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Problematicizing the Concept of Tourism Destination: An Analysis of Different Theoretical Approaches

Saila Saraniemi1 and Mika Kylänen2

Abstract

A tourism destination is one of the key concepts of institutionalized tourism, but researchers and practitioners still disagree on how it should be defined. When building a destination-wide brand, constructing local geographies, or promoting cooperation among entrepreneurs within a region, we must understand the nature of tourism destinations. We wish to take earlier categorization of destination concepts further by highlighting the assumptions and values that define the rather distinct ideas. Informed by a cultural approach to marketing and an interdisciplinary agenda combining tourism, marketing, and organization studies, we suggest a holistic and grounded approach to multiperspective destination discussion. We therefore identify four different approaches to tourism destinations: (1) economic geography–oriented, (2) marketing management–oriented, (3) customer-oriented, and (4) cultural. We define destination as a set of institutions and actors located in a physical or a virtual space where marketing-related transactions and activities take place challenging the traditional production–consumption dichotomy.

Keywords
tourism destination, production, consumption, market, cultural approach

Introduction: Destination as the Unit of Analysis in Tourism

Tourism is about places and spaces that are embedded in cultures, economies, and social lives of communities. In tourism, production, consumption, and experiential characteristics become interconnected in a given location. The complex processes of tourism production and consumption depend on destinations, be they a single community and its surroundings, a region, or a country (see, e.g., Ateljevic 2000; Crouch 1999; Gnoth 2007; Pritchard and Morgan 2001; Rojek and Urry 1997; Urry 1990.).

Haywood (1986, p. 155) noted that little attention has been given to the identification of the most appropriate unit of analysis in tourism literature, the tourism destination. Several studies (Framke 2002; Lew 1987; Saarinen 2004) noted this significant omission that reflects on the understanding of most tourism phenomena but has remained unresolved. A destination is usually seen as the unit of action where different stakeholders, such as companies, public organizations, hosts, and guests interact through cocreation of experiences. In terms of strategic marketing planning and brand management, it is important to define the nature of a tourism destination in its depth and breadth and, thereby, to build the right preconditions for successful destination-level marketing. In tourism industry, it might be worth moving from oversimplifying image work and implementation of one-sided managerial tactics toward a long-term sociocultural analysis of this multiactor and multidimensional task. Whether building a destination-wide brand, constructing local geographies, or promoting cooperation among different stakeholders in the same region, the meaning of the term tourism destination must be understood.

In tourism studies, destinations have been studied from several perspectives. One of the most frequently cited researchers is Lew (1987), who suggested that tourist attractions, or destinations, can be addressed with a framework of ideographic, organizational, and/or tourist cognition–based features. Ideographically, tourist attractions are framed on the basis of their material presence, both natural (such as mountains) and human (such as built facilities). From an organizational perspective, tourist attractions are emphasized on their spatial, temporal, and capacity character, that is, more or less on the basis of scale and scope. Lew also

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points out that the organizational approach focuses on the linkages between attractions themselves and their images. The third major approach to the study of tourist attractions in Lew’s categorization is the cognitive perspective. It underlines the tourist’s perceptions, feelings, actions, and experiences while in a tourist attraction. In particular, the sense of security or risk, motives, degree of participation, and the level of authenticity stress the behavioral and phenomenological side in understanding tourist attractions.

Despite being based on an extensive literature review and calling for cross-perspective measures, Lew’s framework falls short on a number of fronts. Lew does not take into account the layered nature of tourism products and the fact that they consist of many kinds of attractions. Lew also ignores the different dimensions of tourism products from the customer’s viewpoint, as he limits the customer’s experience to taking place only during the time spent in the tourist attraction, not before and after the visit. Furthermore, his idea of an attraction is too narrow, as it disconnects tourism and touristic places from people’s everyday life (see Larsen, Urry, and Axhausen 2007). Finally, although Lew talks about the coexistence of the three features, the framework does not enable that to take place.

