

As Real as it Gets: Authenticity and Tourism in Seychelles

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Introduction

In general, there is something tantalizing and ambivalent about the word 'authenticity'. When used in tourism literature, it reminds readers of the complexity of defining it and its ubiquitous usage in tourists' experience of developing and exotic destinations. However, although one might be tempted to discard the debate completely, it is important to note that the concept of authenticity has played an important role in the understanding of tourist motivation and experience (Kim and Jamal, 2007). It was introduced in tourism studies four decades ago by MacCannell (1973) and it became what Olsen (2012) has called 'a Grande Idee'. Although the concept of authenticity became a pivotal theory in tourism studies, it remained one of the most complex terms to explain (Croes et al., 2013). In fact, MacCannell, left the concept unexplicated (Cohen, 1979). Consequently, some authors have argued that the concept should be abandoned because of its instability and replaced by words such as 'genuine', 'actual', 'real' and 'true' (Cohen et al., 2012).

Laxson (1991) illustrated 'authenticity' as what motivated tourists in understanding and seeing native life as it is really lived. However, when something became a tourist attraction, he argued, it was no longer authentic (Laxson, 1991). Berger (1973) argued that authenticity emerged from the disintegration of sincerity. In other words, it was the opposite of sincerity. Cohen et al. (2012) have debated the polysemous meaning of 'authenticity' by suggesting that it could mean 'origins', 'genuine', 'unadulterated', 'the real thing', 'pristinity', and 'creativity'. But the most interesting suggestion so far, and arguably the most likely, was from Van den Abbeele, quoted in Cohen et al.(2012): 'Once a sight is marked as authentic... it is by the very fact of its being marked no longer quite authentic... Authenticity turns out to be an unstable quality: its very disclosure weakens it' (2012, p.253).

That said, most of these definitions indicate that authenticity originated from the tourist perspective and was directed towards an object or a site of attraction. However, much less was known about the concept being applied to the host in a tourist destination. In addition, relatively little research has been carried out on authenticity viewed from a small island state such as Seychelles. The current study aims to address these limitations through an empirical study where the concept of authenticity is critically investigated among the tourists and the locals in Seychelles.

This paper begins by reviewing the literature on past studies on authenticity and it will then go on to propose the methodology used to collect the empirical data. Finally, a critical discussion about authenticity in Seychelles and a conclusion will follow.

Literature review

In this section, I take a fresh look at the main points of contention, the agreements and disagreements, and the different approaches to what a tourist's authentic experience is. This review leads to a critical assessment of the various approaches such as the objective, constructivism and the post-modern view of tourists' authentic experience. Then, it is followed by the theory of existential authenticity as an alternative view to the three as developed by Wang (1999).

Authenticity and staged authenticity

Boorstin (1964) famously argued that tourists seldom like or seek the authentic but rather satisfy and crave for the copy or what he called the 'pseudo-event', which was the consequence of commoditization of culture and mass tourism. He argued that tourists had lost the adventurous aspect of travelling. They were in search of and interested in 'pseudo-events'. And these events were repeatable, contrived, and artificial, and made ready to be sold as a commodity. In other words, the tourists of today were no longer interested in the authentic, but in the fake. The pseudo-events overshadowed the spontaneous. Everything was planned for the tourists and the adventures were pre-fabricated; even a money-back guarantee was offered to ensure that the tourist saw what he expected to see or was promised to see.

Boorstin's view on travelling, however, met with some criticisms. One of the major critics was MacCannell (1973; 1989). Unlike Boorstin's views that travellers sought superficiality, MacCannell argued that tourists wanted an authentic experience. He argued that the tourists would seek the authentic, even though they may be presented with the fake or a copy. A phenomenon he called 'staged authenticity'. MacCannell (1973) believed that tourists travelled and sought for authenticity. They longed to have a meaningful and authentic experience in the host destination. Unfortunately, the authentic experience they desired so much did not materialize in its purest form, as it seemed impossible for what was advertised and commoditized for tourist consumption to be at the same time authentic. Therefore, what the tourist got was 'staged authenticity'. The authentic that was not real, but created just for tourists needs. But for MacCannell (1973), that experience of seeking authenticity involved what he called 'back and front regions', a term which was coined by Goffman (1990) who distinguished, during a performance, a 'front region' from a 'back region' or a 'backstage'. For the first, it was the place where the performance was given, whilst the backstage was where the suppressed facts made an appearance (Goffman, 1990, pp.110-114). The two regions were adjacent to each other. But the spectators were located in the front region where the 'show' took place. But the most important place was

the back region which was reserved for the actors where anything could be said or done without being censored. In other words, it was a place where actors could be themselves. It was the 'place where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude' (Goffman, 1990, p.115). In MacCannell's (1973) view, tourists' motivation was a quest to experience authenticity, for example, getting closer to the natives and understanding their culture, tradition and how they lived. But what was offered to them was a mere staging. What appeared to be an authentic experience was nothing less than an apparent 'show' prepared in advance for tourists' consumption. However, there was a third view, which accorded with neither Boorstin's nor MacCannell's views but which introduced a third concept through a phenomenological typology.

