2020

IL CAPITALE CULTURALE

Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

eum

Rivista fondata da Massimo Montella

Emanuela Conti, Fabio Forlani, Tonino Pencarelli, Visiting a cultural city in the experiential perspective: the case of Urbino
«Il capitale culturale», n. 21, 2020, pp. 391-424
ISSN 2039-2362 (online); DOI: 10.13138/2039-2362/2117

Visiting a cultural city in the experiential perspective: the case of Urbino*

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Abstract

This work aims to: 1) explore the experiential dimensions of visiting a cultural city, through the Pine and Gilmore model (1999) and 2) understand whether the experiential components vary depending on the socio-demographic and behavioral characteristics of the respondents, the perception of the quality of the basic services and the hospitality of the residents. To this end, a preliminary study was undertaken, based on data collected for a previous research on tourism in Urbino. The main research findings suggest that the

* Even though this paper is the product of unitary setup and reflection from all the three authors, Section 1.1 is attributed to Emanuela Conti; Section 1.2 is attributed to Fabio Forlani; Sections 2 and 3 are attributed to Emanuela Conti and Fabio Forlani; Sections 1.3 and 4 are attributed to all the three authors.

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positive experience of visiting Urbino is mainly linked to the experiential components of the aesthetic type, while the negative aspects of the tourist experience derive from the lack of basic services. Concerning the perception of the experiencescape components, three findings emerge: 1) the sociodemographic and behavioral profile of tourists does not affect the perception of the experiential dimensions; 2) the perception of the quality of tourist services affects the intensity of the experiential components; 3) the lack of hospitality affects the perception of the experiential dimensions connected to aesthetics.

Il lavoro ha lo scopo di: 1) esplorare le dimensioni esperienziali della visita di una città d'arte utilizzando il modello proposto da Pine e Gilmore nel 1999; 2) capire se le componenti esperienziali che caratterizzano l'esperienza turistica di visita di una città culturale variano in base alle caratteristiche socio-demografiche e comportamentali degli intervistati, alla percezione della qualità dei servizi di base e all'ospitalità dei residenti. A tale scopo, è stato condotto uno studio preliminare basato sui dati raccolti per una precedente ricerca sul turismo di Urbino. I principali risultati di questa ricerca suggeriscono che l'esperienza di visita culturale di Urbino è legata in particolare alle componenti esperienziali di tipo estetico, mentre gli aspetti negativi dell'esperienza del visitatore nascono in relazione alla carenza dei servizi di base. Con riferimento alle relazioni con le componenti dell'*experiencescape* emerge che: 1) il profilo sociodemografico e comportamentale dei turisti non incide sulla percezione delle dimensioni esperienziali; 2) la percezione della qualità dei servizi turistici incide sull'intensità delle componenti esperienziali; 3) la mancanza di ospitalità incide sulla percezione delle dimensioni esperienziali connesse all'estetica.

1. *Theoretical background*

1.1 *The experiential approach in tourism design and quality*

In the marketing literature, the experiential perspective is increasingly important for the creation of value for the customer[1], and then, for determining the success of the company offering[2]. The experiential marketing approach is based on the idea that not only the rational, but also the emotional and irrational side of customer behavior[3] is important for the whole experience coming from the interactions between the company and its customers[4]. This experience plays an important role in the customer's preferences and purchase decision process. Differently from classic economic theory, which considers the consumer a logical thinker who makes decisions through rational problem solving, the experiential approach considers the intangible elements linked to

[1] Verhoef *et al.* 2009; Lemon, Verhoef 2016; Jain *et al.* 2017; Forlani *et al.* 2018; Kranzbühler *et al.* 2018.

[2] Homburg *et al.* 2015.

[3] Holbrook, Hirschman 1982; Schmitt 1999, 2003.

[4] Lemon, Verhoef 2016; Verhoef *et al.* 2009.

the emotional value perceived by customers[5]. In fact, consumers look for two kinds of value: utilitarian value (or functional value) and hedonistic value (or experiential value)[6]. A similar position can be found in the managerial field which considers customer experience a fundamental element of competitiveness while elements such as price, service, and technical quality are no longer enough to guarantee sustainable competitive advantage[7].

Tourism is the sector in which the experiential approach has found its strongest application[8]. Although the customer experience theme has become a topic of interest in the tourism marketing literature, few studies have focused on the deep understanding the design[9] of the co-creation tourist experience and on measuring the quality of such an experience[10].

As recently highlighted by Adhikari and Bhattacharya[11], although tourism sector marketers have recognized the importance of creating and delivering (staging) the travelers' experience, the managerial literature on tourist experience design is still in its embryonic phase[12]. In their conceptual model of the "tourist on-site co-creation experience" Campos *et al.*[13] identify three key elements of the experience environment: physical, social, and organizational. Furthermore, they define how these elements interact with each other based on the tourist's participation and his/her interactions with the actors and the environment. In their literature analysis they report that

> the theoretical backgrounds most frequently cited in support of the adoption of the co-creation approach are the experience economy paradigm, the experiential consumption and marketing paradigm[14], the Service Dominant Logic[15], the performance turn[16], creative tourism[17] and the co-creation premises proposed by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004)[18].

Among the conceptual models most often used in tourism Pine and Gilmore's "Four Realms of an Experience"[19] and Schmitt's "ExPros"[20] stand out. They clearly define the various types of experience and identify the experiential

5 Gentile *et al*. 2007.
6 Addis, Holbrook 2001.
7 Shaw, Ivens 2005; Homburg *et al*. 2015; KPMG, Nunwood 2017.
8 Walls *et al*. 2011; Adhikari, Bhattacharya 2016; Forlani *et al*. 2018.
9 Voss *et al*. 2008; Ponsignon *et al*. 2017.
10 Maklan, Klaus 2011; Lemke *et al*. 2011; Milman *et al*. 2017; Forlani *et al*. 2018.
11 Adhikari, Bhattacharya 2016, p. 313.
12 Forlani *et al*. 2018.
13 Campos *et al*. 2018, p. 392.
14 Holbrook, Hirschman 1982; Schmitt 1999.
15 Vargo, Lusch 2004.
16 Perkins, Thorns 2001.
17 Richards 2011.
18 Campos *et al*. 2018, p. 395.
19 Pine, Gilmore 1998.
20 Schmitt 1999.

components of each. Starting with Pine and Gilmore[21], the "Four Realms of an Experience" are identified, through "customer participation" and "connection, or environmental relationship": esthetic, entertainment, educational, escapist. The Authors further state: «we have identified five key experience-design principles: Theme the experience; […] Harmonize impressions with positive cues; […] Eliminate negative cues; […] Mix in memorabilia; […] Engage all five senses»[22]. In recent years, this model has been subjected to empirical verification in tourism by numerous researchers[23] who have confirmed its overall validity, while some have noted that not all the domains or realms of experience have equal weight in all experiences[24].

Schmitt takes the argument a step further, maintaining that the experiential framework contains two aspects: «strategic experiential models (SEMs), which form the strategic underpinning of experiential marketing, and experience providers (ExPros), which are the tactical tools of experiential marketing»[25]. The former are: Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate, whereas the latter are: Communications, Identities, Products, Co-branding, Environment, Web sites, and People. In this case, as well, the model has been the subject of empirical checks – especially in the tourism field – through both qualitative[26] and quantitative analysis[27].

Other authors have built on these models to elaborate subsequent versions. For example, Gentile *et al.*[28] build on the contributions made by Schmitt[29] and Fornerino *et al.*[30] to suggest considering the following experiential components: sensorial, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle, and relational. Conti *et al.*[31] expand on the work by Pine and Gilmore[32] and other scholars[33] to suggest the following five "dimensions" of the experience: aesthetics, education, entertainment, evasion, and socialization.

In the present work, we are in agreement with Mehmetoglu and Engen[34] and hold that the four dimensions or "realms" of Pine and Gilmore's model is a good starting point for understanding the tourist experience. Moreover, the quality of the customer experience is a theme that has only recently been

21 Pine, Gilmore 1998, p. 102.
22 Pine, Gilmore 1999, pp. 102-104.
23 Oh *et al.* 2007; Hosany, Witham 2010; Mehmetoglu, Engen 2011; Quadri-Felitti, Fiore 2012; Radder, Han 2015.
24 Oh *et al.* 2007; Hosany, Witham 2010; Mehmetoglu, Engen 2011.
25 Schmitt 1999, p. 63.
26 Verhoef *et al.* 2009; Musa *et al.* 2015.
27 Song *et al.* 2015.
28 Gentile *et al.* 2007.
29 Schmitt 1999.
30 Fornerino *et al.* 2006.
31 Conti *et al.* 2017.
32 Pine, Gilmore 1999.
33 Sheng, Chen 2012; Brida *et al.* 2017.
34 Mehmetoglu, Engen 2011, p. 245.

explored[35]. Offering a superior customer experience is one of the ways a firm can achieve successful marketing outcomes and further improve its chance of success[36]. However, not enough research has been conducted to empirically examine the antecedents and consequences of customer experience quality. As evidenced in the literature:

> Researchers have sometimes used constructs measuring customers' satisfaction and service quality to measure consumer experience; however, this review showed that there is a fundamental difference between the factors measuring service and [and those measuring] experience. In order to identify and develop an experiential consumption, practitioners need to know how the customer experience can be measured [in a way] that would capture all facets of consumption experiences in [the] tourism industry[37].

