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THE AUTHENTICITY OF MASS TOURISM ATTRACTIONS  
Evidence from American Millennials Visiting the Tower of London

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### Abstract:

The concept of authenticity has been profoundly researched within Tourism Studies with multiple theoretical approaches in existence. Authenticity is considered a key motivational driver for prospective tourists within tourism destinations and has an immediate effect on return visitor intentions. Changing tourism trends observe new ways of uncovering authenticity and with the new demographic millennial travelers (the future of travel), searching for low budget, genuine backstage experiences, is on the rise. Cultural tourism is where people explore or experience a different way of life, reflecting on traditions, ethnicity and objects that may be unfamiliar.

The presence of this concept in early theories of tourism has launched a vast discussion which continues in today's academia considering *Tourism Experience, Authenticity and Perceptions*. It is the experience that will be the focus of this thesis, which aims to explore individual tourists' perceptions of one of London's most prodigious, commodified assets, the Tower of London and extend the interest of the concept authenticity. Guided by Wang's (1999) constructivist typology, the research involves exploration of tourist recall and evaluates their observations through subjective recollection in relation to authenticity.

The empirical study was conducted with five millennial participants, investigating experiential data using qualitative methodology (in-depth interviews), and analyzed using content analysis. Tourists were asked to evaluate the authenticity based on their understanding and experience of the concept, and any authentic/inauthentic aspects they encounter. The findings and discussion focus on the role of perceived authenticity as a measure of product quality and as a determinant of tourist satisfaction. This study analyzes the tourists' experience at the cultural heritage attraction, addressing research gaps in tourist experience and discussing London as a heritage brand.

The results revealed that a high perception of authenticity is desired and can be achieved even though commodification is present. Reconstruction is therefore a sustainable form of tourism development. Cultural authenticity is not impacted by the troubles of mass tourism, therefore, restoring, preserving and managing cultural buildings could fulfil the quest for authenticity. It was established that memorable experiences of London and the role of the American millennial tourist market has helped develop a tailored brand of heritage attractions in London for future tourists. Focusing on authenticity could help heritage managers and marketers better tailor their product.

**Keywords:** authenticity, tourist experience, tourism attractions, cultural tourism, constructivism, commodification, London

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1 INTRODUCTION .....                                    | 6  |
| 1.1 Background of the study .....                       | 7  |
| 1.2 Purpose of the study .....                          | 12 |
| 1.3 Methods and Data .....                              | 13 |
| 1.4 Positioning the research .....                      | 14 |
| 1.5 Structure of the thesis.....                        | 15 |
| 2 LONDON AND AMERICAN MILLENNIALS.....                  | 16 |
| 2.1 Tourism in London .....                             | 16 |
| 2.2 American Millennials in London .....                | 19 |
| 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....                           | 22 |
| 3.1 Mass Tourism and Cultural Tourism Attractions ..... | 22 |
| 3.2 Authenticity in Tourism .....                       | 26 |
| 3.3 Authentic Tourism Experiences.....                  | 27 |
| 3.4 Commodification of Tourism Attractions.....         | 31 |
| 4 METHODOLOGY .....                                     | 34 |
| 4.1 The Tower of London .....                           | 34 |
| 4.2 Data Collection .....                               | 36 |
| 4.3 Data Analysis .....                                 | 40 |
| 4.4 Ethical Evaluation.....                             | 41 |
| 5 RESULTS .....   | 43 |
| 5.1 Destination Experience .....                        | 43 |
| 5.2 Understanding Authenticity .....                    | 47 |
| 5.3 Experiencing Authenticity .....                     | 53 |
| 5.4 Aspects of Authenticity and Inauthenticity.....     | 61 |
| 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....                        | 71 |
| REFERENCES .....  | 78 |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....                                  | 85 |
| Appendix 1: Profile Form .....                          | 86 |
| Appendix 2: Interview Questions .....                   | 87 |
| Appendix 3: Letter of Consent.....                      | 89 |

**List of Tables**

Table 1. Overnight International Visitors .....17

Table 2. Most Visited Paid Attractions ..... 19

Table 3. Objective, Constructive & Existential Authenticity .....29

## **Abbreviations**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| ALVA   | Association of Leading Visitor Attractions                       |
| ONS    | Office for National Statistics                                   |
| TA     | Tourism Attraction   |
| ToL    | Tower of London  |
| TSG    | Travel State Gov   |
| VFR    | Visiting Friends and Relatives                                   |
| UK     | United Kingdom   |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNWTO  | United Nations World Tourism Organization                        |
| US     | United States  |
| WHS    | World Heritage Sites   |
| WTO    | World Tourism Organization                                       |

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Over recent years, tourism has intensified radically due to lower expenses, higher discretionary incomes and endless opportunities (Eadington & Smith, 1992). A growing economy, budget accommodation and airlines, falling oil prices, means that travel is easier – and cheaper – than ever before. Destination choice, mode of transport, accommodation type, style of travel are all fragments surrounding the possibilities of travel. Beside the huge development of the travel industry, there has been more demand for research in tourism in order to keep up with current and changing trends and also forecast for future travel. Emerging tourism matters such as cultural commodification is an important and interesting topic in today's academia, due to the plausible assumption that commodification of local cultural products, surroundings and human relations destroy authenticity (Greenwood, 1977). Commodification (or commoditization) of culture is an essential part of tourism, resulting in both positive and negative circumstances for tourists, the destination and the local community. Contemporary literature suggests that the tourism industry objectifies cultures to represent destinations in a marketable way (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Each individual destination needs a particular 'selling point' in order to attract tourists and maximize capital. In the UK, heritage is often what that selling point is, offering unique, experiential experiences that the tourist simply cannot experience anywhere else. Contemporary anthropologists suggest that culture is inherently 'constructed' or 'invented' (MacCannell, 1976; Cohen, 1998). This is through the use of heritage where a site is altered and recreated into something false for tourism purposes. According to Shepherd (2002), the most authentic experiences and objects are that of genuine imitation, reproduced in a specific setting, by specific people and for a specific purpose – separate to the exchange process. There has been lots of negative discussion about the commodification of World Heritage Sites (WHS) for tourism purposes. In particular, sites such as the Great Wall of China has said to be "desacralized, ruined, corrupted, cheapened" due to commodification (Shepherd, 2002, p. 192).

For centuries, some of the world's most popular heritage tourist attractions were either forgotten or hidden from the world. With many discovered 'by accident', these ancient landmarks offer tourists the opportunity to return to the past for education and entertainment purposes (Garrod & Fyall, 2001). Threatened and vulnerable, UNESCO's purpose is to protect and ensure longevity of heritage sites. Conserving cultural heritage not only stimulates economic development but also promotes identity and cultural diversity (Richards, 2011). In 1972, UNESCO approved the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural

Heritage. In 2003 and 2005, two more conventions were passed to protect the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Diversity of Cultural Expression. Any tourist that participates in an attraction labelled as 'heritage' naturally become heritage tourists (Garrod & Fyall, 2001). World heritage status plays a significant role in attracting visitors to heritage attractions and increases the popularity of a destination (Shackley, 1998). This relates to MacCannell's (1999) theories, where the tourist is more focused on the label that is attached to the attraction rather than the attraction itself. Therefore, the conservation of cultural authenticity is critical to the appeal of a destination. UNESCO (2008) suggest a requirement of attributes a cultural property needs to test authenticity. Authenticity can be conveyed through "form and design; materials and substance; use and function; traditions and techniques and management systems; location and setting; language, and other forms of intangible heritage; spirit and feeling; and other internal and external factors".

Authenticity in the context of tourism relates to tourism experience. As defined by Wang (2006, p. 65), tourism is "a quest for experiences that are in contrast to, and sometimes an extension or intensification, of daily experiences". According to Botterill & Crompton (1996), tourism has been expressed as an action created by experience, and the tourist pursues a quest for experience different to what they would receive at home. Modern tourists no longer settle for basic travel experiences; they want to experience something different, exciting, genuine. Many tourists embark in pursuit for authentic experiences when visiting their desired destination to immerse themselves in a different culture, surrounded by local people and practise traditions and experiences within that destination (MacCannell, 1976). Tourists are bored with the triviality of everyday life, therefore, embark on a quest for authenticity (MacCannell, 1989). This *experience* and *quest for authenticity* is the focus of this master's thesis which investigates the coexistence of authenticity within commodified mass tourist attractions. The study examines constructive authenticity in the context of cultural tourism attractions in London. It explores whether American millennial tourists visiting the UNESCO World Heritage Site the Tower of London, experience authenticity.

## **1.1 Background of the study**

Mass tourism and authenticity are not two words society would usually link together. Mass suggests many, crowds, packs, herds (Kettle, 2017). According to Handler (1986, p. 2, as cited in McIntosh & Prentice, 1999), authenticity is something where one wishes to find a unique

experience, searching for “the unspoilt, pristine, genuine, untouched and traditional”, words not often associated with mass. Recent studies show much negativity concerning the impacts of modern tourism on host societies including economical, sociocultural and environmental effects (Greenwood, 1977; Mathieson & Wall, 1982). There is an increasing need to present tourists with more spectacular, exotic and titillating attractions (Boorstin, 1962), therefore, many cultural commodities are reinvented for tourists to make the products appear authentic (Cohen, 1988).

A complex phenomenon, authenticity is an incredibly valuable and largely discussed commodity in today’s society and academia (Yeoman et al., 2007; Rickly-Boyd, 2013). Authenticity is considered a basic directive for anyone travelling to a destination that is different to their own. There is an increasing desire from tourists to seek experiences that are original and authentic (Yeoman et al., 2007). However, the borderline between reality and fake is incredibly thin, therefore, authenticity has been branded as ambiguous and limited (Wang, 1999). A subjective concept, it is not exactly clear what makes an object or experience authentic – especially as for many tourist’s authenticity means something different. For example, some travelers believe that a true authentic experience in California, USA is to visit the picturesque beaches on the Californian coast, experience surfing and eat at the state cherished burger-chain ‘In-N-Out’ (Compton, 2016; Malloy, 2017). However, other travelers true authentic experience of California may be visiting Disneyland, eating excessively priced cotton candy and buying souvenirs with the label – ‘made in China’ and authenticating this evidence of their destination (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006b). What is largely observed as “the initially quintessential, overtly framed tourist attraction, has over time been increasingly recognized as part of contemporary American culture, and as such, as authentic” (Cohen, 2007, p. 78 as cited in Bull & Lovell, 2017). Urry (1990) argues that there is no such authentic experience. The many theories surrounding authenticity make the topic extremely interesting and inspires further research.

Authenticity is not static and has the ability to change in response to the evolving tourism industry (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006a). It is also not tangible, but a valued judgement determined by the visitor. Tourists are moving on from traditional experiences and rituals and instead are exploring the ‘back’ regions of destinations in order to satisfy their quest for authenticity (Goffman, 1958; MacCannell, 1989). In recent years, the industry has seen a new type of tourism - postmodernism – where one avoids overpopulated destinations and chooses an alternative experience (MacCannell, 1989). Post-modern tourists know that their experience



is contrived, however, they are still satisfied. A self-educating experience, it is becoming increasingly common to hear from travelers nowadays that their favorite destinations and experiences are because 'there are not many other tourists there'. Authenticity within destinations does not necessarily mean that there is something spectacular for travelers to see, but just to associate themselves with friendly, local people. However, with the increase of mass, these destinations are becoming more difficult to find (Kettle, 2017).

Previous studies observe the conceptualization of tourism experiences. Experiences amongst tourists differ significantly at destinations and after visiting a destination, tourists develop a 'sense of place' based on their subjective experience (Wickens, 2002). London as a tourist destination region is defined as a diverse, exciting city with a profuse concentration of culture. The city offers some of the world's most recognizable sights, attractions and activities. The Tower of London is currently one of four tourism attractions on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Usually, culture is staged by creating attractions which satisfy tourists and create economic gains for destinations. It is therefore commodified (Cohen, 1988a; Cole 2007). According to Ashworth (1994, p. 18), "if heritage is consumer-defined, so is its authenticity". In return, economic improvements generally lead to cultural preservation and, if presented accurately, education. Therefore, London continuously works to maintain the expansion and diversification of tourism by improving and serving these attractions to the millions of incoming tourists.

Considering mass tourism, authenticity and tourist experience as a combination, destinations that are populated by thousands of tourists change the original purpose and experience of the destination. Local cultures and people become manipulated and exploited to meet the mass tourist demand, thus risk losing originality and authenticity (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006a). Also, tourism is a global industry, therefore, maintaining authenticity is problematic for most destinations (Kettle, 2017). Cohen (1995), suggested that a wider variety of conceptual and theoretical methods to tourism could be further explored and tested. According to Rickly-Boyd (2013), place and authenticity has not been widely researched within tourism studies. Wang (1999, p. 366) also suggests further research into how "objective, constructive, and existential authenticities are distributed among tourists and why certain tourists prefer one kind of authenticity to others". We can conclude that the concept of authenticity within the developing tourism industry is lacking clear definition, thus, prompting more research. It is also important that the research is relevant to today's industry and relates to current and future global trends.

The millennial generation are the fastest growing demographic and will soon be the largest, spending demographic in the tourism sector. Millennials travel very differently to previous generations and their demands are quite clear. To prepare for the future, the tourism industry has to understand these demands and cater for the changing needs. As the global tourism industry will be hosting this generation for the next 20 to 40 years, it is appropriate that more research should be produced on this demographic and their powerful influence on the future of tourism.

The researcher has decided to focus on millennial tourists as a research demographic for this project. Also known as Generation-Y, Millennials are the current generation (ages 18-34), born from the early 1980's to 2000's (Smola & Suttin, 2002). Millennials are the biggest cohort of current time (Cahill & Sedrak, 2012), exceeding generation X, and consider themselves as citizens of the world. According to Meister (2012, p. 1), millennials will equal "75% of the global workforce by 2030". Millennials are transforming the tourism industry and view the world through a global perspective. The fastest growing demographic, millennials already represent around 20% of current international travelers (Charles, 2018). They want to be active, adventurous and to live like a local seeking unique, authentic travel experiences. Millennials are generally delaying major life stages such as marriage and children in order to travel more and take 'gap years' (Fromm, 2018). They pursue "self-discovery" at the beginning of their professional lives, using travel as a vital component and opportunity to find out what they really want in life.

With increasing technology changes, millennials are travelling differently – using the internet, mobile devices, social media, etc. as a key driver for travel (Jordan, 2018 & Yeoman, 2012). According to Jordan (2018), technology has made millennials visually stimulated, and their mind-set is causing changes in tourism. He categorizes millennials as self-confident and self-absorbed due to technology at their fingertips. In today's society, experience is the new 'social currency' (Charles, 2018), and new technology has allowed tourists to 'post' their experiences for everyone to see. Social media channels such as Instagram is used as a rich source of research and inspiration for future trips, where millennials particularly 'follow' travel blogs and networks. This creates a trend of mimicry behavior, where travelers capture almost identical shots of the same site. Therefore, we can conclude that one of the main factors that entices millennial travelers to a particular destination is; how visually appealing is it? How 'instagrammable' is it? London is an aesthetically pleasing city due to the natural beauty of the

Thames river which runs right through the center of the city and skyline featuring a mixture of old-style and contemporary architecture. There are millions of ‘Insta-worthy’ unique photo opportunities.

Millennials are, however, seeking authentic experiences. According to Charles (2018), millennials view travel as essential and 78% would rather spend their money on experiences – the chance to live in the moment. For the millennial tourist, experience is everything and they prioritize authenticity in their tourist experience - millennials want to live like a local rather than be a simple tourist (Charles, 2018). The majority of millennials say meeting people whilst traveling is more important than bringing back souvenirs. Millennial tourists also prioritize sustainable and responsible tourism as part of their experience - they prefer to eat at local restaurants rather than opt for commercialized, more familiar chain restaurants.

More millennial tourists are independently organizing their travel experience instead of travelling with tour operators or package bookings (Davison & Ryley, 2010). Also, millennial tourists are self-educating, opting to travel solo which allows them to fully pursue their personal authentic journey and worry only about themselves. As the most technologically engaged group (Jordan, 2018), websites such as Skyscanner has allowed millennial travelers to personalize travel itineraries, allowing them to pursue their personal authentic experiences. Online research is an increasing trend where millennials particularly explore peer-review sites, travel forums and other social media platforms as a source of motivation and inspiration for travel. Also, sites such as Airbnb, Couch Surfing, and Home Stay have offered tourists the chance to ‘live like a local’ – satisfying a millennials quest for authenticity. In London, 72% of Airbnb host properties are located outside of the main hotel districts in the city, allowing tourists to experience the unique suburbs and smaller towns in London (London Assembly, 2017). However, even if a millennial tourist wants to stay in the heart of the city, restaurants, hotels and other amenities are catering for the developing demographic. The M by Montcalm Shoreditch London Tech City Hotel is an accommodation created with the millennial tourist in mind (Montcalm). An original concept, the hotel offers futuristic architecture, intelligent technology. The hotel is also conveniently located in the east of London where there are quirky markets and graffiti art.

## 1.2 Purpose of the study

This thesis will make an original contribution to the phenomena of tourist experiences and explore the concept of authenticity and the growing pandemonium mass tourism and attempt to determine if its travelers have a true, authentic experience within mass tourism destinations. The author will explore deeper literature in authenticity and its multiple meanings later in this thesis. The concept has already been largely researched, however, there is still much more to be explored – authenticity will continue to be deeply discussed through the changes in time. Cohen (2008, p. 333) claims that “contemporary tourism is becoming increasingly diversified and segmented, and new specialties are constantly emerging”. Other previous studies on authenticity has mostly focused on its sociocultural value, therefore, there is an importance to research more unfamiliar literature. According to Richards (2011), there is little empirical evidence that supports a growing interest in culture. He claims that most studies are based on ‘broad assertions’, rather than empirical evidence. There is also a need for empirical research on authenticity and tourism experience, particularly within a constructivist approach. Olsen (2002), suggests that research should focus on constructive authenticity, investigating how experiences are created as a result of social construction.