Cohen's phenomenological typology

Cohen (1988) developed five modes of tourist experience, called a 'phenomenological typology' in order to argue that there were different motives behind a tourist's trip. He based his typology on the belief that the tourist, as the traveller, was in pursuit of pleasure and the modern pilgrim was in search of meaning in the other's milieu.

With the first mode, the 'recreational mode', Cohen (1988) argued that the tourist, under the pressure of daily life, got away and sought pleasure and entertainment because these restored his physical and mental powers. In that sense, the experience of the trip was inauthentic and contrived. This mode illustrated the ludic experience such as Disneyland. The tourist 'believes not because he is ignorant, superficial or cheated, but in order to playfully experience that apparent reality' (Cohen, 1985, p.298). However, we cannot generalize that all contrived experience was known to the tourist, as some could be purely staged and sold to the tourist as authentic. In my opinion, the difference here between the playful experience and the staged authentic was that the tourist knowingly travelled to experience the playful, so there was no expectation of authenticity.

In contrast, the 'diversionary mode' was also a 'getaway', but not necessarily from the daily pressure of life, but from the alienation of one's own society and culture. As Cohen (1988) put it, 'strictly speaking, their life is meaningless, but they are not looking for meaning, whether in their own society or elsewhere' (Cohen, 1988, p.185). So, in this mode, the recreational aspect was absent. It was an escape from the boredom and the meaningless routine of everyday life. The two modes described so far were similar to Boorstin's (1964) concept of pseudo-event, and that was why even the attitudes of the two modes were criticized by Boorstin himself as being the reason why we have mass tourism today.

The third mode, the 'experiential', was the experience of the tourist or the alienated individual who longed to transform his existence by seeking meaning, outside his own society, in the life of others (Cohen, 1979). This type of tourist seemed to ignore the authentic life in his own society, or found it contrived, but decided to reverse that by looking for meaning elsewhere. Similarly, Silver (1993) argued by stating that

routinization and bureaucratization caused people to lose sense of what was authentic, therefore they believed that they had to find it outside the western world, or, to put it simply, beyond their inauthenticity.

The last two modes, the 'experimental' and the 'existential', were not found in either Boorstin's or MacCannell's studies. For the experimental, the individual was also alienated by his society and all the values therein, therefore he searched for an alternative to be able to find himself. But in reality, he did not know what he was looking for, that was why he proceeded by trial and error. In other words, he became an eternal seeker. Some of those individuals sought the alternative in mysticism or drugs and others through travelling; for instance, young people travelling to live in farming communities, or on an Israeli kibbutz, or in the Indian ashrams (Cohen, 1979). While the experimental individual was an eternal seeker, the existential one was an extreme that was fully committed to what Cohen called 'an elective spiritual centre' that was external to his own society and culture (Cohen, 1979, p.190). This individual switched worlds, moving from his own to another that he was fully committed to. Such people would desire to go native, for example, by becoming Hindu recluses, Israeli kibbutz members. In fact, what made this mode become a touristic phenomenon was because some tourists would not move permanently to their new found haven, but instead they would continue living the alienated, meaningless life in their own society and then make the trip periodically, as a pilgrimage to derive spiritual sustenance (Cohen, 1979).

Amidst the debate, it was Wang (1999) who, in my opinion, brought some clarity into the discussion through a three-type classification: the objective authenticity, the constructive authenticity, and the postmodern authenticity.

The modern and postmodern classification of authenticity

The objective authenticity was originally used in the museum context whereby an object was characterized as authentic if it was original, not a copy or re-reproduced. Either it was created or painted by someone that was known as the author or the object was recognized as belonging to a community either in existence or disappeared. In the tourism context, however, the objective authenticity represented the toured experience of the tourist as authentic or genuine. For example, tourists visiting the 'Vallee de Mai' in Seychelles can claim an authentic experience. Or we can refer to the Mona Lisa portrait exhibited in Paris, where tourists may feel they are experiencing an authentic viewing because they know that the Louvre hosts the original portrait. Consequently, to confine it to the simplistic definition as meaning 'the original' was over simplistic (Wang, 1999). For that reason, another view on the matter was the constructivism approach.

The constructive authenticity as its name indicated was constructed by the person experiencing the event. It was not inherent to the originality of the toured object but how the subject projected values onto it was what made it authentic. Quoting Bruner (1994, p.408), Wang (1999, p.355) stated: 'No longer is authenticity a property inherent in an

object, forever fixed in time; it is seen as a struggle, a social process, in which competing interests argue for their own interpretation of history'. In other words, the tourists' redefinition of their authentic experience became subjective and mainly based on their own worldviews, perceptions, prejudices, beliefs, expectations, preferences and stereotyped images (Wang, 1999). Therefore, constructive authenticity, also called symbolic, has little to do with reality. It was, more often than not, a projection of certain stereotyped images held and circulated within tourist-sending societies, particularly within the mass media and tourism marketing documents of western societies (Britton, 1979; Silver, 1993).

