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IGI Global

Creative Tourist Experience

Role of Destination Management Organizations

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ABSTRACT

The chapter explores the role and importance of Destination Management Organizations in managing the delivery of creative tourist experience. The study is divided in two parts whereby the first part adopts a qualitative methodology of exploration in regard to Destination Management Organizations and Creative Tourist Experiences while the second part is a case study of the tourism organizations of the UAE. The role of creativity in managing the total tourist experience is the core theme of the study. The study finds that co-creation of tourist experiences have a lasting memory value. Creative tourist experience can be achieved in the creative-theatre by a combination of designed aesthetics, choreographed activities and co-created souvenirs as the major elements.

Key Terms: Creative Experience, Aesthetics, Souvenir, Co-Creation, Creative-Theatre, Destination Management Organization.

INTRODUCTION

Holiday at a destination remains etched in one's memory because of the collective impression of several fleeting moments; this happens absorbing the aesthetics, participating in activities created for tourists and the mementos collected during the visit period. Together, these form the tourist experiences. Buhalis (2000) believes that 'Destinations are amalgams of tourism products, offering an integrated experience to consumers'. To coordinate the offerings of the tourist industries and ensuring smooth delivery of this experience has increasingly become a function of the Destination Management Organizations (DMO).

The study proceeds upon the assumption that creative experiences at a tourist destination are a combination of aesthetics, activities and souvenir shopping. It explores the role of Destination Management Organizations in managing the delivery of Aesthetics, Activities and Souvenirs, as creative tourist experiences. As such the study aims to examine the increasingly changing role and functions of DMOs in planning tourism development for creative tourist experiences. United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been taken as a case example to highlight the value attached to visitor experience. This article is divided in two parts wherein the first part deliberates the concept of Destination Management Organizations (DMO) as organized and practiced in most forms and its relationship with the concept of creative tourism while the second part attempts to redefine the role of DMO with the UAE taken as an example.

The study takes a qualitative route to explore DMO structure, role and functions as established and hitherto practiced. This has been possible with extensive review of literature. The study also includes a case-study of the UAE to corroborate the reviewed literature from which it has drawn the conclusions.

BACKGROUND

With more than 4% growth in tourist arrivals annually and 10% contribution in GDP, tourism sector has been identified as one of the main international economic drivers in the twenty-first century (UNWTO, 2016). Considering the sector's contribution to generation of employment opportunities and also to safeguard a destination's art and culture, development of tourism has been a priority for many governments. However, regularizing tourism sector involves more challenges due to involvement of various suppliers catering to the tourist demand. Buhalis, (2000) claims that destinations are amalgams of tourism products, offering an integrated experience to consumers. A tourist would consume a variety of tourist products ranging from airlines, ground transportation, hotels, restaurants, information bureaus, tour guides, to shopping and attractions. The integrated experience thus is shaped by multiple experiences which might differ depending on the delivery of the service which in turn is largely affected by the service providers' efforts and abilities to deliver! Owing to this distinctive nature of tourism sector, there has always been a need of coordination amongst these suppliers to deliver standardized service eventually leading to increased level of satisfaction. With several inherent attributes of a tourism destination established, perceiving a management organization is pretty logical that will oversee the variety of functions within a destination. The innate corollary is a tourism destination organization. Several terms have been used to define and describe such organizations which are part of this discussion. Functionally the tourism sector works on its organizations. These organizations have complex interaction within a preconceived framework, often strictly, on a practical level. The tourism sector is a combination of various industries performing a dual role i.e. catering to the local populace along with the tourist. Tourism has become a key sector with ramification in all aspects of nation's life. To foster it and develop it on a scale proportionate to its national importance, as well as to mobilize all available national resources to that end, it seems necessary to centralize the policy making authority within the state which can thus take appropriate measures for creating a suitable framework for the

promotion and development of tourism by the various sectors concerned. State's role in tourism includes: coordination, planning, legislation, and regulation. Tourism can best be cultivated if it is an integral part of a balance economic and social development program. Tourism development plans in most countries are, in principle, selective as regards the areas to be developed and indicative as regards the orientation to be provided to the private sector. This leads to the emergence of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) which is defined by World Tourism Organization (2004) as organizations responsible for the management and/or marketing of destinations and generally falling into one of the categories in National Tourism Authorities, regional, provincial or state DMOs and local DMOs.

The meaning of DMO, however, has itself gone through certain arguments and discussions. As early as 1963 the 'UN Conference on International Travel and Tourism' noted that, in order to ensure the coordinated and well planned operation of tourist activities, it was important to leave to governments the ultimate management of tourism. The Conference considered it 'incumbent on the governments to stimulate and coordinate national tourist activities, and was convinced that the task can, in the main, be carried through the medium of National Tourist Organization'. Further, the Conference recommended that 'in order to be able to carry out their proper functions, the NTO should be awarded wider competence, increased responsibilities, and endowed with necessary authority and larger resources'.

