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The role of authenticity in tourism planning: Empirical findings from southeast Spain

Abstract

Tourism is the main economic activity in many towns in the province of Alicante in southeast Spain and has turned this area into a paradigmatic example of mass tourism on the Mediterranean coast. Since the 1960s, the province's coastal towns have opted for a development model centred on what is known as 'residential tourism' or 'second-home tourism', with few exceptions, such as Benidorm. We wish to put forward the argument that the main social agents in the tourism sector have not perceived the 'search for authenticity' as a factor that may attract tourists to this area. To this end, we will start by reviewing critically the theoretical discourse about the role played by authenticity in the motivation of tourists. Then we will discuss some of the results obtained from empirical, qualitative research that included 37 in-depth interviews. As a guide for our empirical research, we use a model based on the stakeholder theory. The epistemological difficulties faced by researchers do not justify certain critical arguments that try to highlight the impossibility of operationalising essential concepts and approaches such as that of authenticity. Therefore, it is necessary that empirical research continues to delve into the sociological keys that determine the 'search for authenticity' in the tourists' experience.

Keywords:
authenticity; qualitative research; sociology; in-depth interviews; residential tourism; Spain

Introduction

Tourism is the main economic activity in most towns in the province of Alicante, an area commercially known as the 'Costa Blanca', located in southeast Spain, on the Mediterranean coast and within the Valencia region. In 2005 the Valencia region received 5.1 million international tourists, 45% of those visitors were British, 13% French and 10.3% German (IET -Spain's Tourism Statistics Centre, 2005). According to a survey conducted by Agencia Valenciana de Turismo (a regional centre devoted to promoting tourism), people visit this region because of its beaches, its climate, the

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peace and quiet, its leisure possibilities, the food, culture, history and monuments (AVT, 2005). Approximately half of the Valencia region's 637 hotels are in the province of Alicante: 308 hotels to be precise. Alicante's Airport ('El Altet') served a total of 8,795,705 passengers in 2005, which made it the sixth airport in Spain in terms of passenger numbers (AENA —Spanish Airport Authority, 2005). Thus, this province has become a paradigmatic example of mass tourism provided we understand tourism as the rendering of services combined, to a greater or lesser extent, with property development (Vera, 1992; Mazón, 2006).

Since the 1960s, Alicante's coastal towns have opted for a development model centred on what is known as 'residential tourism' or 'property tourism', with few exceptions, such as Benidorm or Alicante town; in these two towns the residential tourism model is less apparent or has grown together with traditional tourism developments based on hotel supply (Mazón, 2001). Mazón (2006) defines residential tourism as the segment of the tourism industry that focuses on the construction, promotion and sale of property for residential tourists. The urbanisation initiatives have traditionally been focused on foreign second-home tourists, particularly from Scandinavian countries, Germany and the United Kingdom. The figures relating to the development of the residential tourism model in the province of Alicante do not leave room for doubt. According to the 2001 census, 482,919 households are not permanently occupied, and 281,785 of them are second homes (INE —Spain's National Institute of Statistics, 2001). As a matter of fact, we could say that Alicante has experienced a dual development model. This is best illustrated with two examples: Torrevieja and Benidorm. Both towns together can accommodate up to 400,000 residential tourists, but whereas Torrevieja has 1,643 hotel beds, Benidorm boasts 38,149 hotel beds (IVE -Valencian Institute of Statistics, 2005). On the one hand, we have a mass tourist resort built on residential development; on the other, there is a mass tourist resort built on hotel development. If we consider the entire province, Alicante can accommodate approximately 1,000,000 residential tourists, whereas the province's 308 hotels provide 61,334 beds (IVE, 2005). This type of tourism is booming and nowadays the urbanisation process is not confined to the coastline and nearby areas, as it used to be until a few years ago. The building activity and the new housing developments are spreading towards inland areas that had traditionally been kept out of the property development process.

The argument we put forward is that the main social agents involved in the tourism sector have not perceived the 'search for authenticity' as a tourists' need to be met by the areas they visit. This is so because authenticity has not been identified by tourism planners as a key factor in attracting tourists. However, the results of recent empirical research on tourists' motivations show the increasing importance of the above-mentioned need in tourist demand (Waller & Lea, 1999; Jacobsen, 2000). Therefore, we will study this discrepancy here.

