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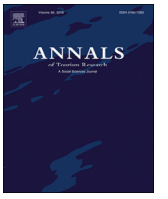

Full Length Article

The emergence of authenticity: Phases of tourist experience

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ABSTRACT

Using the philosophy of critical realism, this article conceptualizes authenticity as a process of emergence to address the question: What makes authenticity possible? This envisions distinct authenticity phases, which are episodic, non-linear, and porous, accompanied by external triggers and internal processes that manifest before, during, and after travel, as perceived in relation to or activated by tourist experiences. Thus, pre-, proto-, in-situ, and post-authenticity phases are outlined and supported by current literature. In doing so, this article situates our current thinking about authenticity, which often foregrounds in-situ experience, within a broader understanding of its relationality to our social worlds beyond destinations. Finally, this approach offers new research avenues that emphasise the on-going emergent nature of authenticity over time.

Introduction

What makes authenticity possible? Among the many debates about authenticity in tourism studies, it is largely acknowledged that authenticity is a socially constructed concept. Emergence is a crucial, yet under-examined, aspect of its social construction. "Since authenticity is not a primitive given, but negotiable, one has to allow for the possibility of its gradual emergence" (Cohen, 1988, p.379). While tourism scholars have developed a robust conceptualisation of the social processes that drive authentication (Cohen & Cohen, 2012), there remains a gap in our understanding of how the individual negotiates authenticity, enters into the social construction process, and is subsequently influenced by it. Thus, driven by the above question, this paper addresses this knowledge gap by working from the following key conditions: (1) the social construction process must be triggered in each individual; (2) authenticity is relational – it operates both objective and subjectively (De Andrade-Matos, Richards, & de Azevedo Barbosa, 2022; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Rickly-Boyd, 2012a); (3) the increasingly philosophical treatment of authenticity, while valuable in stimulating creative thinking, can be abstracted from lived tourist experience (Moore, Buchmann, Månsson, & Fisher, 2021; Zhu, 2012).

As a guide for navigating this question, we employ critical realism as a philosophy that contends that ontology is not reducible to epistemology (Fletcher, 2017). Overcoming the inconsistencies of positivism and interpretivism, critical realism proposes a social reality split between the transitive domain of knowledge and intransitive domain of the objects of our knowledge (Bhaskar, 2008 [1975]). In other words, critical realism "treats the world as theory-laden, but not theory-determined" (Fletcher, 2017, p.182). Such a philosophical lens allows us to map the emergence of authenticity and its alignment with other "emergent entities" (Bhaskar, 2008[1975]), such as semiotics.

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While not the most prolific philosophical perspective in tourism studies, there are notable advances in the application of critical realism. Platenkamp and Botterill (2013) introduce critical realism by critiquing both the constrictive methodologies of positivism and the disappearance of reality that has accompanied the idealist and critical turns in the field. Guided by the question, What makes tourism possible?, the authors illustrate the value of foregrounding a realist ontology supported by an interpretivist epistemology as a means to observe, explain *and* interpret tourism phenomena. More specifically, De Bernardi's (2019) application of critical realism to indigenous Sami tourism enterprises finds a middle ground between objective and existential authenticities. While authenticity has different meanings to each Sami entrepreneur that are realized through their various tourism-related activities (handicrafts, hosting, guiding, and so on), their involvement in creating certifications and labels for their products necessitates "authenticity as a compromise" and demonstrates a process of emergence from the meeting of intransitive (concrete) and transitive (abstract) domains (De Bernardi, 2019).

As conceptually driven research, this paper contributes to niche but significant (c. 10 %) methodologies employed in authenticity research (see Rickly, 2022). Xin, Tribe, and Chambers (2013) define the conceptual method of tourism studies as a set of activities that focus on the systematic analysis and profound understanding of tourism concepts. Highlighting the usefulness of conceptual methods to holistic and creative thinking, "its major outcomes include the clarification of a concept, the proposing of a new concept, the modification of an existing one (re-conceptualization) or ideological or other critique" (p.84). Conceptual research requires the ability to see differences, to think inductively about how various perspectives are related, to take a creative stance, to use deductive reasoning to put forth new arguments, and the ability to do so persuasively (MacInnis, 2011). Thus, in conceptual-only articles, where the theory must "stand on its own", credibility comes from "evidence based on existing literature, supported by coherent, compelling logic" and linked to a theoretical or practical "problem" (Vargo & Koskela-Huotari, 2020, p.2).

Following the processes proposed by Jaakkola (2020) and Vargo and Koskela-Huotari (2020), design of this conceptual paper started with the focal concept of authenticity before introducing other theories to bridge the observed gaps around the concept as both an abstract-philosophical theorisation and as an activity-experience relating to tourism. Employing critical realism's methodological approaches of abduction and retroduction further supported conceptualization. Abduction is a creative process that requires imagination, analogies, and/or metaphors to redescribe and interpret an event or occurrence as an expression of a more general phenomenon (Boost, Blom, & Raeymaeckers, 2022). As such, we approached the existing literature with the corresponding question: How does the social construction of authenticity occur from the perspective of the individual tourist? Retroduction follows abduction and adds ontological depth as it moves beyond the empirical realm to postulate underlying mechanisms, processes and/or structures capable of producing the observed events (Boost et al., 2022). This informed the investigative question: What are the demi-regularities (chain of events and patterns of occurrences) that accompany the emergence of authenticity? Together, these inform the broader conceptual question driving this paper: What makes authenticity possible? As developing a conceptual framework of authenticity as emergent is the overarching goal of this paper, it is noteworthy that the critical realism method of retrodiction was not employed, but it has implications for future empirically-driven research (see Methodological implications section).

