

The Human Library Initiative as an Experience-Based Tourism Product

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Abstract

The desire to get to know new cultures and their way of living has always inspired people to travel. Human library initiative provides precisely - an opportunity to get to know different people from first-hand. It is a one of a kind of library where instead of borrowing books, one “rents” people who tell their stories. This initiative is easily applicable in tourism: both in promotion of destinations and as experience-based products, which are increasing in demand. The goal of this paper is to introduce human library as a new experience based tourism amenity that will disclose interesting stories about the destination and its residents in different languages. The development of the initiative for tourism purposes and the comparison of living books and other in-destination information provision services are provided.

Key words: human library, living books, experience tourism

1. Introduction

In the phase of soft tourism people are seeking a more close relationship with the destination they visit and communities they meet. The human library in tourism would provide on demand the interaction already going on between tourists and residents and make it more thematic focused according to the particular interests of guests. Although it lacks the spontaneity of occasional encounters with locals, it however represents an innovative way of discovering local community's lifestyle. The role of living books in tourism can be dual: in-destination they can

act as local community's lifestyle guides (experience tourism products) while outside the destination they can act as promoters / tourism ambassadors. This paper will deal further with their product function.

A peer to peer initiative worth mentioning that also provides interest based (i.e. gastronomy) interaction of locals and tourists is <http://bookalokal.com/>. This website allows tourists to book a meal from locals that is consumed with hosts in their homes. However here, the primary object of exchange is a typical local meal in a specific context.

This paper is composed of six parts. The theoretical review disclosed the human library initiative in detail - its history, the origin of the idea and current practices. It further deals with experience tourism and the importance of community involvement. A framework of application of the concept adapted to tourism is given in part three. A comparison of this and similar, already existing information provision services are developed in part four, followed by the implications and conclusion.

2. Theoretical Review

2.1. The human library initiative

The Human Library is a non-profit international equalities movement that challenges prejudice and discrimination through social contact. It uses the language and mechanism of a library to make respectful conversations that can positively change people's attitudes, thought, perceptions and behaviours towards people who are different.

The concept of human library is simple, instead of checking out and judging a book by its cover, you "borrow" a person who has stories to tell gathered from a unique life experience. You can sit down for free with someone whom has incredible stories to share, they're able to answer your

questions and tailor the storytelling experience to you. In practice, the Human Library, explaining the diversity and positive difference, raises awareness and takes positive action to address some of the issues that can lead to bullying, abuse and hate crime.

The aim of the ‘human books’ is to be lent out to curious readers who will ask them questions to challenge our stereotypes and prejudices in a positive framework, where difficult questions are accepted, expected and appreciated. Books typically have titles that aim to represent a stigmatized or stereotyped group of people in the community. This could be a religious minority or sexual minority or other members of the community who are exposed to general misconceptions, stigma, stereotyping and or prejudice. The goal is to learn more about each other, to explore and move beyond stereotypes, and to develop a greater understanding of each other’s unique story.

2.1.1. The history of Human Library

In 1993, Copenhagen, five youngsters decide to found non-governmental movement called Stop the Violence to raise awareness and education to mobile Danish youngsters against violence after their mutual friend was brutally attacked and stabbed in the nightlife and survived. Few years later the organization counted 30.000 members all over the country. In 2000, Leif Skov director of Stop the Violence festival encouraged and organized events for Roskilde Festival to put focus on anti-violence (Humanlibrary.org, 2000). That is how Human Library was born and began to encourage dialogue and build relations among the festival visitors.

Human Library has always been a non-profit movement as they provide services that are free to their public. Organizing it is not very expensive and budget depending with the only resources needed being time and willingness to do the tasks; this allows for a wide range of events in different countries staged with very little funding. It is also preferable to organize the libraries in

crowded areas like supermarkets, stations or even in the street. Readers and books are engaged in one-on-one conversations that last for about 30 minutes.

