The Impact of Services and the Experiential Components on the Global Customer Experience: Preliminary Results from an Italian Art City

Emanuela Conti
Department of Economic, Social and Political Studies
University of Urbino Carlo Bo (Italy)
email: emanuela.conti@uniurb.it
Corresponding Author

Fabio Forlani
Department of Economics University of Perugia (Italy)
email: fabio.forlani@unipg.it

Tonino Pencarelli
Department of Economic, Social and Political Studies
University of Urbino Carlo Bo (Italy)
email: tonino.pencarelli@uniurb.it

Abstract
Customer experiences emerge from value co-creation processes of companies, customers and the actors of the value eco-system. Customers live experiences as personal events and co-create them according to their level of interest and participation (Pencarelli and Forlani, 2018; Campos et al., 2018; Galvagno and Dalli, 2014; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Pine and Gilmore, 1999) while companies can provide the platform for the desired customer experiences to emerge (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Schmitt, 2003, 1999).

In order to create positive customer experience many elements are necessary: goods, services, and experiential components. The experience factor is increasingly important for the creation of the customer experience (Pencarelli and Forlani, 2018b; Pencarelli et. al. 2017). Hence, companies should consider in their offerings the impact of goods, services and mainly experiential features on the value creation for customers and the company itself. This aspect has not yet been assigned the appropriate attention in the literature on experiential marketing (Forlani et al., 2018).

This paper is aimed at exploring the impact of services and experiential components on the global customer experience. To this scope, a preliminary study based on data collected for a research on tourism of Urbino (Conti et al. 2016), a Unesco Italian site, was conducted. The findings of this research suggest that positive aspects of customer experience are especially connected to the experiential components while the most perceived negative aspects of the customer experience are connected to bad evaluation of services. In short, the experiential elements of the offer of an art city amplify the perceived value of customer experience of visitors, while services play a very basic role.

From this explorative study, some preliminary theoretical and managerial implications ad directions for future research emerge.

Keywords
Customer experience; experiential components; services; tourist perspective; art city
1. Introduction

The experience factor plays an increasingly important role in determining the success of the company and city’s offering.

The literature on experiential marketing is based on the idea that not only the rational, but also the emotional and irrational side of customer behavior (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt, 1999) is important for the whole experience coming from the interactions between the company and its customers (Campos et al. 2018). Such experience plays an important role in the customer’s preferences and purchase decision process. Differently from the classical economic theory, which considers the consumer as a logical thinker, who takes decisions on rational problem solving, the Experiential Marketing approach considers the intangible elements linked to the emotional value perceived by customer.

In fact, consumers look for two kinds of value: utilitarian value (or functional value) and hedonic value (or experiential value) (Addis and Holbrook, 2001).

A similar position can be found in the managerial field which considers Customer Experience a fundamental element for competitiveness while elements such as price, product and quality are no longer sufficient to guarantee sustainable competitive advantages (Shaw and Ivens, 2005; Homburg et al., 2015; KPMG and Nunwood report, 2017).

Scientific literature on the experience logic has focused most of its attention on theoretical aspects and empirical studies in different sectors (Pencarelli and Forlani, 2018) such as in museums (Pencarelli et al., 2015; 2017; Conti et al., 2017). However, the impact of environments and settings on customer experience from the demand side has been widely underestimated.

This study aims to contribute to start to fill the gap, through the measurement of the impact of services and experiential components on the customer experience.

In particular, this work analyses the impact of these components on the tourist experience of visiting Urbino.

The study is based on data collected for a research on tourism of Urbino commissioned by the National Gallery of the Marche (The Ducal Palace of Urbino) to the University of Urbino (Conti et al., 2016).

Specifically, the research question is the following:

*How do service and experiential components impact on the customer experience from the tourist’s perspective?*

2. Theoretical background: services and the experiential components of the Customer Experience

Providing excellent services may not turn into excellent customer experience as customer experience quality is likely to be determined from the point of view of an individual customer (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Examples provided by Kim and Choi (2013) clarify the concept: customers who go to a movie theater and receive high-quality services from employees may end up having a terrible experience if other customers keep talking on a cell phone during a movie.

