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**THE POWER OF PROJECTIVE DRAWINGS: A NEW METHOD FOR  
RESEARCHING TOURIST EXPERIENCES**

Although there is an abundance of recent literature on destination image and tourism experience that also addresses methodological questions, no attention has been given to drawing as a technique to capture memories of tourist experiences. Based on a sample of 19 students of Tourism and Hospitality, this paper explores drawing as a research technique. It further raises questions regarding the fuzzy boundaries between image and experience. Research does not retrieve the events as they happened, but only as they are introspectively elaborated. The paper concludes that drawing is especially valuable for research that requires the articulation of deep feelings.

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## **Introduction**

Experience has been broadly studied by psychology and psychiatry for clinical purposes over the last 50 years. This literature more or less emphasizes three elements that determine experience: perception, memory and emotion. Beyond the clinical concerns, one might realize that experience plays an important role in the way people perceive and construct their realm. The problem this triggers is the need for researchers to develop valid, efficient and adequate techniques to retrieve experiences. As such, this paper explores the connection between tourist experience and projective drawing as a scientific instrument. The goals of this investigation are threefold: a) introducing a new technique for discovering aspects that are hidden even for participants; b) providing scholars and practitioners with insights regarding the methodology; and, c) demonstrating the value of projective techniques for marketing and advertising ends in tourism and hospitality.

## **The Psychology of Tourist Experience**

The tourist experience seems to be a difficult concept to grasp. Cognitive psychology defines experience as the convergence between knowledge (cognitive image), skills, observations, expectancies and procedural information. Experience plays a pivotal role in the configuration of the personal realm and subjective perception. It can be divided in four types: Physical, Mental, Emotional, Social and Spiritual (Blumin, 1989; Christensen and Turner, 1993; Strongman, 1996; Wautier, 1993). Experience not only articulates the predominating cultural values of a time but also corresponds with subjective guidelines enrooted in the irrationality of emotions (Ricoeur, 2000).

The high degree of intangibility of tourist products corresponds with a need to understand the components of experience globally (Korstanje, 2009). To date, tourism research has mostly focused on the following methodologies to research the tourist experience: a) administration of open- or closed-ended questionnaires to tourists at a destination in one or more languages (Goodrich, 1977; Calantone, Di Benedetto, Hakam, Bojanic, 1989; Reilly, 1990; Vitterso, Vokkinn, Vistad and Vaagland, 2000; Baloglu and Mangalolu, 2001; Gonzalez-Reverte and Miralbell-Izard, 2009; Pearce and Mi-Hee, 2009) or formal/informal interviews (Wickens, 2002; Yiping, 2000; Thurnell, 2009), surveys that combine both of these methods (questionnaires with informal interviews, an instrument well-known as triangulation) (Rial-Boubeta, 2008; Iordanova-Krasteva, Wickens, and Bakir, 2010), historiography (Walker, 2010), analysis of contents in magazines, films or TV (Huang, Busby and Bosdou, 2009; Palmer, 2009; Frost, 2010), analysis of web-sites, travelogues or similar electronic resources as well as literature, writing, guidebooks or biographies (Siegenthaler, 2002; Almeida-Santos, 2006; Villar, 2007; Korstanje, 2007; Tussyadiah and Fesenmeier, 2009; Erikson, 2010; Wylie, 2010).

No studies related to drawing as a free associative methodology have been found in the extensive body of literature currently associated with tourist experiences. Since the human mind tends to repress or simply forget certain issues and tends to recall others (Ricoeur, 2000), closed-ended questions seem to be inappropriate. The literature recommends free-associative techniques rather than intrusive techniques to address this issue (Carleton-Ayer, 2009).

## **Projective drawing techniques**

After the Second World War the projective techniques that a long time back characterized psychology and psychiatry were adopted by marketing and consumer psychology (Berkman and Gilson, 1986). The importance of projective techniques is determined by the ability to discover innermost beliefs and emotions that are hidden as well as main personality assets (Sampson, 1986). Donoghue (2000) argues that projective techniques try to overcome the limitations of classical methods to get accurate data. However, some other voices have criticized these methods for the following reasons: a) the complexity of these means does sometimes not correspond with the skills of researchers and b) projective techniques represent a subjective perspective that is hard to replicate in other studies. To overcome these obstacles, Donoghue (2000) recommends alternating two or more subtypes of techniques based on the principles of validity and reliability of scientific research. Whilst the former addresses the necessary stability of the collected information in time the latter one refers to the possibility of the technique measuring what supposedly should be measured. Messik, in this vein, suggests that the validity of a technique should be valued against the research goals instead of the instrument as such (Messik, 1995).