Importantly, it should be noted that this paper is not attempting to conceptualise "emergent authenticity" or add a new approach to the canon of authenticity studies. Instead, the contribution of this article is to conceptualise the emergent process of authenticity from the tourist's perspective spanning beyond the destination through the phases: pre-authenticity (absence), proto-authenticity (emergence), in-situ authenticity (presence), post-authenticity (afterlife). What results is a framework that accommodates the numerous approaches to authenticity and authentication processes at work in tourist experiences but also the relationality of these approaches. In what follows, an overview of critical realism as the philosophical foundation for explicating this process of emergence is provided. Next, the conceptual model and support each of the phases with evidence from the existing literature are presented. This suggests potential research avenues related to the nature of authenticity experiences over time and methodological implications of critical realism for authenticity research.

An introduction to critical realism

As a decidedly critical realist question, What makes authenticity possible?, is useful as it attends to the objective and subjective dimensions of authenticity that operate simultaneously among tourists and tourism practitioners alike. Decades of research have revealed the objective, constructive, (post-)postmodern, existential, psychoanalytic and phenomenological characteristics of authenticity in tourism (Rickly, 2022). As such, critical realism's acknowledgement of an "objective – yet stratified and emergent – reality, while upholding that our knowledge of it is socially constructed" (Boost et al., 2022, p.14) allows us to bridge the deficit of what has been described as the philosophical and practical aspects of authenticity (Zhu, 2012) as well as the duality of authenticity as embedded in both the theorising and the activities of tourism (Moore et al., 2021).

Developed to overcome the object/subject dualism of the philosophy of science, the founding philosopher of critical realism, Roy Bhaskar, articulated two key positions that are foundational. In summary, (1) "transcendental realism" is a critique of the transcendental idealist tradition that is, arguably, overly concerned with causal relationships as a means to empiricism (Bhaskar, 2008[1975]) and (2) "critical naturalism" argues that studying human phenomena is fundamentally different from natural phenomena such that attention must be given to both social structures and individual agency (Bhaskar, 2014[1979]). Thus, critical realism bridges positivism and interpretivism through its "realist ontology, an epistemic but not judgemental relativity, and methodological pluralism" (Bygstad, Munkvold, & Volkoff, 2016, p.83).

To distinguish between the world and our experience of it, critical realism assumes a stratified ontology with nested domains: the *real*, the *actual*, the *empirical* (Bhaskar, 2008[1975], 2014[1979]). The *empirical* domain contains our individual experiences of the world, which is nested within the *actual* domain where events are occurring irrespective of our perception or awareness of them. This,

thereby, rests within the *real* domain where the mechanisms that generate events are located. Importantly, mechanisms are considered open systems embedded in specific contexts. They are "not necessarily physical but could be social, psychological or conceptual"; for example, institutions, ideas, inhibitions, and rules can be mechanisms if they have causal effects on the subject of investigation (Mingers & Standing, 2017, p.175). "This stratified conception of causation facilitates a more adequate understanding of how (material and social) powers which operate in different locations and/or, often, at different hierarchical levels are related" (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018, p.205).

Bhaskar (2008[1975]) contended that an error of positivism is that, ontologically, it collapses all three domains into one such that experience is the empirical focus causing the potential oversight of context specific conditions. As a realist ontology with a relativist epistemology, critical realism emphasizes questions such as, What is X, and how does it work? It is through a recognition of the world as an open system of emergent entities and the complex causal powers of these nested domains that the concept of emergence becomes useful in addressing such questions, including the one driving this paper. Fleetwood (2005, p.199) explains that an emergent entity is (materially, ideally, artefactually, and/or socially) "real" when it "makes a difference", in other words when it has causal efficacy or an effect on behaviour.

Emergence is not a new idea philosophically. It is embedded in both natural and social sciences. Elder-Vass (2005) summarizes emergence as "operating when a whole has properties or powers that are not possessed by its parts" (p.317). Therefore, emergence is not observed when the constituent parts are simply aggregated but when a set of relations occurs between them (Elder-Vass, 2005; Pratten, 2013). Textbook examples include the wetness of water, an emergent property of hydrogen and oxygen, which the elements alone do not possess, or an orchestra as each player produces music but harmony emerges only by playing the same piece together simultaneously. Further, Fairclough et al. (2013, p.34) argue that "semiosis is an instance of emergence par excellence", as intertextuality offers endless possibilities for meanings to emerge from texts.

Moreover, critical realism recognises an analytical distinction in the direction of emergence. Upward causation is illustrated by the previous examples in that it focuses on how the constituted parts of a structure (mechanisms and context) cause the emergence of higher order properties (Pratten, 2013), and as such is the more common form of causation. Downward causation is concerned with complex systems and how once achieved they have the capacity to subsequently affect their constituent parts (Pratten, 2013). However, Mingers and Standing (2017) point out that causation in social systems often demonstrates additional complexity in that social mechanisms and events form reinforcing causal relations (see Blom & Morén, 2011 for micro, meso and macro social mechanisms). For example, social media exhibits upward causation as it emerges from its collective production by users, but as a part of our broader social structure, we assign meaning and value to it, change its function, and may even regulate it through downward causation.

In what follows, we apply these principles of critical realism towards a conceptualisation of the emergence of authenticity through tourist experience. We begin by addressing the absence of authenticity and how the social construction of the concept must be triggered in the individual leading to upward causation. We evidence authenticity as an emergent entity in the numerous ways it makes a difference in tourists' motivation, behaviour, experiences, and memory-making as well as acts as a mechanism furthering the process of emergence in subsequent phases.

Authenticity as a process of emergence

The different analytical approaches to authenticity have been thoroughly evidenced in the literature (see Rickly, 2022). Importantly, these approaches do not operate in isolation. Necessary to the persistence of such diverse approaches is a recognition that authenticity operates relationally between the objective and subjective (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Rickly-Boyd, 2012a). As a socially constructed concept, it involves a continual negotiation that sustains networks of people, places, and objects (De Andrade-Matos et al., 2022; Moore et al., 2021). Despite our acceptance of the socially constructed nature of authenticity, and Cohen's (1988) articulation of authenticity as historically and socially emergent, we have yet to intellectually engage with its process of emergence from the perspective of the individual tourist. Thus, in this paper, we develop a conceptual framework of this process that accounts for the various approaches to authenticity and facilitates future research into the underlying mechanisms and contexts that drive experiences of the authentic and/or experiences of authenticity (see for example Moore et al., 2021).

