

## #10yearschallenge: how co-creation permeated tourism research. A bibliometric analysis

Marco Tregua <sup>1\*</sup>, Anna D'Auria <sup>2</sup> and Harry Costin <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> University Federico II of Naples. Monte S. Angelo Campus, Via Cintia, 21,80126 Naples, Italy. E-mail: marco.tregua@unina.it

<sup>2</sup> University of Jaén, Campus Las Lagunillas, 23071 Jaén, Spain.

<sup>3</sup> Cyprus International Institute of Management, Limassol Campus, 3-5 Chaidariou Str. 3020 Limassol, Cyprus.

\* Corresponding author

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the conceptual ties between co-creation and tourism that can be found in the academic literature on tourism of the last 10 years with a two-fold purpose: to analyze the main conceptual themes that link co-creation and tourism, and to identify fruitful future research streams.

A bibliometric analysis of the literature from 2008 to 2018 allowed for a systematic analysis of links between key constructs. Findings suggest that there are significant opportunities to further explore the connections between *co-creation* and *tourism experience*, considered as a multi-actor process based on engagement leading to innovation, and enabling new tourist experiences. Five perspectives on *tourism experience* emerged from the analysis: firm-inspired, technology-based, and cultural-based experience; customer satisfaction and participation, and innovation-based experience. These suggest several potential research streams as tourism experiences are recognized to be dynamically co-created through a participatory and engaging process by multiple actors using innovative and technology-based value propositions. Three conceptual pillars emerge from the theoretical analysis: co-creation, as the engine of the process; tourist experience, as the outcome of the co-creative process; and technology, as a key tool to co-create satisfactory tourist experiences.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Co-Creation, Experience, Technology, Service-dominant logic

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## Introduction

The tourism industry is experiencing significant structural changes because of complex and new relationships among its key actors and stakeholders (Altinay *et al.*, 2016; McComb *et al.*, 2017). Leading the discussing on these recent trends UNWTO (2018) has reported on initiatives to share knowledge on key novel elements in the tourism business, such as the changing role of technology, the achievement of sustainable goals, and the strive for quality, inclusiveness, and community empowerment (Pulido-Fernández and Rodríguez-Díaz, 2016). Also, scholars are paying increased attention to these changes in the tourism industry. For instance, the tourism-value chain has been affected, and the internet has brought about a reshuffling of the industry, with traditional actors like travel agencies fading away, and new operators conquering the stage (e.g., Airbnb and Booking.com) bringing about a robust reshaping of B2B and B2C relationships and a new market logic (Aznar *et al.*, 2019). Further significant changes to the value proposition have been brought about by smartphones (Molz, 2012) and the Internet of Things (Sigala and Gretzel, 2017), while some others are on the horizon, such as the impact on tourism of robots and artificial intelligence (Ivanov and Webster, 2018).

Recent marketing studies have described the new roles played by the actors of the tourism industry (Prior and Marcos-Cuevas, 2016; Viglia *et al.*, 2018) – also when contributing to co-create experiences (Sigala, 2016) –, and the role of technologies (Israel *et al.*, 2019; Ivanov, 2019). Most of the scholarly contributions have been influenced by the Service-dominant logic (SDL) framework, which discusses the role of the different actors and the relevance of a multi-actor approach in service provision (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2008; Lusch and Vargo, 2014). Recently, Vargo and Lusch (2016) described the multi-actor phenomenon as supporting the understanding of a web of relationships instead of simply dyadic ones. These relationships shape the context in which value is co-created for the beneficiary by multiple actors. The growing relevance and interest in co-creation is an increasingly common thread in tourism research (von Friedrichs Grängsjö and Gummesson, 2006; Snepenger *et al.*, 2007; Altinay *et al.*, 2016; Kamboj and Rahman, 2017).

Research on tourism through an SDL lens has led to describe tourists' involvement in proposing value creation opportunities (Li, 2014), partnerships as leading to new experiences (Buhalis and Neuhofer, 2017; Prebensen and Xie, 2017), tourists' reviews and bloggers as affecting the expected experiences (Sigala and Gretzel, 2017), online platforms as hosting a whirl of technology-mediated relationships and information (Buhalis and Neuhofer, 2017; Varkaris and Neuhofer, 2017), and also the role of revolutionary technologies such as robotics (Ivanov *et al.*, 2019), leading to customer-to-customer (C2C) co-creation practices in tourism (Heinonen *et al.*, 2018; Rihova *et al.*, 2015; Rihova *et al.*, 2018).

The attention to C2C has grown due to the interactions occurring in both the physical and virtual contexts, with the latter one increasing significantly in recent years. E.g., Rihova *et al.* (2018) stressed online contacts as a way to encourage C2C co-creation and to expand the interactions, and thereby the potential outcomes of co-creative processes.

These trends have led to an interest in additional research on how technology is shaping the tourists' behaviour (Cohen *et al.*, 2014) and on how new relationships between key actors affect co-creation in the tourism industry (Högberg and Olsson, 2018).

This paper focuses on the conceptual ties between co-creation and tourism found in the recent academic literature, with a two-fold aim, namely (a) to analyze the main conceptual themes that link co-creation and tourism, and (b) to identify fertile venues for future research.

The next section reviews traditional constructs in the research literature on tourism such as the construction of tourism experiences, with an emphasis on co-creation. The constructs are not new in the literature; what is new is the role of tourists as co-creators of the tourism experience, including in real time (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019). A gap remains in the literature concerning the ways to systematize co-creation in tourism studies, as stressed by Eide *et al.* (2017) in their call for additional research mainly on how customers join the tourist experience co-creation process.

In an effort to contribute to close the gap in the literature, this paper uses a bibliometric approach to map the recent literature, and analyses how the traditional research constructs interact in novel ways to enhance the 'tourism experience': e.g., Duerden *et al.* (2015) combine the construct of tourism experience with consumer culture theory and service-dominant logic.

For the bibliometric analysis two academic scientific databases were used: Web of Science and Scopus. The findings include five 'tourism experience' research perspectives. These five perspectives are then contrasted and synthesized resulting in an integrated definition of the tourism experience through the conceptual lens of co-creation. Finally, fertile areas for future research are identified.

### **Theoretical overview**

Technology is transforming the tourism industry in multiple ways. For example, the digitalization process has altered the relationship between companies and their competitors and also between companies and their customers. For Fuentes-Blasco *et al.* (2017: 1), "*in tourism, the adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (hereinafter ICT) and variables concerning firms' links with suppliers have been recognized as key determinants to improve companies' competitiveness*". With regards to the new role of customers, recently Vigolo (2017: 85) stated that "*the increasing pervasiveness of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has radically transformed travel behaviour*". Using digital tools such as apps companies are increasingly focusing on the tourists' global experience, even more than on the specific tourism activities, thereby engaging the tourist as a co-creator, since his/her behaviour and reactions can strongly affect his/her perception and the way in which he/she joins the experience. This shift implies a significant restructuring of the industry and the virtuous cycle (Stamboulis and Skayannis, 2003), which activated by knowledge favours the development of new content and reputation, in a process based on tourists-firm interactions. Through the concrete involvement of the tourists, companies can redesign and shape offerings based upon the clients' implicit or explicit suggestions and also the interaction among customers and other stakeholders in general.