Although DMO has frequently been referred to as 'Destination Marketing Organization', it is argued that the wider scope of responsibility having borne by the organization in the modern and post-modern periods makes the term 'Destination Management Organization' more suitable (Goeldner et al 2000, Buhalis 2000) echoing the UNWTO reference as mentioned above. In one of the early studies, Morrison, Bruen, and Anderson (1998) ascribed five primary functions of a DMO as an economic driver generating new income, employment, and taxes contributing to a more diversified local economy, a community marketer communicating the most appropriate destination image, attractions, and facilities to selected visitor markets, an industry coordinator providing a clear focus and encouraging less industry fragmentation so as to share in the growing benefits of tourism, a quasi-public representative adding legitimacy for the industry and protection to individual and group visitors; and a builder of community pride by enhancing quality of life and acting as the chief 'flag carrier' for residents and visitors alike.

As such, marketing is considered by those who advocate for a management organization, to be a part of overall management which in addition to promoting the destination also includes strategic planning, periodic research and technology utilization. However, the conclusion drawn from many of these studies was that DMOs are utilizing resources mainly for promotional strategies as opposed to overall management and comprehensive marketing. Buhalis (2000) argues that little research has been focused on the effectiveness of destination marketing. He also states that increasing the benefits for all tourism suppliers is essential and must be accomplished through effective leadership and government involvement in managing rather than just promoting a destination. Pike (2004) emphasized on marketing as the backbone of organizational philosophy.

Cooper et al (2008) stated that marketing is the principal function of the NTO and its job is to create and protect the brand image of the country/destination. Ritchie and Crouch (2003:188) stated that in ‘the past, the importance of the marketing and promotion roles of the DMO were of such priority that the DMO label was understood to mean destination marketing organization’.

It is now perceived that the DMO should play a greater role in destination management instead of merely being a marketing organization. One of the illustrations chosen for this study that effectively displays the traditional range of DMO activities, is by Swarbrooke (2001) as given below in Figure-1.

-----INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Part I

Changing Role of DMO

Despite the recognition of the central role assigned to the DMO in promotion and management of the destination there has been skepticism over the scope, nature, and function of a DMO. Does the DMO has the mandate of governance that, it has been, by definition assigned? The governments in most of the countries do not consider a DMO as the only agency for all functions that are attributed to it instead, several functions still remain under the active domain of other branches of the executive. It has been observed that the DMO does not have much role in infrastructure development, product development, safety & security of tourists, and any significant role in a crisis situation. All these and a few more such tourist oriented functions are the responsibility of organizations other than the DMO as traditionally performed by other agencies of the government in a country.

This chapter explores the possibility of expanding or redefining the role of DMO within the traditional framework so as not to challenge the field and authority of other established agencies traditionally performing such aforementioned functions. One such changing role is to initiate and promote creative-tourist-experiences at the destination. Although there could be a number of possibilities, the chapter focusses on how best creativity can be associated with tourist experience and what role can the DMO play. The first impression of a visitor to any destination is created by the optics of the place and the aesthetic value that it creates in the mind of the tourist. Aesthetics of the place may not directly be a responsibility of the DMO but it can always be a catalyst in spreading the good word for keeping the destination visibly appealing. Secondly, the range of activities that a destination offers which even impacts the decision for the choice of holiday by a tourist. In designing these activities priority must be given to opportunity of active participation of

the tourist that she can savor as long term memorabilia rather than mere ephemeron. In conceiving, arranging and conducting such activities the DMO can always cooperate with the industry for the benefit of both the business and the experience. And thirdly, the experience of co-creation of these memorable moments to be taken back by the tourist in a tangible form. As such, the DMO should actively pursue to achieve creative experiences for the visitor with a positive visual impact, interesting activities that lead to co-creation of tangible souvenirs. This can be achieved with minimal disruption in established state of functions to which governments may not hesitate, if assigned to the DMO. In some cases this can be achieved by active industry participation leading to creative tourist experiences that will enhance tourist satisfaction. A conceptual framework of such a changing role of DMO has been presented later in the chapter. A case example of the UAE has been discussed thereafter to substantiate the conceptual model of the proposed creative tourist experience model.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

The primary focus of the chapter is to explore the possible need for a change in the role of DMOs. As discussed above DMO as a management organization needs larger mandate by the authority under which it is created. It is time, especially with the all-pervasive presence of Information Communication Technologies (ICT), the DMO needs to shed its bureaucratic image and adopt a proactive role towards creating a memorable experience for the tourist.

