

Is a company's hospitality characterized by its visits? Hospitality experiences and cultural dimensions observed through Swiss and French company visits

Abstract

The objective of this article is to characterize the company visit as a situation of hospitality and understand how it can be a differentiator. Thus, it addresses managerial concerns about the transmission of expertise or craftsmanship and visitor relations. This exploratory work serves two purposes: it primarily aims to introduce the concept of company hospitality into the marketing literature by understanding and completing the following dimensions of company hospitality: social and behavioral, spatial, temporal, convivial, physical, hedonistic and spiritual. Then it tries to understand visitor responses and reactions to hospitality, or on the contrary, the inhospitable nature of the company.

Key words: company visit, hospitality, culture, experience

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Introduction

Over the past few years, industrial tourism has gained momentum under the influence of territorial positioning in regards to expertise or craftsmanship specific to its region or local communities. Increased consumer interest in themed company visits has also contributed to growth in industrial tourism (Bianchini, 2008, Ksouri et al, 2000). Tourists are offered several different concepts: company visits are different from company museums (Meyssonat-Courtois, 1994; Morice, 2006; Pierre, 2005; Rivard, 2006; Cousserand, 2009). A company's museum space can serve as a means of business promotion both in terms of communication and marketing. It can also serve as a catalyst to strengthen its historical, industrial heritage (Hollenbeck et al. 2008; Courvoisier, 2014). The company visit adds to those attributes by solidifying its management and highlighting its expertise and trade dynamics. This concept appeals not only to large companies but also to SMEs and artisans.

Company museums and company visits are rarely the object of marketing studies: in fact, the majority of references found here within come from museum specialists and art historians. What's more, due to their experimental nature, these windows into the company share a common goal: hosting, through leisure activities, a public motivated by their interest in discovering specificities inherent to different localities and trades. In this way, the concept of hospitality (Williams, 2006; Cova and Giannelloni, 2015) will leverage a better understanding of its importance and contribution to the visiting experience.

The objective of this article is to characterize the company visit as a situation of hospitality and understand how it can be a differentiator for companies located in a particular geographical area. Consequently, certain managerial concerns are addressed. We find very little references relating to hospitality in the context of industrial tourism. This exploratory work serves two purposes: it primarily aims to introduce the concept of company hospitality into marketing literature by understanding and completing the dimensions of company hospitality highlighted by Brotherton (2006) and by Cova and Giannelloni (2015). It then tries to understand visitor responses and reactions to hospitality or, on the contrary, the inhospitable nature of the company.

The scope of the study includes a diversified cross section of visits offered by approximately ten Swiss and French companies. According to literature, a situation of hospitality includes four dimensions: spatial, social and behavioral, temporal and physical (Brotherton, 2006), to which we add convivial

and hedonistic aspects of that experience introduced by Cova and Giannelloni (2015). We assume that hospitality also represents a moment of interaction whereby the centerpiece is the cultural identity specific to regional characteristics. It also creates ties between personnel and the visitor. In exchange, the visitor shows gratitude and admiration towards personnel who has shared its passion and communicated its expertise or craftsmanship. This acquired knowledge renders the price of the visit more acceptable. The spiritual dimension is also included in our research. In the context of company visits, the specificities of hospitality lead us to questions about cultural hospitality and how it can be incorporated or conceived of in a nontraditional manner in hopes of strengthening ties between the company and its brand or brands, simultaneously turning satisfied visitors into genuine ambassadors. We can extend this reflection to company museums, where they exist.

1. The company as a museum space: the commercial, communicative and managerial impacts

In a study on Swiss watch making company museums, Courvoisier (2014) reveals a threefold function: first, the preservation of a private heritage which each visitor perceives during their visit, second, brand promotion and third, highlighting a region's craftsmanship. None of the museum curators that were questioned found contradiction between history and marketing, past and present. On the contrary, company hospitality allowing visitors to discover a company's history and heritage tends to strengthen an emotional and positive brand experience, which is in line with the experiential marketing trend (Filser, 2002; Roederer, 2012; Roederer and Filser, 2015). The dimension of hospitality is especially felt during visitor welcoming and during their exchanges with guides and other personnel conducting the visit. An aperitif or small gift following a visit further strengthens the positive emotion felt by the visitor regarding the company's hospitality. The reaction to this hospitality perceived by the consumer was not studied and leaves open the question of gratitude expressed by the client in regards to personnel and the company.