The third approach to authenticity in the tourist experience was postmodernism. The modernists were mainly exemplified by the approaches taken by Boorstin (1964) and MacCannell (1973), where they were more concerned with 'original' or 'reality', 'pseudo-events' or 'staged authenticity'. For the postmodernists, inauthenticity was not the issue. It was all about the experience; how convincing it was or, in another words, how well the unreal was made real. The example mostly cited is Disney World where nothing there could be characterized as real. However, the experience was argued to be authentic. Quoting McCrone, Morris and Kiely (1995), Wang (1999, p. 357) cited: 'Authenticity and originality are, above all, matters of technique... what is interesting to postmodernists about heritage is that reality depends on how convincing the presentation is, how well the 'staged authenticity' works... The more 'authentic' the representation, the more 'real' it is.'

These three approaches to authenticity focused more or less on the toured objects and have been commodified to the extent that the tourist experience became a subject of intense and inconclusive debate thus leading to various divergent views as the literature has revealed. However, the three approaches did not necessarily reveal feelings nor any internal intention that would suggest the impact of the visit on the tourist's wellbeing. What all three approaches have fixated on was what was already pre-packaged for the tourist, what the marketers or even the hosts had intentionally planned for them, and that was why defining the tourist experience on what was authentic or not was not clear cut. Therefore, Wang (2000, p.70) proposed an alternative to what authenticity meant for the tourist: not only their experience with the toured objects, but what he or she did or felt during the experience; something not made for them or pre-packaged for them. She named it existential authenticity.

Existential authenticity and congruency

Wang (1999) argued that: 'What tourists seek are their own authentic selves or inter-subjective authenticity, and the issue of whether toured objects are authentic is irrelevant, or less relevant.' So, if tourists were in search of their own authentic selves, this means that there was something they did that fulfilled such a desire. Wang (1999) called the concept the 'existential authenticity'.

The existential authenticity is an activity-related authenticity compared to the previous ones, which were object related. Wang's (1999) definition of the existential authenticity was fundamentally based on an ontological conception of existential authenticity. In common- sense terms, existential authenticity denoted a special state of 'Being', in which one was true to oneself, and acted as a counter dose to the loss of 'true self' in public roles and public spheres in modern western society (Berger, 1973). Quoting Heidegger (1962), Wang (1999, p.358) stated that 'to ask about the meaning of 'Being' was to look for the meaning of authenticity'. Therefore, in this case, having an existential authentic experience has nothing to do with the object toured being authentic or not. But rather what the tourist did and felt, what satisfied his or her 'Being'. In another words, it was for one to be true to oneself. This means that other people cannot determine what was authentic for the other person. However, although the object-related authenticity was discarded here, it did not mean that it cannot impact the Being, thus creating an existential authenticity or experience. For example, a visit to the 'Vallee de Mai' forest in Seychelles might be such a moving and authentic experience to a tourist, not because of the uniqueness of the place but rather because they felt a transformation within that generated a peaceful experience. In this case the nut in the Vallee de Mai was not the authentic experience, but the inner peace of the tourist, the transformation of his or her Being. According to Wang (1999, p. 360), 'a sense of 'authentic self' involves a balance between two parts of one's Being: reason and emotion, self-constraint and spontaneity, Logos and Eros, or what Freud calls the 'reality principle' and the 'pleasure principle'.

In psychology, a similar meaning was illustrated in the context of communication between a therapist and a client. Carls Rogers (1961;1980) has used the term 'congruence' interchangeably with 'genuineness' and 'realness' with the fundamental basis of remaining authentic to oneself during communications. He claimed: 'I feel a sense of satisfaction when I can dare to communicate the realness in me to another' (1980, p.16). That communication between him and the other person has to be genuine without any façade, openly being the feelings and attitudes which at that moment are flowing in him. He explained:

It is a sparkling thing when I encounter realness in another person. Sometimes in the basic encounter groups which have been a very important part of my experience these last few years, someone says something that comes from him transparently and whole. It is so obvious when a person is not hiding behind a façade but is speaking from deep within himself. From what I have been saying, I trust it is clear that when I can permit realness in myself or sense it or permit it in another, I am very satisfied. When I cannot permit it in myself or fail to permit it in another, I am very distressed. When I am able to let myself be congruent and genuine, I often help the other person. When the other person is transparently real and congruent, he often helps me. In those rare moments when a deep realness in one meets a realness in the other, a memorable 'I-thou relationship', as Martin Buber call it, occurs. Such a deep and mutual personal encounter does not happen often, but I am convinced that unless it happens occasionally, we are not living as human beings.

