



# AUTHENTICATION: HOT AND COOL

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**Abstract:** Seeking to shift the discussion of the concept of authenticity in tourism scholarship from the dominant concern with tourist experiences to the more sociological problem of the processes of authentication of tourist attractions, we conceptualize two analytically distinct, but practically often intersecting, modes of authentication of attractions, “cool” and “hot”. Through a range of examples, we demonstrate the implications of the two modes for the dynamics of the constitution of tourist attractions, examine their interaction, and illustrate how “cool” and “hot” authentication can be conducive to different types of personal experiences of authenticity. We furthermore explore the crucial question of who is authorized to authenticate tourist attractions, and thereby uncover issues of power and contestation in the politics of authentication. **Keywords:** authentication, authenticity, performativity, power, tourist attractions. © 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

The sociological treatment of the relationship between tourism and modernity has been focused on the concept of “authenticity,” ever since MacCannell (1973, 1976) introduced it into the academic discourse of tourism in the 1970s, in his argument regarding the “staged authenticity” of tourist attractions. In the wide-ranging discussion following MacCannell’s opening, the concept has been interpreted and re-interpreted in various ways with regard to such issues as the nature of authenticity, its construction and experience (e.g. Bruner, 2005; Belhassen, Caton, & Stewart, 2008; Buchmann, Moore, & Fisher, 2010; Cohen, 1988, 2007a; Crang, 1996; Knudsen & Waade, 2010; Lau, 2010; Olsen, 2002; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Rickly-Boyd, 2012; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). However, the discussion failed to lead to a broad consensus, which would make authenticity the anchor of a general paradigm for the study of modern tourism, but instead resulted in diverse theoretical perspectives (Rickly-Boyd, 2012). The three types of

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authenticity distinguished by Wang (1999, 2000), objective (object) authenticity (further discussed by Lau, 2010; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006), constructed authenticity (Cohen, 1988; Olsen, 2002) and existential (subjective) authenticity (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006) are still engendering separate discourses, despite some efforts at bridging them (e.g. Rickly-Boyd, 2012).

It is important to note that the three discourses are not on the same level: while objective (object) authenticity and existential (subjective) authenticity denote different types of (personally experienced) authenticity, constructed authenticity does not; rather, it relates implicitly to the process of social construction of the other two types. But, though frequently deployed as a concept, the processes by which authenticity is constructed remain analytically under-developed. Several important questions are still un-explicated: Is there only one or are there several ways by which authenticity is established in the tourism domain? Is there a difference between the processes through which objective, as against existential, authenticity is established? Who has the power to endow tourist attractions with authenticity?

In this article we shall approach these questions from a new perspective: the process of authentication. It should be noted that, whereas the concept of authenticity has been widely discussed in tourism studies, authentication, as the *social process* by which the authenticity of an attraction is confirmed, remains almost unexplored. The issue of authentication has, however, recently attracted the attention of several researchers (e.g. Alexander, 2009; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2005; Noy, 2009; Xie, 2011). Jackson (1999, p. 101) in fact went so far as to “propose to abandon the search for ‘authenticity’ and to examine the more tractable question of ‘authentication’” instead. Xie (2011), in his discussion of ethnic culture, similarly advocates a shift away from authenticity to an emphasis on processes of authentication. However, such programmatic declarations did not yet lead to a systematic theoretical elaboration of the concept. In this article we start to do so, by distinguishing two contrasting modes of authentication, “cool” and “hot,” and discussing their wider implications.

We define “authentication” as a process by which something—a role, product, site, object or event—is confirmed as “original”, “genuine”, “real” or “trustworthy”. We aim to show that, at least in the field of tourism, there exist two different, yet often co-constitutive, modes of that process: however, whereas “cool” authentication corresponds to accepted common-sense and dictionary definitions of the term, “hot” authentication differs from them. The conceptualization and documentation of the latter, with regard to the field of tourism, is thus the principal aim of this article. Second, we aim to show that these processes do not only differ in the manner in which they establish the authenticity of attractions, but also in the manner in which they influence the cultural, social and political dynamics of the authenticated phenomena. Third, we shall seek to demonstrate that the two kinds of authentication are conducive to different kinds of personal experiences of authenticity. Finally, we shall examine the patterns of interaction between the two modes of authentication in several actual

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