

## Holistic Tourist Experiences in Mature Destinations

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### Abstract

Tourism is one of the activities that most urgently requires innovation and creativity to keep its constantly booming. The aim of this paper is to figure out how mature destinations and their tourist managers provide innovative and sustainable actions in its daily management. Current demand tendencies require active experiences, that generate emotions, awaken feelings, experience content, doses of pleasure. The so-called holistic visits are composed of elements that offer participation, hedonism, knowledge, local identity, and nostalgia. Pinacoteca a Cel Obert (Open Air Art Gallery) is an innovative proposal of street art, and the case analyzed. This is a project promoted by the Barcelona local Government (Spain), with the collaboration of the merchants' association and with the participation of a cooperative of tour guides (Revivint el Patrimoni). Street art or the artistic intervention into 24 commercial shutters is the essence of this public action which also hides different objectives: the recuperation and embellishment of public spaces to the community, the provision of new cultural and social spaces to neighbors, the boost of small businesses in the territory, and the creation of a new icon or attraction to stimulate and strengthen another area to temporary visitant flows in a consolidated tourist city, as Barcelona is. It is a clear example of reactivation, recovery, urban development, but in this case, taken into account the complicity of the associative fabric and citizenship, under the local government push to empower this community participation to change the urban issues. In-depth interviews to the respective project managers; as well as the guides who execute the itineraries and a satisfaction survey to the visitors who enjoy the tour are used to analyze the viability and sustainability of this meritorious example of collaboration and consensus.

**Keywords:** Holistic experience, governance, street art, sustainability, Barcelona.

**JEL classification:** Z32, L26, Q01, L3.

### 1. Tourism governance and holistic experiences

Current societies stand out for the increase in the demand for tourism and leisure. Thus, these destinations focus its efforts to enhance its positions in attractive enclaves for consumption (Zukin 1995; Florida 2002; Miles & Paddison 2005; Smith, 2007; Domínguez-Pérez et al, 2015). Traditionally, tour operators and guided tours were the key elements in shaping these tourist enclaves, and they also had the leading role in transmitting to tourists a unified social feeling (Cocks, 2001). These tourism organizers designed a kind of contemplative tour to specific chosen scenes which were previously embellished (Huka, 1990; Judd & Parkinson, 1990; Sassen & Roost, 1999; Cocks, 2001; Harvey 2001; Blázquez y Murray, 2010; Crespi-Vallbona & Domínguez-Pérez, 2016; Sorando & Ardura, 2016; Gil & Sequera, 2018). These tourist enclaves usually included historic sites, monuments and cultural centres, often located in the central areas. Consequently, these central areas increase its physical, economic, social and cultural pressure, starting several processes of gentrification (van den Berg, 2003; Judd, 2003; Paskaleva-Shapira, 2007; Gladstone & Préau, 2008; Ashworth & Page, 2011; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014; Montaner *et al*, 2014; Murray & Overton, 2014; Alabart et al., 2015; Wise, 2016; Postma & Schmuecker, 2017; López & Antebi, 2017), touristification (Prats 1997; Donaire, 2008; Herzer, 2008; Rosas Mantecón

2013; Martín, Martínez & Fernández, 2018) and tourismophobia (Lopez-Gay & Cocola Gant, 2016; Novy, 2017; Milano, 2017; Russo & Arias-Sans, 2017; Quaglieri & Scarnato, 2017; Huete & Mantecón, 2018; Crespi-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miró, 2018).

In that hectic context, managers of tourism destination organizations (DMO) have a delicate and difficult challenge. They have to provide attractive resources, products and services to tourists; maintain the essence, authenticity and singularity of the host community; and try to reconcile interests of both users, that is, tourists and residents and public and private sector (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Thus, current challenge of tourism governance focuses on sustainability (Lloyd, 2000; Hiernaux-Nicolás, 2003; Crespi-Vallbona, *et al.*, 2017). From a sustainability perspective, resident involvement in the governance of tourism is imperative (Presenza *et al.* 2013). Therefore, the current challenge focuses on the implication and collaboration of public sector, private organizations and citizenship in the planning, development, and the design of a tourism destination. In short, amongst the many challenges of tourism governance, balancing stakeholder interests is one of the most common and difficult objective, introducing networks (Hall, 2011) as the best type of management.

