The Role of Authenticity in Destination Development: A Regenerative Approach

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Abstract. Tourism is driven by three primary motivations: the desire for novelty, the pursuit of experiences unavailable within one's life-space,and the quest for destinations beyond the boundaries of one's everyday life. However,tourists often arrive with preconceived notions about a place, phenomenon, or experience, which can shape their perceptions and expectations.Authenticity, a social construct, is frequently negotiated and redefined in the context of tourism.The tourists' preconceived notions can create a disconnect between their expectations and the actual experience, leading to a problematic situation for locals.Any sign of modernity or development may be perceived as inauthentic, forcing the host communities to conform to tourist expectations. Governments often cater to the needs of tourists,rather than prioritizing local concerns.The decision-making power regarding what constitutes authenticity, how it should be preserved,how often it should be delivered and in what ways lies primarily in the hands of governments and tourists. However,locals should have the most significant say in these matters.This paradigm perpetuates the "museumization" of not only places but also cultures and people,denying local communities the right to change and evolve in their own way.Therefore,a regenerative approach to tourism is essential,where decision-making power is distributed equitably among locals, governments, and tourists.A regenerative approach prioritizes mutual benefits,ensuring that both hosts and guests benefit equally.This perspective shifts the focus from economic gains to ethical considerations,recognizing the interconnectedness of tourism's impacts.This paper highlights a)how destination development is influenced by tourists' perception of authenticity b)role of regenerative tourism in addressing the paradox of authenticity and promoting inclusive development c)various ways by which local communities and stakeholders can be empowered to redefine authenticity and shape destination development.

Keywords: authenticity, regenerative tourism, destination development, tourist

1   Introduction

In today's society, authenticity is often assumed to be compromised. Authenticity is a fluid concept shaped by societal norms and expectations. It is always open to interpretation and redefinition. "If nothing on 'the outside' can be relied upon to give weight to the individual's sense of reality, he is left no option but to burrow into himself in search of the real. Whatever this ens realissimum may then turn out to be, it must necessarily be in opposition to any external (modern) social formation. The opposition between self and society has now reached its maximum. The concept of authenticity is one way of articulating this experience"(Berger 1973:88). MacCannell (1976) started the debate on authenticity and tourism. Authenticity is mostly associated with 'primitive' and considered in opposition to modernity. The bifurcation between a premodern(authentic) and modern (inauthentic) has been highly criticized (Meethan 2001;Olsen 2002).

The idea of authenticity is not homogeneous. There are various types of authenticity, such as **hot** and **cool authenticity**—where the former refers to artificial or staged versions and the latter to genuine experiences (Selwyn, 1996); **constructive** and **objective authenticity**—where constructive authenticity refers to authenticity based on socially constructed perceptions, and objective authenticity relates to the authenticity of the original or museum-like objects; and **existential authenticity**, which refers to a personal, subjective state in which individuals feel true to themselves during the tourism experience (Wang, 1999). Therefore, the term 'authenticity' has different conceptions for ethnographers, tourists, curators and anthropologists. In the modern era, many objects, phenomena and even places are considered as inauthentic not because they are actually fake but because the tag 'fakery' has gained high momentum. In this paper, the role of regenerative tourism in co-creation, defining, deconstructing and redefining of authenticity is emphasized. It focuses on the inclusivity of regenerative approach in paving the way for considering the voices of the local communities over the government, private bodies and tourists and the various ways to make this possible so that their development can be ensured.

2. Review of Literature

Boorstin (1961) and MacCannell (1973) suggested in testing the object authenticity based on some criteria. Wang (1999) considered things as authentic not because they are inherently so but because their genuineness is constructed by beliefs. According to Moscardo and Pearce (1999), authenticity of a tourism setting is not a tangible asset but an intangible judgement placed by an observer. Appadurai (1986), emphasized that limited production of an object makes it seem authentic whereas Revilla and Dodd (2003) believed that tourists might perceive an expensive object as authentic. Cohen (1988) emphasized that authenticity is based on selective perception and selective memory and how with the passage of time objects earlier considered as artificial are considered as authentic (which he terms as 'emergent authenticity').

3. Research Methodology

This paper sheds light on the intricate interplay between authenticity, regenerative

tourism and destination development. Through a regenerative approach, this paper aims at guiding efforts towards a resilient, sustainable, inclusive destination development. The insights are drawn from secondary sources which includes scholarly articles. Based on a thorough review of the relevant literature, it critically examines the existing system of tourism development and paves the way for a new approach.

