INDUSTRY VIEWPOINT

Destination design: An integrative perspective on destinations from design studies

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Abstract:

This viewpoint introduces the concept of destination design and shows perspectives and approaches for the development of destinations. Destination design allows an integral view through design studies perspectives, where elements such as transdisciplinarity, participatory approaches, creative and disruptive ways of thinking related to design studies are introduced. Moreover, design approaches are characterized by a focus on problem-solving, a mixture of creativity and analysis and its capability to break through conventional knowledge systems in order to learn and develop existing structures such as destinations. Lastly, an agenda shows how to further develop this concept and which elements need to be included for its implementation.

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1   INTRODUCTION

The current discussions on the topics of overtourism, environmental protection, climate change and the worldwide shift towards a sustainability agenda have shown that tourism and destination research face many complex challenges. Tourism research must deal with tensions between the challenges of planning, political processes and social integration processes in destinations. The fact that tourism development in destinations should not be limited to tourism managers or entrepreneurs is evident; it also requires a certain degree of participation by society and other stakeholders. In particular, the local population plays an important role in the development of sustainable tourism (Innerhofer, Erschbamer & Pechlaner, 2019) and should therefore be increasingly involved in decision-making processes.

Additionally, today's traveller is a critical and sensitive guest who has developed an expanded awareness through vast travel experience, and therefore critically questions destinations and accordingly fosters interest in the destination's socio-economic and ecological developments (Pechlaner & Volgger, 2017). The modern guest is looking for experiences that are characterised by the uniqueness and authenticity of a destination. This requires an interplay of various actors who create products and offers and thus influence the guest's perception.

All these factors raise the question of how a destination can be viewed in an integral way and how various aspects and dimensions can be taken into account. Could the perspectives and fields of application of design studies provide a solution? What are the perspectives and fields of application on destinations and which agenda derives at this interface?

2   CURRENT RESEARCH PATTERNS AT DESTINATIONS

Theories and concepts from destination management, destination leadership and destination governance have positively shaped the development of research in tourism (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014; Pechlaner et al., 2014; Raich, 2006). Important insights have been gained into how destinations can be better understood in terms of development, management and governance. However, changing political, social and technological developments put the methods and instruments of traditional destination management and governance under the microscope. The methods of tourism planning have evolved, particularly in relation to the various governance structures, changing sustainability rules and regulations, and marketing strategies

(Hall, 2008). But perspectives on destination research are still somewhat restricted, with only a few disciplines generally taken into account, mainly geography and economics. Moreover, decision-making processes at a destination level are mainly developed with traditional stakeholders, with participatory approaches rarely considered.

One transdisciplinary approach that could address these limitations and enrich the perspectives on the development of a destination is the combination of destination concepts with approaches from design studies. Therefore, the development of a concept that combines findings from destination research with approaches from design should be prioritised.

3   WHY APPROACHES FROM DESIGN STUDIES?

Approaches from design studies present a promising way to gain an integrative view on destinations because they overcome problems and challenges in different industries due to their original approach (Brown, 2009). Furthermore, design enables the combination of different disciplines and leads to a new understanding of problems through innovative solutions (Brandes et al., 2009). Therefore, the approach developed through the concept of destination design could open up new perspectives and possibilities in the perception and design of destinations and contribute to a more integral view.

Tourism research and design have already been linked through scientific contributions and publications that focus on the planning and design of destinations (Fesenmaier & Xiang, 2017; Tussyadiah, 2014; Rodríguez et al, 2012; Dredge, 1999). Additionally, design-oriented perspectives can help to further combine theoretical approaches and practical implications in goal-oriented research, simultaneously combining different disciplines and actors.

Indeed, the consideration of a destination by means of design approaches includes multi-faceted perspectives, providing:

- a focus on problem-solving,
- a mixture of creativity and analysis,
- a way to break through conventional knowledge structures in order to learn and develop, and finally
- the ability to integrate disruptive approaches into a coherent whole (Lawson, Dorst, 2009).

In relation to tourist destinations, design approaches provide a holistic way to consider the complexity of measures and policies, as well as the physical development paths. As a framework, destination design can incorporate different dimensions such as spatial planning (Dredge, 1999), destination and product development, management, governance and leadership. It also allows the participation of guests and residents in the design of tourist destinations to be taken into account: their individual habits and social practices can be integrated using participatory approaches. Therefore, participatory approaches add an injection of creativity as a novel approach to establish transdisciplinary networks and concertedly handle them in both a linear and non-linear way (Disalvo, Disalvo, 2014).

Design is developed as a pathway for solving nonlinear and complex problems that can't be solved with single approaches from technology and science alone. Thus, design can be seen as a capability-enhancing skill, equipping people with the ability to deal with uncertainty, complexity and failure (Tomitsch et al., 2019). Nelson and Stolterman (2014) describe the process of design as "the most effective and efficient means of getting organizations and individuals to new places. Therefore, design is also about leadership." Moreover, design and its methods are a natural and ancient human ability and everyone is consciously (or not) designing most of the time (Nelson, Stolterman, 2014).

4   WHAT'S NEXT? TOWARDS AN AGENDA ON DESTINATION DESIGN

The development of the concept of destination design should acknowledge the importance of aesthetics for spatial planning and product development. Planning procedures should also be developed through approaches from design (i.e. design thinking), since individual aspects are combined in a creative and disruptive way of thinking and can lead to an openness to different ideas and unusual practices (Cross, 2011). The resulting disruption can be crucial in managing the transition from goals to more sustainable practices in destinations (Fry, 2009).

In particular, design looks for new ways to change behaviour in society through new forms of innovation. The existing user-oriented design approach should therefore be extended to a society-oriented approach (Jonas et al., 2015).

All the stated elements such as transdisciplinarity, participatory approaches, creative and disruptive ways of thinking related to design methods can be applied to destinations in order to develop an integral view. Therefore, objects, relationships and actors in a destination need to be involved when addressing complex problems.

Recent developments in the concept of destination design require a transdisciplinary approach to allow an integrative view of a destination in order to analyse previously separated elements and processes as a whole. In order to expand this view on destinations, the concept of destination design must be further advanced to include design as an instrument for the visualization of processes, as a disruptive element for creating new perspectives, as a vehicle towards trans- and interdisciplinarity and as an tool that enables participation, co-creation and involvement, where creativity is fostered. Future research needs to see destination design through its blurred boundaries (Scuttari, Pechlaner, Erschbamer, 2020), since problems are tackled from a non-disciplinary perspective and solutions are sketched and prototyped at the interface of existing disciplines. Therefore, destination design supports the transition from multidisciplinarity towards transdisciplinarity in tourism research (Scuttari, Pechlaner, Erschbamer, 2020) including design methodologies and methods (Kumar, 2013).

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