Customer experience is defined as the customer’s subjective response to the encounter with the firm, which includes the communication encounter, the service encounter, and the consumption encounter (Lemke et al. 2011; Meyer and Schwager, 2007).
The relationship between customer experience quality and success in businesses has been only recently explored (Lemke et al., 2011; Payne et al., 2008; Verhoef et al., 2009). Superior customer experience is one of the ways to achieve successful marketing outcomes and further improve a firm’s chance of success (Berry et al. 2002; Verhoef et al., 2009) but not enough research has been conducted to empirically examine the antecedents and consequence of customer experience quality.

The study of Kim and Choi (2013) contributed to fill the gap as it shows that the perception of service outcome, interactions with service firms and of peer-to-peer quality have a substantial influence on customer experience quality. Furthermore, their results demonstrate that customer experience quality is one key element to build customer loyalty.

Customer experience quality is defined as the perceived superiority of customer experience (Lemke et al., 2011). While the distinction appears to be unclear from firm standpoint in service contexts, customer service quality is conceptually distinct from service quality. In fact, service quality is considered a perceived judgment of its excellence or superiority (Parasuraman, et al. 1998; Zeithaml, 1988) and its main focus lies in a judgment about the firm’s process and, not the customer’s (Payne et al., 2008). However, customer experience is based on numerous contextual factors such as the presence/contact with other customers and a level of participation in a service process, and hence, cannot be viewed as only influenced by service firms (Pullman and Gross, 2004; Schembri, 2009). Therefore, the customer service encompasses not only perceived quality of services provided by service firms but also customers’ perception of “total experience”.

Another recent study (Klaus and Maklan, 2013) confirms the previous literature stating that customer experience is created through a longer process of company–customer interaction across multiple channels. The Authors introduce the concept of customer experience quality (EXQ) scale, which explains better and predicts both, loyalty and recommendations, rather than customer satisfaction. Customers’ perceptions of their experience are generally associated with the question of how service is delivered rather than exploring what is delivered (Goldstein et al., 2002), and how the customer experience relates to important marketing outcomes (Klaus and Maklan 2012). The study addresses these gaps by delivering evidence defining the exact nature of customer experience and its significant positive influence on customer satisfaction, word-of-mouth and loyalty.

Customer experience, unlike customer satisfaction, measures a more holistic consumer construct by taking into account the sum of all direct and indirect interactions with a service provider providing both better explanatory power and identification of priority areas for managerial attention. For example, that a hotel stay was satisfactory does not necessarily mean that the entire experience was satisfactory. The total experience includes searching for the room, booking online, travel to the hotel, checking out and getting from the hotel to the next destination.

The literature on experiential marketing has contributed to the understanding of customer experience as it adds the experiential components.

Carù and Cova (2007) clarify that there is a “continuum of consuming experiences” ranging from experiences that are mainly created by the customers to experiences that are largely built by companies, passing through experiences that are co-created by consumers and companies (Campos et al., 2015; Galvagno and Dalli, 2014; Vargo and Lusch, 2004).
The following definition of customer experience builds from Gentile et al. (2007)\(^1\) and includes the experience factor.

*Customer Experience may result, a set of interactions between a customer, an organization and a good, a service and/or an experiential component.*

The customer experience is strictly personal and implies customer’s participation and involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and/or spiritual). Its evaluation depends on the comparison between a customer’s expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the organization and its offering in correspondence of the different moments of contact od touch-points.

In the experiential marketing literature, customer experience can derive from the consumption of goods and/or services that are “experiencialized” (Schmitt, 1999; Ferraresi e Schmitt, 2006) and/or of experiences considered as “new” economic outputs (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Pencarelli and Forlani, 2016).

Gentile et al. (2007), building on Schmitt (1999) and Fornernino et al. (2006) contributions, suggest to consider the following experiential components: sensorial, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle and relational\(^2\).

Conti et al. (2017), building on Pine and Gilmore (1999) and on (Shen and Chang, 2012; Caldwell, 2002; Martin-Ruiz et al., 2010; Brida et al., 2017), suggest the following dimensions of the experience: aesthetic, education, entertainment, evasion and socialization\(^3\).

In the experience logic marketing literature, the role of goods and services and of experiential components in the customer experience has been analyzed in all kinds of organizations (Forlani and Pencarelli, 2018) and also in non-profit institutions like museums (Pencarelli et al., 2015; 2017; Conti et al., 2017; Conti, 2017).

However, the impact of goods, services and experiential components on customer experience need to be further explored.

