

## REVIEW OF OPTIMISM, CREATIVITY AND SPIRITUALITY IN TOURISM RESEARCH

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – Optimism, creativity, and spirituality are important variables in Positive Psychology that can lead to better lives. The authors believe these are also fundamental concepts that can bring a new understanding of the tourism experiences, particularly in the current trend of the ‘experience economy’. The study aimed to explore optimism, creativity, and spirituality from a Positive Psychology perspective on tourism settings to deepen the understanding of the state of the art and develop ideas for improvement of tourism research experiences

**Design** – An extensive systematic literature review was developed anchored on PRISMA (2009) guidelines. The search engine Online Knowledge Library (B-On) was used and the search terms ‘Optimism’, ‘Creativity’ and ‘Spirituality’ crossed individually with ‘Tourism’, ‘Travel’ and ‘Visitor’. In-depth analysis considering the chosen inclusion/exclusion criteria were undertaken concluding with a sample of 31 references.

**Findings** – Overall, results showed a lack of optimism studies on tourism, leading to an urgent need to endeavor in the challenge of developing research. Creativity in tourism is mainly used as a background for the place and its culture and considers organizational, structural and product innovation development. Further, tourism can be seen as a spiritual activity seeking personal enrichment and fulfillment.

**Originality of the research** – This study considers three variables not usually applied to tourism contexts as is clear by the low number of references found. The application of these and consequently of Positive Psychology on tourism is *per se* new, allowing the emergence of novel and important discussions on tourism.

**Keywords** Positive Psychology, Optimism, Creativity, Spirituality, Tourism

### **INTRODUCTION**

The tourism system is changing from ‘economy’ to an ‘experience economy’ where tourists’ seek a more personal and transformational experience (Kirillova, Lehto & Cai, 2016). Thus a different perspective is needed to better adapt to the current trends. In this study, we will be focusing on Positive Psychology and particularly on optimism, creativity, and spirituality. The field of Positive Psychology offers an array of variables such as happiness, well-being, quality of life, positive emotions and so much more. The decision to focus in these three variables comes from the fact that to the best of our knowledge, these are not often studied in tourism and, secondly, these are topics of choice of the authors in other contexts. It is our view that these are key concepts with the great potential to enhance tourism experience. Therefore, the decision to review what has been researched in tourism with these three variables and get a better understanding of

the work already done and the possibilities that it opens for further studies. Optimism offers diverse benefits such as a) the promotion of positive attitudes; b) boosts tenacity when dealing with difficulties and c) an optimistic is more prone to take better care of his/her health (Hasnain, Wazid & Hasan, 2014). Optimists are more positive about what happens in their everyday lives and Peterson and Seligman's theory considers it as an attributional style that describes negative events as inconstant, external, temporary and specific (Conversano, Rotondo, Lensi, Vista, Arpone & Reda, 2010). Optimism is related to better health (mentally and physically), academic success and job performance (Hershberger, 2005) and linked to coping, satisfaction and wellbeing (Norem & Chang, 2002). Filep and Pearce (2014b) stated that optimism is possibly one of the essential values that tourists need that may even help them in dealing with unexpected events such as losing luggage.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) developed a classification for wellbeing, the Character Strengths, and Virtues (CSV), on the basis of Positive Psychology principles. It classifies human strengths and virtues which empowers flourishing (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005). It presents six virtues that emerge in nearly all cultures: a) wisdom and knowledge; b) courage; c) humanity; d) justice; e) temperance and; f) transcendence. Each virtue is composed of specific strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character strengths are positive features that mirror people's thoughts, feelings and behaviors, occurring in varying degrees and able to be accounted for individual differences (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Creativity falls in the wisdom and knowledge virtue and spirituality on transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Creativity regards originality and usefulness (Bacon, 2005). It expresses an idea of enthusiasm and it is a positive attribute to society, particularly nowadays where innovation and originality are fundamental to its development (KEA - European Affairs, 2009). The application of creativity in tourism can be a powerful strategy. Creative tourism as a subset of cultural tourism can make great contributions to the development of new experiences and it can also boost social, cultural and economic growth (Virfinija, 2016). Creative tourism is oriented to immaterial resources such as learning, developing experiences and traditions, thus its tourist is someone who wants to not only see the region but to experience it (Virfinija, 2016). Creativity is a strength that communities can use, but also the tourists themselves by experiencing and learning from new cultures and bringing it to their lives and own personal development (European Travel Commission, 2016). Spirituality is linked to subjective experiences and the search for life meaning. It deals with the idea of human potential, life goals, higher entities, God and/or purpose and a need to understand and experience the world or God (Ivtzan, Chan, Garner & Prashar, 2013). Spirituality tends to be preferred when describing personal experiences and is usually linked to concepts such as personal transcendence and meaningfulness (Hill et al., 2000). Travel can be a source to find things that make daily life meaningful. For Filep and Pearce (2014a) tourists' experiences embrace the search for accomplishment, meaning, and purpose in life. Filep and Pearce (2014a) reflect that the tourist experience can fall on each facet of PERMA as expressed by different studies results. In a) positive emotions tourists experiences lead to greater pleasure; b) in engagement the idea of flow and better skills are emphasized; c) in relationships, positive ones emerge from the tourist experience; d) in meaning, tourists' personal transformations can occur; and e) in achievement, studies suggest enhanced fitness levels and improved quality of life. Filep, Laing and Csikszentmihalyi (2017, 10) in a recent book present 'Positive Tourism' a