For companies that do not have a museum, but that more or less regularly open their doors to a large public or only to their clients, to the press or other targeted audiences, the company visit can become a sort of event (Courvoisier, 2014). For example, the group LVMH's "Special days" attracted more than 100,000 people for each of their events from 2011 to 2013 and 145,000 in 2016¹. On Twitter, 25

million people were reached by #LJPLVMH and 30,000 interactions were achieved on Facebook during this “Special Days” weekend which boasted a carefully constructed organization and welcoming both in France (especially Louis Vuitton, Moët and Chandon, Hennessy and Dior) and Switzerland (Zenith and TAG Heuer).

The company visit allows the company to create an experience founded on a fully developed, lively, stimulating, thought-provoking communication (Rivard, 2006). On a managerial level, the company visit tends to strengthen the brand’s appeal and, thus, can lead to a spontaneous purchase if the company has a retail store available at the end of the visit. This is especially true for food products tasted during the visit, such as sweets or wines.

In the context of territorial development plans, the company visit can be an integral part of industrial tourism whereby specific circuits are included such as “Wine Routes” in Alsace or Jura, the French-Swiss “Watch Valley” located between Besançon and La Chaux-de-Fonds or even the “*Etoiles Terrestres*” which highlights a constellation of glass-blowers covering three sites nestled in adjacent valleys of the *Vosges du nord* where one can discover a natural and cultural heritage preserved by man. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage landmark in 2009 for its urban watch making heritage, the cities of La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle invite visitors, through their tourist offices, to discover historical buildings and watchmaking companies whose hospitality contributes to its regional tourism (Courvoisier and Aguilhaume, 2010).

2. Dimensions of tourist hospitality in the framework of industrial tourism adapted to company visits

2.1 Bringing the company and its territory together in the framework of a tourist destination

When examining its latin roots, the word “*hôte*” has a double meaning. It describes both the person who hosts as well as the person invited, or guest. Hospitality appears, then, to have two meanings (Cova and Giannelloni, 2015). When hospitality plays a role in tourism, it produces interpersonal interactions of a hospitable nature (human dimension: Brotherton, 1999) that go beyond a simple room and board offered/given to visitors and actually brings together hospitality and conviviality (social dimension: Gotman, 2004). The result has an influence on the general appeal of the area in question (spatial dimension). Together, these dimensions constructs a scene whereby the visitor is exposed to different players of tourism (population/residents,

service providers for private entities and public organizations) with specific offers (room and board) and in specific places (territories) (Cova, 2010).

In the framework of tourism, such as hotel stays or restaurants, certain authors study the human relations between tourists and the personnel with whom they are in contact (Spielmann et al. 2011). Others include the destination, such as the city (Cottet et al. 2015). We rarely see studies focused on the “host” company that places its personnel, endowed with a certain expertise or craftsmanship, in a situation of hospitality. In this situation of hospitality, we find a mix of elements both tangible (providing a finished product) and intangible (communicating an expertise or craftsmanship) (Cova and Giannelloni, 2008). The common value of these different fields of study is, however, quite real: visitors passing through (tourists) choose their destination, the city, then their hotels, restaurants and company visits. On the other hand, local tourists are motivated primarily by the opportunity to learn about an area’s economy, its traditions and its expertise or craftsmanship (meeting artisans, skilled workers). Even though they are motivated by different factors, tourists and local residents are interested in company visits as a way to learn about a region. In this spirit, both the company and the region should extend their hospitality. Consequently, the combination of both elements appears quite relevant.

