Exploring Travel Experience Design through Lokalii: How can a Travel App Create Memorable Experiences?

By Ida Marie Helgetveit

Keywords: experience design, Lokalii, local experiences, mobile usability, tourism.

Abstract

The demand for local experiences is increasing. Travel trends focus on the discovery of the 'unique', and travellers want to locate the experiences that make a trip memorable. With smartphones, locating information requires little effort. This paper seeks to explore the theory of experience design in tourism through an app for local experiences, Lokalii. Different aspects of both the theory and the app are put forward, to see how a travel app can help create memorable experiences. This paper aims at getting to know travelers' needs and wishes when travelling.
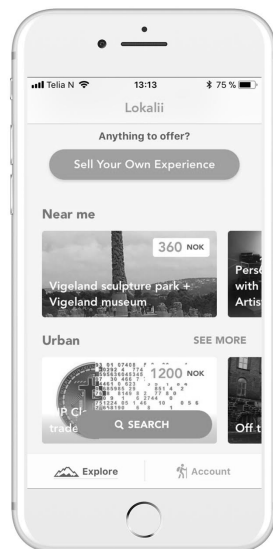
Fig. 1 – How the Lokalii app looks when users first opens it (Lokalii AS, 2017)

Introduction

Experience design in tourism is a theoretical approach which can potentially change how tourists experience a journey. The theory involves different aspects, which can initially change how destinations offer their experiences. During this paper, destinations are used to describe both cities and places, and it is also being used by tourism agencies. In many cases, the theory of experience design in tourism can be too theoretical. It implies, in some cases, that it can be difficult for destinations to know how to implement the theory for their specific destination. This paper seeks to contextualise the theory and apply it to a particular case of Lokalii. Lokalii is an app offered by the Norwegian company. This app consists of the experiences for tourists and locals provided by private individuals. The app works as a marketplace for experiences. The experiences range from travelling down the Akerselva River in an inflatable boat to learning how to brew beer. All experiences typically involve users getting to meet a local, and experience what the locals do in their city or town. Lokalii offers around 450 different experiences in the app (an interview with P. Ruhi, June 21, 2017). In 2014, 61 600 travel apps could be found in the App Store. In Google Play there were 64 100 travel apps. Together, these apps represented 5 percent of the total apps offered (Sommer, 2015). Based on this, travellers have a big range of possible apps to choose from, which probably act as good sources of varied information. This paper will go through a short background for travel trends and apps, with some points from mobile usability. The theory of experience design in tourism will be mapped out and connected to Lokalii. A short analysis has been conducted to highlight points about travelling in Norway in addition to different aspects of Lokalii.
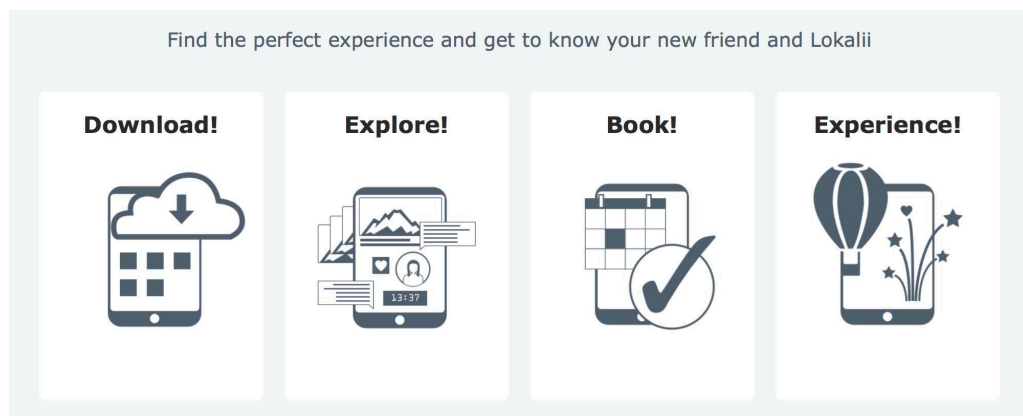

Fig. 2 - Main functions of Lokalii (Lokalii, 2017)

