MARKETING THE DESTINATION EXPERIENCE
O MARKETING DA EXPERIÊNCIA DO DESTINO TURÍSTICO

Ana Cláudia Campos

ABSTRACT

The destination is the basic unit of analysis and management action, and yet it is recognisably the most difficult unit to manage and market. As global competition increases and consumers become more skilled and empowered, destinations striving for survival and competitiveness in the marketplace need to rethink their approaches to marketing. Traditional destination marketing has been failing both destinations and Destination Marketing Organisations in assisting them to achieve competitiveness. Recent research has been calling attention to changes in the environment and suggesting innovative approaches to deal with them, in addition to issues for debate. This paper reviews the destination construct, highlighting the theoretical complexity, and identifies traditional aspects involved in destination marketing. Subsequently, a literature review is the basis of the characterisation of the new marketing environment in which destinations are now competing, while identifying foreseeable challenges that they will have to manage. Some areas of research that are of interest for both DMOs and researchers are identified.

Keywords: Destination, Traditional Destination Marketing, Marketing of Destination Experiences.

RESUMO

O destino turístico é a unidade básica de análise e gestão, todavia é reconhecidamente a mais difícil de gerir. À medida que a concorrência, hoje globalizada, aumenta e os consumidores se tornam mais educados e autónomos na sua tomada de decisão, os destinos que se debatem com necessidades de sobrevivência no mercado e têm ambições de melhorar o seu desempenho competitivo vêem-se chamados a reequacionar a sua abordagem de marketing. O marketing tradicional tem-se revelado insuficiente no seu contributo para a competitividade dos destinos. Investigação recente tem vindo a chamar a atenção para mudanças que estão a ocorrer no ambiente externo, e simultaneamente a sugerir questões e abordagens inovadoras nesta área. O artigo propõe-se rever o conceito de destino turístico, chamando a atenção para a complexidade teórica envolvida, e identifica os aspectos caracterizadores de uma abordagem tradicional do marketing de destinos. Uma revisão da literatura sustenta a caracterização do ambiente de marketing emergente e a identificação das principais mudanças que estão em curso. O artigo conclui com a menção de algumas áreas de investigação futura de interesse para a gestão do marketing de destinos.

Palavras-chave: Destino Turístico, Marketing de Destinos Tradicional, Marketing da Experiência do Destino.

JEL Classification: L83 or M31

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is no longer the pastime of previous centuries' elites of European societies. For the past five decades of the 20th century, it became an expression of the contemporary way of life (Lichrou *et al*., 2008), with travel encompassing a whole range of purposes and motivations that clearly surpass traditional religion, commerce or warfare ones (Antony and Henry, 2005). Since World War II, *leisure travel*, fuelled by technological breakthroughs and mass production processes (the packaged tour), ascended to a global activity, shaping the choices, preferences and purchases of consumers (Page and Connell, 2006, Torres, 2002; Ritchie and Crouch, 2000).

As tourists evolved in their travel experience, becoming to that effect more knowledgeable of their own motivations and destinations available at the marketplace, more experienced in quality requirements and delivery – in one word, more demanding -, tourism witnessed significant and irreversible changes, presenting these days huge challenges to those in charge of tourism businesses and destinations.

The tourist is the *sine qua non* condition of the emergence of what is called 'the tourist destination' (Framke, 2002; Seaton, 1996), because there would be no such thing as a tourist destination if someone would not be willing to travel to and be *'there'*. No wonder then that most tourism research revolved since its early beginnings around the key player of tourism – *the tourist itself* (MacCannell, 1976; Cohen, 1979). *And yet, if the tourist lies at the core of tourism, it is the destination the primary and basic unit of analysis and management action* (Bornhorst *et al*., 2010; Terzibasoglu, 2004).

It has been widely acknowledged that tourism can decisively and positively impact on places, thus playing an unequivocal role in national, regional, sub-regional and local economies (Lichrou *et al*., 2008). At the same time, as demand for tourism continues to grow, more and more destinations are becoming accessible to visitors from all over the world. In today's competition arena, destinations compete at a global scale and all of them have 'to fight for tourist market share' (Lichrou *et al*., 2008), and 'deal with the scarcity of human attention as well as various sources of distractions' (Ooi, 2010).

Destination marketing has been evolving, undergoing changes both in practice and as a result of consistent research. We are living times of uncertainty and fast change, and reflection on pressing matters related to destination competitiveness, planning, vision, development strategy, and marketing are much needed under such circumstances. After decades of Fordian tourism production and consumption, new theoretical frameworks are being put forward, and private and public organisations of the tourism system are taking more responsible and cooperative courses of action to adapt to new realities.

2. THE DESTINATION CONCEPT

The destination concept has been one important topic in destination research, and either we analyse it from the supply perspective or from the demand perspective, we can still discern a wide variety of meanings.

Framke's work (2002) is an attempt to understand some of the uses of the concept. His analysis highlights the existence of two main theoretical paradigms, the business-inspired paradigm (which he calls «classical» or «conventional»), and the sociological one, concluding that there are some meaningful differences between the two.

According to his findings, conventional definitions tend to ascribe great importance to the destination ('a key factor in tourism') because it is a place 'containing actors [from a supply side] who produce together a total product which is the answer to the tourist's

expectations of a total experience' (Framke, 2002); where as sociological definitions do not demonstrate great concern with the destination itself. Sociological approaches are instead prone to view tourism from the tourist perspective, and being so the authors focus rather on the social meaning of tourism as performance and creation of individual space.

Another point of divergence between paradigms relates to what is considered to integrate the destination. Framke (2002) found that business-oriented authors speak of destination contents in terms of (commercial) attractions, facilities and services, while sociological literature focus primarily on images resulting from interactions between destination elements and the tourist, and that is the reason why sociological discourse is more interested in analysing landscapes, townscapes and other kinds of 'scape' originated from tourist experiences.

Incurring the risk of misunderstanding the destination if one is to endorse Leiper's (2000) somewhat sceptical view of it, Framke (2002) proposes the following definition: the destination is 'the sum of interests, activities, facilities, infrastructure and attractions [that] create the identity of a place'. The author claims that such a definition contributes to the understanding of a destination as a simultaneously static and dynamic reality, in which a *place* becomes a specific environment resulting from an agglomeration of actors, products and tourists' varying behaviour ('different demand'). A place it is indeed, however with no obvious and definite physical geographical borders. In fact, in this last respect, both theoretical paradigms seem to agree with the assumption that destination boundaries are a social construction emanating from actions and processes (notably those of marketing).

