

Experience and emotion consumption Perspectives for innovation in tourism and leisure in Catalonia*

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The development of leisure and tourism products is undergoing deep change from the perspective of both consumer expectations and the dynamics of places. In fact, leisure and tourism are becoming complex activities with multiple individual, social, economic, urban and environmental implications requiring own political and management tools in a setting in which a few big global players (with great financial capacity and technological possibilities) lead the business and generate trends. To live up to their chances of development, Catalonia needs to clearly go for innovation and knowledge generation and transfer.



* Ideas on the role of leisure in present-day society as well as its capacity of stimulating new economic and social opportunities are expanded in CLAVÉ, A. (2007). CLAVÉ, A. (2002) features the foundations of the Catalan tourism model.

The social value of experience production

Today, leisure has become as fundamental as thinkers like **Joffre Dumazedier** (1962) had forecast. A cultural order has consolidated that **Guy Debord** (1967) termed as «show society» of which commercialisation of leisure products –among which especially those associated with tourism– is one of the main features. **Manuel Cuenca** (2001) refers to **Alain Corbin** (1993) to explain the existence of three cultural traditions explaining the development of leisure products as they appear today.

The first tradition is the English, which came about as therapeutic and thermal baths became generalised and beaches were discovered, thus being associated with thermal tourism. The second is the French, a consequence of the image cast by Paris after the first world expositions, which took happiness, pleasure and show into the idea of leisure, imposing holidays as a necessary personal break in daily life. The third is the American, which conceives leisure as a time of individual happiness conquered from work thanks to democracy. In any case, a fundamental question is that all three traditions converged after World War II in commercialising the use of leisure.

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In words of **Mihály Csikszentmihalyi** (2001, p. 23), contemporary developed societies have learned to «outsource» leisure to professionals, forgetting that most of what is now accessible

by buying it used to be free not a long time ago. In this respect, **Jeremy Rifkin** (2000, p. 7) is radical in stating that «tourism and all kind of travelling, theme parks and cities, places devoted to programmed leisure, fashion and cuisine, professional games and sports, playing, music, cinema, television and virtual cyberspace worlds, all sorts of electronic entertainment rapidly becomes the centre of a new hypercapitalism doing business with access to cultural experiences». Besides, supremacy of leisure has led to the dissolution of limits between high culture and mass culture, mingling them with tourism, arts, education, entertainment, media, architecture, shopping and sports, thus creating a consumption pattern unleashing experiences and emotions. Leisure has even entered conventional production and consumption processes through the creation of brands that suggest lifestyles, integrating into their products not only human and technological but also especially symbolic capital. It thus enters the experience economy business.

Finally, supremacy of leisure is based on the fact that «the [economic] value of each moment of leisure is increasing», as **Michael Wolf** (1999) puts it. Leisure products and commercial facilities, tourist packages and proposals, representations, objects of daily and non-daily consumption and cultural, arts and sports events stem from the need for each moment of leisure to be of top quality, offer guarantees and cater for the expectations of its consumers.

In a context of complex use of available time, proliferation of recreational offers and increased expectations, the existence of leisure products allows to have access, by means of consumption, to multiple varied experiences and contents that would otherwise be impossible as, if they were outside the market, they would require per se special conditions in preparing their potential consumers (e.g. visiting a pristine area) or very specific vocational skills (e.g. knowing the properties of a given animal species), which are usually solved with specialised business initiatives or the development of specific facilities. Thus products and facilities

concentrate access and simplify satisfactorily the individuals' fulfilment of desires to be, do and know.

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The material basis of producing intangibles

The production of consumer goods in leisure increases in quantity, diversity and access possibilities and is developed along new directions (Bauman, 2008). As regards leisure, four basic production and consumption circuits can be set out in the current context of globalisation, based on Néstor García Canclini (1995). Each of them has a specific contents:

- ▶ The *historical-territorial* circuit made of the set of knowledge, habits and experiences settled in a territory that shows in historical heritage and traditional popular culture.
- ▶ The *elite culture* circuit made of written and visual symbolic production (literature, plastic arts). It includes the representative works of high and middle classes with the highest education level that is not known nor embraced by the whole of society. In the last decades, it has been integrated into international branding markets and procedures (e.g. Gaudí's works in Catalonia).
- ▶ The *massive communication* circuit linked with entertainment shows (radio, cinema, TV, video), its formats, contents, characters and landscapes of recreational consumption specifically created for these shows.
- ▶ The *information and communication systems* circuit devoted to those having access to new satellite technologies, telecommunications systems and ICT in general.

Companies and public authorities are promoting two seemingly contradictory alternatives to use these circuits for creating value. The first is the creation of products based on the specificities of places and the authenticity of events. It takes culture into the consumption circuit and allows to create leisure products, tourist routes and culture-based attractions that generate income, provide competitive advantages to places where they are implemented and allow local development processes of procedural character. The second goes for artificiality and simulation as the ultimate key of the recreational experience.