2.2 Company hospitality

Adapted to company visits, the hospitality of a person traditionally thought of as a host blends with an organization’s differentiating service offer intended for visitors. Differentiating themes can be attributed to a particular region, a cultural identity or an expertise or craftsmanship. Lugosi (2008) differentiates between the concept of hospitality, how we live together as defined by Montandon (2004), and hospitality activities, “which consists of inviting a public to experience a moment of consumption or hospitality”. Applied especially to tourism and accommodations sectors, the concept of hospitality has more recently been introduced to the virtual world to bring a humanistic approach to retail Internet sites (Bataoui and Giannelloni, 2016). These authors examine the links between retail companies and the customer. Hemmington (2007) defines five possible dimensions of hospitality in an observed commercial framework: host-guest relationship, generosity, the dramatization of an offer, surprise and a reassuring context.

It is along this line of research that we wish to further explore the role of hospitality in industrial tourism practices. For this, we reserve an important role for

“host” companies from other economic sectors and personnel whose mission is not necessarily dedicated to welcoming. For the visitor, a company visit is a leisure activity centered on human interaction and sharing. As we mentioned above, we will use the works of Brotherton (2006) to define this situation of hospitality, which is characterized by four dimensions: a spatial dimension, illustrated by the place; a behavioral dimension, which includes motivations and human interactions; a temporal dimension relative to occasions of hospitality and a physical dimension, which includes associated products. Like Cova and Giannelloni (2015), we will introduce a convivial and hedonistic aspect to the experience. For each of these aspects, we will attempt to identify the role of the company, personnel and the region. We will also examine visitor reactions to hospitable companies.

2.3 The specificities of company hospitality: commercial and free aspects

The commercial aspect of hospitality deals with the mechanisms of retribution carried out by the visitor for the benefit company’s benefit. This prerogative, founded on a desire for reciprocity, requires us to widen the scope of the hospitality transaction to include a genuine hospitable interaction, defined as mutual acknowledgment. One possible way of achieving this is to combine hospitality and a hospitable behavior (Lugosi, 2008).

These two elements are combined in company hospitality: a service offer that guarantees interactions and access to a shared experience rich in emotion. The company visit actually invites visitors to a paid or free entry into their authentic production site (laboratory, thematic workshop, factory, brewery, cellar, etc.) with the possibility of tasting, trying their hand at manufacturing and boutique purchases, which generally end the visit. In this situation, the interaction between the customer and the company takes place during the transmission of knowledge and teaching of an expertise or craftsmanship. Rooted in a region’s tradition and its very fabric, these experiences have an authentic nature. Consuming this kind of industrial tourism can lead a customer to feel a form of gratitude towards the personnel, trade, brand or region. So, there is a connection between visitor-consumer reactions to company hospitality.

3. Identifying industrial and hand craftsmanship hospitality and visitor perception

3.1 Methodological protocol

Based on a selection process, two lists were compiled comprised of companies that organize company visits. The first list includes companies from Alsace (France) and the second from French-speaking Switzerland. These companies demonstrate an industrial economic heritage in their two respective regions. The French region is located in Alsace, traditionally rooted in a regional gastronomy (ginger bread, beer, wine) and specific hand craftsmanship (glass work). The Swiss region is located in the French-Swiss Jura Arc, traditionally known for watch making and regional products (wine, cheese, chocolate, watch making). These companies were selected based on two criteria: first, they regularly open their doors to the public and, second, they are sufficiently diversified in terms of size and activity sector (table 1).

Internet sites of the selected companies, recent commentaries on TripAdvisor and certain blogs that present their visits in Alsace² or elsewhere³ were consulted in order to construct a compilation of opinions about these company visits. Web users are French and Swiss, spread out over the whole territory and from outside borders. One objective of this exploratory research is to identify the constitutive criteria of a company’s perceived hospitality in the framework of a company visit. The other objective is to identify possible visitor reactions when they are the invited guest.