Methodology

We will start by reviewing critically the theoretical discourse about the role played by authenticity in the motivation of tourists. Then we will present some of the results obtained from qualitative research that included a stratified sample of 37 in-depth interviews regarding this issue with:

- 15 representatives of all the political parties in the main tourist towns on the Alicante coast, who are members of their local council.
- Key economic agents in the tourism sector (5 representatives of traders and hotel associations, and 4 property developers).

- Experts (5 scholars and 8 council officers) with direct experience on the dynamics of residential tourism.

The interviews were conducted from May 2005 to January 2006. We are interested in examining the discourses of the social agents that exert more influence on the mainstream discourses and the decision-making process relating to tourism development planning. This is the reason why we consider a qualitative approach to be more appropriate for our research. We have based our decision to organise our field research around the above-mentioned social agents upon our adaptation of the tourism planning model devised by Sautter and Leisen and inspired by the stakeholder theory (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). Following the transcription of the information gathered from the in-depth interviews, the qualitative approach consists of an analytical operation as well as a theoretical one.

The analysis consists of creating 'thematic codes'. In this particular study, each of the 'codes' identified during in-depth reading of the transcripts was sorted into a 'family of codes': resources, leisure, heritage, trade, wealth, wellbeing, overcrowding, cosmopolitism, etc. Then, each 'family' is associated with a series of general and predetermined 'thematic sections' that make up the conceptual structure of the tourism system: 'the tourist', 'the economy', 'the environment', 'social interaction', 'the tourism model', and 'social change', in order to reclassify the data collected at a later date by associating ideas and finally to ascertain the discourse typologies and storylines that the tourism planning officers create regarding the question of authenticity. The theoretical stage consists in the construction of an argument to interpret and explain the data collected during the fieldwork. This paper focuses on this second phase of the research.

Revisiting authenticity

The meaning of authenticity has fascinated philosophers and scientists. Throughout the 20th century, the humanistic tradition produced valuable theoretical works on this subject: among the most remarkable essays are those by Heidegger (1927), Schütz (1932), Adorno (1964), or Berger & Luckmann (1966). They have taught us that the decision to define an object as authentic is linked with its construction process. Hence, attention must be especially paid to the existence of, on the one hand, original elements and, on the other hand, of elements that are artificial, simulated or imitated whether entirely or partially.

The decision to consider a tourist experience authentic is determined by the authenticity of the tourist attraction (Waller & Lea, 1999), and also by the type of social relationships established around it. Also crucial is the spatial context in which the said attraction can be found, as is the presence of elements that may influence the process of perception (Pearce & Moscardo, 1986). This issue is even more complicated if we consider the fact that cultures are systems of meanings undergoing constant change.

During the 1970s an interesting debate emerged around these ideas that has questioned the possibility of having authentic social experiences through tourist activity. The papers written by Pearce & Moscardo (1986), Olsen (2002), Chhabra (2005), or Reisinger & Steiner (2006) offer excellent accounts of the development of this discussion. Boorstin (1961) initiated the sociological discourse of authenticity. His was a pessimist approach that attacked 'pseudo-events', and it is still present nowadays in the debate, notably in Augé's criticism (1997). This author considers that tourists are unable to experience the sensations and feelings that traveller-adventurers of the pre-industrial era experienced.

Also in the 1970s, a new line of research into the cultural keys to modernity emerged, and later post-modernity, through the analysis of the changes in the attitudes and behaviour of tourists (MacCannell, 1973, 1976, 1992). MacCannell challenges Boorstin with an optimistic approach. MacCannell's starting premise is that tourism does not prevent tourists from having authentic relationships and experiences; it actually allows and facilitates them as long as tourists manage to go into the 'back regions' and avoid getting lost in the structure of appearances and simulacra of the 'front regions'. He assumes that tourists hope to experience authenticity in an encounter with authentic sites, objects or events (going into the 'back regions'). MacCannell is mainly concerned with the frustration of the tourists' quest through the 'staged authenticity' displayed in developed tourist settings by the locals and the tourist establishments ('front regions') (Cohen, 2000, p. 270).