So, according to Hall's statement, governance can be broken up into two main concepts: public authority and social autonomy. Public authority is about state intervention for policy creation and enforcement. Social autonomy represents the need for public administration to regulate itself. It should be noted, however, that the constant political shifts and practices that occur regularly throughout many governments make having one single definition impossible. Furthermore, Hall classifies the tourism governance in four typologies. But, currently, network approach, that is the public-private collaboration has been gaining popularity in the tourism sector, to balance stakeholder interests (van der Zee *et al.*, 2017). These networks are typically referred to as DMO's or CVB's (Convention and Visitors Bureaus). According to van der Zee *et al.* (2017), the strategic placement of managers, both within and outside of the network is important for funding, information, and other resources. However, due to the complexity of the industry, it is difficult for bottom-up networks to be successful without some sort of public-private partnership (Hall, 1999). Public-private partnership refers to the different forms of cooperation between public authorities and the private business world, whose objective is to guarantee the financing, construction, renewal, management or maintenance of an infrastructure or the provision of a service (European Commission, 2003). Therefore, there is no doubt that mixed entities generate positive externalities that all tourism suppliers share and appropriate (Cambrils, 2016). Definitely, it states the need of a sustainable governance model with the complicity and collaboration of public sector, private organizations and adding also the citizenship participation. To this triple helix, sustainability, innovation and competitiveness are the central aims (Crespi-Vallbona, 2019).

Local resident support is critical for the successful tourism development in an area (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011). A key indicator for successful tourism development is trust, because it builds relationships that underline economic development, legitimacy of governance institutions and promotes outcomes which are in the best interest of society (Nunkoo *et al.*, 2012). Power distribution is another important factor when considering level of support for tourism development amongst residents, for the formulation and implementation of tourism policies" (Nunkoo, 2017). The amount of power that residents have, or believe they have, is proven to have a direct positive effect on their perceptions of tourism development (Madrigal, 1993; Kayat, 2002). Acquiring trust amongst residents in conjunction with empowering them by involving them in the decision-making process of tourism development are the keys to success for tourism governance. Definitely, residents are key stakeholders whose perceptions can heavily influence tourism development. To gain or maintain local support for tourism projects and initiatives requires policymakers to first be informed about resident perceptions of

tourism and potential directions of new development (Presenza et. al 2013). It is only after key stakeholders are heard, that sustainable tourism development can take place. In a nutshell, the sustainable governance strategy involves a new destination management model based on a close relationship with the private sector, the public intervention and citizenship support.

Lastly, there is a required strategy to design and create competitive products. That is, to originate new tourist products to integrate the cultural identity, the emotions and the memorability. Current customers' behaviours or tourists' interests have changed. Contemplative visits have nearly disappeared. Participative experiences and fulfilled emotion proposals emerge vigorously everywhere, as a result of new demand's tendency (Vogeler & Hernández, 2002; Bordas, 2003; Richards, 2004; Bonilla Moya, 2006; de Rojas & Camarero, 2008; Cuenca & Prat, 2012; Rivera Mateos, 2013). Changes in tourism demand mean a research of new experiences far from the daily routine, new activities with the opportunity to discover and know different cultures, other leisure spaces to feel and revive memories of the past (Crespi-Vallbona, 2019). Thus, the attributes that shape these holistic experiences are: participation, hedonism, local identity, knowledge, tasting and nostalgia (Figure 1). These attributes join different tourists' needs, interests, motivations, and expectancies, providing a global experience. Consequently, a new strategy based on these market trends are needed. All these set of elements generate high added value; competitive and differentiated products. Thus, public sector has to force the design of these new, innovative and specialized products based on experiences and emotions. It supposes a holistic and global vision; it means to know the customers' functional needs, as well as their cultural, social and emotional requirements.

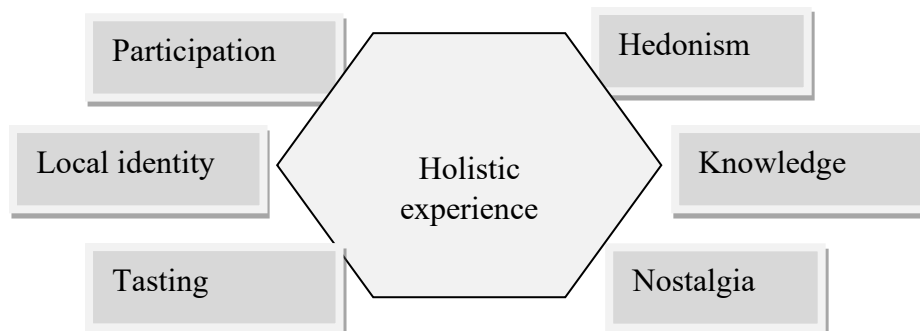


Figure 1. Attributes of holistic experiences

Source: Own elaboration.