(Rogers, 1980, pp.16–19)

The quotation above set the fundamental base to the understanding of the congruence theory. It was the removal of the façade and letting the true feelings out that Rogers meant here. His use of 'I' and the other person, putting it into the context of psychotherapy, was the client and the therapist relationship; he, Rogers, being the therapist. For client satisfaction in therapy, a lot of emphasis was placed on the therapist being transparent, real, genuine and not hiding behind a façade. The feelings the therapist was experiencing were available to him, available to his awareness, and he was able to live these feelings, be them, and be able to communicate them if appropriate (Rogers, 1961).

Rogers (1961) argued that for congruency to happen there needed to be a match between experience and awareness. During the therapy, the therapist must show exactly what he was and not put up a façade, act a role, or even pretend. When he was fully and accurately aware of what he was experiencing, that was when he was congruent. The third element he added, which was communication, was important for the expression of what one was feeling. One cannot express something and then communicate something else. That was incongruency.

For example, when a baby was experiencing hunger at the physiological and visceral level, then his awareness appeared to match his experience and his communication was also congruent with his experience. He was hungry and dissatisfied, and this was true of him at all levels (Rogers, 1961). However, the experience was not the same for an adult, who during an argument became angry and made angry gestures. When asked why he was angry, he denied it and claimed he was not. According to Rogers (1961), it seemed clear that at a physiological level he was experiencing anger. But this was not matched by his awareness. Consciously, he was not experiencing anger, nor was he communicating this. There was a real incongruence between experience and awareness, and between experience and communication.

In summary, it has been shown from this review that authenticity is a complex construct when viewed from tourist's experience perspective. Despite the different approaches to understand it, the concept remained open for further debates. However, it appeared that the existential view proposed by Wang (1999) and illustrated by Rogers's (1961) theory of congruency may direct the debate to another direction where the views of tourists and the hosts may be taken into consideration to determine authenticity. Therefore, the specific question which drives this research is: What is authenticity in the context of Seychelles tourism? In the next section, the methodology that was used to answer the research question will be studied.

Methodology

The methodology of this paper is mainly qualitative, interpretivist, and it is based on findings and conclusion from an unpublished doctoral thesis (Atayi, 2020) which

researched the image of Seychelles from tourists and locals' perspective. In this, I used photo-elicitation to interview 50 participants, among which half were tourists and half locals. Additionally, a group discussion was performed to make sense of the respondents' views on the image of Seychelles. The findings revealed that the image of Seychelles can be summarized as Place (beautiful place), People (kind people), and Price (expensive). These 3Ps, were a combination of physical attributes of the place and the actors' lived experience. However, although a lot of emphasis was on the aesthetic beauty of the place, the word 'authenticity' was not mentioned in the interviews even though it was implicitly referred to. Therefore, a closer interpretation of the findings was necessary to understand the underlined message relating to what is authentic about Seychelles.

I used interpretivism to re-read and understand the meaning from the interview transcripts. So, there was no further need for me to re-collect the data for this topic. Interpretivism is an epistemological position that requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p.728). Hudson and Ozanne (1988, p.513) argued that the primary goal of the interpretivist was to understand and interpret behaviour and not predict it.

This interpretative strategy was inductive by essence, meaning that I may not come into the research with some pre-defined understanding of what the images could mean for the respondents; thus, my reliance on the respondents to provide the knowledge. With this stance, the researcher may come up with some surprising findings (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p.21) as long as he or she was open to new information (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988, p.513). But these pieces of information were not final, they were incomplete. In fact, they need to be interpreted, as the current interpretation may influence future interpretation, or the ones from other respondents. As argued by Denzin and cited by Hudson and Ozanne (1988, p.510), 'one never achieves the understanding, one achieves an understanding'. It was therefore a never-ending process, similar to the hermeneutics circle principle which says that to understand the whole, one needs to grasp the meaning of the parts, in an interdependency manner (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000, p.53). This view was also similar to the constructionism understandings which assume meaning and understanding were not developed through one individual only, but the work of other coordinated social actors (Symon and Cassell, 2012). Robson (2002) argued that researchers using constructionism seek to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge, hence they tend to use interviews to allow them to acquire multiple perspectives.

The 'hermeneutic circle' of Gadamer was selected as one of the philosophical theories that positioned the researcher as the one facilitating the interpretation by taking into consideration his own worldviews and prejudices and those of his respondents in order to reach knowledge or understanding. I selected this approach for two main reasons, among others. Firstly, in my opinion, the hermeneutic circle explained the process of how one gets knowledge of something better than the theories of the naturalists and empiricists. They re-enforced the general view that to understand human beings and their actions we

must put ourselves in their position, meaning thinking their thoughts and feeling their feelings (Martin, 1994). Secondly, Gadamer's approach was well-suited for the craft and the understanding of the study of tourists' and locals' experience in Seychelles, which was based on a qualitative approach. Elements such as history, culture, prejudice, and the worldviews of both the researcher and the respondent were prime to the success of the interviews. As Gadamer (Hollis, 1994) claimed, the individual was secondary and history (culture and tradition) was primary.