From a supply perspective, a large array of destination definitions can be found in tourism literature, and in some of them different dimensions converge as an attempt to capture complexity. For analysis purposes, those definitions can be grouped in the following way:

- Definitions that highlight the geographical basis of the destination or the fact of being a place (Bornhorst et al., 2010; Elbe et al., 2009; Baker and Cameron, 2008; Page and Connell, 2006; Framke, 2002; Buhalis, 2000; Middleton and Hawkins, 1998; Seaton, 1996);
- Definitions that focus on its nature and essential elements; phrasings common to this kind of definitions include, on one hand, 'dynamic organism' (Aktas and Gunlu, 2005), 'large, complex and special entity' (Howie, 2003) or 'animal' (Seaton, 1997), 'a system' (Jamal and Jamrozy, 2006; Manente and Minghetti, 2006); and on the other hand, 'an amalgam' (Morgan et al., 2009; Fyall et al., 2006; Manente and Minghetti, 2006; Howie, 2003; Framke, 2002; Buhalis, 2000), 'a mix' (Elbe et al., 2009; Page and Connell, 2006), 'a sum' (Howie, 2003; Framke, 2002) or 'a combination' (Buhalis, 2000). Elements usually considered in the 'amalgam', the 'mix' or the 'sum' that make up the destination are: tourism products (Morgan et al., 2009; Fyall and Leask, 2007; Fyall et al., 2006; Page and Connell, 2006; Framke, 2002; Buhalis, 2000), tourism services (Buhalis, 2000; Middleton and Hawkins, 1998), stakeholders, agents or actors (Elbe et al., 2009; Fyall and Leask, 2007; Manente and Minghetti, 2006; Cooper and Ruhanen, 2004; Framke, 2002; Middleton and Hawkins, 1998), experiences (Bornhorst, 2010; Page and Connell, 2006; Buhalis, 2000), activities (Page and Connell, 2006; Framke, 2002; Middleton and Hawkins, 1998), organisational bodies (Fyall and Leask, 2007; Seaton, 2006), attractions (Bornhorst et al., 2010; Page and Connell, 2006; Howie, 2003; Framke, 2002; Seaton, 1996), infrastructures (Framke, 2002; Seaton, 1996), sectors of the industry and non-tourism functions (Howie, 2003), landscape (Manente and Minghetti, 2006; Seaton, 1996), information (Manente and Minghetti, 2006), other industries and the people (Seaton, 1996), packages (Page and Connell, 2006);

- Definitions that emphasise the marketing dimension of the destination, hence representing it as 'a product' (Dwyer et al., 2009; Fyall and Leask, 2007; Howie, 2003, Middleton and Hawkins, 1998; Seaton, 1996).

Although diversified, definitions point to the same direction: that the destination is a complex entity, both conceptually and factually, and no matter how fragmented it may be in reality (Elbe *et al*., 2009), it is always more than the sum of its parts (Smith, 1994; Howie, 2003). Morgan *et al*. (2009), in turn, stress the fact that as an amalgam, destinations do not perform as single unities, which may be in contrast with the visitors' perception of it.

The Aristotelian principle may be true from a marketing point of view, in which case destinations are managed, built, and communicated, in short, marketed as products or brands (Elbe *et al*., 2009). However it may be even truer from the consumer's perspective, who perceives it as a *comprehensive experience* (Buhalis, 2000), the *integrated tourist experience* (Elbe *et al*., 2009), a *sum of ideas and impressions* (image) (Seaton, 1996), a *brand* comprising a collection of suppliers and services (Buhalis, 2000), and *places* – whatever the type - visited or stayed at (Page and Connell, 2006).

This very short summary of literature on the destination concept has served to corroborate Middleton and Hawkins' (1998) claim that there is no simple watertight definition of a destination, as well as to understand the grounds for putting forward, as several researchers do, the notion (widely accepted and acknowledged) that 'destinations are some of the most difficult entities to manage and market' (Buhalis, 2000, but also Fyall and Leask, 2007). A fact, more than a notion, challenges thus marketers and DMOs to achieve competitiveness, sustainability, and overall destination success in a highly demanding environment.

3. TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO DESTINATION MARKETING: 'THE WAY WE USED TO DO BUSINESS'

It has been acknowledged by several scholars that the marketing of destinations is a very difficult enterprise to successfully implement (Fyall and Leask, 2007), due to the fragmented and complex nature of the destination. In addition, destination marketing is a still underdeveloped research area within tourism studies (Buhalis, 2000). However, destination marketing is deemed crucial in an era of fierce, global competition, and imminent societal challenges. It can thus play a decisive role in the achievement of destination competitiveness and sustainability in a rapidly and highly demanding business environment.

Elbe *et al*. (2009) say that destination marketing 'is a concept used to denote deliberate, often strategically developed activities performed in order to attract visitors, i.e. tourists, to a specific location'. Wang (2008), on the other hand, stresses the fact that it is about a *collective effort* requiring destination organisations and businesses to 'harmoniously work together to achieve a common goal'. Both definitions propose a supply side perspective emphasising the *deliberate* nature of marketing activities; however Wang's (2008) definition recognises that destination marketing involves *common goals*, not necessarily, or solely, the one of *attracting visitors*.

Terzibasoglu (2004) conveys a broader notion of destination marketing stating that *is* a set of continuous and coordinated activities and processes, *consisting of* decisions on product, branding, positioning, price, market segmentation, promotion and distribution, *in order to* bring buyers and sellers together and, at the same time, respond to consumer demands. Similar to the previous definitions, Terzibasoglu's (2004) highlights its coordinated nature in relation to traditional marketing activities, while stressing the purpose of it all: to join parties involved in the destination for the satisfaction of consumer demands.

The need to manage effectively the tourism system at destination level has been seen as a motive to create destinations management organizations (Bornhorst *et al*., 2010). Although not all destinations develop and market themselves under a DMO, these organisations, in which a wide variety of arrangements and formats are admissible and implemented (Bramwell and Lane, 2000), have been acknowledged as important in the achievement of the destination's success and competitiveness (Morgan *et al*., 2009; Terzibasoglu, 2004).

Buhalis (2000) understands the role of DMOs as one of taking responsibility for the planning and marketing of the destination, and as management structures they are empowered and have the necessary resources to achieve strategic objectives. Terzibasoglu (2004) ascribes to DMOs the task of managing promotion and marketing issues (strategic markets, image management, positioning and branding), but also a wide range of additional activities, ranging from quality issues to information and research activities. Bornhorst *et al*. (2010) highlight the leadership role a DMO can play at the destination, and identify five key dimensions of DMOs activities: the coordination of the system for a single voice of tourism, the leadership and advocacy of tourism, development of tourism system components and image, provision of visitors' services, and the bridging of the destination stakeholders and external tourism stakeholders. Morgan *et al*. (2009) refer to the DMOs responsibility towards the overall marketing plan and activities, noting however that its power is restricted to the influence it can exert on the development of the destination.

