Exploring Tourist Emotional Experiences within a UNESCO Geo-park

Rita Cannas
University of Cagliari
rita.cannas@unica.it

Daniela Pettinao
University of Cagliari
pettinao@unica.it

Abstract
The paper explores emotions as the backbone of satisfactory tourists experience by investigating visitors of a UNESCO geo-park, located in Italy, in which ecomuseum and tourist facilities are offered. The study aims to provide empirical insights to determine emotional associations tourists attach to cultural and community-based destinations. The methodology is based on a quantitative approach and a survey analysis, through a questionnaire administrated in situ, has been realized. The questionnaire is grouped into four main categories addressed to explore multi-dimensional aspect of emotions, as followings: 1) sociodemographic profile of visitors and visit characteristics; 2) emotional dimensions related to joy, love and surprise; 3) hedonism, novelty, social interaction, involvement and impressions on local community dimensions, and 4) overall visitor satisfaction. Beyond descriptive statistics analysis, the methods are a confirmatory factor analysis in order to test validity and reliability of our multi-model, and an asymmetry and kurtosis analysis aimed to identify the main variables which had strong impacts to determine highest level of emotional satisfaction. The main findings show that these variables are heterogenic and belong to a mix of emotional, hedonistic, local culture and place attachment' items. Although the present study is still a work in progress, it show the importance of emotions in the visitors experience within an UNESCO Geo-park and this outcome should be taken in consideration by managers when designing and planning their business for an ecomuseum.

Keywords: tourists' emotional experiences, destination emotion scale, satisfaction, ecomuseum

JEL classification: M21, M31

1. Introduction

In the tourism customer satisfaction field of study, a new area is emerging which focuses on emotional tourism experiences' features. Emotion and satisfaction are a closely related construct. The idea is to consider emotional variables when modelling consumers' satisfaction processes (Bigné *et al.*, 2005; Bigné *et al.*, 2008; Liljander & Strandvik, 1997; Prayag *et al.*, 2013).

Using this idea, several researchers found that visitor's satisfaction at a cultural site (Caldwell, 2002; Martín-Ruiz *et al.*, 2010) is not merely influenced by the technical aspect of the product itself, but also by the emotional, cognitive and social values associated with it.

Tourism experiences are influenced by various dimensions of emotions: for instance, Hosany *et al.* (2014) identify joy, love, and positive surprise as the three key dimensions of emotional experiences. Kim and Ritchie (2014) adopt dimensions such as social interaction and local culture, meaningfulness, involvement, happiness, novelty, etc., to conceptualize the construct domains of memorable tourism experiences in which emotions play an essential role.

Despite its relevance, the study of emotions in ecomuseums is limited. Many scholars investigate emotions' influence visitor satisfaction and whether this depends on objective variables or not (Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2014) and create models linking tourists' emotional experiences, perceived overall image, satisfaction, and intention to recommend (Prayag *at al.*, 2015).

In our paper we explore the emotions as the backbone of satisfactory tourist experiences in the Rosas Mine Village, an industrial and cultural site which is part of the Sardinian UNESCO geo-park, in which an ecomuseum and other tourist facilities are offered. The village is located in a remote and inner area of Sardinia, which is the second largest island in the Mediterranean, and administratively belongs to Italy. Briefly, in the Rosas Mine, the mining exploitation ended around the 1980s and after almost twenty years of preparation, the renovation of the ex-mining site has today established the mining village as an educational, recreational and touristic center thanks not only to the restoration of buildings, but also to the revival and conservation of a historical memory of great significance (Cannas, 2015).

Our main research question is how emotions generated by the tourism experience on a cultural site positively affect visitors' satisfaction. Considering a previous study about the Rosas Mine Village (Cannas, 2015) we hypothesize that tourists' positive emotions are shaped by and related to the interactions with the local community.

2. Literature Review

Over the last thirty years, customer satisfaction has been a subject of great importance in consumer behaviour literature (Oliver, 1980, 1997). Despite its relevance, given the multidimensional nature of tourism industry (Maunier & Camelis, 2013), ambiguities exist about the nature and definition of satisfaction in tourism (Baker & Crompton, 2000; del Bosque & San Martin, 2008; Kozak, 2001).