In the early 2000s, a Scandinavian researcher, Framke (2002), had stated that the term destination is frequently used, and it is seen at least as a locality, a production system, an information system, or a composition of services. Framke identifies two distinct forms of thought, one that approaches destinations from a business perspective and one that prefers a more sociocultural premise in defining the tourism destination. However, he fails to refer specific discussions, leaving the categorization somewhat short, albeit brief. His objective is not so much to combine the sociological and economical approaches in tourism research than to analyze to what extent the destination definitions comment on the geographical boundaries of destinations and their content, the interfirm cooperative imperatives within them, and on the tourist’s behavior. Framke goes on to draw the conclusion that “the sum of interests, activities, facilities, infrastructure and attractions create the identity of a place—the destination” (p. 105). To him, destination is a touristic identity of a place. Interestingly, he encourages us to use the term only in relation to marketing.

We are inspired by Framke’s (2002) dichotomous framework but wish to go further in identifying the diverse destination discussions. We take a deeper look at the theoretical, philosophical, and epistemological assumptions veiling not only Framke’s categorizations but also other destination definitions. Informed by the cultural approach to marketing (e.g., Brown 1993; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Moisander and Valtonen 2006; Venkatesh and Peñaloza 2006) and the interdisciplinary lenses that combine tourism, marketing, and organization studies, we suggest a more holistic and grounded approach to multiperspective destination discussion. We therefore believe that an understanding of tourism destination as a concept and, in parallel, as a dynamic structure lies beyond either the economic or the sociological agenda. Our aim is to emphasize that both business-oriented and sociocultural perspectives should be taken into consideration in order to understand the complex concept of tourism destination (see, e.g., Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Harvey 1989; Lyotard 1985; Moisander and Valtonen 2006).

In addition, we reconsider Framke’s dualist perspective with the help of a recently accelerated debate on the breaking of the traditional production–consumption dichotomy (see Ateljevic 2000; Firat and Schultz 1997; Shaw and Williams 2004). By reflecting the destination definitions on their wider societal and political contexts, we hope to contribute to Framke’s call for further research and particularly conceptual debate on tourism destinations.

This study was not intended to be a thorough review. Rather, the current study adopts an analytical approach (see Li and Petrick 2008; Ritchie 1996). We use a selected, but representative, body of literature and focus on different theoretical approaches. As Li and Petrick (2008, p. 236) put it, our method is an overview, not a review of the literature. The discussion is therefore more subjective and aims to synthesize different views on destination literature. In their analysis, Li and Petrick (2008) wished to provide better direction for future research in tourism marketing. We aim to provide an alternative view on tourism destination studies in general.

The structure of the article is based on the idea of shifting from a tunnel vision to more holistic views. First, we review some of the most common ways of seeing tourism destinations in tourism research and map the field by naming and grouping the different conventional ideas. Then we introduce an alternative view to destinations grounded in cultural geography and the cultural approach to marketing that forms our cultural critique. Finally, we consider some avenues for upcoming discussions and suggest business implications for destination development.

Conventional Views of Tourism Destinations

Economic Geography–Oriented Research

Owing to the emphasis on geography-oriented research in tourism studies, destinations are traditionally regarded as defined geographical areas, such as country, island, or town (Burkart and Medlik 1974; Davidson and Maitland 1997). For instance, Medlik and Middleton (1973) suggested that the destination product consists of five elements: destination attractions, destination facilities, accessibility, images, and price. This “elements model” has been the most popular way of seeing tourism destinations. The wide acceptance of this travelling-oriented approach to tourism destinations can probably be explained by the idea that if people do not travel from A to B, the provision of different kinds of services is pointless.
and Clarke 2001), for instance, the product is defined as a model of total tourist product (Middleton 1994; Middleton to meet the needs of tourists (Cooper et al. 2005). In the therefore agglomerations of facilities and services designed to obtain benefits that meet their own goals. Destinations are produces services and tourists go on to buy them in order to component models share the view that the service provider that make up a complete, layered product. These components have inspired tourism marketing management literature. In particular, models drawn from an “augmented tourism approaches are widely inspired by the marketing management paradigm (see Kotler, Bowen, and Makens 1999; Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993). According to this view, a destination is considered to be a traditional commodity product. In particular, models drawn from an “augmented product” with different layers (Kotler, 1988; Levitt, 1980) have inspired tourism marketing management literature. In these approaches, the tourism product consists of separate components that make up a complete, layered product. These component models share the view that the service provider produces services and tourists go on to buy them in order to obtain benefits that meet their own goals. Destinations are therefore agglomerations of facilities and services designed to meet the needs of tourists (Cooper et al. 2005). In the model of total tourist product (Middleton 1994; Middleton and Clarke 2001), for instance, the product is defined as a package of tangible and intangible components based on a set of activities at the destination. The package describes an overall customer journey, but deals mainly with tourism companies, and the customer perceives it as an experience, available at a price.

