



THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY OF THE LARGEST WALKING EVENT IN THE WORLD THE CASE OF THE *NIJMEEGSE VIERDAAGSE*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to investigate the successful factors behind the largest walking event in the world, the *Nijmeegse Vierdaagse* in the Netherlands, through the prism of a visitors' experience economy. The study explores the demographic characteristics of the respondents, the visitors' reasons to attend, as well as an interpretation of their experience. A total of 327 visitors completed a survey expressing their positive recommendation for others to visit the event and the huge interest (99.4%) to re-attend. This was due to a universal level of satisfaction and the diversification of the entertainment provision amongst Dutch, German and other Europeans with a high educational level, aged 20 and above. Most visitors attended the event with their families and friends, for professional and personal training, as part of a military program or for self-development. The main reasons to take part were firstly, to observe the walkers, secondly, to support friends and family and, lastly, for the atmosphere around the city and its history. The experience has been introduced through Pine and Gilmore's (1998) realms where all four aspects played a huge role in its successful implementation, specifically of the esthetic and entertainment realms. The participants searched mostly for harmony, a pleasant environment and differentiation of cultures. Moreover, the attendees mentioned the educational side as a simplistic curiosity rather than intentional learning, however, they still highlighted that it also mattered as a part of the successful event. Lastly, only small relevance was found in becoming a different person and experiencing a completely different world through escapism. Finally, practically all participants expressed their wish to re-attend the event considering it successful.

KEYWORDS

Pine and Gilmore's realms, memorable experience, reasons, repeated attendance, sports event

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1. INTRODUCTION

The *Nijmeegse Vierdaagse*, also known as the International Four Days Marches, is the biggest and the most popular walking event in the world (Aparna et al.,

2022; Sinkeldam, 2018). The event promotes exercise through sports activities with after four days of walking successful participants receiving a medal while on the last day spectators bestow gladioli on the walkers. Every year in the third week of July, participants walk



up to 50 kilometers per day depending on their age and sex. In 2024, the walking event is being staged for the 106th time (Sinkeldam, 2018).

From the 1970s the organizers endeavored to make the walking event more attractive by arranging additional activities such as music festivals, amusements, food stands, other performances and sport/exercise related activities. To organize and run the *Vierdaagse*, several partners are involved. These include the *Nijmeegse Vierdaagse* Institution, supported by three main partners: City of Nijmegen, the Military and the Royal Dutch Walking Association (De 4daagse, n.d.). Additionally, the organization attracts numerous sponsors, hundreds of volunteers (from several associations like the Dutch Red Cross). There are only a handful of paid employees.

The current event, being a large-scale authentic gathering of like-minded individuals, attracts an incredible number of 40,000 participants which is growing every year. Nordvall and Heldt (2017) have investigated the factors for failure of other major events which have already peaked in numbers, so in order to prevent failure, it would be essential to identify what is behind so many attendees and to dwell on their reasons for visiting and the re-attendance pattern, through the relationship between Pine and Gilmore's experience realms which are widely utilized as the main measurement tool (Ferreira & Teixeira, 2013; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Jurowski, 2009; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Oh et al., 2007; Walls et al., 2011). Moreover, other scholars recommend examining customer experiences in different sectors of tourism and other events to compare with work already completed to revalidate or oppose the results (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Kusumah, 2023; Oh et al., 2007). Not to forget, an outcome of the current research will be a major contribution to the *Vierdaagse* organisers in terms of maintaining and improving the success of the event, as well as for city marketers to identify an up-to-date image of the area and the potential to grow. In addition, this study will provide a better understanding for other large sporting events when it comes to needs and wants, allowing their organisers to compare and readjust the processes.

2. THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

Looking at the definition of experience, a handful of interpretations are introduced. Andersson (2007) described experience simply as the result of consumption and production, however the most recent data views experience as a personalized and a customized approach to interaction among consumers (White et al., 2023). To add to that, the key to a successful event lay in the emotions the participants experience (Keskin et al., 2024) and other studies have claimed that an innovative approach

through gamification leads to a memorable experience (Mileva, 2023). Walls et al. (2011) focused on the description of tourism experiences, considering those as private responses to spectating or participating. Furthermore, the authors added the notion of a relationship established by a host and a guest defined through the provision of an emotional aspect of personalized memorable moments (Hosany et al., 2022). Not to forget that tourism experience is viewed as the center of a destination's appeal as well as a prominent determinant of economic growth, tourist behavioral intentions and decision-making (Bernaki & Marso, 2023; Jog & Alcasoas, 2023; Pine & Gilmore, 2014).

2.1. REALMS OF EXPERIENCE

According to Oh et al. (2007), the theory was devised to measure customer involvement and interactions between those attending an event. Moreover, four realms of experience were identified (Figure 1). According to Pine and Gilmore, experiences can be positioned on this two-dimensional diagram based on the extent to which consumers actively or passively participate (the horizontal axis) and their absorptive or immersive involvement in events (measured on the vertical axis). Active participation occurs when consumers personally influence the event or performance, for example skiing or asking questions at a lecture. On the other hand, passive participation occurs when a customer has no influence on events (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Radder & Han, 2015). During passive participation the customer is mentally involved with an activity, for instance watching a rock concert. The vertical axis in Pine & Gilmore's theory measures the connection that customers have with their surroundings during a performance. Immersion on the other hand is defined as "becoming physically (or virtually) a part of the experience itself" (Loureiro, 2014, p. 2). Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011) summarised the absorptive-immersive difference as customers having a certain distance from the experience when absorbed; while customers are drawn into or become part of performances when immersed.

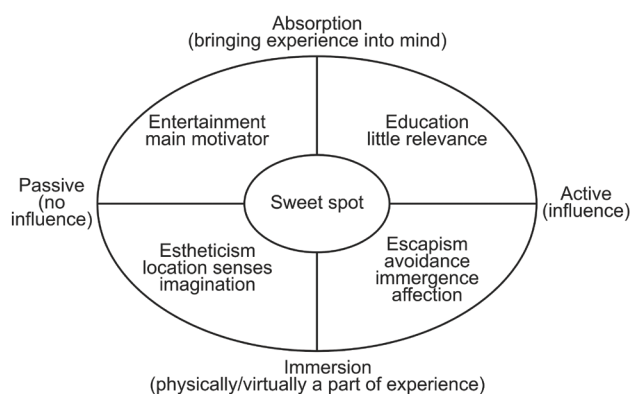


Figure 1. The four realms of the experience economy
Source: authors

Pine and Gilmore labelled the four quadrants of Figure 1 as corresponding to four experience realms, namely: entertainment, education, estheticism and escapism. Each realm represents unique characteristics contributing to the overall customer experience. To achieve the ultimate experience, also called the “sweet spot” which is shaded white in the figure, all four realms should be included, so combining the level of participation with both absorption and immersion (Ho & Tsai, 2010; Thanh & Kirova, 2018).

Vorderer (2001) sees entertainment as an essential motivator, temporarily changing perspectives on reality, although the customer is only passively involved. According to Oliver and Bartsch (2010, cited in Bartsch & Harmann, 2017) entertainment experiences are measured by a composite of factors including entertainment, fun, appreciation and suspense. Nevertheless, Bartsch and Hartmann (2017) note that the entertainment experience is focused on maximizing pleasure and minimizing negative aspects. However, as can be seen in Figure 1, the entertainment realm is associated with passive absorption (Ali et al., 2014; Shim et al., 2015). Being passive, customers do not influence the environment and are not part of the performance. Being absorptive, they maintain distance from the activity, observing and absorbing the situation mentally. From the organizational perspective, entertainment is offered to catch and engage a customer’s attention (Oh et al., 2007).