Besides the hermeneutic circle, the theory of fusion of horizons was also an enabler to understand the narratives. Ultimately, the aim of my selected methodology was to reach truth and knowledge. As argued by Gadamer (1975), the study of society should be concerned with the truth, therefore the fusion of horizons illustrates how, as researcher, I should seek to understand the interviewee, his or her worldview, the milieu, the job, and, in general, his or her horizon. It was an emphatic process whereby the researcher was required to be in the other person's shoes in order to ask the right questions that would lead to the correct answers which would produce the proper knowledge. It was not necessary for both parties to agree with each other, but during the dialogue there was a constant movement of clarification and probing that gradually led to understanding. In the next section, I will look at how authenticity was implied during the interviews and what it meant for both tourists and locals in Seychelles.

Authenticity and tourism in Seychelles

First of all, the word 'authentic' or 'authentic experience' is not used in any of the interviews, nor in reference to the tourists' motivation for coming to Seychelles. Rather, the majority of the respondents seem to be more excited by the fact they will discover something exotic and paradisaic. Even during their stay, they did not directly express having an authentic experience, at least not in those exact words; however, it can be implied, through their appreciation of what the destination has to offer, that they had a good experience. The way they describe their experience of nature, the cleanliness and the emptiness of the beaches, the peacefulness of the destination and the kindness of the people, could all lead to them having had an 'authentic experience', or something that could be defined as such. As the data analysis revealed, there are three themes that came out as dominant in the tourist interviews: the people's kindness, which was the major theme; followed by the beauty of the place; and, finally, the expensiveness of the destination.

I'm arguing in this paper, that if these three themes are what defined their experience here in Seychelles, then one could consider them as motivating or de-motivating factors, and therefore directly linked with the authenticity of their experience if I follow the approach of Wang (1999, 2000) on the meaning of existential authenticity. I can hardly say, at this point, if their experience was object-related authenticity or not. Rather, it is more their

actions: what they did and felt in the destination, that may characterize their experience as existential.

Starting with the 'People' factor, it is generally agreed among the tourist respondents that local people in Seychelles are kind because they smile, and they give directions to tourists freely and politely. What is startling about attributing 'being nice' to the locals in Seychelles is that the latter reject such a characterization. In the data analysis, the locals do not feel they are being nice, but rather that they behave as anyone should when asked for directions; an ideological view which is not the same everywhere. It should be pointed out that the kindness attribute was linked to it being the natural attitude of the locals to lend a helping hand. They don't consider such acts as something worth praising nor do they do it with the aim of motivating tourists to tour the destination.

What is noticeable here, and also confirmed in the literature, is that tourists are alienated in their daily lives and seek refuge in other destinations, at least for a short time. They search and long for an authentic experience, either in the sense of Wang's (1999) existential understanding of it, or MacCannell's staged authenticity (1973), or Boorstin's pseudo-events experience (1964). It seems to me, through the analysis of the data, that in their quest to conform their experience to what they previously knew about the destination, and the stereotype they were exposed to, through media and literature, they tend to impose those commodified values onto the locals. They want the hosts to be friendly, to conform to the attributes and the characteristics of the 'other' found in the exotic tourist destinations. We have seen the same phenomenon in Tana Toraja (Adams, 1984) when the locals were encouraged to keep their dwellings and traditions old and archaic so as to conform to tourists' expectations. The aim being to commodify such values, traditions and artefacts and present to the tourists a destination which is still old and stuck in the past (Adams, 1984). In Seychelles, the locals, during the interviews, seem to be more vocal in denouncing the stereotypes and the attempting to label them as something they feel they are not. But this is not just about themselves. Even when the second theme is considered, which is 'Place', we see similar attitudes.

Tourists claim that the environment of Seychelles resembles a paradise where the verdure is clean with pristine waters and lush vegetation. However, the locals, although agreeing that the place is beautiful, oppose the view that Seychelles is a paradise, in the sense that is used by tourists visiting the destination. It is important to point out that the idea of paradise is sold to tourists before even making the trip (Echtner, 2010; Dann, 1996). Based on tourists' description of the place as paradise, such a place has to be beautiful, surreal, relaxing; and worries or poverty should not be part of the daily reality (Schellhorn and Perkins, 2004). It is this interpretation, that makes Seychelles appear like a Nirvana, that locals reject and resist. Whilst tourists seem to look at the external aspects and the superficiality of the destination, the reality of everyday life is different, from the locals' perspective.