Travel Trends and Apps

The Oxford Dictionary defines a tourist as "a person who is travelling or visiting a place for pleasure" (Tourist, n.d.). In the 1950s it was said that one could give over 550 definitions of travellers. The attempt to define the term has been developed throughout the years. These efforts have contained information that a tourist must travel at least 50 or 100 miles from his or her home, stay overnight, etc. (Hunt & Layne, 1991, pp. 7–9). In 2016, it was estimated that six trends would drive the global tourism industry. These were: (1) strength of the Chinese market, (2) travellers' eagerness to unplug, (3) the discovery of unique places, (4) fewer barriers to travel, (5) millennials are looking for adventure, and (6) staycation (Fuggle, 2015). It was also pointed out that travellers tend to spend more money, and that travel, in general, is considered to be a part of wellbeing. Travelers seek new experiences, and they are super connected. The third, fifth and sixth trends are consistent with what Lokalii offers. It is because the discovery of unique places is something that travellers can do by booking an experience that gives them just that. It might be to travel down the Akerselva River with an inflatable boat, which can also be described as an 'adventure'. They also tend to want to travel closer to home, and therefore the travellers want to experience more of their city. They can use Lokalii to do this, and thereby get an adventure close to home (Fuggle, 2015). Information technology has evolved during the last decades, and it impacts how travellers gain access to and use travel-related information. Especially search engines, which gives travellers access to tourism products. Smartphones are also drawn upon because they create locals for information search, in addition to that, they are accessible on the go (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015, p. 244). The Internet is a platform that helps continuous technological innovations and fosters new businesses (Xiang, Wang, O'Leary & Fesenmaier, 2015, p. 512).

It is argued that companies should create apps if they can afford it. The reason for it is that apps are often more straightforward than websites, in addition to that apps can implement features from a smartphone or a tablet, such as sensors and the camera (Nielsen & Budiu, 2013, p. 34). However, the use of apps requires more from the users. The users have to locate the app in an app store and wait for it to download before the app can be used. An app is often downloaded before users know if it has what they are looking for (Nielsen & Budiu, 2013, p. 38). However, Nielsen and Budiu (2013) encountered that there was a 74 percent success rate for apps when they conducted several tests of mobile usability (Nielsen & Budiu, 2013, p. 34). The use of smartphones when travelling have shown that tourists feel that they get more information and better value from their trips and they also become more flexible when moving, in addition to visiting more places (Wang, Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2016, p. 60). An example of an app that gives users much information when travelling is TripAdvisor. The consumers contribute to the information in the app. The planning of a trip is viewed as a fundamental part of the travel experience. It is here that the traveller creates expectations and seeks information to make decisions connected to the forthcoming trip. Travelers have also become more mobile when it comes to which device they use for planning their trip. Before they either went to a travelling agency or used their computer, which was normally located at home. Now, travellers use their smartphones that they bring with them anywhere (Xiang, Wang, O'Leary and Fesenmaier, 2015, pp. 513–515).

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Experience Design in Tourism

The definition of experiences has been debated for many years, and it can be defined in many ways. One is that an experience can be described as an immediate response to some event that just happened. Another example is that within a trip, there can be many micro-experiences that can be connected by using cognitive and emotion-based processes to create meaning. An experience can also reflect on a single event within a trip such as a concert or a visit to a museum (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017, pp. 19-20). Stamboulis and Skayannis (2003) state that everything can be perceived as an experience, even the 4Ss (sea, sun, sand, sex), which are what many travellers still want to experience at a destination. Experiences have always existed in destinations. What is new is that an experience is designed, produced with intention, organised, prized and often charged for. It is a unique value attribute. Experiences can be divided into four categories: entertainment (passive participation, e.g. music concerts), education (active participation, e.g. seminars), escapist (active participation, e.g. mass tourism in exotic destinations), and aesthetic (passive participation, e.g. sightseeing). Destinations should offer experiences within the four different types, as this gives the participant a broader experience. For the experiences to be consumed, they must be produced. The destination works as the 'theater', where the tourists are actors, and they have to play an active role to experience something (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003, pp. 38-41).

Experience design in tourism is first and foremost a theoretical approach that seeks to enhance tourism experience at destinations. According to Tussyadiah (2014) tourism literature view experiences as the core of tourism, and tourism is also considered to be the biggest producer of experiences. Destinations focus on offering unique products and services, which can lead to memorable experiences for tourists. Experience design research also focuses on technology-assisted services (Tussyadiah, 2014, pp. 543-544). Design thinking is a big part of the creation of experiences within tourism. In service design literature, it is seen as an "effective way to explore and define unarticulated problems associated with service delivery and to provide solutions to these problems in innovative ways" (Tussyadiah, 2014, p. 544). Designing for tourism experience is not about creating tour packages, it is rather to design the travellers' on-tour experience. It is usually associated with experiences connected to the senses, with cognition, emotions and other values, situated in a tourism context. Because of this, it is important that the designers empathise with the end-user, to align with their thoughts and feelings, as well as their motivation and values. The tourism industry is continually becoming more and more competitive. Therefore, various unique products are offered, products that give the users value. The tourism business must offer products and services that connect to the tourists in a personal way. It leads to a deeper emotional attachment, which in most cases results in customer loyalty (Tussyadiah, 2014, p. 543-547). "Experiences should be understood as a complex interaction between design attributes and contextual details where meanings and values will emerge in given contexts, which implies designing within and for a complex sociocultural context" (Tussyadiah, 2014, p. 551). It is also emphasised that experiences should be emotional and social (Tussyadiah, 2014, p. 551). Something that can facilitate the psychological and social is

