

**Service Design in Tourism**

**How do customers experience the “Parents Day” journey mapped by touch points?  
How do customers experience Service Design mapped by touch points?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The hospitality industry is changing rapidly and there are new ways of thinking, “living in a global economy, with new technology keeping us connected to work 24/7.” (Cottrill, Cheryl Cottrill, 2008) The pilot project “Parents Day” at the Hotelschool The Hague, Netherlands is only one part of the research project “Service Design in Tourism” funded by the European Union under the CIP Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme. There are seven more partners from six European cities including AHO School of Design and Innovation Norway (Oslo/Norway), Linköping University (Linköping/Sweden), Making Waves (Oslo/Norway), Savonia University of Applied Sciences (Kuopio/Finland), SKEMA Business School (Sophia-Antipolis/France) and Tourismus Zukunft (Eichstätt/Germany) who applied the mobile application “myServiceFellow” developed by MCI Tourism since 2008 to evaluate different guest perceptions and journey touch points at the chosen tourism destinations. The pilot project was a helpful tool to identify different point of views, opinions and touch points to improve and design the future service.

**Key words: service design, journey experience, guest perception, touch points**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Literature Review**

Service design is a new discipline that guides products or product services to attain success in their field of game by helping them to provide better services to the customers and earn a good return on their investment. (Maithili Banerjee, 2010) One of the great strength of design is that we have not settled on a single definition. (R. Buchanan, 2001) Therefore there are many academic approaches for service design definitions existing. According to the book “This is Service Design Thinking” by Marc Stickdorn and Jakob Schneider, 2011, service design thinking begins with the understanding and experience of the service through the customer’s eyes. So far “improving the guest experience through service standards” (Patrick O’Bryan, 2011) is a general and standardized procedure but does not differentiate from the main stream. “Firms should head toward Experience-Based Differentiation, a blueprint for customer experience excellence.” (Bruce D. Temkin, 2008) because “traditional marketing tools like focus groups or CRM is no longer adequate enough to get real feedback from customers in

the fast-changing complex and competitive market place.” (Jeremy Wright, 2006) Additionally there are different customer perceptions, emotions and unexpected behaviors so that companies are not able to fully control experiences. (Adam Richardson, 2010) Therefore there are many different tools and methods developed in order to gain customers insight on the journey experience of service design. Service Safaris, Customer Journey Mapping, Contextual Interviews, Expectation Maps, Personas, Mobile Ethnography and Service Blueprint are only a few examples to analyze the guests’ perceptions and expectations of different touch points. Those touch points are defined where users interact with the service which can be personal face to face, virtual by a website or physical trips to a building. (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2011:pp. 148 – 214) Hilton Hotels for instance provide their employees a “guest experience” when new employees start at a Hilton property in order to experience the service of the hotel through the customer’s eyes. It includes the full complementary service of the hotel with the return of a feedback form to the HR department. It helps the hotel to improve its service design but can also be seen as very subjective due to the feedback on other team members and supervisors. Therefore companies make also use of “Mystery Shoppers” in order to receive a more objective feedback from the customer view.

Nowadays and in the future this customer experience will make the difference because “good customer experience is highly correlated to customer loyalty.” (Bruce D. Temkin, 2008)

### **Introduction to the case: objectives**

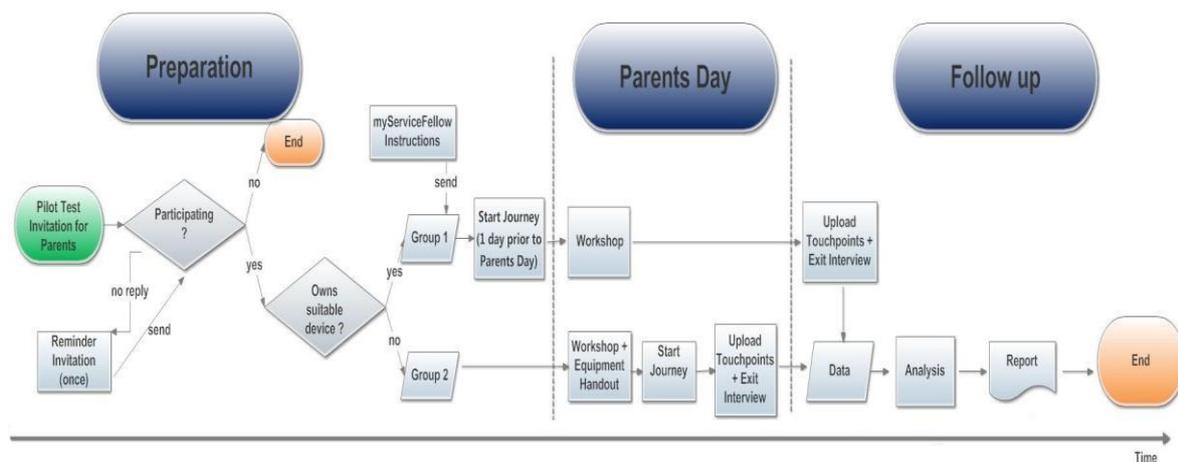
The proposed case “Parents Day” as part of the EU funded research-project “Service Design in Tourism” was initiated as pilot project by the Hotelschool The Hague in cooperation with the Chair of City Hospitality and City Marketing. It was based on the framework of the EU Competitiveness and Innovation Program to increase the competitiveness of European tourism destinations by exploring and implementing the marketing topic Service Design Thinking. The aim of the pilot project was the understanding and improvement of the guests’ experience while the “Parents Day” experience lasted approximately one day depending on the travel distance and transportation mean of the guest. The project provided a great research source due to its local, national and international guest variety, the ease to contact the participants through the Hotelschool relationships and the possibility to stay in contact also after the event for additional feedback.



