

Meaningful knowledge for coastal city RV park creation: Understanding RV camping in practice

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RV camping remains a popular type of self-drive tourism in Europe. Freedom and comfort are reasons why tourists chose to travel by RV from place to place. By facilitating RV campgrounds, or so-called RV parks, a coastal destination such as Vlissingen could improve its image and develop its brand.

International theories on RV Camping

The welcoming of RV recreationists allows for season extension while historical, cultural and landscape aspects receive positive attention. For this reason, RV campers are an interesting market and allows for integration in destination branding activities. The Recreational Vehicle lifestyle is being characterised by a strong desire for outdoor living, being part of a social group and enjoying the availability of comfort whilst being on the road. People involved with RV camping want to be fully aware of their natural environment that hosts recreation activities. Destinations known for being RV friendly appreciating economic benefits of hosting RV campers. These campers select an RV campground which is already visited before or recommended by relatives. Still, campers eventually pick a spot on the available features and state of the camping ground above the actual destination the campground is located. Studies on RV campers' motivation and demands are fragmented, just like insights on RV campground design. Research that combines supply and demand are not existent. A practice theoretical approach to RV camping does show potential of unravelling RV camping in practices before, during and after visiting a destination.

RV Camping in a coastal city

The objective of this study is to give a detailed understanding of contemporary and desired practices related to RV camping. These insights could then be of use to foster strategic policy decision making concerning the creation and operation of an RV park in the coastal city of Vlissingen. Since value is tied to practice, a particular interest is given to what specific value is attached to which elements as competences, meanings and materials in a variation of practices that together make RV camping. By following the customer journey and policy making stages, this study aims to share useful findings per practice that actually highlights value and offers detailed guidelines for both scientific and managerial recommendations.

Methods

In order to understand and describe practice, a range of data collection methods have been applied. Interviews were conducted with five RV camping experts; these experts are RV campers themselves and volunteering for the Dutch RV camping

club, renting out campers, owning an RV park, operating a yacht harbour that facilitates RV camping spots and one interviewee also designs RV campgrounds. Representatives of four municipalities other than Vlissingen are being interviewed about their perspectives on RV camping in practice, just as representatives from the recreation association, and two of another Dutch RV club. A number of fairs have been visited; the holiday saloon in Antwerp, day of the city marketing, and tourist industry meeting convention. Combined with a survey of 350 campers and adding desk research on policies and own observations whilst working in the municipality of Vlissingen on this topic resulted in an meaningful overview of RV camping in practice.

Results

Following practice theory, five different practices have been identified:

1. Being responsible, creating and managing a campervan pitch
2. Choosing a campervan pitch/destination
3. Making use of the facilities at a campervan pitch
4. Enjoying the campervan pitch location
5. Sharing memories

In the first practice, it became evident that the government should better work together with the tourism industry as this is necessary to get to a clear vision on RV camping in the municipality of Vlissingen. In the second practice, it shows that Vlissingen is still too much of an unknown among the fast growing target group of campervan owners. The municipality of Vlissingen is responsible for this itself, as it could have devoted more attention to this at the start of the realisation phase through marketing or other appropriate activities. Concerning the facilities available at a campervan pitch, it became clear that while Campervan owners are self-sufficient and do not require many facilities in order to stay at a campervan pitch, they are not completely independent. The municipality of Vlissingen does appear to think this is the case and is therefore only offering bare campervan pitches to stand and stay for the night. In enjoying the location, it appeared that the location of the campervan pitch is very influential for campervan owners. It must be a good combination between the urban and natural environment. They will also need to feel safe and want to be able to enjoy plenty of peace and quiet during their stay. Concerning practice five, sharing memories, it could be argued that it is of real importance for campervan owners to share their experiences. This is only possible if campervan owners are informed of this fact and become curious about sharing their experiences and memories. The municipality of Vlissingen will therefore need to find an appealing way to make them enthusiastic about sharing their trip memories with others.

Discussion

By not only looking at how value is tied to practices but also by contrasting contemporary and desired practices, the gap is discussed and offers valuable information. This study shows that value as tied to consumption in practice differs per prac-

tice, causing a careful planning, design, operating and promoting of RV camp parks in the future. The study also highlights that whenever a municipality thinks about them as the ones to initialize the creation of an RV park, they should probably think twice as close cooperation with tourism entrepreneurs is crucial. As far as Vlissingen concerns, recommendations for their RV campground policies entail improving the location, the facilities offered and partnering with an RV camping website to better its promotion.