Traditionally, it is acknowledged that the satisfaction is influenced by cognitive antecedents being result of a comparison between the consumption of lived experience and other previous (Oliver, 1980). However, many studies show that the satisfaction derived from a visit to specific tourist attractions is not only influenced by technical aspects and tangible supply but also by the emotional, cognitive and social values associated with it (Caldwell, 2002; Martìn-Ruiz, Castellanos-Verdugo & Oviedo-García, 2010; Rowley, 1999). For this reason, authors who develop models to understanding customer satisfaction pay particular attention on emotions (Bignè, Andreu & Gnoth, 2005, 2008; Liljander & Strandvik, 1997; Prayag, Hosany & Odeh, 2013).

Emotions arising from consumption experiences create affective memory traces that consumers process and integrate to form post-consumption evaluations of satisfaction (Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). Several studies focus on marketing analysis (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999; Ladhari 2007; Liljander and Strandvik 1997; Walsh et al. 2011) and tourism (Bigne, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005; del Bosque and San Martin, 2008; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2007), confirm a relationship between emotions and satisfaction. Oliver (1997) says that satisfaction is a key outcome of positive emotional responses such as pleasure, interest, and joy. According to these studies positive emotions such as joy (Faullant, Matzler, & Mooradian, 2011), happiness, excitement, and pleasure (Grappi & Montanari, 2011) have a favourable influence on tourist satisfaction.

Despite the relevance of emotion in tourism to understanding customer satisfaction, empirical studies to determine emotional associations tourists attach to destinations remains limited (Yuksel *et al.*, 2010). Recognizing the lack of research on emotional content of destination experiences and adopting a rigorous scale development process consistent with conventional guidelines (e.g. Churchill, 1979; Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), Hosany & Gilbert (2010) constructed the Destination Emotion Scale (DES). The DES measures the diversity and intensity of tourists' emotional experiences and is based on three dimensions: (1) Joy, (2) Love, and (3) Positive Surprise. In Hosany and Gilbert's (2010) study the sample was limited to one culture but in Hosany *et al.* (2014) they extended original theory of DES to another culture and they related the item to a new construct: place attachment (Scannell and Gifford 2010). Briefly,

place attachment refers to the emotional and psychological bonds formed between an individual and a particular spatial setting (Williams *et al.* 1992).

At the same time, Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2012) and Kim and Ritchie (2014) developed the memorable tourism experience scale (MTES), based on a research program that identified seven salient dimensions on which to base the MTES: hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty. The first component, *hedonism*, refers to pleasure and enjoyment are significant aspects of tourism experiences. The second component, refreshment, included three items that highlighted personal *involvement*. The third component, *novelty*, is derived from many authors (Reder, Donavon, & Erickson, 2002; Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013) and evidence the importance of unusual, atypical, or distinctive events to remember rather than "typical" events. The fourth component represented *local culture* and it is very important to understanding cultural satisfaction within an UNESCO geo-park. The fifth component, *refreshment*, measuring the psychological need to escape from boredom. The sixth component highlighted and acquire new *knowledge*. The last component represented, *meaningfulness*, help to measure level of happiness and well-being that people acquire during the visit.

With this approach is very important to study interaction between visitors and destination and in this study it is a particular destinations based on ecomuseum. Ecomuseum philosophy demands specific roles which distinguish ecomuseums from other destinations and museums (Corsane *et al.*, 2007). These attributes have been described by many scholars who list a series of separate characteristics (Boylan, 1992; Corsane & Holleman, 1993; Hamrin & Hulander, 1995). Davis (1999) used a revisited version of all these checklists to compare ecomuseums to traditional museums and analyses the features that might be nominated as 'ecomuseum indicators'. The emphasis on a selected geographical territory and the *in situ* conservation and interpretation of selected features in that cultural landscape, and the active involvement of local people in the selection and management of sites are considered essential features.

Briefly, the theoretical framework for this study is mainly inspired by a combination of the DES (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Hosany *et al.*, 2014) and the MTES (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). As already said, these scales are both addressed to measuring the tourism experiences' satisfaction: while the former focuses on three emotional dimensions, the latter adopts seven dimensions that assess memorable tourism experiences. By identifying a composed set of multi-dimensions in which emotions, memorable experiences, local culture's affection, and visit satisfaction are contemplated, we aim to provide empirical insights to determine emotional associations tourists attach to cultural and community-based destinations.