Table 1: presentation of the studied companies

| Selected companies | Regional location |
|--|--|
| <i>Maison Lips</i> gingerbread museum and workshop visit | Located in Gertwiller, France. Gertwiller has been Alsace’s gingerbread capitol since the 18th century. <i>Maison Lips</i> gingerbread and Alsatian folk art museum was created in 1998. |
| Saint-Louis Brewery | Located in the south of Alsace |

2 <http://www.mon-week-end-en-alsace.com/>

3 <http://www.yapaslefeuulac.ch/>

| | |
|---|---|
| The <i>Grand Place</i> , crystal museum | Museum inside the oldest French crystal manufacturer located in Saint-Louis, one of the three sites on the “ <i>étoiles terrestres</i> ” circuit. |
| Horcher, Alsatian wine | The Horcher estate is situated in the Alsatian vineyard. |
| Kelsch weaving workshop | Located in Sentheim, France in Alsace’s Hautes-Vosges (southern region). |
| St-Pierre Priory and Mauler cellars, Môtiers | Val-de-Travers, Switzerland (part of the Neuchâtel canton); specializing in sparkling wines crafted according to the champagne method; film, guided visits of the cellars and Priory, tasting |
| Cailler chocolate factory, Broc, Switzerland | Region of Gruyères, Switzerland, Fribourg canton |
| Spielhofer cheese dairy, Saint-Imier, Switzerland | Saint-Imier (Erguël) Valley, Switzerland, Berne canton; specializes in “ <i>Tête de Moine</i> ” cheese |
| Corum watches, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland | Neuchâtel canton, located in the “urban watchmaking” area and part of the UNESCO World Heritage list |
| Franches-Montagnes (BFM) Brewery | Saignelégier, Switzerland, canton of Jura; specializing in handcrafted beers |

3.2 The social and behavioral dimension of hospitality

This dimension includes elements of interactions that contribute to conviviality, exchanges and communicating a passion. Human relations between tourists and local residents and contact persons highlighted by Cinotti (2008, 2001) are observed in industrial tourism. The host is either identified according to their trade “... accompanied by the brewer”; “the farmer himself leads the visit”; “we were welcomed by Thomas, who described his passion to us...”; “...we met with the reporter responsible for layouts, printouts...”; “a former skilled worker” or, in a more personal manner, by their first names, which denotes the genuine closeness found in tourism, especially with owners of bed & breakfasts, “the Kelsch weaving workshop is run by Marlène and Gérard”. The visitor is fully immersed into the world he/she discovers “in entering the company...”, “sharing an experience, entering into the secret world of watchmaking”, during which time the artisan shares his knowledge and craftsmanship. The testimonials highlight the sentiment of sharing someone’s “environment” (Ricoeur, 1998) and, as a result, the potentially immersing experience in all its various forms: “historically and culturally enthralling”. It is pointed out when the tour takes on a spatial dimension, “the museum hangs over the workshops” offering the visitor another type of immersion in the production site.

Openness, attentiveness and interpersonal exchanges are appreciated because they allow visitors to interact and also because they are the catalyst for communicating a passion and/or craftsmanship. “... they really know how to welcome visitors: explanations, films and tastings all make this visit worthwhile...”. “Marlène shows us how the weaving trade works and answers all of our questions”; “professionalism and passion are words that perfectly describe the estate’s owner who led our visit! ”; “Mr. Horcher willingly partakes in the tastings he offers you”. Interpersonal interactions are omnipresent: “you can easily ask for explanations from the available personnel”; “you can ask questions, the visit is lively and passionate”. When personnel doesn’t actively participate in the visit, we can simply observe them at work “...all while observing personnel at work”. Commentaries from a third person add “...skillfully explained, using anecdotes from the trade”. Openness is imperative “don’t hesitate to ask”. In the absence of true interactions, descriptions of the tour guide take on a generic name “... the guide” and are filled with negative commentaries “after watching a short film (very outdated), we visited a still room followed by a visit to the storage and bottling room while listening to the guide’s explanations”. During open house visits, artisans are not necessarily inclined to provide explanations or foster exchanges, which may lead to legitimate disappointment. “...we take a walk around the room and we are completely ignored... No one came to see if we had any questions or if we needed any explanations...”. Hospitality should be free and willful. In the context of an artisan in his/her work environment, their personality and level of empathy are determining factors.

The reciprocity of hospitality encompasses generosity (Hemmington, 2007) and the subsequent gratitude and admiration expressed by the visitor: “hats off to all of the personnel”; “we met people whose dexterity and inspiration are genuine masterpieces”; “their craftsmanship is astounding”. The commercial aspect of reciprocity, inherent to the company, should not overshadow the importance of human relations or the authentic experience of discovery.

