

# THE NEW FRONTIERS OF TOURISM: SPACE

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In order to give a general outline of Space Tourism, we have to consider and analyse all the social, psychological and economic aspects that play an important role in the touristic phenomenon in general. We will get to understand and demonstrate that Space Tourism constitutes a market on its own and has got few things in common with other typologies of tourism.

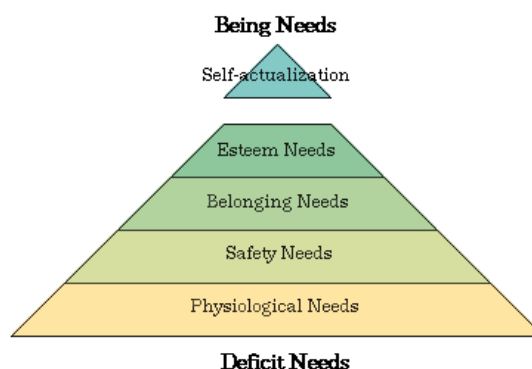
During the XIX century, four tradesmen from Sacramento challenged all critics to create an apparently impossible project, the important railway through Sierra Nevada. Nowadays, this kind of technology is of every day life use.

Lindeberg dared fly alone on his monoplane, winning the Orteig Prize.

Kubrik created the Space myth with his film “*2001: Space Odyssey*”.

Which are times and steps for innovation? Who are the customers crowding tour operators booking lists (nearly full)?. And which are their motivations, their hidden unconscious desires? Nowadays, orbital, suborbital, zeroG, Mig 25 and 29 flights, terrestrial activities, the Shuttle or Soyuz departure sightseeing are actually travel catalogues products, but we have to analyse which are the processes influencing the customer to choose this or that typology of travel in general.

Travels purchasing is influenced not only by pre-conditioning factors, such as income and spare time<sup>1</sup>, but also by *stimuli* which appear through customer’s different inborn needs. These needs interact and are interrelated to each other so it is really difficult to classify them because of their innumerable shades. A great help on this topic is surely given by Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (*picture 1*), a theory based on sociological studies on various areas of human behaviour. Maslow supposes that a hierarchic order exists among individual and social needs, which form a pyramid composed by 5 levels.



*Picture 1*

<sup>1</sup> Dumazieder J., *Sociologia del tempo libero*, trad. it. Milano, F. Angeli, 1985.

Man must satisfy each need in turn, starting with the first, which deals with the most obvious needs for survival itself. Only when the lower order needs of physical and emotional well-being are satisfied, man is concerned with the higher order needs of influence and personal development. Conversely, if the things that satisfy his lower order needs are swept away, he is no longer concerned about the maintenance of his higher order needs. Anyway, Maslow's empiric theory encounters a lot of problems if applied to the touristic phenomenon: there are needs which can be satisfied also by tourism, but proper "touristic needs" does not exist. However, this diagram demonstrates that combining biological with social needs doesn't bar the possibility that man can be driven at the same time by more than one kind of needs.

Work, stress, routine or the need of regaining oneself serenity often induce the modern traveller to run away towards more or less far-away destinations or to choose kinds of tourism in order to restore his inner balance. It is evident, then, that travellers can be motivated by physiological and physical needs, too.

At the same time, social factors have a relevant role. Every man is more or less influenced in actions by other people, so considering the customer as an entity on his own and restricting the study only to a research of inner individual needs are the wrong ways to wrong results<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, imitation and ostentation seem to be the leading factors in the choice of a travel or a touristic typology, just as interpersonal relationships are the leading factors to social life. Relatives' suggestions or friends' advices, defined "contagion advertising" by Katona, are considered more reliable sources than commercial ones: they are regarded as close and safe by customers and they correspond to indispensable influences for the tourist-to-be, who unconsciously tends to assert his *status*. In Marketing these influences are defined *Social Communications* because they're aseptic and without any interest.

Taking into account this context, Edward Mayo distinguishes the potential tourists between an *Optimizer* and a *Satisficer*<sup>3</sup>. The *Optimizer* tourist is characterized by an insecure behaviour, an active and careful search of informations and consequently longer times for the decision; the *Satisficer* tourist has the opposite characteristics.

