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Aspects of Co-Creation in Creative Workshops

119 - Customer Experience (not only) in Tourism

Abstract

Creative tourism is a young, contemporary form of cultural tourism with a high potential for interactivity. One of its most interactive approaches is creative workshops, where the customer experience is often enhanced by a hands-on mentality, which supports the co-creation of long-lasting experiences.

A fundamental understanding of the customer's mindset is the key to creating infinite value by defining, analyzing and working with the factors influencing experiences.

This paper presents a model of influencing factors in creative workshops, which have been assembled from the interview answers given by workshop participants of the World Bodypainting Academy in Austria. The service exchange within the workshop environment is built on the context-levels provided by Chandler and Vargo (2011), while the process of co-creation is explained by the concept of Gummesson and Mele (2010). Suggestions on how to use the results of this study and future research proposals complete this work.

Keywords:

co-creation, creative tourism, workshop, experience design, creativity

1. The development of co-creation

Co-creation between various stakeholders has been a focus of research for the last twenty years (Sanders, 2005; Terblanche, 2014), starting at a B2C level and the very early forms of customer participation (Lovelock/Young, 1979; Toffler, 1980; Kotler, 1986) and developing towards a service-centered approach (Terblanche, 2014). By the realization that the customer always co-creates value (Vargo/Lusch, 2004), the change of the customer from a passive party to an equal contributor in co-creation started (Sanders, 2005). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) provided the foundation for all further considerations of this study by offering this: "co-creation is about the joint creation of value [and] an experience environment that enables the customer to actively create and co-construct personalized experiences that suit their context".

2. Underlying concepts

On variously intense levels of co-creation, numerous concepts of how to play the game with these newly shuffled cards have been developed. This paper consists of three main elements: firstly, Chandler and Vargo's (2011) model of context, where interaction takes place as a form of service exchange on different levels; secondly, the approach on how value is co-created by Gummesson and Mele (2010) through interaction, resource-integration and matching, and last but not least the findings of the interviews, which were conducted as part of the research conducted by the author of this work (2015).

2.1. Chandler and Vargo's levels of context

According to Chandler and Vargo (2011), the center of complex interaction networks is the direct service-for-service exchange on the micro-context level between two actors (dyad). All other context levels proceed on this premise. The next level, called meso-context, adds an indirect service exchange with the two given actors by adding a third party, thereby creating a triad. The output of these direct and indirect service exchanges is multiplied in the synergies of simultaneous exchanges on a macro-context level. Last but not least, the meta-context encompasses all previous levels and creates a service ecosystem through time and replication (Chandler/Vargo, 2011, pp. 40-44). This concept will later be applied in a model of co-creation in creative workshops.

2.2. Gummesson and Mele's co-creation of value

While Chandler and Vargo's (2011) context levels of interaction were used to picture the form of an exchange network, the approach of Gummesson and Mele (2010) delivers the content, as it describes what happens on those context levels and how value is co-created. The model is built on a many-to-many network approach, which equals Chandler and Vargo's (2011) macro-context level. In their model, value co-creation happens through interaction and resource integration. The interaction between various actors can happen sequentially as well as parallel. It does not have to be linear but spreads directly and indirectly in all directions, where it is assessed by other actors in accordance with their own resources and expectations and the capability of value creation within the network (Gummesson/Mele, 2010). This interaction is built on dialogue, where information and knowledge is exchanged to create new insights. One purpose is also to assess the available resources, which can be transferred and exchanged as a next step (value-in-exchange). These resources are activated and used to create value (value-in-use), while at the same time their performance creates an experience for the actors involved (value-in-experience), for example learning, feedback or emotions. The input, processing and output of resources describes nothing less than value put in context (value-in-context) (ibid.).

3. Case study World Bodypainting Festival – Academy workshops

The World Bodypainting Festival (WBF) in Austria is an international art competition with an extensive entertainment program, including various music, art and fashion shows. Workshops in related topics, like make-up, bodypainting techniques or the creation of headpieces, serve as the educational component of the festival. On top of that, the exchange and interaction between its participants is the heart of the event. With artists from all over the world, of different backgrounds and professions, the WBF fulfills all criteria to be named an event of contemporary art with international significance (WBF, 2015; Brunner, 2015). These circumstances and the competitive program of art workshops were the reason why it was selected for research purposes regarding workshops in creative tourism.

