Tourism geographies and the place of authenticity

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Along with the earliest theories of tourism arose an interest in understanding the role of authenticity. These burgeoning efforts were based in history, anthropology, and sociology (see Boorstin, 1961; MacCannell, 1973, 1976; Cohen, 1979); yet, the subsequent infusion of geographical perspectives that spatialize authenticity have greatly enriched our conceptualizations. Indeed, these scholars were invaluable in laying the foundations of key aspects of authenticity – Boorstin (1961) in asserting tourism is comprised of pseudo-events drew attention to staged aspects of tourism encounters, MacCannell (1973; 1976) explicated the mechanisms through which staging occurs and initiated a discussion of the socio-cultural significance of authenticity, which Cohen (1979) then refined by elaborating on the various ways authenticity comes into play in tourists' motivation for recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential experiences. However, what these contributions were lacking was attention to the geographical, that tourism is simultaneously a mobilities and a placed-based phenomenon, and as such the roles of scale, mobilities, space, place, and landscape are crucial to experiences of authenticity.

Geographers are keen to observe the ways mobilities interweaves with the distinct places in which tourism performances occur and across the spatial divides that separates most tourists from potential destinations such that tourism experiences are not limited to the destination alone (see Rickly-Boyd, et al., 2014). For example, while souvenirs may function as representations, Hashimoto and Telfer (2007) suggest the geographic scale of representation is also significant to conveying authenticity. In fact, as the authors argue through the concept of "geographically displaced authenticity", souvenirs function as a medium of representation that extends beyond the specific geographic location of the destination to broader spatial scales – the local area, the region, and the national – thereby also expanding the scope of touristic experience. In the case of souvenirs, authenticity is about far more than the object itself, as most are banal and mass produced, but authenticity, instead, is used to describe the memories they evoke and how such objects relate to socio-spatial dynamics of home (i.e., a bottle of olive oil purchased in Italy amongst other cooking goods in the kitchen or the collection of souvenir leather bookmarks that are displayed on one's bookshelf) (see Morgan & Pritchard, 2005; Peters, 2011).

Examining place representations in tourism, geographic perspectives on authenticity reveal that along with extrapolations of place symbolism, in the form of marketing and souvenirs, representations of place are (re)spatialized and made manifest in the landscapes of destinations. We can find endless examples wherein images perpetuated through tourism marketing are projected back to locales and used to influence further

urban (re)development. To take just one case, with multiple place examples, music tourism has certainly had this effect on several cities' physical and audible landscapes. Gibson and Connell (2007; p. 184) observe that Memphis as a city of blues heritage has not necessarily replaced the "authentic" with the "inauthentic", but in the perpetual remaking of the city in light of its tourism resources, black culture is increasing commoditized while racial politics and discrimination are largely ignored in its urban renewal schemes. Similarly, New Orleans' redevelopment projects in the 1990s, which crafted the tagline "Come join the parade" and a refocus on the city's jazz heritage, also resulted in narrowing the musical diversity on offer at the waterfront promenade in response to tourists' preferences (Atkinson, 2004). Thus, geographers, with their varied toolkits for examining the intersections of space, culture, and time, have revitalized the way we have come to think about authenticity in tourism destinations.

Geographic perspectives have also been put to use investigating the nuances of touristic experiences of authenticity. Lew (2011) observes multiple factors that contribute to "the best tourism places": sensual, landscape, experiential diversity, mixed accessibility, local authenticity, and tourism incognita, among others. This suggests that experiences of authenticity combine the objective, constructive, and existential (Wang, 1999; Belhassen and Caton, 2008; Buchmann, Fisher, and Moore, 2010; Rickly-Boyd, 2012; 2013). Slum tourism, a type of pro-poor tourism, is particularly notable for its promises of authentic experiences. Not only are slums sold to tourists as "authentic" places where they might encounter genuine poverty, but through the tour fee paid, tourists are also made to feel charitable towards the local community (Dyson, 2012; Frisch, 2012). More specifically, Frisch (2012) observes that those participating in favela tourism in Rio de Janiero are on a quest to experience an authentically "other" place and culture, which necessitates objective measures of host poverty, symbols of community life, and existential experiences for the tourists. Similarly, Conran (2006) observes of trekking tourism in Thailand, tourists crave an authentic encounter, not simply witnessing another culture but having a moment of intimacy with someone distinctly their "other". Through a geographic lens, experiences of authenticity have been revealed to be multi-layered such that spatial proximity/distance and observing/enacting place are dynamic and malleable.

In relation to sustainable tourism, more broadly, authenticity can have significant implications for sustainability outcomes. Sims (2009) draws attention to the marketing of local foods as "authentic" products in the Lake District and Exmoor of England, which symbolize place and heritage while also working towards the areas' goals for environmental and economic sustainability. Conversely, Cohen (2012) contends that discourses of authenticity put to use in the communication of sustainability, in the form of descriptions of conservation efforts intended to match tourists' preconceived ideals about landscape aesthetics, often also result in inequitable access to resources for local communities and can, therefore, be at odds with sustainability goals. Further, Kontogeorgopoulos (2004) challenges the spatial exclusivity of mass tourism and ecotourism, by examining the relationship between resorts and eco tours on Phuket, Thailand. In this location, ecotourism companies are able to leverage the market of tourists already on the island to build their clientele while also working towards stronger boundaries limiting tourism development. In other words, they are able to employ staged

authenticity to entice tourists predominantly interested in mass tourism resorts to undertake ecotours that have benefits for local conservation efforts.

In conclusion, studies of authenticity in tourism demonstrate the characteristic multi- and inter-disciplinarity of this field. While only a few perspectives built the maiden conceptualizations of authenticity, various disciplines have since broadened and deepened our understanding. Geographers have been essential to this effort through the contribution of spatial perspectives that draw attention to scale, relationality, and connectivity. Geographic perspectives highlight the complexity of authenticity in destinations, tourism representations, and touristic experiences and provide theoretical tools to investigate the entanglements of place and mobility through which authenticity is performed. The key challenge for future studies of authenticity and tourism geographies, thus, lies in our ability to maintain attention to scale as we keep an eye on tourism places. With all the richly descriptive, place-based case studies being produced, we must be reflexive in assessing their uniqueness while also attempting to generalize our findings in order to continue to build robust theories of authenticity in tourism.

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