The verbatim demonstrates that the process of welcoming and its quality, although it involves every actor, does not necessarily make a customer a guest (Seydoux, 1983). Interpersonal interactions with working per-

sonnel and an interconnection with the host's region are vital elements. Spatial dimension is addressed in relation to the company's region and its regionalization.

3.3 The spatial dimension of hospitality

This dimension refers to the characteristics of a place (factory, workshop, enterprise location) which has been opened for sharing between the visitor and the host (Reuland et al. 1985). It bears regional specificities featured during these visits. Spatial dimension is centered around three concepts: the exterior environment: "from the outside, the museum doesn't resemble much, but on the inside, its fantastic", the environment on the inside: "the museum is located inside the manufacturing site, which is highly appreciated", the regional environment: "how rewarding it was to come upon this little village nestled in the forest lost in the middle of nowhere".

References to the region and its characteristics are remarkable. They are reflected in Alsatian artifacts: "a boutique not only full of delicacies but also all types of Alsatian artifacts", in the theatricality lent to the space "The reproduction of a typically Alsatian "stube" and the Hansel & Gretel house are the museum's key elements" and go beyond the offer's physical aspects "...finally, thank you Sophie for all the local tips and information, especially the *tartes flambées*". Ties between the company, the expertise or craftsmanship and the heritage are expressed: "we hope to preserve this lovely French heritage for many years to come". The place takes on meaning when the history of both the trade and the region are blended: "Here, we see the history of crystal blended with the history of the region and its excellent craftsmanship"; "the factory is nestled in the wonderful region of Gruyères".

The *Franches-Montagnes* Brewery (BFM), in Saignelégier, is one of the region's tourist attractions situated on the outskirts of major crossroads: it welcomes 3,000 visitors a year. An anecdote, rehashed during every visit, embodies the spirit of the brewery: "We had a cat that we named Good Dog. When it died, we sanctified it with the *Saint-Bon Chien* Abbey. We are now at our 5th vintage of this beer matured in oak barrels" affirms Jérôme Rebetz, the brewery's founder and director. This *Saint-Bon Chien* Abbey won over Eric Asimov, famous New York Times gourmet food critic. In a January 7, 2009 article, this full bodied beer was deemed world's best oak-barrel-aged beer (Jaberg, 2009). Hospitality also means revealing your roots.

3.4 The temporal dimension of hospitality

Company visits are motivated by the desire to discover a craftsmanship. For this reason, visitors expect to be able to interact with artisans at work. Their presence and availability are more important than the length of the visit: "... excellent explanations about gingerbread fabrication all while watching personnel at work". In this spirit, visits that take place outside of working hours negatively impact the customer's experience: "The tour's elevated circuit makes it possible to visit the factory during working hours with a former skilled worker rendering the experience especially unique"; "the visit can be accomplished in 30 min. or two hours if we take the time to listen to commentaries and admire the works of art"; "it's best to go during the week to see the watchmakers at work"; "we organize guided visits of the Brewery from Monday to Saturday between 9:57 am and 4:34 pm".

The visitor takes the time to really capture the company's facilities: "...by taking the time to admire, you'll discover the secrets during the factory visit". But, as victims of their own success, company visits can be nonproductive: "we arrived at 3 pm and they told us there was a three-hour wait for the next guided visit and that visits without guides were not possible. Disappointed, we went to the boutique to buy some chocolate. A mind-blowing trip.... we left disgusted. Great Swiss hospitality! "

Time also conjures up direct ties between past and present: "historical and cultural immersion into the ancient handcrafted art that is still very much alive"; "the place is incredible and seems as if it comes from another era" and indirect ties by connecting a region's modernity and authenticity: "the renovation blends perfectly into the historical building"; "It's unfathomable to think that monks have lived in this Priory since the Middle ages! ". This voyage through time conjures up nostalgic sentiments for the visitor (Joy and Sherry, 2003).

