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Destination design: New perspectives for tourism destination development

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ABSTRACT

Theories on destination management, destination leadership and destination governance have made noteworthy contributions to the advancement of tourism research. However, current global dynamics in regards to political, social, technological and economic developments demand a revision of traditional methods and instruments of destination development. This paper suggests perspectives rooted in design and design thinking as a source for gaining fresh understandings of challenges in tourism destinations and for offering innovative solutions. This paper reflects on the possibility of integrating design approaches into the theorising on and practice of destination development. It explores how a transdisciplinary fusion of notions can ultimately result in a new vision for destination development.

1. Introduction

Theories and models of destination management (Bieger, 2002; Laws, 1995; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003), destination governance (e.g., Laesser & Beritelli, 2013; Pechlaner et al., 2010; Raich, 2006) and destination leadership (Beritelli &, Bieger, 2014; Pechlaner et al., 2014) have contributed to advance tourism destination research and practice. With the changes in perspective that accompanied these waves of theorising on tourism destinations, the focus shifted from strategic goals and competitiveness (destination management), to processes and structures (destination governance), and finally to actors and values that shape destination networks (destination leadership). However, developments in digitisation, climate change as well as changing mobility behaviour challenge societies as a whole; they also throw traditional processes and approaches of destination development in disarray. First, developments that are global by nature, such as climate change, influence tourist perceptions and behaviour and little is known about the complexity of demand responses (Gössling et al., 2012). Second, local residents more decisively than ever demand participatory processes and legitimately request to be included in decision-making in tourism destinations. As places described as 'tourism destinations' from a tourist perspective are usually living spaces for locals with differing priorities, planning processes in tourism destinations need to be reconsidered facilitating a better inclusion of local stakeholders. Third, global impacts such as demographic change and a more and more mobile population (including both residents and visitors) challenge established destination infrastructures, processes and heuristics which have often been conceived with generally more settled realities in mind (Hall, 2008). In order to tackle these challenges, inter- and transdisciplinary approaches will be of particular value due to their ability in dealing with increased complexity.

This paper advocates that a transdisciplinary approach capable of enriching practice and theory on destination development can result from the combination of destination ideas with concepts stemming from the discipline of design. Design lends itself to transdisciplinary application as its theorists claim that it is suitable to tackle challenges in different industries and diverse segments of society (Brown, 2009). Furthermore, design is committed to the combination and integration of multiple disciplines to achieve an improved understanding of problems and ultimately generate innovative solutions (Brandes et al., 2000). Applications of design thinking are not entirely new to tourism. Tourism and design have been linked in the contexts of destination planning (Dredge, 1999), creating tourism routes (Rodríguez et al., 2012) and more generally tourism experiences (Fesenmaier & Xiang, 2017; Tussyadiah, 2014). Building on these contributions, we suggest that design-inspired perspectives have potential to advance theoretical approaches and generate operationalizable practical implications in destination-oriented research, while pooling different disciplines and

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actors.

This paper introduces the concept of "destination design" as an attempt to integrate thinking on aesthetics, insights originating from recent advancements in technology and the established research tradition on destination development. The here-advocated opening towards design thinking is not focussed on one particular tradition within the widespread area of enquiry and practice that is design. Rather, features from several schools including service design (Stickdorn & Zehrer, 2014), product design (e.g., Luchs & Swan, 2011), participatory design (e.g., DiSalvo & DiSalvo, 2014; DiSalvo et al., 2012) and experience design (e.g., Tussyadiah, 2014) deserve consideration. Moreover, links to topics such as resilience, sustainability and transformation emerge organically, as contemporary discourses in design put a strong emphasis on social and ecological concerns next to ethical dimensions (Fry, 2009).

Although destination design is an emerging notion, the aim of this paper and of related papers in this collection is to explore opportunities to advance research on tourism destinations on a conceptual and practical level. The purpose is to highlight if and how design could enrich more traditional views on tourism destinations. This paper first presents an overview of current perspectives in the literature on tourism destination research as well as in the design literature. It then combines these two areas to illustrate how design-theoretical approaches can be beneficial in expanding and nurturing research and practice in the context of tourism destinations.