This research study particularly focuses on the coexistence of authenticity within mass tourism destinations, with particular focus on the tourism attraction Tower of London and an American millennial tourist’s perspective on authenticity within their experience. Based on the discussion of different phenomena and concepts presented later in the literature, and the current need for this type of research, this thesis will aim to establish new knowledge and present current findings in tourism research. The researcher has decided to explore existing approaches and concepts to the phenomenon authenticity and tourist experience to better understand the presence of perceived authenticity as a measure of product quality. It will be important to establish the role that authenticity plays in tourists’ experience at the Tower of London and if cultural commodification of tourism attractions negatively correlates with authenticity.

Considering all of this, the main objective of the study is to explore and discuss the subjective perspective of authentic experience and examine the importance of authenticity for travelers based on the opinion of a modern-day American millennial tourist. The study seeks to identify whether authenticity matters, how important the pursuit of authenticity by the American millennial tourist and assess the overall quality of visitor experience at the mass tourism

attraction, the Tower of London. In order to establish this, the researcher is asking the following main research question:

**How is authenticity desired and achieved throughout touristic experiences  
at cultural heritage attractions?**

The research aims to identify raw data that contributes towards the future of the London's travel industry. The researcher will seek to uncover all significant factors of authenticity that are present in the American millennial tourists' experiences in London. The researcher will outline what attractions/experiences engage well with the millennial audience. Therefore, the researcher has identified the following sub-research questions:

1. What is the value of authenticity for American millennials visiting London?
2. How is authenticity perceived and experienced by American millennials at the Tower of London?
3. Which aspects of the Tower of London are viewed as authentic or inauthentic by American millennials and why?

It is important to gain a deeper understanding of the concept authenticity and the theories this thesis seeks to investigate. Considering all of this, the thesis will discuss existing theory offered by tourism scholars through theoretical framework which will be discussed in Chapter 3. Furthermore, the researcher will discuss the case description, including cultural tourism and connecting theory surrounding tourism experience and authenticity.

The purpose of this research project will implicate the participants' opinion on authenticity meaning the study is exploratory and will be based on Wang's (1999) learning theory constructivism. The theory proposes that travelers acquire knowledge and understanding from their experiences (Jennings, 2001).

### **1.3 Methods and Data**

To answer the main research question for this study, along with the sub-research questions, the researcher will establish an appropriate method for collecting and analyzing data. In order for this study to guarantee practical and feasible results, one destination (London) and one tourism attraction (The Tower of London) was chosen as a case study. The research demographic

chosen for this study is American millennial tourists. In order to gain the specific millennial candidates needed for this research project, a purposeful sampling method will be used as part of the methodology. Using a qualitative research method, the research will display the level of authenticity perceived by the visitors of Tower of London, explore the variations in their perceptions, and relate authenticity to their overall tourist experience and satisfaction. The chosen qualitative method is semi-structured interviews which were conducted after the tourist experience. Data were collected in the US with tourists that had recently visited London, particularly visiting the Tower of London. In order to achieve a wider context for the participants to reflect upon, photo-elicitation was used as part of methodology. A total of 5 millennials participated in separate interviews with the researcher. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the data was investigated through content analysis.

#### **1.4 Positioning the research**

“There is a kind of magicness about going far away and  
then coming back all changed.” (Wiggin, 1907)

I was around 12 years old when my mindset changed from an annual, standard family vacation to something more. I became curious, curious to explore outside the hotel walls and curious to meet people that were different to me. This time sparked my love affair with travel. Throughout the years I have travelled extensively throughout many destinations, experienced different cultures, different environments, increasing my understanding of this amazing world, different countries and the people in it. I believe travel is the most intense, however, best form of learning. Upon my return from each destination, I reflect on achievement, feel a changed sense of identity and view all aspects of life differently.

I am particularly interested in how tourism is presented and perceived, and this is what inspired me to pursue a postgraduate degree in Tourism studies. The old, contradictory axiom discussed by Boorstin (1962); there is a difference between being a tourist and a traveler. The tourist looks but a traveler sees. I ponder this thought when considering authenticity and mass tourism destinations. Naturally, I have personal thoughts and opinions for what I perceive as authentic when travelling to a certain destination, however, I am also incredibly open-minded to other interpretations. I particularly enjoy listening to fellow travelers' perception of Authenticity – especially their view on the UK. I was once told from a prospective tourist that they were most excited to try Chicken Tikka Masala in the UK. I couldn't help but laugh. Also, in 2016 I

witnessed a deluge of Chinese tourists flock into a small, quaint town in Wales. The tourists were seen roaming the streets, taking pictures with local residents and even entering their gardens. Baffled by the sudden surge of visitors, I asked the tourists why they were there. Their reply: 'it's beautiful and charming; we're wanting to see the real UK'. These tourists had a desire for authenticity.

## **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is divided into six research chapters, including this introductory chapter. The theoretical background is presented through chapters 2 and 3, detailing all contextual aspects and existing theory of the research subject. Chapter 3 more specifically outlines the theoretical framework, including the concept of authenticity and commodification of tourist attractions. In Chapter 4, methodology is discussed and examined, and a detailed explanation of the chosen research method is presented. The results of the study are presented in Chapter 5 including a discussion of the field work and findings. Finally, Chapter 6 presents a conclusion of the research study, outlining major findings, implications and recommendations for further research.

## 2 LONDON AND AMERICAN MILLENNIALS

London is a mass tourism destination with around 30 million international visitors a year (Visit London). As the chosen research destination for this particular study, it is important to explore London as a tourism destination. The first section provides a contextual background of London and the development of its tourism sector. The second section examines tourist behaviors of the chosen research demographic, American millennial tourists.

### 2.1 Tourism in London

Tourism is the world's single largest industry (Weaver & Lawton, 2006). There are many definitions of tourism and what a tourist is. Tourism is regarded as a leisure activity where tourists' search for conformities, seek an opportunity for relaxation and develop a wider world view (WTO). Tourists are 'voluntary' and 'temporary' travelers, "traveling in the expectation of pleasure from the novelty and change experienced on a relatively long and non-recurrent round-trip" (Cohen, 1974, p. 533).

London, the capital of the United Kingdom and Europe's largest city (by area), was chosen as the destination for this research. Sitting at the center of the world, London is incredibly accessible for global tourism offering five international airports and the 'Eurostar rail link' connecting the UK directly to France and Belgium. The entire city boasts a wealth of culture, history and year-round tourist attractions (Visit London). As a touristic district, London is built up of Soho, Piccadilly Circus, Blackfriars, Covent Garden and the Strand - each of these easily accessible by London's exceptional transportation system. Each year, the city is developing immensely by population, infrastructure and tourism. Regarding heritage tourism, London has an extensive, enthralling timeline of history. *Londinium* was founded soon after the Romans invaded Britain in AD43 – then the size of Hyde Park. Throughout the course of history, London has endured multiple fires, attacks, wars, and widespread disease. Nowadays, the city displays many of the historical landmarks, monuments, artefacts and buildings as tourism attractions, offering multiple experiences for tourist to encounter.

Despite the recent Brexit, the United Kingdom continues to be a growing destination for international visitors. According to the UNWTO (2018) most recent annual report, the UK is forecast to have a tourism industry worth over £257 billion by 2025. London remains the first-



choice destination for international tourists and is one of the most popular visited cities in the world. A total of 55% of all UK inbound visitor spend in 2017 was established by London (UNWTO, 2018). Travelers are attracted to London’s iconic landmarks, exciting monuments, rich culture, infinite shopping and the theatre district, the West-End (Visit London). The city is multicultural, dynamic and of course, royally charming. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), London was the second most visited city in 2017 with 19.83 million international overnight visitors, an increase of 8.5% from the previous year. Although London saw a slight decline in 2018, the visitor rate has been growing rapidly by each year (see Table 1) and has revealed a growth rate forecast of 3.47% for 2019. It is predicted that the number will only continue to increase in the years to come.

Table 1. Overnight International Visitors (Adapted from ONS).

| Rank | Destination City | Country  | Overnight International Visitors (Million) |              |              |              |              |              |              | 2018 Visitor Spend (USD billion) |
|------|------------------|----------|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------------------|
|      |                  |          | 2012                                       | 2013         | 2014         | 2015         | 2016         | 2017         | 2018         |                                  |
| 1    | <b>Bangkok</b>   | Thailand | 15.82                                      | 17.47        | 17.03        | 19.59        | 21.47        | 21.09        | 22.78        | \$16.36                          |
| 2    | <b>London</b>    | UK       | <b>15.46</b>                               | <b>16.81</b> | <b>17.40</b> | <b>18.58</b> | <b>19.01</b> | <b>19.83</b> | <b>19.09</b> | <b>\$16.47</b>                   |
| 3    | <b>Paris</b>     | France   | 15.76                                      | 17.21        | 17.19        | 17.66        | 18.03        | 17.41        | 19.10        | \$14.10                          |

The continuous growth and popularity of tourism in London is largely due to the city’s rich culture. An immaculate combination of both modern cosmopolitan culture and old-world charm, four out of five tourists say that culture is their main motivation for travelling to London (Johnson, 2017). London is fortunate in the sense that the history already exists, however, with the growth of tourism, the city capitalized on its history and created the popular, authentic tourist attractions that exist today. According to the “A Cultural Tourism Vision for London 2015 – 2017” report, cultural tourists spend £7.3 billion a year and generate 80,000 jobs in the city.

London is an incredibly large, bustling city. The ‘Cultural Tourism Vision for London 2015 – 2017’ (2018) report claims that ‘If you tried to picture authenticity as a city, it would be London’. Cultural tourism is the number one visitor motivation behind travel to London (Visit

London) and the city boasts multiple tourist attractions based on heritage. According to MacCannell's (1989) theories, London has multiple tourist traps – a place specifically designed to exploit tourists and their money (many commodified attractions). MacCannell (1976) discusses these as 'tourist districts', where there are attractions, landmarks and activities operating alongside urban structures. He claims that the tourists are aware of neighboring authentic experiences, however, choose to stay in the 'tourist districts'. On the contrary, recent research suggests that tourists are in fact visiting more local and niche attractions in the capital such as Brick Lane and Borough Market (London.gov.uk, 2018). Brick Lane is known to locals as "Banglatown" due to the high immigration of Bengalis that flocked to this area in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is now one of the best places in London for Bangladesh cuisine where the street is lined with curry houses, tea rooms and supermarkets. A similar concept, Chinatown, an east Asian food and market, is a popular tourist attraction among most major cities around the world. London's Chinatown is located in the heart of the city and attracts thousands of tourists daily. However, TA's like Chinatown and Brick Lane do not represent original, British authenticity.

In 2018, the visitor numbers to UK tourism attractions saw an average increase of 8.68% compared to the previous year (ALVA). London exhibits the entire top 10 most-visited tourist attractions in the UK with multiple museums, galleries, monuments and experiences for visitors to enjoy (Visit London). 67,640,804 people visited attractions in London, an increase of 3.37% (in 2018). The most visited free attraction was the Tate Modern which hosted 5.86 million visitors and closely behind the British Museum which had 5.82 million (ALVA). The most visited paid attraction (see Table 2) by a significant distance was the Tower of London with 2.85 million visitors in 2018. Other must-see cultural experience's include: Buckingham Palace, Tower Bridge, Piccadilly Circus, Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, the West End and so on. London also features four UNESCO World Heritage Sites (the Tower of London, the Maritime Greenwich, Westminster Palace and the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew).

Table 2. Most Visited Paid Attractions – London 2018 (Adapted from ALVA).

| Rank | Attraction                    | 2017 Visitors | 2018 Visitors | + Change |
|------|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------|
| 1    | Tower of London               | 2,842,970     | 2,855,438     | + 0.4%   |
| 2    | Royal Botanic Gardens,<br>Kew | 1,802,958     | 1,858,513     | + 3.1%   |
| 3    | St Paul's Cathedral           | 1,571,197 (E) | 1,657,446 (E) | + 5.5%   |

As previously stated, this research will specifically investigate American millennial tourists. On average, Americans spend 6.7 days on their destination experience. They are 'list-tickers', people on a mission to see and experience the best. They are not interested in the hidden gem but for the most famous landmarks and attractions. Americans tend to be interested in novelty and are adventurous regarding local activities, food & drink, however, nothing too misfit. They have high spending (souvenirs and gifts) and tend to pay the asking price, avoiding bartering (Özdemir & Yolal, 2016). Also, Americans do not trust tap water outside of the US, therefore, order everything in a bottle. The researcher will now explore detailed characteristics of American millennial tourists in London.

## 2.2 American Millennials in London

A number of studies have been conducted during recent years to better understand how national culture affects tourist behavior. The concept of 'American parochialism' recognizes that Americans typically do not travel outside of their country. The US is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest country in the world (tied with China), meaning travel is diverse and vast. A passport-less American has the opportunity to travel thousands of miles within their own country, from the exotic beaches in Florida to the picturesque mountains in Colorado, absorbing culture from a total of 50 different states. It is true that Americans do not have to leave their country to travel. Because domestic travel is so accessible, almost 60% of the US population are unqualified for international travel. According to the Travel State Gov (TSG), back in 1994 only 10% of Americans owned a passport, however, the figure now stands at over 40% and is increasing every year. The dramatic increase is due to multiple reasons. The growing economy means that

travel is now more accessible and affordable to everyone than ever before, including Americans. Also, in 2007 new travel laws were introduced meaning that US citizens had to possess a valid passport to travel to destinations such as Canada, Mexico and other nearby countries (this was not necessary previously). The number of Americans holding passports increased by 20 million within 3 years of the induction of new travel laws (TSG).

To better understand the differences and similarities of people with different/similar cultural backgrounds, it is important to identify behaviors of international Americans travel. According to existing research, American tourists are incredibly social (Özdemir & Yolal, 2016). They are interested in fellow tourists and also residents. American workers have significantly less holiday time than Europeans, therefore, take shorter vacations and travel in an incredibly fast-paced manner. The increase of ‘experientialism’, particularly within the emerging millennial demographic, has meant that experiences are considered much more valuable than basically consumer goods. Americans want to travel more outside of the US and experience other cultures.

American tourists account for 12% of foreign visitors to London – the highest origin country (ONS, Table 2). New York is the top feeder city for London with ‘858,000’ visitors and over ‘1 billion USD’ in spending. US passport holders can visit the UK for up to 6 months on a tourist visa making London a particularly easy and accessible destination. Also identified as ‘familiar’ and ‘safe’, London is often the first destination choice for American tourists visiting Europe (Thomas, 2011). They are fascinated by the country’s rich history (some of the UK’s buildings are in fact older than the constitution of the United States), perceived way of life, the British monarchy, and so on. Most American travelers are inspired by British culture as a motive for travel: ‘I can have culture in America, I can have culture anywhere. What I really want to see is the distinct, unique, varied part that makes it different to everywhere else... what makes somewhere distinct’ (Visit Britain). Based on current media, Americans have a particular exaggerated and often fabricated perspective of London authenticity and British aristocracy. Often the American tourist arrives shocked based on their prior expectations of Britain and British people (Thomas, 2011). It’s not accurate to believe that most of the British population live in castles or cottages, speaking perfect Received Pronunciation and drinking tea with the Queen all day.

Millennials are the most important tourist generation for London particularly as they are fastest growing demographic and already represent around 20% of current international travelers (Charles, 2018). They associate travel with novelty, engaging in a different lifestyle, visiting new places and craving unique and exciting experiences (UNWTO). London offers thousands of cultural activities within its urban, quirky borders. The digital world is allowing millennials to 'live like a local' through online sites such as Airbnb. Two thirds of the UK's Airbnb hosts are based in London and according to the London Assembly (2017), the money overseas tourists save on accommodation (by using Airbnb) allow them to stay in the city longer and spend almost double the average visitor. Half of international Airbnb guests come from the USA (London Assembly, 2017). Millennials also tend to be particularly open-minded towards diversity. London is microcosm of the world, with over 300 languages spoken amongst the 8 million plus residents. London also proudly hosts multiple throughout the calendar, celebrating culture, race, creed and sexuality.

Richards (2011) claims that human needs has changed over recent decades from basic needs to creative needs. In order to attract American millennials, London has worked on campaigns with close cities including Paris to attract American millennials to visit both cities during one trip (Coffey, 2019). The cities are geographically 'neighboring' and each offer different visions of European heritage. The emerging demands of millennial tourists requires tourism destinations to cater for their creative needs.

### **3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide theoretical basis for conducting the research. The chapter includes contextual theory of authentic tourism experiences and UNESCO cultural tourism attractions in London. London is still the essence of the United Kingdom for many incoming tourists with four out of five international tourists say that culture is their main motivation for travelling (Johnson, 2017). Culture is an inevitable objective of tourism: tourism is culture (Urry, 1990). The following literature highlights the main theories surrounding the study and will discuss properties associated with London as a tourist destination, tourist experience within mass tourism attractions (specifically cultural tourism attractions) and authenticity.

