free. Many local government initiatives fall into this category, whereby some services are provided (information for example) or cultural expressions (street art, statues) are exhibited. This group of shared impact sources can be called 'local initiatives', while the more intimate parts of local life will be referred to as 'backstage.' It means that 5 sorts of impact sources have been selected so far: main and side impact sources, local initiatives, shared impact sources and 'backstage'.

Next, apart from the 5 modes of tourist orientations as presented by Elands and Lengkeek (2012), another group can be mentioned: travellers in general that visit a destination for some specific and often obligatory reason, as in the case of business people. To what extent they can be labelled tourists is arguable, however, they may visit some tourist attractions. Another group of “obligatory” tourists concerns those who have a clear and exact idea of what they are coming for: sports events, concerts, VFR (“visiting friend or relatives”) or for medical reasons. These are all examples of tourists-on-a-mission and their behaviour at the destination is different from those who come for reasons of escape or search; later on they will be referred to as “visitors/tourists”.

Figure 1 presents the degree of economic value of impact sources in tourism as one parametre and the degree of alienation (liminality) from the home society.

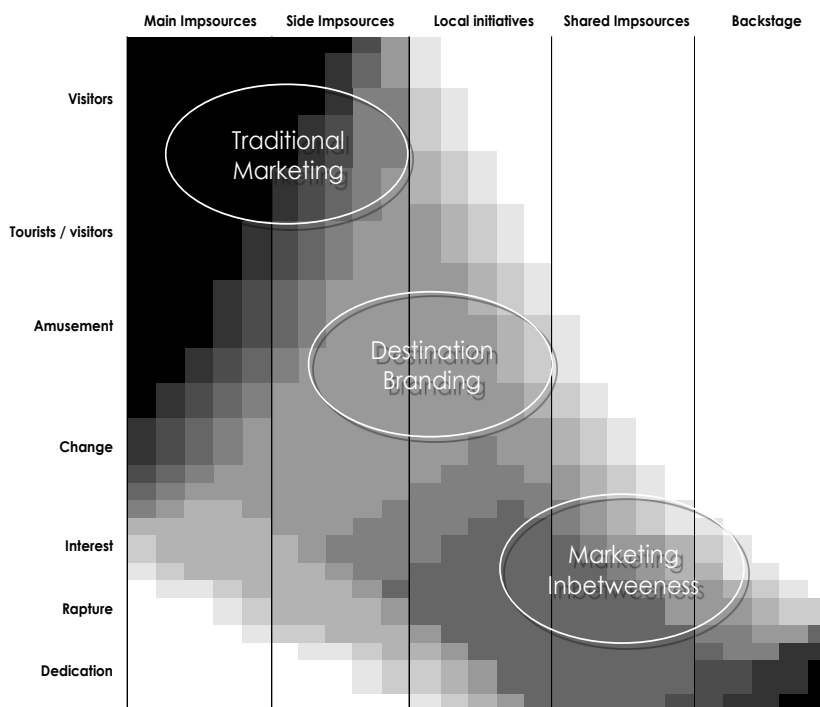


Figure 1: Use of impact sources according to economic value in tourism and degree of alienation from the tourists' societies. The darker the colour, the higher its use-intensity (figure prepared by the author and designed by Mrs. Luna Lin).

This figure represents the extent to which tourists make use of installed tourism attractions depending on their alienation from their home society and the level of search for alternative experiences. The width of each row (tourists' experience mode) does not refer to absolute numbers of tourists. These figures do not exist, since the distribution is arbitrary. There are many visitors and visitors/tourists, but whether they outnumber the so-called 'real' tourists is questionable and different for each destination. As a model it provides some insight into the various areas where different types of marketing strategies apply.

Area 1 is where the more traditional marketing takes place concentrating on tourism highlights. The marketing strategy is based on the sales of products or services rather than aiming at particular tourist segments,

while international tourism destinations try to differ depending upon the types of tourism activities they offer. Since the element of economic value prevails, competitiveness among destinations and product differentiation are key leads for marketing strategies (Kozak and Baloglu, 2011). Marketing activities in tourism need important investments due to the large geographic area of tourist markets, the manifestation of fierce international competition and the intangible character of the tourism product (Nedelea and Aziri, 2013). Market segments are broad and include visitors in general, visitors/tourists and most of the tourists who come “for fun”, with escape as the main holiday motivator. Mass tourism makes up an important part of this section. However, tourists who seek higher levels of home alienation and consciously enter liminal zones will avoid sites with a high concentration of tourists.

Area 2 represents a quite different type of marketing effort. Tourists whose holiday behaviour can be placed in the cluster change/interest react to pull factors (Dann, 1996) and with it to the search for new impulses. Even on a more general level a recent Trip-advisor survey revealed that “Visiting places they haven’t been to before” is the most important factor to travellers when it comes to travel choices (Aboutourism, 2014). The combination of a higher interest in personal well-being, the need to escape and the longing to become acquainted with anything different from the home environment means that these tourists move into the destination’s spaces that are normally used exclusively by the local population. It is about the more responsible and conscious travellers who are aware (to a certain extent) of their ‘footprints’ (Stanciulescu, Molnar, et al., 2011). From a marketing perspective for this area, destination branding, tourist segmentation and other aspects are highly important. As stated earlier, many travel organizations ignore the existence of shared impact sources other than generalizations such as the “friendly population” or “gorgeous landscapes.” Area 2 seems to be a growing sector in tourism (Francis, 2014) and this means the involvement of objects and phenomena that are not directly subject to an investment-profit pattern. The lack of economic control of these resources but the apparent pulling power they may exert convert them into a viable option for tourists who insist on arranging their travel itineraries independently – hence the importance of brands and segmentation. The interest/rapture mode shows a slight increase in the use of side impact sources caused by the need for activities or (extreme) adventure. Physical challenge is part of this cluster of experiential tourist modes and therefore it includes side attractions such as white-water rafting, rappelling or diving.

