AUTHENTICITY IN TOURISM

A study of tourists' perceptions on authenticity throughout the tourism experience chronological phases

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Abstract

When you ask a tourist what kind of experiences they desire when they travel these days, you will most likely hear the word "authentic" mentioned several times. This thesis explores the tourist perceptions on the concept of authenticity in the pre-trip, on-site and post-trip tourism experience. In the pre-trip phase, the idea generation, the travel decision making, the anticipation and expectations are examined. Types of tourism experiences, the role of authenticity and the means to seek it, are analyzed in the on-site phase. Finally, memories and reflections related to authentic experiences are explored in the post-travel phase. The aim is to gain a spheric overview and identify, depending on the timeframe of the travel, how and if authenticity is perceived differently from tourists.

These aspects were uncovered using a social constructivist paradigm by conducting qualitative research. Data collection has been conducted through semi structured interviews. Different outcomes are highlighted through this research. Findings show that traveling and the quest for authenticity are interconnected with the discovery of personal identity. People experience authenticity in different ways and evaluate an object's authenticity using numerous indicators, including their engagement and knowledge in the culture of the destination visited.

Significant perceptions on how authenticity is experienced involve the exploration of different cultures. In this attempt, living the local life like locals do, including trying local food, using public transportation, and visiting neighborhoods is what emerged as key points from the findings. As a result, co-creation is an enticing choice for those seeking authenticity. Tourists participate in the development of their own experience by engaging with one another, and with local people. Moreover, what stood out from the results, is the role of technology and digitalization, which have made it easier to find, but also preserve, authentic experiences. Furthermore, technology was discovered to be an important facilitator in the co-creation of tourist experiences.

In conclusion, due to the complex nature of the concept, authenticity is perceived through a combination of tourism experiences, such as the above mentioned, but the common ground uniting all is the human interaction between tourists and locals.

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1.Introduction

Authenticity, in its broadest sense, refers to something's genuineness, reality, or truth (Kennick, 1985). It has also been characterized in terms of sincerity, innocence, and originality, as well as characteristics like naturalness, honesty, and simplicity (Boyle, 2003). Individuals perceive authenticity in different ways and use a variety of indicators to assess an object's authenticity, which might include their interest in and expertise of a subject (Grazian, 2003). The distinction between genuine and inauthentic is frequently subjective and socially or personally formed (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). It is a self-authored and self-determined conduct, which an individual exhibits (Deci & Ryan, 1991).

Regarding the concept of authenticity in tourism, scholars' attitudes vary, and there are various approaches which attempt to decode the visitors seek of authenticity in travels, and what it consists of. On one hand, it has been said that tourists are displayed fake or "frontstage" events, which are solely created for them, thus making travel experiences inauthentic. On the other hand, it is acknowledged that the main purpose of traveling is the search for authenticity, which is the main driver for tourists, who are looking for the genuine and original, which is still untouched and preserved against modernity (MacCannell, 1976).

Moreover, scholars, in their aim to shed light to the topic in question, distinguished different approaches to authenticity. Firstly, there is the objectivism approach, which deals with the originality and true identity of physical objects, such as the ones displayed in museums and similar sites (Leite & Graburn, 2009). This approach also defines activities, which are considered traditional and cultural, as objects; thus, it recognizes the authenticity in artifacts but also in experiences (Wang, 1999).

Secondly, in contrast to the objectivism approach, the constructivist approach acknowledges that authenticity is socially constructed, subjective and negotiable (Cohen, 1988). Therefore, it is the result of a social agreement between a majority of people that view an experience or phenomenon as true and unique (Cohen, 1988; Moscardo & Pearce, 1986). Lastly, in order to better highlight and frame the concept, there is one more approach to authenticity and it is called existential. This approach values the individual perceptions and feelings of persons, but also their desires and

consciousness onto visited places and objects; thus, realizes that authenticity is a projection of travelers' personal viewpoints (Wang, 1999).

Consequently, regardless of which approach is more suitable or comprehensive, scholars admit that each tourist values different things, thus authenticity is the primary pursuit for some visitors, while others do not concern so much about it (McKercher & Du Cros, 2002). As a result, there are numerous meanings of authenticity as there are people who write about it (Taylor, 2001).

Considering all the aforementioned, authenticity depends on individual perceptions and on various tourism experiences, which are valued differently by travelers. Based on their social, economic, or cultural background, tourists may pursue particular tourism experiences, which according to their attitudes and preferences, may be perceived as unique, thus authentic (Tiberghien et al., 2017). As authenticity is perceived differently by each person, and also since authenticity consists of and is inherently related to tourism activities and experiences, it has to be examined how tourism experiences and activities are defined.

Moreover, these activities and experiences differentiate in time; thus, in different chronological phases of the constructed experience, which consequently will affect what visitors value and perceive as authentic, and also to what extent. Therefore, depending on the timeframe related to the visited destination, authenticity may be perceived differently; meaning that during the pre-trip phase, when travelers research and plan for their desirable travel destination, tourists may have different expectations and anticipation compared to the actual on-site destination phase, or the reflexive post-trip phase.

Conclusively, the seek and pursue of authenticity in tourism is highly interrelated to the themes of tourism experiences and tourism chronological phases. Therefore, by integrating all the foregoing, the following chapter will present the research question of this paper, and its corresponding sub questions, which will eventually guide the investigation of this project throughout.

1.1 Research Question

Taking all the aforementioned into consideration, the research of this project will focus on investigating the role of authenticity in tourism, and more specifically, how, and what tourists perceive as authentic in their travel experiences, through all the different chronological tourism

phases; meaning the pre-trip phase, the on-site destination phase, and finally the post-trip phase, when visitors reflect on their journeys. Moreover, as individual perceptions of tourists will be examined, the tourism experiences that tourists value and feel as more authentic will be investigated, as an ultimate attempt to explore the research topic. Conclusively, the formulation of the research question is:

> *How do tourists perceive authenticity throughout the tourism experience chronological phases?*

To be able to obtain a detailed conclusion and go deeper into the selected topic, the research will additionally take into account three sub-questions.

The first sub-question aims to mainly investigate in which context is authenticity perceived from the tourists, which are the tourism experiences that encompass the authenticity and how important is its role.

1) *How important is the role of authenticity for tourists and with which types of tourism experiences do they reach it?*

The second sub-question aims to investigate the evolvement of an authentic experience in different phases, for example, to understand how expectations and anticipation before travel shape the perception of authenticity, and how this perception evolves or changes during and after travel.