3. Methodology

The study methodology is based on a quantitative approach, and a survey analysis conducted through a questionnaire. The questionnaire is grouped into four main categories: 1) sociodemographic profile of visitors and visit characteristics; 2) emotional dimensions related to joy, love and surprise; 3) hedonism, novelty, social interaction, involvement and impressions on local community dimensions, and 4) overall visitor satisfaction. The first group composed by nine items deals with some generic socio-demographic information, namely gender, age, education, occupation, country of residence, and with some characteristics of visit as following: visit frequency, visit party, and visit services enjoyed. The second part is composed by the 15 items of the DES (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010), which are grouped into three categories, joy, love, and positive surprise. The third part includes 17 items drawn from the MTES (Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012), in which the main core of questions regards the visitors perceptions of the local people and the sense of involvement as well as learning of local culture they experienced

during the visit. Through eight items, the fourth group of questions investigate the overall visit satisfaction by also considering the visitor's propensity to promote actively, among relatives and friends, the visit to the Rosas Mine. Except for the first group of questions, the questionnaire is structured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), is composed by overall 47 items, and it ends with an open question regarding eventual suggestions to improving the Rosas Mine Village visitor' experiences.

The survey has been conducted *in situ* during the period 19 May-30 July 2016, in two ways: the biggest part of total questionnaires were executed as by personal interviews conducted by three *ad hoc* trained students from the University of Cagliari, after groups of respondents had visited the Rosas Mine's ecomuseum. Thanks to the collaboration with the Rosas Mine's staff, remaining questionnaires have been self-compiled by respondents (singles, couples and families) who visited ecomuseum and spent some time at the Rosas Mine Village enjoying accommodation facilities and restaurant services. A total of 87 valid questionnaires were collected, representing 8% of total visitors in the chosen period. Particular, 66 questionnaires were drawn from respondents by face to face interview, and 21 questionnaires have been self-compiled by visitors.

4. Findings and discussion

We start our analysis from the first part of the questionnaire, which focused on demographic and trip characteristics, as showed below.

Variable	Category	N.	%
Gender	Female	49	56.3
	Male	38	43.7
Age	<18	6	6.9
	18-24	3	3.4
	25-34	3	3.4
	35-44	13	14.9
	45-54	11	12.6
	55-64	16	18.4
	>64	35	40.2
Place of residence	Sardinia	60	69.0
	Rest of Italy	27	31.0
Education level	Primary school	8	9.2
	Secondary school	18	20.7
	College graduate	32	36.8
	Graduate	9	10.3
	Postgraduate	4	4.6
	Other	17	19.5
Job position	Employed private sector	9	10.3
	Self-employed	8	9.2
	Retired	37	42.5
	Student	12	13.8
	Other	13	14.9
Number of previous visit	No previous visit	80	92.0
	Previous visit	7	8.0
Travel companion	Alone	3	3.4
	Partner	19	21.8
	Family	20	23.0
	Friends	4	4.6
	Group	40	46.0

	Other	1	1.1
Activity/Service	Ecomuseum	63	72.4
	Mine Gallery	85	97.7
	Restaurant/bar	49	56.3
	Hotel	12	13.8

Table 1. Demographic and trip characteristics
Source: Our elaboration

Descriptive statistics on the sample show that the Rosas Mine Village' visitors are mainly women (56%), elderly people (40%), retired (42%), and Sardinians (69%). Also, they are well educated (with 37% college graduate, 10% graduate and 5% postgraduate), travel in group (46%), and visit for the first time the Rosas Mine Village (92%), particularly gallery (98%) and ecomuseum (78%). Thus, from the first part of the questionnaire (table 1), there emerge a visitors' picture in which there is a lack of tourists, particularly of those coming from abroad. While focussing on emotional responses, we consider the validity and reliability of our model derived from DES and MTES which have been already tested in previous studies (Hosany *et al*, 2014; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Specifically, on the basis of prior tourism researches we expect that both DES and MTES affect emotional and behavioural individual intentions. Our multi-model has been tested by a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the open source software R, with the package Lavaal (table 2). Since the significance of χ^2 test is highly dependent on the number of degrees of freedom, the ratio of the χ^2 test to the degree of freedom was calculate. As stated by Hoe (2008), if the ratio of the χ^2 to the degree of freedom is 3 or less, a model is judged to be acceptable. Then, three goodness-of-fit statistics were utilized: the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI or non-normed fit index NNFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA).