The study by Kim and Choi[38] contributed to filling this research gap as it shows that the perception of service outcomes, of interactions with service firms, and of peer-to-peer quality has a substantial influence on customer experience quality. Furthermore, their results demonstrate that customer experience quality is one of the key elements for building customer loyalty. Customer experience quality is defined as the perceived superiority of a customer experience[39], while the distinction between quality of service and quality of experience appears to be unclear from the firm's standpoint; however, in service contexts, customer service quality is conceptually distinct from service quality. In fact, service quality is understood to be the perceived judgement of the excellence or superiority[40] of the service and its main focus lies in a judgement on the firm's process and not the customer's experience. In contrast, customer service quality 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[41]. Therefore, the customer service experience encompasses not only the perceived quality of services provided by service firms, but also the customer's perception of his/her "total experience".

Another recent study[42] confirms the previous literature, stating that customer's experience is created through a longer process of company-customer interaction across multiple channels. The authors introduce the concept of a customer experience quality (EXQ) scale, which better explains and predicts both loyalty and the likelihood of recommendations, rather than simply reflecting the generic concept of customer satisfaction. The authors generally

35 Verhoef *et al.* 2009; Lemke *et al.* 2011.
36 Verhoef *et al.* 2009.
37 Adhikari, Bhattacharya 2016, p. 311.
38 Kim, Choi 2013.
39 Lemke *et al.* 2011.
40 Zeithaml 1988; Parasuraman *et al.* 1998.
41 Pullman, Gross 2004; Schembri 2009.
42 Klaus, Maklan 2013.

associate customers' perceptions of their experience with the question of how service is delivered rather than merely exploring the question of what is delivered[43]; moreover, they also look at how the customer experience relates to important marketing outcomes[44]. 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 considering 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, experience marketing and experience logic[45] has contributed to the understanding of customer experience as a co-creation (perception of customer) process made of services and experiential components. The experiential literature also agrees that providing excellent services does not necessarily mean that an excellent consumption experience has been provided. The quality of the customer's experience of consumption arises in the mind of each individual customer and depends on the co-creation process[46] in which the following actors are involved: the service providers, the client, the other customers, and all the subjects present in the place and at the time of delivery[47]. Examples provided by Kim and Choi[48] clarify the concept: customers who go to a movie theatre and receive high-quality service from employees may end up having a terrible experience if other customers keep talking on a cell phone during the movie.

1.2 *Cultural tourism experience*

Research on cultural tourism has seen recent growth, especially in fields such as cultural consumption, cultural motivations, heritage conservation, cultural tourism economy, anthropology, and the relationship with the creative economy[49] and cultural and/or museum experience[50]. Furthermore, there has

43 Goldstein *et al*. 2002.
44 Klaus, Maklan 2013.
45 Pencarelli, Forlani 2018a.
46 Galvagno, Dalli 2014; Campos *et al*. 2018.
47 Volo 2009; Pencarelli, Forlani 2018b.
48 Kim, Choi 2013.
49 Richards 2018.
50 Cerquetti 2016; Pencarelli *et al*. 2015, 2017; Conti *et al*. 2017; Ponsignon *et al*. 2017; Roederer, Filser 2018.

been a recent focus on intangible heritage, indigenous and other minority groups and a geographical expansion in the coverage of cultural tourism research[51].

Motivation was an important issue in early studies of cultural tourism, which was defined in terms of cultural motivation, most clearly related to learning[52]. The original distinctions made between general and specific cultural motivations are still evident in recent motivational studies. For example, Galí-Espelt[53] identifies two broad groups of cultural tourists: tourists whose main motivation is to consume culture and those for whom culture is a secondary motivation. She proposed categories of motivations in terms of the tourist's degree of "culturedness" consisting of a combination of dimensions pertaining to length of visit and a high-to-low cultural experience. This mirrors to some extent the categorization of motivations suggested by du Cros and McKercher[54], constructed on the basis of the "depth" of the desired cultural experience. Furthermore, other studies have identified the division between those seeking culture and those using it as a form of escape[55]. However, cultural tourists may follow a cultural "travel career" path, as younger visitors tend to consume more contemporary art, creativity, and modern architecture, whereas older visitors tend to more prevalently favor traditional monuments and museums[56].

Research on cultural tourism experience, in particular on museum experience, has stressed that learning is an important dimension[57]. For example, the museum experience is produced through a combination of visitor-related and context-related factors[58]. Other studies have focused attention on the Pine and Gilmore dimensions of the cultural/museum experience and have stressed the need to consider all the experiential dimensions: aesthetics, learning, escapism, and entertainment[59].

Therefore, the tourism industry has the responsibility to engage visitors in powerful and transformative experiences (not only learning experiences), both during and after their visit[60]. The long-term impact of a tourism experience can be significantly increased by using technology and social networking to maintain contact with visitors after they leave the site[61].

51 Richards 2018.
52 Richards 1996.
53 Galí-Espelt 2012.
54 du Cros, McKercher 2014.
55 Correia *et al*. 2013; Di Pietro *et al*. 2015; Conti *et al*. 2017.
56 Richards, van der Ark 2013.
57 Falk *et al*. 2012; Conti *et al*., 2017.
58 Falk, Dierking 2018.
59 Pektus 2004; Mehmetoglu, Engen 2011; Pencarelli *et al*. 2015; Radder *et al*. 2015; Conti *et al*. 2017.
60 Falk *et al*. 2012; Conti *et al*. 2017; Wearing, Foley 2017.
61 Falk, Dierking 2018.

Heritage, particularly built and tangible heritage, has long been one of the foundations of cultural tourism. As Timothy[62] suggests, the definition of heritage is almost as fraught as the discussion about cultural tourism. He sees heritage as a broad range of resources that include built patrimony, lifestyles, ancient artefacts, and modern art and culture; in other words, he makes little distinction between cultural tourism and heritage tourism. However, much of the research on cultural heritage has tended to concentrate on specific aspects of heritage, such as the designation of World Heritage Sites (WHS), or debates surrounding "contested heritage" consumed by tourists and others[63].

Much of the recent work in this area has re-focused attention on the role of indigenous cultures in different parts of the world[64]. In fact, tourists increasingly want to "live like a local", whether it is to avoid being labelled as a tourist, or because "local" has become the new touchstone of authenticity[65].

Some studies have delved into tourist experiences in cities[66] and have explored, in particular, the economic, environmental, and social forces that have changed the way we are developing our cities. In this vein, Wearing and Foley[67] propose a more critical approach to understanding the way tourists explore and experience cities, by expanding current sociological frameworks that assume the tourist is simply a wanderer in the urban environment. In fact, they build on interactionist and post-structural critiques and expand Wearing and Wearing's[68] theoretical framework of the *flâneur* and the "chorister"; the authors suggest a more feminized conceptualization of the tourist experience as a creative and interactive process. In particular, they move away from the sociological view of the tourist as a *flâneur*, i.e., a wanderer who looks idly at the city but remains detached to embrace the feminist construct of the chorister[69] who interacts with people and spaces and is engaged emotionally, as in a choir. In this view, the distinction between tourists and residents is more nuanced; tourism is considered a process rather than an activity and tourist space is not as one-dimensional and monolithic[70].

Thus, the tourist's urban experience is more than merely seeing the sights; it is about relating to the cultural, built, and natural environment in such a way that s/he heightens her/his emotional, physical, intellectual, and even spiritual senses[71]. To satisfy modern tourists' needs, Hayllar *et al.*[72] argue that urban

62 Timothy 2011.
63 Yankholmes, McKercher 2015.
64 Richards 2018.
65 Cerquetti 2016; Russo, Richards 2016.
66 Ritchie *et al.* 2011.
67 Wearing, Foley 2017.
68 Wearing, Wearing 1996.
69 *Ibidem*.
70 Wearing, Foley 2017.
71 O'Dell 2007; Stickdorn, Frischhut 2012.
72 Hayllar *et al.* 2008a; Hayllar *et al.* 2008b.

destinations should provide meeting places and places of orientation; comfort zones and places of respite and refuge; play spaces and encounter zones; zones of intimacy and authenticity; and zones of distinctiveness and contrast.

This much richer view of tourism in cities should also be adopted in cultural cities, the object of this paper. In fact, the Pine and Gilmore[73] (1999) framework is consistent with the above sociological approach, as the four dimensions suggest an experience that is rich, varied, and multi-dimensional.