Bornhorst *et al*. (2010) research analysed tourism success in a double perspective, the destination and the DMO, in order to determine to what extent both perspectives converge or, in turn, diverge. To carry out the research, the authors undertook a comprehensive literature review on destination and DMO literature. One finding is that there are several research streams within these two areas that correspond to managerial functions, but more interestingly, that the Marketing and the Promotion stream dominates over all the others. This fact may denote a change of view, contradicting what Buhalis (2000) has said a decade before about the scarcity of research on destination marketing. Findings support the claim that destination marketing is gaining *momentum* in tourism literature.

According to Bornhorst *et al*., (2010), destination marketing and promotion research focus on either one of three subjects, effectiveness of advertising and promotion, measurement and management of destination image, and collaborative destination marketing. And in fact, research apparently confirms what has been the prevailing function of marketing at destination level: advertising and promotion. Conventional approaches to destination marketing have primarily dealt with promotion (Baker and Cameron, 2008; Ritchie and Ritchie, 2002, Buhalis, 2000; Ritchie and Crouch, 2000; Ryan, 1991), and most of it meant specifically advertising (Prentice and Andersen, 2007).

In terms of *content*, destination promotion usually revolves around 'what the destination has to offer' (King, 2002), the physical attributes of the destination (Morgan *et al*., 2009), or, to put it more broadly, its assets, such as attractions and amenities (Lichrou *et al*., 2008). This would be sufficient for mass market, unskilled consumers with no propensity for active engagement, i.e. passive (King, 2002), or, on the other hand, in a context of the dominance of *sightseeing* tourism, in which attractions (places and *things*) could be thought of as having value for themselves (objective value). The late arrival of new insights and findings in consumer behaviour may also have contributed to the persistence of the model of the consumers' rational behaviour (Morgan *et al*., 2009; Hudson and Ritchie, 2009), with obvious implications on destination marketing, namely that of developing and proposing to them products to fit exclusively functional features and benefits (Hudson and Ritchie, 2009).

From the *purpose* point of view, traditional destination marketing has been seen as aiming at increasing visitation by attracting more visitors to the destination (Elbe *et al*., 2009),

possibly at the expense of treating tourism as a commodity (Buhalis, 2000). To Buhalis (2000) this means failing 'to recognise the unique needs and limitations of each destination as well as their particular geographical, environmental and socio-cultural characteristics'. Destination marketing involves more than merely attracting visitors to a place, because the tourism system encompasses stakeholders other than visitors, and putting visitors' needs and satisfaction first 'may neglect the needs of the community' (Lichrou *et al*., 2008). In fact, it may be argued that the primary role of a tourism destination is, as Bornhorst *et al*. (2010) claim, 'to enhance the social and economic well-being of the residents who live within its boundaries'. Tourism at destination level consists of providing the opportunities for a range of activities and experiences to take place in order to satisfy the needs of the community; thus tourism is, first of all, a means of achieving a social goal (well-being).

Destination marketing focused on a conventional approach to the tourism product and promotion looses sight of the complexity of the destination. This is the reason why marketers are urged to broaden the destination concept, by adopting a community, systemic and holistic view of it. Call it either a community (Cooper and Ruhanen, 2004) or a system (Manente and Minghetti, 2006), the destination integrates stakeholders other than the visitors, namely the government, government departments, tourism organisations, developers and entrepreneurs, operators, non-tourism businesses, and the community (Cooper and Ruhanen, 2004).

Buhalis (2000) puts forward such an appeal by stating that a broader marketing vision concurs to achieve the destination's strategic objectives and this vision would need to integrate societal concerns. More radically, Lichrou *et al*. (2008) argue the case that a traditional marketing approach, in the sense that adopts a *product* view on the destination based on its assets, may not be the most suitable one for marketers to face current problems in destination marketing.

In fact, existing problems – such as stakeholders' coordination, and the balancing of economic and sustainability objectives – can be understood as consequences of a traditional marketing approach, which imposes on marketers the use of specific tools, the acceptance of a set of principles, and the realisation of complementary activities, as the one of designing the *place mix* (Lichrou *et al*., 2008). In the process of planning the *place mix* for promotion, marketers are supposed to make decisions on what attributes of the destination are to be promoted; but is the visitors' perceived attractiveness of a particular set of attributes enough to develop *a destination meaning* without also encompassing the meanings of the community?

Other traditional inefficiencies in conventional destination marketing relate to the distribution system, and persistent gaps (*the dividing line*) between the tourism public and private sectors (Bennett, 1999), or even between enterprises themselves (Wang, 2008). For decades, the tourism distribution system has relied on a structured chain, in which wholesaler and retailer businesses involved acted according to specific and defined roles. Such structure would enable them to behave as gatekeepers of information (King, 2002), but also to allow tour operators to hold the power over the entire chain (Bennett, 1999). Although cost efficient, wholesaler businesses decided *where* the tourist was supposed to travel to.

New forms of distribution are each day becoming the norm, and this fact is inseparable of the globalisation of the Internet and related Information and Communication Tools (ICTs). As King (2002) clearly states, by gaining access to new technologies, consumers may come to the point of shorten the buying process to one contact, while choosing by themselves what, when and where to consume, meaning that long known barriers in the distribution chain are bound to collapse. By virtue of the Internet and ICTs, most obvious impacts on destination marketing are those related to direct selling and communication with consumers, and the emergence of new intermediaries in the distribution chain (Morgan *et al*., 2009). Distribution businesses are urged to depart from a *gatekeeper* role to one of *becoming an agent*

to the consumer (King, 2002), or, as one may argue, *supporting* and assisting them (Zuboff and Maxmin, 2002).

From a supply perspective, destination marketing changing environment is due not only to competition (as fewer and fewer are 'new' destinations, Bennett, 1999) and experienced consumers, but also to ICTs pervasiveness and their power to propel a paradigm shift (Dwyer *et al*., 2009; Buhalis and O'Connor, 2006) that goes far beyond new dynamics in tourism distribution and communication systems. There is an electronic market out there (Buhalis and O'Connor, 2006) that is revolutionising industries by means of emergent products (laptops, Personal Digital Assistants, Smart Phones) compatible with multimedia applications, the development of nanotechnologies, and extensive networking, forces converging to organisational effectiveness, efficiency, and synergy, as well as e-commerce escalating.

One of the problems arising from the fragmentation of tourism is the issue of the destination's political borders. In fact, this may be taken as a specific case of the 'dividing line' between the public and private sector that Bennett (1999) is referring to. The marketing of destinations often takes place within a political unit, a country or a region. However, especially in the visitors' perspective, many destinations (such as the Alps) are not experienced as political units, but as a space bearing some kind of *identity* and in which specific tourism experiences and activities may occur. Government authorities and marketers at destination level happen to fail in the harnessing of forces to jointly develop a strategic vision and approach to the destination *as seen by the visitor*. In order to represent them the destination *as seen by the visitor*, governmental bodies and agencies belonging to different political units, along with private businesses of the destination, are called to overcome political and legal barriers to marketing and management.