Urry's arguments are inspired by MacCannell's ideas but they also include some critical elements (Urry, 1990). Urry tries to approach comprehensively what Feifer calls the 'post-tourist' (Feifer, 1985). The 'post-tourist' is characterised by three main features. Firstly, the possibility of experiencing tourist objects without leaving one's home (through the use of new technologies). Secondly, the freedom to combine easily experiences associated with what could be called 'high culture' with other experiences linked to 'mass culture', or with experiences that are simply different or new, mainly guided by the hedonist enjoyment that results from 'jumping' from one to another. Finally, the acknowledgement of tourism as a kind of ludic system, an endless range of plays in which each tourist may interpret the situations in different ways, and there is not one true authentic experience (Feifer, 1985). Research on tourist leisure must bear in mind the eclectic, and sometimes baffling, nature of the human being. In the context of a mass consumption society, tourists purchase the 'tourist product' without necessarily feeling a sense of alienation (Holden, 2005). Therefore, Urry points out that the search for authenticity is not one of the main factors around which tourist activity is organised. It is rather the search for experiences, regardless of whether or not they are authentic, that are far removed from all the experiences which make up the tourists' everyday life. Urry tries to establish a connection between this 'post-tourist' and the most general cultural developments of 'post-modernism'. In that respect, he puts forward an argument, which leads us through his research work, to try and understand the construction of the 'tourist gaze' in a 'post-tourism' context. This question results in an attempt to understand the production of the tourist experience, taking into account all the signs shaped in the tourist scenes. The ultimate objective is to produce a sort of 'basic binary division' between the ordinary everyday life and the wished-for extraordinary life (authenticity not being a necessary condition of the latter) (Urry, 1990). New realities (unusual, pleasant and focused on escaping from everyday life) are more in demand by tourists than authentic realities. The history of each tourist object is secondary. The process of construction of the scene is not that important and, as a result, nor is the value of its authenticity. It is, above all, about feeling and living different and pleasant experiences (Cohen, 2004, 2005).

We can also use a flexible interpretative framework including the three main types of authenticity that Wang links to the tourist experience: objective, constructive (or symbolic) and existential authenticity (Wang, 1999). From this point of view, a wide spectrum of rather complex and vague 'tourist experiences' can be seen. We find, on one end, experiences such as those described by Augé in *L'impossible voyage*. On the other end, there is a type of tourism based on a whole series of imitations that go from the copy of an actual reality – liable to become what Baudrillard called 'hyper-reality' (Baudrillard, 1983) - to the copy of a fake one, inspired by an entirely imagined reality,

that is, the whole reality is fiction. Disneyland is the most repeated example of the latter; a tourist destination used by some of the most important authors of the critical discourse on the meaning of tourism and being a tourist, to make significant contributions about these issues (Augé, 1997; Baudrillard, 1983; Eco, 1986; Ritzer & Liska, 1997). Augé's criticism is particularly helpful in outlining two groups of values around the concepts of 'travel' and 'tourism'. These values, comprised in a sort of dichotomy, are eventually interpreted as 'signifiers' that refer to two types of activities, almost opposed, in which the differences are more important than the similarities. One has positive connotations, the other negative ones. Those positive values can be grouped together around authenticity. That is the conclusion we have drawn from Wang's typology of values associated with the 'high taste of travel' and 'low taste of tourism' (Wang, 2000).

These concepts and ideas have proven very useful in our empirical research and have helped us to analyse the results of our research into the stakeholders in the tourist activity in the province of Alicante and their influence on tourism planning.

Empirical findings

A number of recent studies show that, although they may not know the works of theorists such as MacCannell, Feifer, Urry or Augé, tourists have indeed thought about some of the ideas put forward by them. These studies also suggest how difficult it is to determine to what extent the above-mentioned 'post-tourist' is present. The reason is, according to the research on the tourists' self-perception, that many of them want to dissociate themselves from the traditional image of the mass tourist (Prebensen, Larsen & Abelsen, 2003). In any case, 'authenticity' is still valued. Objects considered more authentic are also seen as being potentially more enjoyable, and the presence of large numbers of tourists is identified as the most important factor spoiling authenticity (Waller & Lea, 1999).