DMO and Creative Tourism

The functionality of a DMO has been well defined and organized in literature as well in practice, despite substantial growth in competition among destinations. In the age of experience economy, tourists are more informed and active in looking for holiday experiences that will change them rather than simply filling them with a variety of entertaining experiences (Godbey, 2008; Richards, 2001). Eventually, a DMO has a crucial role to not only coordinate the efforts of various service providers but also to create and promote differentiated product, bringing a novel experience for the tourist. This calls for imbibing creativity in the destination offerings for the contemporary tourists. In recent past concept of 'creative tourism' has been taken up by many destinations, though in most of the cases it was simply an extension of cultural tourism. The meaning of creativity, however, can be perceived differently due to different views on its functionality (Robinson, 2008). Richards and Raymond (2000) defined creative tourism as that offering visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in learning experiences characteristic of the holiday destination. Salman, 2010 introduced the concept of creativity in tourism for the host cities to be re-designed and regenerated as creative cultural spaces

using all their tangible and intangible cultural assets. In one of the major attempt to define creativity, Taylor (1988 pp. 99–121) after reviewing literature on creativity, presented ‘4Ps’ of creativity viz. *the creative person, the creative process, the creative product and the creative environment*.

The ideal tourism development carries scope for these 4Ps, for instance creative environment through visits to creative clusters, the use of creative products as tourism attractions (e.g. travel related to famous authors, painters, and so on), the utilization of the creative process in designing creative activities for tourists (e.g. workshops and master-classes) and the involvement of creative people through the activities of the ‘creative class’ (Florida, 2002). Interestingly, the inclusion of creativity in the experience economy has affected tourism to such an extent that tourism has itself become a creative arena for the development of skills and performance, within which new practices can be developed. A milestone in this context was achieved when creativity was included in the public policy in the United Kingdom in the 90s, when the Labour government made creativity, one of the most ubiquitous policy terms not only within cultural policy discussions but also in the overall spectrum of public policies including education and economy (Neelands & Choe, 2008). Consequently, top managers of the DMOs provide the catalyst for creativity and innovation for the tourism industry while keeping an eye on the long-term strategic goals for the destination development and promotion (Daspit et al, 2014).

DMO and Creative Tourist Experience

Extensive literature is available on understanding tourist experience in different contexts perhaps the role of creativity in shaping up overall tourist experience has remained relatively under-discussed. Most of the early researches on tourist experiences were focused on tourist learning of new place, culture and people, such as Walmsely and Jenkins (1992) and Guy and Curtis (1986) provided evidences of spatial learning, while Pearce (1982) believes that a visit may result in change in perception of not only destination but also of the home. Quite interestingly, Gnoth & Matteucci (2014 pgs. 3-21) attempted a Tourist Experience Model (TEM) wherein ‘the individual is able to live and fully experience the uniqueness of every moment-by-moment’ which they would call ‘being-in-the-world’ moment and that ‘represents the total experience’. Further elaborating the TEM it is stated that, quite often it is not what the individual actually experiences, but what is perceived while having the experience influences mood, energy levels and sense of happiness. “Holiday tourism promises the opportunity to choose one’s optimal environment for experiencing in which the individual seeks to be that form of self he/she strives for” (Gnoth & Matteucci 2014). Ryan (2000 pg. 43-49), however, attempted to look at the tourist experience from a different perspective. While referring to tourism motivational theories and buying behavior, he termed tourist experience as ‘messy’, due to variety of tourists products consumed and number of suppliers involved at the place of delivery. “they may be unclear in meaning when located within the totality of an individual’s experience, and are all the more messy because, paradoxically, tourist experiences can be rich, enriching and cathartic” Ryan (2000). Nevertheless it is quite evident and established that tourism is about an opportunity to gain new experiences though it remains context

specific and learning relates to an experience of indulging in certain activities. A complementary relationship established between the objective (place) and the subjective (tourist experience of that place) makes sense in totality, even in the contemporary times. However, translating this phenomenon to a satisfaction-oriented course of actions might be a complicated task for the DMOs due to various factors being involved. Personality traits of a tourist also play a major role in experiences gained at the destination but these factors have usually been considered uncontrollable. However, the other factors related to the tourist product and services can be well managed as long as they are coordinated and aligned with the overall goal of the destination.

DMOs have historically been focused on marketing the destination and related activities until recently when, the buzz words such as “sustainability”, “ecotourism” and “creativity” have started getting a mention in their planning. Both sustainability and ecotourism have received substantial attention since, but ‘creativity’ has posed issues of conceptualization and resultant implementation. In redefining the role of DMO and bringing in elements of ‘creative-tourism-experience’ as the foci to attract ‘discerning tourists’ the starting point could be the observations of Tan, Kung, & Luh (2014 pg. 248-259); “creative experience is constructed by *inner-reflections*, which include not only *consciousness/awareness*, *needs/motivations* and *creativity*, but also *outer-interactions* which refer to *environment*, *people* and *activity*”.