2. From destination management to destination governance and leadership: advancements in destination research

Destination management is at its core an instrumental perspective that asserts the need for coordination in tourism destinations to optimise outcomes for everyone involved in the local provision of tourism services (including tourists, tourism providers and local communities). Theorising on destination management came a long way from establishing tourism destinations (1) as a worthy area of study and (2) as relevant competitive units in the tourism system (Bieger, 2002; Laws, 1995; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). The field then evolved into more specific and refined lines of thought such as destination governance (Beritelli et al., 2007; Pechlaner et al., 2010; Ruhanen et al., 2010) and destination leadership (Pechlaner et al., 2014) further down the track. A critical tenet in destination management is that the overall service and experience bundle that people consume when visiting a particular place outside their usual environment and staying for at least one night is best described as "tourism destination". Based on this assumption, it is logical to argue that the supply side in such tourism destinations should be managed and marketed in a coordinated manner (Laesser & Beritelli, 2013). Due to the diversity of stakeholders in tourism destinations (Elbe & Emmoth, 2014; Sainaghi, 2006; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005), who altogether create the visitor experience, this is more easily said than done. The task has not been getting easier over time due to an increasingly prominent role allocated to and readily accepted by the consumer, i.e., the tourist, in co-creating these experiences. For the most part, the propositions and debates in destination management hence concentrated on how this coordination of a diverse set of stakeholders can be achieved effectively and efficiently. The destination management organisation (DMO), or alternatively called tourism organisation or convention and visitor bureau, has been the organisational crystallisation point of the theoretical and practical discussions about increasing effectiveness of coordination (Bornhorst et al., 2010; Pechlaner et al., 2012; Pike, 2004; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014a, 2014b).

In comparison, destination governance is an even more vigorously empirically driven perspective that recognises the diversity of actors and the complexity of actor relations in tourism destinations (Baggio et al., 2010). Discussions on destination governance were fuelled by the realisation that the practice of coordinating collective behaviour of multiple stakeholders in a tourism destination is neither described well as market transactions nor is it captured in the ideal typical hierarchical organisation of a firm (or government) (for basics of transaction cost economics see, e.g., Williamson, 1979). At the heart of this shift in perspective from destination management to destination governance sits the realisation that tourism destinations materialise as profoundly social phenomena (Laesser & Beritelli, 2013; Wang & Xiang, 2007). Shifting the connotation from management to governance thus means acknowledging that actor relationships in tourism destinations are aptly portrayed as networks (Baggio, 2011; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2015); that is an intermediate form of economic organisation in-between markets and hierarchies, and in-between political and corporate decision making (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011). In other words: Authors took the complexity (Baggio, 2008) of the coordination attempts in destination networks into account and recognised that different stakeholders can use a variety of sources to exert influence (including, formal authority, money, social capital and trust) (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011; Raich, 2006; Saito & Ruhanen, 2017). Authors also acknowledged that boundaries of influence and power are continuously negotiated and renegotiated in the context of tourism destinations (Pechlaner et al., 2012).

In comparison to research on destination governance, putting destination leadership under the spotlight encourages more instrumentally anchored perspectives. It channels attention towards exploring ways of influencing collective behaviour to achieve coordination in the absence of hierarchical processes and solidified structures of command and control. In essence, destination leadership theorising combined the instrumental ambitions of the initial destination management conceptions with the empirical insights from destination governance research. While insights from work on destination governance corroborated the complex and dynamic nature of relationships between a tourism destination's stakeholders, destination leadership research set out to explore 'soft' mechanisms to direct collective agency in networked environments (Pechlaner et al., 2014). Instead of socio-structural questions, destination leadership research brought the (individual) human element of people involved in motivating and directing agency in destinations into focus. In short: The research attention shifted from structure and process to motivation and inspiration. Researchers paid particular attention to the notions of distributed leadership (Valente et al., 2014) and systemic leadership (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014), both perspectives that allow linking the leadership construct to a networked entity. Networks of leaders and the influence of leaders on the network structure have figured prominently among the main areas of inquiry (Hristov & Ramkissoon, 2016; Hristov & Zehrer, 2019).