Additionally the broadest spectre of types of impact sources used can be found in the change/interest cluster, ranging from the use of tourism highlights to trying to enter a destination’s backstage life. This coincides with a common practice among tourists who, from the 21st century on, involve in what is popularly known as “tourism zapping” and tend to mix various types of holidays: a few days of wellness holiday alternating with some really adventurous tours, then a bit of culture, while not forgetting one’s Self through a Reiki course. Learning elements are more readily mixed with leisure elements. This observation coincides with the postmodern tendency, whereby people like to “channel-surf” the television, dipping in and out of different settings that capture their interest momentarily, regardless of whether or not the entire programme is watched (Gisolf, 2013).

Area 3 refers to the marketing of the inbetweenness and it shows tourists with a high level of alienation from the home society and liminality. Marketing this segment of the tourism supply raises some problems. Since this type of experience clues do not directly represent economic value for tourism, it is unlikely that the private sector, such as tour operators or travel agents, is going to support any marketing effort financially, since no direct gains can be expected and the existence of shared impact sources is often even denied. Local tourism boards are therefore more likely candidates. An important part of this type of tourism provides direct income for local businesses and often the poorer sections of a population participate, meaning that NGOs in support of community-based tourism or pro-poor tourism may also get involved.

Not knowing what they are going to smell, taste, touch or hear leaves tourists’ expectations wide open and vague, even fuelling feelings of uncertainty. It is under these circumstances specifically that the imagination comes into play and with it the importance of metaphors as a vehicle to create an image of what local life may *feel* like. The tourist’s anticipation is based not only on the element of escape, but even more on the need to let go of the home environment and social status entirely in an effort to become part of the destination’s local life. Expectations here are two-directional: not only do they refer to what life at the destination would be like, they also concern the experience of alienating oneself completely from the home environment. The former refers to the element of immersion and its marketing must transmit the feel for a place, which is quite distinct from communicating for selling purposes. The latter however implies a swing to another direction: the activity related authenticity (Wang 1999) and with it the existentialist search for the Self. Voluntary work is one example.

A destination then is selected on the grounds of its potential to satisfy personal motivations of alienation, rather than of its impact value. In both cases the status of impact sources from either the tourists’ or the locals’ point of view cannot be defined anymore from a sheer economic view point. The economic science and with it much of sociological reasoning cannot be applied directly anymore, while other disciplines take up a more prominent role, such as it is the case with psychology, social-psychology or anthropology. However, the term *marketing* is related to the economic environment and therefore for this area of the tourism activity the term *promotion* is more adequate and with it a multi-disciplinary approach. It is in this area that the idea of confluence rather than separation serves as a medium to communicate values on socio-cultural or anthropological levels that

parallels traditional marketing strategies not so much for selling purposes, but for drawing the attention to the storehouses of meanings and experience clues that represent daily life at any destination

VII. CONCLUSION

This theoretical discussion has focused on different types of marketing used in tourism. From an economic viewpoint there are the services and products that represent direct economic value in tourism, while from a sociological standpoint there are many objects and phenomena at a destination of importance to the tourism experience, but these do not represent economic value. In total, five experience sources were distinguished: the main and side impact sources - especially developed for tourists - local initiatives, shared impact sources and life 'backstage.' Apart from this distinction other aspects were presented: some (social-)psychological factors were introduced with the notion of how expectations are framed for experiences. Additionally it was argued that tourist expectations and imagination may create a sense of distance from the home environment. Some tourists may stick to their daily circumstances, while others open up to different sociocultural environments. Elands and Lengkeek (2012) aimed to understand this propensity to either stay close or move farther away from what is familiar as a dynamic 'predisposition' that influences expectations. These predispositions were classified into five experiential modes and represent the level of creating conscious experiences when people find themselves in specific tourism settings or activities.

Next, in Figure 1 these 5 experiential modes and visitors/tourists in general were represented in relation to the use-intensity of the 5 impact sources involved. Main tourism attractions with typically high economic value attract a wider and more uncompromised public, while those objects and phenomena that form part of the locals' everyday lives and do not represent a direct economic value in tourism are mostly visited by tourists with a high level of alienation from the home society. It was then argued that marketing objects or phenomena with economic value follows the ruling market strategies, but the creation of markets and their subsequent promotion turns particularly more complicated when economic value in tourism is lower or non-existent. Sheer economic reasoning does not apply in these cases and hence the drawing on other social sciences as part of a multi-disciplinary approach becomes paramount. The inbetweenness of tourism as an activity in itself as well as of tourists themselves forms a major challenge when it comes to communicating value for selling or other purposes, while the promotion of a destination source in tourism based on a multi-disciplinary approach communicating values on sociocultural or anthropological levels has been neglected by most entities active in tourism to the point of negation.

This discussion also invites additional research in a number of areas. The relationship between the degree of liminality among tourists and their interest in shared impact sources is supposed to be a direct one. The assumption is that to be able to appreciate the way local people live, one has to distance oneself from the home environment and way of living. However, research has been limited so far. Another part of this discussion points to the fact of stripping a destination from everything with economic value in tourism and discarding subsequent societal relations invites setting up an inventory of the experience clues left, which should be taken into account when promoting a destination. It forms the basis for marketing the inbetweenness: creating expectations for experience sources without economic value in tourism.

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