interactivity. It includes the interaction between a traveller and elements at the destination, other tourists or locals, or with mass media. Taking part in activities facilitates interaction which is essential for the tourism experience. Tourism touch points is also highlighted, and includes the hard, tangible elements, such as attractions and facilities, and the soft, intangible elements, such as information and service quality (Tussyadiah, 2014, p. 556). After researching experiences and travellers with mobile phones, Tussyadiah (2014) emphasised that designing for experiences requires that there is a broad understanding of experiences, from the travellers' perspective as consumers, but also as human beings (Tussyadiah, 2014, p. 559).

Understanding travellers' needs, wishes and concerns has become necessary for the competitiveness of destinations.

Understanding travellers' needs, wishes and concerns has become necessary for the competitiveness of destinations. Many stakeholders are present in the tourism industry; therefore Buhalis and Amaranggana (2015) emphasises the importance of smartness within tourism. The use of ICT (information and communications technology) can provide travellers with a better experience of a destination, based on the information available about them. The amount of data available can be a part of giving travellers a personal experience of a place. Many travellers expect destinations to be personalised and moulded for their specific needs. Because of this, the tourism industry is starting to collect information about their travellers, to provide the best

offers for the travellers. Such as relevant advertising and giving them information that can be a part of a decision-making process (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015, pp. 377-380). This particular point cannot be directly transferred to Lokalii, but the point of offering personal experiences are consistent with what Lokalii is offering. It will be elaborated on the next sections.

Mobile Usability

As mentioned previously, Nielsen and Budiu (2013) argue that companies should create apps if they can afford it (Nielsen & Budiu, 2013, p. 34). Apps can establish profitable relationships with companies. Even though apps are favourite, 25 percent of app users open an app once and never again. People are active on their phones, and therefore it is essential that the apps are efficient and enticing (Gove, 2016, pp. 2-3). It can be explained by how people use apps while travelling. As stated above, smartphones and the Internet play an essential role in making trip planning more convenient and efficient for travellers. Many people own a smartphone and use this to do research both before and during a journey (Xiang, Wang, O'Leary & Fesenmaier, 2015, pp. 513-515). Apps can be a part of making this even more convenient for the users because they can use the features of the smartphone. By doing so, users can, e.g., upload pictures directly in an app or do a search based on their location.

Some Lokalii app functions will be presented here, to show what the app contains and what it can facilitate. The app's functions create and promote the concept of Lokalii. Some functions are essential because, for instance, they give the user the opportunity to book an experience. On the other hand, functions such as the ability to send a

message to the host are not crucial; they are an addition. They allow users to ask the host some questions before the trip. It can also help the host and the traveller to get to know each other, should they wish to. All in all, this function facilitates the personal aspect of Lokalii. The host of an experience has to curate a text that explains the experience, in addition to a short paragraph about themselves. The experience text can be viewed as a "sales call", where the host uses the space to sell his or her experience to travellers. It is this space that the host gets to tell all the potential buyers about something that he or she loves, and want to share with the world. A rather new function is that the users can view experiences that are located near them. It makes the booking process more convenient because travellers can find experiences on the go, without having to search. It is also convenient if they are not familiar with the destination, and they can display experiences that are close by so that travellers do not have to travel far to find an experience. The different functions in the Lokalii app are what facilitate the concept, and how the app is perceived to the users. The concept can easily be described as the sharing of experiences, and the app is a marketplace for experiences. By being able to book experiences, travellers can get to know a destination from a local's point of view. The app can, therefore, be perceived as personal and exciting for the users, because they get to experience something together with other people. It can be exciting because many of the experiences are adventurous, such as Slip' 'N Slide!, which consists of travelling down a big waterslide ending in a big pool. The waterslide is built by the hosts. Many of the experiences are like this, and they create a fun and exciting way of getting to know a destination, as well as developing new relationships (Lokalii AS, 2017).