Developing the analysis of the aims which qualify the experience as a touristic one, Cohen was the first to begin a sistematic study on the triple tipology of the tourist, marking his different choices of travel, organization of space and way of living. The *vacationers* simply look for a change apart from any new element: they move from the will of breaking everyday life routine, yet preferring static characteristics. The *sightseers*, on the other hand, are always looking for novelties, their characteristic are more dynamic

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<sup>2</sup> Fabris G., *La Comunicazione Pubblicitaria*, Milano, F. Angeli, 1968 in G. Dall'ara, *Perché le persone vanno in vacanza*, Milano, F. Angeli, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Mayo E. e Jarvis L., *The Psychology of Leisure Travel*, Boston, 1981.

and they are orientated to a *multi-dimensional* travel. During their travel experiences they expect to live different situations, they emphasize more the trip than their stay, giving more importance to the movement in the tourist role, from which they are satisfied<sup>4</sup>. Taking into account these two variables, change and novelty, the *sightseer* can also be classified as an organized mass tourist or an individual mass tourist. The first one keeps staying confined in his *environmental bubble*, he looks for comforts, just as the *vacationer*, but also for novelty; on the other hand, the individual mass tourist has got a partial control on his own time and route, with a partially planned journey but without being linked to any group. The last Cohen's type of tourist is the *drifter* which constitutes the non-institutional area of tourism. The *drifter* tends to fasten from mass touristic routes, looking for comfortable accommodations and safe transports. This differentiation is useful to understand the various levels of touristic organization and institutionalization, which is strictly connected to customer acceptance and allowance of the new, extraordinary and alien components that the touristic experience can face.

A different point of view is given by the concept of the *optimal stimulation level*: the individual, choosing a certain type of travel, would be influenced by the difference he achieves between the qualitative-quantitative stimulations of his everyday life and the level of stimuli he thinks as optimal. However, there are two forces simultaneously acting, so it could be possible that, not only in different travels, but also during the same experience, the individual moves from a search for psychological reward, due to the perception of a hypo-stimulated life, to the need to avoid any stimulus, escaping from the frantic routine.

The other social factors that we have to mention are age and education, which influence the typology of chosen vacation, job, which is strictly related to income, and culture. Anthropologists represent tourism as a phenomenon moving from cultural motivations and, at the same time, as a powerful factor of cultural mutation: it is a determinant and basic part of the desires of man, who acquires most of the impulses he is given, adapting to his environment<sup>5</sup>. This mutable reality can condition his choices of vacation, united with his perception of it<sup>6</sup>. In fact, the studies of psychological factors intervening in the choice of the tourist are the natural completion of the social sphere influences, because they aim to analyse the individual within his inner processes<sup>7</sup>.

Psychological motivations are the converging elements to the structuration of the travel decision, the spring of the choice; then, the perspectives, what the tourist expects the travel to be, act as the final moment in the process of the decision. The perspectives reveal those psychological motivations becoming

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<sup>4</sup> Costa N., *Sociologia del Turismo*, Milano, Cooperativa Libreria I.U.L.M., 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Savelli A., *Sociologia del turismo*, Milano, F. Angeli, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Markin defines it as "the complex process with which people select, organize and interpret sensorial *stimuli* in order to reach a representation of the world full of meaning".

<sup>7</sup> Sessa A., *Elementi di Sociologia e Psicologia del Turismo* (4<sup>a</sup> ristampa), Roma, C.L.I.T.T., 1996.

expectations for the future. Summing up, already *lived experiences* influence man's behaviour in his psychological motivations, conditioning his choices, which could change into habits. Moreover, *acquired experiences* contribute on the evaluation of the typology of tourism because strictly connected to *aptitudes*, which are generalized points of view influencing on personal perceptions and behaviour in a long period. In general, motivations are forces, needs or attitudes forming an inner state, not necessarily conscient, pushing man to behave in different ways.

A different kind of approach to this subject and analysis is Crompton's. He underlines that motivations always start from individual consciousness, but then they are influenced by his external environment adaptation. So, he distinguishes these two categories of factors into *push*, the psychological ones, concerning the general desire to travel, and *pull*, which concern the choice of the typology of travel.