2) *How does the tourists' pursuit of authenticity evolve or reforms during the different tourism chronological phases?*

The third sub-question aims to identify the role of technology as a facilitator in the quest for authenticity, to which extent and in which phase of the tourism experience.

3) *What is the role of technology and digitalization in the quest of creating unique, memorable, and authentic experiences?*

1.2 Personal Motivation

Authenticity has always been a critical topic in my interest in tourism, either academically or professionally. I have had an intimacy on the broader tourism industry, which will assist in

identifying and unravelling multiple perspectives around the concept of authenticity. My previous engagement with the tourism industry has proved crucial for exploring the background circumstances of the personal anticipations and expectations of individuals on authenticity. Although, authenticity has always been a concept that I was interested to research, it did not become a concrete idea, until I completed my internship in the previous semester at Skipit. Skipit is a fintech startup company, founded in the beginning of 2020, that developed and launched in early 2021 an application used from smartphones that combines sustainability, urban mobility, and leisure activities. Copenhagen and Helsinki are the first two cities that the app operates, with various cities across Europe scheduled to come in the future. A *"global platform that unites the traveler with the destination"* sharing the same goal of sustainable travel is the vision of the company (Skipit, 2021).

Skipit has built a digital smart card, with final users to be the tourists. The purpose is to improve urban mobility by providing an effortless access to public transportation for the tourists. The app consists of three services; the ticketing, the journey planner and inspiration feed with locations and neighborhoods to visit and activities to do. The goal is the creation of a *'community of travelers'* that will share information, inspiration and moments in order to support the tourism experience by giving the 'locals' insights' on one hand, while on the other hand, to contribute to the local economies by supporting businesses in the neighborhoods (Skipit, 2021).

During my internship at Skipit, I understood and appreciated the value of sustainability and authenticity in the tourism experience, and most importantly how the one can help the other. Thus, the topic started growing gradually with the assistance and influence of Skipit, and in relation to its future goals and research, which its founders wanted to conduct on authenticity.

At first, Skipit was interested in investigating many different topics, and the research of this paper was supposed to incorporate other aspects as well, such as examining the viewpoints of local communities and synergies. However, I had to finally decide to narrow down the scope and proceed with the specific problem in question, which is authenticity in tourism, as perceived by tourists. The reason for choosing the specific concept, is my desire to focus more on the human understanding of authenticity from the tourists' perspective, as I consider interaction with people and knowledge about their attitudes and thoughts on the topic to play a key role.

1.3 Thesis scope

Authenticity, and its role in tourism, is a broad topic to investigate. It depends on multiple factors, on subjective perceptions and it can be seen from different angles. Furthermore, there are many stakeholders involved in tourism, such as tourists, hosts, businesses, and communities among others, which all of them may operate on a local, regional, national, or international level. Consequently, there are many various aspects that have to be considered, such as organizational, technical, financial, ethical, cultural, legal, and socio-political. Therefore, this paper will have to narrow down the research agenda and its scope, in order to match the curriculum, teaching and requirements of this Master programme and Thesis.

During an attempt to explore topics worth to investigate, and to effectively narrow down their research, a preliminary interview was conducted with the 2 co-founders of Skipit (see **Appendix: (Skipit_Interview.amr)** or click the following link: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xmMpRZu2rU5KFG4ooInwDWam9ULJyBK2?usp=sharing), in order to frame a research that could be also valuable for the startup, but mainly would serve the purpose of this thesis. Skipit is based on the premise and the belief that everyone, including tourists, should be able to travel to every city like a local does. As mentioned above, in order to assist travelers, the company has launched an application, which helps tourists navigate around the city and find useful information about local neighborhoods.

Skipit is mainly interested in promoting districts and places outside the well-promoted city centers. The ultimate goal is to ensure that visitors experience the city like locals; thus, establishing more authentic experiences. Moreover, the aim of Skipit is to support local communities and economies with its endeavor, by promoting and marketing smaller local businesses and communities. As a result, the authentic part of a travel experience can be reached by visiting local micro communities, interacting with locals, and blending in their everyday lives. However, there are different perspectives around the topic at hand, such as the perceptions of tourists, the perceptions of local residents, the perceptions of local businessmen, but also the perceptions and attitudes of the local communities and municipalities as a whole. Consequently, there are many different viewpoints, and for the sake of the requirements of this thesis writing, in terms of process and timeframe, the research had to be narrowed down to a specific target group.

Finally, considering all the aforementioned, and as the primary stakeholder in tourism are the travelers, it was decided to investigate their perceptions and attitudes towards authenticity. Moreover, tourists' viewpoints are interrelated with and interdependent on various social and cultural factors, thus they could provide valuable insight, which could further assist in exploring and understanding accurately the role of authenticity in their travels.

1.4 Thesis structure

To make the reader's journey through this project easier, I have included the agenda, which is divided into six chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the topic of the paper and eventually leads to the research question, the personal motivation for this thesis and the project scope. Last, the structure of the thesis is presented with the objective of facilitating the line of reasoning through the project for the reader.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review of the scientific work done so far in the specific field of research. The literature review lays the groundwork for my arguments later on and drives the research ahead. Furthermore, the theories chosen to support the analytical approach are discussed.

Chapter 3 outlines the approach for collecting primary and secondary data, as well as the strategies that were found to be relevant and informative for this research. First, philosophy of science that goes along with the investigation and analysis is portrayed. Then the research approach and data collection are depicted and finally an explanation of the paths chosen, as well as the limitations encountered along the way.

Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the data gathered throughout the research, as well as an attempt to unfold the findings, arguments, and many perspectives on the topic. The aim is for the reader to understand how the content of the data collected is understood and interpreted, while also obtaining a general idea of the research question.

Chapter 5 discusses the highlights from the data analysis and touches upon the most significant reflections that resulted from the findings.

Chapter 6 introduces the concluding remarks of the project. This last part integrates the aforementioned chapters and serves the purpose of closing the overall discussion of this project.

2. Literature review

In order to examine how the concept "authenticity" is perceived from the tourists throughout the tourism experiences phases, this chapter provides an outline of the so far research around the topic and discusses the most significant aspects by scholars related to authenticity and tourism experiences. More specifically, this chapter attempts to generate an overview of the literature within the field of the tourist experience and its phases, as well as the linkage with the authenticity pursuit throughout, which plays a crucial role into exploring the research question.

