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Tourist experiences of heritage attractions - how can cognitive and affective aspects of experience be used in attraction development?

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There has been a paradigm shift from heritage being only preserved, to also being shown as a tourist attraction. One of two diverse approaches amongst scholars to define heritage tourism is to use a visitor-experience perspective (Apostolakis, 2003). Different segments of tourists have their own unique experiences of the heritage. Specific aspects can be used to explain the experience, such as the “classical” aspects by Pine & Gilmore (1999). In addition, in the last few years other experience aspects have been identified, such as kick, comfort, competence and contact (Kairos Future, 2011). The concept of “the experience room” (Mossberg, 2003) is used to present an experience context. The assumption of this study is that the experience landscape is made up of perceptive signals that cover the human senses. Although one can ask how this approach supports the development of attractions. Cognitive and affective experiences were discussed at conferences on memory tourism in Estonia 2013-14, used in the pilot study to this research. The purpose of the present study is to enhance the knowledge about how tourist's experiences of heritage attraction can be analysed into aspects of experience for different segments of tourists, and secondly, how the human senses influence the tourist's cognitive and affective experiences. An overall case study method will be used to study four maritime tourist attractions. The study consists of unstructured ethnographical interviews, experimental observation of tourists, and tourist's own evaluations during the experience. The research contribution is to shed light to how meaningful aspects of experience can represent the experience of heritage attractions for different target groups. This is based on an analysis on whether tourist experience aspects can emerge from the sensory impressions of tourists' experiences (Agapito et. al, 2014). Another contribution is to figure out how the sense perception can be connected to affective and cognitive aspects that result in a joint experience of an attraction. The pilot study showed that enhanced customer investigations of tourist's experiences are needed, which will be further more analysed. In the end this research will hopefully give attraction developers new tools to generate innovative and well-attended heritage attractions.

Keywords: tourist experiences, heritage attraction development, human senses, experience aspects, tourist investigations

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