Moniek Hover en Jacco van Mierlo

Imagine your Event
Imagineering for the event industry

chapter for:

Event Practice and Event Theory
(provisional title)

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1.0 Introduction
In recent decades, the development of services and products has boomed. Due to fierce competition and the higher demands placed by the consumer on the services we provide, it is necessary for providers to distinguish themselves. New paths are being followed and new combinations are being discovered. Something that may have been regarded as a waste of money years ago, is currently being sold as an exclusive delicacy.

From the perspective of molecular gastronomy, it is highly possible to combine white chocolate with caviar and the odours in a restaurant are experienced as extremely important. The person who is capable of discovering exclusive combinations of food, will take the lead in this. It goes without saying that in relation to this example, stimulating the other senses will also be regarded as important, such as the choice of music and the temperature of the room, to optimise the eating experience.

The leisure industry has been the very domain of experience from time immemorial, the same applies to events. Events are in principle unique, they give people a temporary opportunity to escape from the daily course of events, they give people hope and happiness and appeal to the imagination. Events are used as an instrument for recharging products and services, companies, cities, regions and countries. All in all, events are often the means of realising a goal which has been set in advance. So at first sight it would seem that events are a sort of universal remedy with which all sorts of individual and social goals can be realised. In actual practice, however, it is highly evident that many events are not that distinctive and that an awful lot still has to change to enable events to reach their full potential.

If critical studies are examined regarding events, then we see that a considerable amount has been published about the impact of events, strategic planning and event tourism. A considerable amount has been written about operational matters such as project management, planning, logistics, HRM, marketing, financing and sponsoring, risk management, safety and evaluation. In addition, whether it is relevant or not, the benefits of an appropriate event concept have been expressed, but how exactly do you arrive at a strong concept which is appropriate for your event? Despite the importance of this subject, surprising little has been written in critical studies on the subject of concept development. In many cases, little more than the ‘five Ws’ are dealt with regarding event concepts (Goldblatt, 2005, Why?, Who?, When?, Where? and What?), as well as a number of creative techniques such as brainstorming and thematically giving colour to the event, without considering the significance of the theme for the organisation and/or target group.

From the importance attached to events, the basis, i.e. the development of the event concept, deserves greater attention. This chapter will do justice to this subject and will provide tools for the event manager/developer for developing fully experiential events or for innovating existing events, through the application of imagineering.

In this chapter, in answer to the above-mentioned question, the following subjects will be dealt with: section 1: ‘experience economy’ and imagineering’s background; section 2: ‘experience’ and the levels of experience; section 3: psycho-social framework and the factors that would seem to play a role in this ‘black box’ and at last section 4: imagineering, creating worlds of experience with subjects as the imagineeringsproces, experience concept, physical surroundings and experience instruments.
### 1.1 Experience Economy

From a historical perspective, according to Pine II and Gilmore the economy has passed through a number of stages (1999, see figure 1).

Figure 1 demonstrates the domains in which the creation of value is related to the course of time. For a long time, the primary sector was the only form of economic activity in the form of cattle breeding, arable farming and the mining industry. With the advent of the steam machine, this abruptly came to a close and the industrial revolution set in, central to which was the production of products. Halfway through the 20th century, markets became saturated and marketing made its appearance. Successful companies at that time were the ones which succeeded in offering service with their products (service economy). Money was increasingly being earned on the service which was provided with a product. Events also gradually took part in this growth of the increase in value of the service level. Good service has become however increasingly more a matter of course and is part of the conditions which the consumer places on the service/product provided. For example, it is simply no longer possible at an event for visitors to be kept waiting for hours, that there is no information desk, that the toilets are not clean, that bad or insufficient food and drinks are provided, that bad route descriptions are provided, or that the site is not up-to-date or there are too few places to park.

According to Pine II and Gilmore, the following step for creating a distinctive event, is the addition of theatricality and entertainment (1999). Purchasing and consuming products, and in particular actually visiting an event has, more than ever, to be an experience. In view of the fact that, from the very beginning, events have ascended the day-to-day worries of existence and have usually created a positive experience automatically, the time has now come to distinguish events by the explicit occurrence and incorporation of experience. This will enable the event organisers to keep ahead of the competition and continue to attract visitors. Companies and organisations, particularly in the event industry, have to operate differently and more creatively in such a context in order to have an impact. For although people are by their very nature emotionally involved with events, it appears to be increasingly more difficult to affect them emotionally.

As indicated in the above figure, developments will not standstill after the phase currently taking place. The transformation economy will set in, the first signs of this are already visible (Pine II and Gilmore, 1999). Suppliers are taking the initiative to provide experiences which will bring about lasting changes - possibly in behaviour - in the visitor/consumer. It is exactly in response to these developments that ‘Imagineering’ can provide answers, on the level of an individual event, for event agencies, as well as for the entire event branch.

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**Figure 1: The developmental stages of the economy (Pine II, 2003)**

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1.2 Imagineering’s background
Imagineering came into existence in the last century in the United States. It is a compound of imagination and engineering, two concepts which at first sight would appear to be at odds with each other. Within the Disney concern imagineering has boomed, since Walt Disney started applying it in his company in the initial years. In the early 50s, Walt Disney surrounded himself with an interdisciplinary team for conceiving, creating and realising Disneyland. Imagineering is the way in which, within the team, the right part of the brain (which stands for creativity) is brought together with the left part (which stands for analysis). The Disney imagineering teams are always multidisciplinary, from creative people (such as storytellers and designers) to analysts (such as engineers, project managers and financial people). It is precisely in the implementation of this diversity from the very first step, that its strength lies.

The Disney case consists of far more dimensions than can be assumed at first sight. They are conspicuous in creative concept and product development, in the perfect realisation of leisure experiences, but also in managing and communicating the experience concept, both internally and externally. In this chapter, Disney will often be quoted as an example. The danger of quoting from Disney lies in the associations the brand name often conjures up in Europe: too American, too commercial, experience in the sense of fun and entertainment. However, experience is much more than this. In 2002 in their book Imagineering, Diane Nijs and Frank Peters have interpreted the subject in terms of the European situation. Imagineering can serve as creative input for engineers, designers, developers of commercial concepts and communicators. In this way, imagineering stands for the integral approach to designing worlds of experience which continue to fascinate (Nijs/Peters, 2002). In a broader perspective, Imagineering stands for: Value creation and value innovation from an experience perspective (Nijs, 2006). Experience is a crucial term within imagineering. In the following section we will describe what experience is and which factors play a role in experience coming into existence.

2.0 Experience
In 1999, Pine and Gilmore published ‘The experience economy’. Although they were certainly not the first to talk about the economic value of experiences, the idea in this book that people primarily wanted to be affected personally became widely popular.

Experience does not seem to be an easy concept to define. Pine and Gilmore define it as follows:

An experience occurs when consumers become involved in such a way that they are left with a lasting impression. The event is memorable and very personal. The consumer is affected emotionally, physically, intellectually or even spiritually (Pine/Gilmore, 1999).

Schmitt describes experience as follows:

Experiences are private events that happen to people in response to some kind of stimulus. Experiences are the result of observing or participating in events –whether these events are real or virtual. Such experiences involve the entire human being – our senses, feelings, intellects and bodies. Experiences involve both the rational and the emotional side of human beings. (Schmitt, 1999, p.60)

Whereas in English only one term is used, in the Germanic languages (such as German and Dutch) a distinction is made between respectively ‘Erleben’ and ‘Erfahren’ / ‘beleven’ and ‘ervaren’.

For ‘ervaren’, a rational, long-term experience, Anna Snel uses the following definition:
A rational, long-term experience is a continual interactive process of doing and undergoing, action and reflection, cause and effect, which has a meaning for individuals in various contexts of their lives. A rational, long term experience enables individuals to acquire another image of the world or of themselves. (Snel, 2004)

A rational, long-term experience is placing experiences in a mental frame of reference. From the word ‘beleven’ in the Dutch, two other words are derived: ‘belevenis’ (staged experience) and ‘beleving’ (true experience).