#### **3.1 Mass Tourism and Cultural Tourism Attractions**

In today's global tourism industry, Mass tourism peaks in tourism activity (Weaver & Lawton, 2006). Mass tourism can be traced back to the festivals and games during ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome (Harrison & Sharpley, 2017). Also, the religious event pilgrimage where, for centuries, people have been embarking on a voyage to a destination/place special in their religion. Therefore, the phenomenon mass tourism is certainly not a new occurrence. However, routine travel for pleasure is something that has recently surfaced in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century (Harrison & Sharpley, 2017; Urry, 1990). This was simply due to the fact that few people outside the upper class had the opportunity to travel for pleasure; only work or business scenarios. Also, the development of transport (in particular railways), facilitated the 'package holiday' and Thomas Cook organized the first excursion in the United Kingdom (Brendon, 1991; Weaver & Lawton, 2006). Thenceforth, tourism exploded on a mass scale.

Mass tourism is a type of tourism where multiple tourists visit the same destination at any one time. Mass tourism destinations supply for the large increase of domestic and international travelers that has occurred over the past decade. Vainikka (2013) suggests that mass tourism is not tourism for all. She states that there is no statistically correct number when defining mass tourism, mass can literally mean anything from "five to thousands". The motivations of previous tourists are very different to those that are travelling nowadays (Poon, 1993). Due to the development of transport, e-commerce and global prosperity, travel is easier now than it ever has been before. Poon (1993), therefore, proposes the differentiation between old and new

tourists. She claims that new tourists are spontaneous and want to experience something different whilst having attention for preservation. Therefore, new tourism is replacing the basic foundations of mass tourism. Furthermore, Cohen (1972) defines four tourist typologies: the drifter, the explorer, the individual mass tourist, and the organized mass tourist. The drifter plans all aspects of travel alone and wishes to avoid other tourists by pursuing new and different experiences. The explorer arranges most aspects of travel himself/herself, however, may need guidance. The individual mass tourist is not constrained to a group, however, has a planned itinerary which can be altered with time. The organized mass tourist is part of a tour group and follows a strict, prearranged itinerary. According to Cohen (1972) the individual mass tourist and the organized mass tourist have high familiarity but low novelty. A number of recent studies challenge Cohen's tourist typology, claiming that drifters and other sovereign tourists regularly use the services of the tourism industry by purchasing package tours and typically behaving like mass tourists (Wickens, 2002). This is particularly evident with millennial and backpacker tourists; where it is becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate these from the mass tourist.

Mass Tourism has been the subject of negative discussion in recent academia, in particular the growth of the Chinese tourist market and their incredibly large tourist groups that surge to destinations both rural and commercialized. The mass tourist is said to have potentially destructive impacts on society, culture and the environment (Cohen, 1979). Although mass tourism is said to be ominously unsustainable, new developments in today's industry such as alternative tourism attempts to encourage environmental sustainability. Boorstin (1964) criticizes the growth of mass tourism and refers to present travelers as 'cultural dopes' that accepts contrived experiences. They are satisfied with basic, 'pseudo-events' that are mass-produced and obviously inauthentic (Boorstin, 1962; MacCannell, 1989). However, Enzensberger (1996) defines modern mass tourism as to seek authentic places. MacCannell (1989) also highlights that the mass tourist has the same right and is as much in search of authentic experience as any other purposeful tourist. There is somewhat an irony with many tourists where one wishes to distinguish from the masses and seek authenticity whilst at the same time gladly participating to the growth of tourism.

Frequently related to authenticity (Taylor, 2001), cultural tourism is a fast-growing phenomenon (Poria et al., 2001; Richards, 2011) and now accounts for 40 percent of world travel (UNWTO, 2014). Difficult to define, the UNWTO describes cultural tourism as teaching

visitors about their past and inheritance, as well as their contemporary lifestyle (UNWTO, 2018). They define cultural tourism as “a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination”. According to Garrod and Fyall (1998), cultural tourism is an economic activity, utilizing socio-cultural assets in order to attract tourists. Poria et al. (2001) define cultural tourism based more on tourists’ motivations and perceptions. Reflecting on this, cultural tourism can be portrayed as both educational and entertainment (Silberberg, 1994; Nuryanti, 1996).

An important aspect of cultural heritage tourism is the perception of authenticity (Taylor, 2001; Waitt, 2000) and how the quality of the product is enhanced by authenticity (Cohen, 1988). Authenticity exists in other historical times and cultures allowing consumers to go back in time to experience true reality; authenticity is defined by heritage tourists (Ashworth, 1993). Heritage is not only associated with history and culture; it could also be associated with relaxing, entertainment and shopping (Waitt, 2000). According to Buklstein (2017, p. 11): “Cultural tourism is not a quick fix, or business decision or really even a strategy. It’s about passionate interest and connection to culture”. In contrary, Silberberg (1994) suggests that culture is not every traveler’s motivation; some pursue travel that’s good value for money and time.

With the new travel generation emerging and changing travel patterns, Steiner and Reisinger (2006a) suggests that authenticity can change and adapt with the evolving tourism industry. Boorstin (1962, p. 79) claims that tourist experience has changed over time and the “experience has become diluted, contrived, prefabricated”. In particular, western societies are said to have already lost their true authentic image and culture (Connell, 2007). Many heritage sites are now reinvented and ‘staged’ for financial gain with commodification of culture (Cohen, 1988; Goffman, 1958; MacCannell, 1989). Commodification, as defined by Cohen (1988, p. 380), is the “process by which things (and activities) come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value, in a context of trade, thereby becoming goods (and services)”. Supported by MacCannell (1989), commodification of cultural experiences comes with consequence and makes it impossible to experience true authenticity. However, regardless if the true culture and originality is lost, tourists are still satisfied with their obvious, inauthentic experiences (Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1989).



Cultural tourism attractions are often viewed as icons within global culture. There is an increased curiosity and demand to visit and experience other cultures and as a result many urban areas are needing to produce, develop or maintain tourism attractions and activities. Cultural tourism involves experiences at historical monuments, festivals, museums, religious venues, many tourism attractions are viewed as ‘cultural’ today (Richards, 2011). MacCannell (1999) defines all tourism attractions as cultural experiences. He further explains that there is an “empirical relationship between a tourist, a sight and a marker (a piece of information about a sight)” (MacCannell, 1999, p. 41). According to UNWTO (2018), cultural attractions relate to “a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional feature of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions”.

Cultural tourism attractions represent a varied collection of human history (UNWTO), including museums, historical districts, castles, houses and untouched natural attractions. The UK has world-wide recognition for culture and heritage and as previously stated is a major motivational factor for international visitors (Swarbrooke, 1998). Sites such as the British Museum, Tower Bridge, the Tower of London, Big Ben, St Paul’s Cathedral, attract millions of visitors to their display of rich British culture. These attractions are not only fascinating for the tourists that visit, but also represent national identity (Richards, 2011). Also, open spaces and parks offer tourists a chance to escape the bustle and experience London for free (Visit London). There are 5 royal parks in central London (Hyde Park, St James’s Park, Regents Park, Green Park and Kensington Gardens) Many of these attractions display original, authentic British heritage.

London has vast economic resources to undertake the expansion of cultural tourism attractions. Historical landmarks have been developed to entertain, educate and satisfy international visitors. As a result, overseas visitors can experience the ‘changing of the guard’ at Buckingham palace or watch a stage production at Shakespeare’s Globe. Staging tourism experiences and commodification will be discussed in greater detail later in this study. If exploited in the correct way, cultural tourism will offer huge long-term value to London and will be a motivation factor for repeat visitors (London Assembly, 2017). According to Boorstin’s (1961) theories, London naturally appeals to the mass tourist typology rather than the ‘traveler’. Consequently, he claims that their experiences are superficial and inauthentic.

The Tower of London as a tourism attraction also challenges Cohen's (1972) tourist typologies. All four typologies are able to satisfy their travel quest at the Tower of London according to their individual methods of travel. This would suggest that all tourists, independent or not, contribute to mass tourism.

As discussed above, culture is a broad concept and can be observed from multiple perspectives. It can be both *tangible* (buildings, artifacts) and *intangible* (traditions, way of life). This study will investigate both tangible and intangible aspects, with particular focus on history and heritage. Although cultural tourism and heritage tourism are synonymous, it is important to understand the difference - heritage is what is perceived from the past and passed on to the next generation. Locals and hosts are able to connect with the past both physically and emotionally. For the purpose of this study, the commodity in question (Tower of London) will be referred to as a 'cultural heritage attraction'.

### **3.2 Authenticity in Tourism**

There has been an increasing interest in the study of authenticity by tourism scholars (Cohen, 1979, 1988a, 1995; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Connell, 2007; McIntosh & Prentice, 1999; Olsen, 2002; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006a, 2006b; Rickly-Boyd, 2013; Taylor, 2001; Wang, 1999). Adapted in the early 1970s, authenticity is considered a complex subject as each traveler perceives authenticity in different ways - the traveler decides for themselves what their authentic experience may be (Wang, 1999). Lacking a precise definition, the concept of authenticity, initially developed by Trilling (Wang, 1999), refers to traditional culture and origin - proposing a sense of real, genuine and unique (Sharpley, 1994 (as cited in Wang, 1999); MacCannell, 1989 & Yeoman et al., 2007). An authentic experience could include people, objects, events; anything from visiting famous landmarks to interacting with a local resident. Authenticity suggests a pursuit for originality and credibility; "The notion that tourism is a search for authenticity is one of the most well-known and well-established theoretical debates in the study of tourism" (Wearing et al, 2010, p. 27).

Tourists search for something different to their everyday lives; something of 'meaning' and something 'genuine' (Hannabus, 1999). Veijola (2017) highlights authenticity as who we are, our roots and heritage whereas identity is who we strive to be. Cohen (2010) suggests that tourists can experience different intensity of authenticity; there can be many identities at any one given time (Veijola 2006), and exploring identity can change depending on the situation,

memory and the place. According to Boorstin (1961), the tourist is no longer seeking authenticity. He suggests experiences are reproduced, contrived and ambiguous, however, his arguments are raised based on personal observation rather than empirical data (Cohen, 2004). Boorstin links a lot of his work to social class, where he suggests only the privileged and the wealthy could truly understand authenticity. Once travel was made available to a wider range of social structure, basic and contrived experiences became somewhat adequate. Still, authenticity lacks a clear definition.

Authenticity's ambiguity is where the tourist decides for themselves their personal, authentic experience (Wang, 1999). Authenticity is created by an individual's interpretation of the social and physical environment. Developing tourism trends in authenticity has seen the emergent new forms of tourism such as 'slum tourism' – where the tourist wishes to seek the often unexplored, back region of developing countries (Bishop & Monroe, 2016). Of course, these experiences support the concept of authenticity as the tourist has a genuine taste of real life for the locals, however, raise ethical issues concerning what is considered appropriate for tourism.

### **3.3 Authentic Tourism Experiences**

Authenticity can be found in many forms; objects, events or in tourism experiences. Regarded as a vague, complicated phenomenon, tourism experience is a psychological process between an individual and an event, referring to "perceptions, feelings and thoughts" (Schmitt, 2010, p. 60), and leaving the tourist with a memorable impression (Gram, 2005). Cohen (2000, p. 215) defines experience as "the inner state of the individual, brought about by something, which is personally encountered, undergone, or lived through". Experiences have been previously discussed as intangible, continuous and inherently personal to the customer – no two people can have the same experience (Kumar & Meenakshi, 2011; O'Dell, 2007). Also, Edelheim (2005, p. 251) suggests that an individual cannot achieve the same experience twice as they are "never the same at two different moments". Tourist's search for something more than just goods and services – they look for experiences: a personal, memorable connection that exceeds the basic product or service being sold (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Kumar & Meenakshi, 2011). Authenticity in tourism experience is one of the main topics to be discussed in tourism sociology (Cohen, 1979). According to O'Dell (2007), experience involves more than just the tourist. Tourists pursue authentic experiences that are original (MacCannell, 1989). It is within this pursuit that tourists often fall victim to staged authenticity due to the fact that the

experiences have been artificially created. Further, Pine and Gilmore (1998) suggest a shift from the 'service economy' to an 'experience economy'. In the experience economy, tourists are not just paying for the product or service, but also the experience that comes with it. They argue that it is essential for organizations to create and stage experiences depending on the consumers' needs, experiences are personal. They define this as "an experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event" (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 98).

Experience is not just something that happens at the destination - it consists of three main components: the planning of the trip, the consummation and the evaluation once the trip has ended. Clawson and Knetsch (1966) proposed a model of five phases for visitor experience. The model classifies the stages of a tourist event: anticipation, travel to, onsite, travel back and recollection. The experiential phase is regarded as the central component, however, according to Clawson and Knetch (1966), tourism experiences are most valued through the recollection phase. It is during this stage where the reminiscence of positive memory can be more effective than when the travel experience is happening in present. It is also evident that tourists are more prone to remember positive experiences about the destination in the recollection phase. Tourists achieve recall through re-consumption; conversations with family and friends, pictures taken at the experience and souvenirs purchased (Edelheim, 2005). Depending on the success of the trip, this recall has a ripple effect for the next journey's planning phase. The recollection phase will be the researcher's focus during the data collection section of this research project and will use a multisensory technique in order to enhance this.

There are two main research suggestions regarding the meaning of authenticity: the concept can be related to places and objects or can be associated with the perception/experience of tourists (Timothy, 2011). Wang (1999) claims that authenticity can be associated with either explored objects or tourist experiences. He suggests that it is incorrect to associate 'authenticity as feeling' from the 'real self' as an outcome from 'authenticity as knowledge' from the 'real world'. More specifically, Wang (1999) identified four components of existential authenticity: intrapersonal (bodily feeling and self-making) and interpersonal (family ties and *communitas*) (Rickly-Boyd, 2013). This suggests feelings, emotions, sensations and relationships all significantly contribute to a sense of authenticity. Cohen (2004) suggests a constructivist approach claiming the tourist alienates themselves from modern society in order to gain an authentic experience. Cohen (1988) suggests that individuals have different perspectives and

desires, therefore, authentic experience is unique to the traveler - some may experience ‘real’ culture, and some may not. Based on Cohen’s beliefs, some tourists pursue varieties of authentic experience, whereas others only seek entertainment.

Postmodern perceptions on authenticity validate the inauthenticity in tourism where tourists seek inauthenticity for a better, more stimulating experience based on the ‘hyperreal’ (Wang, 1999). The hyperreal attracts the tourist’s imagination into a fantasy experience. Relating this to cultural tourism, the tourist is able to revisit historical happenings and separate from the everyday. Cohen (1988, p. 379) suggests a development in authenticity by which a cultural attraction or artefact that, as of this moment, is considered “inauthentic”, may eventually become authentic. This statement suggests that authenticity can change and adapt with the evolving tourism industry (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006a). However, it is “unclear who has the authority to authenticate tourist attractions; the field is thus open to manipulation and contestation” (Cohen & Cohen, 2012, p. 1300). In Wang’s (1999) research, the author relates authenticity to either an object or experience. Wang categorizes authenticity into three different typologies: objectivism, constructivism and existentialist (see Table 3).

Table 3. Objective, Constructive & Existential Authenticity. Source: Wang (1999, p. 352).

| <b>Objective Authenticity</b>   | <b>Constructive Authenticity</b>   | <b>Existential Authenticity</b>  |
|---|--|--|
| Authentic tourist experiences are related to the experience of authentic objects. | Authentic tourist experiences are centred on symbolic authenticity, related to how individuals perceive and interpret tourist objects. | Authentic tourist experiences are not based on objects, but rather on the personal feelings involved in tourist activities. Authenticity is related to the achievement of finding an authentic self or state of being. |

Objective authenticity is achieved when subjective influences are eliminated – the tourist decides the measures of authenticity (Connell, 2007; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006a). It is the

process between the tourist and an object and specifies the “genuineness of artefacts or events” (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006a, p. 299). Although the object may not be considered truly authentic (staged), the tourists recognize and accept authenticity (MacCannell, 1989). The authenticity of an experience is not necessarily linked to object authenticity. This leads to constructive authenticity, a concept which is created by the tourist where beliefs, perspectives and expectations can be negotiable (Wang, 1999). Differing significantly from that of objectivist authenticity, the constructivist typology suggests authenticity has no origin, what once was considered inauthentic can later become authentic. Lastly, existential authenticity is activity related – the tourist tries to escape from everyday life. The existential typology deconstructs the constructive typology and the constructive typology deconstructs the objective typology.

This research study will use the perspective of constructive authenticity. The constructive form of authenticity uses social construction; where things are not ‘inherently authentic’ but ‘constructed’ or ‘interpreted’ from the tourist’s point of view (Wang, 1999, p. 351). Consequently, authenticity is negotiable depending according to each individual’s perspective. Wang (1999) claims that authenticity is ambiguous and that origins are constructed in the context of perspective and interpretation. Constructivist authenticity “refers to the authenticity projected onto toured objects by tourists or tourism producers in terms of their imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, powers, etc. There are various versions of authenticities regarding the same objects” (Wang, 1999, p. 352). Cohen (1988) supports Wang’s perspective of negotiable authenticity where tourists pursue authentic experience based on their own viewpoint. Tourists that are not necessarily on a quest for authenticity will accept an authentic experience/object, whereas individuals that are purposefully seeking authenticity will accept the experience as contrived.

Constructivist authenticity can be applied to both products of tourism and experience. Tourists identify “symbolic authenticity” (Wang, 1999, p. 217), from their tourism experience where constructed objects appear authentic though “images, stereotypes, expectations and power” (Wearing et al., 2010, p. 29). An example in London would be products such as a plastic statue of Big Ben are confirmed as “authentic evidence” by tourists (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006b, p. 71). Similarly, Cohen suggests “emergent authenticity”, a concept that authenticity can develop and appear over time. He claims that “a cultural product, or a thrait thereof, which at one point generally judged as contrived or inauthentic may, in the course of time, become generally recognized as authentic, even by the experts” (Cohen, 1988, p. 379). These concepts confirm

that reproduction and commodification can offer authenticity to tourists despite their lack of originality.