While the perspectives on destination management, governance and leadership made formidable contributions to advance our understanding on how to coordinate collective agency in tourism destinations, these paradigms also suffer from shortcomings. One shortcoming is of temporal nature with an imbalanced concentration on more short- and medium-term impacts and dynamics. A second and more severe shortcoming is the partial disconnect of organisational and strategic considerations with the actual tourist experience on the ground. While insights from the disciplines of management, organisation behavioural and political science contributed to advance the understanding of supply-side dynamics in tourism destinations (whether understood as virtual firms or loose actor networks), researchers somewhat lost the interplay between supply and demand out of sight. This is severe because this interplay is a key driver of a destination's competitiveness and sits at the core of the destination concept as "[d]estinations can be understood … as a network of suppliers activated by visitors' demands" (Laesser & Beritelli, 2013, p. 47). There is a need to bring the destination-based tourism experience, and possibilities to nurture this experience in the medium-term, back under the research focus. This may mean going back and borrowing from the planning paradigm (Dredge, 1999; Getz, 1986; Gunn, 1972) where the scientific preoccupation with tourism destinations began. No doubt, many insights are still highly applicable and revealing today. In addition to this very well-warranted look back into the past, the advocated shift appears accomplishable by pairing original ideas on tourism destination development with some of the recent

advancements in the design discipline (Fesenmaier & Xiang, 2017).

3. Current approaches and perspectives in design research

What is design? Design is a term that is associated with multifaceted meanings and is used in a wide variety of disciplines as well as in everyday language. There is no consensus on how to describe the concept of design best. For example, no clear historical point in time can be found when the concept of design was used first (Brandes et al., 2009). In the Oxford Dictionary, the term "design" was introduced in 1588, and described as (1) "a plan or scheme of something to be realised, conceived by a human being" and (2) "a first sketch of a work of art or an object of applied art to be binding for the execution of a work" (Bürdek, 1991, p. 15). Alternatively, Burckhardt (2012) uses "design" to denominate a creative visualisation of functions, offers and processes. The strong methodological emphasis shining through these definitions, which is indeed their commonality, justifies the conception of design as a method.

Who is supposed to design? Manzini (2015, p. 1) argues that "in a world in rapid and profound transformation, we are all designers". This statement coincides with Cross's opinion that "everybody can - and does – design" (2011, p. 3). These authors apply the term "designers" to individual persons, organisations, companies, authorities, cities, regions and states that are involved in all sorts of transformations. Cross (2011) goes further in his remarks and speaks of the concept of design thinking as a methodology to conceive processes, actors and objects. Ultimately, design thinking refers to the ability to pursue a solution-oriented approach and engage in unconventional thinking outside the known. In the context of creative problem solving, design thinking becomes synonymous with creating new options and avoiding mental restrictions when dealing with challenges. In this sense, designers tend to be seen as individuals who can overcome boundaries in order to create commonalities or connect previously separated areas and integrate them into encompassing entities. In the same vein, design is increasingly understood as a meta-discipline relevant to a wide variety of fields of research and practice (Cross, 2011). In essence, designers are all those people and organisations who are able to apply particular techniques and methods to create something new.

Why design? Latour highlights several advantages of the concept of design: He praises "design" for its modesty, its attention to detail and the semiotic finesse. He also reminds us that design "is never a process that begins from scratch: to design is always to redesign" (Latour, 2008, p. 5). In other words, design has particular strengths in dealing creatively with an existing and historically shaped present, as there "is always something that exists first as a given, as an issue, as a problem. Design is a task that follows to make that something more lively, more commercial, more useable, more user's friendly, more acceptable, more sustainable, and so on, depending on the various constraints to which the project has to answer. In other words, there is always something remedial in design" (Latour, 2008, p. 5).