3.1 Authenticity

Authenticity has become a central point of discussion in tourism literature since the last few decades. It has numerous, diverse and dichotomous meanings. Authenticity was originally used in the field of tourism by the experts in determining whether the objects of art displayed at the museum were worth the admiration and price they were getting(Trilling, 1972). The tourists, tourism marketers and scholars have extended this museum-linked usage to culture. There are three approaches dedicated to the study of authenticity.

1. Modernists, Realists and Objectivists- According to Theobald, "Authenticity means genuine, unadulterated, or the real thing"(1998:411). An object in order to be authentic should not be manufactured "specifically for the market".(Cornet 1975:52). They consider authenticity as an inherent quality of objects that can be measured against absolute criteria. Therefore, they believe authenticity to be independent of tourists' experience and dependent on experts' judgements.

2. Constructivists- This ideology considers authenticity as a socially constructed interpretation rather than an objective phenomenon (Bruner 1989,1994; Cohen,1988; Spooner, 1986; Taylor,2001). Things appear to be authenthic not because they genuinely are but because authenticity is actively constructed by the power structure, beliefs and conceptions (Wang,1999). There is no reality untouched by human perception. Therefore, constructed authenticity is always relative (Cohen,1988), contextual(Salamone, 1997), depends on ideology(Silver 1993) and time(Cohen 1988).

3. Postmodernists- They believe authenticity to be either meaningless or of less concern. They are not concerned about it as long as they enjoy it. They believe that even an authentic product might appear inauthentic depending on the experiences the tourists try to seek.

3.2 Influence of Tourists' Perception of Authenticity on Destination Development

Tourists are categorised into five types- recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental and existential (Cohen,1972). The experimental tourists who experiment with various types of potential elective centres (Cohen 1979a:189) share similarities with existential tourists in their criteria of authenticity (Wang, 1999). On the other hand, recreational tourists tend to prioritize experience over authenticity, accepting cultural products in a make-believe situation (Cohen,1985).In contrast, the diversionary tourists are indifferent to authenticity altogether(Cohen,1972). The experimental and existential tourists are more discerning and apply strict criteria to evaluate authenticity (Wang, 1999; Rickly-Boyd,2013). This highlights that different types of tourists have different levels of concern regarding authenticity ranging from highly indifferent to extremely discerning.

The question that surrounds the debate of authentic and inauthentic is not whether the tourist has a purely authentic experience or not(MacCannell, 1973) but what furnishes

his feelings with authenticity in his own view. Therefore, the tourists differ in the number and variety of features essential to their mind to authenticate a phenomenon, place or cultural product. The criteria of authenticity for an intellectual tourist is stricter than the criteria of a common tourist(Cohen 1988). The more alienated a tourist is, the more is his quest for authenticity(Cohen, 1979a:181-2). The reality is either accepted, constructed or denied. Tourists should accept the fact that how it makes you feel is equally important as what it actually is. Overanalyzing a situation or object can lead to losing sight of the situation's inherent value. What is commoditized or modernized is not always contradictory to the old one. It can also be additive. Some tourists might prefer market products as inauthentic whereas some tourists might accept a tribal art as authentic as long as it has tribal art prints on it. Therefore, the meaning of authenticity is beyond consensus, primitive and objective.

The tourist's perspective on a destination plays an essential role in shaping the destination's image, destination branding and the brand personality (Gallarza, Saura C Garcia, 2002; Konecnick C Gartner, 2007). The success of a destination depends strongly on tourists' approval, recommendations and revisit intentions (Yoon C Uysal, 2005). The influx of tourists, development of host population and the ranking of the destination are influenced by tourists' perception and experiences(Murphy, Pritchard C Smith, 2000).

Positive word- of mouth, online reviews and posts on social media enhance a destination's reputation and attract more tourists (Litvin, Goldsmith C Pan, 2008). Negative experiences and reviews deter potential tourists and harm the destination's image (Kotler, Bowen C Makens, 2010). The tourists should be held responsible for the reality they create, the preconceived notions they carry and the takeaways they choose. Things don't always happen to the tourists they play an active role in the experiences they have. Therefore, measures should be taken in order to prevent the future of a destination from being completely dependent the viewpoints of the tourists.