It is therefore no wonder that an increasing number of northern Europeans arriving in the province of Alicante seek to build their villas in relatively isolated areas, avoiding the estates packed with fellow countrymen and expecting to find a rural landscape. This issue is directly linked to the search for an authentic Mediterranean lifestyle, particularly in the case of Alicante. Many visitors associate authenticity with the traditional Spain and certain stereotypes. The development of residential tourism or coastal tourism tends to be seen as a threat to the preservation of the authentic Spain they came looking for (Huete, 2005). The qualitative research carried out by Gustafson on the behaviour and attitudes of retired north European expatriates who have settled, more or less permanently, on Spain's Mediterranean coast raises interesting questions in the light of Urry's thesis. The results suggest the search for authenticity and normality of those who spend the winter on the Spanish Mediterranean coast are distinctive and converging features of a system of motivations, which becomes apparent in two ways. First, the interviewees express that they are able to make contact with a certain type of authentic *Spanishness* that tourists cannot access; secondly, they define their lives in Spain in terms of normality, in contrast to the unusual situation experienced by tourists (Gustafson, 2002).

Bearing these findings in mind, we should rethink the question of residential tourism on Spain's Mediterranean coast. On the one hand, we should acknowledge its sui generis tourist nature once we have identified the joint search for 'normality and authenticity' as a fundamental value, which, at the same time, goes together with the lack of interest in the 'unusual'. In this sense, we find a type of tourist antithetic to

Feifer's 'post-tourist'; likewise, it cannot be explained by Urry's 'post-(mass)tourist' interpretative framework. However, there are more similarities with MacCannell's model, at least regarding the search for authenticity. We must also take into consideration that retired north Europeans are more used to 'jumping' back and forth between the 'front' and 'back' regions in the tourist areas of the northern Mediterranean coast. On the other hand, we may question the tourist nature of this kind of behaviour and interpret it as a new type of migration. It may also be considered a new type of 'mobility', following the concept Urry has been using in his recent research (Urry, 2002).

Our empirical research provides us with some helpful keys to explain how the main agents involved in tourism planning on Alicante's coast have not become aware of the value and meaning of the search for 'authenticity and normality'. To illustrate our arguments, we have chosen the most representative excerpts of the opinions expressed by all 37 interviewees.

The intense activity of the tourism industry has speeded up the process of economic modernisation of the region, and has brought about a profound social change. There has been a direct transition from economies based on their primary sector to economies based on their service sector and construction industry. This has changed society in areas that nowadays are major residential tourism destinations. All interviewees agree on this; however, they disagree on their assessment of this process. The undeniable economic growth has been accompanied by environmental and cultural effects that some consider to be critical (social overcrowding and environmental degradation), while others see them as positive (cosmopolitism and increase in the value of the natural heritage). Nevertheless, this difference of opinion actually has no particular significance. They all believe that the positive socioeconomic effects are far more important than any of the negative impacts we may identify.

The following extracts clearly illustrate the essence of a widespread discourse that, with many qualifications, transcends most social agents, as well as their political beliefs:

…it's difficult to make a living out of farming or fishing, so I think this change has been positive… because now there's wealth, because there are jobs for almost everyone (PSOE – Spanish Socialist Party- town councillor).

…a few years ago this was a rather humble town; now our standard of living is much higher… Like everywhere else, there are people who are in difficulty, but one doesn't usually come across people who can't get by. So my opinion is that tourism has been quite positive… We can't be so cruel or deluded as to think that we should go back to the past (PP -Spain's main conservative party- town councillor).

People live much better, immensely better now… These towns have reached a level of development they couldn't have reached without tourism and the way it has been done (Council officer).

As we have previously stated, authenticity has different dimensions that help us understand the role it plays in this structure. On the one hand, authenticity has a spatial dimension that can be divided into two categories: the built environment (devices and environment designed and created by the human being), and the natural environment (environment that has not been changed or has been slightly changed by the human being). On the other hand, authenticity also has a psychosocial dimension in which culture plays a key role, particularly those aspects of culture that involve values, beliefs and behaviours.

Authenticity, in all its dimensions, tends to be associated with an initial moment, previous to the 1960s, characterised by a 'pre-tourism function' as opposed to the 'tourism function', which developed later and whose protagonists are not middle-class 'tourists' but middle-high class 'holiday-makers':

> *Before modern tourism started to develop, climate and sea were seen as helpful therapeutic elements. There was, obviously, the idea of leisure, but the underlying idea was that sea water could be used to treat certain diseases… At that time, the relationship between locals and holiday-makers (since they weren't tourists as we know them today) was positive: they exchanged cultural patterns, lifestyles… In those years, the income generated by holiday-makers was regarded as a complement to family income… In those years there was a good interaction between holiday-makers and locals (Scholar).*

Only in the context of that pre-tourism situation might the 'impossible voyage' described by Augé be possible:

> *…back then, there weren't many tourists or locals, so there was some interaction between them, and there was this idea… of the traveller from the Empire, who came over to discover the exotic, the Mediterranean, the Spaniards, etc. So, yes, there was some contact. It's just that over the years the town has become so overcrowded (Council officer).*

The overcrowding issue comes up time and again as authenticity's worst enemy. With regard to the social aspect of this concern, and even before we focus on 'authentic' values and behaviours, we must take into consideration the fact that the population has experienced abrupt changes in a short period of time:

> *There is a core of local population but, in very little time, a lot of people have come and settled here, so the town no longer is what it used to be (Council officer).*

In connection with this, a recent study on the coastal towns in the province of Alicante provides an interesting comparison of the number of people who live in each of these towns but were born elsewhere (Mazón and Huete 2005). As a result, the psychosocial dimension of authenticity, which refers to lifestyles (a profound system of values and behaviours), has also undergone a series of changes. The economic development associated with the extraordinary growth of the construction industry, and its complex impact on the socioeconomic system of Spain's Mediterranean coast, has led to a rapid increase in migration flows to this region from other parts of Spain, from Central and Northern European countries, and in recent years, from Eastern Europe, South America and Northern Africa. The development of tourist activity in the destination area brings about multiple effects that are recorded both objectively and subjectively, changing the residents' perception of the visitors, their own town and the meaning of tourism.

Alicante's coastal towns have undergone substantial social changes. One of the most noticeable, often mentioned by the interviewees, has to do with language. Valencian, the most widely spoken language in the region, has been replaced by Spanish and, in certain areas, by English. Some of the interviewees, when trying to explain this situation, suggest that it is actually what tourists look for:

> *When English people think about Spain they think 'sun', well, good weather, and cheap prices. I think that's more or less it. What many of them are looking for is England with sun and cheap prices; that's exactly what they want in this area… There are many English people and they don't like speaking Spanish or mixing with Spaniards: they want England here (Foreign Citizens Department staff).*

However, the situation is far more complex. Many international visitors interested in residential tourism developments experience a dissonance between what they expect and what they get. As several of those interviewed explain, tourists often feel disappointed when they cannot find the visible features of a 'Mediterranean or Spanish lifestyle', which nowadays is just an advertising concept. Such features include, for example, flamenco dancers or bullfights.

In relation to the spatial dimension of authenticity, the interviewees comment on the fact that the built environment has experienced a change almost as profound as that suffered by the population. Tourism has helped the Costa Blanca to undergo a process of modernisation. The area's economy has made a transition from an economic structure that relied upon agriculture and fishing to a structure based on the construction of apartments, hotels and other types of dwellings to accommodate tourists and second homes for new residents. This has changed the urban morphology of Alicante's coastal towns; the traditionally small homes have been replaced by new buildings that have nothing to do with the pre-1960s urban landscape. At worst, some traditional elements are occasionally present in new buildings and this blend of architectural styles produces tasteless outcomes.

The environment has also undergone changes; there are considerable differences between these towns. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents admit that tourism development has mostly damaged the region's landscape. Some of the most severe criticism goes along these lines:

> Property developers and urban planners have made decisions mainly based on profit-making reasons; they have built new housing out of control, without planning permission, which has had a terrible impact on the environment… Some green areas of great value have been lost forever (Izquierda Verde —left-wing green party- town councillor).

When asked what course of action should be followed with the future in mind, we notice two different discourses articulated around the role authenticity can play in them:

- For the majority of interviewees that role is almost non-existent. The opinions shaping this discourse can be summed up in three basic ideas. Firstly, local authorities and decision-makers should keep the approach that has so far guided their actions while aiming to attract tourists with a higher spending power. Secondly, there is a concern that local infrastructures and services (hospitals, schools, roads, etc.) cannot cope with the high volume of visitors and new residents. Last but not least, they are also concerned about the negative impacts of tourism on the environment. Thus, the socio-spatial (built environment) and psychosocial dimensions of authenticity are pushed aside, or not mentioned at all by most of the interviewees:

> If people accept and like what we offer, why not keep offering it? I think that, even though it's said that sun and sea holidays are out, in fact they aren't because there will always be a tourist seeking sun and sea; people are different everywhere and everyone chooses what they like, don't they? So whatever we offer is good (Bloc Nacionalista Valenciá —left-wing regional nationalist party- town councillor).