Constructive authenticity is greatly influenced by capitalism and commercialization (Wang, 1999), where culture is commodified for commercial value.

### **3.4 Commodification of Tourism Attractions**

The constructivist ideology argues that commodified products or experiences provide the same influence as original objects; authenticity is socially constructed. The issues of staging or commodification of culture has been extensively researched in academia (Chhabra et al., 2003; Cohen, 1988a; Cole, 2007; MacCannell, 1989; McIntosh & Prentice, 1999). Commodification is when culture is turned into a tourism product, packaged and sold to tourists (Cole, 2007). Erving Goffman (1958) initially developed the concept of staging; suggesting social interaction as roles corresponding to a stage production. Goffman refers to the social roles as “front and back” dichotomy (like a stage production), with the workers as the actors and the tourists as the audience (Goffman, 1958, p. 17). The tourists, however, never get to see beyond the ‘front’ (Wearing et al., 2010) and experience the backstage, true authenticity unless they specifically explore other areas and activities (Edelheim, 2005). Continuing Goffman’s theory, Dean MacCannell’s (1989) objectivist approach in ‘staged authenticity’ suggests local culture is also in fact ‘staged’ to make a particular impression for tourists. Each experience stems from the interaction amid the staged event and the tourist’s state of mind (MacCannell, 1989; Kumar & Meenakshi, 2011). According to recent postmodernists, it is now impossible to separate the real from the copy. Boorstin (1962) suggests a similar approach where the authentic is replaced with the contrived. The contrived events are regarded as normal over time due to the desire to perceive authenticity. Cohen (1988) supports this statement suggesting that reconstructions are becoming popular and is now the new, modern quest in search for authenticity. However, according to MacCannell (1989), all tourists are indeed in pursuit of genuine authentic ‘back’ experiences, however, are contradicted due to inauthenticity.

Authenticity is a subjective concept; therefore, the tourists do not always recognize that an experience is staged (Connell, 2007). Also, the tourists have an expectation that they will receive contrived experiences, however, they still value the experience if it is done well. This leads to authenticity denial, where the tourists know that their experience is not genuine,

however, are still satisfied with what they experience (Cohen, 1988; Connell, 2007; MacCannell, 1989). The tourist “finds pleasure in inauthentic contrived attractions” (Urry, 1990, p. 7). According to MacCannell, the term ‘tourist’ is “increasingly used as a derisive label for someone who seems content with his obviously inauthentic experiences” (MacCannell, 1989, p. 94). Wang adds, “even though the tourists themselves think they have gained authentic experiences, this can, however, still be judged as inauthentic, if the toured objects are in fact false, contrived, or part of what MacCannell calls staged authenticity” (Wang, 1999, p. 351). However, if a tourist truly believes they are having an authentic experience, spontaneous or staged, it is still classified as authentic (Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999). This literature leads to the issue of, who has the right to authenticate? Authentication is “the social process by which the authenticity of an attraction is confirmed” (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). Based on the theories discussed above, the tourist has the authority to decide whether or not their experience is authentic or inauthentic.

The impacts of ‘staging’ or commodification of cultural experiences/objects has received both positive and negative response in literature (Cohen, 1998a; Cole, 2007; Connell, 2007; Wang, 1999). According to Cohen (1988a), commoditization should not be perceived as a negative impact, but observed in an empirical context. He claims that the commodification of culture does not fully abolish originality, it allows the culture to change and adapt with time. Commodification of culture allows destinations to preserve, revitalize and of course capitalize on economic returns. According to Cole (2007), commodification generates pride and identity for locals. However, there has been conflict over the commodification of cultural experiences, particularly the staging of historical and religious buildings, traditions, rituals or artefacts (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006a). Momentous examples of culture and history are continuously being commodified for capitalism. Architectural reconstruction creates an unrealistic portrayal of the past which is now an increasingly common consumption in mass tourism destinations. Many historical buildings and sites now have parking facilities, ticket offices, gift shops, restaurants, all added for touristic purposes (Shepherd, 2002). According to Cohen (1988a), this act of change diminishes or destroys cultural authenticity for both local residents and the tourists. From a tourist perspective, authenticity is irrelevant as they “either do not value it, are suspicious of it, are complicit in its cynical construction for commercial purposes” (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006b, p. 66). Also, the staging of new tourism trends such as ‘poverty tourism’ has raised concerns for the local communities. Poverty cannot be staged, however, economic



exploitation on poverty can be. These issues have raised concerns over ethical implications of new tourism trends – what can be commodified and what cannot.

To summarize, there has been an increasing interest in the theorization of authenticity in tourism studies and its relevance has been discussed alongside mass tourism. A complex concept, there are still questions relating to how authenticity is used, by whom, whether it is wanted or needed, and if it even matters. MacCannell (1989) proposes tourists as a homogeneous group, whereas Cohen (1979; 1988a), states that there are different typologies of tourists; signifying diverse demands, motivations and consumption patterns. Wang (1999) suggests a strong relationship between three separate approaches to authenticity, however, highlights ‘constructed’ authenticity where there is no single certainty, authenticity is negotiable and decided by the tourist. Tourists in London are therefore seeking experience based on ‘constructive authenticity’, ‘staged authenticity’, ‘existential authenticity’ (MacCannell, 1989; Wang, 1999). We can confirm that authenticity is synonymous with experience and many individuals believe that the overall experience of cultural tourism is enriched by authenticity (Cohen, 1998). In constructivist ideology, authenticity depends on individual construction and perception. Therefore, this research study attempts to examine the relationship between commodified cultural heritage attractions and authenticity, particularly from the tourist’s point of interpretation.

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

The following chapter will provide an account of the chosen research methods for this study. The researcher will inform of the data collection process and analysis techniques. The chapter will conclude outlining all ethical matters involved with the study.

The researcher had decided to apply a qualitative methodology to this research study. According to Clough & Nutbrown (2012, p. 25), ‘methodology’ provides the “reasons for using a particular recipe”, whereas ‘methods’ are the “ingredients to the research”. Further, Pratt (2009) explains that there is no particular recipe that exists for qualitative research and that there are multiple, diverse ways that qualitative research can be used. As such, there is not a clear method to develop qualitative data (Bryman, 2012). Qualitative research is recursive allowing the study to evolve and where new decisions can be made throughout the study (Veal, 2006). The participants are able to communicate their experiences in their own words and to clarify their answers. According to Veal (2006) behavior, opinion and experience is better explained by using qualitative research methods allowing for deeper and richer data which is important for this particular study. Qualitative data can be collected through multiple platforms including interviews, focus groups, observations, visual images. However, analyzing qualitative data is not straightforward and can often be time-consuming.

### **4.1 The Tower of London**

In London, there are currently four tourism attractions on UNESCO’s World Heritage List: the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, the Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London and the Maritime Greenwich. The Tower of London is one of the most famous buildings in the world and an iconic British landmark. It was built on 1078 by William the Conqueror and has a 900-year history (Visit London). It was opened as a tourist attraction in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and possesses a variety of original artefacts. Most famously, the attraction displays the real ‘Crown Jewels’, regalia worn by the sovereign of the UK at the coronation ceremony and other formalized events. Open 7 days a week, tourists can visit the royal palace, prison, place of execution, arsenal, jewel house and even a zoo! The tower displays much of the UK’s history – with most of it happening there. In 2014, visitors were able to experience the poppy commemoration, where almost 900,000 poppies were displayed at the grounds of the Tower of London. The tribute attracted over 5 million visitors, provided significant television and newspaper coverage globally and generated millions of pounds for charity

(London Assembly, 2017). The display was a powerful combination of both London's traditional heritage and contemporary innovation. According to ALVA's most-visited tourist attractions for 2018, The Tower of London was ranked 9<sup>th</sup> with 2.86 million visitors across the year.

Cultural tourists have high standards for authenticity and value an experience that is educational and involves locals (Edelheim, 2005). The Tower of London, a British museum and UNESCO world heritage site, was the number one visitor attraction in UK in 2017 receiving almost 2.9 million visitors UNWTO (2018). The tower has been a visitor attraction since the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Visit London). Visitors can view the many buildings within the outer walls of the tower, join 'lively' tours and attend ceremonies and special events. According to UNESCO (2018), the Tower of London is an outstanding display of 'late 11<sup>th</sup> century innovative Norman military architecture' and has a momentous timeline of historical events. Such events include the execution of Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard (the wives of King Henry VIII), and the imprisonment of Princess Elizabeth. Although the city of London surrounding the Tower's moat has developed immensely, the Tower itself retains its originality. UNESCO claim that the Tower's authenticity is maintained through tradition, documentary records, informative material and through displayed artefacts (armor and weaponry).

According to Goffman's (1958) and MacCannell's (1989) theories, the Tower of London is a commodified tourist attraction. Although many of the buildings are original (some buildings and grounds were damaged in World War II but repaired after the war), the tower is no longer used as a fortress and is instead a museum demonstrating the traditions and techniques used over the 1000 years it has stood. Selwyn (1996), proposed the concept of 'cool' and 'hot' authenticity. 'Cool authenticity' is defined as a performative action by which the "authenticity of an object, site, event, custom, role or person is declared to be original, genuine or real, rather than a copy, fake or spurious" (Cohen & Cohen, 2012, p. 1298) – relating mostly to Wang's (1999) objectivist typology. Alternatively, 'Hot authenticity' is emotion based, felt and informed by belief and relates mostly to the existential and constructivist typologies. There are existing tours of the Tower where visitors can join the 'Beefeater' tour guides (Yeoman Warders), loud and humorous standing guards of the property. The Beefeaters live at the Towers and wear original clothing. They were traditionally responsible for keeping guard of the prisoners and the Crown Jewels, however, now the 'actors' entertain tourists with information, insight and comedy for 30 minutes (included in Tower admission). There is also

audio guides, activities and ceremonies available to tourists. According to Swarbrooke (1995), the public and voluntary sector highly value conservation and education as a motivation for ownership. However, UNESCO (2018) claim that the Tower of London is vulnerable to cultural commodification as UNESCO reveal future development proposals that they claim do not respect the Tower's context and setting.

As previously discussed, UNESCO recognition ultimately popularizes destination (Shackley, 1998). However, despite giving destinations a great competitive advantage, there are always challenges and negative impacts surrounding mass tourism destinations and these impacts can damage sites irreversibly. Local authorities state concern regarding the welfare of heritage sites where increased visitors tamper with structures and walk across ancient grounds. Indeed, heritage buildings are exposed to danger if visited by too many tourists. Also, uncontrolled tourism development such as new infrastructure surrounding the site effects the stability and overall aesthetics of the heritage attraction. Preserving the structure is a challenge within itself without increasing problems from surrounding construction.

Along with the other attractions situated in London, the Tower of London has enhanced the tourist appeal of its host region and provides considerable economic benefits to the city. What sets this attraction apart from others is how much of an important commodity the building is to London and the developer's commitment to its extensive history. While the attraction represents staged authenticity, it is not necessarily inauthentic. From a constructivist approach, this study of the Tower of London seeks to uncover significant qualities based on originality, genuineness, historical verisimilitude and influence.

## **4.2 Data Collection**

The study will focus on the tourists' perspective of authenticity, using the unit of analysis of the millennial American tourist that had travelled to London. Considering this, appropriate research methods must be developed to collect valid data from tourist who are suitable to the outlined criteria.

Qualitative research methods are the most effective way of obtaining data in the post experience phase. Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct a qualitative study as the research plan aims to establish a truthful account within real world contexts (Jennings, 2001). The research methodology was conducted within the Unites States as the researcher was

pursuing an exchange program within a US college during the development of the research project. The researcher has a personal interest in American tourists and is particularly intrigued by the cultural exchange of British and American stereotypes. In order to incorporate the exchange with the master's thesis, the researcher conducted the methodology with American travelers and sourced participants during the exchange. This study particularly focuses on the 'millennial' American tourist, therefore, in order to achieve appropriate data, the researcher had to identify individuals that have that have experienced the phenomenon in question. As a result, the researcher categorized a specific tourist group using purposive sampling (Jennings, 2001). For example, all participants will need to cover all parts of the millennial spectrum; therefore, all participants will be a mixture of 18 to 34. To achieve this appropriate data and to select the correct participants for the specific criterion, the researcher will provide a candidate profile form which embodies a short questionnaire (Appendix A) where participants were asked specific demographic and travel characteristics. In order for the researcher to determine if the candidate is suitable for the interview or not, hierarchical coding was used using codes such as solo, family, organized. The researcher selected respondents based on the following criteria: US nationality (of any state), males and females between the ages of 18 and 34, that have travelled to London in the past two years, that have organized the travel experience themselves (not part of an organized tour), who participated in the tourism attraction, the Tower of London. If the potential candidates fitted the specified criteria, they were formally invited to participate in the interview.

The chosen method for collected the empirical data was interviews. Interviews are the most straightforward approach for collecting data thorough qualitative data (Veal, 2006), allowing adjustment to new ideas and theories as they emerge (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Interviews allow the researcher freedom to personalize and structure the interview according to the research question. However, interviews carry the risk of bias where the researcher could unintentionally influence the responses of the candidates through leading questions or non-verbal signs (Veal, 2006). Therefore, it is important that the researcher outlined ethical standards and did not suggest or influence data in any way. The researcher specifically chose to conduct semi-structured interviews, inciting a conversational style discussion, where the interviewer asked the main focus questions and where the candidates had the opportunity to express honest thoughts and feelings in a relaxed environment (Jennings, 2001). A semi-structure also allowed the researcher the opportunity to modify questions hastily, respond with impulse questions and seek clarification if unforeseen circumstances occur. The interview questions were constructed

by themes based on the theoretical framework and literature review. The researcher conducted the interviews with a total of 5 American tourists that had (within the last two years) travelled to London. In depth interviews offer flexibility and allow for rich, descriptive data (Jordan & Gibson, 2004). The interviews included a mixture of open-ended interview questions (with probes) generating rich, narrative data and closed-ended interview questions that have encoded response categories. The researcher had initially made a planned journey to meet with each candidate in person and conduct the study's data collection period during March 2020. However, because of travel restrictions placed between the USA and UK due to the Coronavirus global outbreak, the planned journey was canceled and alternative methods had to be arranged. As a result, the interviews were conducted with the candidates over video call during the months of March and April 2020.

Other than the previously stated respondent criteria, the interviews were conducted with a variety of respondents who were different with respect to socio-demographic and trip related characteristics. The researcher wanted to explore variations of authenticity among participants, therefore, the candidates were carefully selected to ensure a variety of age, travel duration and travel experience was present. The characteristics of each participant were as follows: 4 female (ages 22, 25, 27, 29) and 1 male (aged 29). The states represented by the candidates were Colorado, Indiana, and Minnesota.

Each interview was held in a separate, quiet room where only the interviewer and interviewee were present. The interviewees were asked to deeply reminisce; therefore, it is essential that the interviewee was able to focus permitting more accurate data. Also, a social setting allows human thoughts, feeling and the use of senses. As the interviews were conducted post-travel, empirical recollection was a factor for participating candidates. Researching people's thoughts, feelings and emotions is difficult as often you cannot measure the same response in their words against their actual experience. The researcher will aim to trigger each participant's memory and incite a detailed response, therefore, the researcher decided to employ an additional methodological approach and applied the multisensory technique 'photo-elicitation'; presenting photographs of the Towers as a stimulus (Heisley & Levy, 1991). The pictures were specifically chosen based on the arranged questions for the interview, however, allowed the opportunity for impromptu questions/responses. This allowed the interviewees to subjectively interpret and interact with the environment around them.

The interview structure was designed based on the proposed research questions and existing theory presented in the literature. The questions were separated into 4 interview sections: A, based on background information, and B, C and D, the proposed sub-research questions. To begin, the researcher asked a set of recall questions, probing the candidates about their purpose for visiting London and to provide a general overview of their visit. This eased the candidate effectively into the interview process before the more intense, reflective questions later. The researcher was also able to access information detailing characteristics such as motivation behind travel to London, travel preferences, and gain an overall perception of each candidate. Any significant difference among respondents was observed and the data was analyzed in relation to trip related characteristics. The second set of questions were based on sub-research question 1: what is the value of authenticity for American millennials visiting London? The third set of interview questions were based on sub-research question 2: how is authenticity perceived and experienced by American millennials at the Tower of London? This is where the 'photo-elicitation' method (Heisley & Levy, 1991) was used and the selected photographs were emailed to the candidates, allowing each candidate to open the document on their computer screens (whilst the video call was running). The candidates were instructed to have the photographs visible for both interview sections C & D. The researcher proceeded with the interview sub-question 3: which aspects of the Tower of London are viewed as authentic or inauthentic by American millennials? Throughout the course of the interview, the candidates were allowed to talk freely about their experiences elsewhere in London. Appendix B details the semi-structured interview questions (also including the candidate profile).

The length of each interview varied but lasted between 30 – 45 minutes. The interviews were recorded for transcription. The researcher considered not using a recording device during the interviews in order to avoid strict formality and allow for a relax, conversational style atmosphere. According to Veal (2006), there is risk that a recording device will hinder the response from the interviewee. Also, transcribing is extremely time-consuming with each interview requiring several hours to transcribe. However, it was decided that there would be too much risk of lost vital information through notetaking alone and also increased difficulty during analysis. Therefore, the interviews will be recorded and transcribed for more simple analysis.