A processual aspect to authenticity has been previously highlighted in the literature. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's theories of authenticity and aura, for example, Rickly-Boyd (2012a) considers the overarching journey of the tourist as involving rituals and performances at different travel phases. This includes afterlives produced through the continued use of travel photographs (mechanism) in self-reflexive practices (context). Similarly going beyond in-situ authenticity, Kirillova and Lehto's (2015) existential model of the vacation cycle highlights the role of liminality, awe, and fade-out effects. Their "vacation effect", conceptualized as an ascent in existential authenticity and a descent in everyday anxiety, is thought to be triggered by the liminality (mechanism) of tourism experience as well as the ability of a tourism environment to evoke awe (context). More recently, the application of psychoanalytic theories suggests that while authenticity is a fantasy, it is nonetheless a powerful motivation and influencer of post-experience rationalizations (Knudsen, Rickly, & Vidon, 2016). Relatedly, Hede, Garma, Josiassen, and Thyne (2014) identify authentication processes operating across two levels for museum visitors: the initial level of the experience when consumers situate themselves in a specific consumption context, followed by the gestalt level when consumers evaluate how a specific consumption activity relates to their own authenticity suggesting a shift from more externally to more internally mediated processes.

Hence, what is proposed is that the social construction of authenticity follows broad patterns that are activated in relation to and experienced through tourism, and re-negotiated with recollections, in what we term pre-, proto-, in-situ, and post-authenticity phases (see Fig. 1). Accepting that tourists' specific engagements with authenticity can be episodic, unpredictable and disjointed

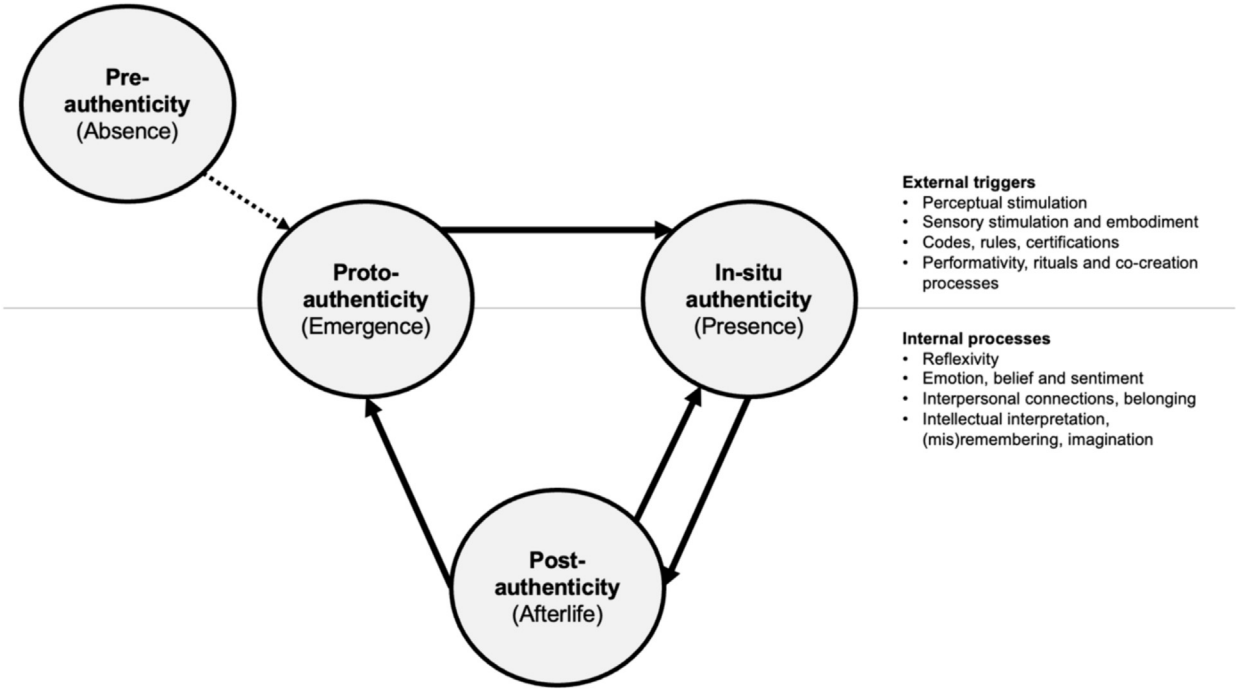

Fig. 1. Authenticity phases.

depending on the circumstance, we nevertheless identify an emergent pattern. This, we contend, is not unlike Vargo et al.'s (2023) theorising of four orders of emergence in marketing practices, from a first stage of ad-hoc interactions between actors and resources, from which novel outcomes can emerge forming and reinforcing habitual patterns, and lastly resulting in reflexive work.

While we employ critical realism to guide us through the conceptualization of authenticity as an emergent process, we do not aim to pinpoint the specific generative mechanisms within the real domain as these are necessarily contextual to each experience. As Boost et al. (2022) remind us: "Although we need to acknowledge mechanisms as ontologically *real* entities because of the outcomes they generate, we can only approximate them through concepts and theories. The analysis of social phenomena, thus, always involves abstraction." (p.16). As such, the figure uses the terms triggers and processes to instead indicate types of mechanisms and events that should be considered in subsequent empirical research that applies this framework. Further methodological implications are discussed in Methodological implications section.