The educational realm is focused on learning new things. In Pine and Gilmore’s approach this is a combination of absorption (the upper part of the vertical axis in Figure 1) and active participation (to the right on the horizontal axis) (Güzel, 2014). In other words, Oh et al. (2007) describe this as a person observing a performance but actively engaging. Depending on the visitor’s needs and interests, Boswijk et al. (2012, cited in Radder & Han, 2015) state that acquiring information leads to meaningful experiences. For example, educational experiences are one of the key motivators for wine tourism, playing a vital role in the creation of memories and satisfaction (Chen & Chen, 2012, cited in Hwang & Lyu, 2015; Thanh & Kirova, 2018). Hwang and Lyu (2015) found that multiple sporting events utilize educational experiences to increase the knowledge of attendees. Yet not all events have educational elements, Shim et al. (2015) reported that the educational realm is of little relevance in casino visits.

The esthetic realm is based on passive consumer participation and being immersed in the surroundings of an event (Shim et al., 2015). The visitor is mentally immersed within the environment but does not exert influence on the event or be involved in other interactions, as occurs in educational experiences (Jurowski, 2009; tom Dieck et al., 2018). Esthetic experiences appeal to visitors’ senses which can be

heightened by their physical surroundings. Examples that generate esthetic experiences are Niagara Falls, Golden Gate Bridge and the Grand Canyon (Ali et al., 2014; Hwang & Han, 2016). Moreover, esthetic heritage experiences more generally are associated with location, infrastructure and intangible elements that stimulate visitors’ senses and imagination (Radder & Han, 2015). Bitner (1992, cited in Hosany & Witham, 2010) divided the physical environment into three dimensions (signs, symbols and artefacts; ambient conditions; spatial layout and functionality) to measure the level of estheticism.

In its core, escapism means that most people have, due to unsatisfying life circumstances, repeatedly to leave the reality they experience on an emotional and cognitive level (Henning & Vorderer, 2001; Thanh & Kirova, 2018). According to Güzel (2014), the escape realm underpins the closest relationship between experiences and individuals. This realm of Pine and Gilmore’s theory (1998) is based on actively participating and being immersed within the environment (Jurowski, 2009; Song et al., 2015), people are more physically involved in an event than for educational and entertainment experiences. Performances that result in escape experiences require immersion and a high level of participation. To understand escapism in Pine and Gilmore’s conception, Oh et al. (2007) suggest the following three types of escapist destinations: first, travelling to temporarily leave normal lives, avoiding daily tasks; secondly, people to immerse themselves in, i.e. destinations exerting a pull attracting visits. By doing so, visitors undergo an escape, even though they had no reason for escaping their daily lives. In the third and last type, people select a destination and become involved in the activities on offer which act as instruments for escape experiences. In this type, choosing the destination and the desire to escape ordinary life are only secondary considerations. Oh et al. (2007) point out that all three types are incorporated within Pine and Gilmore’s approach to escape.

2.2. EVIDENCE OF THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Pine and Gilmore’s theory has been applied widely in hospitality and tourism including studies of bed-and-breakfast stays (Oh et al., 2007), tourism in general (Jurowski, 2009), cruise experiences (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Hwang & Han, 2016), a leisure farm (Ho & Tsai, 2010), an ice music festival and Maihaugen museum (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011), Malaysian resort hotels (Ali et al., 2014), Pamukkale city in Türkiye (Güzel, 2014), rural tourism (Loureiro, 2014), a golf tournament (Hwang & Lyu, 2015), heritage museums (Radder & Han, 2015), temple stays (Song et al., 2015),

and a science festival (tom Dieck et al., 2018). Most of the hospitality and tourism research was quantitative, using self-administered and online questionnaires (for example, Ali et al., 2014; Güzel, 2014; Jurowski, 2009; Loureiro, 2014; Oh et al., 2007; Radder & Han, 2015; tom Dieck et al., 2018).