DMO Role Extension

In redefining the role of the DMO to become a catalyst of creative tourist experience this study focused on the DMOs role in (1) improving optic-value of the destination, (2) design and conduct activities for the tourists and (3) encourage co-creation of memorable moments and more importantly produce something that is taken back for remembrance. In the Tan, King, & Luh (2014) model these elements are the “outer-interactions” at a destination, *aesthetics* is part of the physical environment; people are the tourists and hosts, co-creating memorable experiences through *activities* that can be taken away in form of a *souvenir* for posterity and all together will prove to be the tools through which the DMO shall be able to realize the aspirations of the discerning tourists. The term ‘discerning tourist’ highlights and keeps a focus on the demands of the modern tourist that possess vast intelligence about accessibility, attractions and amenities at the destination due to easy availability of and access to, formal and informal information about the destination. The influence of ICT on decision making and purchase of vacation is tremendous, putting further pressure on destination supplies which can best be regulated by the DMO only. As such, the role and function of DMOs is rapidly changing with more responsibility of making the destination strategically competitive. The conceptual model of the changing role of the DMO that includes active stimulants of the premised elements is illustrated as [Figure-2](#) below.

The discussion that follows explains the relevance not only that of a creative DMO in the present times but also the significance of the three elements of aesthetic value, tourist activities and co-creation of souvenirs as elements of larger creative experience. These three elements have oddly not been considered for greater attention explicitly by managers of destinations despite being part of the total experience that a tourist gets at a destination; creative or otherwise.

-----INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

A discussion about the three basic elements that will redefine the role of DMO becomes necessary here. This is essentially based on available literature and serves the purpose of the study to be further substantiated by the UAE case study analysis that follows in the second part.

(1) Aesthetics

Creativity has a strong role to play when it comes to developing a unique identity in a crowded marketplace. Many smaller destinations have created a destination brand and emotional appeal of the brand image by building on their strengths like culture and markers of identity. Places like Papua New Guinea, Tonga, and Belize have successfully differentiated and branded themselves as sustainable and cultural tourism destinations by utilizing creative aesthetics (Ryan 2001). Aesthetics remain an important component in emerging concept of Geo-tourism often defined as tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place - its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents. Though aesthetics has not been explicitly discussed with regard to tourism in the previous studies, yet its reference is unavoidable when it comes to deliberation on destination image building which is one of the major DMO functions in current globalized environment. In regard to destination image, Aumont (1997) has proposed three elements: *symbolic image*: images as symbols, representing religious idols, brand logos or public images of attractions; *epistemic image*: road maps, postcards, travel films, portraits of landscape; they are all images providing different interpretations to the perceiver; and *aesthetic image*: which produce sensations on the reader; for example the architecture of buildings, monuments, parks and piazzas.

Similarly, tourist motivations are also found to be closely associated with their purchasing behaviors which in turn are associated with aesthetics. Swanson and Horridge (2006) revealed travel motivations influence tourists' perceived shopping attributes such as aesthetics, uniqueness, location, promotion, sales associates, and so on. Holbrook (1999) noted that the concept of value is constituted from qualitatively different types of value like playfulness, aesthetics, status, and so on. In addition to playing a larger role in hotels (architectural facade, interior decoration, restaurants/coffee shops) and attractions (iconic attractions, museums, and amusement parks), aesthetics are found to be one of the attributes of shopping experience. To improve shopping area attractiveness for tourists, Jansen-Verbeke (1991) suggested a specific criteria of nine elements - clustering of a wide variety of shops, catering, leisure, and other activities and attractions; good accessibility and parking; pedestrian priority over vehicles; a positive image; attractive design (aesthetics); availability during leisure time (e.g. Sundays); hospitableness (visitor orientation, adequate information, symbolism identification); social affective value; and liveliness or animation, with surprises. Creativity and aesthetics have a strong connection in the field of tourism

where the implications can be utilized right from creating cities (for mega-events Olympic Games and world expositions), to creating creative hubs.

The changing role of DMO will have to actively demonstrate its ability and influence over aesthetics of the destination at all levels to be competitively relevant.

(2) Activities

There is a growing interest in creative activities at a destination as a shift from cultural tourism to creative tourism. “Creativity provides activity, content and atmosphere for tourism, and tourism in turn supports creative activities” (Richards, 2011).

It is the various hard, soft and marginal activities that differentiate a destination with another and hold the tourist for a longer period of stay. A destination may have several attractions that are easily accessible through an efficient transport system but if the attractions do not engage the visitor it may just have a figurative value albeit life-size and three-dimensional. A vacation remains dull until a heady mix of activities are part of it, to carry back as memorabilia of the experience. There are various kind of activities that a destination has to offer which may range from adventure activities of Bungee-jumping in New Zealand, to Wine Stomping in California and Wine Tasting in Malta or Shopping in Dubai. Several studies have shown that a tourist may spend more time in shopping at a destination which in many cases is an essential planned activity (Upadhyya, 2016). Shopping is seldom mentioned as a primary reason for travel, it perhaps remains the most universal of tourist activities (Alegre and Cladera, 2012) emphasizing further the importance of activities as ‘must do’ at a destination.