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According to Anne-Marie D'Hautesserre (1997), cultural capital (as capital invested in production of cultural forms) becomes here a resource of accumulation with a capacity of penetrating the market that can be infinitely more expandable than other investment modes. All this with the creation of own consumption landscapes like theme parks, new urban scenarios and architectural landmarks (e.g. the Agbar Tower in Barcelona) and specific symbols popularised through mass media, which Renato Ortiz (1994) calls «international popular culture».

As a consequence of the process, there has been an increasing expansion of initiatives packaging and commercialising leisure. Facilities termed by some authors as «cathedrals of consumption» (Ritzer, 1999) are their characteristic locations. They can have differing sizes, contents and formats, including theme parks, aquariums, water parks, fauna parks, ecomuseums and other singular attractions, and it even goes down to commercialising science and nature or to prepare it for tourist and recreational consumption. Such facilities are completed by

commercial areas, theme hotels, brand restaurants, company visitor centres, free air museums and interpretation centres. These spaces include entertainment, events and technology and try to create stable relations with consumers, loyalise them, enhance comfort and community life, encourage the pleasure of consuming and promoting the image and values of brands (either own or sales objects), develop value-added services, communicate contents, train, programme events and create leisure moments (a good example is Decathlon, a commercial area selling sports garment and accessories while being a place to get started in sports).

By means of the products they purchase, people state a lifestyle and make a demonstration of taste or ownership of a given cultural and symbolic capital. These products become components of an experience and the act of purchasing them is the way of accessing it.

In this respect, placing a symbolic content on daily and non-daily consumption products, their generalisation and globalisation, increasing social identification of certain brands and adoption of the values they represent by consumers has changed the very purchase processes. Thus, by means of the products they purchase, people state a lifestyle and make a demonstration of taste or ownership of a given cultural and symbolic capital (this is the case of products with acknowledged brand value like Mango and Carolina Herrera in fashion as well as Sony and Imaginarium in other branches), the more as technological capacity has allowed to manufacture for a large population apparently customised consumption products featuring innovations. In fact, these products become components of an experience and the act of purchasing them is the way of accessing this experience. Specific shops with their design components, their singularity and capacity of global recognition as well as the commercial

spaces they are located in – either the city or a shopping mall – with the symbolic value usually related to this central position and closeness of other shops with similar brand values, also become part of the production pattern of each specific experience.

As a result of this process, commercial leisure and consumption facilities have conquered typical spaces of conventional tourist destinations, characteristic places in cities and symbolic places in rural areas, generating replacement processes in the urban fabric, functional restructuring of cities to host tourist and commercial activities and a differentiation between recreational and the rest of uses, thus causing occasionally a clear spatial segregation between leisure areas and the rest of the territory.

Hence it is clear, as Sharon Zukin (1991) points out, that the creation of leisure areas is not only shifting the practice of productive corporate and private consumption investment but it is also creating essentially a new form of capital, cultural capital, which as it requires a fixed and precise location to develop, it is able to create –through tourism and leisure and under certain conditions– new poles of urban, regional and international growth. In this respect, cultural production and leisure become a prominent item Henri Lefebvre calls «the second capital circuit», that is, real estate investment, urban development and the setup of new social and economic elites (Gottdiener; Collins; Dickens, 1999).

The territorial tourism model in Catalonia

As tourism is one of the main areas manifesting the dominant trends in the use of free time and leisure and Catalonia is one of the world's main tourist destinations, it is convenient to think of adapting the Catalan tourism model to new social expectations based on experience and emotion consumption by both the main feeding markets and Catalan society.

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The hypothesis can be made that the success of the tourism development model pursued by Catalonia during the second half of the 20th century doomed the sense for history and culture in the industry to oblivion until recently, despising development opportunities different from the typical sun and beach ones and traditionally minimising their capacity of producing and consuming experiences and emotions along the lines of this article. In fact, beyond the tourist boom in Barcelona and some recent transformation at small scale, the Catalan tourism industry is basically still the result of the success in Europe of a given way of organising labour that found its intellectual and ideological justification in the end of the 19th century and is mainly manifested in labour discipline and the creation of stable activity and rest patterns, including holidays. This labour organisation paved the way for the most brilliant stage of tourism Fordism in the 1960s –when progress in transport allowed it– that has dominated the landscape of Catalan tourism to this day. During this time, the Catalan coast became a leisure periphery for European tourists; agents developed all commercial and operational processes turning the offer into tourist packages; and, in a context characterised by permissive authorities and clearly speculative stakeholders, a linear and extraordinarily rapid urbanisation process without any planning –that stopped only recently– came about, neglecting and standardising the coastal scenery without providing it with recreational contents, while most of the rest of the country was ignored for tourism. After the 1970s and 1980s, the Spanish and Catalan demand markets progressively embraced this process, strengthening the model and spreading the second home phenomenon all over the country.