The question can be considered broad, but the aim of this research is to explore the existing layers of perceptions around the term "authentic experience". The complexity of this term has also sparked the interest of the scholars into searching for a deeper understanding and thus, create a lot of discussion, agreements, and disagreements along the way. As I will discuss in the next chapters, the complexity of the authenticity in tourism experiences reveals many layers, some of which are not obvious, but the academic research serves to provide a common ground to initiate the discussion.

Authenticity is a rich research topic in literature and has evolved over the years as a result of multiple purposes and contexts. The term authenticity comes from the ancient Greek authentikos, which means "original, true, genuine" and can be traced back to authentes, which means "one acting on one's own authority." (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2020). The contemporary interpretations of the term are based on these original definitions. Among both rationality and anthropological concepts about tourism, the question of authenticity is a popular topic (Wang, 1999; Belhassen et al., 2008; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006).

Following the presentation of what "authenticity" in tourism means, and due to the complexity of explaining the concept, "tourism experiences" will be defined in order to provide a general comprehension of what practices and meanings are there, which fall under this umbrella called "the tourist experience". Smaller themes and emerging trends within the area of the tourist

experience, such as co-creation processes and digitalization facilitating the co-creation of experiences will also be presented, as those are considered relevant to the research question and the analysis of the data collection for this paper. Overall, this chapter addresses the literature and theories that have contributed to background knowledge in order to reach an understanding of the concepts in the context of this thesis.

2.1 Authenticity in tourism

With his book "The Image: A guide to Pseudo-events in America", first published in 1961, Boorstin is considered to be the pioneer author, because although the word 'authenticity' is not used in his work, the topic is discussed throughout his book. According to Boorstin's opinion, tourists are utterly aware that they are displayed a pseudo-event, which is fake and deliberately created for them, therefore, what they seek is not authenticity (MacCannell, 1973; Cohen, 1979; Chambers, 2000).

MacCannell disagreed, claiming that the search for authenticity is the primary tourist motivator. He proclaimed the search for authenticity to be the most important factor that determines tourist travel: "The alienated modern tourist in quest of authenticity hence looks for the pristine, the primitive, the natural, that which is as yet untouched by modernity" (MacCannell, 1976, p. 384). Tourism is viewed as an opportunity to explore the "real" rather than another example of inauthentic modern life. Authenticity is seen as an important factor in fulfilling visitors' desire to encounter the genuine, timeless, and intact all around the globe (MacCannell, 1976).

MacCannell (1999) proposed the theory that all modern visitors, characterized by the new middle classes, seek authenticity elsewhere, or in the "Other," where truth and authenticity are found. Reality and authenticity are correlated with "other historical times and cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles" in this regard. (MacCannell, 1999, p.3). The performative aspect of local cultures is typically what tourists see, a 'staged authenticity' produced, staged, and performed for external consumption. He used the terms "frontstage" and "backstage", taken from Goffman, who first introduced the terms in 1959 in his book "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" (Cole, 2019). In the tourism context, the terms refer to sites built specifically for tourists and "real" local areas,

where the hosts reside and to which tourists seldom have access. Backstage is where authenticity is found; frontstage areas are deemed completely inauthentic by MacCannell (MacCannell, 1976).

2.1.1 Authenticity approaches

Authenticity has been discussed in the context of three approaches in tourism literature: objectivism, constructivism, and existentialism.

Objectivism approach of authenticity is primarily centered on the museum placement of objects, which are examined by an expert to verify their true disposition, that is, in natural characteristics, the originality of objects (Leite & Graburn, 2009). It indicates all that is genuine, pure, without duplicity (Relph, 1976;). Researchers in physical geography, in particular, use this approach of authenticity to examine the relationship between tourists and locals (Waitt, 2000). According to Zhu (2012), Boorstin (1982) assesses mass tourism as "pseudoevents" and MacCannell (1973) considers "staged authenticity" as a result of the commoditization of culture; and they both maintain the objectivist approach of authenticity as objects that can be evaluated against absolute and objective norms. However, viewing authenticity through the subjectivist perspective as the original object seems to be oversimplifying its complexity. It is not a fixed collection maintained by experts in museums; rather, it is seen by mass visitors from an objective viewpoint (Zhu, 2012). The objective approach to authenticity, according to Wang (1999), emphasizes that the visitor's authentic experience is dependent on the tourist, who acknowledges the authenticity of the visited artifacts or experiences. Value is put on objects, which are made from what are considered to be authentic materials and artisans, as well as activities and practices considered to be traditional and cultural.

Unlike the objectivism approach, the constructivist approach of authenticity refers to the studies and scholars who argue that authenticity is socially constructed and is something subjective, negotiable (Cohen,1988) and context oriented (Salamone, 1997). It occurs when a group of people reaches a social agreement that a reality, experience, or phenomenon is true. (Moscardo & Pearce, 1986; Cohen, 1988). Wang (1999) claims that from their conceptual, political, and social contexts, tourists and agents create different versions and meanings of the gazed objects' authenticity. As a result, what is true is subjective, and relative. This type of authenticity was explored by Wang

(1999) in relation to constructivism, an approach focused on pluralistic and relativistic views of truth, or interpretivist epistemology.

Both objective authenticity, which is based on truly genuine/real things, and constructive authenticity, which can take several forms depending on the tourist's worldview, do not have enough conceptual power to explain the tourism phenomenon, according to Wang (1999) and thus, he suggested the approach of existential authenticity.

Existential approach of authenticity, according to Wang (1999), is the one that analyzes the experience by considering personal questions raised by each tourist/individual, such as their feelings and perceptions. "Authenticity is thus a projection of tourists' own views, perceptions, desires, stereotyped images and consciousness onto visited things, especially toured Others," according to Wang (1999, p. 355). He also calls it activity-based authenticity, as opposed to MacCannell and Cohen's object-based approach, since it only applies to the tourist experience, not the visited object:

"*Existential authenticity refers to a potential existential state of Being that is to be activated by tourist activities. Correspondingly, authentic experiences in tourism are to achieve this activated existential state of Being within the liminal process of tourism. Existential authenticity can have nothing to do with the authenticity of toured objects.*" (Wang, 1999, p. 352)

By deviating from the traditional thinking of toured objects-based authenticity, Wang (1999) introduces existential authenticity to imply a deep sense of "authentic self" as a true feeling. It entails the quest for one's real or genuine self, which can be discovered through touristic activities or involvement in social or cultural events. As a result, tourists' feelings may have a major impact on their experiences. Existential authenticity, according to Wang (1999), is divided into intra-personal authenticity (bodily feelings of pleasure, relaxation, spontaneity, and self-making) and inter-personal authenticity (family ties and touristic communitas), with the author claiming that the search is not for authenticity, but it is in among the tourists themselves (Wang, 2000). Other scholars have also discussed the approach. To be oneself existentially, according to the existentialism perspective, implies to exist according to one's existence or nature, which surpasses day-to-day actions or practices, as well as self-conceptualization. (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006).