The range and variety of activities that attract tourists sometimes define the attractiveness of a destination. A great monument such as the Taj Mahal in the city of Agra India does, not offer much activity except passive viewing of the monument. Similarly, several other major cultural attractions such as the Louvre in Paris, the British Museum in London and the Metropolitan Museum in New York, attracting millions of visitors to their displays of culture may still remain quite a mundane walk past each display. Some attractions, such as the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, the Pyramids or the Coliseum come to represent entire cultures and fall in the same category as well. These attractions are held in awe by those who travel from afar to gaze upon them (Duke, 2007). Dubbed as ‘passive cultural consumption’ these activities now account for a very small portion of total tourist engagement during a vacation. Leiper (1990) has argued that attractions do not literally ‘attract’ visitors, they certainly do provide a focus for much tourist activity. For example, several such attractions have developed interpretive centers, museums, and special events such as the Irish Moss Interpretive Center, Basin Head Fisheries Museum, PEI Potato Museum, and Orwell Cove Pioneer Village (MacDonald & Jolliffe 2003).

The above discussion based on extensive review of literature provides ample evidence that the DMO has its role cut out and it must focus attention on arranging tourist engagement in form of

activities that the discerning tourist will look forward to and willingly consume. The answer lies in lies in participative activities that will lead to co-creation of souvenirs.

(3) Souvenirs

Significance of souvenirs as the tangible part of the tourism experience has been highlighted in many studies (Ana et al., 2014). Souvenirs are not just collection of objects, rather symbolize memories and experience of the tours taken by the tourists. A souvenir must be "typical" of the visited site (Black, 1964, as cited in Hume, 2009). Tourist shoppers look for unique products that are not available in their hometown or are unique to a destination (Reisinger and Turner, 2002). Wong and Wan (2013) identified the factors affecting the souvenirs buying. In addition to tangibility, intangibility and uniqueness of the souvenir, the site visited and interaction with the sales staff (impulsive) were found to be pertinent. Souvenirs have been classified in different categories based on various criteria including functional value, gifts or evidence of the visit and even have been considered as 'strategic memory protection' by a range of scholars including Turner and Reisinger (2001), Wilkins (2011) and Upadhyaya (2016).

Ideally, DMO should share responsibility of encouraging designing, production and placement of souvenirs which not only truly represents the destination, but also promotes local art and craftsmanship. DMOs control public owned attractions such as museums and parks and the souvenir shops operating within the precincts of most of the attractions, making it easier for the DMO to coordinate and co-create souvenirs featuring desired attributes of authenticity and symbolism with an aim of generating economic benefits for the local craftsmen. The most significant changing role that the DMO can acquire is in the co-creation of souvenirs mostly at the craft level which will have great fun and memory value. Importance of co-creation in tourist experience is discussed below.

Creativity and Changing Role of DMO

Ample research is available suggesting the changing role of the DMO. The DMO is no more viewed just as a marketing agency mostly mandated by the governments. Since the competition amongst destinations is increasing, a strategic shift in marketing and management of destination has well-nigh become essential. Destinations have to respond strategically to internal and external developments and will have to proactively shape and adapt to new visions of the future of tourism. "Envisioning the future of tourism and examining possible ways of reaching various future

scenarios are essential exercises in this process of deciding which strategic approach to adopt. The process of searching for the future is, therefore, essential because the process in and of itself ‘creates’ (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica, & O’Leary, 2006 pg. 116-126).” In achieving this “future” the biggest role is played by pleasant and memorable tourist experiences. Ritchie & Crouch (2003) have emphasized the role of quality visitor experience and Presenza (2005) considers that simple provisions of visitor services are not sufficient to ensure satisfaction of tourists.

Destinations have also been seen as Strategic Business Units to instill in the DMOs the competitive spirits in the fast changing global scenarios. ‘This destination concept leads to a new paradigm in tourism organizations because it is customer focused and process oriented (Müller, 1996 & Bieger, 1998)’. Destinations, in order to achieve strategic competitiveness, will need to modify their market strategies and tourism policies in light of the different digital cultures, and with the aim to develop tourism products/destination more in line with the changed and ICT-driven tourists’ wants and needs for information (Gursoy and McCleary, 2004; Buhalis and Law, 2008). Here again the tourist is at the focus for the destination to become competitive and this tourist today is well informed and ICT savvy. The solution though may not be in just a technical engagement but creative engagement.