This is relevant from a point of view not only of activity location but also of productive culture. Thanks to the market conditions, the sale of holidays and travels at tight prices is still today the main basis of Catalan tourism business. Likewise, although with local variations regarding growth rate, occupation of wide areas with seasonal residential purposes still persists with the conquest of new spaces in the hinterland.

However, it is true that there is a certain pattern between what is sold in the tourist markets and what is prescribed (Imbert-Bouchard Ribera; Serrano, 2009 and Serrano; Imbert-Bouchard Ribera, 2009), and this difference has relevant consequences as to the use tourists (either those on a package or those organising holidays and journeys on their own) make of Catalonia as their destination.

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So while Catalonia's image as a country with opportunities in experiential, creative and cultural leisure is almost non-existent in tour operator catalogues (even in the case of Barcelona), tourist guides multiply proposals of specific experiences based on senses, resort to the scenery and present the territory as a necessary argument for the tourist experience in Catalonia. In this respect, it is relevant to know what part of the tourist market taken by the second tourist revolution in Europe (the one associated to experience and emotion consumption) – which has its own parallel profile among Catalans – can be attracted by the current (as well as potential) productive structure related with leisure and tourism in Catalonia. Secondly, it will be necessary to compare the adaptation of the country to new needs and act accordingly.

Within this process, it is interesting to identify the development of new products like those associated to intangible rural heritage, the bigger offer in historical and monumental sites to be visited, the inclusion of the different architectural expressions into the tourist productive system, increasing orientation towards visiting religious sites, design – with different degrees of difficulty – of historical routes and networks, plus museums, restaurants and wine products as well as different tourist and recreational activities in nature. All this is possible thanks to the recently published *Atles del Turisme a Catalunya* ('Atlas of Tourism in Catalonia', Direcció General de Turisme, 2009).

Besides, there are other territorially complex proposals such as the PortAventura theme park, commercial areas of different size and kind as well as cultural and sports events. They all link travelling to a specific recreational argument and to emerging leisure related with activity, experience, emotion and learning. Their value is furthermore proportional to security that their tangible and intangible components (structure, facilities, performance, management) minimise inconvenience and uncertainty. In this respect, the challenge for public authorities, companies and the population in general is crucial, not only to improve sustainability of existing patterns but especially also to allow integrated and participatory ways of public management, ploughing back to activity the resources the latter needs to work.

Leisure as an opportunity for the Catalan society

The creation of a vision related with tourism and leisure going beyond the actual fact that Catalonia is the world leader in the sun and beach sector implies the belief that it is possible to cater for the new core value of creative leisure articulating the consumption habits in European societies. And, still more important, action needs to be consistent with this. As to tourism, this shift in perspective means to view

the space not as a territory to build on – like typical residential areas on the coast – but rather to be appreciated through the creation of recreational arguments – interpreted routes, ecomuseums, active science facilities, activity parks or heritage thematisation – acting as activity catalysts. Producing initiatives for leisure requires to act with a sense for sustainability, preserving the scenery when developing new facilities, taking both physical and immaterial heritage into the experience and emotion production system and creating new spaces for discovery, relations and feelings.

Both physical and immaterial heritage needs to be taken into the experience and emotion production system and new spaces for discovery, relations and feelings need to be created.

In addition to this, there is the need to include tourism and leisure into a specific «research agenda» allowing to better know advantages and opportunities arising from it.

As regards Catalonia, there is a need to think, for instance, of the role the different territories can play that so far had no relevant use for tourism, the possibilities offered by correct symbolic appraisal of the scenery as a point of attraction, consolidated patterns and potentialities of sun and beach tourist destinations – clearly positioned at international level – the role, size and effects of leisure facilities in cities, the process of creating and developing shopping malls and areas, the meaning of new technologies, either in communication or related to energy and environment, the possibilities created by leisure in developing creative and innovating territories as well as the potential relevance of certain forms of cultural or active tourism. They need to be specifically measured in relation with tourism, important change observed in the pattern of certain brands based on the power of Barcelona (e.g. **Barcelona Coast-Maresme**) and the existence of destination and facilities trying to capitalise their

closeness to the capital for breakaways for tourists visiting the city (e.g. Montserrat). The possibilities to create new business related with experiences and emotions in Catalonia needs to start from a specific definition of contents, a correct proactive vision of its role and the right market positioning of each initiative.

To do so, progress will need to be made in generating and transferring knowledge in tourism and leisure through strategies, the creation of interaction platforms between public and private stakeholders, overall society and universities and knowledge clusters created in the area of leisure and tourism as well as specific research institutions like the one proposed by the Government of Catalonia for tourism. This interaction shall allow to increase the value and opportunities

to develop places, including technological innovations, fostering the development of new products and promoting local sustainability with the double goal of improving the business results and allow a higher degree of welfare.

From this perspective, we can talk of knowledge as a strategic function in dynamising territories related with leisure and tourism as well as regarding emotion and experience production. This is how knowledge can become a key element in competitive positioning of the industry and thus of its development.

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