As a recap from what we read so far about the three main approaches to authenticity; the objectivist, the constructionist, and the existentialist, it seems that, in the tourism and authenticity debate, the object-centered approach to objective and constructive authenticity, as well as the self-searching approach to existential authenticity, are implying a dichotomy of objective-subjective orientation (Zhu, 2012).

Finally, there is an attempt to merge the three previously mentioned approaches, in order to effectively understand and capture the concept of authenticity in tourism. Belhassen et al. (2008) proposed the concept of theoplacity, which suggests that existential authenticity is the result of socially constructed understandings about the places visited and the actions taken, combined with the tourists' own empirical encounters. In their study, Belhassen et al. (2008) show that the quest for authentic experiences during pilgrimages to holy locations is determined by three interconnected factors: the theopolitical ideology that underpins the journey, the places visited, and the travelers' activities. To express the multidimensionality of its socioreligious and sociospatial origins, they called the relationship "theoplacity," combining the Greek "theos" (god) with the Medieval Latin "placea" (place) (Belhassen et al. 2008). Theoplacity acknowledges the power of toured objects as essential for achieving authenticity, while also featuring the existential approach, that of an individual's perception and interpretation of authenticity (Le et al., 2019. **Figure 1** below illustrates the interaction between the 3 aforementioned approaches, which attempt to decipher tourism authenticity. These approaches are the objectivism, constructivism and existential, and their integration results in the negotiated authenticity, or else called theoplacity (Le et al., 2019):
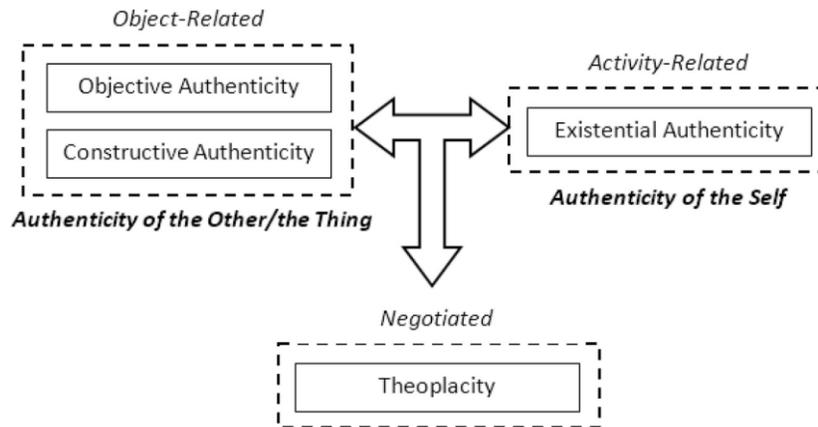
Figure 1 authenticity dimensions, depicted from Le et al., (2019)

2.1.2 Tourists' perceptions of authenticity

There is debate about the definition of the term in the scope of tourism experiences, and Cohen (1988) claims that this is a challenge in research on authenticity. The majority of tourists questioned do not understand the context of the question, which undermines the searches, according to this author (Cohen, 1988). When talking about their travel experiences, visitors often use the word "authentic." They do not, nevertheless, all have the same meaning of the term (Safaaa et al., 2017).

Similarly, the work of MacCannell demonstrates the complexity of the concept authenticity and its possible uses. Tourist backgrounds can be thought of as a continuum, with the leading state being for display and the posterior state being more genuine and motivating touristic consciousness by offering a "chance to glimpse the real." The idea of authenticity in tourism is inseparably linked to the type of tourists visiting a place. (Tiberghien et al., 2017). McKercher and Du Cros (2002) divided tourists into several categories based on how important authenticity is to them when visiting attractions. For some tourists, authenticity is essential, while for others, it is secondary. (McKercher & Du Cros, 2002).

The popularity of a destination and visitors' perceptions of the authenticity of a location and its local culture, according to Tasci and Knutson (2004), are related. When tourists seek comfort in their journeys, the sensation of "being at home" is seen as particularly important in achieving this experience. Wang (2007) mentions that, as visitors on a subconscious level look for 'home' in their journeys, the visitor and tourism relations with local communities are constantly constructing

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personalized authenticity. The visitor's perception enters a transcendent state, resulting in a sense of self-awareness and an existentially authentic experience (Wang, 1999). When a tourist stops becoming a tourist, this coincidental moment is thought to be instantly authentic (Willson, 2013). Finally, the authenticity of an experience is created over time as the consumer interacts with the hosting community, and it is constantly negotiated (Matos & Barbosa, 2018).

Overall, there is a need to learn more about how visitors' conceptions of authenticity function in the host–guest relationship, as well as the degree to which the concept of authenticity serves as a foundation for interaction and social exchange, as Wang (1999) explains (Tiberghien et al., 2017). According to Taylor (2001), there are as many meanings of authenticity as there are people who write about it. (Taylor, 2001).

2.2 Tourism experiences

As previously mentioned, the literacy research aims to provide an overview and cover the most important features of authenticity and tourism experiences. In doing so, it will be investigated how visitors interpret the concept "authenticity" throughout the tourism experience stages. As authenticity is perceived differently by each person, and also since authenticity consists of and is inherently related to tourism activities and experiences, it has to be examined how tourism experiences and activities are defined. Moreover, it has to be further investigated how these activities and experiences differentiate in time; thus, in different phases of the constructed experience, which consequently will affect what visitors' value and perceive as authentic, and also to what extent. Conclusively, this subsection aims to give an overview of the literature in the subject of tourist experience and its phases, as well as the connection with the goal of authenticity throughout, which is vital in addressing the research objective.

An individual's understanding of tourism activities and services is causally linked to their tourist experience. Tourist perceptions also influence how they view the definition of tourism destinations (Wang, 1999). In their study, Park and Santos (2017), mention that understanding what makes memorable tourism experiences is critical to current tourism research and practice, given the links between those and consumer behavior. Therefore, many scholars have granted consideration to conceptualizing and assessing tourism experiences (Kim & Ritchie 2014; Ritchie & Crouch 2003;

Tung & Ritchie 2011). Pine and Gilmore's (1999) concept of the experience economy has been related to the rising focus on experiences in tourism. It is based on subjective mindset, resulting from one's own particular feelings and emotions while on vacation. An individual's impression of tourism activities and products is linked to their tourist experience (Wei et al., 2019). This impression consequently influences how they view the idea of tourism destinations (Wang, 1999).