Instead of the locals trying to hide the harsh realities of the destination, they have been genuine about it by ‘unmasking the paradise’. They reveal what lies underneath the façade of paradise by speaking out and denouncing the injustices, the plague of drug use, the poverty and the corruption. One French respondent, working in the hotel sector, confirms the point, by revealing in his interview that locals should stop telling their life stories to tourists as they are only here for few weeks and not interested in locals’ personal lives. In fact, this is the thought of most tourists and the question that needs to be asked is whether tourists really care about the locals or even try to understand them. Because of the shortness of the visit, each party is prevented from forming a concrete idea about the other, even if the interest is there (Garcia, 1988). In my opinion, when locals try to express themselves by pointing out their realities, the intention is not to generate pity but rather to show to the outside world that the notion of paradise is not necessarily genuine as painted by marketers and tourists. Furthermore, it seems there are deliberate attempts to quash and play down the fact that island destinations are different from others; that they don’t fit the description of other poor countries; that the myth of ‘paradise’ is taken literally and protects them against poverty and harsh realities. But the social and economic reality of the destination is very different to the myths and the theme of ‘price’ expresses it better.

The last theme in the data, which is ‘Price’, does not only mean the monetary value of what is consumed or purchased by the tourists, but rather covers other factors such as labour, dependency and why the destination is perceived as being very expensive. It needs to be pointed out that the data reveals that tourists find the place very expensive and not as cheap or affordable as they are used to finding in developing countries. As pointed out by Crick:

Tourists do not go to the third world countries because the people are friendly, they go because a holiday there is cheap, and that cheapness is, in part, a matter of the poverty of the people, which derives in some theoretical formulation directly from the affluence of those in the formerly metropolitan centers of the colonial system

(1989, p.319)

In the case of Seychelles, locals react by claiming the concept of island paradox being the reason for the expensiveness: because they are small they can’t produce much, and they can’t produce much of benefit through economy of scale because they are small and have limited resources due their geographical condition. Besides, what is significant about this theme is that underneath the high-price factor, there is the theory of dependency (Britton, 1982) that influences the cost of almost everything. For example, the control of the marketing machine by foreign investors, the labour in the tourism sector which is also imported because the locals lack such skills. There is a power-play relationship here which is denounced today in Seychelles. The locals claim that foreigners take all their jobs and they have to depend on foreign labour.

What the three themes teach us in relation to authenticity is that the latter is like a mask that the tourist brings along to the destination. They know already what to expect, they

have their own views of what could be authentic and what might not be, and they are expecting that whatever is seen or experienced in the destination matches what the mask carries. For example, in this study, the respondents had a pre-set definition of what is it for the locals to be 'friendly'. Once the host keeps smiling and serving and helping then, de facto, they are friendly. They came with their set view of the place; as one of the expatriate respondents stated, he had never been to Seychelles or heard about it before, but when he was offered the job and heard the name, he knew that it would be beautiful, exotic and paradisiac. Regarding the price, they complain about how expensive everything is in the destination. They expect it to be cheaper and more affordable without any consideration of the economic situation of the host. Authenticity is therefore becoming just a mere romanticism and mostly generated by the West.

Most studies and literature reviewed focus more on the demand side of authenticity which is translated exactly through the mask they bring to the destination. The focus is usually on tourists searching for authentic experiences and less attention is paid to the provider of the experience, in this case the locals. Chhabra (2003) makes a similar point when he suggests that authenticity has been traditionally defined from the supplier side or from the tourist side. That is also probably why not much attention has been paid to the host. It is always assumed that the visitor, the spender who undoubtedly is the one with the financial means, is the one that defines and dictates what is authentic. However, in the next section, I argue that the object of authenticity remains more with the host than the visitor.

The locals' authenticity

The data collected during this study have shown a different tendency and approach to who initiates authenticity – is it from the tourist's perspective or the local's? The point that is made here is that what the tourist considers an authentic experience is not the same as what the local values as such. There is nothing extraordinary for tourists to claim they are having an authentic experience, but it is peculiar for the host to disapprove of and contradict the tourists' views, especially if the former is from a developing destination.

The locals in Seychelles just want to be themselves in whatever they do or say. They want to express themselves freely and honestly without any fear of turning tourists away. They want to portray a reality they are living as a nation and discard the myths that tourists come along with. Is that authenticity? One could argue otherwise, but I think the locals are being authentic. Everything they have been doing so far is a form of articulation and expression. They are using their voice to point out injustice, inner feelings and, mostly, to correct prejudice and reject stereotype. For example, the locals refute being called friendly. What does this actually mean? The locals sound as if they are setting the record straight: friendliness is not something one detects after spending a few minutes asking someone for directions or being given a quick smile by a waiter or waitress in the hotel. More importantly, the attribute is so overrated in similar situations across the world, when tourists are visiting developing destinations, that it loses its credibility.