Divisions among the public and private sectors of the tourism system are a consequence of the fragmentation of tourism, stakeholders' often divergent interests and divided responsibilities. Because destinations *are not* enterprises (Buhalis, 2000), much of what makes part of them is not controllable, namely the stakeholders that own and run private and *independent* businesses. Traditionally, destination marketing, but more specifically product development and promotion, is the responsibility of public organisations, and these 'fail to control marketing activities and mixes of individual players' (Buhalis, 2000), hence undertaking no more than co-ordination and guidance actions.

First regional tourism boards (Bennett, 1999), and then DMOs, may present themselves as steps towards the solution of these and many other related problems of extreme importance to the development of tourism. Although public agencies are politically and legally empowered to market and manage the destination (Buhalis, 2000), their creation, implementation and management involve in some degree a *partnership philosophy*, that, in face of the fragmented nature of the destination, can be accepted as the most suited one. Buhalis (2000) considers an important challenge for destination marketing the achievement of a comprehensive, i.e. integrated, approach, allowing destination stakeholders to collaborate rather than compete with each other. In fact, the growing interest in tourism partnerships (research and practice) is closely related to the belief that 'tourist destination areas and organisations may be able to gain competitive advantage by bringing the knowledge, expertise, capital and other resources of several stakeholders' (Bramwell and Lane, 2000).

Partnerships for destination marketing are a specific way of collaborative arrangement (Bramwell and Lane, 2000), and implementation and development will eventually lead to the 'blurring of the boundaries between the public and private sectors, a shift in the public sector from direct service provision to an «enabling» function, and, as a result of these changes, the emergence of complex networks of agencies and partnerships' (Bramwell and Lane, 2000). For these changes to happen, Bennett (1999) claims that what needs to be

in place is *'a private sector culture'* capable of bridging the usual gaps between the sectors, *through the understanding of the way the private sector is doing business.* And one could add *the understanding of the meaning the community builds* – or intends to build - on the destination (Lichrou *et al*., 2009).

4. FROM DESTINATION MARKETING TO THE MARKETING OF DESTINATION EXPERIENCES: 'AN ENTIRELY NEW MARKETING ENVIRONMENT'

Tourism is undergoing profound and broad changes that hugely impact on the destination marketing environment (Dwyer *et al*., 2009). In the experience economy paradigm (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), as travel becomes less and less about 'places and things' and more about experiences (King, 2002), destinations can no longer extract benefits from mass promotion messages that feature them as places *having* these and those – one might say, *objective* - attractions, and *providing* such and such services to visitors. The marketing environment has been sending signs to destinations that they can not keep depending on management and marketing strategies unsuited to current conditions.

Destination marketing is recognised as pivotal in the management of the destination lifecycle, and contributing to the formulation of a strategy that is so needed to differentiation (Page and Connell, 2006). However it has also been acknowledged that there are specific problems which are difficult to overcome, mainly due to the complex, fragmented, and multidimensional nature of the destination. The need to properly deal with them, finding effective and efficient courses of action that may contribute to their solution, is becoming more and more pressing, because from both the demand side and the supply side significant transformations are already taking place at a global scale.

The most important ones concern the consumer itself. Societal trends have gradually shaped a more experienced consumer. Consumers have evolved from the Fordian consumption paradigm (Torres, 2002) to more diverse patterns of behaviour, more complex and educated skills and heterogeneous motivations. In general terms, they are now understood and recognised as highly skilled in their purchase behaviour because highly informed, independent, quality and environmentally conscious (Bennett, 1999; Richards, 1996; Poon, 1993).

As to tourism, leisure travel is now a requisite of the contemporary way of life for most individuals around the world. Travel consumption is happening in an almost daily basis, and consumers are no longer computer illiterates, in fact, quite the opposite (Bennett, 1999). ICTs are pervasive in today's societies and consumers are the primary users and beneficiaries of digital technologies. These technologies are enablers of the development of networking communities, first of all amongst consumers, and leading to the blurring of social boundaries (Binkhorst *et al*., 2010; Yeoman *et al*., 2007). Blogs, chat rooms, virtual social networks and similar digital platforms are current currency between individuals scattered around the globe. ICTs do not serve personal purposes alone (such as communicating with friends, broadening of friendship connections, or strengthening of common interests communities), but also societal purposes too, with ICTs allowing societal concerns and awareness to spread among individuals, groups, and societies.

Individualism, as noted by Yeoman *et al.* (2007), is a social trend common to many societies in the world, related to processes of identity creation in a globalised context where deference to authority is no longer the rule. Decline in deference to authority is concomitant with the rise of self-reliance, and it is within this scenario of the ascension of *the individual consumer* that new forms of business interactions are evolving. Experience seeking is taking the place of package holidays (Page and Connell, 2006).

It has been noted by scholars that consumers are now in control in the business environment (Binkhorst and den Dekker, 2009; King, 2001), and thus empowered as never before. Poon (1993) had earlier made known to the world the rise of the 'new tourist' in post-modern societies, drawing attention to the paramount differences opposing the passive consumer to the active consumer; and yet social, cultural and technological changes have been pushing the 'new' even further, to more radical realms of consumer behaviour and business models. The passive consumer made way to the active one, and now the active consumer is transforming itself into *the co-creative one* (Binkhorst and den Dekker, 2009; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004, 2003). The notion of the co-creative consumer should be particularly appealing to the tourism industry and destinations, in particular, since it is now commonly acknowledged that every tourist is different in its unique blend of experiences, motivations and desires (Buhalis and O'Connor, 2006).

Emergent business paradigms are making its way in varied industries to cope with the challenges presented by individual *'in-demand-of-co-creating-experiences'* consumers, and tourism and destination research and practice are already rehearsing approaches and ways to understand and act upon the new business reality.

For the past few years, destination marketing literature has been alerting tourism researchers and practitioners of deficiencies, inefficiencies and inadequacies of the marketing of destinations that ought to be overcome in a context of fierce, globalised competition. Thus destination marketing should develop from conventional notions, principles, and decisions to more daring, creative, responsible, and holistic thinking and acting.

The gradual demise of the packaged product (Bennett, 1999) and the growing awareness that travel is more and more about experiences and not 'things' or places *per se* (King, 2002) are drivers of destination innovation, refreshment and desirability (Bennett, 1999). New approaches are becoming matter of reflection and research, but however different, they all attempt to provide guidance in the future of destination marketing.

Back in the end of the 20th century, Buhalis (2000) asserted that little research focused on destinations as *experience providers*, but at the dawn of the 21st century Hudson and Ritchie (2009) are among those researchers attempting to walk the path of *experiential marketing*. Experiential marketing is a marketing orientation that is emerging as an alternative vision and practice to traditional marketing. It is currently being tentatively implemented at destination level in close relation with branding, a key dimension in the marketing of destinations (Terzibasoglu, 2004, Buhalis, 2000). It is expected that this new orientation brings awareness to both marketers and DMOs managers that there must be a shift from destination promotion to *experiences that connect the customers with destinations* (King, 2002).