In this paper, we focus only on the impact of the services and the experiential components (Fig. 1) on the customer experience of tourists of an art city. By experiential components we adopt the following dimensions of the experience: aesthetic, education, entertainment, evasion and socialization (Conti et al., 2017).

---

\(^1\) Gentile et al. (2007) have developed their definition of Customer Experience from contributions of La Salle and Britton (2003), Shaw and Ivens (2005) and Schmitt (1999).

\(^2\) Schmitt (1999) proposes a modular conceptualization of customer experience consisting of five modules - sense, feel, think, act, relate - while Fornernino et al. (2006) identify five distinct dimensions: sensorial-perceptual, affective and physical-behavioral (components) and social and cognitive (facets).

\(^3\) Pine e Gilmore (1999) argue that there are four dimensions of the experience: aesthetic, education, entertainment and evasion. (Shen and Chang, 2012; Caldwell, 2002; Martin-Ruiz et al., 2010; Brida et al., 2017) consider the social dimension of the experience the exchange of opinions and emotions among persons during the experience.
In tourism sector, customer experiences derive from processes of value co-creation involving tourists and all the actors of value eco-system of cities. Cities and their actors are asked to provide the platform – goods, services and experiential components – to facilitate the customer experiences desired by tourists.

3. Research design and methodology

This study adopts the content analysis method to elaborate data collected in July-August 2016 for a research on tourism of Urbino through direct interviews to 300 tourists.

In particular, from the dataset we have analyzed the answers relative to four questions: one closed question, aimed at identifying the perceived level of satisfaction of tourists for services of Urbino and three open questions on the evaluation of the perceived customer experience. The closed question aimed to identify the level of satisfaction of the following elements of service of the city visiting, using a Likert scale from 1 to 3 (1=little satisfied; 2=quite satisfied; 3=very satisfied): road directions to get to the city, road directions in the city; restaurant service; accommodation; guided tour services of the city; information services of touristic office and finally friendliness and kindness of residents. The open questions were aimed to understand in the tourist’s view: 1) what is the most important element associated with visiting Urbino 2) the main positive aspects of Urbino visiting experience; 3) the main negative aspects of Urbino visiting experience.

Content analysis has been done to understand how services and experiential components impact on the global customer experience in tourists’ perspective.

In particular, experiential components were interpreted on the basis of the suggested conceptual framework consisting of five dimensions (Conti et al., 2017) of the experience: aesthetic, education, entertainment, evasion and socialization.

In our analysis, the significant elements of the customer experience were derived from the co-word analysis, which is a content analysis technique that is effective in mapping the strength of association between information items in textual data (Coulter et al., 1998; Muñoz-Leiva et al., 2012; Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martín, 2012). Co-word analysis reduces a space of descriptors (or keywords) to a set of network graphs that effectively illustrate the strongest associations between descriptors (Coulter et al. 1998; Muñoz-Leiva et al., 2012; Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martín, 2012).

The visualization map was obtained by analyzing the co-occurrence matrix created through the T-Lab software that implements the analysis techniques called Multidimensional Scaling (MDS).

Results of co-word analysis have been also compared with the results of the analysis of interviews of a previous elaboration of the data (Conti et al., 2016) through the use of Survey Monkey software and traditional manual coding (Saldana, 2007).

---

4 The research on tourism of Urbino was commissioned by the National Gallery of the Marche (of Urbino) to the Department of Economy of the University of Urbino (Conti et al., 2016) and investigated a wide range of aspects of tourism of Urbino
5 The sample of 300 tourists interviewed consists of 59% female and 41% male, mainly of 46–60 and 31–45 years old, (61% of the sample is between 31 and 60 age) with a high level of education (the 91% of the sample has at least a secondary school degree) and has medium-high professions. The 66% of tourists interviewed are Italians (mainly from Emilia-Romagna, Lombardia, Lazio and the Marche Regions) 34% foreigners (especially form Germany, France and Great Britain). The main motivations of the visit are arts and culture (57%) and the Ducal Palace (17%), the main heritage attraction of the city.
4. Findings

The main finding of this research is that there is a relationship between services, experiential components and customer experience of visiting Urbino. In particular, the two components impact differently on the customer experience.

Let’s see the findings relative to the four questions analyzed in the dataset which allows to answer to our research question.