### 4.3 Data Analysis

There are multiple methods of extracting and analyzing qualitative research data. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), when there are multiple case studies, data can be analyzed as a separate study. Qualitative analysis is extremely time-consuming, with each interview requiring several hours of transcribing (Veal, 2006). The analysis of interviews requires the researcher to study the data word-for-word. Qualitative research is also recursive; therefore, the research structure may change, or new themes could arise depending on the outcome of the data collection (Veal, 2006).

For analytical purposes, the interviews were recorded and transcribed (with the consent of each candidate) into separate hand-typed word documents labelled candidate A, candidate B etc. Transcripts were kept securely and separately from other documents in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants. The chosen analysis method cross-case synthesis and content analysis, and the interview data was examined manually. The qualitative data was analyzed using 'thematic analysis', "a process of working with qualitative raw data to identify and interpret key ideas or themes" (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 480). The analysis will also use coding operation content analysis, allowing the data to be organized into relationships and/or sets or sub-sets of categories; abstracting smaller data from large sections of data so that they are easier to understand (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Veal, 2006). As the interview questions were completed in 4 sections, the analysis was divided into 4 sections, with foremost attention on the last 3 sections (sub-research questions). The coding will be completed manually by the researcher, highlighting significant data and organizing the data into their predetermined categories (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order to gain further insight during the interview samples, each theme will be quantified by how repeatedly it was stated. After coding, the selected significant data (direct quotation) was compared in relation to the theoretical concepts and themes discussed in the previous literature.

The analysis was based on the participants 'perceived' authenticity of the destination and tourism attractions. Therefore, the researcher quantified authenticity based on participants' own values. Not all responses identified within the data analysis were related to the pursuit of authentic experiences, however, in order to recognize a broader perspective and ethics, the



data was not omitted. For the purpose of this study, only the data relating to authenticity is presented in further detail in the results chapter of this paper

#### **4.4 Ethical Evaluation**

There are ethical considerations that have to be handled carefully throughout this research project. Research ethics must be taken seriously within all research projects as any immoral behavior could lead to severe consequences. Qualitative research methods explore sensitive data through personal experiences and feelings; therefore, greater attention must be made to confidentiality and principles. Veal (2006) outlines that the qualitative research must not cause harm, that participation should be entirely voluntary, and any risks involved with the study are made clear to the candidate before participation. Therefore, the researcher has outlined all ethical concerns associated with this study and how these will be addressed.

The researcher will maintain a record of all research activities and carefully store all recordings/transcripts on a personal computer. Interviews will be conducted with voluntary candidates and all participants will be treated with care and respect. Therefore, each participant will receive a written consent document (Appendix C) prior to the interview explaining exactly what each candidate will be partaking in, explaining their participation is entirely voluntary and that their interviews will be recorded for the purpose of the study. The participants were also made fully aware of any implications, understanding their rights and also where and how their data will be used. The consent document clearly states that the candidates can withdraw from the study at any point. The written consent document was signed and dated by each participating individual and kept on file by the researcher to refer to at any time. The participants will also receive full anonymity throughout the research process. For the purpose of anonymity, throughout the presentation of data analysis each participant will be referred to as Candidate A, Candidate B etc. (C1, C2, etc. for analytical purposes), and the research will never reveal their actual names. Before each interview was conducted, the participants were verbally reminded of all the above ethical considerations and the researcher will receive final clarification before the commencement of each interview. This will be evident in the recording of each interview.

The nature of the interview process explores personal thoughts and feelings towards travel experiences; however, the interview process will not cause physical harm or impose the

participants to speak of any personal distress matters causing mental harm. During the data analysis, the researcher will include all data provided by each candidate; deemed relevant or not. Data will not be tampered with or falsified in any way. It was important to eliminate the researcher's personal viewpoints of authenticity to allow for an honest, fair study. Therefore, the data will be reported as carefully and objectively as possible. Any mention or discussion of other researchers' work will be clearly defined.

## 5 RESULTS

This chapter will discuss the results of the research and present an analysis of the data collection. In order to answer the main research question, different variables were selected and coded against theoretical concepts and themes found in the previous literature. Because of the qualitative nature of this research, the researcher will present subjective perceptions and experiences of each participant in different subchapters based on the study sub-research questions presented on page 13. The first subchapter provides background information and trip characteristics of the participants. The second, third and fourth subchapters present the data established by each participants' subjective journey based on the three proposed sub-research questions which is tested against the existing theories and literature.

### 5.1 Destination Experience

At the start of the interview, the researcher asked the candidates a set of recall questions including to provide an overview of the travel to London. The purpose of this was so that the candidates were eased into the interview and were able to refresh their memory. Tourism experiences are most valued through the recall method (Clawson & Ketch, 1966), and the interviewer was able to gain a synopsis of travel and candidate attributes, and also allowed for a pre-plan of the interview questions that will come ahead. The researcher discovered various motivations, expectations and behaviors of the millennial tourists.

Every tourist is characteristically different and has different travel objectives whilst pursuing their individual tourist experience (Cohen, 1988). Most of the candidates' purpose for visiting London was for a *city break* style of vacation and to experience Britain. The findings of the study established that most American millennial tourists were found to take shorter trips to London but incorporate other European cities within their itinerary. This could be explained by the geographical distance of the US and Europe. They tend to choose the most convenient option as their first stop. For most, this was a direct flight from their closest major city to London. One candidate stated that "we saw England as a launch pad for Europe so seemed like the best place to start" (C5). Consistent with the literature, the millennial tourists were independent mass tourists (Cohen, 1972), however, some participated in organized activities (such as those offered at ToL, bus sightseeing tours etc.). Most of the candidates stayed in hotels within the city apart from one candidate (who had a long-term visit), stayed in their

family's home. All of the candidates used the subway (London Tube) and bus services, whilst some more infrequently used taxis. As stated by one candidate, the "classic black cab was more for the experience than a necessity" (C5). Walking to and around London was mentioned frequently as an option for exploring by all candidates, supporting London as a destination for independent sightseeing. British weather conditions were pleasantly pleasing for the candidates: "weather wise I know there's a stereotype of it always being raining I was there in August and September and it was consistently sunny and beautiful and warm" (C1); we visited during the summer months which was sensible" (C3). Another candidate also stated that "even the rain didn't stop us /.../ what was particularly funny was most of the stores had umbrellas for sale at the front, they know what to expect huh" (C4).

In the 5 interviews, the participants were asked if they had a specific interest in the destination and to discuss activities and/or excursions they undertook during their destination experience. All of the respondents were interested in culture and engaged in culture-based tourism experiences: "so much to do in London and there's history almost every place you look" (C5); "we absolutely loved the Shakespeare's Globe /.../ it was really iconic" (C3). Experiences are mainly related to consumption of the physical environment (infrastructure, scenery, recreational activities, commodities) and the social environment (host, other tourists). Consistent with the nature of 'European city breaks', all of the candidates took part in heritage attractions, ate at local restaurants and bought local products. London as a tourism destination provides a favorable proximity of tourism attractions for independent sightseeing with many representing national identity (Richards, 2011). All of the candidates felt positive about the tourism attractions and activities in London, "there was honestly so much to see and do a couple days for sure was not enough" (C4); "too many places to see and visit in London" (C5). The most popular attractions (not including ToL) confirmed amongst the millennials were Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, the London Eye, Hyde Park and Big Ben. The 'London bus tour' proved to be a popular option for sightseeing with C5 stating "when you have a limited time in a city this [the bus tour] is the best way to get around quickly whilst learning something" (C5). C1 and C2 were particularly interested in recreating how locals live daily life: "why I love London so much kind of the set-up means you know everyone's travelling by tube so we're all kind of doing the local thing" (C1); "It was so simple to get around using the tube or the bus" (C2).

Motivations, behaviors perceptions and experiences amongst tourists may differ significantly at a destination (Cohen, 2004; Wang, 1999; Wickens, 2002). Consistent with the nature of a 'city break' holiday typology, the candidates most popular activities included independent sightseeing, culinary experiences and shopping. Some of the candidates discuss a *nice balance* between the *much busier tourist areas* and the *quieter parklands*. The candidates represent strong attributes of a postmodernist, where the tourist desires unpopulated areas and alternative experiences (MacCannell, 1989), however, acknowledge that London offers experiences for all tourist typologies:

I feel like it's kind of the best of any kind of vacation that you want, it can be anything that you really want to make it, if you want the business and the people and the tourist attractions there's that but if you want, a relaxing vacation, the parks in London are some of the best I've ever seen anywhere. (C1)

If I wanted to visit a busy, tourist area surrounded by people I could, at the same time I visited many parks and residential areas, so it was a really nice balance. (C2)

Travel expectations are driven by the extension of everyday life needs (Cohen, 2004; Wickens, 2002). Social activities that are an integral part of people's everyday lifestyle is sometimes echoed in tourism to balance the destination experience. According to the candidates, there are similarities between the American and British culture/society: "we're [British and American people] just so similar" (C1); "I thought we loved our flag, but the Brits flag was literally everywhere" (C4). This can be viewed as a less authentic experience where the tourists fail to acknowledge uniqueness. The social dimensions of tourists' experiences were a significant factor in this study with almost all candidates participating in interactions with others (host and other tourists), sharing commonalities and creating a theme of togetherness. The findings are consistent with the previous literature implying tourism is a communal activity, observing familiarity with feelings of shared encounters (Urry, 1990). The candidates had an authentic experience by interacting with other tourists and locals: "one of the reasons I don't mind traveling alone is because you meet so many other travelers and just other people in general" (C2). With this perspective, authenticity is present in the behaviors and social relations of all guests, other tourists and local people. The data revealed the importance of social interactions suggesting this contact could enhance authentic experience:

We typically like to spend our evenings socializing so first we'd visit a nice restaurant and then find a bar or something whatever's going on really /.../ we did randomly hang out with a bunch of locals at this bar one night which was pretty fun. (C5)

There was a business event or something so huge group of British and Americans in the bar, I forgot I was actually in London you know I could've been in my city or anywhere else in the US for that. (C4)

Most of the candidates associated their consumption of local culture and lifestyle as authentic. It was particularly evident that the candidates had a considerable level of interaction with local people, emphasizing the presence of cool authenticity (Selwyn, 1996). One candidate had a long-term visit to London and opted to stay with family. Peer-to-peer accommodation enhances the authentic experience of local life, including personal encounters with local people, participating in typical everyday activities and sharing local culinary experiences. They explain authenticity as having a “real experience of London, experiencing regular life” (C1) by living with a local family, signifying the importance of interpersonal relationships for authenticity (Wang, 1999). The other candidates stayed in hotels within close proximity to the city center, however, still achieved authenticity: “the door man that met us at the hotel entrance was amazing and totally charming, had a top hat and all, we felt like royalty” (C4); “the hotel décor was pretty old style kind of more rustic looking /.../ resembled more of a cutesy country cottage” (C3). Other candidates had a less authentic experience at their accommodation: “the hotel staff weren't English and to be honest difficult to understand at time /.../ the hotel was crowded and in a real hotspot” (C5). As described in the literature of the study, mass suggests large crowds and overpopulated areas which is not often associated with authenticity (Kettle, 2017). London is a mass tourist destination; however, the candidates depict that it is possible to find *quiet* areas and escape the mass in tourism. They discuss their experience of authenticity:

I was [staying] with Londoners and they took me, since we weren't so heavily visiting tourist attractions, we were visiting local restaurants and little parks that they liked and kind of going to not so well know places but really cool places none the less. (C1)

Another candidate agreed, however, felt that although they had escaped the mass tourism feel of the city, they found the ‘quieter areas’ still had multiple people present:

I’d read online about Primrose Hill, so we caught the sunset one evening. It was definitely nice to find a sort of green spot but still be in the city and escape all the traffic noise, crowds and stuff. It was still crowded though, [we] obviously weren’t the only ones with that idea. (C3)

Overall, the background of the millennial tourists is consistent with the literature. The recollection method was effective with all the candidates positively recalling the experiences and events at the destination. Americans are ‘list-ticker’ tourists on a mission to see and experience the best: “we tend to tour quickly” (C5). Although the millennials are independent tourists (Cohen, 1972), they all contribute to mass tourism. However, authenticity can still be achieved in both mass and non-touristy areas of London. The candidates agree that there is ample of opportunity and something to suit all tourist typologies. Finally, it is evident from the data that local and authentic are synonymous.

## **5.2 Understanding Authenticity**

The first objective of the study was to examine the participants’ understanding of authenticity, particularly in relation to London. The researcher wanted to establish if the candidates were pursuing authenticity within their travel experiences through reflection and confirmation of authenticity. Generally, all candidates had similar beliefs about authenticity and pursued similar authentic experiences.

When searching for authenticity, travelers pursue an experience different from their everyday lives (MacCannell, 1989). There is an importance for tourists to pursue authenticity through experiencing new places different to what they would receive at home (Botterill & Crompton, 1996). Consistent with the literature, the millennial tourist roles represent the new tourist typology (Poon, 1993), cultural heritage tourists (Garrod & Fyall, 2001) and wanderlust (Wickens, 2002, Cohen, 1974). The candidates expressed many different forms of authenticity they had experienced within London that they would not have experiences in their home country. One candidate believed that London was the “number one destination in the UK for experiencing authenticity” (C2). Other candidates talked about London in general: “exploring

the city, particularly the older parts capture the history and culture of England perfectly” (C5); “I mean the history is so amazing, we just don’t have anything like it” (C3). The terms mostly associated with authenticity “traditional, genuine, and unspoilt” (Handler, 1986, p. 2) were echoed multiple times throughout the interviews: “I love just walking around London and seeing the traditional architecture” (C5); “the guards outside Buckingham palace were wearing the traditional old clothing” (C1). Other candidates had different opinions of what authenticity meant for them: “for me it’s kind of validating everything I had pre-imagined and that can kind of come in a bunch of different categories you know buildings, people, food” (C4). Another candidate viewed authenticity more towards the hosts of the country:

I mean there’s many different ways you can think of authentic I can think of it how authentic are locals towards me whether they’re very genuine, welcoming and wanting to share their place. (C2)

Authenticity is concurrent with culture, local people, traditions and experiences (MacCannell, 1976). Most of the millennials cited their experiences of local life as authentic and wanted to ‘live like a local’ (Charles, 2018). For these tourists, authenticity found in culture, traditions and lifestyle are an integral part of the destination experience. They mostly associate authenticity with visiting local or hidden areas of the city and experiencing something non-touristy (Cohen, 2004). Candidate 1 had a long-term visit to London and suggests that having a true authentic experience is staying in a destination for a longer period of time to *truly immerse in the place* and visit non-touristy places. Although they did not specifically mention the term authentic, it is evident by their interpretation that a sense of authentic experience has been achieved:

It meant kind of stepping into the smaller neighborhoods, out of, not necessarily busier areas but just the more touristy areas and just stepping into the more local, local kind of hidden areas. (C1)

Some of the most memorable parts of the trip were when we just stopped and admired what was around us, like I remember this pub we had only stopped for a quick lunch, well and a beer, and it was just so cozy and full of locals it just didn’t feel touristy at all. (C3)



Authenticity in cultural tourism largely depends on tourists' motivations and perceptions (Poria et al., 2001). They have certain expectations of what they desire to experience and are often satisfied when those expectations are conformed and a true representation of authenticity has been encountered (Culler, 1990). Authenticity can be seen as a desired experience and tourists can benefit from encounters at tourism attractions to enrich their overall satisfaction. The results clearly show that the candidates' overall evaluation of their experiences surpassed their expectations. Some candidate discuss positive emotions from aesthetically pleasing views and buildings in London, "the castle and the bridge right next to it, just so pretty, it was everything I had imagined" (C2); "when I think about Buckingham Palace, I just had this whole like vision in my head of getting to see it in real life for the first time and it was a really cool experience" (C1). These results clearly show the relevance and importance of authenticity when tourists visualize what to expect prior to travel.