According to Hudson and Ritchie (2009), global competition is forcing destinations to create their identity as a means to reducing substitutability; and experiences are being taken as a form of achieving the desired uniqueness. The process would have to develop in complementary dimensions: one of understanding which tourist experiences are occurring at the destination, and the other of branding the destination experience in harmony with them.

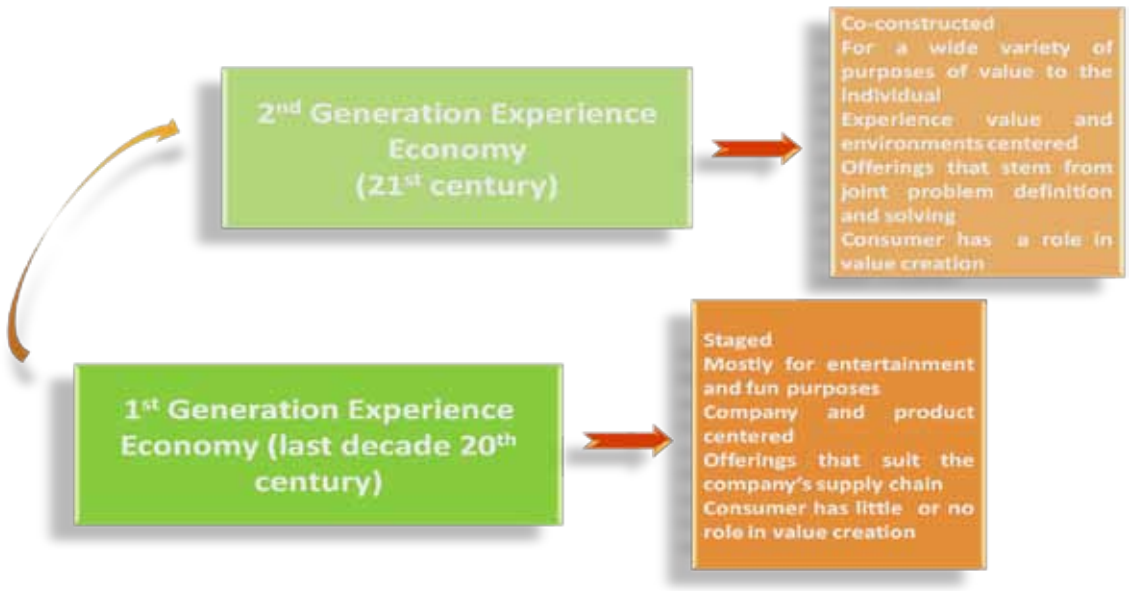
Recent research on consumer behaviour and innovative business approaches are the backdrop to the experiential orientation that Hudson and Ritchie (2009) are proposing for Canada. Morgan *et al*. (2009) provide a useful synthesis on these issues. First, from research on consumer psychology, destination managers have to understand consumers' *emotional dimensions* and their interference in decision processes and satisfaction judgements, their urge in fulfilling aspirations, desires and dreams, and not merely satisfying needs, and, above all, their increasing propensity to take an active role in the tourist experience. The same is found by Dwyer *et al*. (2009) research. According to the authors, 'future marketing efforts must go beyond mere descriptions of the diverse and individualised attractions of the

destination to emphasise the emotional benefits associated with a value set of experiences' (Dwyer *et al*., 2009).

Second, in face of changes in consumer trends, managers from a wide variety of business areas are rehearsing new ways of doing business that are clearly diverging from the *military* paradigm (Morgan *et al*., 2009; Voss, 2004). Pine and Gilmore's (1999) *Experience Economy* is already acclaimed as the new economic paradigm, in which the *drama* metaphor replaces the previous *military* one. It is within their framework that some tourism research is currently being developed (Oh *et al*., 2007). Tourism is 'the greatest generator of experiences' (Binkhorst, 2008), and 'what tourists primarily seek and consume at destinations is engaging experiences accompanied by the goods and/or service components of the destinations' (Oh *et al*., 2007); the acknowledgement of both facts has been spreading and serving as basis for destination positioning (Oh *et al*., 2007).

However, Pine and Gilmore (1999) approach to the experience economy paradigm has been subject of criticism, not only because of the excessive use of the *'à-la-Disney-way-of-doing-things'* (Morgan *et al*., 2009), but also because of presenting their model as if it were a cookbook, offering «how to» recipes (O'Dell, 2010a) for business managers to implement, thus not truly departing from a company-centric view of businesses. Subsequent research in management, but also in tourism, has been pushing challenges for managers even further, in an attempt to allow customer involvement and active participation, in the highest degree, in the process of value creation and delivery.

Figure 1: From Staged Experience to Co-Created Experience



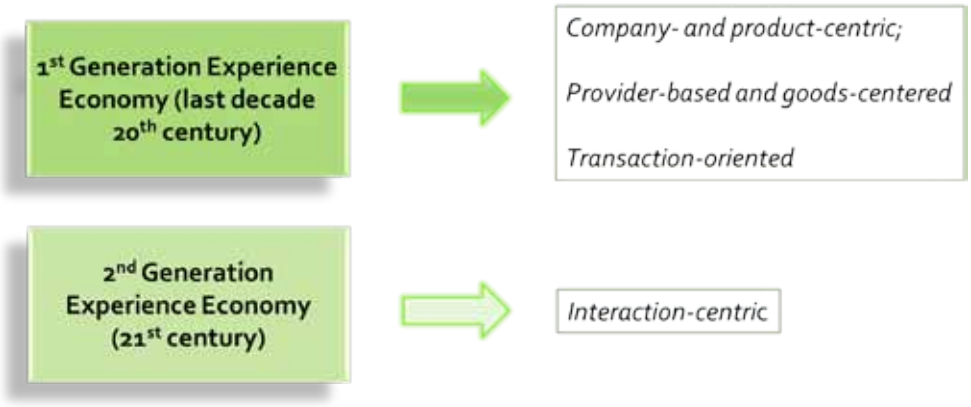
(Adapted from Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009; Binkhorst, 2008; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b)

It might be argued that the *drama* metaphor is giving way to the *happening* metaphor (as a subspecies of drama), because new theoretical adventures and practical examples drawn from businesses currently taking place are heading to *the co-creation concept*. The co-creation concept tells us about *joint value* creation. The keyword is, of course, *jointly*. Joint value creation is something that has not yet really happened in the experience economy at a large and meaningful scale (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). This is a somewhat paradoxical situation, since an economy where experience (value) creation is to happen should be all about interaction (relationships) *beyond staging or orchestration* (Prahalad and Ramaswamy,

2004), and 'scapes' where consumers could picture themselves *other than passive recipients of experiences the company staged for them.*

Furthermore, joint value creation does not mean that businesses are to put aside a company-centric mindset to fit in its place a customer-centric one (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004, 2003). Customer focus or orientation would be too easy – or, to put it in other way, too misleading. Customer focus has been around since a marketing vision started to integrate business strategic planning and management. The challenge co-creation researchers such as Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, 2003), and Payne *et al*. (2008) are exploring is about *the company jointly creating value with the individual that happens to be a customer*. In fact it is a provocation that brings into question business management principles and practices deep rooted in people's minds.