First, tourists associate the city of Urbino mainly to the Ducal Palace, art, Middle Age and Renaissance periods, university and architecture (Fig. 2). The figure stresses that there are relationships among the five groups of words, which describe the city: 1) historical (medieval and Renaissance), artistic and university city characterized by the Ducal Palace and by the figures such as The Duke Federico da Montefeltro and Raffaello Sanzio; 2) Village with Renaissance architecture that embodies the typical Italian beauty, culture and harmony.

The five groups are connected and are coherent with each other and refer to the experiential dimensions rather than to services. In particular, the experiential dimensions are all positive and the totalizing dimension is the aesthetic one (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). In other words, Urbino is characterized in the perception of the interviewees, for its aesthetics components.

Fig 2 – Associations to Urbino (MDS map)

These findings are coherent with the results emerging from the research report (tab. 1) which were obtained through a manual coding process.
Tab 1 – Associations to Urbino in tourists’ perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associations to Urbino</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Ducal Palace</td>
<td>14,30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>13,30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture/Italian history</td>
<td>12,70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medioeval city</td>
<td>12,30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>11,30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raffaello</td>
<td>7,70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Duke Federico da Montefeltro</td>
<td>7,30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renaissance</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17,10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture of the city</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape and nature</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: research report (Conti et al., 2016)

Visitors interviewed (table 2) are on average quite satisfied (2.65) with services (in a Likert scale 1 to 3) of Urbino, especially for guided tour of the city (2.9), tourist office (2.8) and hospitality of citizens (2.78).

Tab. 2 – The evaluation of services of Urbino in tourist’s perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Road directions to get to the city</th>
<th>Road directions in the city</th>
<th>Restaurant service</th>
<th>Accomodation</th>
<th>Guided tour services</th>
<th>Information service of touristic office</th>
<th>Friendliness and cordiality of residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not good</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite good</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Null answer (0)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid answers</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average evaluation</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid answers</td>
<td>96,00%</td>
<td>98,00%</td>
<td>68,67%</td>
<td>31,67%</td>
<td>3,33%</td>
<td>13,33%</td>
<td>89,67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not satisfied (-) Not good</td>
<td>9,03%</td>
<td>7,14%</td>
<td>4,85%</td>
<td>3,16%</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td>2,50%</td>
<td>1,12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On average satisfied (=)</td>
<td>28,47%</td>
<td>20,07%</td>
<td>46,12%</td>
<td>46,32%</td>
<td>10,00%</td>
<td>15,00%</td>
<td>19,33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully satisfied (+)</td>
<td>62,50%</td>
<td>72,79%</td>
<td>49,03%</td>
<td>50,53%</td>
<td>90,00%</td>
<td>82,50%</td>
<td>79,55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: our elaboration

The majority of respondents (average 69,55%) are fully satisfied with all the services except for restorations and accommodation. However, the majority of the sample of visitors has evaluated four kinds of services in table 1 - directions to the city, indication...
of attractions, restaurants and hospitality of citizens - while the minority of visitors interviewed has used and evaluated the other services: accommodation, tourist office and guided tour of Urbino.

Despite the evaluation of services is very positive we can stress that services are never mentioned in the associations to Urbino of tourists (Fig. 2). It seems that in the visitors’ mind Urbino is considered for its emotional dimension connected to beauty, aesthetic.

The analysis of main positive aspects of Urbino visiting experience (Fig. 3) impacting on the global customer experience stresses that the main co-words are related (yellow circles) to the city and its conservation, Renaissance period, atmosphere, art. Another cluster of responses (light blue circles) is related to the quiet, medioeval and little town etc. A third group (green circles) emphasizes the Palace, the Duke and one of the most relevant room of the Palace, the so called “Studiolo” an inlaid wooden room where the Duke used to go to study and meet intellectuals and artists.

*Fig 3 – Main positive aspects of Urbino visiting experience (MDS method)*

Source: our elaboration

The main positive aspects of the visiting experience in Urbino are connected to the aesthetic dimension. In fact, tourists appreciate mostly the good state of conservation of the town (well-preserved, clean an intact town), the art, the history and culture and the Ducal Palace (tab. 3). Further elements are identified such as the atmosphere, the architecture of the city, University, and landscape. Findings are in line with the results of the research on tourism of Urbino which were obtained through the manual coding analysis (Conti et al., 2016).
Tab 3 – Main positive aspects of Urbino visiting experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well-preserved</td>
<td>22.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich of art, history, culture</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ducal Palace</td>
<td>17.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to visit</td>
<td>13.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A quiet city</td>
<td>8.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The atmosphere</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty of the city</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A clean/tidy city</td>
<td>5.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>5.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young atmosphere with University students</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape/nature</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A typical Italian/authentic city</td>
<td>2.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: research report (Conti et al., 2016).