3.5 The physical dimension (tangible and intangible)

Products are pervasive in industrial tourism and are a translation of craftsmanship and of a region's unique traditions. Products are the commercialized end result of careful crafting. Tangible aspects (products) and intangible aspects (explaining a craftsmanship) are connected: "...I appreciate the fact that even laymen like me can understand the process. Technical questions about watch making can be answered without going too much into detail. This may however disappoint connoisseurs. Nevertheless, the guide is available to answer any ques-

tions, making the visit interactive and enabling you to discover more about the things that interest you the most! ”.

It is brought to our attention when the organization of discovery tours has a formative nature, notably to justify the visit's commercial aspect: "...it should be noted that the visit's circuit does not end in the boutique. You are not pushed into buying, but nearly everyone willfully enters the boutique to buy the delicious handcrafted gingerbread". The purchases are an attempt to continue the journey (notably, at home), to remember the experience or to please someone (gift).

Although, as a general rule, generosity and commercial activities relating to hospitality in tourism are contradictory (Heal, 1990), they are simultaneously well managed and fully integrated during formative tours: for example, the presence of a boutique and prices found within are more easily accepted thanks to explanations given during the visit that justify the product's quality and cost (according to the different stages of fabrication). As a consequence, an organizational structure whereby the tangible and intangible are mixed creates favorable preconditions for company hospitality (Cottet et al. 2015).

3.6 The convivial and hedonistic dimension of hospitality

In the framework of industrial tourism, the company visit should respond to a desire to explore an unknown subject area. The convivial dimension invokes elements relating to entertainment or leisure (Lugosi, 2008): "... visiting the factory and the museum was an extremely interesting moment that inspired daydreams about all the beautiful objects we have seen". Emotions were heightened: "...then we went upstairs, surprise! We find relics of an 18th century house and the gingerbread museum, designs, explanations, ancient objects"; "what a pleasure to see skilled workers passionate about their work"; "this is a great moment to be had"; "a glass factory is synonymous with inspiration, an adjacent boutique let's you move from daydreaming to reality". This verbatim demonstrates the importance of hospitableness, as defined by Lugosi (2008), as an emotion shared with the visitor.

Developing an entertaining tour in the spirit of a treasure hunt will surprise the visitor: "organizing a museum layout over several floors in a spiral formation is an original idea"; we don't get lost in an

endless succession of rooms. Ramps along the tour allow you to reach the top..."; "a fun, family activity that uncovers a part of *Maison Cailler's* production line!".

When the company makes food products, the hedonistic dimension is especially demonstrated in company visits that are followed by tastings. For example, BFM proposes the following concept "brewery visit + seasonal product tasting + aperitif comprised of *tête de moine* (cheese), *totché* (pastry made with sour cream), dried sausage and wood-fired bread".

3.7 The spiritual dimension of hospitality

We can add a spiritual dimension to the dimensions mentioned above, which we have discovered in places laden with history or closely connected to the values of the owners-operators, as cited, for example, by Jean-Marie Mauler, owner of the company bearing his name: "The *Saint-Pierre* Priory has long since been one of the region's great religious centers. This is, of course, due to its spirituality, but also to its hospitality and conviviality which characterize the site. I have always preached daily serenity and quality relationships. This is all part of a life philosophy (Coopération, 2016).

Discussion, limits and research avenues

The objective of these works was to identify the building blocks of a company's hospitality and to assess visitor reactions brought about through reciprocity. Ultimately, the five dimensions of hospitality, identified by Brotherton (2006) and Cova and Giannelloni (2015), are perceived and appreciated by visitors. They were specified in the framework of company hospitality. Numerous similarities between French and Swiss hospitality have been brought to light: (1) the first is the presence of a trade expert who interacts with the visitor by sharing his expertise or craftsmanship (communicating a passion). The personnel's' role in a situation of hospitality is first and foremost to communicate a passion rather than simply welcoming guests. This is a key differentiating element when compared to hospitality studied in traditional tourism whereby the notion of welcoming is paramount. Hospitable interactions and generosity are key elements highlighted by the authors in their identification of other situations of hospitality. (2) The second similarity pertains to spatial, convivial and hedonistic dimensions. They are all found in the organizational structure of the visit and, thus, in the offer set forth by the company to come and discover its trade. The visit blends discovery, emotion and communication. It reconciles commercial aspects with the host's generosity. This

translates into a better acceptance of prices. Does a better understanding of the cost of products fabricated by the company reveal its transparency and honesty? (3) The third resemblance is discernible in the appropriation of the space, which connects the museum space to the region, marked by the singularity of its heritage and culture. (4) Finally, the temporal dimension procures as many moments of pleasure as a delightful trip through time. However, throughout all of our observations, we did not detect any differences between French and Swiss company hospitality.