It is important to mention that one of the pioneer scholars who adapted the contributions of Freud relating to the mechanism of defense in developing the “draw-a-person test” was Machover in 1949. Following this method, patients were asked to draw a person on a blank sheet to verify their internal beliefs (Machover, 1949). The projective drawing technique is nowadays often utilized to evaluate feelings. Combining introspection with enabled empathy, these types of techniques claim to unveil the complexity and profundity of human experience (Lee and Martin, 1991) as they assume the drawing represents the inner

world of subjects. The subjective state of being is inextricably intertwined with the drawings and visual materials exhibited in them (Leibowitz, 1999; Lilienfeld, Wood and Garb, 2000).

An impressive review of existing literature in regards to drawing techniques by Lilienfeld et al. (2000) suggests that projective drawing is a technique classified under the subtype of construction where the resulting response is pulled out in more flexible forms than other instruments (draw your experience as you want) but circumscribed to strict standardized parameters of assessment. Most certainly, one of the problems of these types of instruments is the lack of application in non-clinician contexts such as travel and tourism. Moreover, it can be said that the current criticism shows certain inconsistencies because some proponents are convinced of the validity of this instrument in spite of the scarcity or paucity of correlative favorable evidence (Chapman and Chapman, 1967) while detractors of these techniques lose the sight that qualitative methodologies should not be judged following parameters associated with quantitative methods.

Travel as movement beyond familiar environments can evoke a considerable degree of anxiety in subjects, which can be expressed in drawings (Villuendas, Liebana, Fernandez and Córdoba. 2005). The drawings represent not only the inner feelings and depictions but also how subjects perceive otherness (Carmen-Garcia, Navas and Cuadrado, 2003). The sentiment of fear of uncertainty or even curiosity that characterizes any travel can very well be exhibited utilizing projective drawings.

Lilienfeld et al (2000) discovered that people who drew ambiguous signs at the top of sheets were in need of others to gain self-esteem and trust. Current literature suggests that drawing sheets should be divided in two parts. The bottom represents the emotional life while the top reflects reasoning. Besides, the position or situation where the person is drawn is a key factor to understand where the subject's being in the world lies. The more signs or details can be found in one over the other grid the more or less the predominance of rationality over

emotions and vice-versa (Lilienfeld et al. 2000). Standardized guidelines to interpret drawings recommend the following points to be seriously taken into consideration:

- A) The colors of signs (black and white or colors).
- B) The tenure of lines and drawing signs (thin or thick)
- C) The contents of drawing (what exactly the picture means)
- D) The role played by human actors in the picture. (what the players do and why)
- E) The distance between the bottom and top grids of the sheet (the distance between the two grids of the sheet symbolizes the interaction between reason and emotion).
- F) The details drawn in both parts of the sheet as they also reflect the interaction between rationality and emotion.
- G) The cognitive readability of the story and grammar congruence with the picture.
- H) A deep analysis of content of the story given in the evaluation.
- I) The conjugation of verbs and grammatical aspects of the story provided (plural or singular, first or second person).
- J) The identification of key words employed throughout the text.

Some other more concrete guidelines can of course give readers more information for interpreting the drawings in a correct way. Everything drawn on top of the sheet symbolizes intelligence, imagination, curiosity and desire of the participants to discover new sensations. In contrast, the signs placed at the bottom reflect material or emotional needs of participants. Likewise, the left side of a sheet indicates thoughts linked to the past while the right is geared toward the future. Besides, dimensions of drawings are of importance for a coherent assessment. The largest forms evoke a sentiment of safety whereas the smallest encompass serious problems to express or resolve. A constant trace, without interruptions, denotes enthusiasm and perseverance as well as aggressiveness. Finally, the colors take different

meaning depending on the context (Hammer, 1969; Burns, 1978; Munsterberg-Koppitz, 2000). For example, whilst red typically represents a much broader passion for living, black refers to unconsciousness and fear. To a major or lesser degree other colors are important in drawing techniques as green is associated with maturity, yellow with curiosity and blue with relaxation. Orange indicates the necessity of social contact. Thus, given the diverse motivations of tourists, one can expect different color schemes.