new field dedicated to the “study of hedonic and eudaimonic human well-being and conditions (or various circumstances) for flourishing as they relate to individual tourists, members of host communities and tourism workers in diverse sectors of the tourism industry”. It presents a humanistic approach to tourism while centering mainly on ideas from Positive Psychology.

Positive Psychology tries to apprehend the positive, adaptive, creative and emotional enjoyable characteristics of human behavior (Coghlan, 2015). Its use in tourism can lead to better tourists’ experiences, develop feelings for destinations, accept them as a special place in their hearts and promote psychological satisfaction leading to happiness and well-being growth (Dan, 2015). It is with this idea in mind that we believe that optimism, creativity, and spirituality in the view of Positive Psychology can be beneficial to tourism studies and practices. Our aim is to study how these variables are being used and applied to tourism research, therefore deepening our understanding and finding new ideas for the improvement of tourism experiences

## 1. METHODOLOGY

Sample selection was conducted following PRISMA (2009) as a guideline. The chosen search terms were: ‘Creativity’, ‘Spirituality’ and ‘Optimism’, each individually crossed with ‘Tourism’, ‘Travel’ and ‘Visitor’. For each crossing boolean operator ‘AND’ was used guaranteeing inclusion of both terms. The truncation symbol ‘\*’ was applied to all keywords to ensure the inclusion of same origin words and the ‘?’ symbol was applied to ‘Travel’ and ‘Visitor’ to include its singular and plural forms. The search took place in September 2017 on the Online Knowledge Library (B-On). The inclusion criteria were: a) publications dated from 2007 to 2017; b) search terms or related included on the title; c) journal articles written in English; d) publications from Science Direct, SCOPUS and/or Social Science Citation Index databases; e) search terms as the publications main variables and; f) theoretical or empirical studies with validated methodology. The exclusion criteria were: a) publications dated prior to 2007; b) search terms or related not included on the title; c) publications different from journal articles and/or not written in English; d) publications not from Science Direct, SCOPUS and/or Social Science Citation Index databases; e) search terms not as the publications main variables and; f) theoretical or empirical studies with non-validated methodology. Criteria a) to d) were applied through B-On. Next, an analysis for duplicates was run on EndNote software, followed by an individual and manual one. Finally, through title and abstract careful review criteria e) and f) were applied and the final sample achieved.

## 2. RESULTS

On Table 1 we encounter the total number of publications from the search terms crossings prior to the application of any criteria. This first search showed a large number of publications, but after the application of criteria a) to d) these numbers decreased considerably (Table 2).