A number of contributions have stressed the importance of the tourist as a *co-creator* (Altinay *et al.*, 2016; Buhalis and Neuhofer, 2017; Campos *et al.*, 2018), due to the great impact the service-dominant logic (SDL) has had on service research and marketing studies. For instance, Vargo *et al.* (2008; in Chathoth *et al.*, 2013: 11), while discussing the role of the users in service provision, observed that "*consumer expectations from a shopping trip, restaurant meal, or hotel stay are continuously changing, and hospitality organisations strive to anticipate and respond to these expectations. However, the ability to anticipate such changing expectations [...] requires a systematic and strategic approach to cooperating closely with customers*". Therefore, users can play different roles, such as generating content (Hyun *et al.*, 2009), setting up the experience (Chathoth *et al.*, 2013) or assessing a destination or a provider of tourism services (Law *et al.*, 2010); most of the studies that explore co-creation in tourism have focused on the service experience as the outcome of using tourism services, thus recalling the pillars of SDL (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2008), which recognizes the interactions between firms and users as the main *locus* of value, with value emerging during use, thus leading to make value-in-use a central topic in this perspective. Vargo and Lusch fortified their marketing logic as time went by (2008), when modifying

the foundations of SDL and adding a new proposition defining value as uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary. Two years later, Heinonen *et al.* (2010) stressed the role of customers as controlling value creation, with customer experience occurring in customers' life. More recently, Vargo and Lusch (2017) strongly influenced the future of the SDL, converting the foundational premises into axioms, and calling for additional research into the impact of strategies, ethics, and big data, among others. Particular attention was paid to experience, as shaping two of the five axioms. Previously, scholars focused on the context in which the experience occurs (Mehmetoglu and Normann, 2013; Oliveira and Panyik, 2015). Therefore, value co-creation in SDL emerges as a process greatly affected by the user's characteristics, since "*value is uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary*" (Vargo and Lusch, 2008: 7). Following and furthering this perspective, Helkkula *et al.* (2012), introduced the concept of 'value-in-the-experience', defined as "*individual service customers' lived experiences of value that extend beyond the current context of service use to also include past and future experiences and service customers' broader lifeworld contexts*" (Helkkula *et al.*, 2012: 3).

The debate on new value concepts has continued and pollinated several fields of studies with the proposal of a framework to be implemented, research agendas and a further attention to service experience (e.g., Chandler and Lusch, 2015). The tourism experience involves many actors, not only tourists and firms, but also local communities, which can be strongly affected by the presence of the former (Mason and Cheyne, 2000); e.g., Lin *et al.* (2017) argued that "*the development of tourism may facilitate incoming investment and business activity in local community, which provides greater employment opportunity [...] but it also contributes to the rise of price of goods, services, land and property*". Therefore, "*residents can also adopt negative attitude*"; Doxey (1975) proposed an index measuring the irritation of residents of a tourist destination – the Irridex –, stating that "*as tourist number increases, resident populations react with increasing hostility toward tourists, passing through stages from euphoria to antagonism*" (Doxey in Mason and Cheyne, 2000: 392). Hence, as the presence of tourists can have a significant impact on the local community, the approach of the residents can considerably modify the tourism experience.

When talking about co-creation and the tourism experience, the digitalization of the services emerges as one of the most relevant aspects (Neuhofer *et al.*, 2014; Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019). This transformation of the travel and tourism industries is mainly due to the fast development and diffusion of the ICTs. In general, both service offerings and delivery are characterized by a digitalization process (Oliveira and Panyik, 2015), with the goal of improving the overall quality of the experience and service for the customer, while at the same time reducing the costs of production and delivery as the market becomes more competitive and efficient (Israel *et al.*, 2019). The active role of tourists, and the participation of various actors affect the services even during their delivery, since ICTs make the interactions among stakeholders direct and in real-time, according to the multi-stakeholder perspective adopted by most of scholars in service marketing studies (e.g. Davcik and Sharma, 2016; Reypens *et al.*, 2016; Prior & Marco-Cuevas, 2016). Indeed, these studies centered this perspective on the need to stress two pivotal elements, namely (a) the relevance of resource and knowledge integration from several sources as leading to competitive advantage (Davcik and Sharma, 2016), and (b) the suitability of such a multi-actor perspective in achieving innovation (Reypens *et al.*, 2016).

Thus, scholars investigating the multi-stakeholder contexts and the factors affecting the service experience, consider technology too, since it may affect all the service stages including the experience itself, e.g., adding to and transforming what we see through augmented reality (Chung *et al.*, 2018). As concerns the participation of the tourists and the use of mobile devices, innovations have been introduced in all three phases that shape customer participation, namely *joining*, *consumption* and

*detachment* (Lee-Ross and Johns, 2001). The first phase is characterized by the use of new technology to organize the trip, i.e., gathering information about services, prices and the destination, primarily through social media (Arenas-Gaitan et al., 2013); the second phase is the core of the experience, as the tourist moves from a passive role - getting information provided by others - to a mainly active role, taking part in the social community - providing and sharing information (Parra-López et al., 2011); finally, after the vacation, the tourist remains a part of the community, offering comments and suggestions useful to both other travelers and the tourism organizations, thereby participating in the co-creation of the future offer (Neuhofer et al., 2012).

Consequently, Rayman-Bacchus and Molina (2001: 593) discussed 'Internet-based tourism services' and declared that "*Telecommunication developments seem to have sharpened the traveller's appetite for travel information. Internet technologies are complementing rather than undermining the role of personal travel*". In conclusion, technology has empowered tourists, giving them additional opportunities to join the co-creation process (Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009) and also to co-create and enhance their experiences (Neuhofer et al., 2012); tourists are no longer passive, but have become proactive, viz. actors that can support and affect the definition and delivery of the value proposition.

### **Aim & methodology**

The goal of this paper is to analyze the extant academic literature on co-creation in the tourism industry in order to (a) identify the main themes shaping the current debate in this area and (b) to highlight those emergent themes and issues that should shape further future research. Thereby, the paper addresses the calls of scholars, such as Eide et al. (2017) who called for additional research to understand the upcoming effects of co-creation in the tourism industry, namely the identification of the ways in which customers can shape the experience together with firms including the use of new approaches and technologies. Similarly, Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) called for efforts to shape the future of the co-creation tourism experience and some advances in this direction were recently made by Duerden et al. (2015); indeed, they discussed tourism experiences in consumer culture theory and service-dominant logic to highlight nature, elements, and processes as the main drivers of a structured experience.

