

Chapter 7

Psychological Wellbeing as a Creative Resource for Businesses in the Tourism Industry: A Multidisciplinary View

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ABSTRACT

This chapter probes the relevance of adopting a multidisciplinary view to better understand tourism. It focuses on psychology applied to this industry and particularly, psychological wellbeing as a key factor for the competitiveness of the field. Authors discuss the rise of the experience economy; aligning of psychology and tourism to further create knowledge; and wellbeing in tourism. A case study, The Tourist Wellbeing Project, gives hope for future multidisciplinary endeavors. Uniting efforts from different areas increases the chance to innovate and develop creative products, and psychological wellbeing has great potential as a nontangible product to improve the tourism experience.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a field characterized by its diversity and its confluence with different sectors. Being a social, cultural and economic activity (Department of Economic and Social Affairs – Statistical Division [DESA], 2010) tourism faces enormous challenges that clearly require a multidisciplinary view to better understand its many facets. As it is stated by the European Travel Commission [ETC] (2016) the industry of travel and, therefore, tourism will be affected by people's current needs to live more meaningfully lives. Thus, businesses and industry stakeholders should and must adapt to this on-going change that is having a major impact in the world and, consequently in different fields such as in tourism. Migration, terrorism and many other threats have been shaping this industry. Furthermore, we are also seeing a shift in people's needs and desires, many are no longer interested only in going to a new place and just sit and relax. Many people look for something deeper, look for an experience they can connect with and that can enrich their lives. Thus, the need for the tourism industry to reinvent itself it's clear.

This need to reinvent should not be seen as a dreadful endeavor but as an opportunity to embark on a new adventure and maybe discover something new and exciting in the field. In concordance with DESA (2010), it is also the authors opinion that to start this process of reinvention, a multidisciplinary view is crucial, thus in this chapter, the authors aim to focus in Psychology as a new way to approach the tourism industry. Tourism is a social movement and an industry that services people away from home, therefore there is an obvious connection between the two since Psychology main study subjects are people. In this chapter, it will be emphasized the field of Positive Psychology in Tourism, and particularly the idea of psychological wellbeing and its potential for tourism businesses. Positive Psychology is the science that focuses on the study of wellbeing (Scorsolini-Comin, Fontaine, Koller, & Santos, 2013) and wellbeing is a concept that is getting greater attention each day, being acknowledged by some tourism businesses as an important piece that allows offering new experiences to tourists (Smith, & Diekmann, 2017).

Innovation and creativity in any industry, including tourism, can gain a lot from a multidisciplinary view and in this chapter, it is also an aim to address this challenge by presenting a case study, namely, the "Tourist Wellbeing Project" being developed in Madeira Island, Portugal, that combines the fields of (Positive) Psychology and Tourism. The project explores variables such as wellbeing, creativity, spirituality, and optimism, and its goal is to find a psychological profile of the tourist that visits Madeira and look for the activities that the Island has to offer that attract the tourist. The project is divided in three stages: a) the first one encompassed a deep literature review on the main variables of the study and the first drafts and validation of a psychometric measure of tourism wellbeing were made; b) the second phase, which is underway, is about data collection throughout a civil year, this means that at the moment researchers are retrieving data and proceeding to its categorization and introduction on the statistical software; c) the final stage is about data analysis and the development of an *app* that will allow future tourists to have a glimpse of their psychological profile and what activities suit them better so they can achieve higher wellbeing while in Madeira Island.

Thus, this chapter is structured as follows: a) a literature review as a background, b) an exploration about the link between Psychology and Tourism; c) a focus on the emerging idea of wellbeing in Tourism, with emphasis on some issues and concerns that stakeholders are facing, followed by d) a description of the Tourist Wellbeing Project as a way to improve destination competitiveness. The chapter ends with a reflection about solutions, recommendations and future research directions in the field.

Beyond exploring the above ideas, it is also an aim of this chapter to explore the importance of reinventing tourism products and particularly the potential of promoting 'wellbeing' as part of a destination

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