Lokalii and Travel Experience Design

Stamboulis and Skayannis (2003) divide experiences into four groups, and these will be explained and connected to Lokalii here. It has been done to point to aspects of the theory of experience design in tourism, and how Lokalii can fit with the theory. For the sake of doing the brief analysis, different experiences in the app have been viewed and drawn upon, according to the different types of experiences identified by Stamboulis and Skayannis (2003). The first kind of experience is entertainment, which involves passive participation from the traveller. Some experiences offered by the Lokalii app can be described according to this type, but most of the experiences involve participation from the traveller. One experience that can be described as an entertainment experience is "Acrobatic flight over Oslo!", as shown in Figure 3. This experience consists of the participation in a small plane over Oslo, and the traveller will also take part in loops and other exciting acrobatics in the air. This experience does not have to involve participation from the traveller because they just have to sit there and be a part of the experience. However, most travellers will probably talk to the host, and try to learn some of the cool moves that are being done in the air. The second type of experience is education, which involves active participation. This is how many of the Lokalii experiences can be described. Examples of this are "Learning to sabrage sparkling wine with glass", "Learn a hilarious bar game + bar crawl in Oslo" and "Learn to windsurf in the south of Norway!" (See Figure 3). All of these experiences include the word learn, but many of the other experiences will also educate the travellers. The third type of experience is escapist, and it involves active

participation. It can be such experiences as participation in religious ceremonies or destinations or the participation in mass tourism in exotic destinations. Lokalii offers several experiences that can be said to fit within this type. One example is "Lefsebaking" (see Figure 3), where the traveller can learn how to bake "lefse", which is a traditional Norwegian dish. There are not many experiences that consist of religious ceremonies. However, no one knows what kind of experiences the app will contain in the future. Rather experiences such as experiencing something that is typical or traditional for a destination can fit under this group of experiences. The fourth type is aesthetic, which involves passive participation, such as sightseeing. As stated above, most of Lokalii's experiences involve active participation, and it is the same for this type of experience. However, there are a lot of sightseeing experiences offered in the Lokalii app, such as "A different way to see three of Oslo's biggest tourist attractions!" (See Figure 3), "Citywalk along Akerselva, Grünerløkka and St Hanshaugen" and "The

top of Rome". All these experiences consist of showing one place or several places in a city, and the traveller decides how much he or she wants to participate when it, e.g. comes to talking and interacting. Most people would probably participate in such an experience because it is exclusively hosted by a private individual, and there might not be many other people sharing that specific experience. Lokalii is an app for people who want to get to know the residents of a destination, and therefore it is logical that the participants are eager to interact with the hosts. As shown here, the variety of experiences in the Lokalii app can fit with Stamboulis and Skayannis' types of experiences (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003, pp. 38-41).

Lokalii is a Norwegian company, and most of the experiences are located there. However, there are still many experiences offered in different countries. Based on the outlined theories above, Lokalii can be seen as a provider that offers a solution for travellers and locals. Travelers get the opportunity to meet new people, and
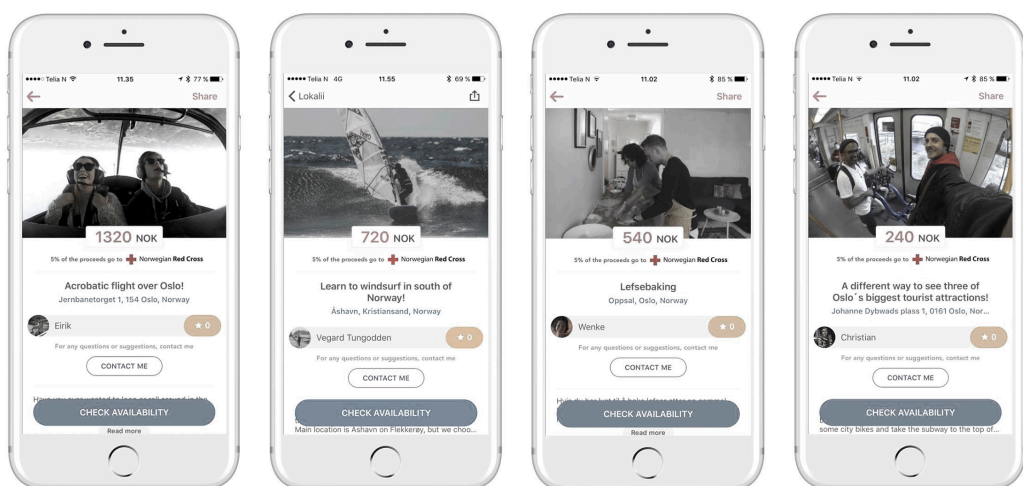