Table 1: Total number of publications prior to criteria application

	<b>Creativity</b>	<b>Spirituality</b>	<b>Optimism</b>
<b>Tourism</b>	146.066	50.689	125.533
<b>Visitor</b>	308.817	127.222	244.392
<b>Travel</b>	629.117	249.725	485.300

Table 2: Total number of publications after application of criteria a) to d)

	<b>Creativity</b>	<b>Spirituality</b>	<b>Optimism</b>
<b>Tourism</b>	22	10	2
<b>Visitor</b>	6	0	0
<b>Travel</b>	5	3	0

This initial sample of 48 references (Table 2) was analyzed for duplicates and for inclusion/exclusion criteria. Two duplicates were found through individually revision and none through the EndNote software. Criteria e) and f) were applied through title and abstract careful review leading to the exclusion of 15 references that did not meet the inclusion criteria. The final sample consisted of 31 publications which its overall results are shown in Tables 3, 4 and 5 regarding, respectively, optimism, creativity and spirituality variables.

Optimism was the variable with fewer studies found. It is observable that just one article complied with the chosen criteria (Table 3) concluding in the existence of a positive relationship between satisfaction and optimism on a sample of tourism/ hotel management students (Ünüvar, Avsaroglu & Uslu, 2012). The shortage of references can be seen as demonstrative of a lack of research having this variable as a crucial feature in tourism. More needs to be done to encourage research and to go beyond students participants, reaching tourism organizations, but fundamentally the tourists themselves. As a core concept of Positive Psychology, optimism is one key construct and can be seen as Filep and Pearce (2014b) acknowledged as tremendously helpful in tourism experiences. Studying optimism in tourists may be crucial to a more in-depth understanding of their experiences and their wishes for these same experiences.

Tables 3: Optimism results

<b>Author, date</b>	<b>Results</b>
(Ünüvar, Avsaroglu & Uslu, 2012)	Tourism/hotel management students displayed moderate results on satisfaction and very high on optimism. Women and students with higher income scored higher on both variables. A positive relation between satisfaction and optimism was found.

On Table 4 is presented the results for creativity, which is the variable with the larger number of studies found (n=21). Overall, it is noticeable that creativity on tourism is concerned with bringing innovation to this setting (Boonpienpon, Maneenet, Siriwong & Kovathanakul, 2015; Cruz, 2014; Greenwood, & Dwyer, 2017; Richards, 2014; Robbins, & Devitt, 2017) and thus attracting visitors. The idea of developing and promoting 'creative cities' to bring visitors is also focused by different studies (Durmaz, Platt, & Yigitcanlar, 2010; Greenwood, & Dwyer, 2017; Richards, 2014). It looks that

creativity is being used as a background for tourism development, one of the ways of expressing a creative tourism according to Virfinija (2016). From the results we also acknowledged that the majority are focused on workers of the system (Horng, Tsai, & Chung, 2016; Horng, Tsai, Liu, & Chung, 2015; Horng, Tsai, Yang, Liu, & Hu, 2016); (Li & Liu, 2016; Tsai, Horng, Liu, Hu, 2015; Tsai, & Lee, 2014; Tsaur, Yen, Yang, 2011) and/or students/researchers from hospitality and tourism studies (Liu, 2017; Liu, Horng, Chou & Huang, 2017; Lin & Wong, 2014). Results also show that creativity is important for worker performance (Horng, Tsai, & Chung, 2016) and that vacation can promote creativity (de Bloom, Ritter, Kuhnel, Reinders & Geurts, 2014). Also work/learning environment is a key piece for improving/increasing creativity (Liu, 2017; Li & Liu, 2016; Horng, Tsai, Liu, & Chung, 2015; Horng, Tsai, Yang, Liu, & Hu, 2016; Tsai, Horng, Liu, Hu, 2015; Tsaur, Yen, Yang, 2011). These overall conclusions lead us to believe that there is a concern for the system workers personal characteristics and a somewhat recognition of their importance for tourism growth and to the development of new ideas to the system. Also, it looks that creativity is being approached from a background perspective with an organizational/structural preoccupation, leading to the improvement of the tourist experience through place and culture. This is aligned and expresses the current trend of the 'experience economy' and what is understood as 'creative tourism'. Richards (2011) stated that this alternative cultural tourism allows for more authentic experiences between the destination and the tourist. Thus it is encouraging to observe that creativity is being thought as an important feature in tourism as is also seen on (Lim, 2016) conceptual framework. However, it looks that research is focusing more on developing the creativity of the destination and those who work (or will work) there and not necessarily directing efforts to explore creativity in those who visit. We do believe that more research about creativity from the tourist perspective is important to further aligned' the tourist experience with the tourists themselves. While much is still need to do as Isa and Aziz (2013) concluded, we believe that the research at this point is promising.