Buhalis (2000) described tourism destinations as amalgams of tourism products offering an integrated experience to consumers. He argues that a destination can also be a perceptual concept, which can be interpreted subjectively by consumers depending on their travel itinerary, cultural and educational background, purpose of visit, and past experience. He thereby defines destination as a geographical region that is considered by visitors—instead of maps and/or political decisions—as a unique entity (see also Gunn 1988). The destination is often given identity by its brand name, creating an image of it in customers’ minds. Buhalis, however, emphasizes the marketing and planning decision making taking place in destination management organizations that have the power and resources to meet the strategic objectives set. A tourist has therefore a very limited power to influence his or her own experience.

One of the most cited and discussed is the model of the generic tourism product presented by Smith (1994), which can also be extended to mean a whole destination as a tourism product. Smith’s model describes how various resources, facilities, services, and other “inputs” from the destination can produce experiential “outputs” for tourists, that is, added value and benefits. Numerous authors (see, e.g., Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith 2000) have, however, stated that tourism is more than just a series of inputs. It is also notable that tourism products extend to outcomes as well. More importantly, the model also fails to recognize the complex processes of the supply–demand system. The model, for instance, lacks the role of human experience (Komppula 2005), as the destination is seen through the eyes of management (Garcia-Rosell et al. 2007).

Gunn’s (1988) model of the tourism system is an early representative emphasizing the touristic experience. He refers to the destination as a tourism product that denotes a complex consumptive experience resulting from the process where tourists use multiple travel services such as information, transportation, and accommodation during their visit. Gunn’s (1988) perspective on destinations and attractions recognizes beautiful nature, multiple routes, wilderness, and historical sites as “groups of things to see and do,” that is, the destination zone (pp. 125, 192). Ritchie and Crouch (2000) also emphasize the role of experience in a tourism product. While agreeing that the actual product in tourism is the destination experience, we however consider that their model fails to reach the level of genuine sociocultural relationships, and the processes and practices that they entail.

Definitions of tourism destination seem to relate to searching for the breadth and depth of tourism products (Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith 2000) as it has been noted that the

Figure 1. An economic geography–oriented approach to destinations
tourism system cannot be operated with models designed for manufacturing of goods. Hence, new models have been created. To Seaton and Bennett (1996, pp. 350-52), destination appears as a complex and unique sociocultural entity that is both physical and intangible. Destinations not only exist physically but also mentally, in the minds of tourists and potential tourists. Thus, it is important to observe the relationship between what genuinely exists and what is merely thought to exist. Although destinations may appear appropriately defined when assessing the complexity of the phenomenon, the available multiple marketing techniques offered by Seaton and Bennett are insufficient to manage and/or promote them.

In marketing management, destination marketing is often reduced to managerial checklists using, for example, a manufacturing industries–related marketing tool, the 4 Ps (Kotler, 1988), which is turned into a destination marketing mix (Pender 1999). Following traditional economic theory (see, e.g., Bagozzi 1986), destination marketing strategies are being planned and executed to create exchanges with target groups that satisfy customer and organizational objectives. Vargo and Lusch (2004, 2006) describe this view as goods-dominant logic of marketing that has dominated marketing science for the past several decades. The essence of this view is to market a destination (in its own right) to faceless tourist masses.