Fig. 3 - Examples of different types of experiences found in the Lokalii app. From right to left: entertainment, education, escapist and aesthetic (Lokalii AS, 2017).

to experience something at the same time. Locals can either choose to offer an experience, or they can participate in one. It is not a service for one of the segments but rather a service for both segments. Private individuals offer most of the experiences. Established actors can also offer an experience, but they have to offer something that they do not offer as a standard service. It is the personal and memorable that is important for Lokalii. The users of the app should get a new experience and something that is memorable. The personal aspect of the app is a part of facilitating relations, where a traveller can get to know a local during the participation in an experience. Innovasjon Norge (Innovation Norway) has recently published a plan of action, and one of the focus areas was on experiences and that Norway has to offer experiences (Innovasjon Norge, 2017). The number of travellers in Norway has increased during the last couple of years, and it is essential that the country meets this with engaging experiences for the travellers. In 2015, there were 3,6 million tourist arrivals in Norway. It is an increase of 12 percent from 2014, and 382 000 more tourists visited the country. This increase is higher than the average of the rest of the world. One reason for this could be the weakened exchange rate of the Norwegian krone, and tourists get better value for their money (Innovasjon Norge, 2016, pp. 9–16). The number of first-time visitors also increased. Many of the tourists that visited Norway wanted to relax and not do so much. However, there was an increase in tourists that wanted to experience the northern lights, dogsledding and participate in concerts and festivals. Several of the tourists also wanted to eat and drink locally, visit ancient buildings and experience the fjords (Innovasjon Norge, 2016, pp. 30–35).

Lokalii is not a source of information; it is a place where travellers can get inspiration to experience a destination.

All of these travellers use an external source to get information about Norway, whether this is an app, a guidebook, or friends and family. Lokalii is not a source of information; it is a place where travellers can get inspiration to experience a destination. The notion lies in the pictures from the experiences, as well as the text that the host has written. It differentiates Lokalii from several other providers, such as TripAdvisor, Lonely Planet, etc. The focus is on the personal encounter between two (or several) people, and what happens when they participate in an experience together. The theory of experience design in tourism highlights this feature, the personal. Because this is something that can potentially create a memorable experience for the traveller, which can eventually lead to customer loyalty; to either the service provider or the destination. Destinations can be a part of this if they choose to offer one or several experiences via Lokalii. The important thing is that they do not offer guiding experiences because the app is focusing on the local and the unique that a destination has to offer. Some travellers want to be guided, but many also want to experience the destination that they are at, and at the same time create relations with people located at that destination. Lokalii is a platform where travellers can do this. Destinations can choose to offer creative and fun experiences that show the traveller how people at the destination use the city or place where they live. By using Lokalii like this, it can potentially increase travellers wanting to visit a destination. It has to be explored more, to say something

concrete about it. Lokalii also has become known as a service provider for many people, to describe this more thoroughly.

Conclusion

This paper has addressed the theories of experience design in tourism and mobile usability. It has shown how travel trends have changed, in addition to how and why apps are distinct sources of information for travellers. Experience design in tourism has been debated, and different scholars used various methods. The theory has been adapted to Lokalii, to show how the app potentially can give travellers a better experience of a destination. Lokalii can eventually become a comprehensive source of tourism within more destinations if it becomes well known around the world. If people understand the service, they can potentially choose which destination to visit based on what kind of experiences that are offered. The fact that most experiences are offered by private individuals makes it easier for destinations to advertise their assets in addition to making the experience of the destination more personal. Private individuals or locals can potentially create a different atmosphere for the travellers than a guiding or a tourism company. This is because the locals choose to offer an experience because they want to show something or some parts of their city, or a

talent that they want others to see. All in all, Lokalii is an app that fits well with the theory of experience design in tourism because both are based on experiences. The theory focuses on how to design memorable experiences for travellers, and Lokalii focuses on making experiences available to everyone. The theory of experience design in tourism should embrace apps like Lokalii, and it would be interesting to see more papers on the subject since there are more apps like this emerging in the market. Regarding the question asked in the title of this article, the answer is that a travel app can create memorable experiences. In this case, it is because of the personal that Lokalii offers; in the app when they physically meet, and what final impression the traveller has. However, in many cases, it is up to the traveller to define what a memorable experience is for him/herself. It also depends on what kind of experience that the traveller participates in. If travellers experience something exciting and entertaining and, moreover, make new friends, it can be argued that this leads to a memorable experience.

Disclosure Statement

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