



Mardi de la Recherche | Mons, 30.04.2024

LUXURY HOTELS : TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF THE DIMENSIONS OF THE SERVICE PALACE

Benjamin BERNARD | University of Mons
Angy GEERTS | University of Mons

AGENDA OF THE PRESENTATION

1. Context
2. Literature review
3. Research questions
4. Methodology
5. Findings
6. Conclusion



1. CONTEXT

- France : 5-star hotels represent 2.6% (433/16.850) of the hotel supply on the 1st January 2023 (Statista, 2023).
- Since 2009 : new designation, the “Palace”.
- Aim : promoting French culture around the world.
- Designation not dedicated to all 5-star hotels : exceptional services are required from the hotel (Atout France, 2023).



1. CONTEXT

- **Two phases to obtain the designation “Palace” :**
 - Instruction phase conducted by Atout France based on objective criteria : fitness center, spa, rooms sizes,...
 - Phase of analysis by a commission : location, aesthetics, history, gastronomy,... of the hotel
- **Designation valid for 5 years and renewable.**



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

EXPERIENCE IN LUXURY

- Impossible to define luxury without talking about experience (Keller, 2009).
- “Luxperience” : strong link between luxury and experience (Batat, 2017).



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

PURCHASE EXPERIENCE IN LUXURY

- Role of the store in the experience when buying luxury goods (Keller, 2009 ; Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009).
- Three main dimensions in the luxury shopping experience (Geerts and Veg-Sala, 2021) :
 - Sensory dimension
Aesthetic perfection & theatricalization of the place
 - Social dimension
Demonstrations to customers & sincere relationships
 - Emotional dimension
Temporal & spatial pleasure



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

EXPERIENCE IN LUXURY HOTELS

Importance of the staff in the hotel experience :

- **Service excellence relies on contact staff** (Eigler, 2002 ; Wilkins and al., 2007), **their impeccable appearance** (Pinna, 2012, 2013 ; Forté and Montchartre, 2013) **and their ability to adapt immediately** (Clauzel and Montargot, 2013).
- **Employees have a real emotional job to do with customers** (Pinna, 2015).



3. REASEARCH QUESTIONS

Aim of this paper :

To define the dimensions of the Service Palace.

- What are the main differences between a “classic” 5-star hotel and a Palace in the customers perception ?
- What are the expectations of the customers about a Palace ?
- How could we define the Service Palace from a customer point of view ?



4. METHODOLOGY

- Exploratory research : qualitative approach.
- 18 semi-structured interviews with luxury hotel consumers based on an interview guide (different topics discussed).
- Interviews were recorded and transcribed.
- One criterion to define our sample : having stayed in a 5-star hotel and/or a Palace in the last 12 months.
- A thematic and a transversal analysis were then carried out.



5. FINDINGS

Elements from the thematic analysis could be classified using the theoretical framework of the dimensions of the shopping experience in the luxury sector from the work of Geerts and Veg-Sala (2021).



5. FINDINGS

SENSORY DIMENSION

Aesthetic perfection of the place

Larger surface area, elaborate design, superior comfort, sophisticated decoration, very clean hotel,...

⇒ No important difference with a 5-star hotel.

“In a Palace, I expect whatever room I'm given to be very comfortable” (respondent n°7, 18-30 years old)



5. FINDINGS

SENSORY DIMENSION

Theatricalization of the place

- Gastronomy : starred Chef, different restaurants,...
- Equipment : rooms with exceptional view, spa, swimming-pools,...
- Appearance of the staff and **of the customers.**

“When you go to a Palace, you have to think that you're going to a Palace and you can't dress or wear shoes any old way” (respondent n°18, 31-40 years old)



5. FINDINGS

EMOTIONAL DIMENSION

Temporal pleasure

24-hour service, taking time at the reception,...

⇒ No important difference with a “classic” 5-star hotel

*“I expect a Palace to put us in a separate room, to offer us a drink, to make us comfortable”
(respondent n°9, 18-30 years old)*



5. FINDINGS

EMOTIONAL DIMENSION

Spatial pleasure

- Sophisticated and distinctive decoration
- All the customers could need is present
- Unique location with history and heritage

“Then when I imagine it, when I arrive in the entrance hall, it must be bling. I must say wow, I know where I've put my money” (respondent 17, 18-30 years old)



5. FINDINGS

SOCIAL DIMENSION

Demonstrations to customers

- Qualitative and varied service offered to customers (valet, concierge, shuttle,...)
- Polite, respectful, caring, available, multilingual,...
- Staff omnipresent and invisible at the same time
- Customers must obtain a response to any request

“In fact, where they're really good is that you know they're there, but you don't feel their presence. And that's what I really appreciate” (respondent n°4, 18-30 years old)



5. FINDINGS

SOCIAL DIMENSION

Creating sincere relationships with customers

- After the departure, customers expect a follow-up from the hotel through emails and gifts
- Super personalised service with “private” members of the staff
- Anticipation of the needs of the customers

*“And in Palaces, people expect all their desires to be satisfied, even before the desire appears”
(respondent n°12, 51-60 years old)*



5. FINDINGS

OTHER ELEMENTS

- **Price** : more expensive than a “classic” 5-star hotel.
- **Type of guests** : niche, superior, haughty, wealthy, more restricted and targeted.



5. FINDINGS

		Palace	Classical 5-star hotels
Sensory dimension	<i>Aesthetic perfection of the place</i>	XX	XX
	<i>Theatricalization of the place</i>	XXX	XX
Social dimension	<i>Demonstrations made to customers</i>	XXX	XX
	<i>Creation of sincere relationships with customers</i>	XXX	XX
Emotional dimension	<i>Temporal pleasure</i>	XX	XX
	<i>Spatial pleasure</i>	XXX	XX
Price		XXX	XX
Type of clients		XXX	XX

Note : « X » = importance of the sub-dimension in the establishment.

6. CONCLUSION

Social dimension makes the main difference between a “classic” 5-star hotel and a Palace in the customer point of view.

⇒ Service in a “classic” 5-star hotel is perceived as more standardised, simpler and less sought-after.

⇒ Service in a Palace is perceived as more detailed, more personalised, more upmarket and more complete.



6. CONCLUSION

Theoretical contributions

- Field that is still little developed in the scientific literature.
- Define a concept that is missing in the scientific literature about luxury tourism.

Managerial contributions

- Highlighting the elements that customers feel should be present in a Palace (elements to communicate more about to attract the right customers).
- Providing more appropriate staff training in Palaces.



6. CONCLUSION

This is an on going research ...

- Point of view from managers in Palace
- Point of view from managers in “classic” 5-star hotel





THANK YOU !

Benjamin BERNARD | benjamin.bernard@umons.ac.be

Angy GEERTS | angy.geerts@umons.ac.be