Several researchers established the existence of the four realms of experience in the hospitality sector (Ali et al., 2014; Güzel, 2014; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Hwang & Han, 2016; Jurowski, 2009; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Oh et al., 2007; Song et al., 2015). Radder and Han (2015) found three museum experience dimensions: edutainment, escapism and esthetic, where 'edutainment' is a combination of education and entertainment for visitors to a heritage museum. Visitors at a leisure farm in Taiwan were mainly escaping from daily life in an esthetic environment (Ho & Tsai, 2010). Apparently, leisure-farm visitors, mainly city inhabitants, become part of the natural landscape and embrace the more primitive life of the countryside in Taiwan. While the escape and esthetic dimensions were major determinants of visitor experiences, Ho and Tsai (2010) recommended that to enhance experiences at the leisure farm, services and facilities related to education and entertainment should be improved. In other research, fewer than four realms were found to be important, despite researchers aiming to achieve all four. For example, Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011) found that all four were not needed at an ice-music festival, as escapism and esthetic influenced satisfaction, but education and entertainment did not.

A substantial body of evidence suggests estheticism is the main contributor to experiential outcomes (Güzel, 2014; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Loureiro, 2014; Oh et al., 2007; tom Dieck et al., 2018). According to Loureiro (2014), esthetics are the most effective drivers of overall experience among rural tourists. In temple-stay programs, esthetic experiences are created through cultural exploration and mountain activities, where visitors take in colorful surroundings during autumn (Song et al., 2015). Jurowski (2009) concluded that estheticism can add value to offerings by resort operators and might enhance marketing and travel packages. Some studies point to linkages between the realms of experience. Loureiro (2014) found that estheticism is closely related to education, reflecting the similar findings of Oh et al. (2007) and Jurowski (2009). Before joining cruises for esthetic reasons, passengers seek to learn new things, hoping for educational experiences (Hwang & Han, 2016). Jurowski (2009) found that escape enhances willingness to seek entertainment. Additionally, escape and entertainment can influence emotional and functional values at temple stays (Song et al., 2015).

3. METHODS

The current study applied a quantitative research approach which has previously been successfully utilized in other works with the Pine and Gilmore model, containing the multidimensional scale of experience (education, escapism, entertainment, esthetics) with five to seven statements (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Oh et al., 2007). The research instrument consists of a 5-point scale measuring relevance from (1) *strongly agree* to (5) *strongly disagree*. Furthermore, the mean as well as the standard deviation are presented on the chart.

The pilot study was successfully tested amongst family members and friends of the authors who had previously attended the event and minor changes were applied accordingly. The authors planned to gather data on whether visitors could relate the realms of experience to the event as well as the main reasons of revisiting, recommendations to attend and the demographics of the attendees based on random sampling. The items of each construct, apart from Pine and Gilmore's model, were measured using percentages and put in a table. After gathering the data, each respondent was numbered, and all responses were coded into an Excel file. Finally, the research was coded with the use of automated computing (Lash et al., 2014), and the findings were reviewed by several people including the tutors and co-authors (Yarborough, 2021).

4. RESULTS

In total, 327 completed surveys were obtained at the *Vierdaagse*, of which 176 were from participants and 151 came from spectators. As can be seen in Table 1, nearly two-thirds of respondents (60.6%) were male and those aged 60 and over accounted for more than a fifth (21.7%). In addition, more than a third (35.2%) were between 40 and 60 years old, around i.e. six out of every eleven respondents (56.9%) were over 39.

Fourteen different nationalities responded to the survey; according to De 4daagse (n.d.), 69 different nationalities attended the event. As can be seen in Table 1, most respondents (71.3%) were from the Netherlands, almost a tenth (9.8%) were German and another 12.8% from other European countries (0.3% Belgium; 1.2% United Kingdom; 3.7% Nordic countries; and 7.6% other). A further 2.4% were Asian, mainly Indonesians living in the Netherlands.