## 2. Case study: Pinacoteca a Cel Obert

The case study analysed is Pinacoteca a Cel Obert (Open Air Art Gallery), as it joins all these aforementioned variables that shape holistic experiences and innovative tourist activities. Furthermore, it represents a proposal to replicate due to its sustainable governance, with the implication, collaboration and complicity of public sector, private organizations and citizenship.

*Pinacoteca a Cel Obert* is defined as a consumption experience in a public space. It consists of 24 shutters of shops (Pictures 1 and 2) in a commercial area painted by two famous street art artists. They are geographically located in the city of Barcelona (Spain), specifically in two neighbourhoods (named *Sants* and *Les Corts*), where there is an active network of shopkeepers (named *Associació de Comerciants Sants-Les Corts*), who concern with the economic, social and cultural dynamization of its area. This project was planned and designed from the bottom-up structure, that is, from the *Associació de Comerciants Sants-Les Corts*, and with the political and economic support and drive of the local administration (specifically, from the economic, promotion and tourism area of the Sants-Montjuïc and Les Corts Districts).

Furthermore, the cultural organization, named *Rebobinart*, executed this pictorial project through two recognized street art artists: Jalon de Aquiles and Lucie Blin. Finally, this project consolidates through a group of citizens, who established a cooperative to work as tour guides (named *Revivint el Patrimoni*). These tour guides decided to create a tourist visit based on holistic experience attributes. All these stakeholders play a leading role in this current trend of contemporary “urbanscapes” (Sherry, 1998; Wang, 2005; Bonfantini, 2015). The 24 painted shutters from different commercial businesses, reproduce classical pieces, well-known in the history of art.



*Picture 1. “Ruby” by Alfons Mucha at Europa Jewelry, in 21 Europa street*



*Picture 2. “Bubbles” by Claude Joseph Bail, at the shop Goccia Verde, in 111 Galileu street*

Source: Own elaboration.

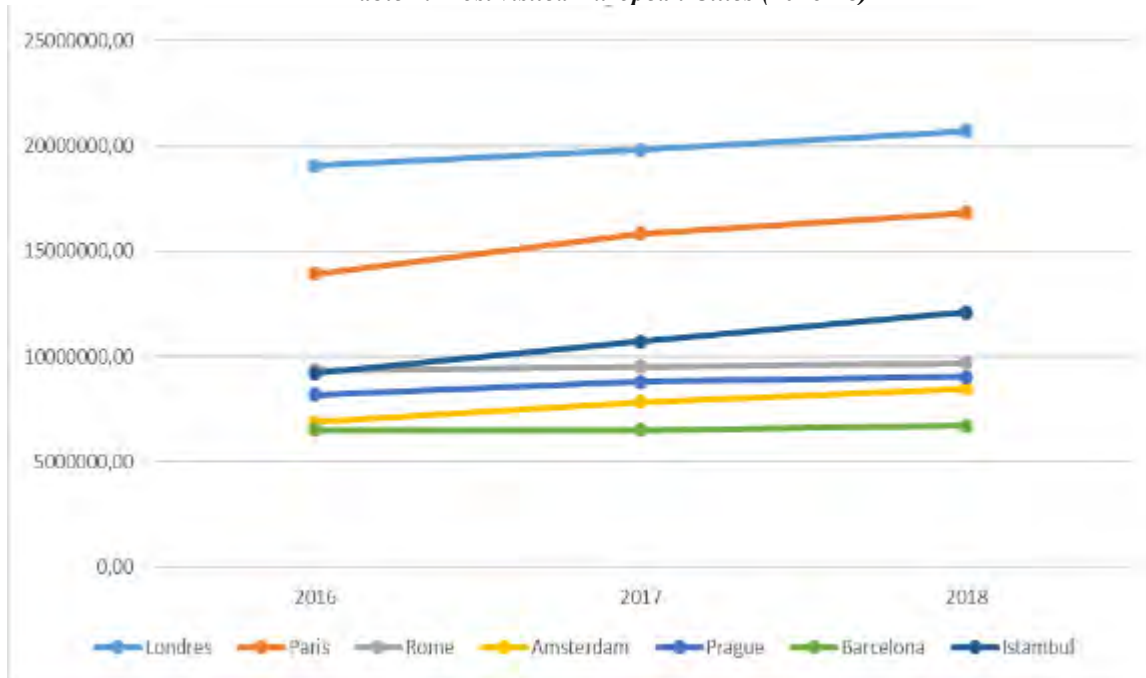
The *street art* as a graphic intervention in the public space is a very studied topic at the scenic art field from the aesthetic and ideological approach, as well as in urban studies from the right of the city perspective and the urbanscape production. In this context, street art is analysed as a leisure and cultural product, as a strong tourist and commercial reaction, due to its embellishment aim. Therefore, in this research, street art is not analysed from the pure and strict conception of street art. Street art refers to artistic expressions that transform the public scene (walls, metro stations, public transport, benches, sing posts, etc.), showing personal feelings, beliefs and ideologies (Gastman, et al., 2006; Rose & Strike 2004; Quintavalle, 2007), and usually without permission (Abarca, 2010). Most of them try to embellish the public scene (Banksy, 2006). Thus, these artistic expressions create new formula of social interactions (Goodsell, 2003; Sacks, 2005), and have a public and urban dimension, as they exhibit in consumption and public spaces. In the case analysed, *Pinacoteca a Cel Obert*, the painted places are shutters of private businesses.