Pre-authenticity: absence

Absence is as fundamental as presence to critical realism. For example, a replicated artwork has an absence of originality, but an original artwork is not the absence of its reproduction. Therefore, applying the process of emergence associated with critical realism to tourism in order to answer, What makes authenticity possible?, means investigating what comes before its presence (in-situ phase). Accepting authenticity as a social construction, we begin with the notion of pre-authenticity to capture the ways that un-knowing or ignorance of a phenomenon precludes its possibility. Without the possibility of comparison and assessment, no preconceptions or prejudices, (in)authenticity is moot. We acknowledge that pre-authenticity is rarely the starting point for tourist experiences, as the proliferation of tourism marketing and popular media have embedded the idea of travel into our social fabric. Nevertheless, our ignorance of all travel possibilities means that we encounter potential places and experiences of which we were previously unaware, thereby breaking down the pre-authenticity phase and allowing for authentication processes to enter our consciousness and become part of our consumer and self-making toolkits. In other words, pre-authenticity is a latent state of unawareness, unthinking or absence, but once the possibility of authenticity emerges, the social construction process is at work and cannot be undone. In this sense, absence can have causality: "A world without absence, without boundaries, punctuations, spaces, and gaps […] would be a world in which nothing could have determinate form or shape, and in which nothing could move or change, and in which nothing could be differentiated or identified" (Bhaskar, 2010, p.15).

At the extreme, pre-authenticity is most associated with innocence, such as young children, and is thus a state that once lost cannot be re-captured as experiences go on to inform future decision-making. As MacInnes, Ong, and Dolnicar (2022) suggest, habits formed during childhood inform much of adult travel behaviour. Hence, habitual, automatic behaviour, acquired by repetition, and prompted by a cue (Lally & Gardner, 2013), shape much tourism consumption. Indeed, consumer studies research has considered how nonconscious motivations characterise much of consumer motivations, attitudes, and behaviours (Bargh, 2002). Bettiga, Lamberti, and Noci (2017) find, for example, that unconscious and conscious arousal have a significant and divergent effect on consumer attitudes

towards experiences. They suggest that unconscious emotions, the implicit, subliminal reactions of individuals to external stimuli, may drive different attitudinal responses from conscious emotions. Janiszewski (1988, p.207) concludes, "preferences may be formed independently of conscious consideration suggests that consumer attitudes may be influenced without consumers being able to identify the antecedents or the processes responsible for that influence".

If such consumption attitudes or behaviours that follow latent patterns imply non-consciousness (absence), then there is always possibility for their awareness (presence). Elsewhere, research has touched upon the various ways that consumption mediated encounters can prompt authenticity engagement. Inspiring adverts, for instance, can motivate consumers to find existential meaning in life by giving them a sense of awareness of and hope in self-change (Chang, 2020). Alternatively, advertising can prompt existential anxiety. Commodifying beloved pieces of music that are important to a person's sense of self can actually trigger resistant responses to preserve sentiment (Abolhasani, Oakes, & Oakes, 2017). While the pre-authenticity stage is one of absence, its presence can trigger authentication processes accompanying its emergence through the proto-authenticity phase.

The realist ontology and interpretivist epistemology of critical realism is thus useful in this regard. It allows us to recognize that there are indeed many aspects of the world that are occurring (the *actual*), even if we may not be directly experiencing them (the *empirical*). By considering authenticity as emergent, we can begin to hypothesize and ask questions of (abduct and retroduct) the mechanisms and contexts through which it is possible and the ways it makes a difference. Thus, the threshold of the pre-/proto-authenticity phases can be observed in the moments where authenticity begins to emerge via social construction processes, accompanied by other emergent entities, such as semiosis (see Fairclough et al., 2013), or more specifically hot/cool authentication practices.

Proto-authenticity: emergence

We posit that the movement from pre-authenticity (absence) requires an external trigger (objective) that inspires internal processes (subjective) (see Fig. 1). It is here, at the proto-authenticity phase, that authenticity as a social construction emerges. We focus on three examples, which are well-evidenced in the literature and often employ semiosis, to illustrate how authenticity emerges in this phase: daydreaming, decision-making, and serendipitous encounters. However, it is also worth noting that once authenticity is embedded in our broader social construction and semiotic processes, the proto-authenticity phase is likely to be the starting point going forward. Hence, Fig. 1 does not show a return arrow to pre-authenticity.

Daydreaming is an essential aspect of tourism, evidencing the relationship of tourism to the experience economy (Löfgren, 2008; Reijnders, 2016). It is key to much consumer behaviour. Heath and Nixon (2021) find that consumer daydreaming indicates longer, more reflective, pleasurable, and meaningful experiences. Consumer culture readily provides visual clichés and fantasies through which to contemplate change and possibilities (Botterill, 2007; Canavan, 2023). As Carù and Cova (2006) explain "the consumer does not expect the organizer to provide a pre-planned package of referents, but instead, needs ones that can serve as resources to help the imagination to work, facilitating personal associations, projecting meaning and hence attaining the stamping operation stage". As such, the proto-authenticity phase is hereby one of stimulation in which tourism marketing, social media, and/or popular culture are mechanisms that trigger one's imagination of potential experiences with daydreaming as an event. While the vast majority of our daydreams are ephemeral and do not materialize, those that do inspire action would then be considered mechanisms according to critical realism. Thus, semiotics is inevitably at work in this phase – a state of developing awareness, thinking about, and seeking out authenticity (see Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Metro-Roland, 2016; Thomsen & Vester, 2016; Paraskevaidis & Weidenfeld, 2021). Employing Lugosi's (2016) explication of socio-technical authentication processes, we argue that the proto-authenticity phase is accompanied by efforts to designate, calculate, and qualify authenticity's worth or value in the context our own existential needs and pursuits. As we establish in our minds an ideal place, experience, self, and so forth, our thoughts have yet to "bump up against" real world counterparts (in-situ authenticity), but we nonetheless use these imaginaries to begin navigating possibilities on booking platforms and review websites.

In fact, there is ample research that suggests tourists' motivations and decision-making can be informed by perceptions of authenticity as an example of upward causation (see Chhabra, 2008; Knudsen et al., 2016; MacCannell, 1973; Pearce & Moscardo, 1986; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2011; Waller & Lea, 1999). Although the aspects of authenticity sought by tourists are fragmented and vary in importance, destinations unable to engage tourists' authenticity perceptions are likely to be less compelling (Sedmak & Mihalič, 2008). As Vidon and Rickly (2018, p.71) describe, "this drive towards the authentic is an important means through which one gains meaningful experiences, personal growth, self-reflection, and the motivation to repeatedly venture into the world in search of the potential for such moments". In the face of existential predicaments tourists might seek relief via travel (Canavan, 2019) or initiate actions towards reclaiming personal value systems (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017a; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017).

