

## **Visitor's Expectations, Destination Image and the Consequences for Local Supply**

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# Visitor's Expectations, Destination Image and The Consequences for Local Supply

*6<sup>th</sup> Tourism Summits Conference, Chamonix 2004*

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## **Introduction**

Could there be a more wonderful feeling than that of positive surprise upon reaching your destination? When it turns out to be all that you hoped for and more? For this summarizes what tourism is about. The tourist through the image he has of a destination seeks out to discover, full of expectations, if this image is true. And if by chance, positive surprises await him on arrival, he may truly reach the moment of bliss that every tourist dreams about. This paper and presentation, ladies and gentlemen, is a little introduction to the motivations and dreams of visitors, and on a more mundane note, to what a destination can do to fulfil those dreams.

## **Motivations to Travel**

Early views of tourist motivation identified the need to escape a boring or stressful everyday environment and to seek new experiences, knowledge or feelings. The dominant view of tourist motivation is therefore a uni-dimensional one, where a large number of tourist behaviours can be boiled down to a small number of motivators, or needs (McCabe 2000). More recently, a distinction has been made between motive and motivation (Gnoth 1997). Juergen Gnoth (1997) calls for a dual system, where recurring motives for travel (similar to the early views), co-exist with more situational motivations.

Therefore, the decision of the tourist<sup>1</sup> to engage in tourist activities can be broken down into two separate decisions. The first is the decision to act, due to certain needs – the motive. The second is the decision of where to go, what to do – in other words the cognitive motivations (McCabe 2000). As such, the motives for travel are lasting, with more or less distinct goals. One can think of the fulfilment of spiritual needs, for example. The motivations on the other hand are the result of situation-person interactions.

The same motive, say spiritual healing, can be satisfied with different behaviours, leading to differentiated motivations. The same motive leads different people to act differently and to seek different types of experiences as a tourist. Conversely, the same behaviours or actions can be the result of different motives. Two different tourists choosing the same

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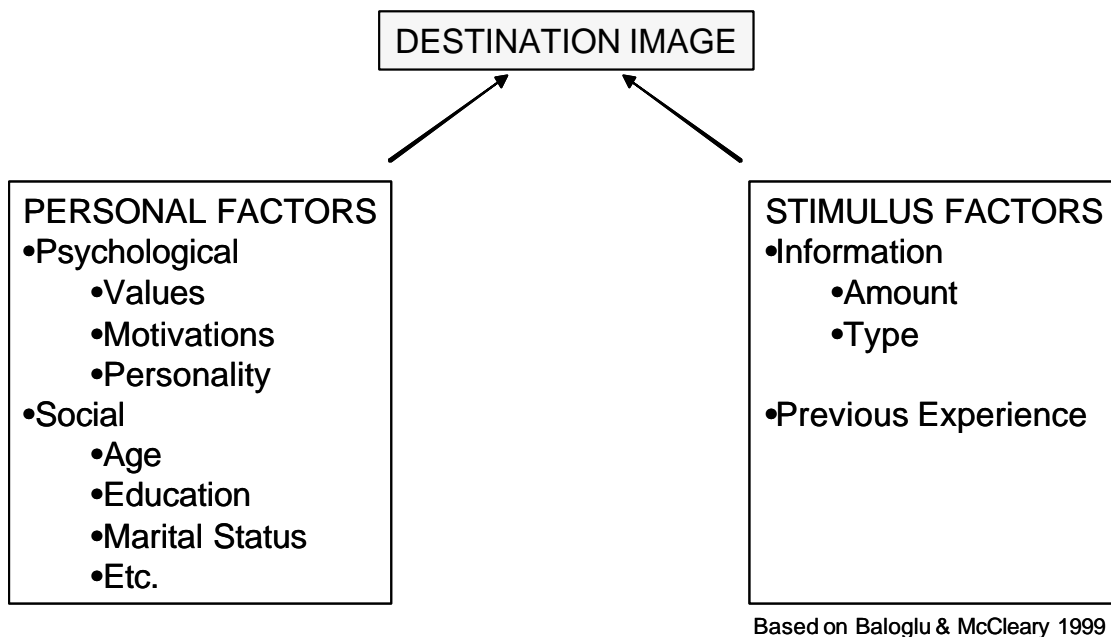
<sup>1</sup> We here use the term tourist, but the term visitor would be valid as well.

tourism product, engaging in the same experience, may do so for different motives (Gnoth 1997). The motives for travel are typically the need to escape, the need to relax, the need for fresh air, whereas the motivations are more constraint and opportunity based. The motivation, or “why does a particular tourist choose Barcelona as a destination rather than Nice”, for example, will depend on more spontaneous decisions, influenced by a large number of factors, including of course the image of a given destination.

Motivations are what destination planners are the most interested in. Motivations reveal preferences. However, these preferences constantly change and are therefore difficult to analyse for the researcher and the planner alike. Marketers of tourism services have long recognised and exploited the possibility of grouping tourists according to various typologies. Tourism products are thus tailored to cater for certain types of tourists, who are driven by certain types of motivations.