Tourism experiences are produced by a process of visiting, learning, and participating in activities in a setting that is different from home (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). Participation in activities, which are viewed as exciting and different from routines, are part of travel to destinations (Edensor, 2000). This involvement inspires curiosity and adds to the construction of meaning from the vacation (Ryan, 2000). When defining a specific travel experience, a memorable tourism experience is a significant encounter that is remembered and selectively recreated by the tourist (Tung and Ritchie 2011). Tourists have a tendency to memorize unexpected events that occur throughout their journeys (MacCannell 1973). The most memorable travel experiences are frequently the unexpected ones, and the best discoveries are self-created.

In general, several dimensions have been investigated in conceptual models, as well as different phases of the experience, and the impacts of the experience. Tung and Ritchie (2011) for instance, suggest that there are four major features of memorable tourism experiences: affect (i.e., positive or negative feelings linked with the experiences), expectations (i.e., unexpected positive surprises, dissatisfaction for not reached expectations), consequentiality (i.e., social development and self-discovery), and recollection. On a different note, Kim and Richie (2014), expanded the tourism experience to seven dimensions (hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty).

Moreover, studies have also resulted into an association between tourist experience and social interactions with others during the travel (Haldrup & Larsen 2003; Murphy 2001). While at the same time, it is suggested that photographs help in providing lasting moments and serve as an important tool for people to recall past events (Caton & Santos 2008). In regard to this, the development of technology has been a great help for all the practices of digital media that can enhance memory-making (Lohmeier & Pentzold 2014). Regarding memory making though, what should be mentioned is that memories are not static or stable; they are flowing and vary through

time, as different circumstances of a phenomenologically same experience may create different memories.

2.2.1 Tourism Experiences: chronological phases

The tourism experience has been viewed as a multiphase phenomenon, covering a broad range of interconnected and interrelated processes, involving all phases of tourism experience. Its phases have been addressed from a chronological viewpoint: pre-trip planning and anticipation, destination on-site phase and post-trip recollection (Clawson & Knetch 1966; Iso-Ahola 1980; Meng, 2006). When a tourist is inspired to take a holiday, the process of deciding and organizing the trip begins, followed by transportation to the destination; clearly, tourist experiences extend beyond the on-site experience (Killion, 1992).

Some choose to do less planning because of many factors such as a lack of time, prior travel experience, or an inclination to take risks. Nevertheless, even if they have planned their trip ahead of time, most travelers must encounter numerous on-site conditions in order to improve the quality of their vacation experience (Prebensen & Foss, 2011). Some claim that tourists' pre-trip information gathering, and planning is a continuous and dynamic process, which progresses throughout and affects the overall tourist experience (Choi et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2012).

Tourists typically regard the pre-trip and en-route phases of a vacation trip as a way of improving the perceived quality of the on-site experience, despite the fact that these phases may have their own worth for contributing to the satisfaction of the trip process (Prebensen et al., 2012). Likewise, as stated in Prebensen et al. (2012), Meng (2006) identifies quality of tourism through tourists' perceptions of the extent of satisfaction of their experience related to the goods and services obtained throughout the different phases of the tourism experience. The customer journey model in **Figure 2** below shows the three tourism experience phases, with the value creation for each (Yachin, 2018).
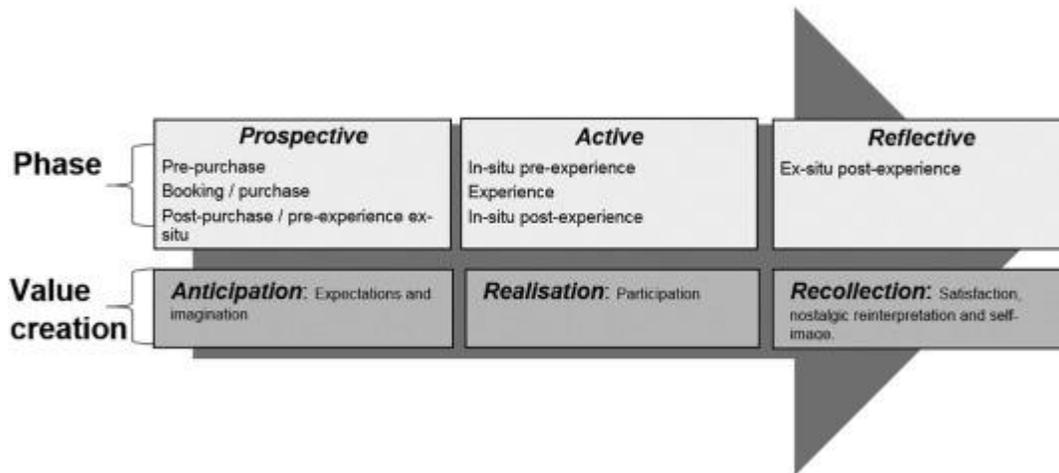
Figure 2, The customer journey model by Jonathan M. Yachin (2018).

Anticipation and expectations are mostly built prior to travel, according to scholars, and substantially influence on-site experiences, such as how people perceive a destination and how they interact with hosts (Dunn 2006; Hospers 2009). Furthermore, travelers' backgrounds have a considerable impact on destination selection, anticipation and expectations, and the construction of experiences (Park & Santos, 2017).

In Park and Santos (2017) is stated that tourists recall specific experiences after traveling (Tung and Ritchie 2011), and these memories are generated from all stages of tourism experience and not only from on-site experiences (Noy, 2004). While pre- and on-site experiences provide insight into the study of memorable tourism experiences, it is the experiences accessed and recalled after travel that are most informative when it comes to predicting future behavior and decision making (Wirtz et al., 2003).

Briefly, a multiphase strategy that examines sequential travel stages (pre-, during, and post-travel) and a range of travel elements is required for a memorable tourist experience study. To recognize the entire value process of a trip, quality elements related to the various phases of a travel might be used (Prebensen et al., 2012). Finally, according to the aforesaid, it is clear that the tourist's perception of authenticity is directly and indirectly impacted by the chronological phases of the tourism experience. Therefore, the three phases of tourism experience and the value process will be useful for the approach in this thesis.

