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Harold Richins
Thompson Rivers University

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Experience Studies in Tourism and Leisure as an Emphasis for Learning Beyond Primarily Business Skills: Illustrations in Mountain Tourism Environments

Harold Richins, Thompson Rivers University, Canada

The notion of *experience studies* incorporates the understanding, creation, development, and provision of human experiences and services, and has progressed toward more complexity, inclusion, application, and focus over the forty years since Toffler (1970) first wrote about the upcoming experience industries. The literature has advanced interdisciplinary concepts in specific areas including: extraordinary experience, products and services as experiences, and the concept of the experience society (Arnould & Price 1993; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Schulze, 1993). Additionally, there has been a growing body of knowledge on the importance of the development and provision of experiences to raise the bar on value within the service industries, particularly through tourism experiences (Aho, 2001; Cohen, 1979; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Uriely, 2005). Over the last two decades, there has been added scholarship and conceptual development utilizing relevant aspects of experience creation, customer service experience, experience behavior, experience economy, as well as the creative economy (Andersson & Andersson, 2006; Flemming, 2007; Jensen, 1996; 1999; Moscardo, 2008; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; 1999; Schmitt, 2003).

This focus on experience studies provides a platform for learning beyond just business skills in tourism, as has been a traditional approach in the provision of tourism education. The provision of quality experiences is of particular interest in the study of tourism, leisure, and visitor experiences (Andersson, 2007; Buhalis & Paraskevas, 2002; Cohen, 1979; Hayes & MacLeod, 2007; Fleming, 2007; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010; Michael, Elbe, & Curiel, 2009; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Michelli, 2006; Moscardo, 2008; Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007; Richins, 2013; Ritchie, Tung, & Ritchie, 2011). Key components in the provision of tourism and leisure experiences have been acknowledged including gaining an understanding of the participant, the place in which the experience occurs, the focus of the experience, the state of mind of the participant(s), the structure, provision and communications which enhance or create success in the experience, the themes or narrative of the experience, and the outcomes which occur as a result of the experience (Moscardo, 2009; Mossberg, 2007; Quan & Wang, 2004).

There has been a clear and applied focus by industry and community players, particularly in mountain regions, regarding the development and provision of quality and engaging experiences (Mountain Experience NP, 2014; Wiegele, 2014). Mountain environments offer myriad opportunities for facilitating and supporting engaging recreation and tourism experiences. People who visit mountain regions often do so for challenging and physically active experiences connected with the natural assets of the mountain regions.

Mountain resort communities have often integrated daily life and leisure experiences with visitor and customer experiences (Sun Peaks, 2014; Whistler, 2014a; Zermatt, 2014). As an example, the Resort Municipality of Whistler (Whistler, 2014b) indicates that the first two priorities of Whistler's 2020 community vision includes *enriching community life* and *enhancing the resort experience* (Whistler, 2014c). These normally dynamic and active

mountain communities frequently involve the development of unique speciality or niche activities, balancing leisure and tourism experiences, and often include high levels of experience engagement and customer focus (Weiler & Hall, 1992; Smith & Eadington, 1992; Douglas, Douglas, & Derrett, 2001; Novelli, 2005; Pearce, Morrison, & Rutledge, 1998; Trauer, 2006).

Though more traditional training and educational approaches to foster mountain tourism enterprise emphasize business skills, a number of organizations have been focusing on prioritizing the development and provision of experiences within their leisure and tourism environments or settings. This paper provides an overview of experience provision, with a particular emphasis within mountain tourism settings. Included is a contextual emphasis on experiences in mountain environments, both within the sphere of visitor experiences and services and also concerning the significance of organizational commitment and education, as well as destination emphasis on experience provision within these unique environments. Numerous examples of organizational commitment within a mountain tourism context are presented through a basic content exploration of tourism enterprise communication and promotion, which emphasize customer experience service provision. The paper also advocates that education, training and further commitment be put forward toward the real centerpiece of tourism excellence and service delivery, beyond business skills acquisition, and toward experience studies and provision within the settings of tourism and leisure.

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