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## Co-construction in tourism service delivery

### Aims and objectives

This chapter brings an understanding of the most recent advances in terms of service-provider interactions. It focuses primarily on the Service Dominant Logic approach which brought a new vision of the consumer by restating his role as a co-producer of the experience. It also addresses the recent evolution of those theories which give a wider opening onto the psychological dimensions of the experience. The more recent Customer Dominant Logic approach is then detailed and the notion of auto-construction is addressed with the idea of a continuum that indicates that consumers vary between co-construction and auto-construction in most tourism contexts. Finally the notion of value brings a more general overlook of the various outcomes of a consumer experience. Several examples are used throughout the chapter, for instance with the development of SmartPhone applications, TripAdvisor, and street theatre festivals.

After studying this chapter readers should be able to:

- Fully understand the precept of the Consumer Dominant Logic and what it implies in terms of managing services.
- Contrast and compare the evolution that the Consumer Dominant Logic brought to this area of research.
- Understand why the concept of auto-construction is important to fully embrace the tourist experience.
- Appreciate the need to conceive the tourist experience as a series of services either co-constructed with the consumer, or respecting the consumer autonomy in appreciating the service.
- Understand the concept of value as it can be useful to tourist experience managers.

The notion of co-construction has been a fairly recent concept in the services marketing field and brings a very interesting insight into the complexities of the experience. This approach conveys a much clearer insight into the active role that customers might play in the service delivery.

## ■ A co-producer and co-creator consumer

The joint production of goods and services between the company and the customer is not a new idea; for example fast food or supermarkets have gained some of their success through the customer participation in order to reduce production costs. Historically, consumer participation in service production was first studied as a strategy to improve productivity by using the client as a free labour, thereby achieving a lower price (Fitzsimmons, 1985; Mills and Morris, 1986). In the CCT perspective, a number of studies proposed to expand consumer participation into the experiential domain, because it helps to guide the consumer towards a consumption experience and brings him satisfaction (Ladwein, 2004). In this sense, co-production is related to an active participation that reflects the consumer involvement in shaping the company's offer (Cermak *et al.*, 1994).

To date, not many examples exist of 'true' co-creation, if it means customers being actively involved by an enterprise in the creation of its product. As we will see later, the idea of co-creation also takes less formal approaches but which are nonetheless very interesting in understanding the relation between consumers and enterprises.

## IReporters as co-creators of information

In the audiovisual and media sector, a number of the internationally renowned U.S. TV channels, such as CNN, have implemented the 'IReporters' concept, which describes a type of citizen journalists who produce and disseminate documentaries and reports. On the CNN website, Internet users are invited to share their experiences, comments and videos on current news or other matters. The best stories are broadcast in the CNN TV news channel and the IReporter is often invited to join the journalist and participate in the debate. Thus, CNN benefits from the expertise of these citizen journalists and reduces the costs of its professional journalists, because to produce a report they must travel, which generates financial and management expenses. IReporters are different because there is no cost – they work for free because they are passionate about the issues and topics. This participation in terms of production and dissemination of information is becoming essential for media groups and the audiovisual sector, who attempt to enhance the collaboration with the consumer, who is able to produce, disseminate and influence information through his online social network. However, this ideology has

some limits in terms of the relevance and the value of the information produced by a consumer who is not paid for this work. Indeed, in the fashion and haute couture sector, designers and luxury brands pay influential bloggers to attend their shows and provide feedback and information on their blog to the online community through Twitter, or Facebook. These users receive remuneration in return and are considered as employees, which is not yet the case in the media and audiovisual industry.

In the tourism industry, the processes of co-creation tend to be more informal than in the news media and audiovisual industry. First of all, as we have mentioned in the previous chapter, the indirect service provision that characterises tourism services intuitively implies that customers will, consciously or not, participate in the production of their own experience. Probably the best perspective to take on co-production is to consider that enterprises offer a range of services and that consumers freely choose which ones they want to use within their experience. The choice remains on the consumers' side. The following section reviews the theoretical background of the notion of co-construction and then illustrates different ways in which it might take place in tourism.

## ■ The Service Dominant Logic (SDL)

The Service Dominant Logic was originated in 2004 by Vargo and Lusch who aimed to establish a new vision of consumers in services contexts. In their 2004 article, Vargo and Lusch set up a new approach, termed a new dominant logic for marketing, which aimed to move away from product marketing towards a stronger focus on services marketing. Vargo and Lusch (2004) indicated that all economies are service based where knowledge and specialized skills are the fundamental source of competitive advantage and unit of exchange. Those authors viewed societies as composed of two elements: operand and operant resources. Operand resources are the basic resources available in a destination and that are acted upon to market them to potential customers. They should include, for instance, physical resources such as forests, mountains or beaches. Operant resources are the physical and mental skills and knowledge used to transform those operand resources. These could include, for instance, the skills of a lift operator to manage a mountain route, the relational competencies of the staff in a tourist office, etc. In the Vargo and Lusch (2004) vision, the key to a competitive business lies within operant resources.

The most important finding of the SDL is the notion that consumers are co-producers. Vargo and Lusch (2004) proposed that resources do not have value as such but that their value is co-created with customers when they are used: 'value is defined and co-created with the consumer rather than embedded in