2.2.2 Co-creating tourism experiences

One important subtype of tourism experiences is co-creation activities. Recent tourism study emphasizes the importance of tourists as co-creators of their own experiences. (Prebensen et al., 2013; Tan et al., 2013). Experiences are desirable because they connect the emotive, cognitive, and behavioral components on a moment-to-moment dynamic (Schmitt, 1999), and contribute to the meaning of people's life (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The tourist contributes to a particular aspect, phase, or the entire tourism experience in some way (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009). Consequently, co-creation affects the level in which tourists perceive authentic experiences in visited destinations, thus making co-creation an important aspect to consider.

Furthermore, co-creation of tourism experiences is strongly related to the chronological phases of a travel. Co-creation includes processes of interconnected interactions and events that unite the tourist and other actors before travel, during the stay at the destination and after the travel (Andrades & Dimanche, 2014; Binkhorst, 2007; Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Prebensen et al., 2013; Volo, 2009). Co-creation is defined as necessitating the visitor's active engagement and involvement during the on-site experience, stressing two aspects: emphasizing active engagement in events that place the tourist at the center of a network of participants in the experience setting, and considering specific experiences that motivate the tourist to interact with others (Campos et al., 2015).

The ultimate goal of a tourist experience is to produce enduring memories that a tourist will reflect about and share in different social media platforms (Andrades & Dimanche, 2014). Experiences entail a temporary disruption of everyday life and opposite the daily routine, therefore the experience memorability is linked to uniqueness, spontaneity, and unexpectedness (Andrades & Dimanche,2014; Kim et al., 2012); thus, with the search for authenticity in travels.

In their study, Campos et al. (2016) mention that co-creation can be discussed through two perspectives. First, as a series of interconnected interactions and activities that link tourists and other actors, with experiences serving as the setting for those interactions and activities (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009; Volo, 2009), and second focused on the specific tourism experience as it is occurring in the field (Prebensen & Foss, 2011). This viewpoint is more focused on visitors, as they choose to engage in tourism, and how they communicate through their own tourism experiences (Campos et al. 2016).

For Larsen (2007), individuals create tourism co-creation experiences when participating in activities and interacting with subjects in a particular experience situation. Interpersonal interactions occur between people in a variety of circumstances, from informal to formal, and include verbal and nonverbal communication processes. They are seen as extremely important in the hospitality and tourism industries (Tan et al., 2013; Andrades & Dimanche, 2014).

Nature-based or sport tourism, cultural and heritage tourism, resort tourism, adventure tourism, events and festivals, and religion and pilgrimage tourism are all examples of co-creation, encompassing active participation and interaction with others during consumption, according to Campos et al. (2015). Since it focuses on the tourist and how he chooses to practice tourism, it is strongly tied to the concept of creative tourism (Richards, 2010; Richards & Marques, 2012). In this sense, depending on the tourist's role, either active or passive, in the sort of tourism experience chosen, the tourism experience may be co-creative or non-co-creative (Campos et al. 2015).

As already mentioned above, co-creating experiences include interrelated and interconnected processes that may occur throughout the stages of the tourism experience: pre-trip, on site and post-trip. From the tourist perspective, examples of the before travel co-creation could be brainstorming in travel design or an online platform helping design an itinerary. During the travel, an example could be carving an instrument in a workshop. Finally, sharing experiences and memories in a digital community is an example of a co-creation experience in the post-travel phase (Campos et al. 2015).

2.2.2.1 Technology facilitating co-creation in tourism experiences

Technology plays a vital role in co-creating experiences. More specifically, thanks to new technologies, customers may create experiences that are more useful to them from both an economic-functional, as well as a cultural and ideological viewpoint (Cova & Dalli, 2009). Potential tourists can now get information about a destination from anywhere and at any time, thanks to technological advances. Tourists have evolved from passive recipients to networked consumers, who co-create their experiences in a technology-enabled destination environment, as a result of the usage of technology (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Various users become connected as technology opens up new areas for co-creation. Websites, mobile city guides, travel guides, virtual life, are all cutting-edge types of technology enriching the experience (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). Web 2.0 technologies enable a shared virtual arena, in which the tourist consumer can connect with a large network of people, such as friends, family, and peers. In addition to that, a tourist is connected to a larger social network of followers and other tourists, who like participating, socializing, and sharing experiences about a certain destination online. (Neuhofer et al.,2012).

Consequently, in the co-creation process, technology can ensure a higher degree of knowledge, transparency, and flexibility (Chathoth et al., 2016). The attitude of using technology to share tourism experiences expands the experience in both time and location (Neuhofer et al.,2012), and enhances the role of tourists as experience co-creators. Ultimately, their mindset is able to contribute to the creation of tourism experiences (Buonincontri et al., 2017).

To conclude, the literature review section elaborated on the topics of authenticity, tourism experiences, the shift towards the co-creation in tourism experiences and technology as a facilitator for co-creating tourism experiences. Literature shows that the concept of authenticity is complex and multidimensional, but also depends on many aspects and on the subjectivity in tourists' mindsets. Tourism experiences can be distinguished chronologically in three distinct phases, the pre-trip phase, on-site phase, and post-trip phase. Co-creation refers to tourists participating and engaging in the creation of their own experiences either physically or mentally, and technology assists in creating and retaining unique authentic memories. However, all the aforesaid are strongly interdependent and interconnected, as the creation of any tourism experience and of any memory relies on various aspects such as: on different chronological phases, on one's own perceptions and personal involvement, but also on technological means (or not) in order to be able to recall those experiences. Consequently, tourism experiences and co-creation, in their distinct chronological phases, assist in the travelers' attempt to live, witness, and create authentic experiences and moments, in order to frame and outline what ultimately can be described as unique or authentic.

3. Methodology

This section provides a review of the overall methodology of the research approach, data collection and data analysis in regard to the research question. The underlying philosophical standpoint and the methods, which have been followed, will be presented, and explained. Philosophy of science is a philosophical position involved with the basis, methods, and effects of science. Science attempts to comprehend why the world is the way it is, and its three main paradigms are: natural science, social science, and humanities.

According to one's paradigm choice, what counts as reality, truth and understanding, varies, as similarly the chosen method of studying a subject does. The philosophical foundations of the study have an impact on how I approach the research question by guiding what should be studied, how it should be studied, and how the findings should be examined and analysed. Apart from the philosophical standpoint of the research in this specific study, the section will also explain the research approach, the primary and secondary data collection, the adopted qualitative methods with the in-depth semi-structured interviews, the desk research, and the method of analysis. Lastly, the section will include the limitations that have been encountered throughout the research process.