The tourist is more focused on the label that is attached to an attraction, rather than the attraction itself (MacCannell, 1999). The discussion concentrated around whether heritage attractions needed World Heritage designation for drawing tourism. The results on their individual experiences revealed the relevance and critical influence of World Heritage Status in attracting visitors (Shackley, 1998). The candidates were generally in favor whilst considering the impact of World Heritage Status on their decision-making process for an experience: "given the history and World Heritage Status, it [ToL] was definitely on my to do list" (C2). Others state how a label can positively impacts their decision:

Yeah there's a reason why it's [ToL] a heritage site and it deserves its status /.../  
perhaps not everyone really knows how important that is if you don't have a  
background. (C5)

If I kind of go back and forth on whether I want to go out of my way to visit and I  
find out that it's a World Heritage Site or something like that I'm more likely to  
say yes I'm gonna make the effort and go and visit. (C1)

Alternatively, another candidate claimed that World Heritage Status was not really a consideration for their visit as they already regarded the ToL as a well-established tourism attraction:

I already knew that it was a popular, well-known attraction so I, the World Heritage Status definitely didn't affect going there, I already knew based on the history that I wanted to go there. (C4)

According to the literature, it is increasingly difficult to find friendly, local people within mass tourism destinations (Kettle, 2017). The candidates in the study reject this philosophy as it is evident that they had connected well with local people, gained a better understanding of the history and culture of London, and engaged in local life: "very friendly people" (C5); "everything is better quality, the amazing architecture, the service, the people are friendlier, the lovely British accents, everyone wanted to talk to you" (C2). According to this study, you cannot take the mass out of a mass tourism destination; however, you can balance both the busier tourist hotspots with quieter, more local areas. Comparing the similarities and differences of local life across London, the results show that all of the candidates discussed culinary experiences (such as local foods) and surrounding themselves by local people whilst avoiding areas that are not typically classed as tourism spots within London as authentic. These experiences were expressed as one of their "favorite parts of the trip" (C1), reiterating a genuine desire for authenticity. The millennials remember culinary experiences signifying the presence of authenticity: "we treated ourselves to afternoon tea at the Brown's hotel which was a real experience, I felt like I should've bought my suit it was that fancy" (C3). Another example includes:

I wanted to try local fish and chips because I mean Americans do it but Brits take it to a whole different level so I had googled fish and chips in the area and there was this one place they had I mean thousands of 5 star reviews which is always a good sign and so I got the directions there and it was in a totally residential neighborhood it was a little bit hard to find cos it was just so hole in the wall it was this tiny fish and chip shop and there was I mean buses weren't even running on that street it was just a total you know hole in the wall local find /.../ just kind of getting off the end track where there was you know thousands of tourists doing the same thing whereas I found this tiny place and had some of the best fish and chips I'd ever had. (C1)

According to the data, it is possible to have an authentic culinary experience even if the products do not originate in that particular country: "I'm trying to think of the name of the

street but it was full of like cool cafes and Indian houses /.../ it was probably the most delicious curry I have ever had” (C3). The researcher explored this further by asking the candidate if they thought this was authentic for their individual experience. They were able to reach authenticity:

I mean the street was definitely catered to a more kind of multicultural market so I think that in terms of that particular pocket area yes it was authentic but then I guess most people would think that you know fish and chips or something like that which is more traditionally British, which we had several times by the way we just personally like to be pretty spontaneous and yeah that was a really good find /.../ I would definitely include it as part of my overall experience. (C3)

One candidate defined authentic as “having the same experience as [the] people that were born and live in that country” (C2). The results on most enjoyed experiences revealed the importance of social interactions with local people and local life. The other participants embodied authentic tourism experience as participating as much as possible with the local way of life. Examples of experiences valued by tourists include:

Using the tube as our main source of transport, especially at rush hour was an experience in itself /.../ total chaos but fun to see how the locals act just like us on a typical workday. (C5)

To me, one thing that comes to mind is the locals and my experience I guess that’s a big thing for me when I travel is how can I experience authentic local culture and I mean on that level for me it’s not just at the restaurant where every tourist goes but I want to experience the little hole in the wall restaurant where all these locals visit. (C1)

Conservation of cultural attractions is critical to the appeal of a destination, however, once accessible for tourism purposes they often attract mass crowds (Enzensberger, 1996). The candidates were asked about UNESCO cultural heritage sites. It was apparent that C1 is an experienced tourist and has much higher expectations than other candidates. They admit that the issue of mass tourism is *overwhelming* and there is a possibility of endangering authenticity at the attraction:

That one I've actually thought about and I feel really conflicted about that question because like for me I wanted to find places where there wasn't masses of tourists and there was locals and more quieter places, but in saying that just as I would find a cultural UNESCO site or you know any destination very interesting, I understand that millions of people around the world had that same thought to go to see something like that so I wouldn't say it lessens the authenticity, for me I think it would just feel more overwhelming or annoying that there's thousands of people visiting it. (C1)

Other candidates also discussed conflicted thoughts about mass tourism and authenticity: "I always think the best way to experience anything is when you can avoid the mass crowds but as I've experienced in other countries that's not always possible" (C5). Examples of other quotes include:

Areas like Buckingham Palace where mass of tourists were gathered but for me it didn't change my experience or you know make the palace less authentic /.../ actually I guess kind of the mechanics of it might be annoying that I'm there with 5 thousand people. (C2)

It can be determined that both similarities and differences are evident in the responses of the 5 candidates. The evidence presents diverse responses with regards to understanding authenticity. This could suggest a lack of knowledge with regards to the concept in a tourism context. They simply do not understand what is authentic and/or inauthentic. Candidate 4 suggests a lack of prior knowledge to a destination can impact their perception of authenticity. Constructivists validate authenticity based on stereotypical images, expectations and cultural preferences (Culler, 1990). The candidate further explains stereotypes and expectations they had as: "just trying to pack everything in, that's stereotypically British into one experience" (C4). Candidate 5 particularly describes an activity where they were culturally and socially dependent on their individual, interpersonal authenticity. This was interesting because the candidate started talking about this experience as inauthentic and then changed opinions mid conversation. What they originally perceived as inauthentic became authentic. This is because the candidate perceived their authentic experience without requiring tangible evidence:

It always helps being in English speaking countries where you can always find our everyday places to eat /.../ I didn't want to but I did purchase McDonalds one morning, we were rushing for the bus and I already knew it was the place to grab something quick /.../ I mean it is our creation right so probably not authentic to be eating in England but I remember there were loads of workers grabbing coffee and stuff, it was right mid-morning so yeah I'll call it the local thing. (C5)

Alternatively, the data showed that some of the candidates were able to recognize inauthenticity in the destination experience:

In Piccadilly circus I feel like it was right when we all come off the tube or something and it was just a whole bunch of tourist shops that struck me as inauthentic, it was very you know every shop sold the same, generic, London stuff and it's the word inauthentic comes to mind when I think of that, place just masses of tourist shops selling the same stuff everyone just kind of buying the same things to bring home to friends and family. (C1)

London represents a mixture of heritage buildings and modern builds. It is evident that tourists are not often aware that they are visiting contrived attractions because London presents these buildings as authentic. Additionally, the tourists are unable to distinguish the reconstructions from the originals. This is often due to lack of prior information the tourists have accessed. Overall, the study reveals the underlying characteristics of millennial tourists' authentic experiences as: culture, local life and social interactions. There are displays of both intrapersonal authenticity and interpersonal authenticity between the candidates (Wang, 1999). The millennials all resembled the independent tourist typology with a motivation to recreate life as a local (Cohen, 2004). It is evident from the data that the tourists significantly associate authenticity to people and local life. Authenticity is subjective and each candidate decides what their authentic experience is.

### **5.3 Experiencing Authenticity**

The second research objective was focused towards tourism experience, particularly the participants experience at the Tower of London. The questions sought to gain an understanding

of the candidates' thoughts and feelings about the ToL and provide additional insights on on-site authentic experiences. The section will establish the notions of authenticity that the participants were pursuing whilst gaining an understanding of their authentic experience. As discussed in the literature, the ToL is a World Heritage Site, protected by UNESCO. It is one of the country's most popular tourism attractions and according to the candidates, an historical delight. According to UNESCO, the building contains its authenticity through historical significance, informative material, display of artefacts, lifetime records and cultural importance to the city of London.

Recreational experiences are vital attributes to overall satisfactory experiences that greatly contribute to tourists' perception of London (Wang, 2006). These experiences allow tourists the opportunity to revisit history through both education and entertainment (Garrod & Fyall, 2001). A closer examination of on-site attraction experiences within a mass tourism destination confirms the relevance and influence of authenticity. The experience process starts at the planning (anticipation) stage and ends after consumption (recollection) stage (Clawson & Knetsch, 1996). According to the candidates, the ToL was easy access with one candidate using their tour bus stop and the rest using the nearest tube station: "as we came out of the subway station, you couldn't miss the grand fortress" (C4). Depending on each candidate's level of interest and time in London, some spent only a couple of hours at the attraction with others spending almost half a day. While discussing the purpose of their visit, the candidates had different motivations: "I always had an interest in castles and stuff, I mean we [Americans] just don't have anything like it (C4); it was the best place to absorb so much history" (C5). Another candidate purchased the London Pass (including admission to over 80 attractions in London) and has a passion for history:

I'm definitely a bit of a history buff so was ridiculously keen to see anything to do with history and the monarchy and since we had bought the London pass we just tried to stick to the attractions included in that and I mean it was pretty inclusive and amazing value for the money. (C3)

Regarding authenticity, all of the candidates were aware of the term and could answer the questions spontaneously. The terms real, original, genuine, unique, trustworthy (as seen in Sharpley, 1994; Cohen & Cohen, 2012), was conceptualized frequently throughout the course of each interview with one candidate referring to the attraction as "a real London gem" (C5).

The results confirm a substantial focus and amazement on the history, architecture and culture at the attraction. The candidates recognize authenticity through the original physical location: “as soon as I walked in the entrance there was a real sense of majesty, it was amazing” (C3); “it’s pretty awesome to experience something that has stood for thousands or something years” (C2). In this respect, the candidate disregards commodification as inauthentic and identifies the building essentially as original. Some of the candidates also commented on the physical building: “it was well maintained and in its original shape” (C5); “the chapel was in its original state” (C1); “incredibly well-preserved old-world castle” (C5); “it was basically empty shells of what once was” (C2). One candidate established authenticity within the physicality of objects: “the real jewels [Crown Jewels] looked great and super awesome to be able to see them in person, I wish I could’ve gotten a picture” (C2). Other candidates discussed physical objects: “the nice displays of armor and genuine artefacts” (C4); “they had an array of weapons and genuine war equipment” (C1); “a great collection of original armor” (C5). Another example of authentic artefacts includes:

There was one particular exhibition, I think it was in the White Tower but that was really awesome like the stuff about Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>, I mean he’s such a massive example of British history so to see some real artefacts that he used was pretty unreal. (C3)

Some of the candidates further suggest the physical aspect of the attraction to be authentic. The ToL is located in its original location, however, has been restored (due to damage through the war) and recreated into a museum for tourism purposes. One candidate confirms the originality of the site: “they’ve pretty much built London around this fortress” (C4). The candidates were able to access both the front and back (Goffman, 1958), areas of the tourism attraction. As evident from the candidate’s experiences, the tour guides (Beefeaters) represent the actors with the tourists as the audience. It was observed from the candidates that most of the ‘backstage’ had been commodified, not representing the buildings true, original self:

I was a little disappointed that some of the rooms, like the tower itself I expected to be kind of restored as they originally were, but they just felt empty and kind of samey. (C4)

The researcher asked the participants about the amount of people visiting the attraction. All of the candidates agreed that the attraction seemed crowded, however, were not deterred by masses of tourists: “it speaks to how important that place must be, or you know there’s a reason why we’re all here” (C2). Other candidates specified that: “the room where the jewels [Crown Jewels] was super crowded, of course that’s what everyone wants to see” (C2); “I braved the long line to see the Crown Jewels” (C5). Other candidates stated:

I mean there were some long lines especially for like the major points to see but it was fine you know there wasn’t a time limit on your entry so if you get there early enough you can still get around everything. (C3)

I don’t know if we were there during some kind of holiday or something, but the lines were long but felt regulated /.../ you know if you wanna see and do this stuff then you have to be prepared to wait. (C5)

Novelty, escape and self-development, proposed by the UNWTO were evident for the millennial tourists. The attraction experience regularly led to positive feelings of enjoyment – tourists are travelling in the expectation of pleasure from the novelty (Cohen, 1974) and seek authenticity based on the hyperreal (Wang, 1999): “you feel as though you’ve gone back in time” (C5); “a very special and memorable place” (C2). As evident from most of the candidates, the grounds at the ToL were beautiful and grand. One candidate detailed: “the grounds were so spacious I forgot I was even in a large city /.../ pretty with so many opportunities to grab pics” (C2). It is evident from the literature that millennial tourists are technology focused (Jordan, 2018 & Yeoman, 2012). Social media is particularly important to them and they pay attention to photograph opportunities which they can post and share with their network: “great for photographs” (C5). One candidate suggested a different approach to the typical millennial and claimed that visiting the tower was more than just picture evidence. Examples of such quotes include:

I wasn’t doing it for like the Instagram picture I was doing it because I was very interested, and I had learned so much about it before going so I was just going there to verify [and] to see things in real life. (C1)



In order to satisfy tourists and create economic gains for a destination, there is a need to present visitors with impressive reinventions of cultural commodities (Cohen, 1988). The millennials observed commodification at the site: “many of the displays have been modernized” (C4). Providing further insights, other candidates echoed similarities among experiences:

It’s now a museum so some changes have been made from the original palace but most of the armor and stuff inside the rooms were authentic /.../ the rooms in the living quarters part of the castle weren’t the original. (C2)

The results showed a significant divide between tourists that participated in organized tours and those who opted to navigate the site themselves. All of the candidates who participated in the tours emphasized that the tourist experience was greatly affected by the tour guides with some claiming this was the most authentic part of their experience: “the tour was incredible, really informative and truly made the history come alive with his stories” (C5). This style of learning offers detailed information about the attraction/destination additional to the information boards and photo/video exhibits. C4 suggested that without the tour guides it would have been difficult to learn the in-depth knowledge of the place: “they [Beefeaters] gave a solid introduction to the place and so much humor” (C4). When asked about their experience at the ToL, one candidate claimed that they relied more so on the information provided by the tour guide and recognized that “the guides were authentic in their narrations of history” (C5) at the Towers. This [ethnographic] knowledge-based authenticity is affirmed by Selwyn’s (1996) concept of cool authenticity. It signifies the importance of knowledge and interpretation of history and culture by staff members at the attraction in order to achieve an authentic experience. Candidate 5 also commented on the tour guide attire, who was “dressed in traditional uniform” (C5). Other candidates perceive their experience in London as authentic if they are served or escorted at the site by local people:

A sign would be to have locals whether it’s selling tickets or guiding you, giving you information, cos when I’m visiting something in England or something I don’t want a Chinese tour guide telling me about you know, I want a local person explaining their culture, their site what it means to them. (C4)

The tour by the tower guards was definitely a highlight of the entire experience, they were real entertaining, but also knew their facts and stuff like I don't mind a bit of gore or anything grim like that, so their bloody tales and execution stuff was really cool. (C3)

The role of the tour guides is to educate, provide knowledge and entertain visitors in a genuine manner. The results suggest that the tourists interpret tour guides and other service providers at the attraction further than their professional role and perceive them as authentic ambassadors for the destination. The study showed that the tourists who participated in guided tours were especially happy with this activity. Some candidates claimed that you cannot get a more authentic experience than from a real, local person: "the stories and history from them make it much more interesting" (C4). Storytelling of personal experiences was also considered to be authentic. The authenticity of local people proves to be an important aspect together with the physicality of objects/experiences at the tourism attraction.

Candidate 1 and Candidate 2 decided to navigate the attraction alone and set their own pace by not participating in any guided tours. These candidates support Cohen's (1972) explorer typology, where they arranged the visit and navigation of the attraction themselves, however, require guidance such as maps: "the exhibitions were great with a good mixture of display and interactive areas /.../ everything was labelled and explained" (C1); "the layout was really good and we were given a detailed map on arrival so it was pretty easy to orientate alone" (C3). Candidate 1 told the researcher that they prefer to self-manage with regards to time and pace whilst traveling, therefore, require freedom whilst visiting attractions. This is related to Wang's (1999) intrapersonal dimension of existential authenticity. The candidate wanted to achieve authenticity by immersing into the history and felt like the best way to achieve this was to visit more secluded, quieter areas of the attraction away from other tourists: "I remember just sitting on the grass area for probably an hour just admiring the building" (C1). However, the candidate was not deterred by the 'mass tourism' label related to the ToL, nor the crowd numbers the attraction had that day. This supports the theory that sovereign tourists have similar behaviors to those of a mass tourist (Wickens, 2002). Tourism provides a structure where travelers can act spontaneously, matching their true feelings and authentic self:

I've typically enjoyed doing it on my own sometimes I feel especially with the tour guides, I have done tours a couple tours in the past and I just feel like I can kind of explore my interests a little bit more if I take my own time. (C1)

Candidate 2 suggested that price sensitivity was a constraining factor for not participating in any additional activities or guided tours at the Towers. They claimed that "the buildings were enjoyable alone, if I'd paid for anything else it would've been a waste of money" (C2). They did confirm that the site was marked well and easy to navigate without any additional guidance. This candidate also referred to the mass crowds at the attraction: "there were several groups [tours] that were going around and this did often mean waiting but it honestly wasn't a problem for me, I still got to see everything I wanted" (C2).

In constructivism, tourists judge authenticity based on social construction through experience and education (Wang, 1999). It is very common to perceive a place on something we've read or seen in the media; however, reality is often very different. Consequently, tourists often misjudge the authentic. The candidates base many notions with what they see in the media, although, they were able to differentiate with what they experience in real life. They expressed preconceptions of authentic characteristics of London such as: *Georgian homes, warm pubs, black taxis, red phone booths, royal places*. Some candidates expressed notions based on novels and documentaries: "I had watched many documentaries on the royal family, I mean Americans are obsessed with it" (C2). Authentication is therefore constructed by records and the media. Candidate 1 had particularly been *watching* and *obsessing over* 'The Crown' prior to their travel and quoted expressively of their experience at the Tower of London. Other candidates base their notions on literary and media sources:

Having researched more about everything that had happened, at the place, and outside the place, I feel like I just had more of an appreciation about what I was visiting. (C1)

I have read so many historical novels and histories of English medieval times, it was totally fascinating to experience first-hand where so much of what I had learned about took place. (C5)

The candidate's knowledge or awareness of the majority of tourism attractions in London was high, specifically as all of them discussed some element of history and culture. All of the candidates were aware of the ToL before their arrival and had conducted prior research to their experience: "you can definitely enhance your experience by researching, even lightly googling these places beforehand" (C5); "there was definitely a lot to see so reading and making a plan, about the jewels we knew it would be best to head straight there" (C4). Tourism attractions use staging, design and atmospherics to encourage social interactions (MacCannell, 1989). This candidate provided some aspects of the tourism experience that to them, made it feel like a staged event:

I felt like the towers was more of a kind of complete experience whereas if I think about Buckingham Palace for example like it's a major highlight but it's everyone kind of does the same thing you know you take the picture, you look around and then you leave /.../ the towers had so many rooms to see, activities, tour guides, a restaurant, store where you could spend the entire day there. (C2)

This further symbolizes different tourist desires: those who have researched the historical background to the attraction and value details, information and authenticity, whereas, others that have a stronger desire for recreation and entertainment. Other candidates discuss how their experience at the ToL compared to other tourism attractions in London:

I also visited the War Rooms and the Winston Churchill museum which was also fraught with history and it was actually way less crowded than the Tower of London so we could move around at a better pace I guess /.../ we had studied WW2 so much in school and I've always loved learning about that time in history. (C5)

I would say Kensington was maybe more authentic of an experience, when I went in August that would have been roughly the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of when Diana died and so that effected it because there were all these flowers and it was clearly a very personal place for people [and] their connection to Diana. (C1)

These tourists confirm historical and royalty as their preference for touristic experience. Some candidates comment that the presence of other mass tourists may have impacted their authentic

experience at ToL, stating that they were able to *absorb* more information at another London museum as there were less tourists there. Candidate 1 particularly suggests a similar approach and relates authenticity to a more personal level. They claim that finding a place with less tourists offers a more *tranquil experience*, thus, more authentic. This again relates to an intrapersonal component of authenticity suggesting feelings and emotions relate to a sense of authenticity (Wang, 1999), and seclusion from other tourists can, therefore, enhance the authentic experience.