Figure 2 suggests that the traditional tourism destination definition used in (destination) business management, destination-bound actions are most often seen as a managerial process aimed at managing natural and man-made resources efficiently and successfully, albeit from a technical perspective. The decision-making process can be described as a straightforward action taking place inside tourism businesses (or a single destination management organization). The role of tourists is more or less to enter and leave the area with or without the benefits sought. Tourists are rarely considered explicitly while planning destinations, and when they are considered, an overgeneralized view is often taken (such as “the British,” “the Japanese, or “the leisure” tourists). The model neglects the social aspect in both consumption and production. Although it is worth mentioning that the illustration is to some extent exaggerated, it nevertheless indicates the key assumptions veiling the traditional modernist idea of tourism destination.

The Customer-Oriented Research

The special nature of tourism products has been widely recognized, and models that treat them as goods manufactured on a conveyor belt, or only slightly more complex, have been challenged. The views of services marketing literature (e.g., Grönroos 1993; Gummesson 1992) were acknowledged by Lumsdon (1997), who argued that in tourism, the core benefits and service interaction dominate and they therefore constitute a tourism offering. This can be defined as a combination of services that delivers primarily intangible, sensual, and psychological benefits but also includes some tangible elements. For example, a modification of “a servicescape” by Bitner (1992), an experiencescape (e.g., Mossberg 2007; O’Dell 2005), refers to the physical environment surrounding a service encounter taking place in a tourism destination or an attraction. However, the destination is reduced down as a service environment facilitating the experience.

The services marketing perspective is not distinct from a model discussed by Haathi and Komppula (2006; see also Komppula 2005; Komppula and Boxberg 2002). In the model, customer value is placed at the core of the tourism product. The service concept therefore asks what kind of value the customer is expecting. The second circle focuses on the creation of prerequisites for this experience through distinct service modules often representing services provided by different service providers. In total, these modules form the service system, the extended, customer-oriented product with its special features such as image, place, service staff, and hospitality. This view acknowledges that service providers facilitate an experience for the customers but cannot deliver it. Hence, it concentrates on “marketing (a destination) to” specific customers (see Vargo and Lusch, 2006).

The third strong argument in the tourism destination debate, the one using a services marketing approach, can be implanted into the following illustration (see Figure 3). Although a significant difference can be seen between the manager-oriented and customer-oriented approaches in a modeling sense, philosophically and epistemologically that is not quite the case. The history of conventional destination definitions is characterized by endless models, and the constant renewing of the relics of the modernist approach, such as traditional supply–demand dichotomies and rigid marketer–consumer relationships (see Firat and Venkatesh 1995). The models with their neutralizing packages and mixtures of resources, activities, and experiences—although to some extent informative—fail to uncover the “engine” that powers the destinations, that is, the dynamic processes and practices that take place between the context-bound interconnected actors.
The customer-oriented approach considers a tourist on the one hand as a passive consumer when he or she is an object of the actions taken by the service provider and his or her goods and services. On the other hand, the tourist as a customer is understood as a participative, active, economically rational decision maker in his or her own right, as a self-interested actor who desires wealth, avoids unnecessary labor, and has the ability to make judgments based on rational choices (e.g., Moisander and Valtonen 2006). Nevertheless, the tourist appears as a behaviorally consistent, autonomous agent whose actions are completely explainable and thus predictable (see Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995). The customer orientation is to a great extent illusory, with the production process mostly executed from the manager’s perspective. The model concentrates on value creation (see, e.g., Grönroos 2008; Prahalad 2004) and the experiences of individual customers and focuses on his or her cognitive process (see, e.g., Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith 2000). These authors represent the customer as an individual visiting places according to his or her needs and wants. In doing so, individuals fail to capture the social nature of the places, and the spatiality of experience (see, e.g., Rojek and Urry 1997; Urry 1990). Hence, the tourist’s experience is seen as individual, where the communality plays a minor role (cf. Arnould and Price 1993; Cova 1997).