This research brings forward theoretical development by introducing a new scope to the concept of hospitality and by demonstrating its “transferability” to the company visit. Let us reveal two other aspects that have not yet been identified: the spiritual dimension and the company’s regional roots, formed by working personnel. To give an example, visitor reactions attest to their gratitude towards the artisan, which they express when they are satisfied with their learning experience (expressed in terms of appropriation: “a heritage we hope to preserve for years to come” or admiration). It is also worthwhile to continue research on expressions of gratitude, motivated by the desire for reciprocity, and on their role in perceived hospitality.

On a managerial level, companies can now use company visits not only as a technique for acknowledging its personnel but also as a tool for business promotion and communication. Communicating a company’s values involves conveying an expertise or craftsmanship and regional traditions. The visit is also a concept. Because it creates social ties between the visitor and the company, contact with personnel is a key element which the company should integrate into its trade discovery offer. Acknowledging the artisan or skilled worker in this way fosters an acceptance of the fabricated products as well as their commercialization. This leads us to suggest that companies should use the visit to develop a kind of educational advertisement of their fabrication costs and sale prices.

Furthermore, in order to foster hospitality, our results reiterate the importance of organizing visits in a manner that goes beyond a standardized “guided” experience. They should be initiated and carried out by the men and women that breathe life into the company and backed by the economic area’s cultural and territorial specificities. In that respect, the company’s history is connected to that of the region (perhaps even to that of a trade specific to the region). Finally, this trade discovery goes beyond simply learning about an expertise or craftsmanship

and actually introduces an *art de vivre* and a mentality. It also strengthens the company’s spiritual identity. Conveying a passion in this manner is not only a prerequisite in creating company hospitality but also a distinguishing element in a company’s service offer for trade discovery.

Of course, the company visit has its risks, especially if it is “nonproductive”. Certain company visits are highly sought-after, because the product is popular (such as chocolate), the brand is well-known and word-of-mouth is spread throughout touring circuits. Victims of their own success and inundated by mass tourism (Cailler welcomes more than 350,000 visitors a year!), certain visits can have unpleasant aspects such as long lines and huge crowds in the company’s buildings. “The Cailler visit is pitiful, whose only objective is to have you spend time in their boutique. Yes, it’s organized, but the standard of this visit was very disappointing to me. We don’t visit the factory; we learn nothing about the fabrication process: just a series of rooms with automatic presentations of questionable quality, which have no value in relation to the industrial processes. Tasting at the end of the “visit” and exited via “direct injection” into the boutique... Not only do we have to pay 10 CHF, but we also wait one hour to learn nothing”. These testimonials prove that the visit should be designed and managed with visitor satisfaction in mind.

Naturally, this exploratory research has a certain number of limits, which present future avenues of study. Firstly, the cross section, although diversified, is limited and does not cover the entire spectrum of company visits available in Alsace and throughout the Jura & Trois-Lacs region of Switzerland. For example, it insufficiently considers diverse company sizes. Secondly, visitor perceptions were constructed based solely on testimonials gathered on the observed company websites, evaluation sites such as TripAdvisor and a handful of blogs. It would be appropriate to widen the study’s scope to include a larger cross section of companies and gather visitor perceptions *in situ* directly after their visit or by telephone.

These are our primary managerial recommendations: allow for easy visit sign-up on-line or by telephone, manage long lines and busy days, personalize the visits as much as possible by integrating working, smiling, expert personnel, put little emphasis on product sales at the end of the visit so as not to devalue the latter with a commercial connotation.

Finally, our study shows that the visit is a precious tool for any company searching for strategies to create ties, humanize their organization and form

cultural alliances all while meeting managerial and commercial demands. Together, these factors add value to the region's economic heritage and hospitable character.

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