The highest level of education achieved is also presented in Table 1. The results show that the highest qualification of most of those surveyed was either a 'junior college' degree (36.7%) or a bachelor's (38.5%) i.e. more than three quarters (75.2%) of the research sample have one of these qualifications.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents ($n = 327$)

Characteristic	Categories	Percent
Gender	Female	39.4
	Male	60.6
Age	Under 18	3.1
	18–20	5.8
	21–24	9.2
	25–29	8.0
	30–34	9.8
	35–39	7.3
	40–44	7.3
	45–49	9.5
	50–54	9.5
	55–59	8.9
	60 or over	21.7
Education (highest level)	No school education	0.3
	Elementary school	1.8
	Junior high school	9.2
	High school	4.0
	Junior college	36.7
	Bachelor's degree	38.5
	Master's degree	8.6
Doctorate degree	0.9	
Birthplace	The Netherlands	71.3
	Belgium	0.3
	Germany	9.8
	United Kingdom	1.2
	Nordic countries	3.7
	Other European countries	7.6
	Asia	2.4
	North and South America	3.7
Occupation	Director	1.2
	Manager	8.9
	Self-employed office worker	5.5
	Self-employed technical worker	2.1
	Professional (doctor, lawyer, teacher or similar)	4.9
	Technical occupations (trades worker, administrative or similar)	9.2
	Labourer	17.4
	Student	14.7
	Retired	17.4
	Housewife	0.6
	Other	18.0

Source: authors.

The response "Other" was given by 18% as their occupation and a total of 59 were in military service as soldiers. The next largest category is made up of 17.4% reporting themselves as retired as well as the same percentage for "Labourers" from physical and unskilled work across several industries. Smaller groups were represented by students, directors, managers and others.

4.1. REASONS FOR ATTENDANCE

Participants were asked with whom and why they took part in Table 2. Just over 40% attended with family, friends or partners who were also taking part; another 25.6% participated as individuals. Others were present as a part of large groups, either military (29.0%) or non-military (5.1%). Spectators were asked to select as many reasons as possible for attendance, from a list of eight.

Table 2. Types of participants and spectators at *Nijmeegse Vierdaagse* ($n = 327$)

Responses		Percent
Participant type	Alone	25.6
	With friends or family members	40.3
	As part of military activity	29.0
	As part of other group	5.1
Reasons for being a spectator	A friend/relative/partner is participating	47.0
	To watch the walkers	60.9
	For the atmosphere	41.1
	Live in Nijmegen	10.6
	Work in Nijmegen	9.9
	Work at the event	10.6

Note: number of participants = 176 (percentage of all respondents = 53.8%); number of spectators = 151 (percentage of all respondents = 46.2%).

Source: authors.

Most spectators (60.9%) stated they visited the event to watch the walkers, 47% percent selected to support a friend, a partner or a family member. In addition, 41.1% of were there for the atmosphere. Furthermore, 20.5% lived in Nijmegen (10.6%) or worked there (9.9%), with the remaining 10.6% coming to the *Vierdaagse* to work at the event as presented in Table 2.

4.2. PREVIOUS ATTENDANCE

As presented in Table 3, 95.4% of all respondents had attended previously, i.e. only 15 of the 327 respondents were at the *Vierdaagse* for the first time. To narrow it down,

Table 3. Previous attendance at *Nijmeegse Vierdaagse* (n = 327)

Previous attendance type	Percent	Range of attendances	First quartile	Median	Third quartile
Total (all types)	95.4	1 to 71	3	7	15
Participant	58.4	1 to 44	0	2	9
Spectator	62.4	1 to 71	0	2	6
Both	25.4	2 to 65	7	13	22
Never been a participant	37.0	NA	NA	NA	NA
Never been a spectator	33.0	NA	NA	NA	NA

Note: NA – not applicable.
Source: authors.

58.4% had been to the event before as a participant, 62.4% as spectators and 25.4% had previously spectated but on other occasions had participated. As a check, the sum of the percentages for participants and spectators is 120.8%, however, subtracting the percentage for both gives 95.4% (which is the percentage of all 327 respondents who had attended previously). The reasons for the high levels of previous attendance comes from the history of the event, the popular image created through the years, the atmosphere in the city, recognition for participants, and the appreciation of friends and family.

Participants and spectators were asked questions about recommendations to others and their own revisit intentions. As shown in Table 4, 97.6% of the 327 respondents would recommend to others that they should visit the *Vierdaagse* as a spectator. There is slightly less agreement (91.4%) that respondents would recommend visiting as a participant i.e. walking one of 30, 40 or 50 kilometers on four successive days. Most remarkably, out of all 327 respondents, 99.4% said they would like to visit the *Vierdaagse* again; as 312 of the 327 respondents had already attended previously, it follows that there is a near universal intention to revisit yet again.