The main objective of this project was to gain a customer insight of the journey experience mapped by different touch points. That included also other stakeholders providing city hospitality services for instance parking facilities. With this research question the journey of “Parents Day” began.

## Introduction to the case: methodology

The primary aim of this study is to explore the concept of experiencing service design through the customer's eyes for its improvement and customization. The Hotelschool and City Hospitality of The Hague were hosting and organizing the event "Parents Day". The graphic below demonstrates the individual steps taken for the pilot project in order to gain voluntary participants, provide information and mobile devices and to evaluate on the customers' immediate feedback via the mobile application "myServiceFollow" and the final exit interview.



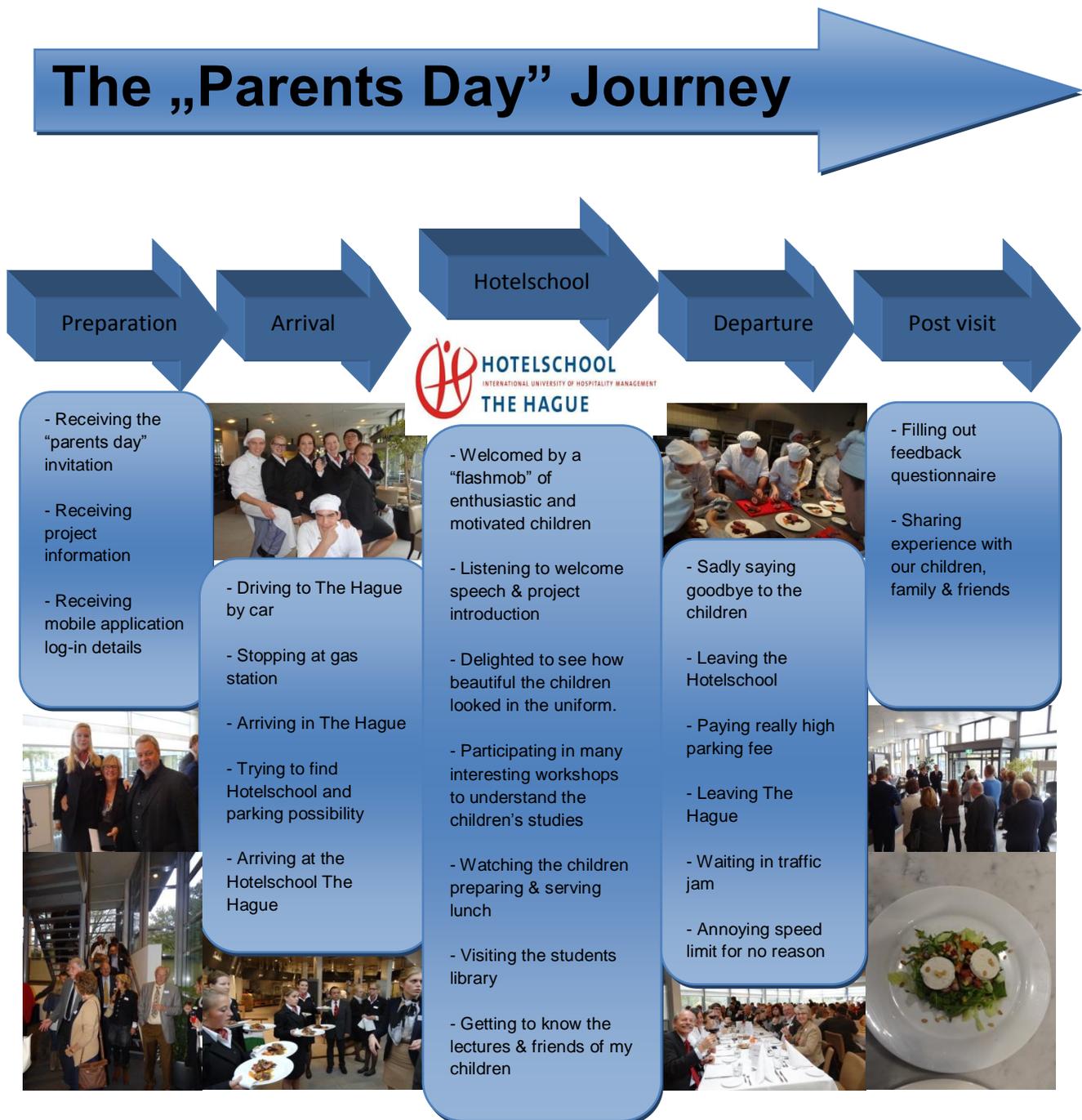
In order to create excellent customer experiences there have to be controllable elements, touch points to understand the journey that the customer takes within the company. (Adam Richardson, 2010) The table below shows the different touch points that supported the customer through their journey dependent on where they started. The customers were able to document their touch point perception and experience immediately via the mobile application "myServiceFollow" by making notes, taking pictures, videos or voice records.