We regard a staged experience as follows:
A staged experience is a - more or less limited - event as can be “directed” by a supplier, which can be set in a scene. It is the stimulus which can trigger a true experience in a consumer.
A true experience we define as follows:
_The inner, personal, emotional reaction to a stimulus. This true experience may transcend a staged experience in time and space._

Not every staged experience will lead to a true experience. Dependent on the psycho-social framework (this will be discussed in section 3), a true experience may or may not take place and this will be less or more intense. For example: in watching a football match, one person will have a strong true experience, whereas the same stimulus may leave the person next to him completely cold.

### 2.1 Levels of experience:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><strong>The basal experience:</strong> this is linked to the stimulus and the exposure to it. An emotional reaction can be said to have taken place, but the experience has had insufficient impact to stay in the memory for a long time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td><strong>The memorable experience</strong> is of a higher level and does remain in the memory. It not only concerns the memory on a cognitive level, but in particular being able to recall the emotion at a later date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td><strong>The transforming experience</strong> evokes durable changes in the individual on a behavioural or attitudinal level. Not every intense, memorable experience automatically leads to transformation. In experience reports from research conducted at 3 war museums, it was evident that two weeks afterwards the respondents described their experiences during the visit in an emotional way: thus an intense memorable experience could be said to have taken place. In response to the question whether the visit had changed their attitudes regarding the subject, the answer was however “no”, they had already had this attitude beforehand. Their involvement (and the underlying values) were only perpetuated by the visit (van Buuren, 2006). It is possible that an event can become a “life changing experience”, providing it gives someone the opportunity of expressing latent values and in this way giving them a deeper meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recently in a show on the Dutch television, fragments were shown from the finals during the World Cup in 1978 where the Dutch football team lost against Argentina. At the moment that the presenter announced these fragments, the camera swerved round the audience in the studio. Clearly visible on film was a man who spontaneously threw his hands up to his face: after nearly 30 years the memory of this game still evoked strong emotion. One guest at the show closed with the remark that ‘we should never ever broadcast these images again’.
The level of experience reached differs for each individual. The same stimulus may only lead to a basal experience for one person, but may stay in someone else’s memory for a long time. For another person it may lead to change. To explain this it is necessary to gain insight into the psycho-social context. This will be dealt with in the following section.

---

**Dance4life**

On Saturday 27 November 2004 the time had come. A stadium packed with boys and girls from all over the country who had collected money for dance4life. Various performances from one star after another contributed to a fantastic party with just a single goal: dancing for life!

Desmond Tutu (Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, South Africa) powerfully expressed the vision and values of dance4life:

> “Dance is a universal language.  
> Dance is freedom, dance is exhilaration, dance is life.  
> Young people deserve care, protection, condoms.  
> Please don’t let them dance alone.”

Projects such as dance4life are literally a matter of life and death. It is not only a matter of collecting money, but also importantly for providing information. “With dance4life we want to involve young people all over the world in combating HIV and aids. Positively and effectively because it is a matter of necessity.” (Ilco van der Linde, initiator dance4life)

Dance4life is much more than just a party in a football stadium. In 2004, activities such as school projects, dance events, campaigns, television programmes and even far more took place in three different continents (The Netherlands, South Africa and Bali). In 2006, dance4life has spread to ten new countries.

That dance4life may not remain unnoticed is clear. From research from a Dutch research agency NIPO, it appears that, all except one, dance4life is the best known charity amongst young people and that 70% of young people between 13 and 18 years have heard of dance4life. In addition, the dance4life organisation was awarded the innovation prize in 2004 because it was regarded as a unique project which was unprecedented in the world.

www.dance4life.nl
To summarise, the process of staged experience to true experience can be visualised as follows:

![Experience Model Diagram]

Figure 2: Experience model (van Wijngaarden/van Gool, 2005) adapted by Hover, 2006

3.0 Psycho-social framework
The psycho-social context is essentially a ‘black box’: nobody can argue with certainty which factors are crucial for an experience to take place. The following factors would seem to play a role.

3.1 Knowledge. At first sight, knowledge and experience would seem to be two opposite notions. Yet it is precisely (background) knowledge which can influence the experience. In some cases this can lead to an enrichment of the experience. Sometimes a lack of knowledge may even be an hindrance for an experience taking place. Modern, abstract art is often not valued because people do not know or understand its background.

The access to knowledge and information has boomed in recent years due to the Internet. These days, a consumer can acquire all possible sorts of background information before visiting an event. As far as knowledge is concerned, a supplier has to be aware that visitors will be coming fully prepared.

3.2 Earlier experience and (often derived from this) expectations. If a true experience is saved in a mental frame of reference, it becomes a long-term experience. The memories of an experience are brought along by the individual into a following staged experience in the form of an expectation. An expectation is often coloured by emotions, it is as it were an extension of true experience. It is important that the expectations are fulfilled, and preferably, that they are exceeded. Expectations which are not fulfilled are disastrous for a positive experience.

True and rational experiences do not need to be strictly personal to result in certain expectations. Other people’s experiences may also greatly influence an expectation. Digital media offers people many opportunities of exchanging experiences. In the light of all these opportunities, people appear to have increasingly more need to send their experiences and emotions into the world wide web, judging by all the web logs, discussion forums etcetera. Spontaneous virtual communities about events also are coming into existence with people who share the same values and interests. Many suppliers in the event branch regard this uncontrollable stream of communication as a threat. However, it is more a fantastic opportunity of using these communities to get to know what actually motivates and moves people.
The focus of events should not only be on the exposure phase (when the event actually takes place), but also on the pre-exposure and post-exposure phases because an extension of the experience takes place in the form of remembering/post-enjoyment or of expectation/enjoyable anticipation.

Figure 3: Cycle of experiences

Every experience is for an individual a personal story, as it were, that takes place round the actual experience. Linked to the phases, it appears as follows:

A = the introduction
B = the trigger
C = the building-up of tension
D = the crisis
E = the climax
F = the winding-up

Figure 4: The experience storyline
Robbie Williams is going to give a concert! This is the introduction to a story which a fan will experience. This is where the pre-exposure phase of an experience actually begins. At the moment that a fan has been able to get hold of a ticket for the Robbie Williams concert (the trigger within the story), the pleasant excitement begins: the feeling of anticipation, the ‘counting of nights’, visiting websites to share these feelings with kindred spirits. The arrival at the concert location is the ‘crisis’: now we’re nearly there! Robbie enters the stage and his show begins. This is the climax. After the concert has ended the post-exposure phase commences: the winding-up of the storyline, in which everything find its own place. The fan reads reviews, visits websites, purchases CDs or DVDs in order to relive it all and to experience the emotions once again.

A supplier has to be really aware of what the story of the experience in the heads and hearts of the people looks like and to try and nurture this story in all its phases.

3.3 motives: According to Neulinger, for a leisure experience being able to exist for an individual, there are two matters which are of essential importance (in Beunders/Boers, 1996). The first matter is motivation. Is it a case of intrinsic motivation (because of the pleasure that people expect to experience: playing football for the sake of kicking the ball) or extrinsic motivation (then it is the reward that people expect to obtain which is important; playing football to win)? There can often be said to be a combination of both.

What is also important is the degree of ‘perceived freedom’ in an activity: not every leisure activity is undertaken completely voluntarily. Sometimes social obligation can be said to play a role.

Freedom of choice also influences the experience. For someone who undertakes something as an obligation, there will be blockades in the experience in advance.

3.4 moods: there is a distinction between moods and emotions. Emotions are mostly linked to an event or an object, moods are not. In generals, moods last longer than emotions. They are often the consequence of earlier emotions. Moreover, they can lower the barrier for the accompanying emotion, or in fact strengthen it. The importance of moods for an experience to come into existence is therefore great. The behaviour which belongs to a mood is directed at allowing an unpleasant mood to cease, and a pleasant one to continue (Boom, 2006). Moods can be influenced by a supplier. We will return to this subject in the section about experience instruments.

3.5 involvement: Optimum involvement during an activity occurs during flow. During events flow can also come to exist, at the moment that a visitor feels completely immersed in the experience.

Flow
It is clear that one experience is not another: the first time something is experienced it will often be more intense than the tenth time. In general the appreciation of the staged experience decreases through repetition. But this rule is not true in certain situations and/or for certain activities (Poel, 2003). It appears that the feeling of enjoyment that occurs with flow (the ultimate experience) actually seems to stimulate the repetition of the activity (Poel, 2003). Flow has been researched and described by Csikszentmihalyi (1999/2001).