When we talk about quality we mean an acceptable level of…a level of tourists who have a certain spending power (Bloc-Els Verds —a coalition of a left-wing and a green party- town councillor).

…tourism is a necessary industry; we're not turning away from it but we must look after it. We believe tourists must be offered something more than sun and sea because there is an end to that, and we must improve our town with services, as I've

already mentioned, with basic services and other activities other than sun and sea (Izquierda Unida —coalition of left-wing parties- town councillor).

- The role of authenticity in the discourse of the minority is two-sided. On one hand, it would mean revitalising authenticity, that is, something original and genuine that has been lost:
  …new types of tourism are being developed, not only on the coast but also in inland towns, directed towards products that take into consideration the local identity, the landscape, all the elements at the basis of the most traditional aspects of these towns (Scholar).

  …all those things that define ourselves and make us stand out, such as our culture, the way we enjoy our leisure time, the sea, the food…should be put in a splendid showcase (President of a Chamber of Commerce).

On the other hand, that role would involve inventing, recreating the elements of authenticity, whether or not they are fakes, in the sense we have discussed above, or new cultural products, that are more or less creative:

And I think that some of those towns with no appealing features, with no history, nor anything interesting to offer, well, they have to make up something, as they've already done; a literature prize or any other such nonsense, which has nothing to do with reality and serves no other purpose than coming out in the papers (Izquierda Unida town councillor).

There are less and less fishing boats because people don't want to go fishing and it's not profitable. So there aren't many left; some owners are turning them into a sort of small gondola to take travellers or tourists around, or something to that effect (PSOE town councillor).

Conclusions

We have examined how the local social agents in the main tourist destinations on Spain's Mediterranean coast perceive the role played by authenticity in attracting visitors or residents to those areas. We have adopted an exploratory approach and a qualitative methodology based on in-depth interviews. In the light of the findings discussed here, we have identified in the region studied a tourism development model that challenges the sociological theories put forward to explain the role that the search for authenticity plays in the motivation of tourists. Thus, the simultaneous desire for normality and authenticity shape a new pattern which directs the search for the Mediterranean lifestyle of an increasing number of tourists/residents from northern European countries. This wish has been neither understood nor internalised by the main decision-makers with regard to tourism planning policies in the tourist destinations on the Spanish Mediterranean coast. They follow two patterns in their decision-making process. In one of them, followed by most of these decision-making agents, authenticity is either deemed a secondary element or ignored. The other one is a two-sided approach to this issue. On one hand, authenticity is considered as a factor that can boost the revitalisation of lost original, genuine elements; on the other hand, authenticity is used as a reference to create cultural simulacra.

Our aim in this paper is to contribute to the reformulation of the theories about residential tourism, and the questioning of its nature. In this respect, we put forward two very different lines of interpretation. Firstly, we put forward a line of interpretation

radically opposed to the 'post-tourist' model proposed by Feifer, as well as to the reformulation of this model by John Urry and his concept of the 'post-(mass)tourist'. The lack of interest in the unusual, together with the search for 'normality and authenticity', leads us to a model of tourist much closer to Dean MacCannell's original idea. Secondly, an alternative interpretation questions the description of the behaviour patterns shown by northern European expatriates as being typical of tourists.

Local social agents are offering a product that tries to appeal to tourists with a higher spending power, or those who are more willing to travel - a kind of tourist that is not attracted by mass tourism destinations. Many of these tourists react by looking for the 'real' Mediterranean style, in other words, an authentic tourist experience on the Costa Blanca of Alicante. Therefore, it is essential to develop new theoretical perspectives and carry out further empirical research into the role played by authenticity. This should prove helpful in improving the quality of the tourist experience and in planning future development projects more efficiently.

Finally, we feel certain that empirical research must keep delving into the sociological keys that determine the 'search for authenticity' in the tourist experience. In our opinion, the epistemological difficulties this research has faced so far do not justify certain critical arguments that try to highlight, perhaps too soon, the lack of operativity of essential concepts and approaches such as that of authenticity (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; McCabe, 2005). Concepts and theoretical models should not be understood as mere speculations but as the result of a slow, cumulative work of empirical research to which all researchers can contribute, so as to help us understand reality. In that respect, it is encouraging to find studies that make an effort to produce explanatory models that take into consideration not only the findings of previous investigations, but also the criticism, to shape new guidelines for further research.

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