## **2.1. Barcelona: a mature tourist destination**

According to Euromonitor International (2018), Barcelona emerges as one of the most visited cities in Europe (Table 1). A brief historic analysis states that the first tourism plan made by the City Council (1988-1992) had the clear objective to position Barcelona in the world tourist scene and provide the accommodation capacity to participants and visitors to 1992 Olympic Games. Therefore, the XXV Olympic Games celebrated in Barcelona put the city in the mind of any potential tourist around the world, creating an image and a brand linked

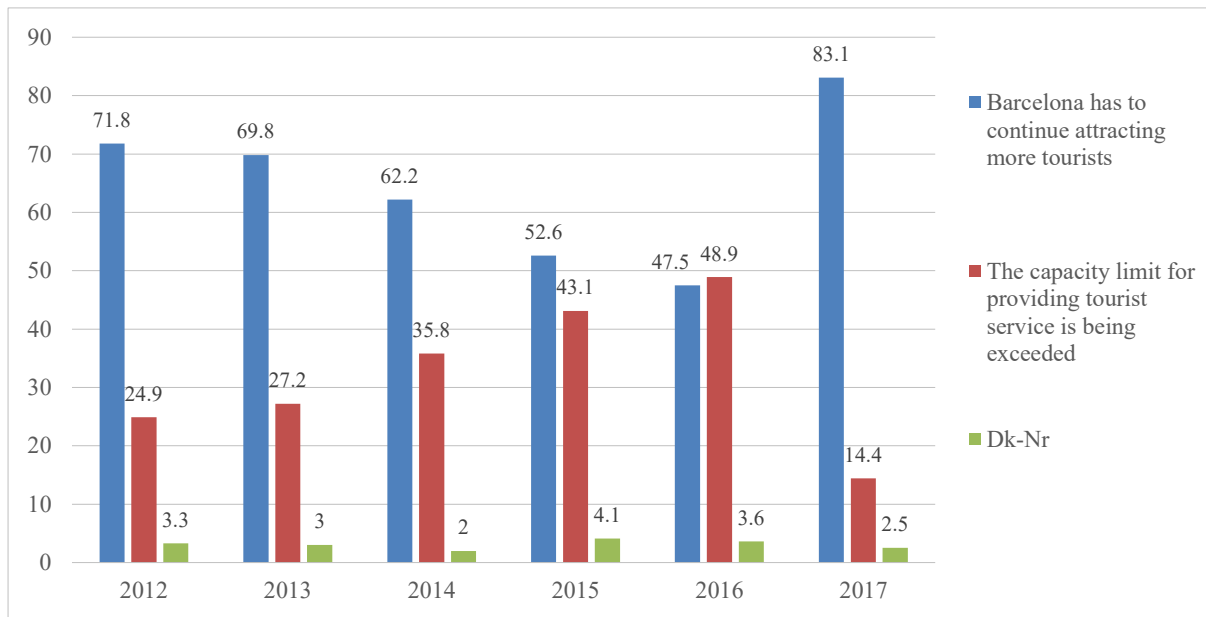
to the cosmopolitanism, modernity, design and tradition, with open-minded, welcoming and friendly residents (Alabart et al, 2015).

