

Transporting people to new experiences: The role of airport spaces

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Introduction

It can hardly be a co-incidence that no language on earth has ever produced the expression “As pretty as an airport”.

Airports are ugly. Some are very ugly. Some attain a degree of ugliness that can only be the result of special effort. This ugliness arises because airports are full of people who are tired, cross, and have just discovered that their luggage has landed in Murmansk (Murmansk airport is the only known exception to this otherwise infallible rule), and architects have on the whole tried to reflect this in their design.

They have sought to highlight the tiredness and crossness motif with brutal shapes and nerve-jangling colors, to make effortless the business of separating the traveler from his or her luggage or loved ones, to confuse the traveler with arrows that appear to point at the windows, distant tie-racks, or the current position of Ursa Minor in the night sky, and wherever possible to expose the plumbing on the grounds that it is functional, and conceal the location of the departure gates, presumable on the grounds that they are not.

Adams, D. (1988:1-2)

What this presentation will cover

- Background to the research
- Literature review and underpinning theoretical models
- Is the airport a 'non-place' (Augé, 1995)?
- Examples of transformation: Entertainment, shopping, art and rain forests
- The role of architecture in transforming airports
- Airport hotels – how do they contribute to the experience?
- What are airports *asking* their customers?
- What are travellers actually *talking* about?

Background to the research

- Background in hospitality management and customer satisfaction management
- PhD research focus is on the airport customer experience
- Participant observer in many airport experiences over the past decade in the UK, The Netherlands, Dubai and Hong Kong
- Noticed a friction between operational effectiveness and customer orientation at airports
- Initial literature search in ‘hospitality’, ‘customer satisfaction’ and ‘operations management’ failed to find a discussion on this
- Steered towards geography literature by a fellow tourism academic – modernist (efficient transport hub) v post-modernist (experiential consumer-orientation)
- Leisure spaces, popular culture and geographical imaginations

Literature review

Key themes

- Bitner's Servicescapes model (1992; 1990)
- Nature & determinants of customer expectations (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1993)
- Co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2008; 2004a; 2004b;)
- The meaning of airport space (Kraftl & Adey, 2008; Adey, 2006)
- Global design trends and modern lifestyles (Lunday, 2009; McNeill, 2009; 2005)
- Hospitable spaces (Lugosi, 2009; 2008)
- The airport customer's 'gaze' (Urry, 2004; 2002)



The challenge of the airport - capacity



Fuerst, Gross & Klose (2011)



The airport as a ‘non-place’

The non-place – those spaces of transit that include hotels, airports, theme parks, and refugee camps. (Sharma, 2009 p129)

‘Passports, visa slips, and train tickets affirm only an instrumental identity –the one required to keep on moving or to keep shopping.’

‘All the non-place asks of you is to plug in and pass through.’

(Sharma, 2009 p131)

Terminal Man – the real one and the others

‘...where one is hailed by the aromas of duty free perfume and chocolates in one moment and then processed by US homeland security in the other and where VIP airport lounges and detention rooms can be found on the same blueprint.’

(Sharma, 2009 p139)

So how are airports transforming the servicescape of airports?

Some examples in the following slides:

Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum

Kuala Lumpur's 'rain forest'

London's shopping

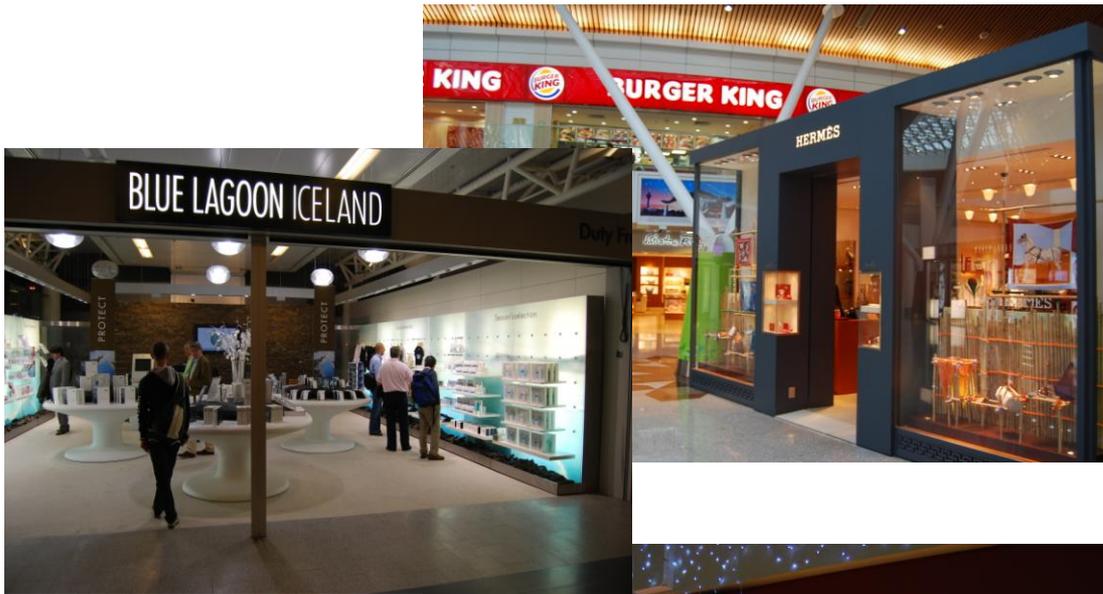
Auckland's 'tree'

Cultural symbols – Auckland and Melbourne

Amsterdam's Schiphol airport



Can shopping give an airport an identity?