1.3 *Conceptual framework*

Many elements are needed to co-create memorable tourist experiences[74]: physical, social and organizational (experiencescape influencers). However, while the literature reveals empirical evidence of the relationship between the experiential components perceived by tourists and the satisfaction and quality of the visit experience, little attention has been devoted to the relationship between the perceived experiential components and some components of the experience co-creation.

In particular, the empirical application of the Pine and Gilmore[75] model has underscored that: 1) the tourist experience, even from the qualitative point of view, may be described on the basis of the experiential dimensions (esthetics, entertainment, escapism, education); and 2) the importance of the different experiential components varies in relation to the typology of tourism and thus, in the perception of quality.

However, there are no empirical studies which stress the relationship between the perception of the experiential components (therefore, of the overall quality of the experience) and the following important components of the experience co-creation process: 1) the socio-demographic and behavioral characteristics of tourists; 2) the perception of quality of specific tourist services (e.g. hospitality, restaurants, tour guides, etc.); and 3) the hospitality and courtesy of the residents. To bridge this gap, we used "The Four Realms of an Experience" (Esthetics, Entertainment, Education, Escapism) to map the experiential dimensions of a visit of the city of Urbino (fig. 1).

In light of the experiential dimensions of the Pine and Gilmore model, we used the operationalization of the model proposed by Mehmetoglu and Engen[76] and integrated it with that of Quadri-Felitti and Fiore[77] to interpret the tourists' responses to the open interview questions, as follows:

[73] Pine, Gilmore 1999.
[74] Campos *et al.* 2018.
[75] Oh *et al.* 2007; Hosany, Witham 2010; Mehmetoglu, Engen 2011; Quadri-Felitti, Fiore 2012; Radder, Han 2015.
[76] Mehmetoglu, Engen 2011.
[77] Quadri-Felitti, Fiore 2012.

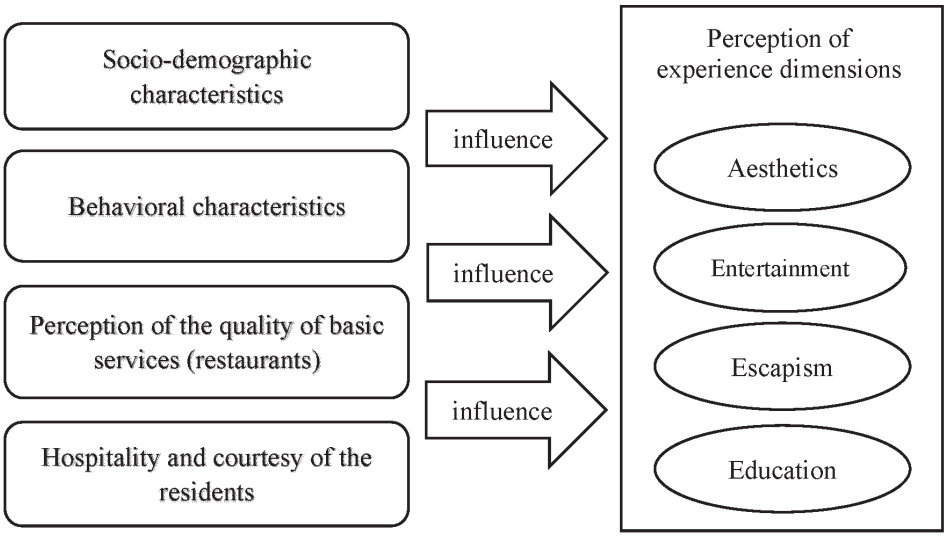

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework (Source: our elaboration)

- *Esthetics (being)*. Tourists are enriched by sensorially pleasing environments (e.g. The setting was very attractive; I experienced the surroundings as being attractive; the surroundings strengthened my overall experience).
- *Entertainment (feeling)*. Tourists are engaged by performances (e.g. Activities of others were fun to watch; the visit was entertaining to me; I enjoyed seeing/listening to stories/music).
- *Education (learning)*. Tourists enhance their knowledge or skills (e.g. The visit made me more knowledgeable; I learnt something new during my visit);
- *Escapism (doing)*. Tourists become engrossed by entering into a different time or place (e.g. I felt like I was living in a different time or place; I forgot all about time; I got carried away by the different events).

We interpret tourism in cultural cities in a broader sense, and consequently, we have described how this way of using a space can potentially involve all the dimensions of the experience. In this sense, the fruition of a cultural city seems to be the ideal field of application to evaluate the relationship between the perceived experiential components, the characteristics of tourists, and other elements that are part of the experiencescape.

2. *Research objectives and methodology*

The objectives of the study are twofold. The first is to interpret the associations with a cultural city and the positive and negative elements characterizing the tourist experience of visiting a cultural city through the lens of the Pine and Gilmore[78] framework. The second is to understand whether the experiential components characterizing the tourist experience of visiting a cultural city varies according to tourists' socio-demographic characteristics, their behavioral characteristics, their perception of the quality of basic services (accommodations, restaurants, guided tours, etc.), and the hospitality and courtesy of the residents.

This exploratory study adopted the content analysis method to compile data on the tourist experience of visiting Urbino, collected in July-August 2016 through direct interviews to 300 tourists[79]. Urbino was selected as it represents not only an interesting Renaissance art city, but is also a UNESCO city with one of the most beautiful examples of a Ducal Palace in the world and a collection of key Italian artists.

The answers to the following questions composed the dataset:

1. The tourist's profile (closed questions): gender, age, geographic origin;
2. The tourist's behavior (closed questions): travel intensity (trips per year), intensity of museum visits (per year), overnight stay (or not) in Urbino; first visit of Urbino (yes, no);
3. The tourist's level of satisfaction with the tourism service related to the city (closed questions, Likert scale from 1 to 3: 1=not very satisfied; 2=quite satisfied; 3=very satisfied): road directions to get to the city, road directions into the city; restaurant service; accommodations; guided tour services of the city; information services of tourist information office;
4. The level of friendliness and kindness of residents (closed question, Likert scale from 1 to 3: 1=not very satisfied; 2=quite satisfied; 3=very satisfied);
5. The tourist's mental associations with Urbino (open question);
6. The main positive aspects of the Urbino visiting experience (open question);
7. The main negative aspects of the Urbino visiting experience (open question).

The closed questions in groups 1 through 4 are the independent variables of the relationship. The open questions in groups 5 through 7 identify the perception of the experience which represents the dependent variable.

To answer the first research question, the open questions (dependent variable) were analyzed. For the second research question, the independent variables

[78] Pine, Gilmore 1999.
[79] Conti *et al*. 2016.

were crossed with the dependent variable to determine the existence of relevant relationships among them.

As the open questions had been previously formulated for other purposes, we used the available data (answers to the open questions) and adopted an inductive approach. As described in the previous paragraph, in order to interpret and categorize the open answers through the lens of Pine and Gilmore's model, we used the Mehmetoglu and Engen scheme that operationalizes the "four realms of experience".

We conducted a content analysis to understand which experience dimensions are most characteristic of the image of Urbino and which ones are most closely associated with the positive and/or negative aspects of the visiting experience. The analysis was performed through the use of content and text analysis software (TLab). This software objectively identifies the recurring keywords and the co-occurrences between them. This allows both an analysis of word frequencies and an analysis of recurrent relationships between words through the visual interpretation of MDS maps[80].

3. *Findings*

In this paragraph, the demographic and behavioral data of the sample will be described and summarized in Table 1, below. There follows a discussion of the main findings of the study.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	177	59%
Male	123	41%
Age		
under 18	7	2%
18-30	58	19%
31-45	80	27%
46-60	102	34%
over 60	53	18%

[80] MDS is a set of data analysis techniques that allow us to analyse similarity matrices in order to provide a visual representation of the relationships among the data within a space of reduced dimensions. The input tables are constituted by square matrices which contain proximity values (dissimilarities). The results obtained allow us to interpret both the relationships between the "objects" and the dimensions that organize the space in which they are represented. The degree of correspondence between the distances among points implied by the MDS map and the matrix input is measured (inversely) by a Stress function. The lesser the stress value, the greater the goodness of the obtained adjustment. Stress <0.10 is good. The axes are not predefined and are not significant. There is no real orientation to this map. You could legitimately rotate the values around the plot's centre. The main characteristics of interest are the relative positions of the points and any clusters that are apparent.

