

# Customer Journey Mapping for Nature organizations; implications and applicability

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In many regions National Parks and other protected areas have become an important attraction and play an critical role in destination development (Reinius and Fredman, 2007). Such attractions are a very important motivator for tourist travel. In order to ensure consistent development of National Park tourism, management practices must focus on effective marketing and satisfying customer experiences which enhance revenue streams from tourism (King et al, 2012). This is important for attracting visitors. In national parks in The Netherlands, however, there is little emphasis on value creation for customers through service experiences. Customer Journey mapping is a tool to analyze the way in which customers engage with an organization, encompassing their entire interaction, and how this influences the visitor experience (Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016). The concept is mostly used in the retail industry and offers valuable insights which are helpful to improve visitor experiences in National Parks.

## **Application of customer Journey concept for National Parks**

The Customer Journey of National Park visitors can be understood as the collection of experiences that are formed by different moments of interaction between the visitor and the park organization before, during, and after the visit to the National Park. It highlights the different phases of the customer experience, formed by different moments of interaction (Anderl, Schumann & Kunz, 2015; Cardoso et al., 2015; Jolly, 2015; Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016;). These moments of interaction are called touch points (Marcus, 2014; Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016; Tax, McCutcheon & Wilkinson, 2013). Stein and Ramaseshan (2016) highlight that not all touch points are necessarily intentional ones from the providing company itself, for example external reviews or advertisement of other companies. Customer Journeys have become more and more complex in nature, in which consumers interact with an enormous number of different touchpoints. Also, customer to customer interactions (through social media) have given new challenges and opportunities for organizations and firms.

A Customer Journey can be designed for any kind of product, optimized in any type of organization, for any target group. Insight in how a Customer Journey works and how it plays a crucial role in attracting visitors, meeting their expectations and offering a satisfactory visitor experience is the first step towards improvement.

## **Methodology**

The European Futures Institute (ETFI) has developed a method to analyze the Customer Journey of National Park visitors in a workshop for forest rangers and marketing and communication managers in The Netherlands. The Dutch Forestry Department (Staatsbosbeheer) has applied the Customer Journey Mapping workshop as a tool to get insight into how the organization communicates with its visitors and influences the customer experiences in NP De Biesbosch. The research questions which need to be addressed during a

workshop differ per organization. In De Biesbosch the participants analyzed how prominently the brand of Staatsbosbeheer was represented in the different phases of the Customer Journey. Also looking for missing or failing touchpoints (and the related customer experience) was an important part of the exercise.

A Customer Journey mapping workshop is usually done with 8 to 12 participants which are split up in small groups. The first step in the workshop is to brainstorm about the most important touchpoints which are intentionally set up by the organization (the planned journey). Then the participants assume the role of a specific visitor type (persona) and start searching on the internet for those specific activities in which the persona is interested. This allows the park managers to experience the actual journey, from the visitor's perspective. Visitor satisfaction surveys, complaints and feedback are also important to get an understanding of the visitor perspective. The last part of the workshop is about setting up an action plan and implementation of improvement points.

## Results and Analysis

The results from the workshop show that:

- Nature conservation organizations operate in a diverse, multi stakeholder environment.
- The management of the network of touchpoints is complex and requires careful management of communication and marketing. This coordination is often lacking but is very important in order to present a coherent image to the public.
- A nature conservation organization has two basic interests; providing a satisfying visitor experience and protecting the natural values. The customer journey should be carefully designed so that both goals are met. This is distinctly different than most commercial companies and organizations that focus solely on selling their service or product to their client.
- The desires and intentions of the consumer might be in conflict with the interest of the nature conservation organization. This makes it hard for natural area managers to think from a customer perspective and adds a level of complexity to the design of a customer journey.
- Besides communicating about the heritage values of the area and the importance of nature protection, the organization can win satisfaction when they focus more on the technical and service related aspects of the experience they provide.

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