While the previous examples – daydreaming and decision-making – take place prior to the moment of travel, this does not have to be the case. We contend that serendipitous encounters with authenticity also initiate the proto-authenticity phase, albeit with accelerated movement through to the in-situ authenticity phase, as authenticity emerges suddenly and its presence necessitates engagement with authentication processes in the moment. Relatedly, Moore et al. (2021, p.2) observe:

> "the phrase 'authentic experience' can have two distinct uses: It can be used to denote *experiences of the authentic* (e.g., of authentic objects, places, peoples, cultures, etc.); it can also be used to denote personal *experiences of authenticity* (e.g., feelings that one's experiences are real, genuine and meaningful and that one is acting in an authentic manner). […] Both of these uses can be seen as parts of one process that is expressed in the activity of tourists (and, more generally, of people). That activity seeks and then enacts 'ways to go on' in the world which, when successful, signify connection and embeddedness."

For example, Cary (2004) describes tourist moments as spontaneous instances of self-discovery and feelings of communal belonging elicited by serendipity that renders an experience authentic. Conversely, the opposite can also be the case, proto-inauthenticity encountered serendipitously might raise suspicion, make one sceptical. Wassler and Kirillova (2019) find that tourists experiencing the 'local gaze', exposes their objectification practices and brings to the fore the possibility that the tourist is an inauthentic outsider. Such moments in the real world can trigger a feeling of (in)authenticity and inspire us to reflect upon or keep seeking.

Proto-authenticity therefore represents the beginning of this process of emergence, which is then reified through the in-situ and post-authenticity phases. Thus, applying the lens of critical realism suggests that the possibility of authenticity is being hinted at in this phase. As the transitive (theoretical potential of authenticity) is engaged and inspires seeking out the intransitive (objective existence) of authenticity, we can see that it is an "ideally" real mechanism in that as a concept authenticity makes a difference in the motivation and decision-making of tourists. In this way authenticity is both an antecedent and an outcome of tourist experience, thus demonstrating the social mechanism called the self-fulfilling prophecy in which it is both a mechanism and an emergent entity (Bygstad et al., 2016) – authenticity is sought out and experienced through travel. However, as the next sections show, authenticity as antecedent and as outcome are not necessarily equivalent.

In-situ authenticity: presence

To date, the majority of tourism scholarship on authenticity has focused on in-situ experiences when tourists encounter places and co-create meaning. Whereas proto-authenticity is the phase of emergence, in-situ authenticity relates to an immersive phase of exploring, embodying, imagining, and enacting the intersubjective performances of authentication in tourism places. The social processes that drive authentication are conceptualized by Cohen and Cohen (2012) as cool and hot modes. Cool authentication involves processes of certification, engagement with factual information, and objective measures, whereas hot authentication encapsulates emotional, incremental, participatory processes through which authenticity is subjectively ascribed, preserved, or reinforced over time (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). Thus, the in-situ authenticity phase is about confronting the presence of authenticity where the objective and subjective meet and understanding why place matters in our experience of authenticity (see Rickly-Boyd, 2013).

The literature is replete with examples of the supposed serendipitous nature of authentic moments where authenticity emerges (proto-authenticity phase), and tourists must confront the (potential) presence of authenticity in-situ. Mura (2015) conceptualizes such moments as "authenticity-triggering". The considerable research on semiotics and authenticity further evidences these observations (see Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Metro-Roland, 2009; Thomsen & Vester, 2016). Specifically, Paraskevaidis and Weidenfeld (2021) find that the application of a Peircean pragmatic semiotics reveals the relationality of projected authenticity (marketing and promotions), indexical authenticity (factual knowledge), iconic authenticity (performative and embodied actions), and symbolic authenticity (perceived qualities). This also resonates with the assertion of Moore et al. (2021) who describe authenticity as a signifying process of connection and embeddedness between people and places, physical objects, and encountered others. As illustrated by post-modern (i.e., Vidon, Rickly, & Knudsen, 2018) and post-postmodern (i.e., Canavan & McCamley, 2021) approaches, prevailing socio-cultural emphases can shape authenticity negotiation. Cultural differences towards authenticity are also observed (see Torabian & Arai, 2016), including a Western tourist preoccupation with objective authenticity (see Mkono, 2013; Oakes, 2006). Derbaix and Gombault (2016) argue that visitors' pre-existing knowledge is an important moderating factor in assessing authenticity, as novice consumers do not perceive authenticity with the same intensity. In moments where one lacks the prior knowledge or cultural associations that come from an extended proto-authenticity phase, imagination becomes essential to bridging the gaps. Indeed, the role of imagination in authentication processes is evidenced in research on engagement with storytelling at battlefields (Chronis, 2005) and the suspension of disbelief at urban legend sites (Lovell & Thurgill, 2021). Bringing this altogether through complexity theory, De Andrade-Matos et al. (2022) capture the connections between objective authentication, constructive storytelling and experiential performances and find that authenticity "is not simply attached to objects or individuals or social structures, but actively negotiated through these relationships through the principles of complexity" (p.11).

This porous nature of the proto- and in-situ authenticity phases is well captured in the literature. Belhassen, Caton, and Stewart (2008) observe that having been inspired by their imagined experiences of the Holy Land (proto-authenticity phase), tourists are then confronted with other indicators and dimensions of authenticity in-situ that influence their overall experience. This is similar to the work of Buchmann, Moore, and Fisher (2010) who identify objective, constructive, postmodern, and existential dimensions of the in-situ authentic experiences reported by *The Lord of Rings* film tourists. In this way in-situ authentication expands on the moments of inspiration of proto-authenticity, keeping a connection to them as touchpoints (or mechanisms) outside of tourism places. Indeed, authentication involves judgements of authenticity but also concerns how these are utilised, constructed, and defended (Chatzopoulou, Gorton, & Kuznesof, 2019). Lamont (2014) illustrates this point in his discussion of the simultaneous processes of hot and cool authentication among cycling tourists, whereby engagement with venerated sites, collective participatory roadside antics, and their associated social media promotions together reinforce and amplify a sense of authenticity.

