

Authenticity: From heritage to tourism

Odete Paiva

Assistant Professor
Polytechnic Institute of Viseu, Portugal
odetepaiva@gmail.pt

Cláudia Seabra

Associate Professor
Polytechnic Institute of Viseu, Portugal
cseabra@estv.ipv.pt

José Luís Abrantes

Coordinator Professor
Polytechnic Institute of Viseu, Portugal
jlabrantes@estv.ipv.pt

Fernanda Cravidão

Coordinator Professor
University of Coimbra, Portugal
cravidao@fl.uc.pt

Abstract

Authenticity as a concept has been studied since a long time. Despite this, and the historic preservation movement that arose in Europe in the early nineteenth century, authenticity was not a keyword and its study only began to be systematic in social sciences, from the second half of the XXth century (Starn, 2002). After that, the concept has raised and continues to raise many questions about its interpretation. Authenticity continues to justify reflection not only with regard to the heritage preservation, but also in the tourism context (Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1973).

Authenticity is a matter of choice, a motivation that takes tourists to leave their familiar surroundings and look for unique spaces. Some tourists seek for authentic experiences, while others gravitate in artificial experiences (Cohen, 1988). In fact, the pursuit for authenticity has become a central theme in the tourism literature (Belhassen, Caton & Stewart, 2008). The authenticity is a central motivation in tourism experience. The attraction of tourists to places of

social, historical or cultural significance is comparable to the desire of pilgrims to visit holy places (MacCannell, 1973). The authenticity as dynamic and multifaceted concept has sparked many debates about its meaning and utility, so it occupies a central position in tourism studies (Rickly-Boyd, 2012). Many researchers have deconstructed theoretically and empirically the notion of authenticity in heritage environments due to its crucial importance, namely for heritage tourism (Yeoman, Brass, McMahon-Beattie, 2007). Over the years the concept has been studied from different perspectives such as object, place, experience - these thoughts are translated into several theories sometimes conflicting. Indeed, research in this area gives us a perspective of the present discussion and development discourse about the authenticity concept (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999).

In this context, this paper main goal is to make a literature review on the concept of authenticity and its relationship with tourism. Specifically, we intend to present the historical evolution of the term linked to the Heritage classification, namely the contributions of ICOMOS, secondly we present the concept of authenticity in tourism studies. Discussion centres on this review literature implications to theory and future research.

Keywords: Authenticity, Heritage, Tourism, ICOMOS

Introduction

Authenticity is a universal value and it is seen as a key a motivating factor in the tourism demand (Cohen, 1988; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; MacCannell, 1973). Authenticity is an even more important factor with regard to cultural tourists (McKercher & Du Cros, 2003) especially in heritage tourism (Yeoman, Brass, & McMahon -Beattie, 2007).

The concept of authenticity used in museums was extended to tourism, since tourism products as works of art, festivals, rituals, food, accommodation, destinations, among others, are often described as "authentic" or "inauthentic" according to the local population and traditions criteria (Wang, 1999). The question that arises is whether authenticity is an objectively identifiable feature of objects and cultures, or a subjective perception, socially and individually constructed (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). Authenticity is a matter of choice, a motivation that makes tourists leave their familiar spaces and look for unique sites and destinations looking for real experiences (Cohen, 1988).

In line with the above, the concept of authenticity is critical for Heritage Sites marketing (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). Despite its obvious importance authenticity is troublesome and underexplored concept (Wang, 1999). Therefore, more studies are needed on the authenticity concept (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010).

The main goal of the present study is to review relevant literature on the authenticity concept mainly in its relationship with tourism. Specifically, this study presents the

historical evolution of authenticity linked to the Heritage classification, namely the contributions of ICOMOS, secondly the concept of authenticity in tourism studies.

Literature

The authenticity concept was initially used by experts in museums and then extended to tourism. In the museology context, authenticity refers to traditional cultures and their origins, to be genuine, real and unique. However, in the tourism context the concept applicability and importance is much broader (Sharpley, 1994) because it allows a better understanding of the tourist experience (MacCannell, 1973).

Authenticity - ICOMOS contributions

The movement for heritage preservation started in the 1960s and grew rapidly, since then the conceptions have been developed and changed (Chen, 2005). In the following section the most significant documents are addressed showing the concern for heritage preservation and also the definition of authenticity: the Venice Charter, the Nara Document and the San Antonio Statement.