Flow is state of apparent immersion of the subject with [his or] her environment, which occurs during high levels of performance by, for example, chess players, artists, composers, musicians, athletes and mountain climbers (Goossens, 1998).

Flow is linked to:
- an enriched perception, that is, an intense sensory experience
- a feeling of carefreeness
- a distortion in the natural sense of time
- a pleasant, enjoyable feeling
- a strong personal involvement in the situation (Nijs/Peters, 2002).

What is important in flow experiences is that the challenges faced by people should grow along with the skills and knowledge. If that does not happen, then people will become bored (Poel, 2003).
Sometimes, however, a staged experience should actually remain unchanged to lead to an experience. An example of this is nostalgic experiences which appeal to recognition and memory. A family who visits Disney’s Magic Kingdom for the fifth time, will actually wish to come across the same activities in the same places to once again feel the emotions of earlier days.

When we talk about involvement as a factor within the psycho-social framework, then however, it concerns the involvement which is present beforehand, how involved is someone before he steps into the experience?

In such a case enduring involvement or situational involvement can exist. In situational involvement someone is temporarily very involved in a specific activity, but this involvement disappears again once the activity has been fulfilled. An example of this would be searching for and booking a holiday. After the holiday has taken place the involvement usually disappears.

Enduring involvement does not need to directly coincide with a concrete activity or experience (for example, someone is completely into sailing), but it is often the consequence of one or more memorable or even transforming experiences. Enduring involvement will not always be expressed in concrete and actual behaviour. It is possible that the person who is into sailing, is temporarily unable to get round to it due to his/her living circumstances. This does not mean, however, that the involvement disappears.

Research has demonstrated that the higher the level of enduring involvement with an activity in general, the earlier this individual will become immersed in flow during the activity (Havitz/Mannell, 2005). Someone who is enduringly involved with the Stones (a real fan), will become immersed in flow earlier during a concert than someone who is less involved. From supplementary research it appears that for the opposite there is also a connection: when someone undergoes an intense experience and becomes immersed in flow, this leads to a heightened effect on the enduring involvement in relation to the activity (Stok, 2006).

The first 5 factors are more or less linked to the specific experience where the consumer enters. The following 2 factors from the psycho-social framework are not directly linked to the specific experience. Because of this they form a more transcendent framework, which has a more stable character.

3.6 personality and competencies: certain human characteristics may influence the experience. Csikszentmihalyi sees a connection between creativity and being able to become immersed in flow (Poel, 2003). For open-minded people, new and uncertain things constitute a challenge which they feel attracted to (Nijs/Peters, 2002). This group will often experience a surprise in a positive way. However, closed-minded people will experience stress from uncertainly and unexpected matters: this will influence their experience in a negative way.

Fantasy also appears to be important in someone’s ability to immerse themselves in an experience. Someone who continually thinks during an experience: “this is fake” or “it’ll all be over soon”, will have a less strong experience than someone who completely submits to it. Fantasy is not a mutilation of reality, but an enrichment of it. “Fantasy liberates” (Cornelis, 2005).

At first sight it would appear to be difficult for a provider to take people’s personalities into account: after all, this is not something you can change. But a provider could utilise certain characteristics which are relevant for consumers. This subject will be dealt with further in the section experience instruments (co-creation).

3.7 Values: In imagineering values play an emphatic role. For this reason, more attention will be paid to this than to other aspects within the psycho-social framework. In today’s ‘experience economy’, the primary needs are satisfied. Therefore why people purchase services, such as visiting certain events and buying products, may no longer be explained by means of the primary satisfaction of needs. We have to look for deeper motives in people and that leads to the focus on values.

There are two different approaches to the meaning of the concept of value. In the first place, value can be ascribed to material matters such as a ticket, a CD/DVD, a signed photo or a piece of jewellery. The other interpretation of the concept of ‘value’ concerns immaterial matters such as religion, but also visiting an event. We understand this second sort of value to mean an individual’s approach concerning what is desired or good. When people attach value to something, it is considered to be important. It primarily concerns emotional value which is inextricably linked to matters of a material value. A concert ticket or a signed photo of a pop star stand for the one time you met your idol in real life. This is mainly to do with enjoying the moment, re-experiencing the emotions which are felt with greater intensity the more the values affect the core of being, as individual and as part of society. In this way, values can be seen more as a strongly anchored approach, an idea about what is
meaningful in life, something to strive for, a sort of ideal. Values are an essential constituent of our cognitive system and determine what we expect from people and things. Values determine how people should think and act, how they should deal with information, how they collect, save and use it. In this way values form criteria with which people assess information, whatever the nature of this may be (Franzen & Holzhauer, 1987). When event developers manage to succeed in coupling values to their event, then the emotional involvement will increase to a high degree. In this way an event will distinguish itself with respect to its competitors and a strong link will come to exist with the target group that the event is aimed at.

Rokeach was one of the first to conduct research into consumer values (in: Boom & Weber 1994). He distinguishes between two sorts of values: final values (the consumer’s desired final objectives) and instrumental values (the means of achieving these final values). The values which emerge from his research can be found in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final values</th>
<th>Instrumental values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social harmony</strong></td>
<td>Competency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Peace</td>
<td>• Ambitious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Equality</td>
<td>• Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Freedom</td>
<td>• Creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• National security</td>
<td>• Capable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Salvation (immortality)</td>
<td>• Logical (rational)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal satisfaction</strong></td>
<td>Compass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social recognition</td>
<td>• Disposed to forgiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Living comfortably</td>
<td>• Helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pleasure</td>
<td>• Cheerful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Achievement</td>
<td>• Loving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-realization</strong></td>
<td>Social disposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Beauty (nature and art)</td>
<td>• Polite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wisdom</td>
<td>• Obedient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inner harmony</td>
<td>• Clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-respect</td>
<td><strong>Integrity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Achievement</td>
<td>• Responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Safety</td>
<td>• Honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Caring for the family</td>
<td>• Self-control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Salvation (immortality)</td>
<td><strong>Love and affection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adult love (sexual and adult intimacy)</td>
<td>• Adult love (sexual and adult intimacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Real friendship</td>
<td><strong>Personal satisfaction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Happiness (being content)</td>
<td><strong>Competency</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure: Rokeach’s table of values (in: Boom & Weber, 1994)
Building on earlier research into values, Franzen has distinguished three sorts of values, namely (in: Nijs & Peters, 2002):

1. **Instrumental or functional values.** These are preferred qualities, features and the performance of the product itself. In daily advertising practice they are usually referred to as ‘product benefits’.

2. **Symbolic values.** These are classified as follows:
   a) **Expressive values:** These concern our relationship with others and how we wish to be regarded by others.
   b) **Impressive values:** These are aimed at our self-perception (having a good feeling about yourself, inner harmony, thriftiness, etcetera).
   c) **Final values:** Ideal conceptions about life, such as we would ultimately prefer for ourselves. These are in fact the highest ideals that we strive for in life.

3. **Social values:** Ideals that we cherish in relation to our everyday world and society as a whole (for example, peace on earth, preserving nature and national freedom).
The above figure provides insight into the various levels of values. The symbolic values, however, are the most important in creating an experience concept for an event. In the imagineering process we will examine how values can be used to achieve a meaningful level of experience (this will be discussed in section 4).

3.8 social context: this is absolutely essential for an experience coming into existence. In the first place, this concerns the people with whom visitors undertake an activity. Visiting an event with colleagues can be totally different on the level of experience than when people do this with their own family. In addition, how people personally experience the other visitors is also influential: what one person experiences as “enjoyable”, maybe for another “irritatingly busy”. The social context reaches further than the time boundaries of the experience. Through virtual communities new social contexts exist which influence the experience in the pre-exposure and post-exposure phases.

The role of the personnel is also often included in the social context. This will be discussed in the section on experience instruments.
Summarised, the experience model can now be depicted as follows:

![Experience Model Diagram](image)

**Figure 6: Experience model (van Wijngaarden/van Gool, 2005), adapted by Hover, 2006**

### 4.0 Imagineering: creating worlds of experience

As mentioned in the introduction we regard Imagineering as:

*Creating value and innovating value from an experience perspective (Nis, 2006).*

Imagineering concerns creating and managing worlds of experience, based in internal values (DNA) on the one hand and/or values of the target groups on the other, with the objective of creating the emotional involvement of all stakeholders, in other words, not only the external target groups, but that all those concerned internally also feel involved.