All of the candidates had an overall positive experience at the attraction. Authenticity was tested against historical architecture, objects, people, and culture within the tourism experience. The candidates were able to access trustworthy information, interact with staff members (Beefeaters, guards) and view genuine artefacts. The critical importance of the attractions physical setting such as cleanliness, availability of information (obtained from both human and literary sources) and commodification was observed. It is evident that both literary and other media sources have a substantial impact on the tourists' perceptions, motivations and expectations to construct their view on authenticity. Some of the candidates disputed the number of other visitors present at the attraction. Consistent with the literature, the tourism experience chosen for this study is a must-see attraction and provides tourists with an authentic portrayal of British heritage. However, the tourists consume a representation of history rather than historical authentic historical objects. Therefore, the study provides evidence that tourists accept and acknowledge lack of originals and that authenticity is not a concern as long as they are happy with their experience (Cohen, 1995). The researcher concluded that all of the millennials had encountered authenticity and the ToL is an authentic attraction.

#### **5.4 Aspects of Authenticity and Inauthenticity**

The final objective of this research is to investigate which aspects of their tourist experience was classed as authentic and/or inauthentic. The researcher will examine the similarities and differences conceptualized by the participants.

According to the literature authenticity is ambiguous, and the tourists decide for themselves what is authentic and inauthentic (Wang, 1999). The candidates discussed their experiences in relation to many aspects of authenticity: objects, history/culture, interpretation and personal encounters with other people. These are aspects of how the quality of the products is enhanced

by authenticity (Cohen, 1988). One candidate observed that “the buildings were very authentic, that is the real experience /.../ the stores over the road selling the same, generic stuff, that’s pretty inauthentic” (C2). Another candidate suggested that the generic souvenir shops are an inauthentic aspect of London, “a lot of those stores where I feel like, you know, ten thousand people might leave London with the same thing” (C1). This experience lessens the authenticity for this candidate.

Some of the candidates thought that it was possible to have an authentic experience even though they state that there may be inauthentic attractions/products (Cohen, 1988a; MacCannell, 1989). Some candidates recognize that tourists have different demands (Cohen, 1988a), therefore, these inauthentic commodities exist for the wider audience. Candidate 2 admits to purchasing products that they perceived as both authentic and inauthentic “I bought both but there’s a difference to me” (C2). Other candidates claimed that “the places I had named as unauthentic I also admitted to visiting them and buying things from these shops” (C1); “pretty tacky souvenirs on sale but I guess that’s part of it all” (C5). This data suggests that although the millennials recognize inauthenticity, they still participate in purchasing these products. Therefore, the millennials view authenticity as a negotiable concept (Cohen, 1988). They recognize constructive authenticity (Wang 1999), where experiences are interpreted from each participants point of view. As long as their expectations are met, the experience does not have to be authentic. Examples of other quotes include:

I personally didn’t look in any of the giftshops, the typical tourist stuff it’s just not really my thing and it was nice the way the layout meant you weren’t forced to go in any either. (C3)

For some people those shops or that certain attraction or the way this is done it’s for a large portion of people that’s what makes their trip authentic it’s just not what I would think. (C2)

I’ll be honest I did get sucked into those shops because [laughs] I had a few friends back home that had a certain expectation of what they want from a city and I knew I was just catering to that expectation of getting this typical thing with Big Ben on it or you know a red telephone booth something. (C1)

Tourism products was an important aspect of authenticity within the destination experience for all candidates. Products and souvenirs purchased from a tourism experience represent 'symbolic authenticity' as authentic evidence (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006b). The candidates discussed different souvenirs that they had purchased on their trip. The evidence criticizes commercialization: "I didn't notice any traditional British crafts around any of the big attractions, only stuff attracting the tourist crowds" (C5) and "lots of stores selling the same type of thing" (C4). The researcher purposefully asked the millennials if they had noticed where the products were manufactured:

It's all made in China that those [tourist] shops had to offer so that didn't help because to me I'm much more likely to buy something and want to buy something and be really happy with a purchase if I see that it was made in the country. (C1)

This candidate conceptualizes inauthentic experience as something where an object is not manufactured in the original country. Other candidates discuss their opinion on authentic products. Candidate 1 specifically discussed local foods they had purchased to take home to their family. They discuss purchasing products that are not characteristically British, however, the candidates acknowledge these products as more authentic than "typical thing with Big Ben on it or, you know a, red telephone booth something" (C1). Other examples of such quotes include:

My family valued more authentic, in my opinion more authentic, souvenirs so it was for example bringing home macarons from a really cool local French bakery, you know whereas it's not, it doesn't have you know a red telephone booth on it but to me that was more authentic. (C1)

It's just the difference of like bringing home some washed cloth with like some picture of Buckingham Palace versus bringing home like a bottle of local wine or a cool cheese that's made in England. (C2)

The relationship aspect, involving social interactions with staff members, local people and other tourists were important during the experience. Some candidates explained that interaction with local life is authentic: "I enjoy talking to locals, I often like to ask the waiters, waitresses, bar staff, anyone for tips around the city /.../ best way of getting inside knowledge" (C4); "we

would causally talk to some of the workers” (C3). Other candidates referred to sense of isolation as part of their most enjoyed experiences within a mass tourism destination:

Even in such a big city, like there are little niches of people, it kind of helps smallen London, whatever part you’re in there’s way to kind of just find ways to make it not so huge, whether that’s the local pub or a cool restaurant where you can meet people. (C1)

Some candidates propose that facilities within the tourism attractions were a lot more trustworthy: “the café served traditional English things /.../ ate some delicious scones with jam and clotted cream” (C5). These services ultimately add value to the attraction; however, it was the quality of the service that the candidates viewed as authentic. Another candidate specifically thought that the souvenir shops within the attraction giftshop were more authentic whilst comparing to the shops in the city:

At the gift shop they had a lot of cool things and a lot of that was made locally, sourced locally so there’s definitely shops that are in my opinion better and worse at doing souvenirs. (C2)

Further analysis was employed to determine the validity of commodification. Commodification of cultural products, infrastructure and human relations risk destroying authenticity (Greenwood, 1977). As identified in the literature, the ToL was built over 1000 years ago and without the preservation efforts by UNESCO, the building would have decayed into ruins or entirely perish. UNESCO have and continue to restore parts of the Towers with integrity to restoration and authenticity. One of the most significant evidence to emerge from the data is the candidates’ thoughts towards tourism development efforts by UNESCO. Whilst discussing the commodification of UNESCO sites, in particular the ToL, the candidates were conflicted in the opinions. Some of the candidates suggest that restoration is vital for the survival of the building, whereas, others would prefer to leave the site in its natural form. This evidence contributes to the concern of commodification and retaining authenticity (Shepherd, 2002). One candidate felt uncomfortable, questioning the history and even the existence of the ToL which has been changed for tourism purposes:



It makes me a little bit uncomfortable to be honest when the site itself has been changed for the purpose of tourist, I would say if it's been changed for the tourists then it's not really its original self, it's not the, original thing that we were coming to look at. (C1)

Most of the candidates relate authenticity in London to *old buildings* that are unique to the city, something that cannot be experienced anywhere else. This candidate admits that: "I know there is little than can be done, but the new builds overpower the old buildings" (C5). Although they recognize that many of the original buildings have been reconstructed for tourism purposes, the candidates were still satisfied with the restoration of the physical appearance of the cultural attractions. This candidate claims that "they [historical buildings] look exactly like I had imagined" (C2). Other candidates referred to commodification in London as "I could tell they [London attractions] were commercialized but still realistic, I don't know, there were definitely some areas that it was noticeable but not everywhere" (C4); and "as far as London goes I don't think any of the changes are so big that they're you know abusing or ruining the original culture" (C2). This evidence is congruent with the literature and commodification should not always be perceived as a negative (Cohen, 1988a), but allows culture to change with time. Another example of such quote includes:

Generally it [London] was a real mismatch of old and new but both represented the culture well /.../ we went to the Tower of London but also the observation deck at the Shard, like we did both and to us both represented England well. (C3)

I felt like the place had a pretty authentic feel to it like I've seen other historical attractions and they come across as real tacky attractions which I don't know in my opinion ruins it but yeah London on the most part has done this well. (C5)

Tourists are often criticized for contributing to superficial and meaningless experiences (Boorstin, 1962). Despite the overall satisfaction of tourism attractions within London, some candidates reveal critical observations concerning tourism development including economical, sociocultural and environmental effects (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). One candidate acknowledged that "London is full of potential and I feel like they [tourism developers] could take things too far" (C5). Such potential could somehow affect the level of authenticity perceived by tourists with future developments. Other candidates challenge the authenticity of

commodified tourism attractions: “if it’s been changed to streamline all this incoming [tourists] you have to do that to make it possible, it’s just not necessarily super authentic” (C2). Another example includes:

I would say it takes away from it definitely I mean it serves a purpose obviously it might make it more possible for more people, but I think there's something to be said for. (C1)

It’s difficult, I guess it’s kind of sad that the building can’t just stay the same and we could you know walk around like it was, but yeah I guess that would definitely impact the authenticity but it’s more how you see authenticity, is it the original building or is it the best recreation of it I don’t know (C3).

These measures indicate that reconstruction of cultural buildings degrades the physical authenticity. According to the literature, contrived attractions are replacing natural attractions as it is becoming increasingly uncommon to find natural sites untouched (Cohen, 1995). The purpose of UNESCO is to restore and preserve historical buildings whilst providing education and entertainment (Silberber, 1994). The researcher purposefully asked the candidates about heritage buildings and the data revealed that changes to the original heritage had been noticed: “it [ToL] did seem that a lot had been rebuilt or restored” (C4). However, it is evident that the millennials did not object to the reconstruction of heritage buildings and are satisfied with obvious, pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1962), recognizing them as standard due to the desire to perceive authenticity: “as far as London goes, I don’t think any of the changes are so big that they’re you know abusing or ruining the original culture” (C2). Other examples include:

It didn’t really cross my mind thinking about you know how much work had been done to it /.../ would probably be a city full of ruin if left so I thought the buildings had been thoughtfully restored /.../ there was a nice balance between history and tourism. (C5)

I feel like the people have truly restored and kept their history and culture intact, I do think they’ve done a good job and I was definitely left feeling like it had really been like this. (C4)

I mean yes if you think of it [ToL] as commodified then yes I can agree that it has been remodeled but they've [UNESCO] obviously thought real carefully about all the details I mean it all looked authentic well in my opinion it was what I would've imagined it to look like all those hundreds of years ago you know I remember just walking along the ramparts and cobbled paths and for me it was a real sense of awe. (C3)

The changes they've made for tourists, has almost become part of the experience, I mean it would be completely different if we were visiting a ruin or something or if we could even visit as all if that were happening. (C1)

These criteria show that cultural preservation can be satisfactory if it is done with genuine imitation (Shepherd, 2002). On the other hand, another candidate felt conflicted about cultural reproduction and recognized that originality could be lost with reconstruction. This candidate expressed hostility between the balance of preservation and authenticity:

There's a very fine line with, when they [UNESCO] preserved these sites, number one is to make it available so people can enjoy it but destroying or a chance of destroying its originality in order to do that is obviously quite a powerful thing. (C2)

In general, perceived levels of commodification were favorable for the millennial tourists. None of the candidates felt like any commodified aspects undermined the authenticity at the site. Although they do have a regard for culture and are aware of the many changes, they recognize that it is done well. The developers have made the Towers appear like the original which is conceptualized in Cohen's (1988) emergent authenticity. Authenticity has the ability to change with the evolving tourism industry (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006a). Therefore, the candidates experience can be authentic despite exact originality:

For me as long as the recreation has been done well and it looks as close as possible to the original structure or whatever, then I don't see why it can't be considered authentic. (C3)

Authenticity can be considered beyond commodification (Cohen, 1988). Some of the candidates extended their opinions on authentic and inauthentic to a more complex level. They acknowledged and accepted that everyone has a different perspective on what they consider to be authentic, thus, can be manipulated and contested which is widely supported by Cohen & Cohen (2012). Examples of such quotes include:

Whether it's inauthentic or not I think there's just a purpose for everything you know even for myself I know that there's different things that interest me and what complete my experience, but I also know everyone's experience is so different.  
(C1)

The candidates not only recognized authenticity within the physicality of objects/places but also represent authentic experience by an interest in local culture and the people. Expectation plays a vital role in the tourism experience. According to the literature, American tourists is often surprised based on their prior expectations of Britain and British people (Thomas, 2011). However, the research provided evidence that many millennials were satisfied with their destination experience because their imagery and expectations were met or exceeded; thus, expectations are negotiable (Wang, 1999). Examples of such quotes included: "getting more into the culture and regular life and that was my expectation going into this trip, so, I feel they were met" (C2); "I didn't think that London would be so green /.../ they were all just as I imagined" (C1). Other examples include:

I had quite stereotypical expectations /.../ hearing the lovely British accent and seeing the royal palaces that I've obsessed over my whole childhood was everything. (C4)

Just the history and all those incredible buildings, for years I had imagined what it was all like and to see it all in real life was amazing. I think that is what will stay with me for years to come, the visuals of everything. (C3)

Within the broad spectrum of millennial experiences, the results indicated that the overall destination experience is complex and multidimensional. Based on these findings, the defining characteristics of the American millennial tourists comes close to independent mass tourist travel type for learning and excitement. Consistent with previous empirical research, it is

evident that authenticity is a subjective concept and the experience is valued if it is executed well (Cohen, 1988). Although there were some striking observations on the critical elements of tourism experiences, including souvenirs and commodification, the overall satisfaction of the destination is positive, and a high level of authenticity was achieved. The tourists recognize that tourism serves a purpose for all, including inauthentic experiences and products. Although the findings clearly show that overall satisfaction does not necessarily lead to authentic experience. According to MacCannell (1989), all authenticity is staged and structured to meet the needs of the tourists, although the tourists placed an importance for authenticity through the quality of local life.

The research aim had been operationalized into three research objectives and established into main themes found in the data. The first objective was to explore the millennials understanding of the concept authenticity. Although the concept of authenticity and mass tourism may seem hypothetical, the evidence based on interaction between the elements of mass, heritage and authenticity was distinctive. Whilst exploring the candidates understanding of authenticity within the destination experience, the concept was recognized through verbal contentment such as *traditional* and *genuine*. Authenticity was placed highly on three specific aspects: **Culture**: architecture, transportation, experiences, stereotypes; **Local Life**: people, traditions, culinary experiences and **Heritage**: historical buildings, museums and royal buildings. The researcher can concur that authenticity is a fluid concept therefore individual experiences of authenticity are open to change.

The researcher continued to delve deeper into cultural heritage attractions with the second research objective, exploring the candidates experience at the chosen tourism attraction, the Tower of London. The results support the literature signifying the popularity of cultural heritage attractions is largely based on a personal desire to recreate history and share people's past. Thus, the Tower of London is staged to display and recreate the traditions. The millennials observed this staging as a more *complete* tourism experience comparing to other cultural heritage attractions in London. Having established the relationship between authenticity and the touristic experience at the ToL, five things have become clear as principal characteristics in perceived authenticity: **Aesthetics**: recreating the original design of the Towers and its elements; **Information**: creating truthful meaning and understanding whilst actively connecting consumers with what they are visiting; **Storytelling**: captivating people with real stories (achieved by the tour guides, Beefeaters); **Exhibition**: presentation of physical objects,

content of information boards, tours etc.; **Sustainable Development:** the restoration at the towers have been and should continue to be managed with care and consideration. Commodification does not destroy authenticity if it is done carefully and correctly.

Finally, the researcher wanted to establish what aspects of authenticity and/or inauthenticity the candidates had encountered throughout both their destination experience and cultural experience. What became obvious in this section was the desire to discuss inauthentic experiences outside of the attraction, leading to conflicts in cultural commodification. Based on their visit, the aspects/elements of the Tower of London that the tourists found most authentic and inauthentic were categorized into themes; **Authentic:** the Yeomen tours, tour guides (Beefeaters), chapel, artefacts (Armor, Crown Jewels), Ravens and **Inauthentic:** living quarters, gift stores. Although inauthentic elements were recognized through product development, it is still possible to achieve a positive experience.