## **Research Design**

Exploratory research was carried out with 19 students of tourism and hospitality ranging in age from 23 to 30 years. These participants, all of them Spanish native speakers, come from different Latin American countries such as Colombia, Argentina, Venezuela, Brazil and Uruguay. The sample included 8 males and 11 females. The investigation took place through June of 2008. Following Donoghue's recommendations, the drawings were complemented by a short story of the experience. Combining analysis of discourse with techniques of projection this work explores the holiday experiences of students based on three goals: a) determining the visual elements (cultural and natural) that comprise tourist experiences and how the physical displacement reveals itself in such an experience, b) understanding the potential of projective drawing as a research technique in consumer sciences, and c) testing drawing as a research technique to understand the experience of travelers and holiday-makers.

The collated stories were analyzed following three main criteria: a) the narrative time in which the story takes place; b) persons used to conjugate the paragraphs for example I, We or impersonal such as It; and c) the overall contents of the experience. Starting from the premise that any story is told in coherent but independent cognitive elements, the stories were

structured into five dimensions: 1) *situations of apprehension* where the participants evoke new opportunities of knowing or enjoying new landscapes. This dimension refers to the need of possession that characterizes modern tourism. 2) *Relationship*: this dimension is emotionally linked to a moment of great transcendence where the cohesion of a group is enhanced. This typology spans from thanksgiving celebrations to a reencounter with friends or family. 3) *Descriptive* is often associated to the needs to describe historical or biographical events that marked the life of subjects or their holidays. 4) *Conditions of surprise* are determined by those moments of frustration, anxiety, excitement or surprise that suddenly generated some disruption in the experience. Examples range from traffic accidents to positive events; ultimately 5) *Resting or pleasure purposes* refer to a much broader necessity to symbolize the holiday as a form of physical and symbolic escape in sparsely-populated areas.

## **Findings**

Of the total of 19 students, 18 drew landscapes while only one focused on a car being towed uphill. Half of the landscape drawings focused on iconic urban attractions such as the Eifel Tower, Big Ben, the pyramids in Egypt, or Chichen Itza and so forth. The rest were natural landscapes where snow, sun, mountains and beaches predominate. In addition, 13 out of the 19 participants included themselves or their relatives in a leading role whereas only 6 framed their sojourn in landscapes excluding persons. With respect to the stories the following points can be highlighted:

- 15 participants narrated their stories in past tense. On this basis one might speculate that participants are not inventing or broadcasting their experience.

- 13 used the first person singular (I) while 2 used the first person plural (WE), 2 wrote the stories following an impersonal conjugation (IT) and only 1 narrated the experience in third person plural (THEY). This indicates the auto-biographical nature of these stories.

A profound semantic examination reveals that 5 of these stories were enrooted in a situation of apprehension, 5 were under conditions of surprise, 4 were associated with a descriptive spirit, 2 related to relaxation and entertainment and only 2 were dominated by the dimension of relationship. Ultimately it is important to denote that conditions of surprise seems to be often associated to negative and disrupting events which spoiled the experience. This ranges from a natural disaster to the simple cancelation of a flight (perceived as hazards). However, this is a speculation that should be continued in other studies. The 15 drawings in color were dominated by green, blue and yellow.

### Case number 1



The above exposed picture represents two persons sharing a Mate (a traditional drink in Argentina) alongside a coast while they experience a spectacle for which they are not

prepared. Two whales surfacing from the bottom of the sea. The dimension of the sea in the sheet appears to be consistent with a need of physical isolation.

### Case Number 2



Case number 2 has been brought to us by a 24 year old female who remembered: “*my last holidays were together with my husband in Punta del Este. In order for us to escape from the pressure of urban cities, our goals were initially entertainment and enjoyment of sun, beach and sea. Alternating sun-bathing, excellent meals with swimming if the weather conditions allowed, we shared a great moment during our sojourn in Uruguay*”. Analytically, birds on the blue sky signify escape. This is also validated by the predominance of blue overall. Unlike the drawing number 1, this picture shows proportional distribution of the island’s coast, the sea and sky. In this case one might observe a certain emotional equilibrium between the self and the other.