Place of residence		
Italy	197	66%
Other countries	103	44%
Travel intensity (trips per year)		
Occasional traveler (1-2)	165	55%
Frequent traveler (>2)	135	45%
Intensity of museum visits (per year)		
Occasional museum visitor (1-3)	204	68%
Frequent museum visitor (>3)	96	32%
Overnight stay (or not) in Urbino		
Overnight	105	35%
Not overnight	195	65%
First visit of Urbino (yes, no)		
Yes	187	62%
No	113	38%

Tab 1. Respondents' profiles (Source: our elaboration)

Data analysis was done by observing the circles in terms of size (frequency of word use) and color (word associations), as well as the lines between them (frequency of connections between words). With reference to the elements characterizing the experience of making a cultural visit to a city, the study reveals the dominant themes in what tourists associate with the city of Urbino[81] (fig. 2). They primarily think of the Ducal Palace and the Duke of Montefeltro (blue and light blue circles), the Middle Ages and the Renaissance periods (yellow circles), a small medieval town (pink circles), architecture and landscape (green circles), and harmony and beauty (brown circles). The figure also underscores the relationships among the five groups of words, which describe the city: 1) a historic (Medieval and Renaissance), artistic, university town characterized by the Ducal Palace and by historical figures such as the Duke Federico da Montefeltro and Raffaello Sanzio; 2) a town with Renaissance architecture that embodies the classic features of Italian beauty, culture, and harmony.

The five groups are connected and dovetail with one another in that they refer to the experiential dimensions or realms, rather than to services. Overall, our findings show that the experiential dimensions are all positive, with the primary and most encompassing one being the aesthetic dimension[82]. In other words, the interviewees' dominant perception of Urbino is tied to its aesthetic features.

From the analysis of the main positive aspects of an Urbino visit (fig. 3) which impact the overall customer experience, we observe that the main co-words used are related to the word "City" (violet circles) which is characterized by a number of other key words. The main ones are: conservation, Medieval, and village (orange circles), atmosphere, Renaissance, unspoiled (yellow circles), quiet, traffic, resident (light blue circles), architecture,

81 The words of the maps in this section are in Italian, the language of the interviews.
82 Pine, Gilmore 1999.

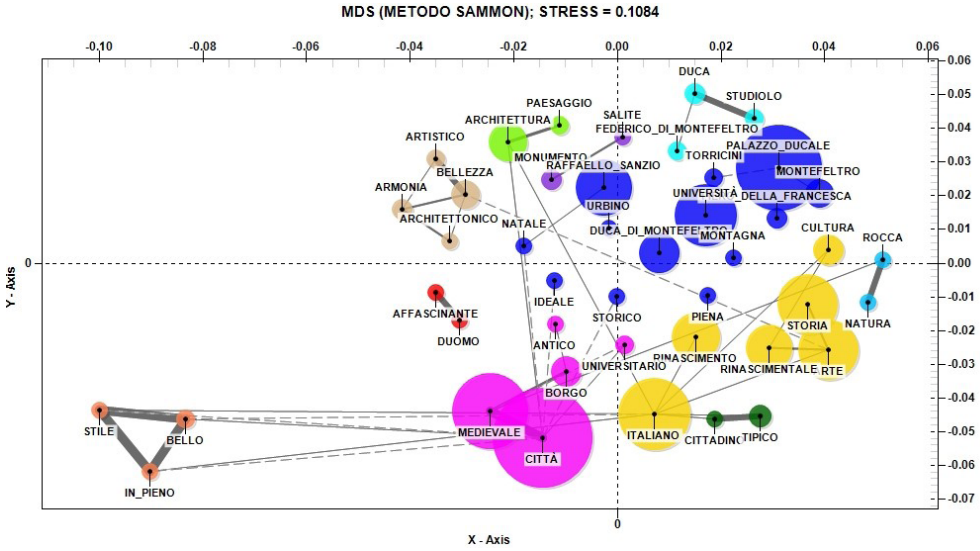

Fig. 2. Associations with Urbino (Source: our elaboration)

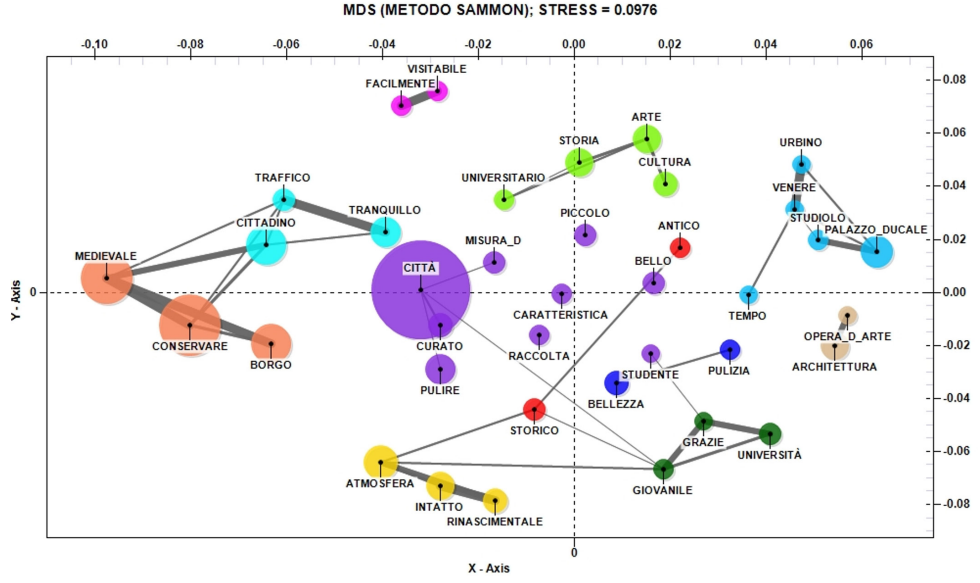

Fig. 3. Main positive aspects of Urbino visit (Source: our elaboration)

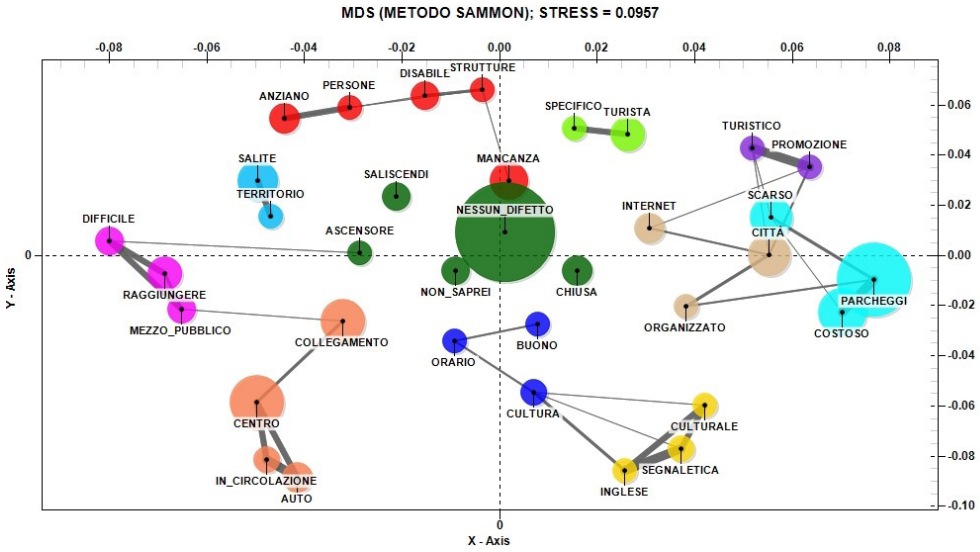

Fig. 4. Main negative aspects of Urbino visit (Source: our elaboration)

artwork (brown circles), university, history, art, culture (green and light green), and Ducal Palace (blue circles).

From this analysis it emerges that, in the minds of visitors, Urbino is appreciated for its emotional dimension linked to beauty, the historical landscape, and in general, to the aesthetical dimension. In fact, tourists very often note the good state of conservation of the town ("well-preserved", "clean" and "intact"), and they praise the art, history and culture represented in the Ducal Palace (fig. 3). Further positive elements are identified in the general atmosphere, the architecture of the city, its University, and the surrounding landscape.

From the analysis of the negative aspects of the experience in Urbino (fig. 4), the first observation is that many respondents do not identify any defect whatsoever (dark green circle). The second is that the main critical complaints are related to scarce and expensive car parking (light blue circles), and poor connections to other cities (pink circles) and services inside the city (e.g. elevators). Therefore, service components, especially those connected with accessibility for the elderly or disabled (red circles) and car parking, public transport, etc. (purple circles) can negatively affect the tourist's perception of the city. There is no criticism specifically related to the experiential components of an Urbino visit.

In sum and with reference to the first research question, the analysis shows that the experience of visiting Urbino involves, almost exclusively, the aesthetics dimension of the Pine and Gilmore model.