Furthermore, only the exchange value or use value of the products is usually taken into account. For example, recent debate in marketing literature concerning a paradigm shift toward a new service-dominant logic by Vargo and Lusch (2004, 2006) has been criticized for ignoring the meanings and sign value in production and consumption (Venkatesh and Peñaloza 2006). In tourism literature, service-dominant (S-D) logic (in addition to relationship marketing) is still almost nonexistent (Li and Petrick 2008). S-D logic sees the customer as a cocreator with whom the service process is executed. In their recent modifications of the S-D logic, Vargo and Lusch (2008) emphasized the experiential (phenomenological) nature of value. In doing so, they refer to consumer culture theory, where meanings are considered to capture the cultural context (Arnould 2006; Vargo and Lusch 2008).

Although meaning-intensive production via symbolic and sign-based value becomes more and more emphasized (Harvey 1989; Lash and Urry 1994; Venkatesh 1999; see also Baudrillard 1981), it has to a great extent been left in the shadows in the literature. As multiple brands, such as destinations, compete against each other in the global tourism market, the cognitive, aesthetic, and experiential features of production and consumption come into focus. Brand experience and decision making of tourists is widely grounded in emotions and the symbolic elements of the products. It is the complex combination of material and nonmaterial, however, that counts (Lash and Urry 1994, p. 15). When concentrating on the sign value that connects to the identity work of the customer, it therefore becomes possible to stress the socio-political relations of production and consumption and, thus, help to understand the construction of experience.

Snepenger et al. (2004, 2007) take the customer orientation approach further by indicating places as storehouses of meanings that capture value in use and frame expectations for experience. The places shared by tourists and residents can be viewed as a social communication system that offers insights into the value of experiences and the symbolic nature of places. Tourists and residents define the meaning of places by being in those places, by consuming, and by interacting with others in the same place.

Pritchard and Morgan (2001, p. 177) state that the representations used in destination marketing are not value-free expressions of a place’s identity—instead, they are the culmination of historical, social, economic, and political processes and reveal much about the social construction of space, cultural change, identity, and discourse. With this view in mind, we call for rethinking of the modernist approach when defining destination, which has been based mainly on traditional management and marketing theories with an emphasis on customer satisfaction (Kotler 1988) as well as economic transactions (e.g., Hunt 1991).

**An Alternative View: Sociocultural Construction of Destination**

Frustrated by the widely spread thinking of modern destination marketing management, Ringer (1998, p. 2) called in his...
inspirational book for a broader perspective to tourism destinations. The spatial and temporal dimensions of places are emphasized and in tourism, production, consumption, and the host community are intertwined (see García-Rosell et al. 2007; Rojek and Urry 1997). The key idea in the constructionist nature of production culture, consumer culture, and local culture (see Garcia-Rosell et al. 2007; Shaw and Williams 2004) is that they are all based on representation (Ateljevic 2000; Pritchard and Morgan 2001). By analyzing the representations of production and consumption of tourism destinations, it is possible to reach beyond the dualistic framing of economy and culture and, thus, the monetary act of purchase. Producers and consumers intercommunicate in the various contexts they create and reproduce, and thereby construct commonsense understanding (Ateljevic 2000; du Gay et al. 1997; Pritchard and Morgan 2001).

In cultural geography, it has been identified that destinations are not stable, closed systems but are under constant negotiation and renegotiation that connect to wider discursive frameworks and historical systems (see Ringer 1998; Saarinen 1998, 2001; Shaw and Williams 2004; Shields 1991). Traditional modernist ideas usually consider destinations as immune and passive elements of tourism in which changes “just seem to happen” as a result of some abstract, mainly external causes (see, e.g., Butler 1980). After the spatial turn in geography, however, destinations have become understood as socioculturally constructed spaces that actively shape their own future (see, e.g., Franklin and Crang 2001; Pritchard and Morgan 2001; Saarinen 2001, 2004; Shields 1991).

This sociologically grounded perspective suggests that places and spaces are the result of social practice and, thus, processual structures of meanings and values rather than merely physical essences (see, e.g., Framke 2002; MacCannell 1976/1999; Urry 1990). This has brought lots of new ideas to the debate on destinations. Indeed, the sociology of tourism (Urry 2003) has had an enormous impact on the development of new approaches to tourism that go beyond strictly economic issues.