Several changes of life style, the easyness of interpersonal relationships, better social and economic conditions, the influence of new ideas and values, quick transports in time and space contributed to create new forms of social life, more used to change. Consequently, the present-day motivational studies tend to be really important to analyse all the factors acting in a choice. Researches on customer behaviour are widening to new perspectives, through the new combination of different subjects, such as literary critics, ethnographic studies, cultural anthropology, history, semiotics, phenomenology, aesthetics and psychoanalysis. Lots of these routes are still unexplored and all that we know is borrowed from economic, psychological and sociological fields, which turn into a unique multi-disciplinal area.

Considering the touristic phenomenon in general, it was born as a luxury good and only later, in the period after the Second World War, it became a normal good. Nowadays, touristic services have high elasticity, growing proportionally to income.

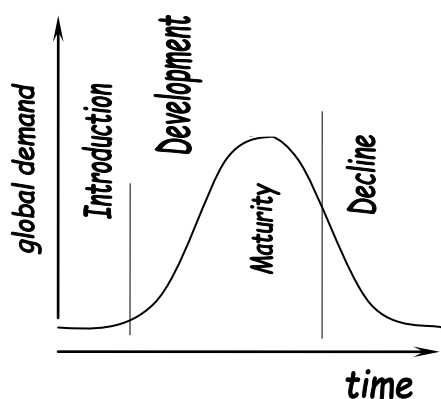
The connexion between touristic demand and income dynamics changed a lot: it isn't anymore the alternative between doing or not the travel, yet, how much luxurious you choose it<sup>8</sup>.

However, we are not able to easily describe, limit or restrict the touristic system, actually conceived as a real industry, because of its trasversality, its several evolutions and its interactions with other sectors, such as production or services, strictly connected with territory and a referring target<sup>9</sup>. Thus, using the theory of the non-uniformity of the life cycle of a touristic product (*picture 2*), Space Tourism can't anymore be considered as a part of Adventure Tourism, but as a niche tourism on its own, meeting the different needs of the potential tourists, attracted by this kind of tourism.

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<sup>8</sup> Dall'ara G., *Perché le persone vanno in vacanza*, Milano, F. Angeli, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Peroni G., *Il Marketing Turistico*, Milano, F. Angeli, 1989.



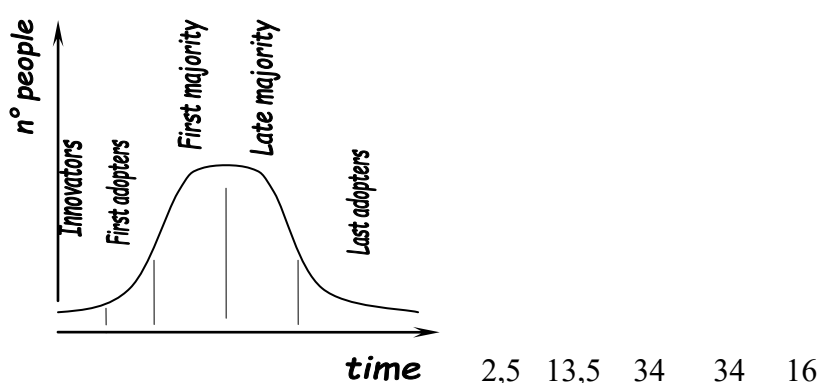
Picture 2

Space Tourism is well distincted (it is a touristic typology easily recognizable and individuabile) and, thanks to its novelty, to the product complexity and to the lack of any kind of similar tourism typologies (it is unique), it tends to be diversified in its internal (it is possible to try different types of experiences), which is the essential condition to the *customers satisfaction*.

All these characteristics have already created worldwide a high and well-defined demand, presenting long waiting lists, such as the *Moon Book*, opened since 1860 by Thomas Cook.

The customer dispositions to new ideas, new behaviours and new products correspond to *innovativity*: how an individual can adopt a novelty before the other members of the social system he lives in. *Innovativity* is linked to the individual predisposition level to novelty, apart from its spreading among his community. *Innovativity* is the ammount of favourable informations an individual needs before accepting the adoption risks.