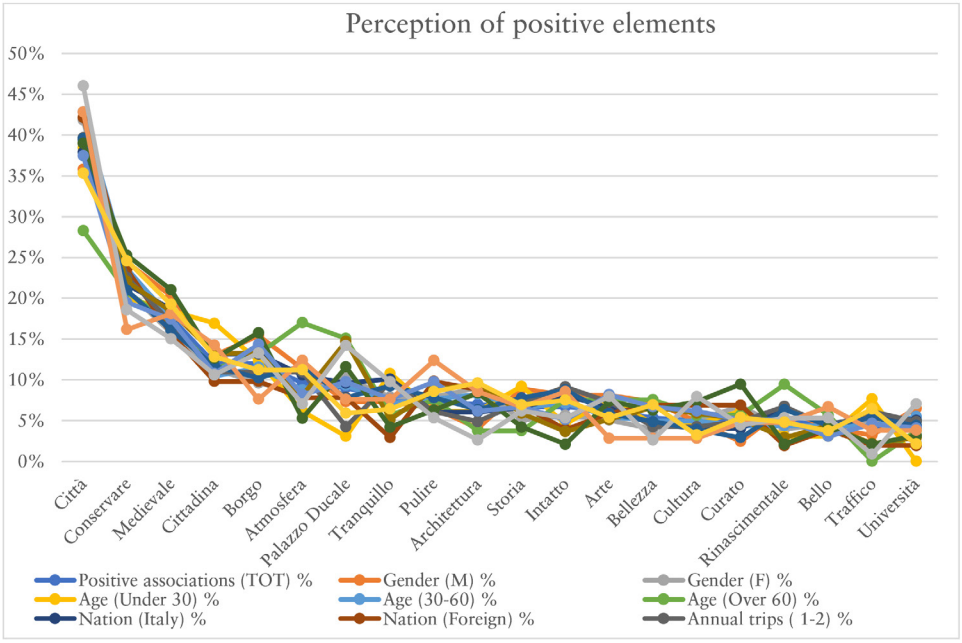

Fig. 5. Perception of positive elements of Urbino (Source: our elaboration)

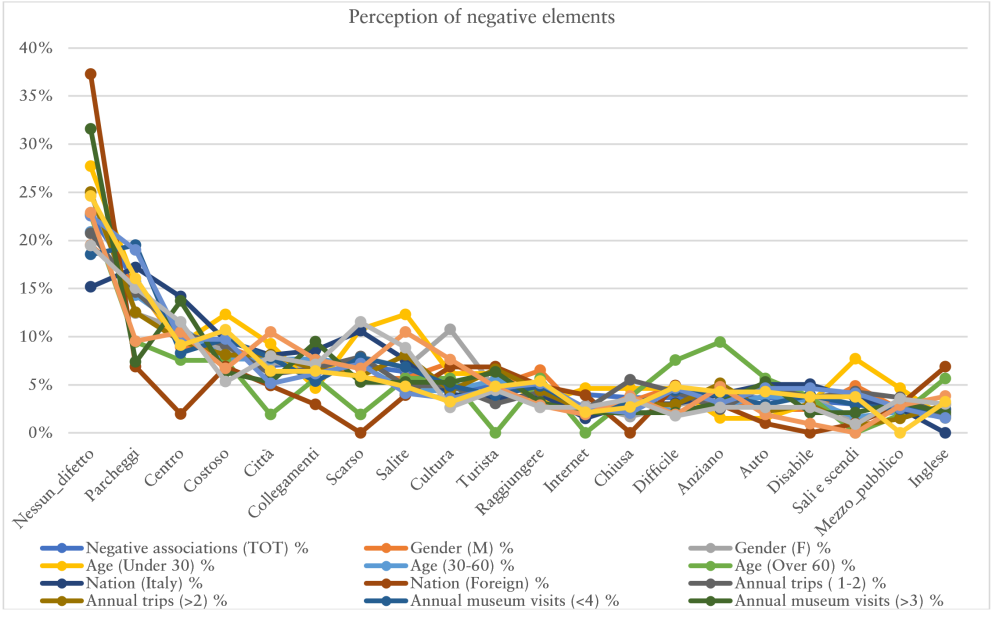

Fig. 6. Perception of negative elements of Urbino (Source: our elaboration)

Concerning the second research question – the relationship between the experiential elements of the visit and tourists' profiles –, the main finding of this study is that all or most of the tourists interviewed describe enjoying the same aesthetical experience of visiting Urbino. In fact, there are no relevant differences in the visitors' answers concerning both the main positive aspects (fig. 5) and the main negative aspects (fig. 6) of their experience of visiting Urbino. The same main words were used to describe the experience, and there are no significant gaps in the frequencies of the responses.

Furthermore, the co-word analysis revealed that there are no relevant differences among the associations of words used in the answers given by tourists; this holds true for both the positive and the negative aspects of the experience. Because of limited space, the MDS maps pertaining to these findings are not included in the present work.

Only some independent variables (characteristics or behaviors) show slightly larger gaps in frequency with respect to the other variables. Focusing on the positive aspects of the experience, all the tourists interviewed similarly perceive the aesthetic dimension of the experience of visiting Urbino, which is characterized by the well-preserved medieval, Renaissance city and the special atmosphere of an Italian art city that is clean, quiet, and intact. Only age and intensity of travel per year show slight differences among groups of respondents as concerns some words/components of the experience. Over-60 visitors appreciate atmosphere (17%) and the Ducal Palace (15%) more than the under-30 ones (6% and 3%). Also, frequent travelers (15%) attach more importance to the Ducal Palace in the visiting experience than do occasional travelers (4%). Concerning the order of the main words used to describe the tourist experience, there are some slight differences but they are not relevant. For example, women put art and the Ducal Palace before (general) beauty, while men are more taken with the atmosphere. Under-30 visitors consider no traffic a positive aspect, while this is not a key factor for the over-60 group. Italian tourists rank atmosphere very highly, while foreign tourists focus more on architecture and the Ducal Palace. Interestingly, tourists who spent at least one night in Urbino used the word "Ducal Palace" more frequently, while those who did not, privileged the word "atmosphere".

Turning to the negative elements of the experience, the first item observed is the percentage of respondents (23%) who do not identify any significant defects. It should be noted, however, that this percentage varies significantly if we observe the difference between Italian tourists (15%) and foreign tourists (37%) and between tourists who frequently visit museums (32%) and those who visit them less often (19%). Specifically, the negative elements curves show similar trends in the different segments; this signifies that tourists have identified the same problems (key words) in similar percentages from group to group. More in detail, all the tourists interviewed stressed that poor services, especially expensive and scarce parking facilities, could negatively impact the tourist

experience. There are no relevant differences among different groups of tourists. Also, in this case, only the frequency of museum visits and nationality are factors that reveal differences of more than 10% among groups of respondents when asked about parking (frequent museum visitors 20% *vs* occasional museum visitors 7%; foreign visitors 7% *vs* Italian visitors 17%).

In other areas, women seem to be more sensitive than men to the availability of services/infrastructures for disabled people and for the elderly (in fact use the word "ascent" more frequently); moreover, women are also more critical of shops and opening times. In more general terms, for under-30 visitors, the main negative aspects are steep ascents and the absence of Internet connectivity, while for tourists in the over-60 segment, the main difficulties connected to the visit are elevators, steep ascents, and the lack of accessibility for the disabled. Expensive parking is one of the main negative aspects for Italian tourists, while for foreign tourists it ranks second after the absence of English. It is quite obvious that lack of parking is considered a negative aspect, especially by tourists who do not overnight in Urbino.

The second relationship investigated was between the perception of quality of services and experiential dimensions.

	Road directions to get to the city	Road directions in the city	Restaurant service	Accom-modations	Guided tour service	Tourism Information service
Not good	26	21	10	3	0	1
Quite good	82	59	95	44	1	6
Very good	180	214	101	48	9	33
Null answer (0)	12	6	94	205	290	260
Valid answers	288	294	206	95	10	40
Average evaluation	**2.53**	**2.66**	**2.44**	**2.47**	**2.9**	**2.8**
Valid answers	96.00%	98.00%	68.67%	31.67%	3.33%	13.33%
Not satisfied (-) Not good	9.03%	7.14%	4.85%	3.16%	0.00%	2.50%
On average satisfied (=) Quite good	28.47%	20.07%	46.12%	46.32%	10.00%	15.00%
Fully satisfied (+) Very good	62.50%	72.79%	49.03%	50.53%	90.00%	82.50%

Tab. 2. Tourists' evaluation of services in Urbino (Source: our elaboration)

Visitors interviewed (tab. 2) are, on average, quite satisfied (2.65 overall average) with services (in a Likert scale of 1 to 3) of Urbino, especially for guided tours of the city (2.9) and the tourist information office (2.8). The majority of respondents (average 69.55%) are fully satisfied with the quality of all the services except for restaurants and accommodations (roughly 50%). However, the majority of the sample of visitors only used and (therefore) evaluated four kinds of services in Table 2 – directions to the city, indication of attractions, restaurants and hospitality of citizens –, while a minority of visitors

interviewed used and evaluated also the other services – accommodations, tourist information office and guided tours of Urbino.