Artwork



Auckland's 'tree'



Kuala Lumpur's Jungle Boardwalk



Does airport architecture transform?



(Kraftl & Adey, 2008; Lunday, 2009; McNeill, 2005)



Is 'transformation' really co-creation?



The role of airport hotels in transporting people to new experiences

‘As William Mitchell notes, ‘the emerging characteristic Pattern of twenty-first-century work is not that of telecommuting, as many futurists had once confidently predicted; it is that of the mobile worker who appropriates multiple, diverse sites as workplaces.’ (McNeill, 2009 p219)

‘The airport hotel. Often disparaged as the most extreme form of non-place, a site of fleeting stopovers and rapid passenger churn, these institutions are some of the least known, yet most visited, institutions in the contemporary city. (p220)

‘Airports are becoming multimodal interchange nodes’ (p221)

New terminal designs include hotels

‘Hotels have long played a significant role in temporarily ‘fixing’ mobile bodies’ (p223)



So if airports are now palaces of consumerism what do airport management ask us about?

- Customer feedback questionnaires from: Heathrow, UK; Auckland, NZ; Kansai, Japan; Glasgow, UK; Edinburgh, UK; Hong Kong SAR, China; Bangkok, Thailand
- In some cases the questionnaires are general tourism research questionnaires with the opportunity to comment on the airport experience
- In a surprising number of cases there is no opportunity to comment.
- The most comprehensive questionnaires seem to contain the following:
 - Departures: drop-off, check-in, shopping & food, security, shopping & food, departures lounge, gate
 - Arrivals: disembarkation, immigration/passport control, baggage reclaim, pick-up, shopping
 - Car parks
 - Other: left luggage/lost property, public transport, passenger assistance, rental car, taxis
 - Other information: flight details, traveller/greeter, contact details, compliment/complaint, do you want a response?
- Many questionnaires now also offer the opportunity to complete feedback online

How are we performing? August 2010

KEY TO PERFORMANCE



We welcome your feedback:
heathrowcustomerfeedback@baa.com

Heathrow

How are we performing? August 2010

KEY TO PERFORMANCE



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Heathrow

Airport customer feedback – what they really really want!

Tripadvisor.com

- probably the world's most famous consumer rating site

Foursquare.com

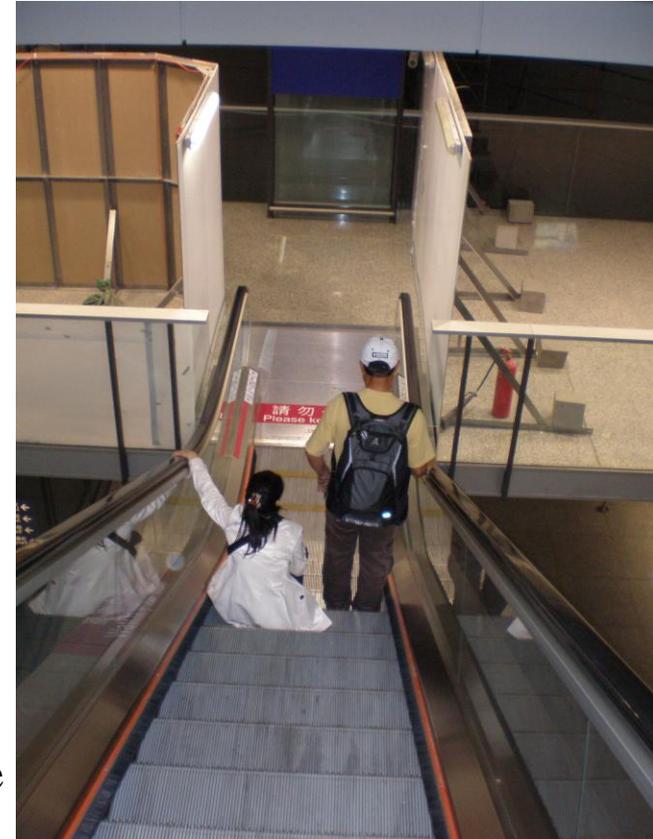
- an informal consumer support website with badge-collecting-Farmville-style thrown in

Sleepinginairports.net

- Does exactly what it says on the tin

Methodology

- Collected comments from the above sites which related to one particular international airport
- Interested to find out if the concerns expressed in the literature were reflected in unsolicited customer comments online



So what do we want to avoid?

- A mediocrity of merchandising
- A disempowering non-place – ‘a global by pass’
- ‘Spaces of continuous movement and dislocation’
- A ‘panopticon’ or ‘banopticon’ (Sharma, 2009)
- A bureaucracy à la ‘Terminal Man’
- A no-man’s land – ‘a liminal zone of perpetual waiting’



What do I think we want from an airport?

I think we want to be 'wow'd, proud, entertained, engaged and involved, awed, but also reassured by the airport's comforting familiarity and sameness.

I would be very interested to hear what YOU think.

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Contact details & Questions

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What was your last airport experience?

Were you delighted or disappointed by anything?

Please send me an e-mail to tell me.