To analyze the literature the authors used Bibliometric analysis, considered by some scholars to be one of the most unbiased methods to discover emerging research trends (Persson et al., 2009). The use of bibliometric analysis has been considered particularly appropriate when combining different constructs (Belter, 2017; Strandberg et al., 2018), in this case those of tourism and co-creation. This type of analysis is performed using different software packages (He, 1999; Leung et al., 2017) and databases. For this paper both Web of Science and Scopus were used as sources of data, a choice made previously by other scholars like Torres-Salinas et al. (2009).

To ensure transparency in the data collection process the methodological suggestions by Aguinis et al. (2018) were followed; therefore, co-keywords analysis using the terms provided by authors rather than editors was used to analyze the links between key constructs (Callon et al., 1986; Gil Leiva and Alonso Arroyo, 2007). This approach has been considered preferable among the traditional ways of performing a bibliometric analysis, that use co-citation, co-words, co-authors and co-keywords provided by editors (Leydesdorff et al., 2013).

Also, to interpret the extant literature, the methodological suggestions by Aguinis et al. (2018) have been implemented; thereby (a) one consistent theoretical lens - SDL - has been used by the authors to interpret the categories emerging from the bibliometric analysis; (b) all contributions have been

considered regardless of their methodological approach, leading to a richer dataset; and (c) the use of two different databases has offered a more complete understanding of the ongoing debate.

The datasets have been built considering papers and book chapters from scientific field linked to business and published from 2008 to 2018 – the oldest relevant paper found in the search engines - until the present, drawn from the two databases and using three queries: “co-creation + tourism”, “cocreation + tourism” and “co creation + tourism”. The 10-year-time-span also coincides approximately with SDL-oriented contributions in tourism studies, with the exception of only two papers appeared earlier (Snepenger *et al.*, 2007; von Friedrichs Grängsjö and Gummesson, 2006).

Next, the three queries were done and results compared to remove duplicates. Journals, chapters, and books were chosen without discarding any due to rankings considerations; on the other side proceedings were discarded, since some of them may have evolved into journal papers or book chapters. Table 1 shows the main features of the data collection process; the number of contributions was almost the same for both databases, but Web of Science offered a higher percentage of books. Some of the entries of the two datasets were not considered in the analyses performed, since no authors’ keywords were provided; also, only entries allowing a co-keyword were considered. A total number of 394 entries conformed the two original datasets, while the additional criteria used, and the availability of data led to the final analysis of 295 contributions. Interestingly, 2017 is the year with most of the contributions (about 30%), but this number does not constitute a foreseeable peak, but rather the beginning of a trend.

**Table 1.** Data collection criteria (Authors’ elaboration)

Data selection	Web of Science - Core Collection	Scopus
Method of analysis	Bibliometric analysis (Callon <i>et al.</i> , 1986)	
Typology of analysis	Co-keyword analysis on authors’ keywords	
Queries	co-creation + tourism “co creation” + tourism cocreation + tourism	
Branches of Science	Business & Management Business finance Economics	
Time span	from 2008 to 2018	
Software	BibExcel (analyses); VosViewer (label view maps)	
Total entries	195 (18 proceedings)	199 (19 proceedings)
Dataset: entries with authors’ keywords	135	160
Data Analysis	Year with most contributions (2017): 31,07%	Year with most contributions (2017): 28,89%

Before starting the analysis of the data using the software, the two datasets were compared to verify to which extent there were duplicate entries; since the percentage of contributions found in both datasets was about 41%, the choice of combining analyses on the entries from Web of Science and Scopus was proven to be useful. The two datasets were analysed using BibExcel (Persson *et al.*, 2009), a software package endorsed by several scholars (e.g., Jiang *et al.*, 2017; Koseoglu, 2016), due to the options offered

by the software. A co-keyword analysis using authors' keywords was performed, to highlight the ties among different themes, depict current research trends, and identify opportunities for further research. Using authors' keywords allowed for focus upon the intended interpretation of scholars of their own work; using editors' keywords has been considered misleading by some scholars (Whittaker, 1989).

The output of the BibExcel analysis was then mapped using the VosViewer software (Leydesdorff *et al.*, 2013) which provides an easy-to-understand graphical representation of the results in the form of a label view map. The label view map also highlights the strength of connections among the different research streams (the bigger spheres represent the strongest ties while the smaller spheres the weakest ones; finally, terms appearing on their own are not linked at all to the other emerging topics). The objective and unbiased graphical outcome of this analysis was then interpreted as a whole by the authors, in line with the methodological guidelines offered by Aguinis *et al.* (2018) cited above.

## Findings

The analysis conducted with the help of BibExcel and VosViewer using datasets from Web of Science and Scopus shows the emergence of four main clusters in the academic literature (see Figure 1) according to Web of Science and three main clusters according to Scopus. The papers present in the different clusters were then further examined to clarify conceptual distinctions between the emerging perspectives.

In the next sub-sections, the findings are summarized using five perspectives related to the core construct of 'tourism experience', since it emerged as a key topic in all clusters.