Co-Creation

An essential strategic objective of the tourist destination thus is to offer creative experience to the discerning tourist which she is yearning for. The lead has to come from the DMO as designer and developer of creative engagements for the tourist who participates in it co-creating memorable experiences that can be taken away in a tangible form! Neuhofer et al. (2013) have suggested a ‘Tourism Experience Value Matrix’ for creation of contemporary tourism experiences which envisages a combination of co-creation and technology. Closer to the concept being put forward here, is a recent study by Campos et al. (2016) that proposes on-site co-creation experience from a tourist perspective. This study too has taken into consideration the Tan, Luh, & Kung (2014) observations already described above as the starting point of this conceptualization. The co-created experience affects the five human senses namely **sight, sound, smell, taste** and **touch**. It is through active participation in an activity of choice, choreographed for the tourist, that these senses are stimulated creating an experience that is etched in the memory of the partaker. Besides the sensory experience there also is a need to ‘tangibilize’ the memory in form of some shape, size and figure. According to Ana et al. (2013) co-creation involves active-participation and social-interaction whereby attention and memory get intertwined for a lasting experience. Co-creation involves tourists’ active participation and interaction in experiences (Rihova et al., 2015; Tan et al., 2014). Active participation, either in physical or mental terms (Bertella, 2014; Minkiewicz et al., 2013; Prebensen & Foss, 2011), has been found to be highly relevant for tourists because it focuses attention on their experience, leading to higher levels of memorability.

Co-creation of tourist experience is becoming a necessity to be offered to the discerning tourist at the destination. This study sees the possibility of co-creation in overall aesthetics of the destination area, which is the theatre where the experience shall take place. It is therefore being termed the **creative-theatre**. This creative-theatre offers all the amenities for co-creation of tourist experiences. The activity so designed for the tourist has to be an innovative engagement either with the help of involvement of technology or only physical participation or a combination of the two. And equally importantly, creation of an object that can be taken away as tangible memorabilia. This could be a craft that is co-created with a local artisan within the theatre. It is not necessary though, that the craft be learned to perfection and mere participation in the activity of making the object will be a satisfying experience besides being a creative experience. The object so taken away as souvenir will have great evidence value of the experience.

In most of the literature that is available in public domain what lacks is the relationship of co-creation of tourist experience with the role and function of the DMO. The DMO can take upon itself the responsibility to let tourists have a memorable experience. The DMO has traditionally been coordinating the activities of the tourist industry and in providing creative experience it has to widen its domain to various other agencies both governmental as well as non-governmental to arrange creative tourist experiences. To achieve creative experience for tourists, DMO has to expand and reengineer its role. This may be possible at three levels in the creative theatre. Creative-theatre is the place where the major attraction within the tourist destination is located. It can also be the whole of a popular tourist destination. A conceptual model that illustrates the changing role of DMO activities can be seen in [figure-2](#). The three levels of such co-creation of tourist experience are as given below.

1. Engage with agencies responsible to make the creative-theatre aesthetically appealing loaded with amenities for a creative-tourist-experience.
2. Involve with industry for generating ideas of exciting activities that are native to the creative-theatre.
3. Encourage and facilitate the industry both at craft level and art level for co-creation of souvenirs as a long term take away of memories.

Part II

United Arab Emirates (UAE) - Tourism Organization

The case of UAE tourism organization is being discussed below to further emphasize the concept of the changing role of the DMO as discussed in the first part above and corroborate its practicality.

There is ample scope for the National Tourism Organization and the Destination Management Organizations of UAE to expand their role for creative experience of the tourist. It has also been observed in an extensive review of NTO/DMO functions through their websites that each of these have laid a definite focus on innovation and creativity for attaining and attracting tourist numbers. A brief review of role and functions of UAE tourism organizations is given below.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a constitutional federation of seven emirates: *Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ra's al-Khaimah and Fujairah*. The UAE is endowed with an extensive coastline, sandy beaches and varied landscape, where a wide variety of activities can be indulged in, ranging from powerboat races to sand-skiing. Manicured golf courses provide ready enjoyment and for the less active, shopping opportunities abound. Additionally the country's deep-rooted cultural heritage, which is easily accessible at various cultural centers and traditional sports such as falconry, camel- racing and horse-racing, have been a powerful attraction for tourists. The UAE has also become a much sought after venue for conferences, regional and international exhibitions and major sports events such as the Dubai World Cup, the Dubai Desert Classic Golf Tournament, and polo and cricket competitions.

Tourism in the UAE is organized through a National Tourism Organization at the federal level while the responsibility of managing tourism from its planning & controlling to its coordinating & monitoring remains the responsibility of each Emirate. Each Emirate now has a well-structured DMO with its scope of role and functions properly defined. DMOs in the individual emirates actively market their own special attractions, frequently attending international travel fairs as well as encouraging travel agents and tour operators to visit the UAE to experience the rich fabric of Arabian life, culture and heritage that form the basic tourism resources.