### **The Image of a Destination**

A common definition of destination image is that it is “a set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people have of a place or destination” (Baloglu & McCleary 1999:871, Kotler et al 1993). The influences on image are numerous, just as the sources of information about a destination are. We can however categorize them into a general framework. Figure 1 depicts an example of such a categorization. In this figure, authors assume the visitor has not yet been to the destination in question. Once a visitor has actually been to a place, the image he has is of course profoundly altered. The main determinants of image seem to be on the one hand the socio-psychological factors of the visitor, such as his values, motivations, age and education. On the other hand, stimulus factors also have an important role to play, i.e. the information he receives about a destination.



**Figure 1**

Images created by the marketing efforts of a destination set up myths and generate expectations about the destination. The actual experience of the tourist is therefore conditioned by the representations delivered through marketing, but also by the pre-existing image of the destination (Andsager & Drzewiecka 2002). The tourist, upon visiting a destination, will look for clues to confirm his pre-existing notions about the destination. The tourist stereotypes the destination before going there, and once there, looks to confirm his stereotypes.

Destination marketing often serves to accentuate these stereotypes, which is logical since the stereotypes are difficult to break down (Andsager & Drzewiecka 2002). Promotional material often represents destinations as a kind of paradise, with somewhat unrealistic representations of immaculate landscapes, and locals dressed in traditional garments ready to cater to the tourist's every need. Never do you show a potential visitor, pictures of hordes of other tourists, or of the poverty of locals or other such barbaric images. Familiar landscapes and landmarks serve the stereotypes and attract the visitor. The tourist actively seeks out the difference in a given destination. He looks for something distinctly Swiss or French or Indian, (or what he perceives to be distinctly Swiss or

French or Indian), and is disappointed when he does not find it. An important point to emphasize once again is the apparent strength of stereotypes. These are often so strong that even when the tourist finds that his stereotype did not fit with his actual experience of the destination, he likely will not change his stereotype. Furthermore, stereotypes tend to be so anchored in a society that the positive experience of one visitor alone will not alter the opinion of the society as a whole. The result is that the image of a destination cannot easily be changed and on the contrary can endure for decades, or even centuries.

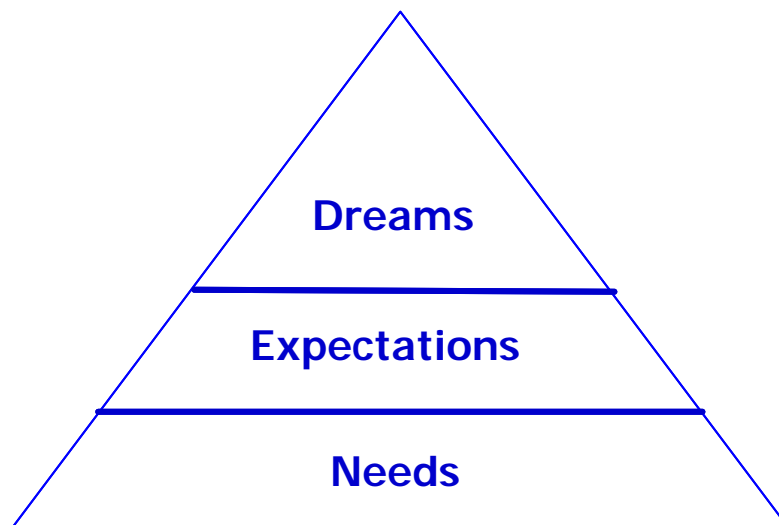
In the case of Switzerland, a study conducted some years ago (Thatcher 1992), found that potential tourists still have a very basic, predictable and clear image of Switzerland. What people expect from Switzerland are:

- Best hotels and restaurants
- Mountain tops
- Green meadows
- Clear lakes
- Historical cities and towns
- Country of watches
- Country of chocolate

Thus, the image of Switzerland has remained that of the romantic era of practically two centuries ago, when Switzerland was a romantic stop on the Grand Tour of Europe. The detailed plans for a projected, but never constructed, Swiss Village Resort in Japan, give us some further insights into the image of Switzerland abroad. The truth is of course that Switzerland still has mountains, still produces watches and chocolate, but is also one of the most advanced economies in the world with large multinational companies operating in both industry and services. It's not a very romantic place if you live there.

### **Conclusions on Expectations and the Tourist Moment**

Expectations are similar to attitudes, or stereotypes, in that they are positively or negatively inclined. Expectations are mental representations of future events or unfinished learning processes (Gnoth 1997). The tourist is very conscious of these expected outcomes, and in fact he longs to see his expectations fulfilled. What differentiates a good holiday with a true life experience may be if the destination manages to positively surprise the tourist, and go way beyond his expectations. This is illustrated in figure 2. If the holiday is a special time, a time of heightened expectations and excitement, then the climax, or what may be referred to as the tourist “moment” (Cary 2004), is when the tourist ceases to be a simple tourist but feels engrossed in the destination, almost a part of it. This is the moment when he feels at one with this foreign environment, having integrated and absorbed it.



**Figure 2**

Creating the conditions for such a climax necessitates moving beyond simply satisfying the needs and the expectations of the tourist, and towards a dream experience. The needs of the tourist are generally well understood. The expectations and images may be influenced by marketing. But the positive surprise can make all the difference to the

individual tourist. This surprise can be created on a local level. It is here that the local destination planner and the individual hotel, attraction or service company can make a difference. They cannot expect to change the overall image of the destination, but they can create bliss for the individual visitor.

Thank you for your attention.

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