Results show that our model, composed by three frames (DES, MTES, and Overall satisfaction) has a partial validity. Particularly the items grouped into the MTES provided a good fit.

Measures	All variables	Joy, Love and Surprise (DES)	Hedonism, Novelty, Local culture, Involvement, Knowledge (MTES)	Over-all Satisfaction
χ^2	1433,45	227,41	193,95	148,62
DF	704	87	109	20
CFI	0,67	0,78	0,86	0,75
NNFI	0,64	0,73	0,82	0,64
RMSEA	0,11	0,14	0,09	0,27

Table 2. Measurement model results: confirmatory factors analysis – Goodness-of-fit statistic index
Source: Our elaboration

Also, we operate cluster analysis in order to classify possible sub-groups of respondents, such as "retired people", "Sardinians", in order to identify those related to the higher positive feelings and emotions. Cluster analysis does not fit in our sample. We hypothesize that the scarce number of respondents might have influenced both model's validity and cluster analysis. However, our study is a work in progress and we expect to strengthen sample, data analysis, and results on the forthcoming months.

The descriptive statistics regarding percentage distribution of responses are showed on Tables 3-5. When we began our study we hypothesized that the overall visitors' satisfaction was correlated with strong feelings, such as joy, love, and the sense of surprise. Instead, we found not so strong ties among these variables and the overall visitors satisfaction, probably because

of the specific nature of the mine site. In fact one who visits a mine site may feel intrigued by others feelings: some respondents wrote in the latest question that they felt very touched by the visit into the ecomuseum and gallery.

Items of Destination Emotion Scale (DES)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Joy							
I feel cheerful	9.2	3.4	10.3	18.4	39.1	14.9	4.6
I feel a sense of delight	4.6	1.1	4.6	18.4	44.8	16.1	10.3
I feel a sense of enthusiasm	1.1	0.0	2.3	4.6	41.4	36.8	13.8
I feel a sense of joy	5.7	0.0	9.2	31.0	34.5	16.1	3.4
I feel a sense of pleasure	3.4	0.0	3.4	24.1	40.2	24.1	4.6
Love							
I feel a sense of affection	6.9	1.1	3.4	35.6	24.1	23.0	5.7
I feel a sense of caring	9.2	1.1	4.6	34.5	36.8	8.0	5.7
I feel a sense of love	16.1	2.3	4.6	43.7	20.7	9.2	3.4
I feel a sense of tenderness	9.2	1.1	9.2	36.8	24.1	11.5	8.0
I feel warm-hearted	1.1	0.0	1.1	4.6	35.6	39.1	18.4
Positive surprise							
I feel a sense of astonishment	1.1	1.1	1.1	14.9	31.0	31.0	19.5
I feel a sense of amazement	1.1	0.0	4.6	8.0	32.2	31.0	23.0
I feel fascinated	2.3	0.0	4.6	9.2	27.6	33.3	23.0
I feel a sense of inspiration	5.7	4.6	9.2	34.5	26.4	10.3	9.2
I feel a sense of surprise	2.3	1.1	5.7	16.1	31.0	28.7	14.9

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of Responses of Items related to DES
Source: Our elaboration

Items derived from Memorable Tourism Experience Scale (MTES)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Hedonism							
Thrilled about having a new experience	0.0	0.0	2.3	6.9	31.0	40.2	19.5
Indulged in the activities	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.7	39.1	33.3	21.8
Really enjoyed this tourism experience	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.2	36.8	35.6	18.4
Exciting	0.0	0.0	1.1	9.2	42.5	35.6	11.5
Novelty							
Once-in-a lifetime experience	20.7	5.7	5.7	12.6	25.3	18.4	11.5
Unique	5.7	2.3	8.0	13.8	32.2	23.0	14.9
Different from previous experiences	5.7	2.3	6.9	17.2	27.6	25.3	14.9
Experienced something new	5.7	4.6	3.4	9.2	37.9	23.0	16.1
Local culture							
The local people left me with a good impression	1.1	0.0	3.4	16.1	26.4	31.0	21.8
Closely experienced the local culture	11.5	1.1	9.2	24.1	29.9	18.4	5.7
Local people in the Rosas village were friendly	2.3	0.0	1.1	25.3	28.7	25.3	17.2
Involvement							
I visited a place where I really wanted to go to	4.6	0.0	0.0	9.2	35.6	36.8	13.8
I enjoyed activities which I really wanted to do	4.6	0.0	1.1	12.6	43.7	29.9	8.0
I was interested in the main activities of this experiences	1.1	0.0	3.4	12.6	35.6	31.0	16.1