Tables 4: **Creativity results**

<b>Authors, date</b>	<b>Results</b>
(Boonpienpon, Maneenetr, Siriwong & Kovathanakul, 2015)	Tourists can experience through food local culture, traditions. This is a form of product innovation and can be an alternative form of cultural tourism.
(Cruz, 2014)	Algarve shows a vast array of intern resources enabling it to diverse its touristic offers.
(de Bloom, Ritter, Kuhnel, Reinders & Geurts, 2014).	Vacations can develop creativity, in terms of flexibility.
(Durmaz, Platt & Yigitcanlar, 2010).	Film workers revealed a relationship between place and creativity. Being in the center of the city has a positive contribution to creativity. Film businesses are an important part of the economy and spatial growth of creative cities.
(Greenwood & Dwyer, 2017)	Macau sustainable development as a gaming/tourism destination has the potential for success if/by the development of characteristics of a 'creative' city.

<b>Authors, date</b>	<b>Results</b>
(Horng, Tsai & Chung, 2016)	Increasing creativity in tourism will favor behavioral changes and raise awareness for the importance of creativity in the tourism sector. Process, culture, proactive personality and satisfaction influences tourism practitioner creative performance.
(Horng, Tsai, Liu & Chung, 2015).	Creativity facets of people, place, process, and product linked to tourism/hospitality environments can bring together creative-process approaches. Employee personality, creative processes, and positive work environment drives to creativity and satisfaction.
(Horng, Tsai, Yang, Liu & Hu, 2016).	Creativity in tourism/hospitality business can be nurtured by employing passionate talents, assist the development of new ideas and offering a creative supporting environment.
(Isa & Aziz, 2013)	Creativity in outdoor activities and marketing is still missing.
(Li & Liu, 2016)	Tourism academics who dedicated more endeavors in keeping good relationships with partners show more gains from collaboration diversifications strategies and academics creativity.
(Lim, 2016)	Development of a conceptual creativity framework that can lead to greater sustainability in hospitality/tourism.
(Lin & Wong, 2014)	Gender, different universities, its locations, and type of high school graduated are linked to hospitality students' creativity.
(Liu, 2017)	The development of creativity on tourism/ hospitality students' is influenced by a creative learning environment.
(Liu, Horng, Chou & Huang, 2017)	Co-competition course design (learning mechanism) could promote tourism/hospitality students' critical thinking concerning sustainability and develop their creativity.
(Pappalepore, Maitland & Smith, 2010)	Tourists' experiences in a creative urban place were more influenced by the creative people than by accessibility of tangible consumer products.
(Richards, 2011)	Creative tourism echoes the increase combination of tourism and creativity. It is an alternative to mass cultural tourism, presenting more authentic experiences that can be built between the destination and the tourist.
(Richards, 2014)	Cities are using creativity as a way to distinguish themselves from others. The move from tangible to intangible offers is still growing and leaning to more interactive forms of tourism centered on creativity and knowledge.
(Robbins & Devitt, 2017)	Design thinking can be an important tool in the cooperative, multi-sectoral tourism services advance and entrepreneurship.
(Tsai & Lee, 2014)	Travel agency workers with a high emotional regulation and broad use of emotions show considerable creativity.
(Tsai, Horng, Liu & Hu, 2015)	The work environment is a mediator between organizational support and workers creativity.
(Tsaor, Yen & Yang, 2011)	Job features have a positive and significant influence on workers creativity on travel business.