The in-situ authenticity phase is thereby also one of involvement, existential enactment, and activating intra/interpersonal connections in distinct tourism places. The information gathered in the proto-authenticity phase has the potential of performativity in the in-situ authenticity phase. The examination of moments where past daydreaming and travel planning intersect with tourism (counter-)experiences offers valuable insights (see Noy, 2004; Rickly-Boyd, 2012b). For Shaffer (2004), despite pre-trip preparations and the use of appropriate props for an authentic performance of European backpacking, the author instead found moments of authenticity when she improvised and went off-script. Similarly, Senda-Cook (2012) shows that while pre-conceived notions of authentic recreation inform preparations for hiking, being on the trail presents encounters with the landscape, other hikers, and oneself wherein authenticity is negotiated (see also Rickly & Vidon, 2017).

By extension, the performativity of the in-situ authenticity phase has the potential to produce powerful existential moments that highlight one's alienation. We find numerous examples of the ways collective performances produce liminality and moments of existential authenticity that are not possible in everyday life, particularly related to festivals (see Brooks & Soulard, 2022; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Morey, Griffin, & Riley, 2017). Canavan's (2019) reading of existential catharsis and catastrophe suggests travel encounters might be so powerful that they immediately call one's sense of self into question without a longer period of in-situ immersion necessitated. Sharma and Rickly's (2019) analysis of the palpable smell of death at Hindu cremation grounds, for example, represents a challenging olfactory reminder of mortality that is not pleasurable, but might nonetheless push towards self-examination and change. As such, tourism provides an exploratory space conducive to self-examination, lifestyle contemplation and other questions of existential authenticity that may be felt in everyday life (Brown, 2013; Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017b; Rickly-Boyd, 2012b). In these in-situ moments where the transitive and intransitive meet, authenticity has presence in both materially real and ideally real ways. In other words, the objective authenticity of the place acts relationally with the experience of constructive, postmodern, and existential authenticities. Having been confronted in-situ, such experiences of (in)authenticity can become mechanisms when reflected upon, developed, and given afterlife in the post-authenticity phase.

Post-authenticity: afterlife

What do we do with the (in)authenticity we experience as tourists? Cohen's (1979) foundational work on the phenomenology of tourist experience identifies five typologies based on motivation for travel and its subsequent lifestyle influence. He argues that the recreational and diversionary modes are not motivated by a pursuit of authenticity and are merely seeking a temporary break from everyday life/alienation, whereas authenticity is a key factor for the experiential and experimental modes who seek to explore otherness and may be inspired to make minor adjustments in their lives (Cohen, 1979). The existential mode, however, is driven by profound desire for change and therefore authenticity is sought through travel experiences to guide this journey (Cohen, 1979). Considering the implications of tourism motivation and experience for everyday lives, we conceptualise the post-authenticity phase as one where these have afterlife: the encounters with (in)authenticity during the act of travel may persist, be reflected upon, encourage changes in attitudes, behaviours, or lifestyles, and influence future travel decisions. It involves what Wilson (2014) describes as the reflexive process of "managing authenticity": "what we have learned (and this is consistent with critical realism in all its phases) is that managing authenticity is about living out *both* the potential for (collective) emancipation *and* somehow living within our limits" (p.297).

Authentication processes continue to be employed in the post-authenticity phase, particularly related to memory work. Memory underpins how tourists deal with travel experiences, as well as travellers' post-trip perceptual and emotional outcomes, and how they recall their travels (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007; Pearce & Packer, 2013). Alternatively, forgetting or misremembering might be employed to distance oneself from existentially troubling encounters. Research suggests that tourists will sometimes refuse to acknowledge unwanted, yet genuine, elements of destination culture (Zhou, Zhang, Zhang, & Li, 2018) and might instead deem it inauthentic as they continue to search for what aligns with their own preconceived ideals (Knudsen et al., 2016; Oakes, 2006). Likewise, some will simply reframe what were described as unpleasant experiences in the moment as authentic adventures after the fact (Vidon et al., 2018; Vidon & Rickly, 2018). Such strategies for managing the memories and narratives of authenticity confronted during travel can be seen in social media practices. Conti and Heldt Cassel (2020) identify combinations of pictures, captions, and hashtags help tourists to express distinctions between tourism and everyday landscapes and to explore associated self-identities. Alternatively, Mahrouse (2011) finds socially-conscious tourists who, despite disappointment with the staged nature and perceived inauthenticity of their "reality tours", nevertheless report authentic experiences to their peers, as the ideological "investments" made in their tourism choices mean that "personal rewards come with producing discourses of satisfaction about the tour" (p.385).