The researcher will next finalize this study by providing a discussion and a detailed conclusion of the data results and discuss these in relation to implications for the study. The researcher will lastly provide recommendations for further research.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results chapter details an account of American millennial tourists' on-site tourism experiences derived from qualitative data from interviews. It investigates the level of authenticity experienced at the Tower of London. The results both confirm and contrast the earlier discussed literature and offers additional evidence to the phenomena in question. Theorizing the relations of authenticity in the touristic experience and considering the complexity and vastness of the concept, the present literature has often generated more arguments than solutions. This thesis has instead attempted to examine how authenticity is used within an experience, whether authenticity is desired and why, and if authenticity matters. This chapter will discuss important conclusions established in the study, implications and provide recommendations for future research.

Since all of the candidates are younger individuals, it is assumed from the literature that importance is placed on novelty and escape. However, since London is a mass tourism destination, and the Tower of London a mass tourism attraction, the notion contradicts that. Consequently, what emerged strongly from the data shows that some of their perceptions support the mass whilst pursuing original experiences. Therefore, we can assume that mass tourism and authenticity can coexist.

Overall, the results of the study concerning the qualitative data have been relatively diverse. The candidate's discussion weighted mostly on their satisfactory experience within the destination. This supports Clawson and Knetch's (1966) theory that experiences are most valued through the recollection phase and that tourists are more likely to remember positive experiences over negative through recall. It was evident that all of the candidates were satisfied with the majority of elements comprised in London. Interactions between the tourists and culture, heritage and social relations revealed to be the most important aspect of the destination experience and pursuit of authenticity. These include setting, weather, activities and friendliness of local people. All of the candidates referred to the cultural attractions as the source of satisfactory experiences. Candidates indicated high satisfaction with many of the tourism attractions available in London. It was evident with all the candidates that they were not in the conscious pursuit of authenticity (MacCannell, 1989), however, all experienced authenticity none the less. Tourists are not experts on what they visit so base their motivations, perceptions and experiences on promoted features by the media, tourism industry and literary

sources. Consistent with the literature, the results show that the younger millennial audience place a high importance to learn, explore and experience local life similar to that of previous studies. The results show that tourists considered unique destination attributes such as local life, friendly locals more highly than initial expectations.

Established in both the literature and results, authenticity is an undeniable motivational factor in the cultural heritage tourism experience. It has been demonstrated that tourists highly value authenticity with objects, experiences and authentic others (Wang, 1999). However, the analysis showed a complex nature of the relationships between commodified experiences and authenticity. Some of the candidates were critical of aspects such as prices and quality of souvenirs. There were also concerns about tourism development such as infrastructure and commodification, traffic and transport conditions. The evidence opposes MacCannell's (1989) staged authenticity and demonstrates that tourists can pursue and achieve authenticity even if they encounter and consume a staged attraction. This is because of social constructivism. The study provided detailed evidence that further accords with past research, which showed that novelty and prestige are core significant factors for travel to London. It is evident that London is perceived as a cultural hotspot for tourism where American millennials quest for authentic self. They tend to like unfamiliar experiences with intense host-guest interaction. Furthermore, the findings also support post-modern perspective that tourists are on a quest for alternative experiences (MacCannell, 1989) and also reflect the main characteristics of Poon's (1993) new tourist typology where the tourists want to experience something different. It is difficult for the tourists to say if something is authentic or inauthentic. The results thus support other studies in constructive authenticity, where authenticity is negotiable and interpreted from the tourist's point of view (Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999).

The perception of people was one of the main contributors for the candidates' satisfactory experiences. This was pursued through interactions with local people, other tourists, communicating with various staff members. The findings show how social interactions critically influence authenticity within destination experience. However, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity within an experience, especially when the length of stay between candidates varies significantly. Candidate 1 had a long-term stay in London, whereas, the other candidates had much shorter stays (2-4 days), incorporated into a European tour. The long-term candidate had more opportunity to find their authentic self (Wang 1999) and managing to achieve this by visiting non-touristy areas of London. The



other candidates were much more dependent on social and cultural aspects, attempting to include their most valued pre-conceptions of London into their experience. Considering the findings, London is a destination that appeals to the younger millennial tourist due to its long history and cultural appeal. However, suburban and more contemporary areas are proving to be a common exchange for the more populous, mass tourist areas. The study strongly supports the notion that tourists desire a blend of the remote and the mass and can achieve authenticity in both. It can therefore be concluded from this study that authenticity is not a discrete concept.

Royal and historical buildings were the main themes discussed by the American millennials and within these attractions the results discuss many aspects of objective, constructive and existential authenticity. Although the research project was focused towards a constructive perspective of authenticity, it is difficult to ignore the objective aspects as both typologies are closely related. From an objective sense, authenticity is not present, however, the tourists reject this and perceive their experience as authentic based on social constructivism. If the tourism experience is socially constructed, then so is authenticity. It is therefore evident that authenticity is subjective and relative to individuals.

According to the literature, tourism has regularly been criticized for degrading the authenticity of cultural heritage buildings. Developers are said to be profit-driven and often disregard the safeguarding of culture and authenticity. Since this attraction is UNESCO protected, retaining authenticity is a crucial priority in preserving the Tower of London. There is a consistent need for conservation and visitor safety, however, all restoration projects operate in an attempt to minimize impacts on the tourists' authentic experience. In other words, there is stability between the preservation of host culture and development of the local tourism industry. At the Tower of London, the millennials are searching for reality though they face a staged reality. This can be observed through Wang's (1999) constructive typology in the literature, the Tower of London is not original due to commodification. However, staging does not necessarily mean superficial as the candidates accepted an original structure even though they recognize reconstruction. They accept this through care of the historical ambience, experience and storytelling of the tour guides, information available and presentation of original artefacts. The millennials recognize the facts over the fiction. Thus, they support Cohen's (1988) and Wang's (1999) theory on emergent authenticity and their experience is authentic. The findings also cohere that of MacCannell's (1989), where the staged is not superficial since it contains element of the original traditions. It is, however, evident that the visitors are limited to front

regions (tour guides, service staff) and never get to see the backstage, unless the explorer tourist manages to escape the mass within the attraction. Through both, authenticity is achieved.

The Tower of London is an excellent example of MacCannell's staged authenticity. The proposition that tourists accept or seek commodified staged authenticity (Cohen, 2004 & Waitt, 2000) is accurate and applicable to this attraction, although it is unclear if commodification was an actual motivational factor. It can be concluded that commodification is not an issue for the tourists as they recognize that it is done well and are happy with their experience. This demonstrates the importance of the quality of staged events. The Tower of London is a renowned attraction with global symbolic significance due to its immense, beautiful structure, extensive history and display of ancient and original artefacts. By retaining the traditional components of the original building, a balance can be achieved between authenticity and commodification. The determination of authenticity relies on different social and cultural values (Cohen, 2004), therefore, if the millennials expectations were met during their experience, then authenticity was achieved.

What was evident in the literature was the need for captivating people's interest for the heritage attraction – destinations are seeking ways to represent their destination in a marketable way (Hollinshead, 1992). There is certainly a very thin line between the positive and negative effects of cultural commodification. This current research suggests that authenticity and the tourism experience depend on the implementations of both the tourist and host. In this way, the host provider has a critical role in providing appropriate settings and facilities that enhance the consumer experience and engage in authenticity. Consequently, culture must be represented in a specified, delicate way which is respectful to the host and authentic to the tourist, and by doing so, encouraging repeat visitors to the attraction. Some of the candidates discussed the negatives surrounding mass tourism and it is clearly a threat to heritage attractions. It may result in a weakness if failings to deal with the masses. Therefore, clear strategies on sustainable development need to be implemented for future generations in order to retain authenticity.

The empirical findings from this case study have confirmed the importance of authenticity in cultural heritage tourism attractions. This importance is placed largely by all stakeholders who have immediate power over the value of the heritage environment. In the context of the Tower of London, much value is placed on the image, aesthetics and history of the attraction as opposed to a place purely for tourism and recreation. The Tower of London provides a

respectable example of a sustainable cultural tourism; however, it is the experience enriched by the quality of authenticity with added infrastructure and services. It has become a characteristic of many heritage attractions to expect some form of commodification, thus it is vital that the reconstruction is done well. The towers are an honest display of history and artefacts; however, the modernity of restoration has influenced the authenticity. This gives an important indication to tourism developers that sustainability is evidently desirable for the Tower of London and it needs to incorporate both recreation and history.

As previously noted, authenticity is subjective and complex. The data, however, revealed important differences in the perceived level of authenticity among the millennials. Some had a clear understanding of the history and held wealth of knowledge, whereas others observed more spontaneously. What can be revealed from this is the visitors that had exclusive, prior knowledge did not perceive the attraction to be more authentic than their counterpart. As a result, the millennials simply do not know what is officially authentic or inauthentic; they just perceive it as authentic/inauthentic. This can be present in both tangible objects that are constructed by professionals to appear authentic to tourists or where the individual tourists judge something as authentic even if they do not actually know if it's authentic or not. It is, however, authentic to them. Although some of the tourists were able to access an intrapersonal aspect of authenticity, their escape is only temporary, and they soon return to the mass tourism. It is confirmed from this study that authenticity needs to be evaluated in terms of the individual tourists' expectations and beliefs.

The relationship between authenticity and commodification of tourism experience has been an ongoing discussion amongst tourism scholars for many decades. Cohen (1988) initiated and inspired an enduring line of knowledge production. Although much has been discussed, and many philosophies defined, the theory as a whole is still open to new ideas, perspectives and innovative approaches. It is important to understand travel behavior and help determine the current and future market needs. Although the percentages studied in this project is small, the impacts are important and could benefit local industries in the heritage market. This study greatly contributes to the literature and discussion of authenticity and commodification of the authenticity of tourism attractions whilst providing useful information on a new generation of cultural tourists.

All research is subject to limitations but can be an encouraging source for further research. Having established the relationship between authenticity and the touristic experience, two things become clear. Firstly, this study touched on some elements of the decision-making process, however, did not completely establish if authenticity was or was not the millennials motivation behind their visit to the attraction or London in general. Secondly, time and resources available limit the study samples. Lastly, the complexity and vastness of the concept authenticity itself limited the research. The researcher had difficulties reducing the theory developed from the literature.

This qualitative study has an exploratory purpose; thus, the sampling of the study is small. The research was made with one tourism attraction in London, the Tower of London. This limited the findings to perceptions of this attraction only, although the candidates were free to discuss other attractions/experiences. If a larger sampling method and a more diverse context is applied, the results may have been different. Lastly, the sample size was also limited by the number of participants – only five millennials were interviewed. The majority if the candidates were female (one male), which may have restricted the research results. Although the study showed that gender had no influence with respect to perceived authenticity and other factors within tourism experience.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, all of the interviews had to be conducted over Skype, recorded and transcribed subsequently. The researcher felt that a personal aspect was lost through this process. There was also an increased risk of technology failure, some sections of the transcript are inaudible, therefore, unable to be used as data evidence.

This investigation has several limitations, therefore, recommendations for further research can be offered. The conclusions are only statistically based on one tourism attraction in London. Future studies should generically study more contexts and compare commodification across a much broader scale. This would guarantee more diverse results and further validate the current conclusive model. Also, the results from this study showed that the majority of candidates were visiting London as part of a tour around a number of countries in Europe. Europe as an entirety has a rich history and large diversity between each country. It is therefore recommended that comparisons of authentic experience could be tested against other countries in Europe.

Other segmentations of authenticity have not been considered in this study. It is recommended that a wider population and different nationalities should be studied against their relationship of authenticity and the tourism experience. A quantitative analysis would allow research to reach a wider audience. It is also recommended that objectivist and existentialist forms of authenticity should be explored in more detail. It was evident that many aspects of these authenticities were raised throughout the data collection, thus requiring further investigation. Future studies could expand the scope to incorporate more and diverse forms of authenticity. This could be achieved through further research on the decision-making process and tourists' motivations.

There is still a much broader discussion based on the question, who uses authenticity and why? This study specifically looked at millennial tourists and confirmed that they are seeking authentic experiences. It would be valuable to compare this demographic with other age groups. All of the ideas for future research mentioned previously could be applied to experiences in general.

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## Appendix 1: Profile Form

### *Demographic characteristics*

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Hometown: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Trip characteristics*

Travel days in London: \_\_\_\_\_

Travel date in London: \_\_\_\_\_

With whom did you travel: \_\_\_\_\_

Solo or organized trip: \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose of travel:

Leisure       Business       VFR       Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Tourism attractions visited (please tick all that apply)

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buckingham Palace        | <input type="checkbox"/> Houses of Parliament | <input type="checkbox"/> Trafalgar Square  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tate Modern              | <input type="checkbox"/> St Paul's Cathedral  | <input type="checkbox"/> Hyde Park         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tower of London          | <input type="checkbox"/> Westminster Abbey    | <input type="checkbox"/> Big Ben           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kensington Gardens       | <input type="checkbox"/> London Eye           | <input type="checkbox"/> Harrods           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tower Bridge             | <input type="checkbox"/> Piccadilly Circus    | <input type="checkbox"/> British Museum    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Covent Garden            | <input type="checkbox"/> Madame Tussauds      | <input type="checkbox"/> National Gallery  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Victoria & Albert Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Kew Gardens          | <input type="checkbox"/> Royal Albert Hall |

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2: Interview Questions

### Section A – Background

If you could give me an overview of your trip to London. Explain what the purpose of your trip was, how you travelled there, where you stayed, did you walk, subway, eat out, activities, excursions etc.

- Why had you decided to visit London, UK?
- Did the trip meet your prior expectations? In what way?
- What is London like as a city?
- What was London like as a tourist destination?
- Did anything surprise you about London? Did you experience anything different, interesting or important?
- Did you learn anything about yourself, the people and the place?

I am now going to ask you to close your eyes and describe and reminisce about your trip. I want you to describe to me the following points:

- *what can you see*
- *what can you smell*
- *what can you taste*
- *what can you hear*
- *what can you feel/touch*

### Section B – Understanding of Authenticity

What does authenticity mean to you when you travel?

- What did you think about authenticity in London?

What is the role of local people in making places authentic?

- Do you engage with local people, see original buildings, experience local way of life, feel unique, feel you are a part of the experience?

In your opinion, what makes UNESCO cultural heritage sites authentic?

- Does the amount of people visiting these sites increase/decrease the authenticity of the sites?
- Does World Heritage Status effect your decision-making process for a destination? If yes, what particularly interests you?

Were you conscious about your contribution to the destination?

- Were you aware of any implications caused to local tourism attractions, in particular UNESCO heritage sites?

Could you give an example of a place in London that you found very authentic or inauthentic? Please explain.

- When you returned home, did you want to learn more about British culture, history or something else based on this experience?

### Section C – Experiencing Authenticity

Why did you decide to visit the Tower of London?

- What did you know about the towers prior to your visit?

In your own opinion, what was your experience of the Tower of London?

- What time of the day did you visit and how long did you stay?
- What did you look for in this experience?
- Did you take part in any other activities/specialist tours not included in your admission ticket?
  - If yes, what?
  - If no, why not?
- How did this attraction compare with others you have visited in London?
- Do you believe the attraction was value for money?
- What was the best and worst part about the experience?

Was authenticity a consideration for your experience at the Tower of London

- If yes, why? What did you do, plan to do, experience that was perceived as authentic for your experience?
- If no, why not?

How much attention did you pay to the following media?

- the photograph exhibits, watched the video exhibits, listened to the tour guides, read the information boards, listened to recordings.

Did you learn much from your experience (about yourself, people, places)?

- Were your thoughts provoked, emotionally moved?
- Did the experience increase your understanding of British culture and heritage?

#### **Section D – Authenticity and Inauthenticity aspects**

Which aspects/elements of the towers would you consider authentic/inauthentic?

- The royal palace, the prison, place of execution, jewel house, zoo, the ‘beefeater’ tour/tour guides, photographs, videos, other exhibits

Did you have any interaction with staff members/local people/other tourists during your visit?

- If yes, what?
- Were they trustworthy/doubtful?

Did you buy any souvenirs at the Towers?

- If yes, what? Why did you buy this? Where were the souvenirs made?
- If no, why not?

Did you think the Tower of London had been commodified/commercialized for tourism?

- If yes, why? Do you think such commodification impacts the authenticity of the site? If yes, explain?
- If no, why not?

If you would be able to make changes to the Tower of London, what would you change to make the visit and experience more authentic?

Is there anything else about your trip or authenticity you would like to add?



### Appendix 3: Letter of Consent



LAPIN YLIOPISTO  
UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND



Dear X,

My name is Catherine Watson and I am Master student at University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland, under the supervision of Senior Lecturer José-Carlos García-Rosell. You are invited to participate in my master thesis study entitled: “The Authenticity of Mass Tourism Attractions: Evidence from American Millennials visiting the Tower of London”. The purpose of the study is to uncover perceived authenticity within tourism experiences at cultural heritage attractions. I will be conducting interviews to gather the data for my research. The result of the study will be published as part of my master thesis.

By signing this letter, you give consent to use the interview material confidentially and exclusively for research purposes. The research follows the principles for responsible conduct of research dictated by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research. The data will be handled anonymously. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw your permission at any time.

Should you have any questions or if you would need further information regarding the study and the use of the research data, please feel free to contact me (Phone: X; Email: X) or my supervisor (Phone: X; Email: X).

Sincerely,

Catherine Watson  
Master’s degree student

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I give consent to use the interview as data for the purpose mentioned above.

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Signature

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Date

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Print Name