Parents I (Have smartphone/ tabloid)	Parents II (Do not have smartphone/ tabloid)
<b>Journey</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entering the car/ plane or train</li> <li>• Leaving the city</li> <li>• Gas station or any other shop</li> <li>• Arriving in The Hague</li> <li>• Arriving at the Hotelschool The Hague</li> </ul> <b>HTH</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot Test Introduction</li> <li>• Reception</li> <li>• Coffee Machine</li> <li>• Aula</li> <li>• Mediathek- Library</li> <li>• Elevator</li> <li>• Mangerie</li> <li>• Classroom</li> <li>• Food Selection</li> <li>• Toilets</li> <li>• Le Debut</li> <li>• Zinq</li> <li>• Le Cafe</li> <li>• Teachers/ Instructor Encounter</li> <li>• Student Encounter</li> </ul>	<b>HTH (only)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot Test Introduction</li> <li>• Reception</li> <li>• Coffee Machine</li> <li>• Aula</li> <li>• Mediathek- Library</li> <li>• Elevator</li> <li>• Mangerie</li> <li>• Classroom</li> <li>• Food Selection</li> <li>• Toilets</li> <li>• Le Debut</li> <li>• Zinq</li> <li>• Le Café</li> <li>• Teachers/ Instructor Encounter</li> <li>• Student Encounter</li> </ul>
Touchpoints: 20	Touchpoints: 15

In the end all different customer perceptions of touch points were evaluated in order to improve the service design for future events.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDING (RESULTS)

The picture below demonstrates an example how customers experienced the journey on “Parents Day”. The mobile application “myServiceFellow” gave the participants the opportunity to share their opinion anonymously and immediately when perceiving positive or negative touch points on their journey. Some customers even set additional touch points besides the given ones in case they perceived something that has not been determined as a touch point.



The division of the customer journey into different touch points made it easier to evaluate on the guest perception. It was also easier to improve the service design upon those negative touch points like the outcome of an overload on workshops and time pressure which was interpreted as an overall negative experience by some customers.

The results showed as well that small or simple things seem to attract the customers' attention stronger. An example gives the change of the unremarkable welcome reception with champagne glasses set up in a heart shape turned into a positive touch point experience after filling the glasses with a red colored drink.



Even things that are seen as common and handy in the industry without paying much interest to it attract the customers' attention as shown in the example above with the chair handle.

A more detailed analysis of the most positive and negative experienced touchpoints shows the outcome below where the outstanding words had a higher impact on the guest journey experience.

#### Positive Experience



#### Negative Experience



Additional due to entry restrictions for instance text length of the mobile application "myServiceFellow" customers were sometimes limited in their expression of touch point experiences. The data of pictures and other documents could not be saved to the advice so that the data could only be used at that moment since later access was not possible.

Other customers did not want to participate in the pilot project at all because they simply wanted to enjoy the journey without making documentations of their perception and experience of touch points.

## CONCLUSION (AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS)

The mobile application “myServiceFollow” meets the demands of today’s society to stay connected 24/7 and to communicate their experience anytime with the opportunity for the service provider to react and improve its service design. The outcome of the different customer experience as well as adding individually additional touch points simply underlines that companies are not able to fully control experiences due to different customer perceptions, emotions and unexpected behaviors. (Adam Richardson, 2010) The findings showed that small and simple things can already attract the customer’s attention with a bigger impact on their journey experience. Most great service experiences did not come with a large amount of blood, sweat, toil and tears. In fact, when great service is at its best, it is delivered effortlessly, as if the service provider was actually enjoying it! (L. Dennis, Unkown) The overload on touch points of the customer journey might have lead to a negative customer experience. “Rather than racing to bring new product features to market, companies need to refocus on the needs of their customers — who might even want fewer features” (by Bruce D. Temkin, 2008) That view is also shared by Tim Brown in 2008 when he stated that “companies are asking Designers to create ideas that better meet consumers’ needs and desires. The former role is tactical, and results in limited value creation; the latter is strategic, and leads to dramatic new forms of value. As there are people with different needs who want to enjoy their journey instead of giving feedback, this mobile application will miss out on their customer perception which limits the achievement of excellent customer experience. Therefore other tools need to be considered that are able to recognize the unconscious customers perception of service design without asking in a conscious way. In the end the customer also stated ways of improvement as seen below that can be considered to improve this journey with existing touchpoints rather than creating new ones.

Points of Improvement:



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