Our data also reveal that locals choosing their own pictures that define the image of Seychelles is also a form of articulation and freedom. They have found their voice through the selection of the photographs that best represent their nation and values. Their photographs are not always about beautiful sites, like beaches, compared to those of the tourists, but they took photographs of places that are dirty, where the environment has been violated, and sea turtles killed for consumption. This shows that locals do not hide behind the benefits of tourism and they do not compromise their integrity, but rather denounce the laissez-faire attitude and carelessness of their own countrymen, which may hurt their own heritage which is the 'unspoilt Seychelles'.

Even in terms of price, the locals have been authentic when charging high prices and by defending their actions. That is why bargaining does not really work in Seychelles as it does in other destinations where the tourist is warned to bargain hard before buying. They don't let the buyer, in this case, the tourist, decide the price. They speak out and give a rational explanation of why the prices are high and point out the injustice of dependency and the imbalance of the labour market.

In these three circumstances, I would like to argue that resistance is at the centre of the locals' views on People, Place and Price, the three themes that were at the centre the image of Seychelles. So, it seems that locals are being authentic when they resist certain attributes that are brought in by tourists. They want to find their own identity and not have it dictated to them. This is contrary to the literature which reveals that in some circumstances, the host self-transforms only to please the visitor and perpetuate the stereotype. The host is authentic when they argue that the tourists' notion of paradise does not reflect theirs. And, finally, they are authentic when they charge high prices despite the risk of losing returning visitors.

The courage of the locals to deny, refute and resist any identification, characterization and description of their daily life and environment introduces us to another form of authenticity which is dissimilar to Wang's (1999) existential authenticity and the object-related authenticity for that matter. Whilst the former emphasizes an activity-based authenticity, meaning that tourists experience authenticity in what they do and not what they see, the locals in Seychelles look at authenticity from a different perspective. This is a shift in the debate, as argued earlier, when authenticity is from the tourists' perspective. Moreover, it is used here as self-identity, self-discovery and as a resistance tool. The role is reversed and the host takes the rein of defining and setting the rules for what is authentic, thus becoming the one that is authentic. Due to the fact that the locals' authenticity does not have the tourist as the initiator compared to object-related and activity-related that do, therefore it needs its own classification because it doesn't fall under any of the main approaches studied earlier.

This self-identification, articulation, and the desire to express oneself by refuting and resisting the myths and the stereotypes is behavioural-related authenticity. It comes from

within oneself, from a strong desire to be true to oneself and to one's values and the 'ideal self'. I borrow the term 'congruence', which is a concept developed in psychology by Carl Rogers (1961,1980), to describe the authenticity as experienced by locals in Seychelles. I coin it 'congruent authenticity'.

Congruent authenticity

Although Rogers does not develop the concept for use in tourism, it is important to assess its appropriateness to the tourist experience. This theory is helpful in contributing to the understanding of the relationship between the visitor and the host as two beings that cross paths and need each other for authenticity to happen. This new element in the debate allows us to view authenticity from another perspective, which is the perspective of the local. It has always been assumed that authenticity has to come from the visitor's perspective, but during their exchange in the destination, both tourists and hosts contribute to make the experience of the visitor memorable to the detriment of the local. One could argue that the local, somehow, is also a beneficiary of the transaction, in terms of monetary value. But what is important here is the inner benefit of the experience. The three approaches of authenticity make it clear that the tourist is benefiting from the experience. Even Wang's (1999) alternative to the three approaches, the existential, is also a point of concern, as the tourist is still the one that generates the interest, the one that experiences the toured object.

Using the theory of congruence, one can argue that for a 'real' or 'genuine' experience to take place, as per Roger's concept, one needs to let down the façade and be the person inside, and communicate as such. During a psychotherapeutic session this theory makes sense, as it is between the patient and the therapist and truth and genuineness are required for healing. But this could be problematic in the tourism sector in which the whole point is to provide service and satisfaction. If these things do not happen, then the effect is felt in terms of bad reviews and the credibility of the service in the destination. Especially today, with the rise of social media, a positive or negative review could easily affect a business that provides services. Tourists have a tendency to check online reviews before making a trip or choosing a particular service to consume. For example, one of the tourists states in the interviews that he was early for his breakfast and wanted to have it before the rest of the guests arrived, but on that morning the restaurant was not ready to serve food. The tourist states that the facial expression of the waitress showed her displeasure. Although she didn't communicate it, the behaviour did. This is congruity. This could have been incongruence if the waitress, although unhappy, kept her smile and adopted a positive composure in order to please the guest.