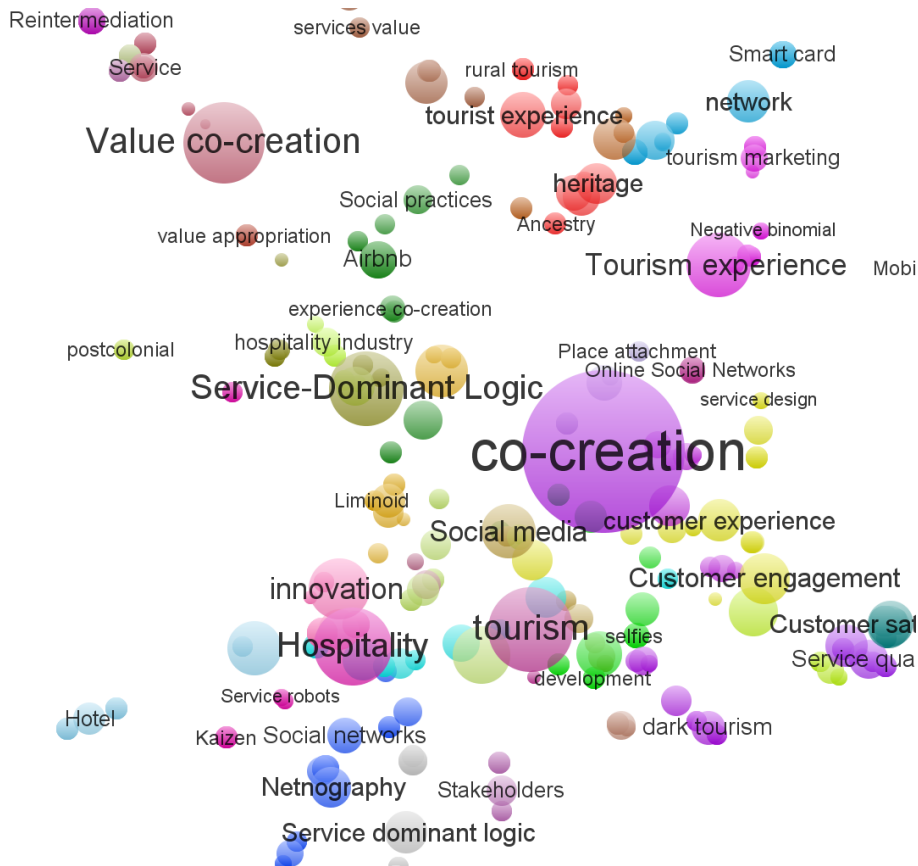
### *Web of Science Dataset*

First, we present a brief overview on the dataset resulting from the queries on Web of Science; 177 entries shape this dataset with 40 book chapters and 137 papers from scientific journals. The contributions considered showed a huge increase in the academic debate, since 25 out of 177 have been published from 2008 to 2013, while the remaining 152 – namely, almost 86% – from 2014 on. Additionally, Table 2 shows the most relevant links from the bibliometric analysis, based on the coupling performed through BibExcel.

**Table 2.** *Coupling among topics and link strength*

Item	Total link strength ▼	Item	Total link strength ▼
co-creation	241	Customer satisfaction	20
tourism	66	tourist experience	19
Value co-creation	61	value	17
Hospitality	57	Customer loyalty	17
Service-Dominant Logic	52	Customer participation	17
Tourism experience	38	Smart Tourism	17
innovation	35	Service dominant logic	17
Experience	31	customer experience	17
technology	28	network	17
Social media	27	Netnography	16
authenticity	26	satisfaction	16
Customer engagement	24	crowdsourcing	16
Loyalty	22	Co-production	16
Culture	20	creativity	16

Figure 1 shows the main themes and constructs shaping the four clusters; the bigger spheres describe the core of each cluster, while the relevance of the thematic ties declines when considering the smaller spheres. Further, the font-size of the words represents the degree of relevance they have in each cluster.

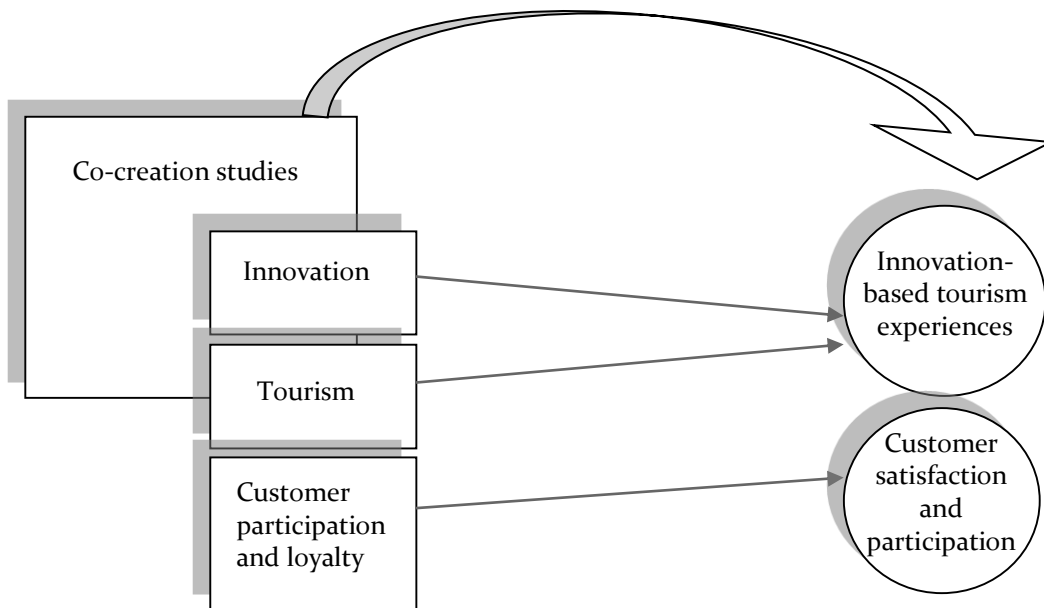


**Figure 1.** Label view map on the dataset from Web of Science (Authors' elaboration through VosViewer)

Four main clusters – represented in the squared boxes in figure 2 – emerge from the analysis of the literature, the first, *co-creation*, embeds two of the remaining three, namely *tourism*, and *innovation*, while the fourth is *customer participation and loyalty*. The clusters are related to two main perspectives, innovation-based and customer satisfaction and participation – represented in the circles in figure 2 – that will be discussed further below. The clusters analysed should be thought of as linked to each other and as contributing to more than one single perspective; thus, the four clusters should not be thought as “watertight boxes”, and also considering that the aim of this paper is not to categorize contributions but research interests.

The authors identified two perspectives (as shown in Figure 2) based on the *co-creation* cluster; additionally, one of the perspectives integrates two other clusters based on *tourism* and *innovation* (named *Innovation-based tourism experiences*), while the second one focuses on the cluster based on *customer participation*, *customer satisfaction* and *loyalty* (named *Customer satisfaction and participation in tourism experiences*).





**Figure 2.** Clusters and perspectives on the dataset from Web of Science (Authors' elaboration)

#### *Innovation-based tourism experiences*

As anticipated, the first perspective includes contributions focused on innovation and experience, as the main elements describing the changes derived from co-creation in tourism using technology. The interactions among these constructs combined with others such as loyalty, culture, creativity, and co-production, confirm the recent transformation of the role played by the tourists. For instance, according to Kelly *et al.* (2017), tourists are no longer passive but have become active participants in the design of services; as co-creators and co-innovators of the experience throughout the entire value chain, from design to end use.

Hence, the tourism experience is increasingly co-created by users, and its effects take place in a context influenced by acquaintances of these users; for instance, research on generations X and Y shows that online social networks affect both the needs of the users and the service experience itself (Guerra *et al.*, 2015), while Yoo and Gretzel (2016) consider experiences as the effect of customers' participation in technology-empowered processes. These processes now include the experience itself, since the core of traditional tourism activities does not suffice to fully encompass an experience.

Using a different perspective, namely a focus on providers, Chen *et al.* (2017) explore the relations between travel agents and their suppliers through a co-creation perspective. Their analysis highlights the importance of technology as an antecedent of service innovation, even if only through an indirect influence; the key influence has been found to be relationships mediated by technologies with several value co-creators when new value propositions were developed (Buonincontri *et al.*, 2017). The importance of technology has also been highlighted by other scholars who advocated the use of RFID technologies, mobile applications and their integration in service offerings as a crucial element leading to value co-creation, due to the empowered role of customers (Cobos *et al.*, 2016).