On Table 5 results for spirituality are shown. The studies followed mostly a qualitative approach which is not surprising since spirituality is a complex construct, aligned with personal experiences that need a more in-depth and individual methodology to be understood. Results showed that tourism experiences can be or can lead to spiritual enrichment (Cheer, Belhassen & Kujaw, 2017; Moal-Ulvoas, 2017; Prayag, Mura, Hall & Fontaine, 2016; Singh, 2009; Willson, McIntosh & Zahra, 2013). Spirituality is also seen as a cultural endeavor or resource ((Fonneland, 2013; Gezon, 2017) with positive outcomes but also negative on local culture as seen with the Aboriginal community on Smith, Scherrer, and Dowling (2009) study. As in our introduction, spirituality is considered a more individual experience where a search for a connection with something bigger or pursuing meaning on life is sought ((Moal-Ulvoas, 2017; Prayag, Mura, Hall & Fontaine, 2016; Singh, 2009; Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra, 2013). The increasing importance of spirituality on tourism is also clear on Barkathunnisha, Lee and Price (2016) study where it is explored a possible model to include it in tourism education. Overall, it looks that spirituality is aligned, with the current idea of ‘experience’ on tourism, where meaning and personal development are crucial for the tourist experience.

Tables 5: **Spirituality results**

<b>Author, date</b>	<b>Results</b>
(Barkathunnisha, Lee & Price, 2016)	Suggests/explores the (possible) integration of spirituality in tourism education.
(Cheer, Belhassen & Kujaw, 2017)	There is the emergence of two forms of spiritual tourism, one more religious and one more secular.
(Fonneland, 2013)	Sami Tour indigenous spirituality is utilized as a (cultural) resource and is important for local economic regeneration.
(Gezon, 2017)	Travel is important in social and cultural processes.
(Moal-Ulvoas, 2017)	Travel positively increases seniors’ spirituality.
(Prayag, Mura, Hall & Fontaine, 2016)	Drug-induced tourism experiences can be spiritual to people.
(Singh, 2009)	Tourism is a spiritual activity linked to human values and society and can be seen as a holistic process.
(Smith, Scherrer & Dowling, 2009)	Cultural and spiritual effects on places of Aboriginal significance together with on-site visitors’ management problems need immediate consideration.
(Willson, McIntosh & Zahra, 2013).	Personal meaning, transcendence experiences, and expressed connectedness can be understood through travel experiences.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored Positive Psychology concepts such as optimism, creativity, and spirituality on tourism. Overall, three major reflections can be retrieved. First, there is a lack of research where optimism is concerned. Optimism is linked to well-being and satisfaction and should be a key concept to explore on tourism, thus more needs to be done in this regard. Secondly, creativity is explored, mainly, as a background for tourism development through organizational, structural and product innovation where workers and future ones are understood as important for its growth as is the place and its culture. Thirdly, tourism can be seen as a spiritual activity leading to personal connectedness and life enrichment, which is aligned with the current views of the 'experience economy', where the search for meaning in life is a big part of tourism experiences.

These results have implications for tourism diverse actors such as stakeholders, tourism operators or even destination managers. To improve tourism experiences these 'actors' must acknowledge and, therefore, develop new offers and activities that take into account the tourist well-being and 'meaningful experiences' for them. It is not enough to present 'souvenirs' anymore, the tourist wants more in-depth and intrinsically rewarding experiences. For researchers, these results are also important since few studies are being done in the exploration of these variables in tourism settings. More research is needed to understand the significance and the shift in the tourism system from purely economic to a more personal experience. This shift brings implications for tourism regions' economy, marketing and products offer. Future research should focus on exploring the impacts of 'tourism experiences' in the local communities, but also in the perspective of the stakeholders and the tourists themselves. Equally, studies should look for a more in-depth perspective of the tourist as 'a person' to promote the development of more personal and significant experiences allowing for well-being and quality of life improvement.

This study had some limitations. Our chosen criteria may have been too restrictive. The inclusion of more databases or languages in our search could have led to more findings. Other search terms could have been used enlarging the sample. The use of inter-observer reliability is also lacking and in the future, we suggest its application.

Overall, the above reflections are the first step in exploring these three variables on tourism. We believe these are important concepts that can lead to a more in-depth understanding of tourism experiences and there is a clear need to further explore them. We suggest the development of new research where these variables are taken into account individually but also simultaneously to allow a deep understanding of their function in promoting tourists wellbeing and meaningful tourism experiences.

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