Hence the post-authenticity phase is one of reflexivity. Moving from a confrontation with the presence of (in)authenticity during the in-situ phase, post-authenticity involves internal processing ex-situ. In this way, post-authenticity relates to the newfound awareness that might accompany tourist experiences, and how this awareness is then processed, linked to, and used to reflect on one's self-identity and everydayness. Again, we see how authenticity as an event in-situ becomes a mechanism post-situ. Pearce and Packer (2013, p.402) posit that "refreshing of one's world to support desired personal changes resulting from existentially important and life influencing travel" can be observed in various scales of change. It is the making sense of triggers, rather than the triggers themselves, that inspires tourists' transformation (Kirillova et al., 2017a). The implication is that tourists can enrich or extend experiences of authenticity by linking to their everyday lives, as has been observed in the post hoc integration of authentic tourism experiences into individual's autobiographies (see Cary, 2004; Lamont, 2014; Rickly-Boyd, 2010). Indeed, a recurrent theme in the literature is that tourism can inspire significant change in those pursuing it (see Knudsen et al., 2016; Noy, 2004; Vidon & Rickly, 2018). Illustrating, Kirillova et al. (2017b) describe how existential anxiety felt post-trip can motivate tourists to resolve pertinent existential dilemmas and to initiate meaningful life changes. Using examples such as relocating to places more conducive to desired lifestyle, they explain that "facilitated by serendipitous triggering episodes, a transformative tourist experience necessarily implies a greater awareness of existential concerns and heightened sensitivity to existential anxiety, which encourages a tourist to seek a more authentic lifestyle" (p.648). However, these experiences of self are not permanently achieved in transformative moments but must be maintained and continually practiced in the face of changing personal and social conditions. Aptly, Brown (2013) describes the temptation to let existential discoveries sink back again, hidden and disguised, and similarly Kirillova and Lehto (2015) articulate a fade-out effect as a gradual descent in existential authenticity induced by the lack of existential courage post-travel (see also Yu & Liu, 2024). This thus demonstrates a fundamental aspect of mechanisms in critical realism. While "their existence is judged by a causal rather than a perceptual criteria […] [m]echanisms are relatively enduring in respect of the events that they cause but their absolute timescale may vary immensely" (Mingers & Standing, 2017, p.176).

Importantly, the emergent process of authenticity does not have an end point. As an emergent entity, authenticity continues to make a difference in tourists' lives and future tourism behaviour. It moves from an event to a mechanism in the progression through phases. The post-authenticity phase is characterized by afterlife because of the subsequent influence of the authenticity experienced in-situ. Thus, post-authenticity interpretation and meaning-making is drawn upon in future proto- and in-situ authenticity phases as semiotic "cultural baggage" (see Metro-Roland, 2009; Nellhaus, 1998) that informs future decision-making and interpretations. For example, Canavan (2023) records how authenticity interpretations shift over time: the staged initially perceived as fake can come to be appreciated as genuine, suggesting experiences of authenticity are evolving. Experiences that stimulate thinking around notions of truth, self, connections, and change, might thereby be thought of more broadly than the convincingness that still tends to shape assessments of tourism authenticity. Surprise in-situ encounters with "all too real" authenticity or realizations that attractions are staged may inspire greater caution and interrogation of tourism promotions in future proto-authenticity phases. Likewise pleasant surprises of hospitality and belonging may encourage more confidence in solo, community-based and/or cultural tourism excursions, while the fun experienced from suspending disbelief and giving over to child-like wonder may stimulate a desire for more improvisation. To summarize, in response to authenticity reflected upon, revisited, and (mis)remembered, tourists may become more sophisticated, nuanced, complacent, troubled, by (in)authenticity with further experiences, which may henceforth associate with altering travel (de)motivations.

Discussion and implications

Many scholars have contended that the experience of authenticity is not one that is sustained and immutable, but rather episodic and fleeting, and part of an ongoing intersubjective process of relationality of objective/subjective encounters (see De Andrade-Matos et al., 2022; Rickly-Boyd, 2012a, 2012b). Much of this literature is focused on the experience of authenticity in-situ at tourism destinations, although some have considered the relationship of motivation to experience (Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Waller & Lea, 1999; Yi, Lin, Jin, & Luo, 2017) and experience to post-travel behaviours (Brown, 2013; Kirillova et al., 2017b; Yu & Liu, 2024). To conceptualise this processual dynamic and capture these temporal-spatial connections from the tourist's perspective, we have drawn on the realist ontology and interpretivist epistemology of critical realism to elucidate authenticity as emergent. Driven by the question, What makes authenticity possible?, this conceptualization reveals pre-, proto-, in-situ and post-authenticity phases that work from the absence of authenticity to its emergence as its presence is confronted in-situ and it is given afterlife as it subsequently influences future tourism practices.

Within this conceptualization, there is accommodation of the numerous analytical approaches to authenticity. The pre-authenticity phase is characterized by absence prior to the social construction process triggered by external stimuli provoking the proto-authenticity phase. Here, constructive, postmodern, existential, and psychoanalytic aspects of authenticity are engaged in tourists' daydreaming and decision-making. Then, the in-situ authenticity phase brings engagement with the presence of authenticity, such that authentication may emphasise various objective-subjective cues used to interpret meanings (i.e., Chhabra, 2008; Grayson & Martinec, 2004) and performativity facilitates meaning making through embodiment and co-creative enactment of interpersonal relations (i.e., Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Lovell & Thurgill, 2021). These experiences have afterlife in the post-authenticity phase wherein tourists process, reflect, and react to the (in)authenticity encountered. Thus, across the phases we can observe authenticity making a difference in the shift from authenticity as unimagined to imagination-stimulation (Chhabra, 2008) to imagination-work (Derbaix & Gombault, 2016) then self-imagining and re-imagining (Kirillova et al., 2017a). As such, the notion of authenticity as a process of emergence captures its complexity as an integrated system of various mechanisms and contexts (see also De Andrade-Matos et al., 2022), while also framing how these are encountered, engaged, or processed at different points of the tourist journey having an emergent effect with on-going influence. Such a conceptualization also opens new avenues for research in the field.

Life course research

The research on authenticity to date not only emphasizes the episodic nature of authenticity but is also constrained in its examination of authenticity through this lens. Specific tourist moments at particular times and places are the focus. The ways that our engagement with authenticity changes over the course of our lives has not yet been captured. MacInnes et al. (2022) argue that habits established during childhood inform adult travel behaviour. It has been suggested, for example, that younger consumers are more attracted towards extraordinary and extreme experiences, whereas older consumers, who feel less of a need to negotiate their self-identity, tend to find value in everyday routines that reflect the lifestyle they have chosen (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010). Even though fleeting, ambiguous, and unpredictable, the implication is that consumers can accumulate authenticity experiences and may use this to inform their ongoing authenticity-related tourism behaviours, including seeking out, scepticism, avoidance, imaginaries, and so on. Do authentic experiences among repeat visitors contribute to loyalty over the life course (i.e., Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Yi et al., 2017)? In what ways does authenticity feature in the development of tourists' travel career ladders (see Pearce & Lee, 2005)? Thus, research on such authenticity-related behaviours over the life course and with attention to demographic differences might highlight disparate values associated with authenticity and its influence on travel decision-making.