### Case Number 3



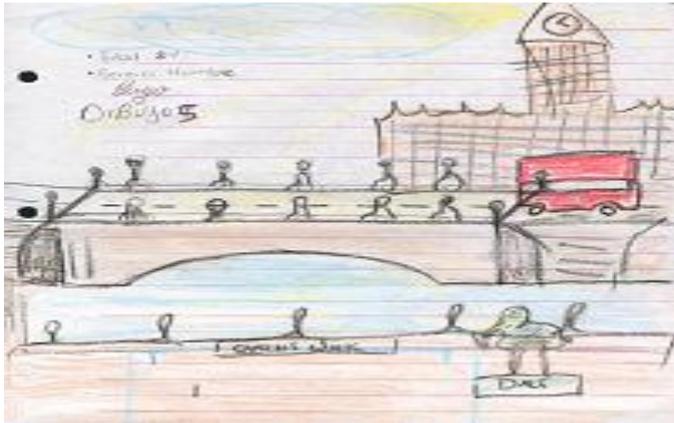
The story of this female is worth to be mentioned because it synthesizes how deep-seated emotional issues in tourist experience are connected. She writes *“this drawing represents my own and family happiness each year whenever we have the chance to meet for Christmas. This is one striking and memorable moment because I can share with my families my own experiences. Personally I would like this moment to never finish because Christmas emulates a type of encounter rediscovering the love I feel for my relatives...they give me the necessary trust to live.”* This drawing exemplifies how emotions and rationality are offset. The excessive usage of green color in this example suggests important degree of maturity and progress and assurance of self. The enormity of human figures means that the subject is psychologically attached to her family demanding security and safety sometimes in an exaggerated manner. Issues like this are of course circumscribed to stimulate a further debate in future research about the implications of projective drawing in retrieving tourist experience.

#### Case Number 4



This 23 year old female told her story about her holiday during the summer of 2007 as follows: *“I drove a long time from Venezuela towards Colombia with my best friend and I am sure to say this was one of the most memorable experiences until today. One of the sites I can recommend is the National Tayrona Park situated in Santa Maria, a subtropical paradise protected, well-organized and impeccable. By walking roughly 2 hours we went to a couple of cottages wherein we lodged and hired two horses to visit the area. Beyond the mountains we came across amazing beaches and people of the four corners of the world. This place was one of the safest I have ever visited”*. This story emphasizes protection, safety and aesthetic as the primary criteria of enjoying. Her drawing exhibits a yellow large sun, the mountain and sea. At the bottom, one can see a camp ground with tents. The story combines the adventure of a long trip with friendship, and a classical tourist product such as sun and camping. The drawing sustains what has been said. She gives more space to the heaven and clouds at the top of the sheet which speaks to the need for control over the situation.

## Case Number 5



The last case refers to the experience of a 26 year old male who recounts his experience in London. *“I was in London on a sunny and beautiful day. My drawing synthesizes my own experience in this great and ancient country. If you ask me, I felt a sentiment of enormity and greatness whenever I heard the Big Ben in front of the British Parliament. Furthermore, whenever I was seated on a bench the birds, elderly persons and people in general smiled and were very happy because London is cloudy almost all the time but this day was magic. In London I learnt to live at maximum intensity and enjoy every moment of my life. Undoubtedly, the absence or presence of sun can change your life from one moment to the other”*. The drawing reflects order. Pictorially, he drew himself in the bottom of the sheet as a sign of subordination to a status-quo that gives to him a symbolic refuge. The sun also symbolizes his need of centrality and power subordinating his own opinion. The drawing can be examined in the following manner: a) the trace denotes a certain aggressiveness and perseverance against obstacles; b) the horizontal and vertical lines lead us to the idea of planning and rationality, and c) the lack of intensity in colors reflects a great psychological dependence on others.

## **Conclusion**

One of the aspects that determine our memory and experience seems to be related to our emotional and subjective world. Everything we perceive, or what one might forget and recall is strongly associated with the restructuring of our emotional basis. Projective techniques have been suggested in the literature as a channel to uncover this basis. The study showed how they can be integrated with other methods to reveal interesting aspects of experiences.

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