

Entrepreneurship in Biophilic Tourism: The Case of “Botel Diffuso Dei Laghi”

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Biophilic tourism, a dimension of experiential tourism, is based on being close to nature and feeling connected to the natural environment. Biophilia is founded on Wilson’s (1984) premise that human beings have an innately emotional affiliation to other living organisms. Compared to urban contexts, natural environments facilitate mindfulness and concentration (Gillis & Gatersleben, 2015). However, due to the many, and often stressful, demands of modern life, nowadays there are fewer possibilities to connect with the natural world (Chen, Tu, & Ho, 2013).

Botel diffuso dei Laghi is a floating boat hotel on Lugano Lake, in Porto Ceresio (Varese-Italy): an innovative start-up taking its first steps in this specific field of tourism. Strongly symbolic, Botel may be seen to have a high potential for promoting respect for the environment, especially given that water was chosen as the location for the concept. It enables a form of tourism which is both experiential and slow, and makes possible a rediscovery of a direct contact with nature. On the one hand the start-up answers a need to return to one’s roots, on the other it encapsulates all the innovation needed by an off-grid unit on a lake. It combines nature and innovation through a value system based on the awareness of the global need for regeneration and on respect for environmental and socio-economic aspects.

In sketching a series of “possible” combinations between human beings and the environment, this start-up carries a highly symbolic message which suggests new ways of approaching tourism. This aims to: celebrate experience and living (instead of consuming); take one’s time and focus on reflection (instead of a “here-today-gone-tomorrow” approach); focus on self-determination and co-creation of services in a system that includes businesses, users and territorial networks (rather than all-inclusive, mass-tourism).

In a wider sense, it represents an invitation to look for meaning in one’s actions: for the present and the future; for ourselves, and for the things and people who are close to us. Furthermore, the concept presents an alternative perspective on luxury, understood in this context as being able to choose how to use the time we have at our disposal, in line with trends which link status to self-determination and experience. In particular, the customer experience is interpreted in a holistic dimension, inclusive of the different perspectives (entertainment, education, escape and aesthetics) underlined by Pine and Gilmore (1999).

There is an expanding market consisting of people who are choosing to get closer to nature in order to rediscover a link with their true selves. Botel invites us to discuss about this, considering ideas, trends, goals, possibilities and risks. In this sense, too, it contributes to increasing awareness, even if some unanswered questions remain. Indeed, the opportunities offered by a world in transformation go hand in hand with risks and difficulties. At times, these are not immediately visible and this case shows them as potential areas of interest which can inspire both industry professionals and academics in their thinking, strategies and decisions.

Keywords: experiential tourism, innovative businesses, value co-creation

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