Figure 2: 1st Generation Experience vs. 2nd Generation Experience Orientation



The emphasis in this new business era is on the 2-way, reciprocal relationship between producers and consumers. In the literature some reference is made to the emergence of *improvising* behaviour that necessarily comes with uncertainty (O'Dell, 2010b), as well as with the need of allowing consumers a degree of freedom and spontaneity (Binkhorst, 2008). Improvising in fact may be related to creativity, innovation and increase in productivity in the experience context. However, if the customer is not (not anymore, anyway) an *innovator*, but, as suggested by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), a *co-creator*, every experience is in itself unique and unrepeatable, and therefore contextual. And the 'contextuality factor' alters the way businesses are to operate from now on. Destination managers and stakeholders' contextuality skills will be needed as never before, namely adaptability, resourcefulness, responsiveness, and creativity.

Co-creation experiences in tourism are already taking place a little bit all over the world (Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009), exploring different possible realms: among consumers, among suppliers, and between suppliers and consumers. From a supply perspective, the expected growth of co-creation in the tourism context is an answer to the acknowledgement that consumers are better educated and skilled, in search of self-development and experiential activities through tourism (Richards and Wilson, 2006) - in what could be considered an extension of their lifestyle and personal values.

Although experiential marketing is not *about* co-creation, as a marketing orientation that views consumers as emotional beings seeking pleasurable (holistic) experiences (Ritchie and Hudson, 2009), it appeals to innovative approaches to the destination offer that may go beyond a strictly staged 5-senses experience, and to creative ways in the marketing and promotion of it, in which the consumer may be called to play an active role. As emphasis

should be less on destinations than on consumers themselves (Morgan *et al*., 2009) stronger efforts should also be put on information and knowledge of tourists (Buhalis, 2000).

Destination 'future makers' (Dwyer *et al*., 2009) are still to commit to satisfying the needs and wants of all stakeholders by means of achieving strategic objectives (Buhalis, 2000), however facing a 'whole host of issues' that will expectedly impact on destination marketing (Fyall *et al*., 2006). Fyall *et al*. (2006) attempted an approach to summarise destination marketing main challenges.

Although the authors claim that the proposed framework is not definite, because still in a developmental stage, it is meant to serve as a suitable synthesis on the subject. The framework is composed of 15 key issues, it may be used to assist both researchers and practitioners in the analysis and comparison of destinations (Fyall and Leask, 2007), and from which useful insights may be drawn. From Fyall *et al*. (2006) point if view, strategic issues are: complexity, control, change, crisis, complacency, customers, culture, competition, commodification, creativity, communication, channels, cyberspace, consolidation, and collaboration.

As to *complexity*, it is already common knowledge that destinations are inherently complex realities, and it is unlikely that it can ever be decreased. Apparently, the opposite is true. Fyall *et al*. (2006) draw attention to the fact that destination marketing can no longer disregard the myriad of visitors' perceptions on the destination, as they become more and more skilled and creative of personal meanings. On top of that, concerns with destination sustainability recommend holistic approaches to development, hence highlighting the need to encompass the system's multiple stakeholders, namely the local communities. Lichrou *et al*. (2008), for instance, while proposing a new framing of reference to destination marketing, suggesting for that effect that destinations should be marketed to consumers as *narratives*, not as products, argue their case claiming that local communities have needs and live in specific socio-cultural contexts, being the makers of the destination culture and history. Traditional marketing approaches, in their view, eventually came to neglect destinations' complexity, reducing it to *a place with valuable assets* (Lichrou *et al*., 2008).

Control issues are related to the fragmented nature of the destination and the industry (Wang, 2008), and coexistence of stakeholders that may compromise a unified, coordinated strategy for destination marketing, by choosing to adopt varied, if not contradicting, messages to target consumers. Unlike complexity, control over the marketing strategy for the destination is being assisted by developments in ICTs, and collaboration efforts are happening in tourism as a means to bridge the gaps between stakeholders (Wang, 2008). As Wang (2008) emphasised, collaboration for destination marketing is a dynamic process for collective action, and insofar as it involves business and political decisions and processes that impact on the system stakeholders, interdependency is bound to happen, complicating even further control issues at destination level.

Fyall *et al.* (2006) claim that *change* is another key issue for destination marketing. In fact, change is inherent to social life, and destinations are no exception to it. However, apart from being structural to social systems, and thus, to some extent, inevitable and uncontrollable, change may be the result of human (intentional) action.

External forces in the environment are *global drivers of tourism change* (Dwyer *et al*., 2009). Dwyer *et al*. (2009) point to trends that are generating economic, political, environmental, technological, demographic and social changes that inevitably will impact on tourism destinations competition. From increased deregulation trends in business – such as in the transportation sector – to security issues brought forward by a globalised tourism activity, but also from individualism to climate change, everything in the environment is forcing action upon destination manager and marketers.

As to *human action* at marketing destination level, Dwyer *et al*. (2009) research has shown that change should be directed towards increasing targeting while deepening relationships with key markets; for these relationships to go beyond advertising and reach the point of *built* relationships, database marketing must be enhanced. Ritchie and Ritchie (2002) go even further, proposing a comprehensive framework to implement a destination marketing information system, that would serve the needs of both tourism authorities and tourism businesses, and thus of the destination itself. The framework is meant to bridge the gap between information needs, on one hand, and direction to marketing decision making, on the other.

Dwyer *et al*. (2009) have also highlighted that destination marketing 'must go beyond mere descriptions of the diverse and individualised attractions of the destination to emphasise the emotional benefits associated with a value set of experiences'. And that is exactly what Hudson and Ritchie (2009) attempted to demonstrate with their research, focusing in the process of brand building for Canada, with experiential marketing serving as theoretical framework. While not neglecting physical attributes, marketing efforts should aim at emphasising the 'heart' of destination, i.e. the emotional benefits that may be meaningfully associated to experiences that take place *there*.

Crises, being now commonly acknowledged as affecting tourism activity and destination attractiveness, encompass health issues, natural disasters, political instability and terrorism threats and actions, among others. As a globalised phenomenon subjected to spreading effects from regional dimension to a global one, tourism needs from destination managers and marketers to take a proactive approach (Page and Connell, 2006) to these issues, which could mean to 'incorporate some form of crisis management planning into its strategic marketing planning cycle' (Fyall *et al*., 2006). WTO proposed a crisis strategy integrating *before, during and after the crisis action* (Page and Connell, 2006) in order to assist destinations to better deal with crisis issues. Page and Connell (2006) also note the importance of a clear leadership in the management and communication of a crisis strategy, while Fyall *et al*. (2006) recommend a continued search for market diversification, product development, promotion and public relations so that destinations can take action according to 'the changing tourist flows that accompany crises'.