For instance, Saarinen (2001, 2004) identified two intertwined discourses relating to the identity of a tourism destination in order to criticize the traditional evolutionary, linear, and ahistorical models of tourism development: the discourse of development and the discourse of region. Far from universal and given, Saarinen (2001, 2004) considers the tourism destination as a dynamic and historical–spatial unit that evolves over time and space through certain discourses and discursive practices. Thus destinations are not “out there” (Allen, Massey, and Cochrane 1998, p. 2), but they are produced and reproduced through combinations of social, cultural, political, and economic relationships (Saarinen 2001, pp. 34-35).

Bærenholdt et al. (2004) took a new perspective to the production processes of tourism. They approached tourism as a social and cultural practice. Unlike the modernist view, they stated that in order to understand touristic places, both industry-based analysis and tourist perspective are needed. In addition, there is always something that cannot be reduced down to material and foreseeable design processes. Places therefore receive their meaning only through concrete production and consumption processes that connect people to the world by contextualizing their experiences. When taken to a level of a concrete tourism destination and reflected on destination or brand development, this calls for holistic planning and invites different parties to participate in the process. It also stresses reflexively the current techniques of destination development. Baerenholdt et al. (2004) therefore suggested that tourism studies should pay attention to practising and performing, and that the production and consumption practices create spatiality (see also Ateljevic 2000; Crang 1997; Edensor 2001; Franklin and Crang 2001; Perkins and Thorns 2001).

An interesting and appealing approach to tourism destinations can be adopted from the marketing discipline, in particular from the cultural approach to marketing (see, e.g., Brown 1993; Firat and Dholakia 2006; Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995; Firat and Schultz 1997; García-Rosell et al. 2007; Moisander and Valtonen 2006; Peñaloza and Venkatesh 2006; Venkatesh and Peñaloza 2006). This perspective suggests that a market is a “set of institutions and actors located in a physical or virtual space where marketing-related transactions and activities take place” (Venkatesh and Peñaloza 2006, p. 136; see also Venkatesh 1999, p. 16). As destinations appear as spaces through which power, identity, meaning, and behavior are constructed, negotiated, and renegotiated according to sociocultural dynamics (see, e.g., Pritchard and Morgan 2001), we find this approach truly useful in understanding tourism destinations in their contextual completeness. The cultural approach to markets therefore takes a wider perspective to destinations, one that goes beyond single firm-based models. In this sense, destinations are about market actors and market activities, and moreover, the destination is a construction that takes distinct discursive forms and practices across various spatial and temporal contexts. Destinations are multicultural and globalized markets where various actors produce, maintain, negotiate, and transform meanings while creating destination cultures (see Moisander and Valtonen 2006; Venkatesh and Peñaloza 2006). Destination marketing or branding is therefore not about managerial choices over “the right marketing techniques,” but about understanding the markets in their symbolic, discursive, and process-related nature.

Figure 4 illustrates the cultural approach to markets, although it has to be said that the complexity of the market(s) can never be captured in a single picture. We consider it important to show some key features of tourism destinations from the viewpoint of the market(s), however, particularly compared to the three previous approaches. As the illustration highlights, it is hard to define the boundaries of a
destination. Destinations are being constantly produced and reproduced through complex practices and discourses: to some tourists, tourism companies, local people, and other market actors, the destination may appear totally different in terms of shape, content, and relationships (see Moisander and Valtonen 2006; Venkatesh and Peñaloza 2006). The destination may expand or shrink, and it may receive deeper or superficial meanings.

Three key characteristics differentiating the alternative approach from the three more conventional ones can be identified in the spirit of postmodern marketing (Firat and Dholakia 2006; Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995). They are (1) the role of a tourist as a producer (blurring the roles of marketers and consumers); (2) the transition from the provision of products toward the creation of potentials and processes that enable experiences in a multicultural, communal, and globalized setting; and (3) fragmentation instead of segmentation. The tourist as a producer indicates the rethinking of subject–object relationships in the production of tourism destinations. Accordingly, market actors are not only individuals with separate and inscribed roles but members of communities taking part in complex and reciprocal “play” of various subjects in contemporary marketplaces (Firat and Dholakia 2006; see also Arnould and Price 1993; García-Rosell et al. 2007). In tourism destinations, marketers also consume and, in reverse, consumers also produce (see Firat and Venkatesh 1995). The customer is the product, and the customer becomes the producer, as he or she is searching for specific products (and meanings) to market their self-images and to (re)produce their own identities in the markets (Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995, pp. 51-52; Firat and Schultz 1997, p. 200; see also Pine and Gilmore 1999).