Table 4. Recommendations on re-visiting and personal intention to re-attend (n = 327)

Percentage saying "Yes"	
Recommend that others attend as:	
Spectator	97.6
Participant	91.4
Personally re-attend	99.4

Source: authors.

4.3. EXPERIENCE REALMS AT THE *NIJMEEGSE VIERDAAGSE*

Firstly, in Table 5 the distribution of responses to statements directed at the education dimension is shown. The statement “the event stimulates my curiosity” stands out as nearly two thirds of respondents (65.8%), *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the event stimulates their curiosity. For the other three education statements, more than a fifth *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed* with the statement. However, the main response to each of these statements lies between *neutrality* and *agreement* and the standard deviation suggests a roughly equal spread of responses around means.

Table 5. Responses to Pine and Gilmore’s (1998) statements on realms of an experience

Responses		<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither disagree nor agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	Mean	Standard deviation
Education dimension	The event stimulates my curiosity	4.0	13.5	16.8	40.7	25.1	3.69	1.107
	It increases my knowledge about sport/exercising	7.0	19.6	24.5	33.9	15.0	3.30	1.153
	The ‘Nijmeegse Vierdaagse’ is a learning experience	6.7	15.3	20.2	38.2	19.6	3.49	1.164
	The event stimulates my curiosity to learn new things	4.9	18.7	27.2	29.7	19.6	3.40	1.141

Entertainment dimension	The activities/events are amusing to watch	0.0	2.4	4.9	25.1	67.6	4.58	0.700
	Watching others perform is captivating	0.3	2.8	8.9	37.0	51.1	4.36	0.782
	I have fun during this event	0.3	0.3	2.8	20.8	75.8	4.72	0.561
	I feel emotionally stimulated with this event	3.1	16.8	25.7	36.4	18.0	3.50	1.065
	I have an unusual experience during this event	5.5	21.1	26.6	26.9	19.9	3.35	1.175
	I interact with other participants/spectators at the event	0.9	5.2	9.2	38.2	46.5	4.24	0.889
Escape dimension	I feel that I am living in a different time or place	6.4	22.0	16.2	38.8	16.5	3.37	1.180
	The event gives me the opportunity to escape daily routine	4.0	10.7	15.3	38.2	31.8	3.83	1.110
	I feel that I am in a different world during this event	8.3	22.9	17.4	30.6	20.8	3.33	1.263
	I forgot my daily routine during the 'Nijmeegse Vierdaagse'	5.2	14.7	22.0	31.8	26.3	3.59	1.173
	It feels that I am a different person during this event	18.0	28.7	30.9	14.7	7.6	2.65	1.159
Aesthetic dimension	The event creates a sense of harmony	0.0	0.0	2.4	21.7	75.8	4.73	0.495
	The 'Nijmeegse Vierdaagse' is very attractive	0.3	0.6	4.6	44.3	50.2	4.43	0.642
	Being present during this event is very pleasant	0.0	0.9	4.3	51.7	43.1	4.37	0.612
	The event has a pleasing physical environment	0.0	0.6	7.3	49.2	42.8	4.34	0.640

Source: authors.

In the case of the first, second, third and final statements in the entertainment realm, the level of agreement was about 75% or very much more. The greatest percentages of *agreement* or *strong agreement* were for the statements, "The activities/events are amusing to watch" (92.7% agree) and "I have fun during this event" (96.6%). Corresponding to this, both statements had means of 4.58 and 4.72, indicating that in general respondents tended to *strongly agree* with the pair of statements.