3.1 Research paradigm

This research aims to explore how is authenticity perceived in tourism experiences from the tourist perspective, and the first step is to define the philosophical standpoint that will guide this research throughout.

The paradigm enlightens the options for organizing the study. Guba & Lincoln (1994), define paradigms as "the belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in the choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105). Thus, researchers inevitably are impacted from a range of paradigms in their subject of investigation and their methods are based on their paradigm positioning as researchers.

This research is conducted implementing the social constructivism paradigm, which considers that social phenomena and their meaning are continuously being created by social contexts (Bryman, 2012). In the context of this research, I seek to explore the authenticity as a concept in tourism, from the tourists' perspective, more specifically what it means to travellers, how they perceive

authenticity when travelling and how their tourist experiences are shaped to find it in the chosen destinations. Social constructivism implies that reality is created through the use of language in interactions with others and is predominantly inspired by society and culture (Carter & Little, 2007). Each person's perception of the world is based on their personal experiences, and reality is seen through subjective meanings (Goldkuhl, 2012). This means that different informants may describe the same concept or subject in a different way, having their own unique viewpoint (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2015).

Constructivism aims on meaning-making, with the attempt to comprehend how people make sense of their worlds and realities (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2015). As a result, the aim of this study is to look at the knowledge, perceptions, meanings, and experiences of various people when it comes to authenticity in tourism.

3.1.1 Hermeneutic considerations

Hans-Georg Gadamer, a German philosopher and theorist, is the creator of hermeneutics and the hermeneutic spiral, which is a method of comprehending something that cannot be measured, like i.e., in this study, authenticity in tourism (Gadamer, 2008).

The hermeneutic spiral involves three stages: pre-understanding, interpretation, and new understanding. In this research, I have a pre-understanding or perception of what authenticity in tourism experience is. My pre-understanding comes from the knowledge on the research done so far in the topic, therefore to my acknowledge, when understanding this concept, I do not start from scratch. I use this pre-understanding to interpret new information, and by these means, create a new understanding. As this goes as a spiral, the three stages are repeated without any limit for when one has enough knowledge.

This thesis explores, individual tourist perspectives, experiences, and beliefs. As a result, the paper will adhere to hermeneutical principles (Nygaard, 2012, p. 32). Given that the research topic concerns the subjective human understanding of it, hermeneutics appears to be more appropriate for the study, (Nygaard, 2012, p. 28). However, as a reaction, it will surely have an impact on the research findings (Nygaard, 2012, p. 23-24).

3.2 Research Approach

There are two basic schools of thinking, according to Trochim & Donnelly (2006): deductive and inductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning is defined as the process of moving from particular observations to generalizations, and deductive reasoning is defined as the process of moving from general to the specific. Furthermore, each explanation takes a distinct method to research in terms of investigation, data collection, analysis, and conclusion making.

According to Creswell & Poth (2016), qualitative research employs inductive reasoning, because researchers begin with certain measures and observations, and based on them they attempt to detect and discover patterns and concepts in the data. Researchers may be able to develop more general findings or theories, as a result of this endeavour to discover and disclose patterns. Deductive reasoning, unlike inductive reasoning, draws conclusions from rules, laws, or evidence, which also applies to quantitative analysis; as a result, deductive has been associated mostly with doing quantitative research (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006).

Furthermore, since each style of reasoning requires a particular sort of analysis, qualitative research was chosen. Statistical analysis, such as inferential or descriptive statistics, is usually associated with quantitative research (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is frequently carried out in natural settings. The researcher is usually in charge of data gathering and must record interviewees' statements and thoughts. The researcher must analyse the words and find common concepts and themes; this is a challenging procedure that focuses on the participants' human comprehension and interpretation.

As Gadamer (2008) argues, that new knowledge is made from interaction with others, which enforces a qualitative data collection (Gadamer, 2008). This technique is more appropriate for this study since it recognizes the importance of the researcher-participant interaction in developing a holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Qualitative research recognizes the existence of various realities. Each person represents a unique set of experiences and points of view; thus, each person witnesses a unique reality (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). As a result, each interviewee for this paper will bring their own experiences to the table, as well as provide comments and insights.

Social Constructivism is normally linked with qualitative methods (Creswell, 2014) and seeks answers to the research questions about a socially constructed phenomenon (Bryman, 2012). Given the purpose of this study to understand how tourists perceive authenticity when travelling, in which ways they achieve it and what are their overall reflections around this topic, the chosen positioning highlights that the informants are co-creators of the social reality. In relation to that, the uncertainty and flexibility of meaning-making and of the symbols, such as language and visual images, are used to express and communicate meaning to oneself and to others (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2015). Therefore, in this approach, context is particularly important, and it also becomes relevant for the collection of the primary data, where knowledge is generated through dialogue in the form of interviews, which means that language and verbal expression become part of the analysis.

Additionally, in qualitative research, the researcher can move back and forth between collection and analysis of data and must re-analyse data to unearth new themes or establish more complex linkages and patterns between concepts. Moreover, when classifying data and knowledge into themes, the researcher's personal perception is added to the transcription and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Consequently, qualitative research aims to learn and obtain knowledge from participants (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

Subsequently, since subjective viewpoints will be employed, it was determined to gather data using qualitative instruments and analyse it suitably, in order to get a conclusion on the study subject. This technique will work inductively and will be based on empirical data collection. Ultimately, this research relies on completing a comprehensive literature search and constructing a broad interview guide in order to collect participants' personal perspectives, which are primarily text, and then analysing and using that text for conceptualization (Creswell & Poth, 2016); without forgetting that the researcher will definitely add his own bias into the process (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005).

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Qualitative semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured qualitative interviews were chosen as a data collecting approach, because the empirical data in this paper is based on subjective experiences and opinions. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they might generate significant knowledge from different viewpoints and experiences. In addition, there is enough room for spontaneous and unexpected perspectives to emerge (Van Aken et. al., 2007). Finally, according to Kvale (2008), this strategy has several advantages and disadvantages, which will be discussed shortly below.

Interviewees should be told about the substance of the interview ahead of time, according to Kvale (2008). The questions, as well as a brief abstract and description of the research topic, were delivered to the participants by e-mail in advance. The goal was to acquaint respondents with the topic and questions, so that they could have a more productive and positive conversation during the interview.