This ability if not necessity of design to link an existing present with a desirable future elucidates the potential of using design thinking in destination management and development. However, until now, design has only had limited fields of application in destinations and has only been integrated partially into the field of tourism (e.g., through experience design). Stienmetz, Kim, Xiang, & Fesenmaier, 2020, this collection) make a valuable contribution by helping the interested reader to link the basics of design to the phenomenon of (tourism) experiences. They first review and synthesise conceptual frameworks on 'experiences' in psychology, economics, geography, marketing and services management. They then proceed to combine these conceptual bases with design tools to suggest ways to manage, develop and measure tourism experiences. Stienmetz and colleagues agree that research on experiences and experience design offers promising pathways for emerging perspectives on destination design.

4. Principles for an emerging field of destination design

Design is holistic. Social practices, political interventions, economic leaps and radical technological developments provide for a mixture that is able to set great and small transformations in motion. The multiplicity of these transformations and the realisation that so-called decision makers have limited influence on theultimate effects of their decisions requires different, and indeed in parts yet unknown, practices. Faced with such global complexity, it becomes increasingly clear that questioning focussed on problems as a means to identify problem *solutions*, is not sufficient. Planning in the sense of defining plans or even master plans, and management in the sense of defining tasks, processes and responsibilities as well as their implementation initiate the creation of new subsystems, which in turn exacerbate complexity. Traditional problem solving involves the increasing differentiation of expert knowledge (Lawson & Dorst, 2009). In order for this expert knowledge to not be hampered in its applicability to complex global issues due to compartmentalisation it must be combined with even greater efforts to recognise inherent connections with other, related areas of knowledge. The challenge is to understand the interconnectedness and interdependence of economic, political, social, cultural and religious spheres through inter- and *trans*-disciplinary thinking (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014a, 2014b). Ultimately, the way forward is more about initiating social practices that do not only help in solving a specific problem, but aid in devising new approaches to conceive phenomena and their inter-connections differently (Scuttari et al., 2021).

It is well-known that in developing destinations, branding and naming have an important role to play. The study of Qu, Cao, & Xu, 2020, this collection) exemplifies how multi- and transdisciplinary approaches that blend insights from cognitive psychology and linguistics can be useful in broadening the current view on destination naming and branding. Qu and colleagues generate and showcase a framework of design guidelines for destination slogans based on the attenuation model. According to the authors, this framework will help to close the projected slogan-perceived slogan gap by ensuring that receivers (i.e., potential visitors) give full attention to the slogan information.

In the context of tourism destinations, the pursuit of a homogeneous and seamless service chain within the tourism realm can clash with the often-heterogeneous worldviews and interests of stakeholders. In particular, *places* that underpin tourism destinations are distinguished by heterogeneity in development agendas and conflicts in land use priorities. Places where tourism happens are at the same time living spaces for inhabitants. In this sense, a holistic conception of destination design combines the often market-driven view of the tourism destination with the resource-based view of the living space. A particular value of destination design can lie in requesting development conceptions to take the needs of both guests and residents into account.

Koens, Melissen, Mayer, & Aall, 2019, this collection) suggest the 'Smart City Hospitality Framework' as a foundation to cultivate destination-design-driven and collaborative reflections on urban tourism development. The framework specifically promotes reflections on how to fairly distribute costs and benefits of development among different stakeholder groups. Chief among the characteristics of the Smart City Hospitality Framework is its alleged capability in dealing with overtourism issues. Koens and colleagues reassert the importance of citizen participation and resilient design thinking principles to nurture the willingness of local stakeholders to engage in development processes.

Design is open, human-centred and participatory. As discussed further above, design thinking does not denote a *particular* way of shaping or designing of processes or artifacts. Design is inconclusive and addresses anteceding factors as it attempts to stress a way of deliberation that facilitates conceiving processes and combinations of artifacts to trigger new thinking and acting. More than ever, the ability is needed to ask the right (i.e., in many cases: open) questions that allow to generate answers in a collective and collaborative manner in order to initiate and master

transformations. Already in the 1940s, Lewin (1947) was well aware that, regardless of whether manufactured or spontaneous, sustained change is far more likely if it is anchored in the collective sphere and in shared worldviews. Genuine stakeholder participation and involvement becomes indispensable. In sum, design thinking is not obsessed with precision, but aims to provide flexible means for expressing and addressing complex issues in a human-centred and participatory manner.