Complacency is related to an *easygoing* attitude towards the marketing environment of the destination. Today's tourism is facing huge challenges and threats that should be enough to discourage destination managers and marketers to be complacent (Fyall *et al*., 2006). Global competition and worldwide destination efforts to differentiate from one another do not allow relaxation. Furthermore, complacency is enhanced – wrongly – by what has been seen, over the years, as consistent travel patterns of markets. As changes in the environment are happening so rapidly and unpredictably, established confidence in traditional market sources is no longer recommended.

Individualism as an expression of contemporary life impacts on visitors' motivations for travel, expectations and choices, in short, it impacts on how they behave and respond to the marketing efforts of destinations. As tourism becomes a way to build personal identity, 'markets become more fragmented and individualistic' (Yeoman *et al*., 2007). This poses the burden on destinations to offer more customer-focused products and be creative in the marketing techniques and strategies adopted (Fyall and Leask, 2007). Individualism expectedly means to look for the authentic (Dwyer *et al*., 2009; Yeoman *et al*., 2007), seeking a variety of experiences, and self-improvement opportunities (Dwyer *et al*., 2009), leaving an open space for destinations to build strong emotional relationships with visitors.

Culture plays a central role in product differentiation and it has been used as an objective resource in destination marketing (Lichrou *et al*., 2008), with heritage conveying to places *a sense of uniqueness* (Fyall and Leask, 2007). The challenge however is how to develop a

strategic marketing perspective making sense of how the destination's multiple dimensions interact with each other in its specific social-cultural context (Lichrou *et al*., 2008). Culture is also part of what Yeoman *et al*. (2007) called a 'trust in the past', pushing people's search for authenticity and iconic value. In this sense 'destinations rich in history and heritage are perceived to be authentic, because history is an illustration of the truth rather than something that is falsely manufactured' (Yeoman *et al*., 2007).

Competition is a key variable in today's business environment, and it is increasing as destinations become available to visitors from all over the world. Business innovations, especially in the transportation sector, are making travel more accessible than ever (Fyall and Leask, 2007), so virtually every place in the world can use tourism as a development strategy. 'You can now take a holiday at the North Pole and the South Pole and everywhere in between' (Yeoman *et al*., 2007). Competition can also be related to the increase of population that, year after year, takes part in tourism activity, and this, in turn, being an effect of affluence and general well-being (Yeoman *et al*., 2007).

Tourism growth under the Fordian paradigm gave rise to the *commodification* of destinations as the natural response to a standardised mode of tourism consumption (Torres, 2002). Under this paradigm, destinations featured the same type of facilities, architecture and entertainment activities 'demonstrating remarkable similarity' (Torres, 2002). Environmental bubbles (enclavic spaces) used to serve as markers of places where tourist activities and experiences took place, clearly separating tourism space from local community environment. Plenty of destinations around the world, but especially European destinations, still conform to the Fordian paradigm of tourism. Fyall and Leask (2007) argue that although differentiation through price reduction may appear attractive to visitors, *commodified* destinations, by decreasing yield from them, should focus instead in niche opportunities.

Creativity is being acclaimed as a new agenda for tourism development and research (Richards and Wilson, 2007). Creativity is a challenging way to respond to visitors' needs of self-improvement, with travel serving as investment in them (Dwyer *et al*., 2009). This new agenda follows findings in consumer psychology that point to *a shift of emphasis from the rational to the emotional aspects of consumer decision-making, a transition from satisfying needs to fulfilling aspirations, desires and dreams, and the role of the customer as an active participant rather than a passive consumer* (Morgan *et al*., 2009). Co-creation tourism can emerge as a specific form of developing creativity in destinations, and the challenge for marketers will be to emphasise consumers themselves, being a fact that travel is increasingly more about experiences than about destinations *per se* (Morgan *et al*., 2009).

From a supply perspective, Fyall *et al*. (2006) claim that branding of destinations very much needs creativity so that they can position themselves differently from the mass. Traditional barriers to destination branding pointed by Fyall and Leask (2006) are lack of product control and tight budgets that may hinder communication of a clear brand proposition. Hudson and Ritchie (2009), based on previous research proposing a multistage method for destination brand building, provide evidence that it is possible to build a nationwide brand, and at the same time use the process as a marketing weapon to position and differentiate destinations from one another.

Communication challenges link to creativity in the sense that communication targets are now more educated and sophisticated. That poses the question of how to reach demanding and skilled markets: are traditional communication tools enough to attract visitors to destinations? Are traditional communication strategies enough to differentiate destinations? Yeoman *et al*. (2007) have identified a trend in consumer behaviour that puts consumers increasing their resistance to marketing, especially with respect to advertising messages. Resistance to marketing will become even more evident with the trivialisation of digital television, and the role of friends, relatives and social networks in the process of buying

decision will be prominent. This particular trend is paramount for destinations, since communication tools used by destination marketers are mostly the traditional brochure and leaflet (Fyall *et al*., 2006). Apart from tools, communication strategies should be directed towards the building of brand values, while meeting customer aspirations. In the context of the Experience Economy, if one is to communicate experiences, the basis for it should be 'ongoing, direct, two-way and networking consumer communication channels' (Fyall *et al*., 2006).

Channels for the distribution of the destination product are evolving towards multi-channel approaches, with networks, websites and mass media (television) attempting to make way to disintermediation (Fyall and Leask, 2007). For this disintermediation to become stronger, allowing direct communication with markets, destination marketing systems are needed more than ever. Dwyer *et al*. (2009) state that ICTs, by both allowing interactive (direct) access to product offering and responding to independent travel (Fyall *et al*., 2006), give visitors 'unprecedented control over how they spend their time and money'. At the same time, as disintermediation is becoming a trend facilitated by technology developments, re-intermediation is also occurring, due to uncertain travel patterns of key markets (Fyall *et al*., 2006).

Cyberspace is more than a *medium* for online communication to take place. It is above all the prerequisite for the *e-revolution* to happen, changing production processes and consumption patterns (Buhalis and O'Connor, 2006), and which also impact on the domains of tourism, travel and hospitality (Fyall *et al*., 2006). The importance of the *e-revolution* for tourism and the marketing of destinations is the changes it has introduced in the consumers' buying process (namely, direct and independent access to destinations and producers of tourism services; Dwyer *et al*., 2009), and, from a supply side, the networking synergies it is generating to deliver the discrete products and the destination product alike (Fyall and Leask, 2007).

Consolidation is the process of the strengthening of companies within an economic sector by means of alliances, mergers and acquisitions, giving way to new integrated corporate structures (Fyall and Leask, 2007; Fyall *et al*., 2006). It is acknowledged that consolidation operations and processes may cause huge impacts on the tourism industry, in particular on the power balance between tourism intermediaries and providers. To cope with consolidation, +destinations are attempting to develop multi-channel options to gain and maintain access to consumers.