From the analysis of the negative aspects of the experience in Urbino (Fig. 3), one can affirm that the main critical issues are related to poor and expensive car parking (the pink circles), and also connections to other cities and services inside the city (such as elevator). Therefore, service components especially those connected with the accessibility (car parking, public transport, etc.) negatively affect the perception of the city. There are no critics related to the experiential components of Urbino visiting experience.

Fig 3 – Main negative aspects of Urbino visiting experience (MDS method)

Source: our elaboration
Also in this case the main negative aspects of the tourist experience in Urbino are in line with results of the market research commissioned by the Direction of the Ducal Palace (tab. 4) which are mainly related to services related to parking, visiting connecting to other cities, public transport, etc.

**Tab 4 – Main negative aspects of Urbino visiting experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>25.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical issues connected to parking</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many ups and down (hard to visit)</td>
<td>9.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badly connected to other cities</td>
<td>7.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical issues connected to public transport</td>
<td>5.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarce services for disabled people</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarce initiatives/services for tourists</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not suitable for old people</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many cars in the city center</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little marketing to promote the city</td>
<td>2.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor English directions for cultural site</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No wi-fi in the city</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: research report (Conti et al., 2016).

Then, such dimensions of the global experience of Urbino have been crossed with the evaluation of services.

The purpose of this analysis was to understand if tourists who have a different perception of the quality of service also have a different perception of the positive and negative characteristics of the global city experience. This analysis was carried out by isolating the catering component because this item has a significant percentage of responses on the total (69%) and because there are elements of criticality in the perceived quality (only 49% of respondents judge the restaurants of the city in an excellent way by assigning them the maximum value of 3). Ultimately these data allow the comparative analysis of two groups of comparable respondents as they have had a similar experience but have provided different opinions on the quality of the restaurant service.

As Figure 5 shows the visitors who are fully satisfied (3 in the Likert scale) with restaurant service are those who strongly appreciate the experiential factor connected to the aesthetic dimensions of the experience. In particular aesthetic factor is related to the atmosphere and the conservation of Urbino. A very good perception of this specific service (restaurant service) amplifies the perception of the experiential factor, and ultimately of the global visit experience.
Fig. 5 – The relationship between the main positive aspects of Urbino visiting experience and the evaluation of restaurant service 3 (MDS method)

Source: our elaboration

Differently, Figure 6 shows that visitors who are not or quite satisfied (1 or 2 in the Likert scale) with restaurant service do not emphasize the aesthetic experiential factor and stress the importance more generically of the city of Urbino.

Fig. 6 – The relationship between the main positive aspects of Urbino visiting experience and the evaluation of restaurant service 1-2 (MDS method)

Source: our elaboration
Regarding the main negative aspects of the tourist experience in Urbino visitors who are fully satisfied with restaurants think that the main negative aspect which destroys value of the customer experience is related to the car parking. In particular, parking is associated with accessibility elements and easy connection to the historic center. Further negative aspects are related to the lack of cultural events and the use of English.

*Fig. 5 – The relationship between the main negative aspects of Urbino visiting experience and the evaluation of restaurant service 3 (MDS method)*

![Graph showing relationship between main negative aspects of Urbino visiting experience and evaluation of restaurant service (MDS method).](image)

Even tourists who are less satisfied with restaurants criticize the car parks but in a different way. The word parking is in this case associated with expensive as well as with missing/lacking and the difficulty of reaching the center by public transport. Furthermore, critical issues emerge in the promotion and in the ability to welcome tourists (a closure attitude).

*Fig. 6 – The relationship between the main negative aspects of Urbino experience and the evaluation of restaurant service 1-2 (MDS method)*

![Graph showing relationship between main negative aspects of Urbino experience and evaluation of restaurant service (MDS method).](image)
5. Discussion and conclusion

Referring to our research question, the study highlights that services and experiential impact on customer visiting experience of visiting Urbino. Furthermore, services and the experience factor impact in a different way, confirming the importance of studying these components together (Lemke et al., 2011, and Maklan and Klaus, 2011).