Bichler (2019, this collection) specifically explores the role of residents in destination design. Based on an extensive literature review, he argues that governance arrangements in tourism destinations often promote elements of participation but at the same time show a tendency to neglect inclusion of local residents as a particular stakeholder group. He calls for additional research into approaches that allow to cultivate direct participation of residents in destination development, including clarification of their roles, required support and techniques of evaluation/assessment. Moreover, the paper disseminates hope that innovation-centred design offers opportunities to revitalise participation in tourist destinations.

Design also stresses customer-focused (or, to use the diction of the field: user-focused) approaches. Digitalisation allows tourists to design their own destination bundle (Laesser & Beritelli, 2013). Thus, destination development in terms of a narrow supply-driven optimisation of organisational practices becomes increasingly ineffective. Needless to add that political-administrative circumscriptions are becoming even less suited to be advocated as the glue that should hold a destination together. Co-creation of destination experiences with tourists is a smarter way forward (Boes et al., 2015). Creating attractive tourism products increasingly means enabling the alignment between the imagination of tourists as expressed in and shaped by digital texts (including images) with co-created experiences during their actual stays in destinations.

Destination design is requested to interpret the role of the individual in a particular spatial and temporal context. This openness towards the individual is balanced with a consideration of the *genius loci*, that is the character of a place (Volgger, 2019). Atmosphere and atmospheric design (Pfister, 2013; Volgger & Pfister, 2019) can become means to connect service design (Zehrer, 2009) with places and their artifacts. The atmospheric component in destination design can be interpreted as the connected moods and feelings surrounding and transcending people and artifacts in a particular place at a particular point in time. Atmosphere, including deliberate interventions into this atmosphere ("place-making" as in Lew, 2017), are thus crucial in turning an anonymous space into a unique place.

Usenyuk-Kravchuk, Gostyaeva, Raeva, & Garin, 2020, this collection) introduce Arctic Design as a source of inspiration for destination design that takes place-specific cultural and environmental complexities into account. The authors present educational experiments on designing would-be tourist destinations in Russia to demonstrate that the approach of Arctic Design puts a particular emphasis on both human-/-user-centeredness and human-nature interactions. They conclude by stressing human-centeredness and local involvement as signature values for co-developing innovative, respectful and workable solutions for tourism destinations in extreme environments (e.g., polar regions, outer space).

Design means translation. Design aims to translate concepts and ideas into materials, shapes and into visualisations which is a process that helps with the intrinsically related factors of complexity reduction and implementation. With actor-network-theory, Latour (2007) highlights the inseparability of innovation, innovation implementation and networking: Connecting actors, objects and ideas through networks is critical in implementing change. Translation competence thus can be understood as the ability to connect heterogeneous elements based on an idea and to embed them in more or less durable and targeted networks to help this idea gain acceptance (Latour, 2007). In this process, goals, roles and conditions are re-defined and a network is created where all 'members' speak the same language.

Translation is critical to gain acceptance of innovation and, more generally, consensus in tourism destinations. In destinations, hence, design has the task to connect and bridge businesses, cultures and philosophies. Connection and translation are often not exact and precise but use techniques of encouraging contact as well as applying irritation and provocation. Translation competence in destination design also benefits from political competence in dealing with power, money, trust and knowledge, which contributes in making imagined futures possible. Translation in the context of destination design finally means varying the degree of complexity in a skilful manner. Disruptive developments require space for roaming thoughts that allow for a multitude of possibilities; at the same time disruptive design also needs to provide for patterns of subsequent streamlining (Lawson & Dorst, 2009).