Hence, rather than being considered as a sole business activity of companies, marketing should be developed into an openly accessible practice. This means that the process can not only be controlled by the manager to serve tourists and their needs. Instead, it is the contemporary producer and consumer communities that construct the markets (García-Rosell et al. 2007). This connects to calls by human geographers (e.g., Ateljevic 2000; Britton 1991; Shaw and Williams 2004) for stepping outside of the production and consumption division. For instance, Ateljevic (2000) claimed that the boundaries between production and consumption—or in cultural–geographical terms, economy and culture—need to be crossed as they are interconnected through reproduction of spatiality and places (see also Pritchard and Morgan, 2001). Ateljevic’s aim is therefore to illustrate the connectedness of tourism with the fabrics of everyday lives and identities and wider social and natural systems and, more importantly, to identify the power structures within capitalism. This raises critical questions about the contemporary tourism destinations, in particular, the roles and positions of different actors.

In relation to the blurring roles of marketers and consumers, the destination is not a fixed and completed entity but a process into which the tourist can “jump in.” This shift from product to process has been discussed in several contexts. In addition to the suggestion by Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh (1995, pp. 51-52; Firat and Schultz 1997, pp. 195-196; Firat and Venkatesh 1995, pp. 245-246; Venkatesh 1999, pp. 12-13) that the consumer is a customizer of the product at each consumptive moment, in tourism studies it has also been underlined that value is not accumulated merely by using the product (visiting the tourist destination) but by the means of more experiential elements, active participation, practicing, and performing (Cragg 1997; Perkins and Thorns 2001; Tarssanen and Kylänen 2006). The success of destinations no longer lies in the bundle of products offered by different service providers to customers but in the competitive processes that enable consumers to immerse themselves into and find the elements that they seek in (re)presenting and (re)producing their fragmented identities (Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995; Firat and Schultz 1997). The consumer has therefore moved from the end of the production process (end user) to the very beginning of it (cocreator). According to the S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2006), the destination is marketed with a tourist.

As the third condition of the market(s), customers cannot be segmented into smaller homogenous target groups. Instead,
markets have to be reconsidered as fragmented. *From segmentation to fragmentation* refers to mobile tourists who want to experience diverse themes, and take various, or even contrasting, roles as consumers and producers and cannot therefore be reduced to generalized targets with predictable, permanent consumption preferences. Tourists are swapping lifestyles and values in order to feel good each moment and are not committed to existing brands (or even destinations; see Firat and Schultz 1997.)

By applying the cultural approach to marketing to tourism destinations, we wish to show that the understanding of tourism destination as a concept and, in parallel, as dynamic, mobile markets lies beyond strict distinction between economic and sociological agendas. When the product combines both the industrial and the consumer markets, the process cannot be viewed as merely a manageable action (Venkatesh and Peñaloza 2006, p. 137). The cultural approach to marketing takes both business-oriented and sociocultural perspectives into account, and therefore helps to break free from the rather aged production and consumption dichotomy (see, e.g., Ateljevic 2000; Firat and Schultz 1997; Shaw and Williams 2004). When destinations are reconsidered as markets with a complex interplay of material, social, and symbolic values and meanings, it also becomes evident that the sociocultural approach does not necessarily lack economic validity or escape the applicability as a sustainable business practice (see also García-Rosell et al. 2007; cf. Apostolopoulos, Leivadi, and Yiannakakis 1996; Framke 2002). Instead of maintaining and reproducing the clumsy and technical supply–demand divisions, the liberating cultural approach to marketing redraws the destination dynamics as a constant production process of equally important market actors who negotiate and renegotiate the destination through discursive practices and practical discourses (see Moisander and Valtonen 2006; Venkatesh and Peñaloza 2006). This helps to narrow the gap between the everyday life of destinations and the vast body of destination marketing management literature. Eventually, this may lead to more sustainable decision making in tourism by encouraging a more inclusive and, thus, more widely accepted process (see Garcia-Rosell et al. 2007).