The authenticity conceptualization discussion, mainly related to the historical heritage preservation, began with the Charter of Venice in 1964. This document supports the safeguarding of cultural heritage and ancient monuments as a common heritage. Also states that all communities have the duty to preserve heritage, with all the richness of its authenticity. This statement reveals the perspective in which the authenticity was traditionally designed: authenticity viewed as an approach to "object" (Starn, 2002).

Authenticity raised many questions about its interpretation, which led ICOMOS to reflect and present some clarification suggestions. From these concerns of authenticity conceptualization, being that one of the requirements for the sites inscription on the World Heritage list, the concept was the subject of deep thought and questioning leading to the Nara Conference in Japan in 1994. In this conference a document was prepared to be the basis of analysis to the applications for the World Heritage List.

The Nara Document on Authenticity, is inspired by the Charter of Venice, 1964, extending its conceptual framework, answering to new concerns about cultural heritage. According to this document the essential contribution of authenticity concept is to respect and enhance all the collective memory of mankind dimensions by promoting the cultures and ways of life diversity associated with it, as critical for its development, protection and dissemination (Doc. Nara, art. 4). It ensures also that cultural diversity is expressed both in a chronological and geographical dimension (Doc. Nara, art. 4).

The concept of authenticity application proposed by the Nara Document, was discussed at the ICOMOS meeting in San Antonio, Texas, in 1996. Of this debate resulted the Declaration of San Antonio, which establishes some important connections:

- **Authenticity and Identity:** cultural heritage authenticity is directly related to the cultural identity.
- **Authenticity and History:** the history understanding and significance of a place, over time, is crucial to identify its authenticity.
- **Authenticity and Materials:** the cultural site material may be the main component of its authenticity. The presence of old and original elements is an important part of a heritage site basic nature.
- **Authenticity and Social Value:** or intangible heritage, the heritage sites can hold deep spiritual messages, which support community life, linking it to the ancestral past.
- **Authenticity, Dynamic and Static Sites:** the heritage includes dynamic cultural sites, meaning those who continue to be used by society, and static cultural sites such as archaeological sites.
- **Authenticity and Administration:** the heritage is characterized by very heterogeneous patterns of ownership and protection. Communities and authorities should provide the means for the assets correct knowledge and evaluation, for their protection and conservation, to promote artistic and spiritual enjoyment as well as for their educational use.
- **Authenticity and Economics:** the heritage sites authenticity is intrinsically based on the physical component, and extrinsically on the values associated with them by the communities rooted in the sites.

After this clarification the authenticity concept is assumed as a fundamental requirement in any process of World Heritage classification. In fact, to all the sites recognized in the World Heritage List is recognized an Universal Outstanding Value based in three aspects: i) entry criteria - registration reasons and importance; ii) condition - authenticity and integrity; and iii) conservation and management. So, authenticity refers to the ability to convey the true historical meaning and is a necessary condition to sustain the exceptional universal value (Rodwell & Oers, 2007). In conclusion, authenticity describes the integrity of a place, an object or an activity in its original creation.

Authenticity – from Heritage to Tourism

The search for authenticity became central in the tourism literature (Buchmann, Moore & Fisher, 2010). Authenticity is a central motivation in the tourism experience. Tourists' attraction to places that present social, historical or cultural significance is comparable to the desire of pilgrims when visiting holy places (MacCannell, 1973). The emotional

attachment to these 'authentic' places is so important that makes the journey a kind of pilgrimage (Buchman, 2010).

Authenticity is a dynamic and multifaceted concept and has marked many debates about its meaning and utility, so it occupies a central position in tourism studies (Rickly-Boyd, 2012). Over the years different approaches were proposed and the concept was analysed in different perspectives - object, place, experience - these reflections translate into several theories sometimes antagonistic.

Authenticity qualifies objects, places and tourist experiences and has been measured and studied over the past decades from different perspectives (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). In this study the focus is the authenticity from tourists' perspective. It is considered the destination and its attractions, travel motivations, cultural repertoire and contact with other tourists (Kohler, 2009).

One of the first studies in tourism using authenticity was in the 60's and analysed the travel experiences of American international tourists. The study concluded that tourists were not able to experience authentic foreign cultures because they were in large numbers in the destinations, so mass tourism generates pseudo-events and commercializes culture, homogenizing and standardizing experiences (Boorstin, 1961). In this first study the authenticity is considered as an essential feature of objects and places destroyed by tourists' presence (MacCannell, 1999).