The effect of innovation is considered as disruptive by Hsu *et al.* (2016) when investigating the new factors in business-to-business relationships mediated by technologies. In this case, innovation is considered a source of competitive advantage since companies can join “a reduction in operational costs and an increase in productivity, access to more customer segments, and increased customer satisfaction and loyalty” (Kelly *et al.*, 2017); moreover, the recent changes are considered as anticipated (Kandampully *et al.*, 2016), thus as reinforcing the leadership of a firm when competing. To sum up, innovation permeates both the process of service delivery and the value outcome, i.e., the tourism experience.

#### *Customer satisfaction and participation in the tourism experience*

The second perspective is shown in the left section of the label view map (see Figure 1 above); in this area, the customer plays a central role, since customer satisfaction, customer participation, and involvement emerge as the most relevant topics, since co-creation and tourism are closely related through customer involvement.

Chathoth *et al.* (2016) consider customer satisfaction and customer participation as key goals of customer engagement; indeed, a company’s support to customers significantly affects the degree of customer co-creation, while the degree of co-creation positively affects customer satisfaction and thereby increases use of the services.

Content generated by users and other actors tied to the firm affects brand perception and brand awareness. Tourist participation in value co-creation processes leads to an increase in the awareness of a destination brand (Frías-Jamilena *et al.*, 2017). This effect is stronger when tourist efforts are partnered with other actors’ contributions (Mazurek, 2015). Social media increase the number of actors that need to be considered in co-creation processes as they increase both the willingness and the opportunities to participate in co-creation (Sigala, 2016). Participation of tourists through sharing platforms does not only impact the tourists willing to share their experience, but the broader user needs for comfort, security, general information, and exchange of experiences which are all crucial in shaping the experience and lead to customer satisfaction. Today, the tourism experience begins even before the core service is delivered, having led scholars to introduce the concept of experience design in tourism (Duerden *et al.*, 2018; Tussyadiah, 2014): customers join the process early and, more importantly, the relevance of the human element has in no way decreased despite the central role played by technologies in tourism experiences.

The findings suggest that technology leads the path towards a technology-based value co-creation in tourism, due to the participation of customers and the opportunities for contributions offered by online communities. Therefore, users take part in value co-creation processes in different ways through knowledge sharing and recombination, self-customization of value propositions, and the co-construction of the service context together with the firm or the destination.

In conclusion, scholars emphasize the core role of technology in today’s tourism experience and its impact on co-creation, which requires further research (Neuhofer *et al.*, 2012). This new approach to tourism studies encompasses both time and space, since co-creation takes place starting before the use of tourism services until after using them, with technologies and innovative processes also helping to overcome spatial barriers. This has led to multi-actor initiatives affecting the tourist experience (Oliveira and Panyik, 2015); therefore, firms should introduce co-creative modalities for their offerings favouring a careful management of customer experiences (Chathoth *et al.*, 2016).

Table 3 highlights the main findings of this section based on contributions from Web of Science. The four clusters of literature shape two perspectives describing the tourism experience. The tourism experience is depicted as related to innovation, since co-design and the contribution of multiple actors through technologies are offering change to have new and creative solutions to be transformed into value propositions and into experiences. The second perspective relates to customer satisfaction and participation and depends on the engagement of several actors – first and foremost customers – to co-creative processes leading to new contents, thereby setting the ground for higher levels of satisfaction, due to the links between participation and satisfaction.

**Table 3.** Summary of the three perspectives emerging from contributions in Web of Science

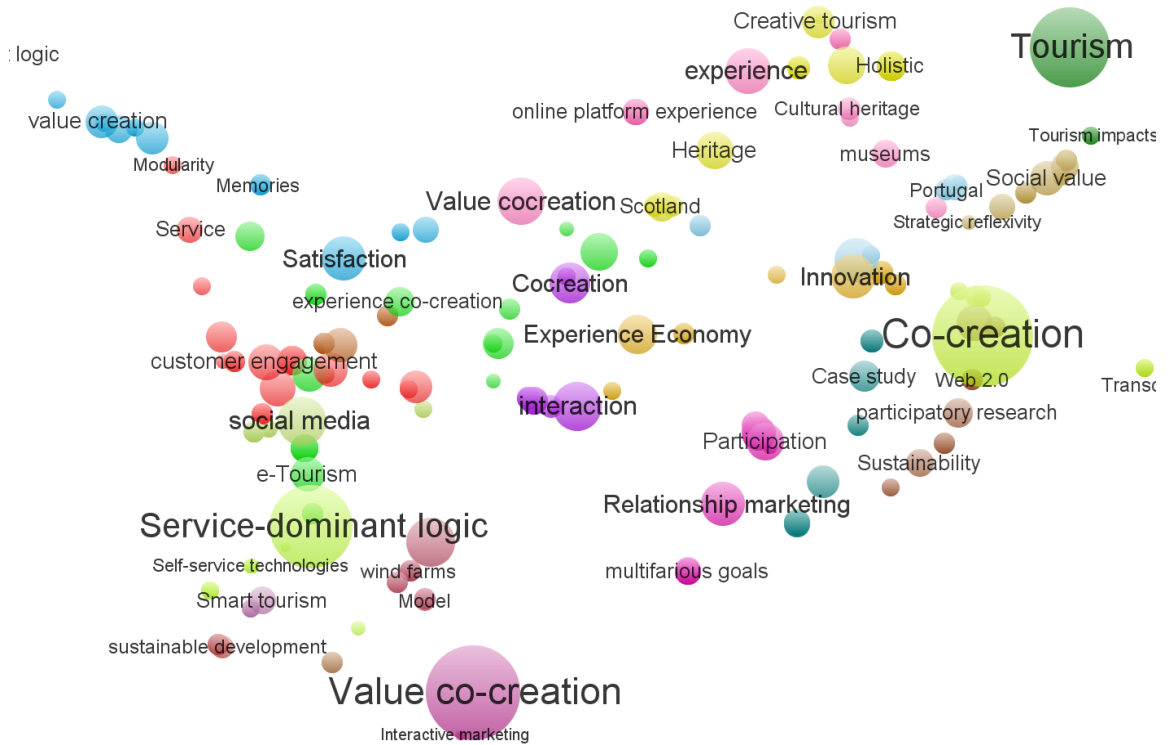
WOS Dataset			
<b>Clusters</b>	Co-creation		Customer participation and loyalty
	Innovation	Tourism	
<b>Perspectives</b>	<i>Innovation-based tourism experiences</i>		<i>Customer satisfaction and participation in the tourism experience</i>
<b>Most representative contributions</b>	Yoo and Gretzel (2016) Chen et al. (2017) Kelly et al. (2017)		Chathoth et al. (2016) Sigala (2016) Frías-Jamilena et al. (2017)
<b>Most representative themes</b>	Service co-design Technology-empowered processes Creativity		Customer engagement User-generated content Multi-actor participation

#### Scopus Dataset

Before starting the analysis, a brief overview of the dataset resulting from the queries on Scopus is offered; 180 contributions are included in this dataset with 39 book chapters and 141 papers from scientific journals. The entries considered show a significant increase in the academic debate – as already witnessed from the dataset achieved from Web of Science –, since 38 out of 180 were published before 2013, while the remaining 142 – namely, almost 79% – from 2014 to 2018. Also, Table 4 shows the topics leading to the most relevant links from the bibliometric analysis, based on the coupling performed through BibExcel.