The example below indicates that internal values may also be a point of departure in creating a meaningful experience. Groups of followers will automatically come to exist who feel attracted to these values.
In the imagineering process, a central role is therefore set aside for the creative development of an experience concept which links supply and demand. It is precisely through linking the experience in an innovative way to values that it becomes meaningful for the provider and for the consumer.

### 4.1 Competencies of the imagineer

The imagineer thinks in worlds of experience. Designing experience concepts demands an integral, concept-oriented and creative approach. It is important for an imagineer that he/she can apply competencies such as fantasy, imaginative power and empathy, both in the analysis phase as well as in the creation phase. An imagineer needs passion: an enthusiastic drive for creating extraordinary experiences. The most essential competence is however creativity.

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**SenCity**

In 2004, under the name of Sense, Skyway organised two music events for the deaf and hard of hearing, respectively at 013 in Tilburg and Tivoli in Utrecht. In 2005, a SenCity event took place at Paradiso in Amsterdam. The focus was to communicate the passion, atmosphere and emotion of the music by means of light effects, musical interpreters, video animations, musical performances with dancers, aroma jockeys and vibrating floors.

The great success of these pioneering parties mean that SenCity and its organiser the Skyway Foundation have in the meantime become famous in the world of the deaf. Young people who are deaf and hard of hearing come to this six-monthly event from all over West Europe to go out of their minds. But also for dance fans in the world of hearing the penny is beginning to drop: at SenCity all the senses are stimulated and music acquires other dimensions.

At SenCity an innovative, pioneering, intense experience of music is created. Musical sign interpreters interpret the music in sign language. VJs project specially designed creations, the Westvest Academy in Tilburg enables the visitors to translate the music in fluorescent drawings and an aroma jocky spreads aromas through the hall which enhances the atmosphere of the music. At all the parties, Skyway works specially together with the New Artists Institute in Rotterdam, which in addition to its own professional dancers, also trains deaf young people. All these unique extras constitute a total experience with expressions which surprise the visitor from top to toe!

**Skyway Foundation**

**Mission**

The Skyway Foundation stimulates, motivates and supports groups of people on the basis of their own strengths to actively participate in activities which would initially not seem to be accessible for them. It organises pioneering events which inspire this target group to participate in our society. The guiding internal values of the Skyway Foundation are to work **purely, with inspiration and open-mindedness**.

**Future**

On the 13th of May a SenCity event has taken place in Gent, Belgium. Due to the international turnout (Sense visitors come from all of Europe: Spain, Italy, Finland, Austria etc) and the results of a feasibility study, which was carried out by NHTV University of Applied Sciences, Skyway is of the opinion that there us sufficient support for SenCity to become a European event. Seeing the Unseen a Skyway photography project for the blind and the visually handicapped, will be continued.

In addition, it is Skyway’s mission to look at ways of making other activities accessible for certain groups of people. Moreover the Foundation is willing to cooperate with all sorts of festivities. Skyway provides for the needs of people not covered by the normal provisions of leisure activities. At the same time it wishes to demonstrate that a handicap may also actually enrich the current cultural provision, all the more because someone can use their handicap to their advantage. Deaf dancers have, for example, much more expression in their body language and a blind photographer has a completely different focus. The surprising effects lead to a synergy when cooperation takes place with people without a handicap.

www.stichtingskyway.nl
Creativity
Developing new experience concepts according in a purely analytical way will not lead to results. Although knowledge and analysis are essential, creativity is the indispensable ingredient for the concept development process. A number of important aspects of creativity are:
- creativity is concerned with solving problems
- creativity is concerned with innovation: thinking of solutions which other people have not thought of. It may then concern developing completely new ideas, but also the skilful combination of various fields of knowledge.
- creativity is concerned with ‘looking beyond the usual boundaries’: applying knowledge and ideas from other subject areas often leads to a completely new view of the matter.
- creativity is not the result of activities which take place in the right side of the brain (where you would expect to find creativity), but more an activity which takes place in an interaction between the (rational and structuring) left and the (intuitive) right part of the brain (Nijss /Peters, 2002). Shifting between the parts of the brain and creativity do not necessarily have to be take place in one person; it can just as well take place within an imagineering team, providing they are all passionate about what they are doing.

4.2 What does the imagineering process look like?

The imagineering process always begins at the **Heart**. If the heart does not beat, then everything would be at a standstill. It is a question of thinking with the heart, allowing the heart to speak and doing things with heart and soul.

From the heart you go to the **head**:

**Left part of the brain:**
This is where the phase of the acquisition of knowledge begins. An analysis is made of the problem or idea which forms the cause. Look at the problem from different angles, bring the problem up for discussion, raise as many unexpected connections as possible. Analyse the existing internal and external supply, possible networks, trends and developments, target groups.

Target groups are analysed on the level of values. An existing experience can also be analysed. Both values as well as experiences are difficult to chart in a hard, quantitative way. In
research into values and experiences, it is mostly a matter of carrying out qualitative research in which methods are used such as in-depth interviews, group discussions, participant observations. In this, various creative techniques are often used such as laddering, visualisations (e.g. mood boards). The analysis of values and experience is however insufficient on its own. Use as many sources as possible. Watch films, read stories, visit locations, look at the world around you, and become inspired from everything.

In this phase, continual shifts are made back and forth between the left side of the brain and the

**Right side of the brain:**

**Dreaming, experiencing, brooding, brainstorming**

The acquisition of knowledge phase gradually turns into a brooding phase. This is a chaotic phase in which hope, frustration and new insights alternate with each other. Dreams are visualised and communicated to each other. In this phase it is absolutely essential that imagineers project themselves into the intended experience. Which emotions does it concern? Which values play a role and how are these values expressed? Which images does the experience conjure up? Which colours and smells? But what is also particularly important: what is “the end”, what feeling should the guest be left with at the end of the event? In this phase, creative sessions are an important aid.

Know your end result. It could be an image, feeling, or a metaphor. Do research to that end. Find a visual direction that matches the result you want.

When you are faced with a project, relate it to something you know. For example, how would you paint a room that should “feel like the look on a child’s face when they receive their first puppy?” You would paint it very differently than if you were simply asked to paint a room.

(Susan Dalin in The Imagineering Workout, Disney Enterprises, 2005)

“I know what I like when I see it”

Observe something you like for five to ten minutes. Notice your reactions: what aspects attract you – color, shape, sound, form, personality, or habit? What engages you – feeling, memories, details or use?

Observe something you don’t like for five to ten minutes. Notice your negative reactions but, more importantly, figure out why you don’t like it. Are aspects such as cultural associations, materials, context, memories or trendiness turning you off? Find something you do appreciate in these things. Almost everything is cool in someone’s eyes – figure out why.

(Sue Bryan in The Imagineering Workout, Disney Enterprises, 2005)

**The Stomach**

**Creating a vision and an experience concept**

In this phase it is important to take distance and to take stock of everything that has come up in the first phase as far as knowledge and feelings are concerned. A clear, innovative and appropriate vision will be created. A vision is by definition always subjective: it is a personal opinion or a bundle of views, a means of seeing or observing, an inner perception. A vision represents the broad outlook. It is a comprehensive or special insight (Nijs/Peters, 2002).

A vision can be related on 3 levels:

A vision of the world

A vision of people in general (and of the target group in particular)

A vision of the “product”.

Lego’s vision is: We believe that play is the essential ingredient in a child’s growth and development. It enables the human spirit to grow. It encourages imagination, conceptual thinking and creation. This
vision is of people in general, the child in particular and the reference to play clearly creates a link to the product.

In the extension of the vision a meaningful experience concept will come to exist which captures the essence of everything the imagineer knows and feel. This is to do with a “gut feeling”: the concept has to feel right, it has to be right.

Lego’s concept is in fact articulated in the name: Lego originates from the Danish words “leg Godt”, which means “play well”. In Latin it means “I put together” (www.lego.com). The vision is encapsulated in this: that conceiving and constructing things is a good way of playing.