While some libraries are ditching their books in favour of laptops, e-readers, and mp3 players, there's one library that believes stories are much better shared when they come from the source. People get a special feeling in the air when they realize that a policeman is sitting and speaking with a graffiti writer or a football fan is in deep chat with a feminist. Helena Warburg (2012) head of the Science Library at Williams, participated as a book titled, "Child of Holocaust Survivors." Warburg reported that she wanted to participate because as a librarian she loved the message she would get from a book and the opportunity to be a human book instead of a written book was intriguing for her. To be able to share something personal about her was extremely intense and exciting. Warburg was surprised to learn the extent to which stereotypes persist. She added that each reader was varied and not once did someone ask the same question.

Today Human Library is developed and currently active in more than 60 countries and is still growing. The Human Library is associated with a lot of positive experience. In Australia, first country with a permanent Human Library, it won the award for the social project of the year and award for the Grand Marketing Event of the Year. In Denmark, a Human Library bus tour was given The Little Brother Award. The Council of Europe became the biggest supporter of the development and promotion of Human Library programs and has become a crucial partner in the developing of a global promotion.

2.2. Experience economy and local community

Global tourist trends impose new perceptions of tourism and the emergence of "new" tourists. People who get involved in tourist trends are today becoming increasingly experienced. They are expressing an increased number of needs, not only within the destination, but also during their

journey to the destination. Attractive destination elements must be complemented by additional activities and the destination excellence measured by expectations and experiences, i.e. realized experience. It is this very diversification of needs and motives for which people choose visits to and stays in a particular tourist destination which leads to a qualitative shift from the standard tourist offer. The accent, therefore, is on tourist product quality, by which a qualitative differential factor in competitive tourist destination positioning is achieved.

A modern tourist product, which is adjusted to the needs of new tourists no longer, includes a tourist partnership role, but individualization and personalization of the experience itself. Should such a base be accepted, it is to be concluded that traditional positioning of destination tourist offers on both macro and micro levels is no longer sufficient, i.e. positioning based on comparative advantages. By traditional positioning, it is not possible to differentiate the tourist offer from the competitors' tourist offer, which ultimately implies a request for competitive tourist offer positioning, enriched by new requirements and needs. Such an approach negates the conventional attitude that the existence and availability of comparative advantages is, in itself, sufficient in order to generate tourist demand and creation of competitive experience economy.

If tourism is interpreted as a social phenomenon, it is necessary to consider it not only at economic sciences level, but that consideration needs to be extended also to history, political sciences, sociology, geography and cultural anthropology (Cohen, 1995). Such a wider perception implies a lack of a one sided perception of tourism where, as an observation base, the category of growth and not of development is taken. From that aspect, the space which represents a tourist base should not, at any time, have an exclusively tourist purpose, although it is the bearer of the tourist function. Therefore, no method of evaluation which is used to assess spaces with dominant tourist function is applicable, but rather the method of equilibrium between

protection and tourist demand, which later also facilitates tourist offer market differentiation and positioning.

The development of tourist products based on experience as the key exchange value requires an interdisciplinary approach. By means of further analysis, distinction imposes between perception of experience as a separate product and the aggregate set of experience economy. The absence of experience economy factors in the creation of a modern tourist product achieves extremely negative results. Historically speaking, the category of national economy competitiveness has suppressed the once dominant category of comparative advantage. The same situation can be noticed in observation of tourism, where added value progressively increases when competitiveness is based on experience economy.

2.3. The importance of foreign languages

Human Library can be used in tourism to promote destinations and provide tailored information to its visitors. Living books can easily convey interesting stories about destination and its residents in different languages. Significant is the role of tour guides and home residents who participate in storytelling to tourists. To make sure that tourists are getting the right message from the story, languages are important to communicate. The limitations in languages of guides are considered as a barrier to communication (Gordon, 2009; Tange, 2009; Kostić-Bobanović, Bobanović, 2013) and we suppose it is going to be the same for telling story as a living book.