**Table 4.** Coupling among topics and link strength

Item	Total link strength ▼	Item	Total link strength ▼
Co-creation	89	Value	16
Value co-creation	79	Cocreation	15
Service-dominant logic	60	Experience Economy	14
Tourism	56	Dark Tourism	14
Tourism experience	24	Participation	13
social media	22	Heritage	13
Tourist experience	21	Authenticity	13
interaction	21	ICT	13
Value cocreation	20	Design thinking	13
experience	19	Experiences	12
Innovation	18	customer engagement	12
Satisfaction	18	trust	12
destination branding	18	Motivations	11
Relationship marketing	17	Membership	11



**Figure 3.** Label view map on the dataset from Scopus (Authors' elaboration through VosViewer)

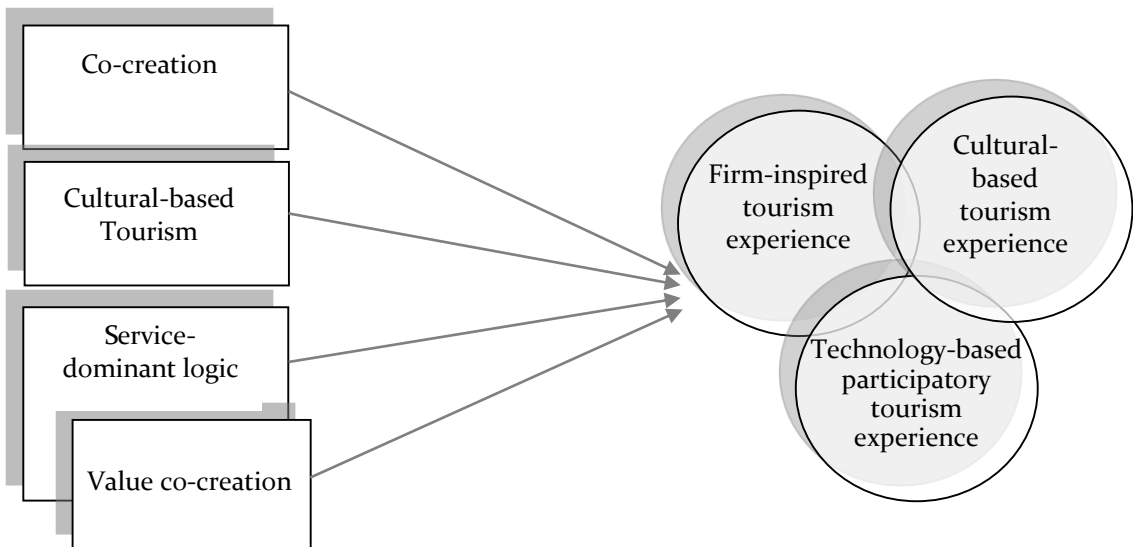
Four clusters emerge from the analysis of the Scopus database (Figure 3): *co-creation*, *cultural-based experience in tourism*, *service-dominant logic* and *value co-creation* - represented in the squared boxes in figure 4 - which are integrated into three main perspectives based on the tourism experience: *firm-inspired experience*, *technology-based experience* and *cultural-based experience* represented in the circles in figure 4.

#### *Firm-inspired tourism experiences*

The first perspective analysed is based on the cluster of co-creation linked to constructs such as *destination branding*, *relationship marketing*, *consensus seeking*, *strategic reflexivity*, *innovation* and *sustainability*; the combination of themes and constructs leads to the configuration of the role of firms in experience building (see Figure 2), highlighting how companies involved in tourism initiatives pay attention to the definition of the offer through the employment of technological tools and innovative processes.

It is important to underline that this perspective is not just focused on the management of customer role, but also involves all the actors participating in the construction of the tourism experience with the support of technology. In this regard, Malone *et al.* (2018) highlight that when scholars discuss the configuration of tourism initiatives, they tend to focus on the firm rather than on the customer perspective; the authors discuss how consumers' emotions, and antecedents influence the process of value creation. Likewise, Chathoth *et al.* (2014) underline the importance of an overall strategy involving

the whole structure of the company as well as its culture and vision in developing customer engagement and designing the tourist experience, through the example of hotel organizations. A similar approach is adopted by Chim-Miki *et al.* (2017) who recall C2B2C (consumer-to-business-to-consumer) theory when discussing the role of collaborative network organization in the co-creation of value in tourism. Several scholars (Olsson, 2013; Rahmani *et al.*, 2017; Tung and Au, 2018; Wu *et al.*, 2018) describe the role of customers in marketing research, which is key to observe tourism initiatives impact, and to design the offer and destination branding. Also, Prebensen *et al.* (2013), use the findings of a survey filled out by 505 consumers, to show that the value of personal service, the surrounding natural environment and the behaviour of other tourists are the factors that mainly affect service quality. The support offered by new technologies is stressed by Tiago *et al.* (2017) who focus on the relevance on new technologies in developing innovative forms of communication and co-creation with customers. Similarly, Cimbalevic *et al.* (2018) and Israel *et al.* (2019) state that a wider application of ICTs in tourism contributes to the achievement of destination competitiveness.



**Figure 4.** Clusters and perspectives on the dataset from Scopus (Authors' elaboration)

#### *Technology-based participatory tourism experiences*

The second perspective integrates the two main clusters in the left section of the label view map (see Figure 2 above), namely the one related to *service-dominant logic* and the other to *value co-creation*. This perspective includes constructs linked to the involvement and the engagement of customers through social media and innovative tools, aimed at improving satisfaction and loyalty through the co-creation of value.