The development of the concept is the first and most crucial step in the development of the experience. Creative techniques (such as brainstorming) can help in the development of a concept.

**Exercise as warming up:**

Imagine how many different ways someone can jump fifty feet into the air. You’re not constrained by cost, time, or even physics at this point. Let your mind wander from super size trampolines to liquid fuel jetpacks. Let your curiosity lead you. Ask yourself the how, why, and what other way questions. Get as many options down on paper as possible.

The most unrealistic options inspire tangent ideas that take you to new places you would never have considered.

(Dave Crawford in the Imagineering Workout, 2005)

**What is brainstorming?**

Brainstorming is a process that incites creative solutions with riotous, swirling activity, thunderclaps of genius, and sweeping winds of change.

The unstructured structure behind brainstorming allows creative chaos to flourish.

Tools:
- Brainstormers: a group of 3 to 12 people, of any age or expertise; diversity is essential;
- Runner: to help record and organize ideas, to pin up cards;
- Supplies: index cards, magic markers, pushpins.

Rules:
- There are no bad ideas: one idea will lead to another.
- Respect all input.
- Share the imperfect things: someone might get inspired.
- Be willing to be wrong.
- Set meeting time limits: you’ll know when to stop.

Ready, set, brainstorm!

Time’s up! The wall looks a mess: cards with terrible handwriting, bad doodles. Brainstorming is done. How can that be? There’s no solution! Yes, there is – in the connections or the innovations.

(Mk Haley in The Imagineering Workout, 2005)
4.3 What’s in a concept?

What do we understand by concept? In the leisure industry, the notion of concept is used in many ways and not univocally. Concept sometimes appears to be a meaningless container notion: everything can be labelled concept. The definition for concept that we use is: A concept (as related to an idea) is the working principle that creates coherence and provides direction to the realisation of one or more objectives (Hover/Kops, 2004).

A concept does not cease to exist the moment that the realisation of products has taken place. To the contrary, it ensures that the coherence remains.

Under working principle we mean the way in which something works in essence, from what something derives its right to exist, “what makes it tick”. The working principle within a concept may be naturally present (such as the cold North Sea on 1 January which may or may not invite a dip), but it is only when this working principle is brought into action for realising an objective that a concept can be talked of. To continue with the example: the Unox New Year’s dip, in which thousands of people in the Netherlands simultaneously take a dip in the North Sea, is in this sense a concept.

People can also grow into a concept. It is in this way that Jamie Oliver has an authentic, working principle at his disposal: a sincere, trendy young man who just happens to like cooking. At the moment that this working principle is recognized and someone has the idea of consciously bringing this into action, then Jamie Oliver can become a concept.

With regard to a concept, there is thus on the one hand an underlying idea, on the other hand, a concept provides coherence to various components such as themes, products, personnel, communication.

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**Opera in the Bus**

Once in the two years, Yo! Opera Festival attracts a wide audience in Utrecht with an international opera festival for the youth. The objectives are: building bridges between opera and a wide/young audience, placing opera in the middle of society and fulfilling a booster role for repertoire development and a new generation of young opera makers.

The concept ‘Opera in de Bus’ and the festival theme ‘Community Opera’ appear to have really hit the mark. It resulted in six splendid operas in moving buses each of which did something in their own way with the social, historical context of the specific bus routes. From the neighbourhood projects which additionally took place during the festival, the opera flat was perhaps the very height. Fifty-four households took a singer into their homes for one day. The audience could ring at the door and the singer sang his/her song or aria in the doorway specially for the listener. Six hundred amateur singers from 22 local choral societies participated in a gigantic choral work, the lyrics of which were written by the mayor of Utrecht. The bus operas literally dragged opera out of the ivory towers onto the street. The part of the project ‘The Singing City’ (with the stream of choirs as its high point) brought amateur singers and children out of the community centres and neighbourhood halls to the theatre.

The following special results can be mentioned:

- The special bus driver’s choir which was set up for this festival continues to exist. The bus drivers meanwhile write their own lyrics.
- After the festival, a number of opera buses were invited to perform in other places at home and abroad.
- The stream of choirs has been adopted by other cities and festivals as a strong concept for performing on a large-scale with local choirs.

www.yo-festival.nl

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We make a distinction between functional concepts and experience concepts. Functional concepts are aimed at functionality. For example the working principle of a transport cafe is the self-service principle. Physical environment, personnel, activities: all of these are in keeping with the functions ‘quick’ and ‘easy’. In experience concepts the objective is to realise an experience for the guest. All choices, so the functional aspects too, are connected to the concept and are directing the intended experience.
4.4 Experience concept

A strong experience concept is satisfactory at the moment that the objective is realised, in this case, that the experience actually takes place. To increase the chance of this as much as possible, an experience concept must satisfy a number of criteria. Strong concepts:

1. are meaningful, they consist of a sort of “inner truth”. Precisely by basing an experience concept on relevant values for the target group, its authenticity will be felt. It concerns making a connection with what people experience as important. It is only then that a concept can bestow meaning.

2. are distinctive and, in the ideal situation, unique. Today’s consumers are spoilt: they have already seen and experienced many things. Uniqueness does not necessarily mean something completely new, but may also consist of a surprising combination of existing elements.

3. have enduring appeal. A strong experience concept has appeal for a longer period of time. However, there should also be room for it being regularly renewed or supplemented, without it losing its essential strength.

4. should be multi-layered. They are subject to more than one interpretation and because of this they are often more exciting and interesting for more than just one target group. In this sense, in essence concepts resemble stories such as fairy tales: these can also be said to have a key message surrounded by various layers. Storytelling is the key for strong experience concepts.

5. should be right as far as timing is concerned. A concept may be strong on paper, but if it is not realised at the right moment, it will lose its potential value. For this reason it is very important to keep a sharp eye on trends and developments, not only in an analytical manner but also particularly in an intuitive manner.

4.5 Developing an experience concept

A method for developing an experience concept is by applying storytelling in the concept development phase. In this, you select a ‘story’ as a working principle within the concept. Via this story, it is then possible to lay down values and emotions in the experience from within. The story can be the one that the guest will experience. In this way, you make a link with the idea that an experience for a consumer often seems to follow a story line (see psycho-social framework). Encapsulating a concept in a one-liner is one way of telling the story in its most essential form. This one-liner can also be used as the name/means of communication.

Rock 'n' Roller Coaster

A good example of an experience concept is the Rock ‘n’ Roller Coaster at Disney’s MGM Studios, Orlando (a somewhat ‘leaner’ version can be found in Paris). The primary target group for the roller coasters are boys between the ages of 8 and 18. Important values for many adolescent boys are ‘adventure’ and ‘pushing back boundaries’. In today’s society there is however little room for expressing these values in a responsible and safe way. What is actually tough and exciting nowadays? In what way can you still really push back boundaries? The roller coaster is an answer to this. Whoever is finally tall enough for the roller coaster, is no longer a child but is becoming a young man. Because of this, the first ride in a roller coaster is a sort of initiation ritual. Such a small, big boy wants to cast off his childhood. Rock music is tough and exciting and is totally in keeping with this experience. From this experience the experience concept has come into existence and is encapsulated in the name: Rock ‘n’ Roller Coaster. The name expresses the story of what you will experience: Rock in a Roller Coaster.

The Rock ‘n’ Roller Coaster is already visible from the distance because of the red mega-guitar which adorns the front of the attraction. The route to the attraction is decorated with display cases containing sound equipment and concert posters from various eras. The pre-show consists of a visit to Aerosmith’s recording studio. The manager comes and tells the members of the band that they have to hurry up in order to arrive at the concert location on time. “But what about all these good people then? They have just arrived!” And so the band invites the good people on the other side of the glass to go with them in a super-stretch limo.

Backstage: the place of departure where the ‘limo’ drives up to. The journey is accompanied by hard rock played by Aerosmith and makes you dizzy. With colourful signs the story continues: “Civic Centre” and the rollercoaster slows down a little. “Caution! One way road ahead” and it swerves suddenly to the left. Arrival at the concert location: the red carpet welcomes.
And the inevitable post-show: the shop. The entire decor denotes the rock theme: an openwork drum set serves as a container for articles. Sound equipment cases upon which products are displayed. And at the checkout where you can buy a photo of yourself in the attraction a very subtle small display carrying the words: Walk this way ... and then: for your photo...

