

PhD Scholarship in User-centric digitalization in Tourism

With this project we seek to enhance our knowledge about the role that sustainable digital technologies can play in the Smart tourism destinations based on a co-creation perspective with the visitor as main point of departure.

Point of departure

Environmental responsibility and sustainable development are a major societal challenge today and in the foreseeable future. In this research project it is desirable to gain deeper knowledge on how user centric technologies can contribute to raise environmental and social awareness and contribute to change of behavior among international as well as domestic travelers.

The environmental and social awareness is crucial for the co-created development of tourism to achieve increased sustainability in economic and social development. By using the user-centric approach in this research we can gain insight into the relationship between global, regional and the local perspectives in a new way that is unique and very valuable

Project

By applying intelligence to address visitor needs before, during and after their stay, destinations may also promote and encourage pro-environmental behavior of the visitors which will be imperative to mitigate the possible negative effects of tourism. Destinations could implement smart-technologies (strategies) and aiming at making tourists more aware of their negative impacts (Sharma& Gupta 2020, Shen & al 2020), something that has proven to increase their competitiveness (Buhalis and Amaranggana 2014) and sustainable behavior (Esfandiar & al , 2021). This is a turn from a dominant thinking within Smart Cities approaches within which the citizen has quite limited influencing power since the focus, objectives and solutions are concluded before the involvement of the citizen (Capdevila and Zarlunga 2015; Cardulla and Kitchin, 2018). The research on the field has thus identified a need to re-imagine what it means to be a “smart tourist” (or “smart citizen”, Anthoupolos, 2016), such as exemplified by the “Mitt Stavanger“ project that incorporates user experience, machine learning, artificial intelligence, blockchain, wearables, sensor data and real-time testing on real people actively interacting with the platform.

The co-creation perspective is based on the view of the consumer as co-creator in her/his own experience (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Phi & Dredge, 2019; Jensen & Prebensen, 2015 Ramaswamy & Oszan, 2018). This implies that the role of the companies can be seen as merely providers of the frames and elements or as facilitators of specific experiences (Jantzen, 2013) or of what can be denoted as “experience platforms” (Jensen, 2020; Jensen & al. 2017). Following this perspective a market can be seen as a “Forum” where experiences of unique and contextualized value is created (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), and this can, for example, also take place through tourism experience networks (Blinkhorst & Dekker, 2009). Various platforms can also be designed and applied for connecting and matching the “right” type of consumers (tourists, travelers, visitors) and providers effectively (Parker et al., 2016) as well as local participants, however, from a co-creation view the consumer’s or visitor’s

needs and preferences are still in the ultimate focus. These platforms can by design drive the tourism industry towards sustainable conscious behavior since all three perspectives of tourism yield (Lundie & al 2007) are simultaneously influencing the consequences of use from both users, providers and governments.

The initial focus in this research on sustainable Smart tourism destination is how different digital tools and/or structures can be used as engine to maximize the experience value of visitors individuals in an interactive and dynamic way at different stages of the visitor process, especially during travel. Questions that can be raised are: How can such digital tools and structures contribute to meet the needs for the tourist and to maximize the experience value? How can such tools and structures be formed to connect the consumers, providers and local contributors at different stages and in different situations to match relevant needs and preferences? How to facilitate the interplay between visitors' decisions to participate in particular activities and the actual realization in an eudaimonial way for the visitor? How can these tools and processes lead to responsible tourism practices?

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