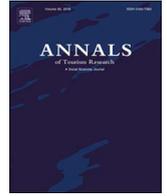


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Alienation and anxiety in tourism motivation

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ABSTRACT

Although underexplored in tourism studies, recent work suggests theories of alienation, as the dialectic of authenticity, have much to contribute to our understanding of tourism motivation. This paper uses three major theoretical tropes (Marxism, existentialism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis) to examine the role of alienation in the motivations of hiking and rock climbing tourists. In particular, these tourists describe only temporary and retrospective relief from anxiety, articulating authenticity as an elusive experience that lies at the horizon, in the next adventure, or in the past as a memory. Alienation is an ever-present component of the human condition, and as such, anxiety is omnipresent in our lives, contributing significantly to touristic desires for escape, rejuvenation, and existential experiences.

Introduction

“[A]uthenticity is only possible once the taken-for-granted world and the security it offers are called into question. This is dependent on a specific mood – anxiety – which, in subjecting everydayness to questioning, reveals the groundlessness of human existence”

(Turner & Manning, 1988, p. 137)

Tourism literature increasingly attends to notions of alienation, adding to already rich discussions of authenticity; yet, there has been little investigation of anxiety and its role as embodied alienation in motivating the search for authenticity (with exception of Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017). While MacCannell (1976, 1999) took note of the role of alienation in modern society and its relationship to the ritual aspects of tourism and Cohen (1979) posited that alienation plays a role in the need for escape and recreation, the relations among anxiety, alienation, and authenticity have yet to be effectively articulated, particularly in relation to tourist motivation. Based on data collected from hiking and rock climbing tourists in the Adirondack Park, New York, USA, and Red River Gorge, Kentucky, USA, respectively, this paper explores several notions of alienation to address anxiety as embodied alienation in relation to touristic motivation, and to further elaborate on the elusiveness of authenticity. Seeman (1959) identified five manifestations of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. We focus on the feeling of anxiety that accompanies these and its power as an acute motivator or push factor (Maoz, 2006) in tourists' quests for authenticity. While existentialist approaches (see Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999) attempt to identify ways of resolving alienation through existential authenticity, this paper contends that alienation and its embodiment as anxiety maintain a dialectical relationship with authenticity and as a result can never be fully satisfied. Nevertheless, while never resolved, we argue that alienation and anxiety act as important drivers in tourist motivation, spurring tourists on in their search for authentic experiences they believe may alleviate these unpleasant feelings. To illustrate this, we approach alienation through three major theoretical tropes: Marxism, existentialism,

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and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Anxiety, that unfocused feeling of disquiet, dread, or concern, is an ever-present component of the human condition, and while it may be suppressed, it is always just under the surface, bubbling up at particular moments. Kingsbury, Crooks, Snyder, Johnston, and Adams (2012, p. 369) define the term generally, stating “[u]nlike fear, anxiety does not usually have a specific perceivable focus, stimuli, event, or object”. According to Kierkegaard (1844/1980), anxiety is related to fear and freedom of existential choice. It is what Heidegger (1927/1962) referred to as a mood that accompanies the desire for an authentic self, and which Sartre (1939/2002) further elaborated on as a feeling that is indicative of consciousness and Being-in-the-world. More generally, anxiety “manifests itself as a highly unsettling feeling of uneasiness that accompanies an individual throughout his or her life” (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015, p. 9; see also Kirillova et al., 2017). Its omnipresence in our lives is due to the fact that it is the embodiment of alienation. Lacan (1949/2006) argued alienation is a constitutive condition of all social subjects, and as a result a social subject can never be rid of her/his alienated condition, can never attain the authentic, and thus may never escape anxiety. This, however, does not prevent the subject from embarking on quests to assuage feelings of anxiety by seeking the fantasy of authenticity (Oakes, 2006; Knudsen, Rickly, & Vidon, 2016). In fact, this is arguably the most human of endeavors, as we each seek to alleviate our alienation through various means – travel, shopping, leisure, and so on. We argue that it is not just authenticity that drives our travel behavior but acute feelings of anxiety as embodied alienation that drive us to seek out the fantasy of authenticity in particular destinations.

