

The concept of **design thinking** and its application to tourism

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Objectives | The main objective of this communication is to address the concept of design thinking, focusing on its hitherto usage in management and – more specifically – tourism management context, opening the door for further academic conversation on the topic. We aimed to gain an insight into the extent to which the concept is discussed in the academic literature and answer the following questions: What are the implications of engaging design thinking in tourism and in which context is it used? In which way is it used in terms of a scientific/research method? How does it assist in co-creation of innovative tourism experiences, contributing to experience and creative economies and defending sustainability?

Methodology | This is a theoretical, conceptual paper that relies on qualitative methodology, using comprehensive literature assessment as a research method. It annotates and discusses the literature on design thinking in general, thenceforth shifting focus to its engagement in management and, more particularly, tourism management. The conclusions are based on selective bibliography readings, covering the main contributors to the development of the topic.

Main Results and Contributions | The existing literature on design thinking is concentrated mainly on examples of good practices, i.e. successful implementations of the concept by companies and/or managers. In terms of scientific, academic literature, it is very scarce, practically non-existent, especially when it comes to tourism area. Consequently, the paper tends to contribute to the State of the Art in tourism, attempting to make a parallel between tourism in the managerial context and the design thinking.

Design thinking is a concept equally used in theory and practice, both in design realm and the areas un-

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related to design. It is a human-centred innovation process that goes from inspiration, through ideation, to implementation of ideas to address concrete issues in business and society by applying methodologies and approaches used in design. According to Martin (2009), this form of thinking is rooted in how knowledge advances from one stage to another through the 'knowledge funnel' – from something we cannot explain (mystery), through a rule of thumb that guides us towards a solution (heuristic), to a predictable formula that produces an answer (algorithm). The value creation model requires a balance between the analytical and the intuitive and design thinker is someone who bridges these two logics, working towards the abductive logic.

The theoretical value of the paper rests in attending to topics scarcely addressed in tourism literature, while appointing to practical problems related to tourism, such as heritage preservation, sustainability on various levels, etc., that can be addressed using the design thinking approach and its principles.

Limitations | The study is limited to the analysis of the existing theory on the topic, therefore lacking practical elements to the research. It uses qualitative methodology, reading the available literature and analysing the usages of design thinking outside the design realm. Therefore, additional studies involving data and engaging quantitative and other qualitative methodologies are necessary for further developments of the topic.

Conclusions | There has been a shift from a marketing-focused and industry-centred to a user-centred designing. Customer experience has come to play a central role in customer's buying choices and meeting their demands and, as such, has become a decisive factor of success for businesses. Businesses are moving away from designing consumer products to designing consumer experiences. Accordingly, authors point out that the indispensability of design thinking in the management realm lays in the fact that design is nowadays shifting focus from products and brands towards a broader and more strategic range of organizational activities, in order to meet the demands of the increasingly competitive marketplace. The concept calls on creativity, innovativeness and interdisciplinarity, making tourism 'smart' and helping co-create distinctive tourism experiences.

References |

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