Despite the limits of this study, connected to the use of secondary data collected for a previous wide research on tourism of Urbino (Conti et al., 2016), we can state that:

1) the experiential components play a fundamental role in the experience of visiting Urbino and in the global perception (associations to Urbino) of the city. It is not obvious that these results emerge in other cities, even art cities;

2) services are fundamental to create the customer experience. In our study poor services especially connected to car parking, connections to other cities and public transport strongly impact in a negative way on the customer experience, or put it in another way, they strongly contribute to destroy value for visitors of Urbino. The experiential components, instead, strongly impact in a positive way on the global visiting experience of Urbino. Specifically, the aesthetic experiential components connected to well-preserved city art and Ducal Palace and art of the city of Urbino impact positively on the value of the global perceived travel experience, or put it in another way, they strongly contribute to create value for visitors;

3) the intersection of the perception of service quality with the perception of the total experience also seems to indicate that the perception of quality of service significantly influences the perception of total experience. The study shows that the customers who are fully satisfied with services (in our case we have analyzed restaurant service) are those who mostly appreciate or amplify the experiential factor, and differently those who are not satisfied with this service do not appreciate the experiential factor. In particular:
   - the positive evaluation of services (restaurant service) contributes to the positive evaluation of the customer experience, but is not able to make such experience “memorable”. Instead, the experiential components amplify the customer experience;
   - the negative evaluation of services (restaurant service) contribute to reduce, to destroy the perceived value of the city, or in other words affects negatively the perception of the customer experience of visiting Urbino, with particular reference to the critical aspects.

Even though the literature strongly stresses the personal responses of the experience (Lemke et al., 2011; Meyer and Schwager, 2007) this study confirms that the experiential factor is increasingly important in the customer experience co-creation but also that services are still fundamental. In fact, this study of tourist experience in an art city is strongly determined by it is quite obvious that the aesthetic experiential components are fundamental, as this dimension of the experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) related to concerns the pleasure of simply being in a beautiful place.

The study underlines aspects such as beauty and conservation. We could say that the aesthetic dimension of the experience, is connected both to the cultural heritage but also to actions consisting in services related to the conservation. Therefore, it is related not only to heritage beauty but also to the human effort and interest consisting in services to conserve and valorize cultural heritage.

Core services of a city are important also in an art city, thus confirming that core services should be delivered properly (Kim and Choi, 2013). Our study also confirms the importance of
the interaction with other customers (peer-to-peer) in the creation of an excellent experience (Kim and Choi, 2013) as the atmosphere of a quiet town and at the same time young and live town because of University students are important experiential components appreciated by tourists of Urbino. These components are related both to the history and beauty of the city (aesthetic) and to the socialization dimension of the experience.

With regard to managerial implications of this study, managers of a city need to understand the importance of services and the experiential factors which help enhance customer experience. In particular, the design of the touristic offer of a city requires different attention and effort on the experiential and service components. For example, improving services will reduce negative perception of the offering system and of the customer experience, but with no investments in the experiential components there are no effects on the positive aspects and on the attractiveness of the city offer.

Focusing on the aesthetic dimension of experience of an art city, it is important to preserve and valorize cultural heritage.

Finally, this study suggests some future research steps. In particular, it suggests the need to conduct specific studies to measure both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the relationships between the service and experiential components of the global tourist experience. Future research need first to analyze systematically the literature on services in order to identify all kinds of services to take into consideration and to measure their impact on the customer experience.

Furthermore, future studies should measure empirically the impact of the experiential components and of services on the global customer experience through qualitative and quantitative methods. In particular it would be interesting to study the impact of all the experiential components (e.g. aesthetic, entertainment, education, evasion, socialization) and services on the global customer experience in different sectors. For example, focusing on tourism it would be interesting to understand how these components impact on the global visitor experience connected to different kinds of tourisms such as seaside, mountain, wellness, congress tourism etc.

Finally, future studies should measure how the customer experience relates to important marketing outcomes (Klaus and Maklan 2012).

References


by the Direction of the National Gallery of the Marche (The Ducal Palace of Urbino) to University of Urbino Carlo Bo.