3.3 Role of regenerative tourism in addressing the paradox of authenticity and promoting inclusive development

Regenerative tourism originated from sustainable tourism in the 1980s as a response to the environmental and social impacts of mass tourism. It gained momentum with the launch of the Regenerative Tourism initiative by the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST) in 2019. Regenerative tourism developed as a response to the limitations of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism focused on mitigating negative impacts rather than creating positive change whereas regenerative tourism goes beyond sustainability by regenerating and restoring local ecosystems, cultures, and communities. Regenerative tourism is still an emerging field. It is gaining interest among tourists and tour operators with many seeking to adopt regenerative practices. Several certification programs have been launched to promote it. Research institutions and organizations are exploring and innovating regenerative tourism practices, including new business models and technologies.

Governments and international organizations are incorporating regenerative tourism principles into their tourism policies.

The notion of authenticity in tourism is often perceived as a romanticized idea of primitive local communities and underdeveloped destinations (MacCannell, 1973).

This concept has unintended consequences, denying these communities and destinations the opportunity for development. Many tourists seek authentic experiences, which are perceived as being untouched by modernity (Cohen, 1988). This creates a paradox where local communities and underdeveloped destinations are expected to remain unchanged in order to preserve their "authenticity" for the benefit of tourists. By remaining static, local communities may be denied access to economic benefits such as improved infrastructure, education, employment and healthcare (Butler, 1999). Such an expectation of authenticity can lead to cultural stagnation, where local communities are pressurized to maintain traditional practices and customs, rather than evolving or adapting to the changing circumstances (Harrison, 2001). This results in inequitable distribution of benefits where the external stakeholders, such as tour operators and travel companies benefit more than local communities, exacerbating existing power imbalances (Mowforth C Munt, 2003).

Regenerative tourism recognizes that authenticity is dynamic and evolving (Wang, 1999). The destinations and local communities should be encouraged to develop while maintaining their unique cultural identities. It focuses on empowering local communities and ensuring that benefits are equitably distributed and aligns with community needs and values (Manyara C Jones, 2007). It promotes sustainable and responsible tourism practices and prioritizes environmental conservation, cultural heritage preservation, and community well-being (UNWTO, 2019).

Various ways by which local communities and stakeholders can be empowered to redefine authenticity and shape destination development Empowering the local communities and stakeholders is necessary in redefining authenticity and shaping destination development. Their empowerment can increase their decision making power in the development sector in general and tourism sector in particular. It can occur in various ways. The community-based tourism enables local communities not only in managing but also in benefiting from tourism development (Manyara C Jones, 2007). The cooperative ownership models allow local communities to owning, managing and ensuring that the benefits of tourism practices are equitably distributed (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). The participatory rural appraisal (PRA) involves local communities in the decision-making process, ensuring that their needs and concerns are properly addressed (Chambers, 1994). The collaborative governance models help in assembling local communities, stakeholders, and government agencies to make decisions about destination development (Bramwell C Lane, 2000).

Various training programs should be introduced to enhance local communities' skills and knowledge, by educating and enabling them to manage and benefit from tourism development (UNWTO, 2019). The mentorship programs can introduce pairing of local communities with experienced tourism professionals, thus providing guidance and support (Gartner, 1996). Participatory budgeting should be enhanced allowing local communities to have a say in how tourism revenue is spent and ensuring that the benefits are equitably distributed (Cabannes, 2004). Digital platforms can enrich the minds of local communities with access to information, markets, and resources and by empowering them to participate in destination development (Gretzel C Jamal, 2009). Community-led digital initiatives should be organized frequently in order to enable local communities to manage and promote their own tourism products and services (Huang et al., 2017). The government and tourism professionals should consider the point of views of the localites on their objects being commoditized. Not all natives

believe in the notion that commoditization of products will destroy its authenticity.

4. Conclusion

Authenticity has become a pivotal concern in tourism development since the 20th century. The tourists' perceptions of authenticity significantly influence the trajectory of destination development. Surprisingly, external stakeholders, including tourists, mostly have a greater say in shaping destination development rather than local communities. Given that authenticity is subjective and varies immensely among tourists, it's essential to consider it in conjunction with other factors while planning to develop a destination. A regenerative approach is therefore necessary, where local communities will be empowered to define and manage their cultural heritage. This approach must include the declaration of local communities on what is authentic and why, whether and how to commoditize their cultural heritage, deciding their share of benefits from tourism development , planning and controlling what aspects of their culture they should reveal to the tourists. Tourists must realize that their experiences are shaped by individual perceptions and not by presented attractions. The plans, policies and marketing strategies such as destination branding should be developed in collaboration with local communities in order to ensure their active involvement and consent. Therefore, adopting a regenerative and community-led approach, helps in ensuring that the tourism destination development is inclusive, sustainable, and respectful of local cultures.

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