The credit for placing authenticity as a central issue in tourism research is for MacCannell (1973, 1976). The author defines authenticity as a central motivation in tourism activity and experience; a dimension attributed to some objects and places, through modern social processes that also produce the motivation for their consumption (MacCannell, 1999).

Still in the 70s another study examines authenticity as a motivation factor for tourist consumers. According to this study (Cohen, 1979), in the postmodern world, many individuals are disappointed and struggle to find meaning in everyday life and get out of alienation. These alienated individuals' desire to experience authenticity by living the lives of others – the experiential tourists. According to this study, tourists can be segmented into five groups according to the degree of authenticity seeking: leisure, fun, experiential, experimental and existential. The first two types of tourists are motivated by escape mechanisms and seek for a change in daily routine. The experiential, experimental and existential tourists aim for a deeper level of authenticity; they are motivated by the search for meaning in the visited places (Cohen, 1979).

Many authors concluded that authenticity is a main motivation for tourists influencing their main decisions, such as destination selection, leisure activities practiced, visits, among

others. Authenticity is the search for knowledge and also brings pleasure to tourists' experiences. So, the search for authenticity is real and destinations should invest time and money promoting it to tourists (Waller & Lea, 1999).

With the growing concern and interest in sustainable tourism, authenticity became a central concept. In fact, authenticity fits with the current trend for sustainability in tourism, its importance is clear: "Authenticity is synonymous with tourism that is well done" (Pauchant, 2006).

More recently, authors agree that the search for authenticity reflects the need of urban tourists from industrialized countries looking for something out of their daily lives, something different, an escape. They want to try new things and enjoy the feeling of being where things are real and original. They want to be able to say "I was there". Authenticity in tourism refers to a unique experience like: different ways of life experiencing; contacting with the other people identity; to see different traditions, discover places that remain untouched by modernity maintaining traditional methods and ways of life, among others. In this way, tourists also realize the difference between the visited destination and their own life. So, tourism experience emerges as a window into their culture, heritage, history and identity. This kind of experience also allows to break with globalization and tourism standardization, creating additional value to tourism experiences (Laliberté, 2005)

Types of Authenticity in Tourism

Authenticity is assuming a central position in tourism research (Rickly-Boyd, 2013) and authors assume mainly two distinct perspectives in its study: i) objects authenticity (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999) and events perceived as real and genuine (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006); ii) and experience authenticity (Wang, 1999), as a true human attribute or true to its essential nature (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). Deriving from those two perspectives, authenticity in tourism was approached from three dimensions reflected in three different authenticity types - objectivist, constructivist and existential (Wang, 1999):

- the objectivist approach assumes that authenticity emanates from the visited object originality, being a place, a site or a specific attraction; (See: Belhassen & Caton, 2006; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006)
- the constructivist perspective emphasizes the different ways in which tourists perceive authenticity, sometimes it is related to their personal interpretations (Wang, 1999);
- the existential approach is similar to the constructivist, lies in the subject and not on the visited object (see: Belhassen, Caton & Stewart, 2008; Kim & Jamal, 2007; MacCannell, 1973; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Rickly-Boyd, 2012; Wang, 1999).

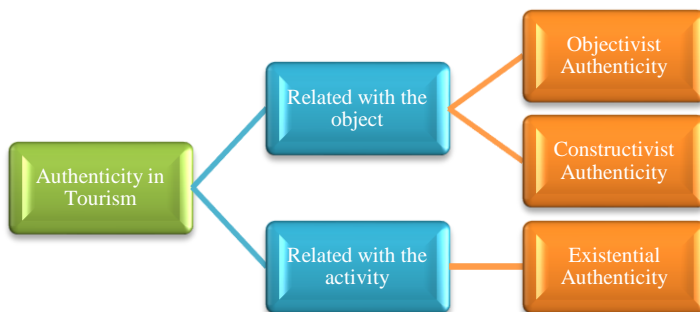


Figure 1: Authenticity in Tourism

Authenticity Related with the Object – Objectivist Approach

When tourists think of authenticity, they imagine an object from the past inherently authentic, supported by researchers that use authenticity criteria and confirm that the object is authentic (Cohen, 1988). In this line, tourists have a passive role, they are not actively involved authenticity construction since the authentic interpretation of objects is provided (McIntosh & Prentice, 1999).

There is the general idea that the real and authentic can be found in other cultures and periods of time, so living the History can be a catalyst to bring tourists to these cultures. Moreover, these new cultures and time experiences can be very valuable, not only to attract new tourists, but also to increase their knowledge making them wanting to return. The authentic tourist experience comes from the visited original objects and sites and the recognition of their authenticity (Wang, 1999).