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Knowledge							
The visit enhanced my personal development	1.1	1.1	5.7	27.6	31.0	18.4	14.9
I learned something new about myself	10.3	3.4	0.0	29.9	23.0	13.8	10.3
I learned about the local culture	3.4	0.0	0.0	11.5	28.7	37.9	18.4

Table 4. Percentage Distribution of Responses of Items inspired by MTES
Source: Our elaboration

The frame of items showed in the Table 4 are inspired by the MTES. Specifically those items grouped into "refreshment" and "meaningfulness" by Kim, Ritchie & McCormick (2012) have not been taken in consideration in the present study, because of the length of the questionnaire, and the type of the site in which the survey has been conducted.

Table 5 shows the overall visitors' satisfaction in which there clearly emerge high levels of appreciation by respondents who visited the Rosas Mine Village. Only the two last items display scarce visitors' appreciation, maybe because being mainly elderly people they are not so familiar with social media tools.

Items of Overall satisfaction (OS)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I liked the Rosas Mining Village (RMV)	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.4	21.8	33.3	41.4
My experience at RMV has been satisfying	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.6	21.8	46.0	27.6
I would revisit RMV to enjoy of services/activities	3.4	0.0	4.6	18.4	35.6	27.6	10.3
I will recommend RMV to other people	1.1	0.0	0.0	8.0	23.0	31.0	36.8
I will say positive things about RMV to other people	1.1	0.0	0.0	6.9	21.8	26.4	43.7
I will encourage friends and relatives to visit RMV	1.1	0.0	0.0	5.7	20.7	26.4	46.0
I will promote actively RMV through my social media page	12.6	0.0	2.3	31.0	19.5	18.4	16.1
I will actively follow the social media page of RMV	11.5	1.1	3.4	31.0	24.1	16.1	12.6

Table 5. Percentage Distribution of Responses of Items of Overall Satisfaction
Source: Our elaboration

Figure 1. Distribution of variables by Asymmetry and Kurtosis' analysis
Source: Our elaboration

Finally, for each item of the questionnaire we compute the distribution of the answers and then the asymmetry and the kurtosis related to them. In the Figure 1, on the x-axis values of asymmetry are reported; while the y-axis shows kurtosis values.

Negative skewness means that hypothesizing a normal distribution of variables, the top of the curve slopes on the right side, attesting that highest values of appreciation/satisfaction are expressed. High values of kurtosis mean that preferences are more concentrated in low values. Thus, negative asymmetry joined with higher kurtosis show items for which respondents have expressed highest appreciation and also reveal the highest concentration of positive variables.

The variables which show negative skewness and positive kurtosis have been highlighted in the Figure 1. They are: "I visited a place where I really wanted to go", "I learned about the local culture", "I really enjoyed this tourism experience", "I enjoyed activities which I really wanted to do", "I learned about the local culture", which belong to group the items of MTES; "I feel warm-hearted", and "I feel a sense of enthusiasm", which pertain at the DES; and "I will encourage friends and relatives to visit the Rosas Mine Village", I will say positive things about the Rosas Mine Village to other people", and "I will recommend the Rosas Mine Village to other people", which regard the overall visitor satisfaction.

5. Conclusions

In the specific context of an ecomuseum, where an emotion approach to visitor satisfaction seems very rare, our findings show high levels of appreciation expressed by respondents who visited the Rosas Mine Village and took part at the present survey conducted by a questionnaire. The main findings showed that the main variables which have positive impacts on visitors' satisfaction are heterogenic and belong to a mix of emotional, hedonistic, local culture and

place attachment' items. The study has shown the importance of emotions in the visitors' experience and this outcome should be taken in consideration by managers when designing and planning their business.

However, as the sample has been characterized by the segment of Sardinian elderly people, we need to administrate a higher number of questionnaires which hopefully cover other segments of people, e.g., those coming from the rest of Italy, and abroad, which usually visit the Rosas Mine during August and September. For this reason we consider the present study as a work in progress which will be developed in the near future.

Acknowledgments

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