The following model demonstrates how storytelling can constitute the working principle in an experience concept:

As working principle, the experience concept gives direction to all the choices which are made, it is as it were, the operating system and the driving force behind the process. All further products, experience instruments, communication (both during as well as around the experience) have to contribute to strengthening the story. It is in this way that the experience concept provides coherence, which makes the whole stronger than the sum of its individual parts. The objective has to be continually in one’s mind: it concerns realising an experience for people.
The Legs: directing the experience:
An experience concept has to "land" sooner or later, it has to make contact with the earth. The concept is not only translated into a concrete experience, but all the products and communication (means and channels) linked to this should arise from the concept. In the context of this chapter, we will limit ourselves to staging an event as an experience and the instruments which can be utilised in this.

4.6 Physical surroundings
The physical surroundings are highly influential for the experience. From research it appears that a location firstly has to meet a number of basic aspects before there can be any talk at all of a positive experience.

1. The environment has to be clean. No matter how beautiful an attraction may be, a dirty toilet or an overfull rubbish bin will be immediately disturbing. Disney has researched that people are prepared to walk an average of 21 steps to throw something away. It is for this reason that in the Disney parks a rubbish bin can be found every 20 steps.

In the park the 'Efteling' in the Netherlands, the character Hollebolle Gijs (Big Mouth, the friendly guzzler) has existed for decades now. The idea behind this concept is based on the reformulation of: How do we prevent rubbish lying around? to: How do we make throwing rubbish away a fun activity (Nijs/Peters, 2003, p. 198)? Big Mouth is a talking rubbish bin who calls out "paper here". When rubbish is deposited in his mouth he responds with "thank you very much".

2. The location of the facilities. It is well known in museums that having sanitary facilities close to the exit shortens the visitor's stay. Placing resting and catering facilities half-way through the route however, lengthens the visitor's stay (Nijs/Peters).

3. Lay out. Cognitive psychology has discovered that people principally try to get an internal idea of a place as fast as possible, painting a so-called cognitive map. They look for specific reference points. European cities whose histories stretch back to medieval times are excellent examples of psychologically styled places. They always have a main axis. The intersections of these axes, the large street crossings, are significant hubs. They lead to central squares emphasized by a mnemonic point – the cathedral, city hall. Axes, hubs, mnemonic points, districts are the four typical features of cognitive maps.

Entering modern exhibition halls you often feel overwhelmed by the confusing mass of innumerable visual elements and inundating visitors. This 'visual heap of rubbish' that does not allow our constantly flitting eyes any hold, thereby preventing any cognitive map from forming. (Mikunda, 2002)

That Disney’s roots lie in the cartoon film industry can still be seen in the fact that imagineers use cinematic perspectives in creating an experience: first the ‘long shot’ has to be clear. In the distance there is something high/large-scale which attracts the attention. Round forms stand for security (such as the Tree of life in Animal Kingdom), pointed forms for challenge (such as the Big Thunder Mountain in Magic Kingdom). Red attracts the attention, green brings rest.

A place should seduce visitors to promenade, mall and stroll. In some respects, a place does have to offer surprises but if wandering around means becoming lost, then the experience is immediately disturbed (Hesselmans, 2005). Route signs are important. For that matter, basic information may also be meaningfully designed. In Disneyland Paris the service entrances are decorated with directions in English and French: at the Alice in Wonderland maze a sign can be found which reads: Queen’s guard only, translated into French with: Ne pas entrer ... which represents a missed chance on an experience level. A text can also be replaced by something else. Every child in the Netherlands knows the small gnome who sits close to the toilets in the Efteling, who indicates with his thumb and says: 'spend a penny!'
4.7 Experience instruments

There are various experience instruments available for directing a leisure experience. In imagineering it is important to continually make all choices from the viewpoint of the experience concept as a guiding principle. It is to do with the holistic approach in which the instruments reinforce each other in a cohesive, meaningful whole.

4.7.1 Theming

Theming is a much used instrument in the leisure sector. The theme of a congress is the substantive subject which the congress is about. A theme within the experience instrument we interpret as follows: A theme is the outward, recognizable, explicit subject which is carried through in setting, in details and in communication.

Broadly, themes can be based on:

1. history. Within this the following can be distinguished: events (such as the Second World War, a theme, for example, at museums); eras (such as the Middle Ages or Roman times, which can serve as a reference, for example, for theme parties)
2. culture/sub-cultures, such as expressive arts, heritage, music, folklore, countries.
3. fiction: such as books (Harry Potter), films (Sponge Bob), fairy tales/legends/myths (Robin Hood).
4. nature: such as jungle, beach, gardens, animals.
5. technology: such as trains as the theme at a Railway Museum.

Very often a theme will fall under various main themes, at the Railway Museum for example, a combination can be found of history, heritage and technology. Themes have the goal of achieving a change in the consumer’s perception of reality, of immersing him/her in another world. In the ideal situation, space, time, material and people (individuals) are integrated in a cohesive whole (Nijs/Peters, 2002).

According to Joseph Pine theming is the main ingredient in the “recipe” for creating a memorable experience, in other words, an experience which consumers will remember positively. According to Pine, it is essential to infuse the theme with as many appropriate components as possible (‘positive cues’) and to avoid components which are inappropriate (‘negative cues’) as much as possible.

Yet theming does not always appear to be a success formula. From research into theming at leisure locations (see insert), it appears that it does not always automatically lead to a memorable experience. In addition, the role of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ cues would seem to be strongly dependent on the degree to which people are involved in the theme. The lower the degree of involvement, the less value people place on whether the cues are right or not.

Experience research into theming and storytelling

In 2005, students from the Leisure Management Academy (NHTV) conducted research into experiences.

In the research into the relationship between experience instruments and memorable experience, field research was conducted at various leisure locations, including theme restaurants, theme parks and open-air museums. The research was qualitative in nature. Observations, interviews, analyses of guest books and so-called experience reports were used. These experience reports involved a total of 130 respondents.

The experience report consisted of a questionnaire with open questions such as ‘Can you describe what you experienced during your visit?’, ‘What did you tell your friends and family afterwards about your visit?’ By phrasing the questions in such a way, the respondents were not steered in the direction of a particular experience instrument. They were asked to complete the experience reports two weeks after their visit so that insight could be gained in the ‘memorability’ of the experience.

In restaurants, the theme was indeed experienced as increasing the atmosphere, but people did not mention this first in relation to the experience. It was noteworthy that for the Ribhouse Texas (Wild West theme), the most memorable moment mentioned was in fact a completely inappropriate cue, where the theme was concerned: a large steak served by Fred Flintstone with a great degree of spectacle. The more that people were involved in the theme (such as a restaurant specialised in the Italian eating experience), the more critical people were regarding the cues (Koopman, 2005).

At the theme parks and open-air museums, real experience also only took place once a number of basic aspects had been satisfied. These were good weather, attractive surroundings and friendly personnel. Furthermore, it was apparent that a clear connection between themes and sub-themes was important. Although the respondents did not mention it as such, it appears that they strongly felt the
Mondoverde was experienced as intended by the coordinating concept: a journey through world gardens. It was also the case here that, the more meaning a theme had for someone, on the one hand, the more critical people were with regard to the details, but on the other, the more intense the experience was. For example, the Chinese garden actually evoked a strong experience by someone who had been to China.

Nevertheless, the strongest experiences were caused by aspects other than the theme itself. This mainly concerned the personal framework upon which the provider had no direct influence. In this, one respondent’s story was particularly moving: ‘My wife has been seriously ill and because of this she has been going through a very rough time. It felt so good to see that she completely revived when she walked through the park […] It was wonderful to see how she became engrossed, how she inhaled the smells of nature, how she looked at the gardens with shining eyes, how she enjoyed nature’ (Hesselmans, 2005).

There is a great chance that in two weeks time, it will be these lines you remember the most from this insert. The quote conjures up a story full of authentic emotions and values (love, tenderness). This indicates that another instrument that was included in the research works far more powerfully in relation to experience, namely storytelling.