National Council for Tourism and Antiquities (NCTA)

National Council for Tourism and Antiquities (NCTA) is the federal level tourism organization of UAE. It was established in 2009 with an aim to represent the country at global tourism events, and create a federal level structure to regulate tourism departments in individual emirates to ensure uniformity and the successful implementation of a cohesive strategy to boost tourism throughout the UAE. It was only after inception of NCTA that UAE could make its place in United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as a full member.

Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority (TCA)

TCA Abu Dhabi was established in 2004, and is a statutory body with wide ranging responsibilities for building the emirate's tourism industry. The ADTA's mandate covers seven main areas: 1- Destination promotion - overseeing the activities of its expanding overseas office network, the staging of road shows and inbound trade familiarization trips and participating in trade fairs 2- Convention Bureau - developing and promoting business events tourism in Abu Dhabi in

partnership with stakeholders. 3- Licensing – the services include issuance, approval, renewal, amendment and cancellation of all tourism-related licenses. 4- Classification of accommodation sector including hotels, hotel apartments and resorts. 5- Industry initiatives & Emiratizations which includes the development of industry employees; increasing the number of Emiratis involved in the sector and engagement with the local community in its future development (Emiratization is the term given for UAE citizens' employment drive). 6 – Product development aiming at creating tourism product with a focus on tourist attractions. 7- Sustainability- positioning Abu Dhabi emirate as a sustainable tourism destination, and operating a comprehensive sustainability management and reporting project.

Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM)

Pioneer in realizing and developing tourism as an alternative economic activity in the mainly oil based economic environment Dubai has achieved an enviable position amongst the top tourist destinations of the world. Established in January 1997, the DTCM succeeded the Dubai Commerce and Tourism Promotion Board (DCTPB), which had been in existence since 1989. In assuming its administrative responsibilities within Dubai, the DTCM has now taken over the licensing of hotels, hotel apartments, tour operators, tourist transport companies and travel agents. Its supervisory role also covers all touristic, archaeological and heritage sites, tourism conferences and exhibitions, the operation of tourist information services and the organization and licensing of tour guides. Recently DTCM has taken up initiatives to grow mid-market hotel segment through offering incentives to the hoteliers and the Dubai Green Tourism Awards which are designed to encourage and reward pioneering hotels and hotel apartments that have made significant efforts to support environmental awareness.

Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA)

The SCTDA was established in 1996 with an objective to promote the commerce and tourism in the emirate of Sharjah, through the activities such as planning and laying down strategies and policies; promoting the emirate's tourist and historical attractions through events, activities and promotions; conducting appropriate market studies and surveys, attracting foreign investment through tourism development. The desire in presenting Sharjah as a unique tourist destination emphasized the great attention the authority pays to the tourism related exhibitions, presented in its participation in the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) in UAE, ITB in Berlin and other exhibitions. Recently, Sharjah has been selected the Capital of Arab Tourism for 2015, demonstrating its inclination towards developing cultural and heritage tourism in the region.

Fujairah Tourism & Antiquities Authority (FTAA)

Earlier Fujairah Tourism Bureau, Fujairah Tourism & Antiquities Authority (FTAA) was established in 1996 to and objective to pay attention to the antiquities and heritage and to archive tourism development to the emirates. In addition to issuing tourism licenses and identifying tourism investment zones, FTAA is committed to protect the emirate's heritage and culture

through developing tourism. The emirate is known for its scenic beauty, museum and forts. FTAA has been quite active in developing new sites such as Fujairah Paradise Project (Vij & Verma, 2016) and promoting tourism through participating in national and international travel exhibitions.

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAK TDA)

RAK TDA was established in May 2011 to develop the emirate's tourism infrastructure and promote it, both domestically and abroad. Ras Al Khaimah TDA's aim is to establish the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah as a luxury destination for leisure and adventure whilst maintaining its appeal for families. RAKTDA has a mandate to license, regulate and monitor the emirate's hospitality industry, for which it conducts research. The authority also indulges in destination branding and developing marketing programs to encourage tourism investment into the emirate.

Ajman Tourism Development Department (ATDD)

ATDD was established in 2012 to highlight the importance of tourist attractions available in the Emirate of Ajman, and lay down strategic plans for tourism promotion through holding/participating in conferences, exhibitions, and international promotion campaigns. In addition, ATDD also oversees preparation of legislation, rules and regulations that are required to develop tourism in the emirate. In addition to classification of hotels, the department has the authority to issue, renew and cancel licenses for travel agencies.