The opinions of respondents on escape statements vary widely over the 5-point Likert scale. On three statements, *agreement* or *strong agreement* overshadowed *disagreement* or *strong disagreement*, but the sum of the percentages of *agree* responses were in the fifties. The statement "It feels that I am a different person during this event" scored higher on disagreement than on agreement (46.7% of

respondents *disagreed* while 22.3% were in *agreement*). Other statements within the category such as "I live in a different time and I escape from a daily routine" were very high in agreement (38.2% and 38.8%). Furthermore, this statement had the lowest mean emphasizing that most of the people *disagreed* or answered *neutral*. All five statements had a standard deviation above 1, with the highest being 1.263.

Finally, in Table 5, esthetic factors were favorably regarded. For each statement over 90% of the respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed*. This means that of the 327 respondents, 300 or more, found the event harmonious, very attractive, very pleasant and took place in a pleasing environment where diversity of cultures was appreciated. Each mean score was above 4.34 or above, which signifies that most of the respondents answered *agree* or *strongly agree*. In addition,

the standard deviation is very low, meaning there is little spread or deviation of responses away from the mean (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

5. DISCUSSION

As stated in the introduction, it is essential to further investigate the experience of the guests within the tourism and hospitality events to compare results and to highlight similar or opposing findings (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Kusumah, 2023; Oh et al., 2007). Experience from the attendees of this event can be described as a personalized approach between a consumer and the offer, however, not only for the purpose of its acquisition (White et al., 2023), but also for consumption. Moreover, on top of the emotional aspect between a host and a guest (Hosany et al., 2022), entertainment and education play a vital role in creating a memorable experience during events. Lastly, current research supports the idea that tourism experience is a prominent determinant of the intention to revisit and economic development (Bernaki & Marso, 2023; Pine & Gilmore, 2014).

When it comes to the realms of experience, all four were ideal for the participants in proving Ho and Tsai's (2010) and Thanh and Kirova's (2018) findings that disagreed with other scholars that all four dimensions impact the overall experience (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Radder & Han, 2015). Entertainment is one of the essential motivators to attend (Vorderer, 2001) though not the most predominant in an event like the *Nijmeegse Vierdaagse*. One of the highly regarded realms is the esthetic aspect meaning a creation of harmony, a pleasant environment and appreciation of diverse cultures which revalidates previous findings (Güzel, 2014; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Loureiro, 2014; Oh et al., 2007; tom Dieck et al., 2018). There is also great curiosity to see what is happening during the event which belongs to the educational realm.

Moreover, escapism has been found as the least profound element although previously highlighted by other scholars (Güzel, 2014; Hwang & Han, 2016; Song et al., 2015; Thanh & Kirova, 2018).

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Having seen from the survey results, many of the visitors are males, fully retired or close to retirement with a college or a bachelor's degree from the Netherlands or other European countries. Those participating could be divided into three main groups: individuals, family/friends, military. The main reasons to take part were,

firstly, to watch the walkers, secondly, to support friends and family and, lastly, for the atmosphere around the city. The revisit intention percentage is huge as well as encouragement for others to come and experience the event due to its history, the atmosphere during the days and the recognition of participants.

Moreover, visitors pointed out that the event stimulated their curiosity rather than their ability to learn more about activities, showing the educational dimension to be only slightly present. Unlike the entertainment realm, where the attendees agreed on experiencing amusement, fun and emotions, the escape dimension seems to be not so relevant to the event where only some participants felt as if they were escaping from daily life and almost no one related being in a completely different world or being a different person. Finally, the esthetic realm found its highest relevance amongst every group. It appeared that the majority of those questioned viewed their experience as harmonious, pleasant, cultural and attractive. Therefore, it can be concluded that the entertainment and the esthetic realms were considered the most essential and it can be suggested that due to these dimensions individuals appear to return and encourage others to take part.

According to Pine and Gilmore's theory, the sweet spot can be achieved if all four realms are relevant and find a positive response from the guests, hence, it could be useful for the organizers to work on elements of escapism and education. For instance, when it comes to the walkers, some pre-event videos could be sent and for the spectators an educational form such as quizzes or workshops which could be organized during the days of the event around the city. Nevertheless, it could be interesting to discover what aspects of escapism, on top of the avoidance of daily routine, are viewed as useful during such events.

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