Although tourists' evaluation of services is generally very positive, it is worthy of note that "services" are never mentioned among the words tourists associate with Urbino (fig. 2). Subsequently, the various dimensions of tourists' overall experience of visiting Urbino were then cross-analyzed with the evaluation of services. The purpose of this analysis was to understand whether tourists who have a different perception of the quality of service(s) also have a different perception of the positive and negative characteristics of the overall city experience and the experiential realms involved. This analysis was carried out excluding the catering component, for two reasons. Firstly, because this item accounts for a significant percentage of responses in the total (69%) and, secondly, because there are elements of criticality in the perceived quality (only 49% of respondents rated the city's restaurants as excellent, assigning them the maximum value of 3). Ultimately, these data allow the comparative analysis of two groups of comparable respondents who have had a similar experience but have provided different opinions on the quality of the restaurant service.

As is shown in Figure 7, the visitors who are fully satisfied (3 on the Likert scale) with Urbino's restaurant services are those who strongly appreciate the experiential factor connected to the aesthetic dimensions of the experience, especially as they relate to the atmosphere and the state of conservation of Urbino. A very good perception of this specific service (restaurants) amplifies the perception of the experiential factor, and ultimately of the global experience.

In contrast, Figure 8, above, shows that visitors who are not very or just fairly satisfied (1 or 2 on the Likert scale) with restaurant services do not emphasize the aesthetic experiential factor and stress the more generic importance of the city of Urbino.

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 damages the value of the customer experience is related to the parking situation, as well as accessibility and easy connection to the historic center (fig. 9). Further negative aspects are related to the lack of cultural events and of the infrequent use of English.

Even tourists who are less satisfied with restaurants criticize the car parks, but in a different way (fig. 10). In this case, the word "parking" is associated with not only expensive but also insufficient parking spaces and the difficulty of reaching the center by public transport. Additionally, these tourists also criticize the promotion of the city and its ability to make tourists feel welcome (they lament a "closed" attitude). In this case, there appears to be a relationship between the perception of the quality of services offered and the perception of experiential components. Such a relationship either amplifies or destroys the value of the experiential dimensions. Therefore, this study supports the view that a tourist's good

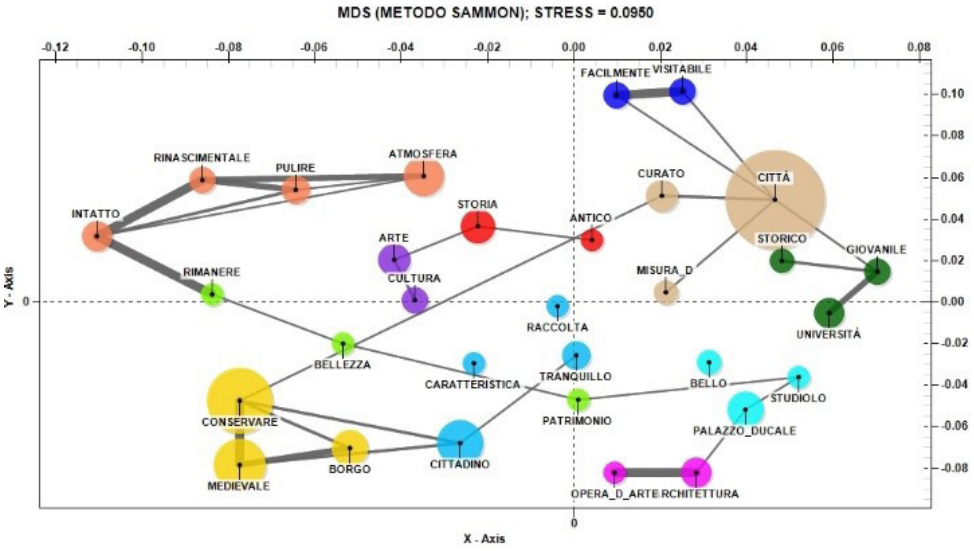

Fig. 7. The relationship between the main positive aspects of visiting Urbino and the high evaluation of restaurant services (Source: our elaboration)

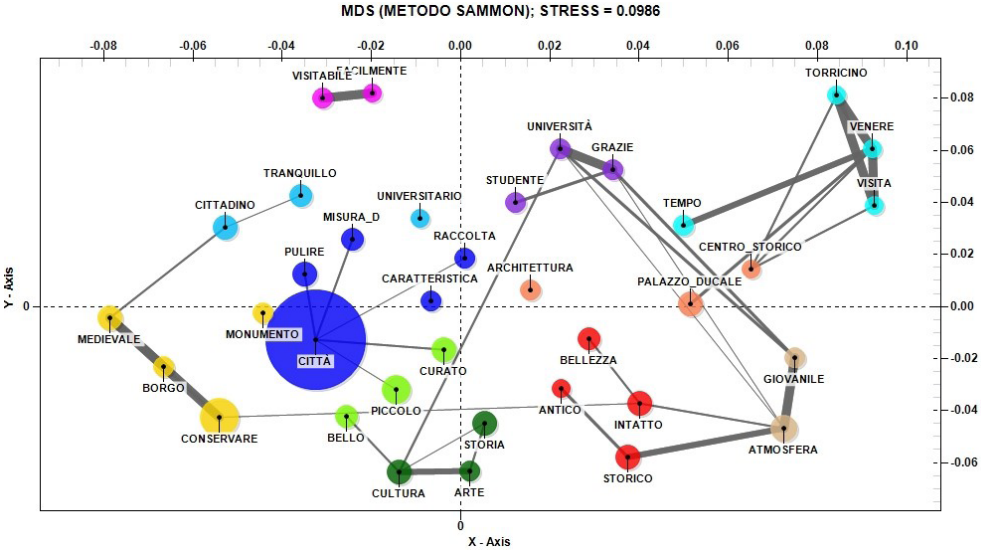

Fig. 8. The relationship between the main positive aspects of visiting Urbino and the low evaluation of restaurant services (Source: our elaboration)

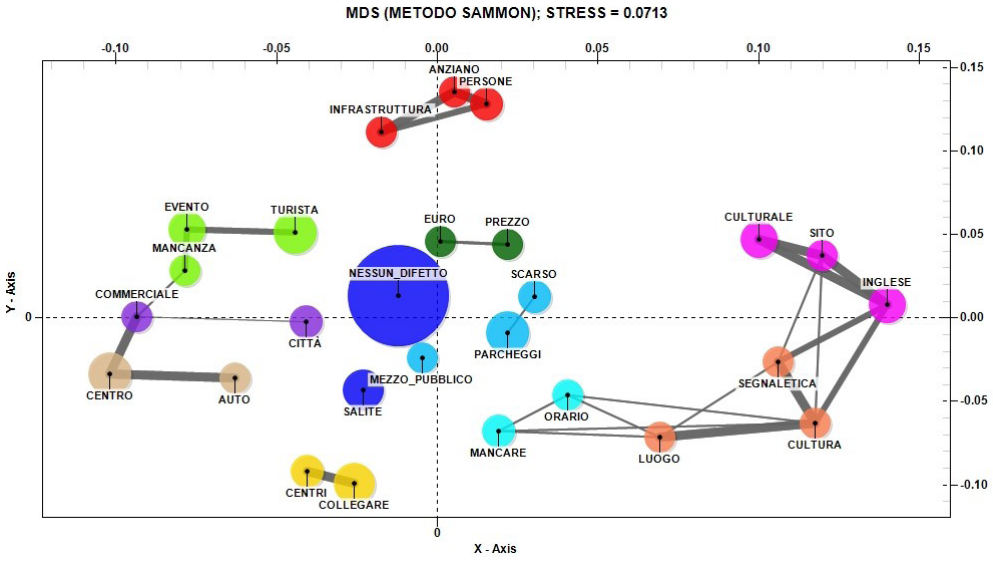

Fig. 9. The relationship between the main negative aspects of visiting Urbino and the high evaluation of restaurant services (Source: our elaboration)

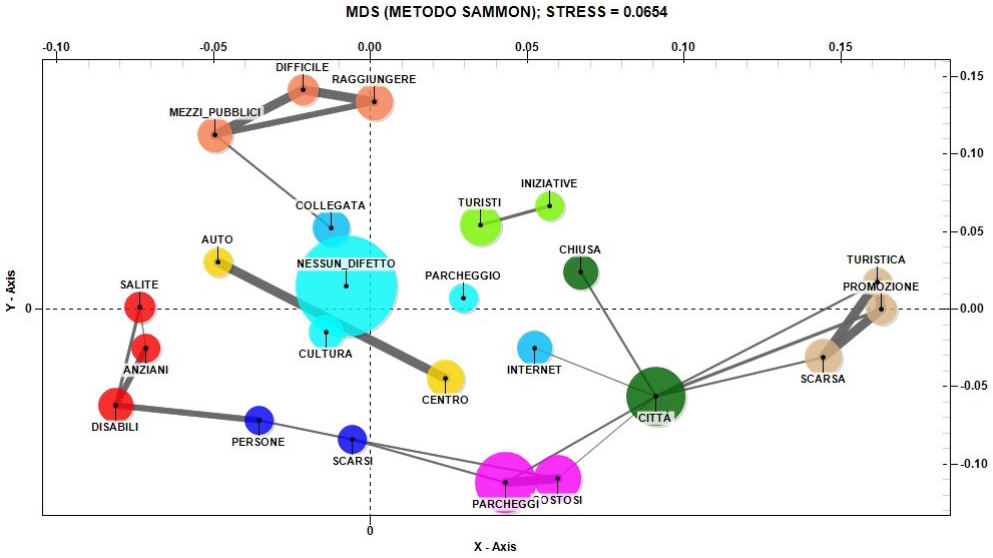

Fig. 10. The relationship between the main negative aspects of visiting Urbino and the low evaluation of restaurant services (Source: our elaboration)

perception of the quality of the services amplifies his/her perception of the experiential components, while a bad perception of the quality of services tends to reduce it.