Collaboration in destination marketing is a major subject of research (Bornhorst *et al*., 2010), being acknowledged as crucial for destinations to counter their diverse and fragmented nature (Wang, 2008). The collaboration approach at destination level depends on coordination, communication and consensus building (Wang, 2008), and involves stakeholders to believe they have to cooperate rather than compete (Fyall *et al*., 2006). Bornhorst *et al*. (2010) refer to the growing tendency of DMOs to engage in collaborative marketing alliances as a way to overcome funding needs and enhance strategic effectiveness. Collaboration can take the form of intra-destination networks, relational brands and governance, but it is definitely 'a necessity for destinations to survive in the face of considerable competition and environmental challenges' (Fyall *et al*., 2006).

5. SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH IN THE MARKETING OF DESTINATION EXPERIENCES

Fyall *et al*. (2006) have outlined the main issues that destination marketers and managers will have to face in present and future times. These issues not only result from emergent challenges and changes that are taking place in the marketing environment, but also from

inefficiencies arising from approaches, processes, and organisational patterns deep rooted in destination management and marketing.

In time of globalised and fierce competition, destinations are forced to differentiate from one another and become competitive in the market place. In short, they will have to reinvent themselves and their marketing approach. Fyall *et al*. (2006) claim that, as complex entities, destinations need to focus prioritarily on further developing a collaboration philosophy and practice, because they always involve a wide range of stakeholders with oftenly divergent interests and aspirations. Other related issues, though intertwined, revolve around this key one, 'the *sine qua non* for successful destination marketing in the future' (Fyall *et al*., 2006).

Other research stream that could bring forward useful insights to destination marketing is the one attempted by Lichrou *et al*. (2008). The authors propose a framing approach based on destination *narratives*, as a way to better integrate in the marketing vision and communication of the destination (symbolic) socio-cultural and environmental meanings. The approach is very challenging in the sense that entails the visioning of the destination as a process rather than a product (Lichrou *et al*., 2008), and dealing with extraordinariness, dreams, myths, fantasies, and so on. Narratives, instead of products, are highly dynamic and socially imbedded, and the marketing and consumption of destinations is in no lesser degree dynamic and socially imbedded. In fact, for Lichrou *et al.* (2008), investigation of destination narratives would be the right path for seizing 'the intangible, contested and dynamic nature of destinations'. Further research in this stream would have to focus on processes of generation, dissemination and consumption of destination meanings, and actors involved in them.

The branding of places is, from a supply perspective, a process for creating and communicating a destination identity and promise to visitors. As Hudson and Ritchie (2009) have shown, the building of a destination brand is intended to propose a *memorable experience* to visitors based on the development of identity (head and heart together) and a (experiential) brand promise. Following previous research, they recommend that the promise moves beyond defining the physical aspects of the destination to creating an expectation of experience that is emotional in nature and engaging. The branding approach to destinations involves in some sense the *narrative* framing proposed by Lichrou *et al*. (2008), because brand building by virtue of evoking emotional states related to experiences are, in the same process, making way to symbolic meanings. Research on destination branding is becoming more significant, as experiences and showcases in this area provide evidence of being a powerful weapon available to marketers (Hudson and Ritchie, 2009).

In an ever changing environment, research on macro-environment trends to assist marketing decisions at destination level is increasingly important. Yeoman *et al*. (2007) pinpointed ten trends in the macro-environment, eight of them directly related to consumer growing habits, influences, behaviours and characteristics. These trends are meant to help us understanding how important, either for tourism and destinations, authenticity and the search for authentic experiences will be in the future. Dwyer *et al*. (2009), on the other hand, reviewed the main PEST drivers relevant for destinations.

As empowered consumers, visitors are demanding an active part in tourism experiences, consistent with their own needs of self-improvement and discovery, personal growth, intellectual stimulus and learning. The tendency is for them to engage in activities that assist them in the creation of their own identities, while experiencing feelings and related emotional states (Morgan *et al*., 2009). The co-creation paradigm accepts the premise that tourists are primarily, and above all, human beings that *occasionally become tourists*. In this sense, if research is to assist businesses and destinations in generating strong emotional connections with them and meeting their current aspirations, researchers are urged to develop and apply a wide variety of research methodologies (Binkhorst and den Dekker, 2009).

A broader vision on destination marketing demands from us a much greater care of all the system's stakeholders, from local businesses to communities, and visitors' needs and wants can no longer be met without balancing them with those of other stakeholders of the system.

6. CONCLUSION

The literature review has shown the different meanings and approaches to the destination concept. There are definitions that recognise primarily the geographical basis of the destination, while others try to capture its essence. From a marketing point of view, the destination is considered a product that is available in the marketplace, and thus that can be managed like any other.

Destination marketing is both a management practice and an area of research. As a practice, it has been serving the purpose of assisting the positioning of destinations in the context of competition concurrently with satisfying the needs of stakeholders. Evolution in academic thought and application of it has been helpful in the broadening of the marketing approach, by encompassing satisfaction of needs other than visitors needs.

Environmental awareness and socio-cultural concerns related to tourism impacts on places and communities have been gradually integrated in destination vision, planning, and marketing. Trends in the macro-environment, especially those related to consumer behaviour and demographics, are demanding from DMOs and marketers special attention. The competition is fierce, global and increasing each day, with destinations from all over the world being easily available to tourists. If destinations aim to compete competitively and sustainably, traditional marketing approaches should be called into question.

Research has been contributing to identify marketing insufficiencies and inadequacies that used once to work. Standardised, mass market modes of production, management and communication are no longer suited in today's business environment. Destination competitiveness depends on the close collaboration between all stakeholders, and this means, in the first place, that the public and private sectors should do away with the long lasting dividing line.

On the other hand, as tourism is refining its development goals towards integration of social, cultural, and environmental concerns, destination marketing is challenged to try approaches that defy traditional visions and framings. Destinations determined to succeed need to know better who are their targets, what motivates them, what do they expect from the experiences to mean. So, knowledge on people that are travelling do destinations is an even more important strategic tool for success.

ICTs can and do to play a role in this field. Communication technologies are powerful tools for destinations and DMOs to maintain direct contact with consumers, contribute to the surpassing of traditional inefficiencies in the distribution chain. Channels for communication and distribution are also crucial tools for destinations to achieve competitive advantage over competition. But above all, what DMOs and marketers need to understand is the uncertainty and fast change that is happening in the macro-environment. Trend analysis is a marketing tool to assist decision makers in the process of brand building and promise communication, under the premise that the destination has something compelling to propose to consumers. Perhaps the time to rethink the marketing concept of product adapted to the destinations has come, because though they can be framed as products, destinations are meaningful to consumers (and communities) as long as they are *experiential.*

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