3.1. Scientific background

This paper is based on a review and the results of primary research conducted by the author within the master thesis on the topic of co-creation in creative workshops. The study used the Austrian World Bodypainting Academy (WB Academy), which is held annually during the WBF in Pörtschach, as an example for creative tourism par excellence. Eight artists, who actively participated in WB Academy workshops, were selected by convenience sampling and interviewed according to a semi-structured interview guideline via telephone. The outcomes of these in-depth interviews were clustered, coded and analyzed following a structured inductive as well as deductive content analysis method[1]. The interviewees were asked a set of different questions regarding their demographic and professional backgrounds, their activity and perception within the workshops, their previous knowledge of the matter and the reason for the selection of the workshops. Furthermore they were asked about what influenced their workshop experience and to what extent they felt they themselves had influenced it. On the whole, this study aims to answer the following questions:

- How does co-creation in creative workshops happen?
- To what extent do the participants shape the event and what activity veers into the zone of "*out of control*"?
- How can the experience design process of such workshops be optimized? What factors influence it?

4. Findings

The study used Chandler and Vargo's concept of context levels (2011) as an underlying service exchange network for the development of a model of a creative workshop environment (explanation L,

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[1] For the deductive step, the content was structured and coded according to previously developed categories (coding tree), which were based on the research questions and the interview guideline. Where new answers or topics appeared, which had not been considered so far, they were added as new categories to the coding tree (inductive step).

M, S relationships). The different context-levels were adaptable to the various relationships that appeared during the workshops and can be shown – but are not limited – by the following examples:

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Micro-context	The direct service-for-service exchange between two individual actors (dyad), like the workshop participant (student = S) and the lecturer (L).
Meso-context	A third party (model = M) is added and a triad is created. In this example, L and M indirectly serve each other by M providing his/her body to be painted by L, which enables L to directly serve S by showing him/her how to do it. In return, M gets the experience of being painted.
Macro-context	Each actor of the triad is directly or indirectly also an actor in one or many other triads, which make up the workshop environment. This complex service-context creates cumulative synergies through simultaneous service-exchanges (Chandler/Vargo, 2011).
Meta-context	By adding the factors of time and replication, a service-ecosystem is created, which includes all other context-levels (ibid.).

With the levels of interaction clarified, the next step is to look at what influences these interactions. It became clear from the interviews, that the workshop environment and therefore the interaction between the actors are influenced by internal and external factors. *Internal* factors are pre-defined by the individual background of the actor and based on his/her previous knowledge and experiences as well as the personal motivation, preferences, expectations and set of values. These influential factors were put under the category "personal variables" (Brunner, 2015).

A second category, the environmental variables, is similar to the first only insofar as these factors are also given, or pre-set. In opposition to the internal personal variables, environmental variables are *external* with little to no influence of the actors within the workshop. Favorable environmental factors are expected by the workshop participants and ignite negative emotions if they are to the contrary[2]. Such factors are the organization, group size, infrastructure, equipment, location and all related factors, like the temperature, lighting or accessibility (Brunner, 2015).

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[2] They are highly comparable to Herzberg's „hygiene factors", which demotivate if they are absent, but do not motivate additionally if they exist.