De La Ballina (2020, this collection) makes a valuable attempt of momentarily "freezing" (Weick & Quinn, 1999) dynamic real-world processes for the purpose of translation. In his article, he offers a novel way to present and analyse destination networks, the so-called SmartMax approach. This approach is designed to model and examine a multi-destination system by accommodating a number of sub-networks, within a wider geographical area, and by visualising relations between agents, attractions and tourist services. This innovative modelling method has potential to add fresh insights to the perception and conception of destinations by focusing on the visitors' perspective and their movement patterns within a certain area.

Design is ongoing and transformational. Design thinking creates space to observe processes in their development and, if necessary, to change them while already in progress. Tourism destinations can be seen as spaces for personal development as well as for relationship development with other personalities or even artifacts. In this sense, destination design can be part of the answer to the prevalent longing of modern societies to replace the experience of externality with a journey into a new inwardness (Sheldon, 2020). Enabling an inward journey also requires destination designers to understand tourists' contexts and life-worlds to be able to interpret intensely personal needs. Being conscious of the complexities and intricacies at hand, a destination designer will strive to maintain a flow of curiosity and to allow for experimentation. The destination designer will avoid to be narrow-minded and will adopt inter- and *trans*-disciplinary perspectives as they are embedded in the connected nature of economic, political, social, technological and natural dynamics. Simply put: The destination designer encourages an ongoing process of linking people, places, artifacts and thoughts to create transformational realities where individuals can express themselves; while knowing that these enabling realities will need to remain ephemeral.

Technology can help destination designers in familiarising themselves with the needs of specific target groups and in developing the necessary empathy (Kouprie & Visser, 2009), and at the same time technology can be part of effective solutions. The article of Lam, Chan, & Peters, 2020, this collection) discusses the role of technological contributions in the context of design for accessible tourism. The study highlights different types of barriers encountered by the visually impaired in visiting urban attractions and how they can be removed by introducing technological devices (such as smartphones and computers). Moreover, this paper also offers ideas for future technological innovations aimed at improving the accessibility of a destination even further.

Gon (2020, this collection) illustrates how social media data can be used as a valuable source of evidence in destination design and how it can help to account for the critical role of host communities in creating tourism experiences. She suggests to consider what she calls "local experiences" as a key focus of tourist desire and illustrates how such local experiences can serve as a basis for designing tourism destinations. Gon ultimately argues that destination designers can utilise user-generated content about local experiences (mined from social media) to generate a holistic understanding of desirable tourist experiences.

Design complements management and leadership. Design, leadership

and management complement each other on the pathway of translation from idea generation to idea implementation. Management works *in* and *with* a system, whereas leadership works *on* a system (Hinterhuber & Popp, 1992). Management refers to making the best possible use of an existing framework to realise high degrees of effectiveness in achieving objectives, and demonstrating a high level of efficiency in defining and implementing strategies. In sum, management is the most operational concept of the triad. Leadership is an ability to inspire people to overcome boundaries and to be innovative (Hinterhuber & Popp, 1992). Design is more relational and more profoundly innovative in comparison: It is a way of expressing leadership through networks and linking spaces, artifacts and individuals. Design in this sense means connecting or interfacing, and thus enabling the generation of entirely new possibilities. By networking, design first of all makes possibility spaces visible. Leadership can help to seize the visible potential by motivating actors based on values. Management ultimately ensures efficiency in implementation by transferring responsibilities to the acting persons and finalising the reduction in complexity that characterises the translation of ideas into implementation.

Without doubt, the discussion about destination design is still in its early stages, is partly unstructured and theoretical principles are yet to be refined. Most importantly, an expansive combination with other topics and perspectives from various disciplines needs to be nurtured, despite some imprecisions and (apparent) incommensurability it may bring with it. We suggest that it is timely and we tried to illustrate that it is fruitful to explore possible future directions of destination design as a way to advance our understanding of tourism destinations. The papers included with this collection on 'destination design' share this basic understanding and cover a variety of elements that are critically required in a conception of destination design as an enabling perspective on destinations. Among others, these papers shed light on how participation, inclusion, governance, experience creation and digitalisation interact with destination design and thus contribute notably to advance the current knowledge on tourism destinations.

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