For Croatia, tourism is one of the main branches in economy, especially in the coastal regions. The interest for Croatia's tourism is growing. Since 2005, Croatia was declared as one of the top destinations in the world three times, by National Geographic Adventure, Lonely Planet and Travel Leaders. In order to keep this level of interest it's necessary to present what Croatia has to offer through advertisement in different languages. Foreign languages are used in promotions,

invitations and service providing. Nonetheless, foreign languages are important in making a first-impression with tourists (Hanlan, Kelly 2005; Jansen-Verbeke et al. 2005; KostićBobanović, Gržinić, 2011.) As a result of a good first impression, international tourists and visitors will probably come back again visiting the country where they felt comfortable and secure. (Kostić-Bobanović, Bobanović, 2013). The knowledge of foreign languages has evidently the key role in the development of tourism which has a multiple role and is viewed as economic, social and cultural activity (Huges, Allen, 2005; KostićBobanović, Bobanović, 2013). According to Vuković (2006) it is indisputable to state that it represents one of the most important activities of the modern, contemporary society around the world, but especially in Europe where languages have long been a fundamental and accepted part of educational programs. In today's globalized world, the importance of knowing foreign languages is a necessity and multilingualism is viewed as an investment in the future. With the continued expansion of the European Union, European language policies are moving towards the teaching of 'at least two foreign languages from a very early age' and describe the knowledge of foreign languages as a 'basic skill' (Kostić-Bobanović, 2013). However, not all foreign tourists can communicate in a foreign language, whether or not it is English. We suppose that a key to a successful Human Library is the ability to communicate with tourists by using their own language.

3. The Human Library Initiative as an Experience Tourism Product

The pilot project development is briefly explained through the 4P marketing model. The responsible holder of the activity is the DMO (Destination Management Company) or tourism organization. The 4P of a human library for tourism purposes should include:

a) Product:

- definition of desired topics (encouraging suggestions)

- tender launch for periodic job
- selection of candidates (public representatives of a certain group)
- storytelling education of candidates

b) Price:

- setting the price for individuals
- setting the price for small groups (depending on library's capacity)

c) Place:

- organization of work (availability of living books, payouts)
- possibility of booking
- post sales support

d) Promotion:

- media plan development
- PR
- DMO website
- social media marketing
- in-destination marketing (posters, brochures, info-kiosks etc.) etc.

It is advisable to arrange free storytelling for groups especially in the launch phase to popularize the product. It is possible to include as living books various associations active in the promotion of cultural values of a particular destination, but also local experts in various fields (e.g. historians, craftsman etc). Human libraries in tourism could also be organized on voluntary or semi voluntary basis. An idea how to incite locals to apply could be offering them complimentary services such as library subscription or language courses. Donations for destination related causes could also be collected this way.

4. Implications

There are different aspects the introduction of human libraries in a tourism destination influences e.g. within the social component it encourages interaction, mutual understanding, helps fighting

prejudices etc. There is an obvious educational component with benefits for both locals (improved language skills, storytelling) and tourists (learn about the destination, its culture and residents). The model represents an entrepreneurial opportunity for locals and an innovative amenity for today's experienced tourists. It contributes to the revival of libraries (in case of use of those spaces) or other vacant buildings, without many modifications to existing places. This initiative is in line with sustainability as contributes to all of its three pillars.

5. Conclusion

Today's travelers are eager on making new discovers, thriving for new, capturing stories. The human library concept application could be an excellent response to the markets' need for 3E (Entertainment, Excitement and Education) products. Currently in the market there are not many tourism products offering first hand opportunity to meet the lifestyle of locals.

Unlike other tourism products that imply the supply side, in this case, resident communities are crucial, their stories, and their lifestyle - they are the product itself. Getting to know local lifestyle from interactions with locals has thus developed from a "side effect" to a complete product.

Using existing libraries and/or other vacant buildings as indoor venues of the activity or practicing it outdoor makes this concept a low-cost one. As it contributes to improving visitors' experience, preserve destination culture, requires no construction works and generates new, although modest incomes, it is in line with sustainability goals of tourism destinations. As peer to peer business models are growing in popularity, a possible development direction of such an initiative could be a global player in the industry (such as Airbnb for accommodation) specialized in living books and connecting locals to tourists.

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