Fig.1: Service-contexts and influential factors of co-creation in creative workshops
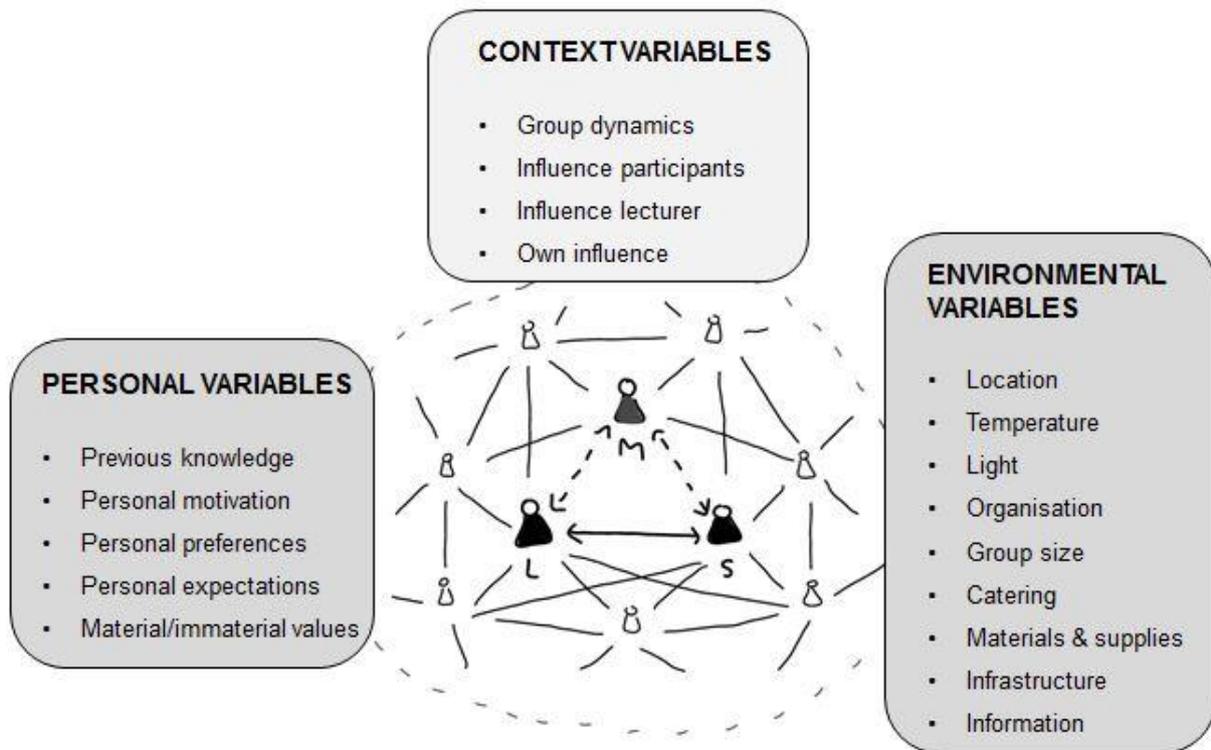
Source: Brunner (2015)

The importance of interaction for co-creation as mentioned by Gummesson and Mele (2010) was confirmed by the case study by the category of context variables, which are *reciprocally created* between the actors (personal variables) and the workshop environment (environmental variables). The exchange between the actors is especially important, as every actor influences others and plays a part in the group dynamics in general. Good personal relationships towards other students and lecturers were named the most important factor for a successful workshop during the interviews. The interviewees always measured their own influence by the personal contribution to the learning environment within the workshop and by the relationships towards others. Since an actor's own influence on the workshop environment is determined by his/her personal internal variables, this category is indirectly included within the context variables. Hence, context variables can be seen as the most important influential factors on co-creation (Brunner, 2015).

5. Implications, limitations and directions for future research

While it is a well-established fact that co-creation needs at least two parties involved (Prahalad/Ramaswamy, 2004), interview findings suggests that there is also a *maximum number* of actors, which is optimal for the best learning experience within creative workshops (Brunner, 2015). A

first orientation could be extracted from the number of participants in qualitative focus groups, although literature has not found an agreement yet of what this number should be.

Further in-depth research is needed to verify, develop and add influential factors in creative workshops and to develop a *best-practice example*. A further step would be the determination of applicable workshops, once new findings occur and have been implemented.

The evaluation of who is interested in such workshops and why is considered basic research necessary for approaching the next topic on how to integrate creative workshops in existing or new tourism products. The knowledge of these influencing factors is paramount for providing an optimal environment to foster creativity as well as flow-experience[3] and for maximizing value for all stakeholders.

The results of further research are not only important for the development of creative tourism products, but models deduced could also be used in an adapted form for the educational sector, especially *schools*, where the research conducted could help to develop a *new teaching practice*. The fact that the terms used, like co-creation, creativity and creative tourism, still do not have a unified definition takes a backseat to these promising prospects.

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[3] The ultimate balance between mind and body, where the skill-level of the actor and challenge of the task meet at an optimal level, as defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1996).

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