Besides many researchers argue that the authenticity based on the object should be abandoned (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006) others state that object authenticity remains relevant for tourists, residents and professionals (Belhassen & Caton, 2006).

Authenticity Related with the Object – Constructivist Approach

The constructivist authenticity concept results from the social construction, meaning that the objects are considered as authentic, not because they are inherently genuine, but because they were created and built according to a culture views and beliefs. So, authenticity refers the perception that tourists hold on the visited objects, in terms of image, expectations, preferences, beliefs, among others. Thus, there are "multiple authenticity versions and visions on the same object" since is symbolic (Wang, 1999). Constructivist authenticity is thus relative and negotiable (Cohen, 1988), determined by the context

(Salamone, 1997) and is always ideological (Silver, 1993). So, tourist authentic experiences and the authenticity of the visited objects are complementary (Wang, 1999).

The authenticity related with the object is not the conceptual approach defended by all researchers, many suggest that the original never existed. According to some researchers authenticity is the one built by society over time or never existed (Cohen, 1988; Hughes, 1995).

Authenticity Related with the Activity – Existential Approach

Existential authenticity refers to a potential state of mind that can be activated by tourism activities. The authentic experiences in tourism help tourists to achieve this state of existential spirit and they have no relation to the visited object authenticity. Instead of evaluating if something is or is not authentic, it is more appropriate to ask tourists what they value as authentic and if they face inauthenticity as a problem (Wang, 1999).

This perspective suggests that there is nothing inherently authentic, that authenticity is a observer's creation. This view is opposed to the objectivist and constructivist perspectives since the authenticity is felt it doesn't exist in the object, involving only the individual subjectivity (Wang, 1999).

The existential experience involves personal or subjective feelings activated by tourism, in which individuals feel more authentic and express themselves more freely than in their everyday lives, not because they consider the visited objects as authentic, but because they are involved in a different activity, without the daily constraints (Wang, 1999). In this sense the existential authenticity is understood as "authentic good time" associated with the activity and logically distinct from the object (Brown, 1996).

The studies that give special attention to the relationship between heritage and existential authenticity (Handler, 1986; Kellner, 1995; Plant, 1993), conclude that individuals look to the past to find their identity and to understand themselves (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). The heritage is a personal historical experience, of learning and education. The notion of "getting closer to history" is very important to experience the heritage authenticity, as well as the feeling of pleasure (Goulding, 2000).

Conclusions and future research

Western societies have museums, art galleries, historic parks and professional interpreters to show them the meaning of the places, even though it may involve the stimulation of selective memory or nostalgia. The tourist experience is considered as authentic according

to the interactions that shape it, with the actors' originality and the social and spatial context in which this interaction occurs (Mantecón & Huete, 2008).

Over the years researchers tried to clear authenticity concept in tourism, and explain where the authentic is rooted: in the visited object and site or in the tourism activity, deriving to three different perspectives: the objectivist, constructivist and existential authenticity.

The assumptions of authenticity related with the object were criticized and replaced because they are unable to explain the motivations and experiences in tourism (Wang, 1999). In fact, the existential authenticity approach is conceptually more useful to understand how contemporary tourists attribute meaning to their travel experiences (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999). This is more important when is based on the idea that modern society creates individuals' alienation creating the desire for tourism experiences identified as authentic (MacCannell, 1999; Olsen, 2002; Wang, 1999).

More and more tourists will desire authentic experiences and not false ones, this because they will be more educated, more sophisticated, and more environmentally conscious (Yeoman, Brass, McMahon-Beatie, 2007) claiming the difference and alienation of societies (Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1999). Authenticity must be examined from the individual tourist perspective - what is real or not depends on what the tourist wants to experience (Olsen, 2002).

In addition to the reflections on the authenticity concept use and conceptual approach, researchers continue to explore the analysis of authenticity in tourism experiences (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Steiner & Reisinger 2006; Wang, 1999). However, there is much to be done. Authenticity continues to provide interesting discussions about tourist motivation and experience and gives an alternative analysis on how and why tourists have experiences that are described as authentic (Olsen, 2002; Taylor, 2001).

Past research highlight the tourism experience importance, focusing on the tourist, meaning the authenticity on the consumer side. However several questions remain: what is needed to a tourist experience to be considered as authentic? Or what is an authentic heritage reconstruction? Or would it be better to ask: Who benefits from the authenticity? Who are the players interested in achieve an authentic historical past or culture representation?

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