4.7.2 Storytelling

Our understanding of storytelling is: communicating stories. Storytelling is perhaps as old as mankind. It is an outstanding means of communicating values and norms (as is the case for fairy tales), of conveying emotions, of involving people and even for bringing about transformations. Storytelling can help people to understand the world. People are looking for frames of reference to give meaning to the world in which they live (Rijnja van de Jagt, 2004). It is not facts which are important in stories, but actually the meaning. Stories catch on because they help us to day dream: to momentarily abandon your thoughts, without losing your head (Gabriel, 2000). They activate pride, fantasy and longing (Rijnja, 2004). These are elements which are closely connected to experience.

An important dimension within storytelling is authenticity. In this, the concern is not authenticity in the sense of something really having happened, but it is more about originality, credibility in the sense of real emotion and meaningful values. A fantasy story may also be authentic in this sense. Lord of the Rings is not credible on a factual level, but on an emotional level it is.

In relation to theming, the contextual authenticity in stories plays a role. If the story is “in its original surroundings”, it becomes stronger. For example, if a story about Indians is told in a wigwam, this will evoke a stronger experience. Layering is an important dimension of storytelling. Powerful stories have many layers which can be interpreted on various levels. It is precisely for these reasons that children want to hear the same stories again and again. In a good story they can continually discover new layers. Being able to continually discover new elements in a familiar story may perhaps play an important role in the repetition of leisure activities.

In storytelling, explicit storytelling can be used, in other words, a story can be literally told by someone. The storyteller can infuse the story with emotion and can involve the audience in the story by giving them a ‘role’, or by means of interaction using questions and answers. On the other hand, implicit storytelling also exists. A visual performance or an object can trigger a story in individuals, which they then flesh out with their own fantasies. It can stir up a nostalgic memory from a personal or collective past. An example of this are the old cardboard train tickets in the Railway Museum which carry visitors back to their own memories of an earlier experience. An object may also serve as a metaphor for restoring a story - whether true or not - to understandable dimensions. For example, the suitcases containing personal effects in the Memorial Centre Camp Westerbork stand for the personal human drama of deportation.

In directing experiences it is highly important to incorporate a connection between instruments such as storytelling and theming on a concept level.

4.7.3 Stimulating the senses

Sensory perceptions lead to emotions (Frijda, 1986) and emotions are the crucial factor in relation to experience. The more the senses are involved, the more intense the experience will be (Pine/Gilmore, 1999). However, this is certainly not always the case. Someone may also have a very intense experience when listening to music or looking at a painting. Stimulating the senses can be used to strengthen the experience. We will examine this in more detail in terms of colours and smells.
**Colours**

Colours have a strong influence on people’s moods and, as said above, moods play an important role in an experience coming into existence. Colours can help support a story structure (John Hench, 2003). Colours can set people in motion.

Red is festive (suggesting good times) but it also commands attention and challenge. The first association with blue is the sky, which suggests heaven, open space and freedom. Brown and related earth tones strongly evoke the natural world, and suggest the strength and solidity of terra firma.

Green represents nature, it connotes new growth, abundance, rest and leisure, and good health. Very dark, cold-toned spaces have a foreboding look. They can look threatening but become inviting when lit with coloured lights or small twinkling lights which make even the most foreboding spaces seem magical and romantic. (John Hench, Designing Disney, 2003, Disney Editions, New York)

**Smells**

From experiments it appears that sight is the most dominant sense, immediately followed by hearing. Processing smells takes place in the limbic system in the brain. In this area, the driving mechanisms for emotions are also located. The importance of the sense of smell is not always recognised, whereas it is precisely smells which bear a strong relation to moods, experience and memory (Dekker, 2006).

In 2006, two students from the Leisure Management Academy (NHTV) conducted experiments to research the relationship between smell and experience. One experiment took place during Sencity (see insert in section 4.0), in which both deaf and hearing young people were the respondents. The outcome was that the more that a number of sensory stimulants were present at the same time (such as light, sound, vibrations), the addition of smell was perceived less sharply and barely led to an increase in the experience. The deaf (who missed a sense) did indeed perceive the smell more sharply, but this did not always lead to an increase in the experience. From the research it can be concluded that an overkill of sensory stimulation does not lead to a more positive experience. Moreover, the associations with smell are strictly personal: what smells good for one person, stinks for another (Boom, 2006).

The other experiment took place in a wellness centre, where in fact the sense of feeling (the heat of the sauna) was the only sensory stimulation which counted. For one group of respondents, smell was added to the visit to the sauna, the control group stayed in the sauna without smell. From the research it is appeared that the group with smell had a far more positive experience and through all the associations invoked by the smell, were distracted from the discomfort of the heat. The group without smell were very conscious of the heat, which bothered them and through this had a more negative experience (Dekker, 2006).

Working with the addition of smells is currently being used quite often, for example, by aroma DJs. It is a matter of working subtly. If in particular taste and smell conflict with each other (you smell cinnamon and taste beer), this can be confusing and it will result in a disturbance of the experience. Too many stimulations at the same time is not recommended. A smell can however be utilised to divert the attention from relative discomfort during an event (such as waiting in a queue). In addition, smells can be used to take advantage of the experience of the pre-exposure and post-exposure phase and in this way stimulate memory and strengthen the expectations.

4.7.4 **Play**

Who has never had a row with his best friends during a game of Risk or the Colonists of Catan? Who has never felt euphoric in scoring that goal in the unimportant practice game? Computer games and, in particular, online computer games have undergone an enormous boost in recent years. In addition, somewhat paradoxically, the market for board games has grown drastically in the last 10 years (Hover/Horsten, 2004).

There are various sorts of play. Play denotes unorganised, spontaneous playing. This concerns a setting in which pleasure and development are the most important factors. Games are a different discipline. Games have been designed and organised in relation to time and space. Challenges, optimising the rules and tactics are central in games (Verhagen, 2006). Playing consists of surprise, allows room for creativity, and enables the player to develop cognitively, physically or emotionally.

Play, game and sport are closely related. Although in sport - professional and amateur - clear characteristics of playing such as “freedom” and “pleasure” would sometimes seem to be disappearing
into the background, for both the practitioners as well as the audience, sport has been since time immemorial a much sought-after form of leisure activity in which the emotions can run high. Playing is often associated with children but playing is also an important element in the leisure activities of adults. Playing is an outstanding means of involving people in an activity, as onlookers or participants. Where the onlooker can actively influence the game (such as in Pop Idols), the experience is reinforced. Playing has been used with great success in events and the business world for years: it frees people from ingrained patterns, offers room for interaction (social context) and carries people away in an experience.

4.7.5 Co-creation

Consumers are increasingly becoming better at gaining access to information and are therefore capable of making well-founded decisions. The role of the consumer is changing. There is a growing need for interaction with the organisation to arrive at the creation of value proposition which is meaningful for the individual consumer (Pralahad/Ramaswamy, 2004). Co-creation is the involvement of the consumer in designing the experience which is most in keeping with the meaning that the individual wishes to give to his/her life. It is the ultimate form of a demand-based approach. Co-creation is often presented as an innovative concept within the new generation of experience economy. For a great part, it is however based on the same principles as play. The important similarities between playing and co-creation are:

- the freedom of choice experienced
- intrinsic motivation
- interaction is central
- room for creativity
- room for self-development
- the results are not fixed (Verhagen, 2006).

We have already encountered most these factors under the psycho-social framework which influences the experience. It is clear that co-creation can also be used as an experience instrument. From time immemorial, an event as an experience has often in fact already been interspersed with co-creation between the provider and consumer (think of the fights between the gladiators in ancient Rome in which the audience could help determine the outcome). In a leisure product such as an event, the experience only really takes place through the contribution of the visitors to the experience. A performer playing to an empty hall is not an experience. The visitors who applaud, sing along, dance or give expression to their experience in another way, make this experience what it is: interaction takes place between provider and consumer and the experience is accessible for others. The ways in which the fans from various countries dress up and present themselves during the Football World Cup, also contributes to their own total experience but also to that of third parties.

It is possible to involve the consumer earlier in the co-creation process by giving him/her a say on the concept and product development level. Digital media such as the Internet offer many possibilities for doing this. This already regularly happens in an event context. Various major festivals give the consumer the possibility of voting for their favourite line-up via their websites.