The third relationship investigated is between the hospitality and courtesy of the residents and the tourists' perception of the experiential elements. From the data shown in Table 3, approximately 80% of visitors are satisfied with the hospitality received.

	Friendliness and cordiality of residents
Not good	3
Quite good	52
Very good	214
Null answer (0)	31
Valid answers	269
Average evaluation	**2.78**
Valid answers	89.67%
Not satisfied (-) Not good	1.12%
On average satisfied (=) Quite good	19.33%
Fully satisfied (+) Very good	79.55%

Table 3. Friendliness and cordiality of residents (Source: our elaboration)

Upon analyzing the relationships between the tourists' perception of the residents' hospitality and the positive and negative elements of the visit to Urbino, there appear to be no substantial differences in the positive aspects that converge with the general ones on the aesthetic aspects of the experience (figs. 11 and 12). In particular, respondents who have perceived the city residents to be friendly and cordial emphasize more words such as "preserved" and "atmosphere". This may mean that, in their view, there is an amplification of the aesthetic dimension that characterizes the visit of Urbino.

However, respondents who have a negative perception of the hospitality of Urbino residents tend to amplify the problematic aspects of the visit. As Figures 13 and 14 show, in fact, the frequency of "no defect" answers diminishes and the criticality of parking and accessibility, as well as the lack of promotion and enhancement of cultural characteristics, increases, instead.

In short, even the hospitality of the inhabitants would seem to be a factor that amplifies experiential perceptions. In particular, the lack of hospitality tends to diminish the positive aesthetics dimensions (reducing, for example, the perception of the medieval atmosphere) and amplifies the negative ones (inconvenience of parking and of public access to a historic city).

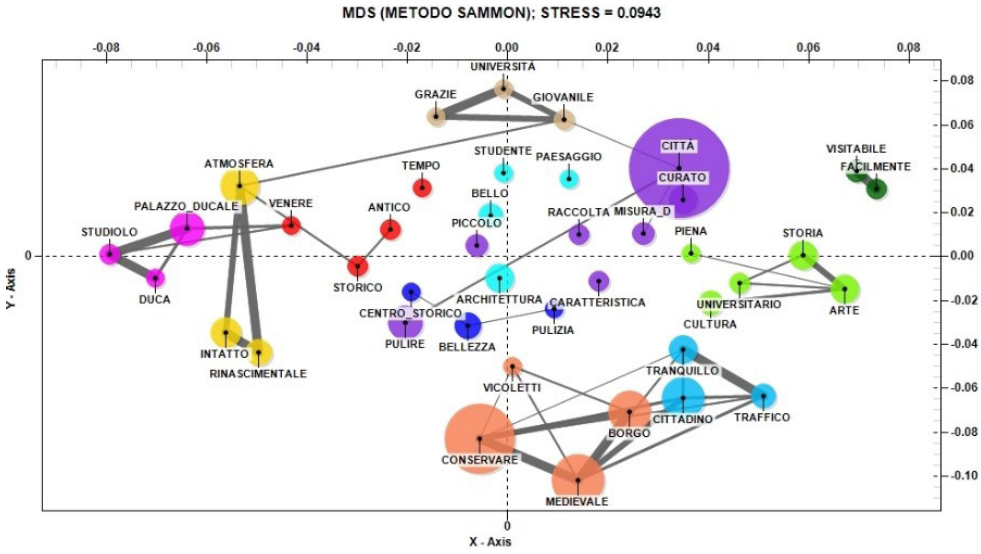

Fig. 11. The relationship between the main positive aspects of visiting Urbino and the high evaluation of the friendliness and cordiality of residents (Source: our elaboration)

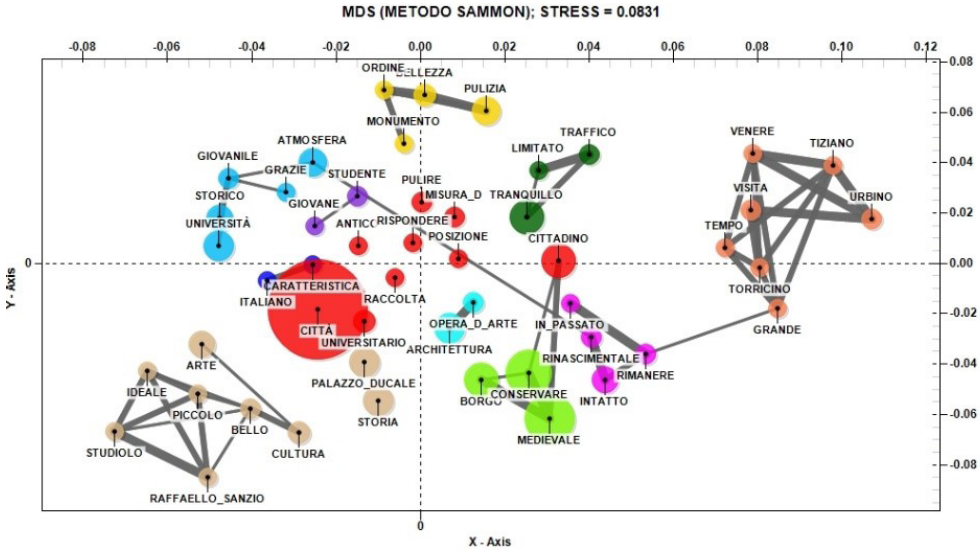

Fig. 12. The relationship between the main positive aspects of visiting Urbino and the low evaluation of the friendliness and cordiality of residents (Source: our elaboration)

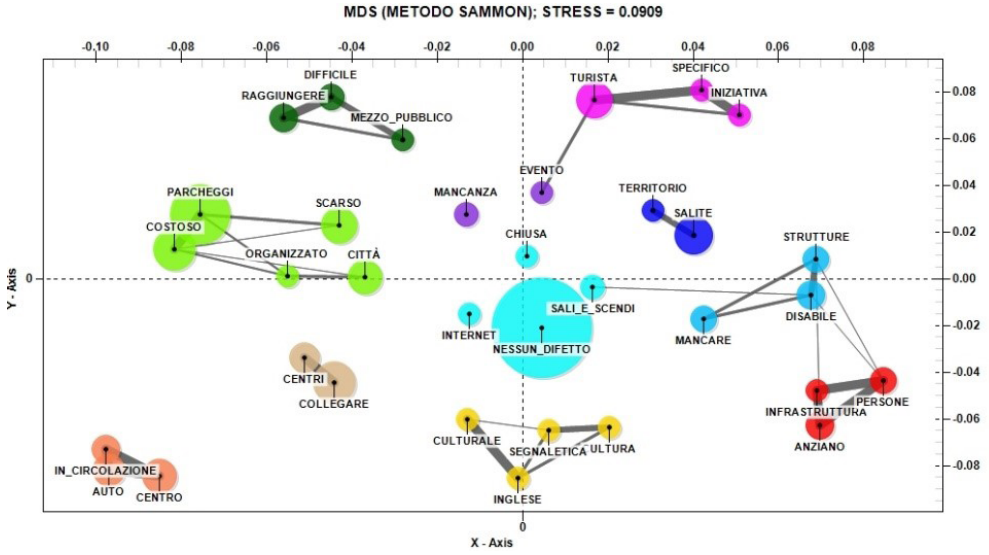

Fig. 13. The relationship between the main negative aspects of visiting Urbino and the high evaluation of friendliness and cordiality of residents (Source: our elaboration)