Alienation and authenticity in tourism studies

Theories of alienation and authenticity are eclectic in nature, yet they nevertheless figure prominently in tourism literature. While authenticity has historically received more attention in the field, alienation, as “authenticity’s forgotten cousin” has enjoyed increasing consideration since Rickly-Boyd’s (2013) appeal for its greater inclusion in tourism scholarship and Xue, Manuel-Navarrete, and Buzinde (2014) elaborated on different perspectives of alienation at work in tourism (production, consumption, existential). While MacCannell (1976, 1999) took note of the role of alienation in modern society and its relationship to the ritual aspects of tourism, Dann (1977) examined the experience of anomie as a push factor towards travel, and Cohen (1979) posited that alienation plays a role in the need for escape and recreation, the relations among anxiety, alienation, and authenticity have yet to be effectively articulated in this context. Indeed, Xue et al. (2014, p. 187) note that “the concepts of alienation and authenticity are complementary however they are neither equivalent nor interchangeable [...] alienation embodies a self-emancipatory vantage point and an intellectual pedigree that authenticity lacks.” However, we suggest that this explanation of alienation and authenticity de-emphasizes the crucial relationship of these concepts, as dialectical, in which one does not exist without the other as they relationally define one another.

Marxism

Marx’s notions of alienation have served as a foundation for early scholars pursuing theories of tourism involving alienation and authenticity (see Rickly-Boyd, 2013). Indeed, MacCannell (1976, 1999) contends that as individuals living in modern capitalist society, tourists are alienated and therefore seek the authentic in tourism sites and experiences. Entrenched in their everyday lives, they become more alienated from both self and society and thus more acutely aware of their own alienation, which prompts them to seek out authenticity outside of their daily lives in modernity. Invariably finding “staged authenticity”, MacCannell contends that tourists nevertheless seek the authentic as a means to overcome their own alienation. What’s more, “alienation seems to follow the travelers into their touristic adventures. The alienation takes the form of restricted choices framed by a ‘staged’ consumption pattern—a fetishism if you will—in which the singular theme of possession and display takes priority over all other social behavior” (Watson & Kopachevsky, 1994, p. 649).

In their recent categorization of alienation, Xue et al. (2014) include Marxist alienation within a broader understanding of “production” relations. In doing so, they shed light on the alienating working conditions of tourism and, importantly, extend the analysis of alienation beyond simply the tourists to those who work to make our holidays leisurely, carefree, rejuvenating, and recreational. Indeed, as Watson and Kopachevsky (1994, p. 653) posit, by interpreting tourism as a commodity, we can reveal a particularly alienating structure of social relations: “those who demand, and those who supply—those who serve, and those who are served”.

Existentialism

While MacCannell’s use of alienation assumes a Marxist formulation, there has recently been a resurgence of scholars connecting alienation and authenticity vis-à-vis existentialism (see Maoz, 2006; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999; Kirillova et al., 2017). Existential authenticity is increasingly trumpeted as the antidote for the modern subject’s alienated condition, itself a precondition for existential anxiety. This is a profoundly Western conceptualization of both concepts and one that harks back to Cohen’s (1979) typology of authenticity and degrees of alienation and to Dann’s (1977) work placing alienation squarely in the modern or post-modern condition. Wang (1999) further develops notions of alienation and authenticity to include bodily feelings, *communitas*, and self-making, while also maintaining that alienation in modernity drives individuals to seek out their authentic selves in the spaces apart from their everyday existence. He asserts, “work and everyday roles impose constraining and monotonous routine in which individuals find it difficult to pursue their self-realization [...] such routinization and over-predictability gives rise to the ‘feeling of loss’” (Giddens, 1990, p. 98 cited in Wang, 1999, p. 363). It is this feeling of loss, this existential inauthenticity or alienation, then,

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