For instance, Blazquez-Resino *et al.* (2015: 1) find that “*tourist loyalty is achieved through the development of relationship quality in the co-creation of tourist experience*”; Tsai (2017), stresses the linkage between innovation and consumers' loyalty, recalling the holistic innovation paradigm, as new technological tools are essential in initiatives based on consumer participation in tourism initiatives. Indeed, when looking at the figure above, constructs such as *community-based events*, *social media*, *e-tourism*, and *service innovation* appear, showing how important ICTs are to the interactions among the different stakeholders of the tourism industry. In this regard, Kim *et al.* (2018) mention the tourist

attraction's owners, managers, and tourism researchers, as well as current and potential visitors, who are important actors able to contribute to the re-branding process of a destination through a co-creative approach. The destination branding strategy is also discussed by Oliveira and Panyik (2015), who define content generated by tourists, travel journalists, bloggers and professionals and shared through social media and apps, the greatest digital challenge of destination branding today. According to these authors, tourist-generated content can effectively increase the brand value of destinations rather than of firms. The relevance of new technologies and mobile devices is also underlined by Buhalis and Foerster (2015) and enforced by a focus on C2C co-creation practices by Rihova *et al.* (2018), since through their own mobile devices, multiple users can join the co-creation context and combine information belonging to different sources and create their individual profile to shape and join a personalized tourism experience.

As concerns the role of communities, Bertella (2015) and Bertella *et al.* (2018) analyze the importance of emotions and emotional ties in community-based experiences. Lin *et al.* (2018) discuss the role of tourist communities in the renewal of areas affected by disasters, thanks to a process they call co-creational ethos able to transform negative labels associated with dark tourism into motivation to re-shape local image and improve the quality of life of citizens.

#### *Cultural-based tourism experiences*

The last perspective analysed refers to new forms of tourism, with special reference to the tourism experience related to cultural heritage and creativity. According to Jovicic (2016), cultural tourism is a form of tourism promoted as an alternative to mass tourism. Instead of joining passively the experience, cultural tourists show a proactive approach and participate in the co-creation of high-quality experiences.

Boukas *et al.* (2017), focus on the role of museums in creating a holistic memorable experience for the visitors and enhancing the image of the destination. In addition, Chugh (2018) describes cultural heritage as an element upon which forms of creative tourism can be based through a co-creative approach. This kind of tourism is strictly related to the engagement of customers, indeed, the degree of willingness to participate in tourism initiatives represents the key to define a satisfying experience. The connection between creative tourism and cultural heritage is also described by Ross *et al.* (2017). In their paper, creativity in tourism adopts a different meaning, namely the virtual recreation of inaccessible or destroyed sites, to facilitate creative tourism experiences using new technologies. Finally, Smed *et al.* (2016) discuss the relationship between cultural heritage and creativity in tourism through the case study of a Danish Viking site where tourists can experience everyday life in the past interacting with Viking storytellers, and thereby achieving the co-creation of the experience as well as the co-creation of value.

As concerns the co-creation of value through creative tourism initiatives, Richards *et al.* (2014) underline the relevance of creative imagination in event design and planning process, while Marques and Borba (2017) discuss the case of Recife, Brazil which they call a “playable city”, a new form of city developed according to a co-creative approach and through concrete projects to face the challenge of reconciling the needs of residents and tourists with the support of new technologies.

Table 5 summarizes the findings of this section; four literature clusters contribute to three perspectives describing the tourism experience. This concept depends on several contributions and themes. The most relevant ones are highlighted below, albeit the effects of other themes should not be thought as being irrelevant. The firm-inspired tourism experience is more oriented to what organizations do to

define a value proposition for tourists and for the actors contributing to such an offering. On the other side, a cultural-based tourism experience is found in different contexts and creativity is more relevant than in other perspectives, primarily because of the nature of cultural heritage-based activities. Finally, the technology-based tourism experience describes how technologies are providing new opportunities to shape services through the support of multiple actors, even in an online context.

**Table 5.** Summary of the three perspectives emerging from contributions in Scopus

<b>Scopus Dataset</b>			
<b>Clusters</b>	Co-creation	Cultural-based Tourism	Service-dominant logic
			Value co-creation
<b>Perspectives</b>	<i>Firm-inspired tourism experience</i>	<i>Cultural-based tourism experience</i>	<i>Technology-based participatory tourism experience</i>
<b>Most representative contributions</b>	Prebensen <i>et al.</i> (2013) Chim-Miki <i>et al.</i> (2017) Israel <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Jovicic (2016) Ross <i>et al.</i> (2017) Chugh (2018)	Buhalis and Foerste (2015) Rihova <i>et al.</i> (2015) Tsai (2017)
<b>Most representative themes</b>	Service quality Collaborative network Destination competitiveness	Cultural heritage Creative tourism Alternative tourism	Mobile-mediated services e-tourism and online communities content sharing

### Discussion and implications

The analysis of the five perspectives emerging from the co-keywords is clustered around tourism experience as the key construct; this is due to the impact of SDL during the last decade, and to an understanding of experience as a new way of addressing value co-creation processes and value outcomes for customers (Vargo *et al.*, 2008). Tourism experiences are identified as the result of dynamic co-creation through knowledge integration (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015) and as the essence of value co-creation along the entire set of processes in which tourists and firms interact (Chathoth *et al.*, 2016). SDL permeates the debate on tourism experiences when dealing with co-created experiences, namely the customization of a tourism service and its outcome, depending on the contributions of several actors (Bryce *et al.*, 2017). Unfortunately, the co-creation of experiences can also lead to undesired effects, as discussed by Murdy *et al.* (2016), when role conflicts affect the expected outcome of customization, due to a misalignment of either actors' behaviour or the resources required to achieve co-creation.

The comparison of the five perspectives shows both similarities and contrasts; first, both the *innovation-based tourism experience* and the *firm-based tourism experience* stress soft skills as leading to the co-creation of tourism experiences. Indeed, creativity, emotions, and firms' culture are the levers for the achievement of co-created service experiences (Chathoth *et al.*, 2014; Malone *et al.*, 2018). Tourists are playing a different role than in the past, and firms are offering a fertile ground for the co-design of tourism experiences. This may lead to value propositions with a higher level of quality than before (Prebensen *et al.*, 2013) and to opportunities to improve firm competitiveness (Cimbaljevic *et al.*, 2018). These effects can be achieved in contexts embedding innovation as a philosophy. Thus, the intangible skills discussed above, the co-design of tourism experiences, and the co-creation of value propositions

should all be oriented toward an innovation-based approach. Innovation in the tourism industry is also achieved through technology, and is reshaping B2C and also B2B relationships (Aznar *et al.*, 2019). Technology favours these changes as it contributes to the diffusion of innovation and allows for new ways to perform core operations. Firms that embrace technology are more willing and able to encourage co-created experiences leading to better outcomes for tourists, higher competitiveness for firms, and multiple co-creation opportunities.