Discussion

It can be noted that six out of seven UAE Emirates have official DMOs that are mandated for development and promotion of tourism in their respective states. Being a federation leaves each Emirate with ample scope and authority to mold its tourism policies independently. Sharjah, it is observed has been promoting cultural tourism while Ras Al Khaima is offering beach tourism with the sun and sand thrown in as valuable extras. Dubai has been the pioneer that realized the potential of tourism much earlier than anyone else and has been a beacon for all others. The similarities of products on offer are obvious but the contrasts are what distinguishes each Emirate with the other. On a global level the emirates are competing with each other for attracting tourists and the market has gotten inadvertently segmented by the efforts of each DMO. Dubai has been targeting affluent West European and North American tourists while, Ras al Khaima attracts large number of tourists from East European Republics and Sharjah on the other hand, is attracting families and cultural tourists mainly from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Being an established tourist destination in the Middle East UAE is tagged as a safe and exciting place to visit for an Arab experience especially in troubled times where all other Arab destinations are under some kind of crisis or other. This provides scope for the UAE to further improving the tourist experiences with more possibilities of co-creation of creative experiences. The DMOs are in the right position to take up

the challenge to experiment with the concept of co-creation of memorable tourist experience as against passive viewing. UAE is known the world-over and has been able to successfully brand itself as a ‘shopping destination’ that already provides active participation of tourists. The entire UAE becomes the creative-theatre and offers tourists an experience of participating in memorable activities; besides shopping there is *dune-bashing* during a *desert-safari* a typical and essential tourist activity for all visitors. If a sand collection and framing activity is initiated for the tourists it can be a good takeaway of the whole experience. There already is a popular souvenir of UAE that offers seven-colored-sand framed in such a way that it makes different patterns.

Table-1 highlights the major driving principles of each UAE tourism organization sketched above. It can be observed that the idea of creativity and innovation is inherent in the driving principles of each of these organizations. Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) has already taken several initiatives to boost creativity in tourism. The Emirate is known for its creative hubs such as *Design District*, better known as *D3* - an ambitious commercial hub for the Dubai’s fashion and creative industries; and *Al Quoz* -home to several art galleries displaying contemporary work from the regions’ most famous and emerging talent. It is also home to Alserkal Avenue, a network of galleries, cafes and creative spaces offering a base for Dubai’s art community to collaborate, converse, debate and appreciate international and regional work. The venue also plays host to a steady stream of events throughout the year including the Urban Market and Street Art Night.

One of the most common UAE souvenir is ‘sand-art’ where colored sand is filled in a glass bottle that forms certain Arabian motifs. If the visitor is provided this opportunity to co-create a bottle of sand art her experience will become memorable and the piece of craft will let her re-live the moments several time on, throughout. This is a suggestion of co-creation of enriching tourist experience that a discerning tourist can be offered with the facilitation by the DMO. In several instances such activities are being carried out by industry. What is needed is to prioritize it, organize it and regularize it for strategic competitive advantage.

-----INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Conclusion

The DMO has to shed its traditional bureaucratic image in the fast changing knowledge-economies where the citizen travels not only for getting away from the quotidian but also to de-stress herself. This is a process of a different and care-free engagement that takes the tourist away from the competitive environment of the routine professional life to the creative-theatre of new experiences.

The extensive exploration of relevant literature and keen observation of the functioning of DMOs brings the study to the conclusion that the role of DMO needs expansion whereby it has to become pro-active in stimulating the industry instead of just coordinating; it must regularly come up with thrilling ideas of co-creation of experiences that do not lose the local flavor. To start with the elements of aesthetics that enhances the optic value of the destination along with offer of creative activities that have the possibilities of co-creation of a memorable take-away give the DMO sufficient opportunity for a makeover that will benefit the destination and enrich the discerning tourist with creative experience. It is the suggested interplay of pleasing aesthetics, participative activity and co-created souvenir, facilitated at the creative-theatre that shall redefine the role of DMO for a creative futuristic leap.

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KEYTERMS

Aesthetics: a set of principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty providing optical value to the viewer. The state of mind and emotions in relation to the sense of beauty at a destination.

Co-Creation: a process that brings different parties together in order to jointly produce a mutually valued outcome. A tourist activity in which participants create a satisfying experience or object.

Creative Experience: an experience influenced by inner-reflections such as consciousness/awareness, needs/motivations and creativity; and outer-interactions which refer to environment, people and activity. A tourist experience of anticipated self-satisfaction.

Creative-Theatre: Creative-theatre is the place where major tourist attractions are located within a destination. It can also be the whole popular tourist destination. It is here that the tourist passively or actively engages with attractions and avails services.

Destination Management Organization: Generally a public organization playing key role in long-term development of a destination; responsible for formulating effective tourism plans, policies for achieving strategic competitive advantage.

Discerning Tourist: modern tourist who possess vast intelligence about accessibility, attractions and amenities at the destination due to extensive use of ICT. Knowledgeable tourist who is looking for well-appointed amenities and hearty experiences.

Souvenir: something that is kept as a reminder of a person, place, or event; usually an article given, kept, or purchased as a reminder of a place visited. Memorabilia of vacation experience.