The *innovators* are curious and active adventurers, driven by the desire for novelty. They correspond to the *molecular leaders* and they prime the development phase, which follows the introduction one.



Picture 3

Rogers' curve (*picture 3*), which is the curve of adoption of a product or a service, analyses the current world population referring to the industrialized areas. These individuals, the *innovators* correspond to the 2,5% of the whole, that means 30.000.000 people, who are going to be joined by the *first adopters* (the 13,5%, almost 162.000.000) before the two thousand and twelve.

This map outlines an unbelievable touristic market from every point of view, especially from the economic one: in facts, these adventurers correspond only to the 16% of the whole considered sample.

### Conclusions

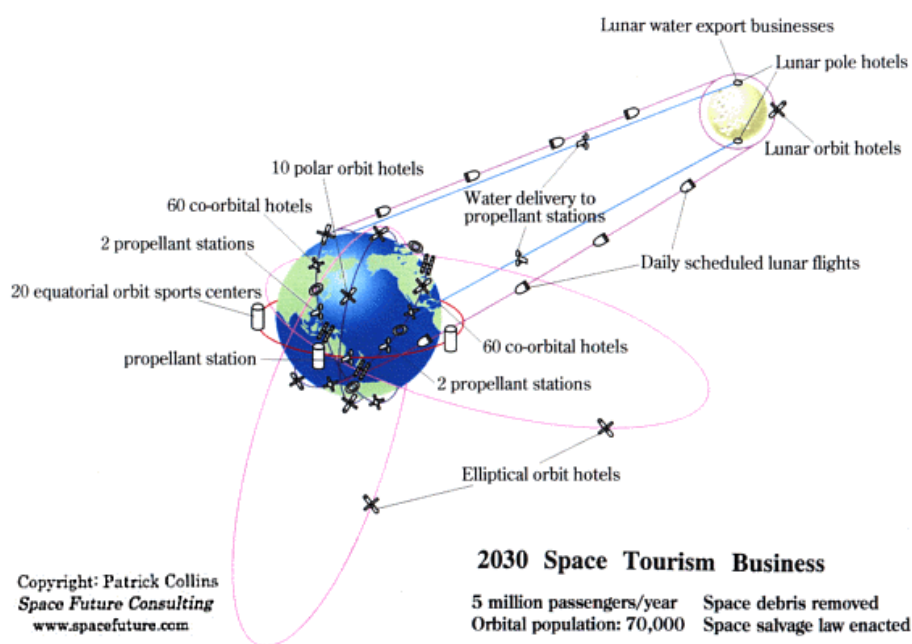
We are not talking about either visionary science fiction or imaginary and unrealizable scenes. In Continental Europe, mass-media and public opinion reveal an insufficient and sceptical attention to this phenomenon, caused by a cultural gap which prevent the majority to see it as a new frontier, both in terms of evolution and business.

A common approach tends to belittle its entity, undervaluing the huge possibilities of development of this great niche market, that every day gets bigger, being esponentially supported.

Because of this short-sighted mentality, linked to the past, there still aren't active managers, universities and institutions acting in order to make the public aware in Europe. It seems unbelievable that, for example, University "La Sapienza" in Rome can't find enterprises, managers or financiers for the first international master in Space Tourism: although the common consent of the accademic italian world, the project was stopped one year ago.

In the mean time, Tour Operator's waiting lists are full.

Only 300 lucky people have already tried the excitement of an orbital flight, but they are supposed to become twenty milion in 2030, as Patrick Collins affirms<sup>10</sup>.



<sup>10</sup> P. Collins, "Space Activities, Space Tourism and Economic Growth", Proceedings of 2nd International Symposium on Space Travel, Bremen, 1999.

Russia already started a liberalization and occidentalization process, opening the casket of its military secrets, handed down by the Cold War. Now they are giving man a concrete possibility and we have to thank them if we can be the eyewitnesses of this new tourism frontier, a market in its introduction phase. Just as the general touristic phenomenon turns from an elite privilege into a mass market, it is important and hoped that Space Tourism could soon get rid of its diffident halo in order to conquer the great public.

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