*Table 1. Most visited European Cities (2016-18)*



Source: Own elaboration from Euromonitor International Report, 2018

Barcelona cultural icons and attractions are located in the historic centre: the Rambla, the Cathedral, the Gothic Quarter, etc. They are the most visited places. Consequently, the overcrowding and oversaturation in these central spaces involves the emergence of different social movements against the tourist activity. It has also generated the government reaction with the approval of different decrees and plans to regulate and control the uses and licenses of touristified spaces. However, it is worth to mention, that regular survey of the Tourism Administration to citizens reflect their support to tourism activity (Table 2). In such controversial context, this paper stands up for this new model of act in the urban space: artistic expressions into the street furniture, specifically on the shutters of private commercial businesses, using aerosol, with the local administration permission, made by urban street artists and painting classical pieces of art. The final aim is not transgressing or mark the territory, but embellish, converse, decorate, make visible the local and traditional trade in the city, providing a new consumption experience to tourism and visitors, and emphasizing the public-private and citizenship participation in its design and implementation. That is, looking for the local support and the project sustainability.

**Table 2. Evolution of residents' tourism support/rejection in Barcelona (2012-2017)**

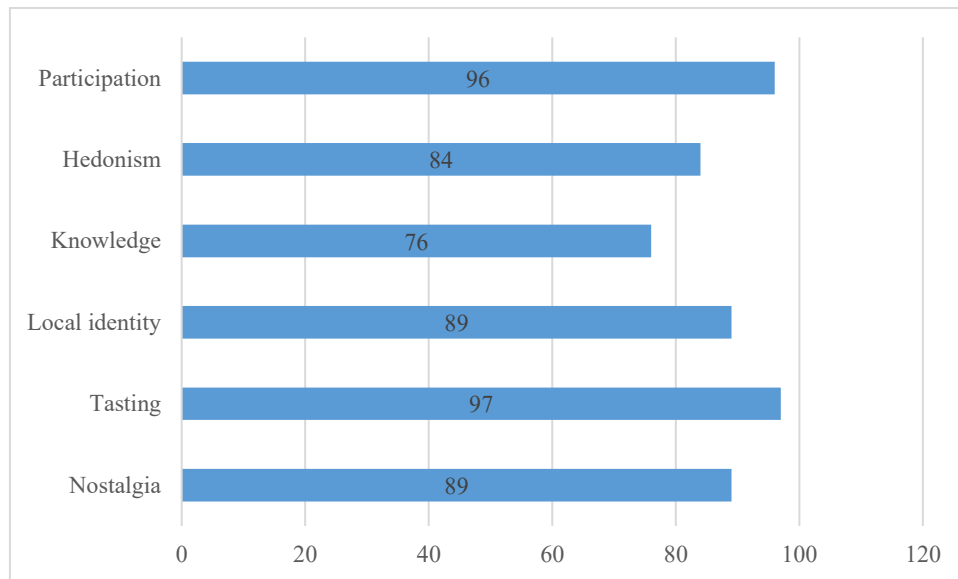
Source: Own elaboration from Tourism Barcelona Statistics, 2017

### 3. Discussion

Quantitative and qualitative methodology used in this research states the sustainable mark of this project, named *Pinacoteca a Cel Obert*. Primary data is collected by in-depth interviews to organizers, designers and tour guides of *Pinacoteca a Cel Obert* itinerary, participant observation during the visits and a survey to visitors conducted at the end of the tours. Secondary data comes from Strategic Plans of City Council, related to tourism and commerce.

This sustainable mark comes from the governance model, this bottom-up network based on the co-partnership and joint responsibility among the different stakeholders leading the economic and social activity in the city: public administration, private organizations and citizenship. A model that strengthens ties between the involved participants to the project and the local community; driving new management and organizational ways to generate shared value to the mutual profit.

Related to the attributes of the holistic experience designed by the tour guides, survey results conclude the significance of each of them (Table 3), emphasizing the interactive nature of the tour, the nostalgic moments emerged during the visit, the fruits tasting at the end of the visit, as a surprise end, the amount of knowledge and local information achieved in a funny atmosphere. However, participation (96%) is the most appreciated value because respondents highlight how they had fun sharing information, trying to guess or deduce the questions suggested by the tour guide.

**Table 3. Perception of satisfaction according to the attributes of the holistic experience Pinacoteca a Cel Obert**

Source: Own elaboration

The breaking point of all the visits was always the same: when visitors had to build a paper magnifying glass to observe the painted shutter on the Fap business (which it is specialized in the restoration of ancient cars). The painting is “Death on ridge road”, by Grant Wood (Pictures 3 and 4). So, these social interactions planned in the itinerary are the most highlighted aspect from respondents.



**Pictures 3 and 4. Admiring “Death on ridge road”, by Grant Wood, at Fap business in 140 Galileu street**

Source: Own elaboration

Finally, the paper reinforces the new conception of street art, as a pretext to increase the community value, to revitalize a commercial area, to embellish the public space. Moreover, it becomes a new icon to decentralise the touristified central areas of Barcelona.

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