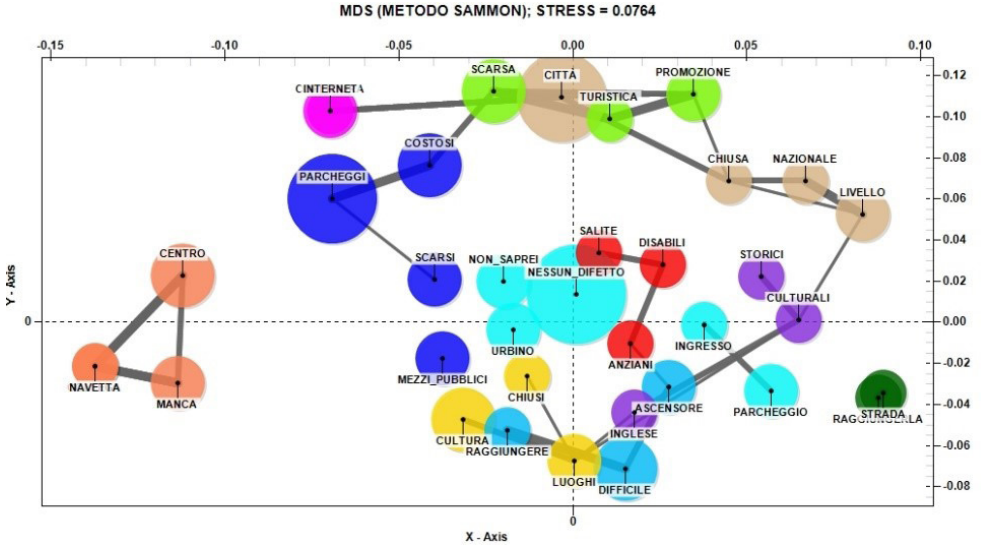

Fig. 14. The relationship between the main negative aspects of visiting Urbino and the low evaluation of friendliness and cordiality of residents (Source: our elaboration)

4. *Discussion and conclusions*

The present work enriches the tourist experience literature by providing evidence on the experiential components that contribute to the visitor's experience of a cultural city as well as on the presence or absence of relationships between the profiles of tourists, the perceived quality of tourist services, the (perceived) hospitality of the resident population and the tourist's experiential perceptions of the cultural visit experience.

With respect to the first contribution, this study highlights that services and the experience factor impact the Urbino visiting experience in different ways. This confirms the importance of studying these components together, in both experience design[83] and quality measurement[84]. In particular we can state that:

1. the aesthetics experiential components play a fundamental role in the experience of visiting Urbino and in the global perception (associations with Urbino) of the city. It is not obvious whether these same results emerge in other cities, even art cities;
2. services are fundamental for creating the customer experience. In our study, poor services – especially car parking and connections to other cities and public transport – strongly and negatively impact the customer experience; put in another way, they strongly contribute to diminishing the value of a visit to Urbino. The experiential components, instead, have a strong impact in a positive way on the global visiting experience of Urbino. Specifically, the aesthetic experiential components connected to a well-preserved city of art such as Urbino and the Ducal Palace impact positively on the perceived value of the global travel experience, or, in other words, they strongly contribute to creating value for visitors.

As regards the second contribution and the first relationship examined, our research reveals that there are no relevant relationships between a tourist's profile and behavior and his/her perception of the touristic experience. In other words, the visiting experience of a cultural city goes beyond the subjective differences related to the personal data or behavior of the tourists interviewed. Furthermore, specific experiential components seem to be perceived slightly differently by specific segments of tourists.

This study needs to be replicated in other cities (not only cultural cities) and should also test other independent variables, such as level of education, income, the use of mobile technologies during the visit, etc. If the results are corroborated, further research in this direction is not recommended. Instead, the findings of this study suggest that further research should more deeply investigate other variables of segmentation connected to passion, experience, etc. In this regard,

[83] Voss *et al.* 2008; Ponsignon *et al.* 2017; Pencarelli, Forlani 2018b.
[84] Lemke *et al.* 2011; Maklan, Klaus 2011.

there is a body of existing literature focused on psychographic segmentation and, specifically, on variables such as personality, motivation, and other individual values that have received attention in recent studies in intangible and experiential contexts. For example, a study on sport segmentation[85] has stressed that rational and emotional aspects explain sport consumption and participation. Another example is a study on fast-food restaurants[86] that underscored how elements like a pleasant décor, pleasant music, subdued lighting, ambient aromas, etc. can improve consumers' overall experience.

As regards the second relationship examined, the intersection of the perception of service quality with the total experience perception also seems to indicate that the former significantly influences the latter. The study shows that visitors who are fully satisfied with the services available (in our case we have analyzed restaurant services) are those who mostly appreciate or amplify the experiential factor, and on the contrary, those who are not satisfied with this service do not appreciate the experiential factor. Specifically, we found that:

- the positive evaluation of services (restaurant services) does contribute to the positive evaluation of the visitor experience, but this alone is not able to make such an experience "memorable". Instead, the experiential dimensions are what ultimately characterize the tourist's overall visit experience;
- the negative evaluation of services (restaurant services) contributes to a diminished perceived value of the city, or in other words, it negatively affects the tourist's perception of the experience of visiting Urbino, adding to other critical aspects.

Even though the literature strongly stresses the personal (and subjective) nature of the responses regarding the experience[87], this study not only confirms that the experiential factor has become increasingly important in the customer experience co-creation but also underscores the fact that services remain fundamental to the experience. In fact, in this study of the tourist experience in a cultural city it quite strongly emerges that the aesthetic experiential components are obviously fundamental and that this dimension of the experience[88] is closely related to the pleasure of simply being in a beautiful place.

With reference to the third relationship examined, the intersection of the perception of friendliness and cordiality of residents with the perception of the total experience seems to indicate that the tourist's perception of hospitality does not significantly influence the perception of an overall positive experience. At the same time, however, it does impact more significantly on the perception of negative elements, amplifying them.

85 Mason *et al.* 2019.
86 Shamah *et al.* 2018.
87 Meyer, Schwager 2007; Lemke *et al.* 2011.
88 Pine, Gilmore 1999.

In sum, the study of the experience of visiting a cultural city highlights the influence of aspects connected to the aesthetic dimension described by Pine and Gilmore[89]. The beauty of the historic monuments, and above all, the beauty of the historical landscape of the city are what ultimately contribute to the overall atmosphere created.

We could say that the aesthetic and sensorial dimension of the experience is connected both to the cultural heritage of Urbino and to actions consisting in services related to conservation. Therefore, it is related not only to beauty but also to the human efforts and interest devoted to services that aim to conserve and enhance the cultural heritage. Core services of a city are important in a cultural city, too, thus confirming that they should be delivered properly[90]. Our study also confirms the importance of the friendliness and cordiality of the residents since the aesthetic experience of a cultural visit can be adversely affected by negative interactions with the local community. All these components of a visit are related to the history and beauty of the city in the aesthetic dimension and to the socialization dimension of the experience.

In conclusion, the study contributes to experiential studies in tourism by showing that: 1) the socio-demographic and behavioral profile of tourists does not affect the perception of experiential dimensions; 2) the perception of the quality of tourist services affects the intensity (amplifying or attenuating them) of the experiential components rather than the typology of these components; and 3) the lack of hospitality of the residents affects the perception of the experiential dimensions connected to aesthetics.

We argue that Pine and Gilmore's interpretative key is consistent with a modern vision of tourism, in which the tourist takes a rich and multidimensional approach. S/he is not relegated to being a *flâneur* who simply walks and observes the city, but acts more like a chorister who experiences the journey deeply and feels and identifies with the local community.

The limitations of the study are connected to the analysis of only one cultural city in Italy and of the use of data collected for a previous research on tourism in Urbino. The first limitation does not allow the generalizability of the findings and this is why the work is to be understood as exploratory. The use of a database built for other purposes forced us to use the three-point scale previously used to evaluate the quality of tourist services and consequently to adopt an inductive approach in the analysis of experiential dimensions.

With regard to the preliminary managerial implications of this study, the design of the touristic offer of a cultural city requires attention and investment in the aesthetic experiential components – preservation and valorization of cultural heritage – to satisfy tourists and improve the attractiveness of the city's offerings. In particular, the touristic offer requires different types of attention

[89] *Ibidem.*
[90] Kim, Choi 2013.

and effort spent on the experiential and service components. For example, improving the quality of services will reduce negative perceptions of the offering system and of the customer experience; however, if there are no investments in the experiential components there will be no effects on the positive aspects and/or on the attractiveness of the city offering. When focusing on the aesthetic dimension of experience of a cultural city, it is important to preserve and enhance its cultural heritage, the crucial factor for building a memorable visiting experience.

Finally, suggestions for future research steps include, in particular, specific studies to measure the quantitative aspects of the relationships between the service and the experiential components. Furthermore, we also consider it extremely important to deepen the psychographic profiling of tourists and the perception of the experiential dimension of visits. Moreover, it would be interesting to study the impact of all the experiential dimensions and services on the global customer experience in different sectors. For example, in the arena of tourism, it would be interesting to understand how these components impact on the global visitor experience connected to different types of tourism related to seaside, mountains, wellness, conferences, among others.

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ISSN 2039-2362