Being a tourist is not a discrete activity, and the embedded nature of authenticity within the tourist experience occurs within the human experience more generally (Moore et al., 2021). Any notion of authenticity as emergent will extend beyond tourism as a facet of and embedded within overall life experience in which we manage authenticity. Of course, the concern for authenticity is variable

(Cohen, 1979, 1988), and "the experience of authenticity is pluralistic, relative to each tourist" (Wang, 1999, p.355). MacInnes et al. (2022) find that most tourist motives do not change in accordance with increasing travel experience but remain more habitual. Perhaps relatively few tourists encounter authenticity or attempt to process this if they do, as indeed tourists may not use time on holiday for existential reflection but instead be content with and feel no need to change their life (Brown, 2013; Cohen, 1979). Alternatively, others have observed authenticity and tourism choices to be carefully interwoven into tourists' autobiographies and other self-directed narratives, suggesting authenticity may have cultural and/or social capital properties (see Cary, 2004; Hede et al., 2014; Mahrouse, 2011; Rickly-Boyd, 2012b). Thus, conceptualizing the emergent process of authenticity as operating beyond the bounds of the destination is also an avenue for the consideration of the ways we manage authenticity through our identities and personal narratives over time.

Further, the growth in research on accessible tourism, specifically related to cognitive impairment and ageing populations (Connell, Page, Sheriff, & Hibbert, 2017; Page, Innes, & Cutler, 2015) raises questions about the pre-authenticity phase and challenges the framework's assumption that once the proto-authenticity phase is triggered and social construction processes begin, one cannot return to the previous state. For example, forgetfulness occurs as a resistance-to-crisis mechanism by tourists impacted by trauma and who try to suppress the memory of it by continuing to travel to acquire new positive experiences (Farmaki, 2021). Thus, in such circumstances as memory loss, whether through impairment, degeneration, or trauma, does one return to a state of absence of authenticity?

Methodological implications

In the recent comprehensive review of four decades of authenticity scholarship, Rickly (2022) identifies methodological silos as a serious future challenge resulting from qualitative and quantitative studies that do not "speak" to one another. Such a trend indicates the potential divergence of research into increasingly focused cause/effect studies *or* critical/interpretivist investigations. For instance, the use of structural equation models to measure the influence of specific variables on authenticity perceptions cannot tell us how or why those variables matter, conversely subjectivist investigations that offer insight to embodied experiences of individual moments are rarely generalizable.

In this way, critical realism is also useful, as scholars "assume the existence of an objective (intransitive) world that has power and properties that can be more accurately known as a consequence of scientific endeavour but recognise that knowledge is a subjective, discursively bound (transitive) and constantly changing social construction" (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018, p.201). To access this, critical realism advocates methodological pluralism for data collection (case study, institutional/historical analysis, surveys, participatory and action research, literature evaluations). While methodologically inclusive, the analysis process is more structured following the steps: (1) description of events; (2) analytical resolution: identification of components of interest; (3) abduction: theoretical re-description and hypothesis of mechanisms; (4) retroduction: identification of affordances, processes and/or structures that explain demi-regularities; (5) retrodiction: identification and analysis of how mechanisms interact in specific contexts to generate events; (6) concretization: assessment of explanatory power and contextualization of findings (see Boost et al., 2022; Bygstad et al., 2016; Mingers & Standing, 2017).

For authenticity research, critical realism offers a philosophy specifically interested in the relationality of objective and subjective phenomena, making it amenable to various methodologies for approaching the complexity of an open system of emergent entities and accessing the generative mechanisms of a stratified ontology (empirical, actual, real) (e.g., Platenkamp & Botterill, 2013). Not only can critical realism accommodate the multiple approaches to authenticity – objective, constructive, existential, (post-)postmodern, phenomenological, and psychoanalytic – its processes of abduction, retroduction, and retrodiction would *require* engaging with them in order to flesh out and investigate the affordances that come with each set of authenticity relations in specific tourism contexts.

Conclusion

Potentially the dominant paradigm for the study of tourism (Cohen & Cohen, 2012), authenticity remains conceptually contested and is yet to fully serve as a disciplinary anchor for the field (Moore et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the creativity that has arisen from tourism studies' commitment to authenticity research has inspired consumer studies, more broadly, as marketing literature inevitably pays tribute to and looks towards tourism for inspiration for its own authenticity conceptualisations (Alexander, 2009). This paper has sought to pay tribute to this influential and inspiring area of tourism theory, in all its complexity and contestation, by posing the question: What makes authenticity possible?

Some have contended that the disparate facets of authenticity can become an obstacle to a coherent concept (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006) and methodological silos may lead to divergence rather than collectively building authenticity as a concept (Rickly, 2022). Inspired by those who have attempted more holistic approaches (De Andrade-Matos et al., 2022; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Rickly-Boyd, 2012a), this conceptual model of the emergent process of authenticity offers an encompassing perspective of the tourist experience with its pre-, proto-, in-situ and post-authenticity phases that accommodates its multi-paradigmatic nature. Critical realism facilitates such an endeavour as a philosophy underpinned by a realist ontology and relativist epistemology with methodological inclusivity that is particularly attentive to complexity and relationality. Its application here also highlights new research directions for the field related to life course tourism behaviour, autobiographies and social/cultural capital, and methodological pluralism.

As with all conceptual papers, there is a limitation related to the lack of empirical foundation. While it has been built from patterns (demi-regularities) observed in the existing literature, it has not been tested. It must also be noted that this processual

model is not intended to be prescriptive, to imply stability or pure linearity, as the length of each of the phases is variable. Outlined in the proposed model, therefore, is a simplified and idealised process.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Jillian Rickly: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Brendan Canavan:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Conceptualization.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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