So, how do we reconcile the experience of locals in Seychelles who seem to be more expressive of their sentiments than interested in safeguarding the tourism or service industry? How would the local being congruent be beneficial to the tourist experience? One could rightly argue that it could be bad for the destination as it would create a discrepancy between what the brochures promote and the reality as experienced by the

tourists. However, I would argue that the tourists' true intention is neither to enjoy the fake or the staged. They inherently and genuinely desire to experience the authentic. The question that needs to be asked is why would they pay for a trip to discover and experience new things, that they don't have in their own periphery, and then settle for the staged and the pseudo? This brings me to argue that the congruent behaviour displayed by the hosts helps both the tourists and the hosts to achieve their own fulfilment and authentic experience. How does this happen? Apparently, as argued by Bruner (1991), tourists are not transformed by their trip because of the superficiality of the experience. He states that there is a discrepancy between the discourse on what the tourist is promised through the brochures and the actual experience in the host destination.

In my view, the transformation of the tourist does not only happen on a sensorial level as Bruner (1991) claims. On a sensorial level, one remembers the experience of the trip years later by what was seen, eaten and touched, even by the smell of the place. For example, someone that vacationed near a fishing resort, will hardly forget the fishy smell of the area. Instead, one can also remember very well, on an intellectual level, what the people of the area were like. For example, who they were, what was their mental and social state, how they felt about life and tourism in general. In my opinion, this is probably where we can experience a transformation in a tourist. But this transformation occurs on the basis that the hosts themselves facilitate it. In the case of Seychelles, the locals' tendency to articulate their views on various aspects of their life is poignant; the way they feel about their own identity, the economic dependency and the environmental concerns affecting the islands. They are seen as people resisting external and internal influences. This may have an intellectual impact on the visitor who realizes that they are dealing with principled people, not people who will hide behind a façade or fabricate their own realities to please tourists or to conform to the tourist brochures' narratives.

During a recent trip to Vietnam, the first thing the guide announced in the bus taking us for a tour was that we could ask him any questions about Vietnam and he would respond; but if we asked about politics, he would not answer as he did not want to get into trouble or lose his job. This prompts me to argue that the tour guide might not have given us a full view of what it is like to be in Vietnam, and he might also have hidden some facts from us, just to protect his job and the industry.

The transformation of the tourists is therefore on two levels. The sensorial and the intellectual. They can have an authentic experience if the host is frank, genuine, and not hiding behind a façade. In fact, for the tourist to experience a congruent authenticity, the hosts have to fulfil their part in being congruent themselves: 'real' and 'genuine'. As I said earlier, they are also transformed in the process. Whilst most of the literature claims the transformation (sensual) is of the tourist, this study proposes that the locals, in the case of Seychelles, are also transformed. Although economic and social transformation ring true, I am proposing and adding that, in Seychelles, the locals' transformation is not only economic or social. Locals are transformed on an ideological basis, knowing that they can

articulate their feelings and make their own choices in terms of what they consider to be the image of Seychelles, even though there might be divergent views from those of the tourists. In the study, locals chose their own images and photographed their places of interest. Most photographs are similar to the tourists', but one particular theme that seems important for the locals, yet not highlighted in the tourists' transcripts, is the cleanliness, the preserving of the environment and the protection of the endangered species. The locals believe that if these are lost, then Seychelles will cease to exist as 'the unique' destination in the region.

Conclusion

Although I argue in my literature review that the concept of authenticity is confusing, relative, and subjective due to its ubiquity in the literature, it does however, contribute to understanding the tourist experience. This paper has shown that the Seychelles experience does not directly talk about authenticity. The interviewees do not mention it, however through their use of words and actions, one can see that the concept of authenticity arises. It does not arise by following the traditional approaches – which are the objective, constructive and postmodern. Even the alternative approach, which is the existential authenticity cannot help to categorize the Seychelles experience, because the focus is on the host experience instead of the visitor. The former rejects anything that points to objective and constructive authenticity by resisting the stereotype of 'friendliness', 'paradise' and the 'cheap' holiday. I therefore argue that the object of authenticity in this context of Seychelles remains more with the host than the visitor, thus creating what I coin 'congruent authenticity' following the work of Carl Rogers. The importance of the congruent authenticity is that when exercised, it helps both tourists and locals experience a better authentic experience. During that experience, the former deal with a genuine and principled host that does not play a role, whilst the latter creates their own identity by articulating who they are and not what brochures and marketers want them to be.

For the practitioner, understanding what is authentic about Seychelles' tourism may be a selling point for the destination. Whilst other destinations may try to stage authenticity through their offerings, the Seychelles tourism industry can devise means to offer what is genuine and unique to the country by focusing more on its people, especially their diversity. Moreover, since locals' attitudes have been key to the determination of authenticity, their involvement in key tourism decisions would further promote the positive image of Seychelles.

This paper was limited to interpret and define authenticity from a phenomenological standpoint, a future study may look at a similar concept but from ethnographic perspectives such as the markers of its culture. The cultural diversity of the population and its mixed traditions of Europeans, Africans and Asians would further enhance the existing literature on Seychelles' tourism.

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