**Discussion and Implications**

We hope to have discovered alternative routes in order to gain further understanding of the concept and practice of tourism destination. Our aim has not been to rate or choose “the best” solution; neither have we tried to come up with an ultimate, watertight definition for tourism destinations and, thus, a definite answer to the tourism destination debate. We have hopefully produced an advancement of some kind in proportion to the previous categorizations of tourism destinations. Furthermore, we offer this article and, in particular, the cultural approach combining both cultural geography and marketing as an inspiration for further discussion in the field of academic debate as well as business development.

In particular, we hope to encourage researchers and practitioners to ponder the relationship between production and consumption and consider how they become intertwined in the context of tourism destinations. We also suggest that traditional models do not give a sufficient overview of the complexity of tourism destinations—their creation, maintenance, and reformulation. The traditional models have over the years led to exclusion and narrow acceptance in destination development and strategic tourism decision making on local, regional, national, and international levels. Instead, when taking a cultural approach to tourism destinations, depicted in Figure 4, it is possible to reform the process and principles of tourism destination development. By our approach, we have aimed to describe, first, the ongoing change and complexity in operational environment and in interorganizational relationships of tourism, and second, the importance of breaking down the boundaries between modernistic dichotomies, such as economy (production)–culture (consumption) and macro (global networks)–micro (local communities). Third, we wish to discuss a new mindset in destination development. To understand and hence to develop tourism destinations, it is vital to take into account the poly-vocal issues of tourism; the complex relationships between producers, consumers, local people, and authorities; and the symbolic cocreation of tourist experiences based on sign value. When turned to business practices, the cultural approach calls for joint forums and innovative interfaces where different actors can meet each other and activities can interconnect. Furthermore, in these multiperspective forums, it is important to clarify from which perspective each person or instance speaks and what is meant by tourism destinations and their development. In terms of the guiding principles of business development, tourism destinations deal with wider issues than just company-centered strategies or customer orientation.

By switching the emphasis to destination cultures, it is possible to give a more realistic and hands-on picture of the different turns and perspectives taking place in destinations. It also becomes possible to base the destination development tools on firmly grounded theoretical discussions. By taking a cultural approach to tourism destinations, we are able to move beyond a viewpoint that is based strictly on economic issues, with an emphasis either on faceless meeting points of supply and demand or the customers. When it comes to tourists, the cultural approach enables deeper, symbolic–emotional consumption of cultures rather than just meeting their needs. The approach also makes room for local people to participate in the development work of their home region. This becomes even more vital when considering the ever-expanding forms of e-commerce, social media, and “technological branding” of destination, and their unforgiving nature, since Internet and the pervasiveness of multilayered images of destinations makes the image and the destination complicated to manage.
We believe that the cultural approach to marketing adopted in the article as a new paradigm to tourism destination discussion will, in part, enforce the position of marketing science in the nexus of contemporary business, social, and cultural phenomena. Similarly, we consider tourism as a phenomenon and tourism destinations in particular key concepts to understand the complex and abstract conceptualization of the market(s). Instead of just borrowing from other disciplines, tourism research also offers an arena for developing them. Tourism destinations help to understand the complexity of multicultural, global markets on a number of fronts. They will potentially challenge conventional firm–employee relations, the interfirm competitive models of behavior in industry, and the cocreation of consumer–producer value in service industries. On the other hand, tourism is a valuable context in marketing research when trying to understand wider societal and political phenomena. This helps to understand (1) the borders of the product, (2) the responsibilities of different organizations and individuals, and (3) the interaction between the market actors.

This article answers to the lack of conceptual papers in tourism marketing literature (see Li and Petrick 2008), although it has its limitations. The study was not a systematic literature review and there is possibility that important contributions into the destination literature were omitted. Nevertheless, the authors hope that the study will encourage new research and more sustainable practices in destination development and management.

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**References**


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