For the consumer who enters the co-creation process with the provider on this level, it will undoubtedly result in a strong personal experience: he/she can after all invest in his/her own creativity, which, as we have seen in relation to flow, is strongly linked to experience. Moreover, he/she will be strongly personally involved before, during and after the process and he/she can share this involvement with others. The down side of co-creation is, however, that visitors who have determined their experience in advance, already know what they can expect: there is little room any more for surprise, or for exceeding expectations. In brief: sometimes its fun to do your own cooking, at other times it is exciting to choose a surprise menu in a restaurant.

In addition, the question of whether co-creation is an interesting option for an individual is for the great part dependent on the relevance that a specific activity has for someone (to what extent does he/she want to be involved?). Co-creation does of course require effort and not everyone will have time nor inclination to put themselves out. It is matter of weighing costs against benefits. In addition, an individual's competencies play a role. Some people simply miss the self-confidence, the initiative or the creativity to dare take it on. In relation to this, virtual communities may also play the role of a safe “family” in which individuals can engage in co-creation.

The optimum of a demand-based approach in the form of co-creation is a way but certainly not the only way of guaranteeing a strong experience. In a setting staged by the supplier a deep, meaningful experience can also still take place. For the provider in the leisure context it is therefore a matter of imagining themselves in the experience of consumers, creeping under their skin and wherever possible, together with the consumer, arriving at a meaningful experience.
Unexpected Encounters
The objective of the client’s personnel party (Erasmus Medical Centre) reads as follows:
The creation of a feeling of togetherness, amongst other things, through the staff being able to meet each other. In addition the members of staff and partners should be thanked for their efforts, commitment and loyalty. The total programme should also consist of enjoyable ingredients for the people who have to stay on the job. For a hospital these people are a real target group, in view of the nature of the work and the necessary hands at the bedside.
‘Unexpected encounters’ is the central theme: a series of surprise meetings in which there are no obligations.

The ultimate event is part of a communication mix which consists of, amongst other things, posters, family days, a website, a soap series and the event itself.

In this example, we will confine ourselves to the website. The website constitutes the connecting link between all the other components such as the family days and the personnel party. Moreover, this party site creates a virtual meeting place for the members of staff and their supporters. In this way the people who stay on the job are also treated to the festivities.

The site is designed as a virtual hospital consisting of a virtual reception, waiting room, kiosk and the party lift which will take the guests to a choice of festive departments. Various activities and components within the site will ensure that the guests will experience unexpected encounters with other colleagues, professors, and mystery guests.

Soap: In the first weeks a hospital soap in photos was realised. The film shots created a great deal of positive commotion in the departments of the medical centre and the personnel themselves unexpectedly played a role in the story. The story of the soap ended with a surprise encounter of the two leading characters at the personnel party.

Radio broadcasting company: Here the guests could vote on their personal evergreens from the fifties right through to 2004. The Erasmus MC top 25 gradually acquired form during the course of the festivities and was played during the event in the disco.

Canteen: Here colleagues met each other for a chat session or a panel discussion; they could arrange a lunch date with a colleague and meetings took place with mystery guests. So singer Do attracted considerable curiosity and a glance could be taken behind the scenes. This caused many people to quickly put their names forward for the personnel party …

Dating Service: The outstanding place for singles. People could place a personal advert to which colleague could react. Moreover, the members of staff could put their names forward for a blind date during the party. A dating counter coupled the guests during the Erasmus MC party.

The kitchen: The international seaport city of Rotterdam along with the Erasmus MC is a melting pot of cultures. In the virtual kitchen these cultures came together, which was a guarantee for a varied menu compiled by the guests through sending in personal recipes for tasty dishes. Moreover, people were invited to think of a special party snack for the Erasmus MC party.

The Hall of Fame: The pre-eminent place to meet special colleagues who were nominated by employees of the medical centre. The winner of this internet competition would win a unique and personal ‘dream portrait’.

Car park: In the basement car park there was the opportunity of making carpool agreements. This was primarily intended for enabling people to travel together to the party. Once they have already had a taste for doing this, then hopefully carpooling to and from work will take off.

Beauty Salon: Here the guests were furnished with various tips with regard to clothing, hair styles and make-up. During the party the guests would be further ‘taken in hand’.

It’s your party: After the family days and the personnel party, photos would be placed here online. It was also possible for the guests to express their appreciation here.

www.planetevent.nl
4.7.6 Personnel

Continuation of experience research into theming and storytelling

From the research it appeared that utilizing storytelling in combination with the theme, is clearly beneficial in creating a memorable experience. In the Southern Sea Museum, volunteers play the roles of inhabitants of the houses. They tell ‘personal’ stories about the hard lives of earlier times. From the experience reports it appears that it was often these very stories which gave the visitors the feeling of immersion. It was striking that in this the respondents used many emotionally-loaded words, such as ‘amazement’, ‘impressive’, ‘moving’. Storytelling leads to immersion.

Personnel play a crucial role in the design of an experience. It certainly does not have to be a matter of “performing a role”. It starts with some obvious basic aspects such as friendliness, accessibility and helpfulness, which however do not always seem to be a matter of course. In contributing to the ultimate experience, empathy is the most essential competence that the personnel should have at their disposal (Louie Gravance, 2006). This concerns the ability to empathise with the feelings of the visitors and to exceed their expectations.

At Disney, the role of the personnel as bearers of the experience has been perfected. Each member of staff (no matter what their position is in the company) is a cast member. Working is being ‘on stage’, in which everyone is part of the show. For European ears this often sounds like something which would not suit ‘us’. Nevertheless there are lessons to be learnt. In every Disney shop there is a certain budget available which members of staff may use at their own discretion, whenever they have the opportunity to create a special, magical moment for a guest. This does not only enrich the experience for the guest, but the cast member also may derive great pleasure from this interaction.

Every evening at 8 o’clock the firework show takes place in the Magic Kingdom. The highlight of the show is the moment in which Tinker Bell is suspended in the air via a cable. 5 year old Erica had looked forward to this moment for ages. However, on that very evening one Tinker Bell was on holiday and the other one was ill. So it was no-show for Tinker Bell. Erica had already started to sob during the show and once this was over, she was really crying her eyes out. Her parents shepherded her to the shop in an attempt to console her. But no matter how many times they said: ‘Quieten down now, Erica.’, nothing helped. Erica carried on yelling: ‘Tinker Bell is dead! The pirates killed Tinker Bell!’ The girl at the counter asked the waiting guests for a little bit of patience. She took a Tinker Bell key ring and a Tinker Bell picture postcard from the rack and wrote on the back: ‘Dear Erica, sorry I couldn’t make it. Hope to see you next time! Love, Tinker Bell’. She then walked through the shop asking: ‘Is there a small girl here called Erica?’ You can guess the rest.

The above story indicates how a cast member interpreted “Create happiness”, the underlying experience concept. But it can also be simpler, without presents being involved. Take five means: no matter how busy it is, take 5 seconds, 5 minutes everyday to enjoy personal interaction with one guest for whom you will just create that magic moment. Experience works from two sides. It also gives the member of staff new energy.

In training the personnel, storytelling at Disney is an essential instrument. For the main part, the Disney traditions programme consists of storytelling such as that about Erica. Such a story conveys the Disney values and it becomes clear to every listener how you translate this into behaviour.

Personnel at events often tend to be in temporary ‘employment’ such as volunteers. In this situation there is relatively little scope for training courses. It is precisely here that storytelling could be an efficient and effective instrument for ensuring that all those involved get into the correct experience mode. Telling an appealing story about how a member of staff/volunteer had managed to contribute in a personal way to the true experience of visitors at an earlier event, would achieve more than a list of 20 instructions.

To return to the experience model. We can now interpret it from an imagineering approach: the contents are formed by the experience concept which is preferably based on values, for the form the physical surroundings have to be specifically examined. Then, through a cohesive mix of experience instruments the event can be directed as a whole to achieve a meaningful, true experience.
Figure 9: Experience model (van Wijngaarden/van Gool) adapted by Hover 2006

Keep walking!
The imagineering process does not stop once an event concept and product have been developed and the experience has been directed. Imagineering means being constantly oriented towards experience, it is a different way of thinking and doing, a way of life which has to be understood and exercised by everyone in an organisation. The experience concept has to be “lived through” and, even outside the boundaries of the event, be disseminated through all channels.
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