Both the *customer satisfaction and participation* and the *technology-based participatory experience* perspectives consider engagement as a key factor to increase the tourists' participation in the co-creation processes. This participation is encouraged and favoured by the new technologies, and found in contexts and relationships mediated by technologies (Mehmetoglu and Normann, 2013; Eide *et al.*, 2017; Sigala, 2016). Social media, online platforms, sharing practices, and user-generated content are the most relevant instruments and results of these co-creative processes leading to customized and more satisfying experiences (Kim *et al.*, 2018; Yoo and Gretzel, 2016). Additionally, the shaping of new experiences is based on the participation of multiple actors, other than the ones framing the traditional B2C relationships; indeed, technology-driven multi-stakeholder (Prior and Marco-Cuevas, 2016; Viglia *et al.*, 2018) contexts are thought of as the best environments to increase participation and satisfaction and leading to co-created tourism experiences (Chugh, 2018; Tsai, 2017). Customization, the uniqueness of the value outcomes, the actor-to-actor approach – instead of a B2C approach – and the high level of participation favoured by involvement and engagement practices are the drivers of co-created tourist experiences, in line with the SDL approach adopted by scholars and discussed in this paper (Heinonen, 2018; Aznar *et al.*, 2019).

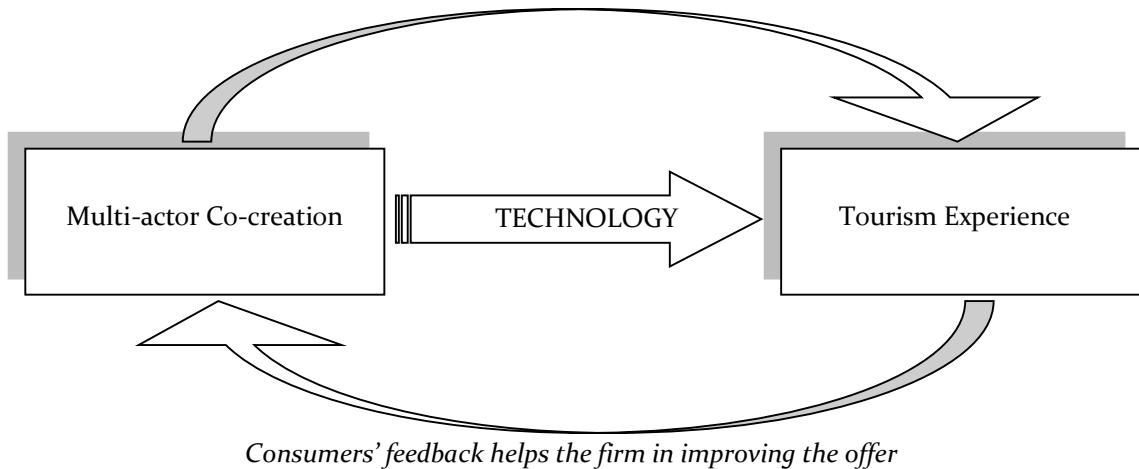
But not all five perspectives converge, and key differences emerge when they are contrasted. For instance, cultural-based experiences appear to be distinct. Creativity, one of their key features is an innate skill (Smed *et al.*, 2016), higher levels of tourist participation already exist (Jovicic, 2016), and quality is a core feature embedded in cultural tourism contexts (Boukas *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, tourists opting for cultural-based tourism are already familiar with a co-creation approach centred on knowledge sharing, quality, and the participation encouraged by the challenge of high-quality tourism experiences.

In brief terms, this study offers a clustering of the literature on co-creation in tourism of the last 10 years into five perspectives framed by the constructs of innovation, customer satisfaction and participation, firm support, technology, and cultural services. These perspectives are further analysed and synthesized to better understand the impact of co-creation on the tourism industry as well as its importance in the research agenda proposed by Eide *et al.* (2017). Also, the focus on tourism experience addresses the call for research by Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) and the recent findings of Duerden *et al.* (2018). The commonalities among the perspectives lead to consider tourism experiences as dynamically co-created through a participatory, involved, and engaging processes by multiple actors using innovative and technology-based value propositions. Such processes aim at the increase of value as an outcome, of quality as a driver of loyalty, and of the competitiveness of the tourism industry.

To sum up, three conceptual pillars emerge from the analysis of co-creation and tourism in the literature, co-creation itself, the tourist experience, and technology: the first as the *engine* enabling the interaction through a multi-actor approach to improve customers' experience and transferring consumers' feedback to adjust the offer when is needed; the second as the outcome of the co-creative process; and the last one as the *tool* to co-create satisfying experiences for the tourist (Figure 5).



*Interaction through a multi-actor approach supported by ICTs can improve customers' experience*



*Consumers' feedback helps the firm in improving the offer*

**Figure 5.** *Conceptual pillars emerging from the analysis of co-creation and tourism (Authors' elaboration)*

## Conclusion

This study analyzes the extant literature on co-creation in tourism. The findings show that besides the use of tourism services, co-production and co-innovation arise as two new ways to depict how tourists interact with firms. The same applies to other key stakeholders of the industry, such as local communities, other firms, and local governmental agencies. Therefore, the co-creation process emerges as not only pertinent to the business-to-business (B2B) or business-to-consumer (B2C) perspectives, but fundamentally as a multi-actor process based on engagement, and leading to innovation and the enabling of new tourist experiences (C2B2C theory). The interest in framing tourist studies in a co-creation framework is reflected in contributions of the last five years, that discuss many linkages among common topics in tourism studies and service-dominant logic, such as engagement, participation, innovation, service experience, and the role of technologies.

The analysis of the extant literature suggests the need to further research the factors affecting co-creation processes, including the viability of a continuously evolving context, guidelines to manage multi-stakeholder relationships, and an increasing level of real-time interactions. Also, a clustering of potential tourists based on their degree of participation, involvement, and engagement, and an evaluation of the out-of-control variables in social media represent areas to be further investigated in order to offer a more complete understanding of the value co-creation processes in the tourism industry. Further, a systematic review of the emerging empirical evidence should complement theory-based analysis, describing how technology and online contexts are favouring actors' engagement and the emergence of new initiatives. Also, new insights may emerge from the analysis focused on technologies and their effects on multi-actor interactions, since currently few studies are proposing concrete insights about the outcomes of technology-oriented co-created processes in tourism.

Finally, to widen the scope of bibliometric research in this field, the authors suggest to replicate the co-keyword analysis contrasting and/or combining the findings obtained using the authors' and the editors' keywords, while keeping the same methodological approach to reinforce the validity of the

results obtained. It should be pointed out that the main limitation of this study relates to the limited number of scholarly contributions, due to the criteria used to collect the data and to the fact that studies focusing on co-creation in tourism only started appearing in the literature some ten years ago. Further, there is no single database that encompasses all the extant scholarly literature on co-creation and tourism. Still, most of the relevant contributions are included in this study. Nevertheless, the future integration of databases would lead to a more complete overview and analysis of the themes discussed in this paper.

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