Kvale (2008) also recommends segmenting the interview and its questions into several themes. The literature study and the research question guided the development of the interview's structure, topics, and questions. The themes and classifications offered in the literature review section were likewise followed in the concepts, categorization, and priority of the questions. Furthermore, because the focus of this paper's research and literature analysis was ultimately centred on distinct phases of a travel experience, such as pre-trip, on-site, and post-trip, the interview questions are divided into the appropriate phases. However, the interview guide entails a number of broader questions, in order to allow interviewees to express themselves about the topic and to provide them the opportunity to contribute fresh ideas and perspectives to the research. Finally, the interview guide, which was also sent in advance to participants can be seen in **Appendix (Appendix H, Interview Guide).**

Moreover, in order to achieve a high level of replicability, the interview questions were also written to match terminology, acronyms, or definitions available in the literature. When attention is brought to replicability, differences or parallels between interviews and literature become more interesting (Asendorpf et al., 2013).

Finally, using qualitative interviews may raise ethical issues. The participant's informed consent is a critical ethical matter (Kvale, 2008, p. 6). As a result, prior to performing the interview, all persons were notified and gave their approval. Furthermore, the confidentiality of the interviewees is a significant ethical consideration. Therefore, they will be referred to as participants (**P**), and will be given numbers, i.e. **P1-P7.** Although anonymity can help the researcher control findings and information, it also allowed participants to express themselves freely and contribute significant insight that would not have been possible otherwise.

In total 7 interviews were conducted, 4 of them over the phone and 3 of them via email. The interviews, which were conducted over the phone, and the corresponding audio files can be accessed at the **Appendix: (Liliana (P1)_Interview.3gpp, Sina (P2)_Interview.3gpp, Alexandros (P3)_Interview.3gpp, Andia (P4)_Interview.3gpp)** or by using the following link: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1RDvdT4JqyjcF81uYtv4oAzAxecjp36pK?usp=sharing.

All 7 completed and transcribed interviews can be accessed in the **Appendix (Appendices A, B, C, D, E, F, G).** Additionally, the interviews were conducted in English and then subsequently transcribed in English using the otter.ai website, and its transcription tool (Otter, 2021). Despite the limited time available to conduct, transcribe, code, and analyse the interviews and the small number of participants, the interviewees' responses approached a level of saturation, implying that additional interviews with similar subjects would not have revealed new themes or provided new insights (Kvale, 2008 p.43-44).

3.3.2 Recruiting Interviewees

Since the topic of investigation is related to tourists and their perceptions around authenticity, the interviewees should be individuals who have travelled around the globe in the past and have relevant travel experiences to share. The basic criteria, in regard to age range, was to be of a certain age group, which could have at least some experiences in travelling, therefore the range should be at least from 21 years old and above. Other than that, there were no more specific selection criteria, neither nationality, gender, or any kind of background, because I did not want to exclude a lot of people, and at the same time I wanted to ensure a minimum number of participants.

Participants were merely contacted through personal relationships and network, but also via LinkedIn or travel groups in Facebook. As a result, the interviewers recommended additional

suitable persons, who would be interested in participating in this research and in getting interviewed as well, resulting in a snowball sampling (Christensen et al., 2008). During the pandemic crisis, when most people only had a limited amount of free time, this repeated sampling proved to be effective.

Regarding the participant's profiles, their age ranges from 24-40 years old, and they have different nationalities. Each one of them has a unique profile and characteristics, as described hereunder:

- Interviewee 1: Liliana (P1), 38 years old, from Mexico, student & employee in tourism & restaurant industries
- Interviewee 2: Sina (P2), 38 years old, from Germany, employee in tourism industry
- Interviewee 3: Alexandros (P3), 40 years old, from Greece, yachting agent
- Interviewee 4: Andia (P4), 24 years old, Greek Albanian, IT student
- Interviewee 5: Vineet (P5), 33 years old, from India, tourism researcher
- Interviewee 6: Efi (P6), 40 years old, from Greece, employee in tourism industry
- Interviewee 7: Daša (P7), 31 years old, from Slovenia, employee in an NGO

3.4 Data Analysis

This paper's research was both qualitative and exploratory in nature. As previously stated, the key stakeholder studied was tourists, as they are the primary source of relevant empirical data. On one hand, the objective of collecting empirical data is to see if and to what degree the interviewees' comments will validate the previously done literary research. Furthermore, if these interviews might lead to the discovery of new topics or subjects of interest. On the other hand, theories or models based on observations may be built, depending on the analysis and its results.

3.4.1 Method of Analysis

The completed interviews were analysed using the qualitative analysis software NVivo v. 12, and the relevant NVivo analysis file can be found in the **Appendix: (Analysis_Conducted_Interviews.nvp)** or by clicking the following link: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1bnSOTgYHoEtckwutNIMjyOYWdbruP6T4?usp=sharing. The data obtained from interviews will be categorized under comparable concepts in order to

successfully capture and analyse the data. Participants' replies will be grouped and conceived accordingly, in order to highlight the themes that they mentioned, as well as the new subjects that they raised.

Furthermore, it must be determined how themes are identified. There are two levels, according to Braun & Clarke (2006): the latent level, or otherwise called interpretative level, and the explicit, or so-called semantic level. When data gets thematized on an interpretative level, the data analysis attempts to analyse and hypothesize ideologies based on the participants' wordings, moving beyond the explicit substance and meaning of the interviews' comments.

In contrast, when utilizing a semantic approach, data is conceptualized by using its explicit meaning rather than further analysing or researching the participants' wordings. The semantic approach begins with an initial description and categorization of data in order to highlight patterns in explicit content, then moves on to summary, and finally ends up with the interpretation of the findings, in an attempt to highlight the significance of previously recognized patterns, as contrasted to literature (Patton, 1990).

Moreover, the appropriate selection of epistemology of research determines what can be said about the findings, how to conduct the analysis and how to theorize meaning. On one hand, by using an essentialist/realist approach, one may easily theorize experience and meaning, because an essentially unidirectional relationship between experience, meaning and language is assumed (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). On the other hand, when following the constructivist perspective, it is believed that meaning and experience are socially constructed and reproduced rather than inherent in people (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consequently, the approaches that examine specific features, latent themes, and follow the constructivist paradigm frequently cluster together, whereas those that examine meanings across an entire data set, semantic themes, and follow the realist approach frequently cluster together.

Consequently, the analysis of this paper is following an interpretative approach, as interviewees respond to questions, which may require interpretation and thematization on a latent level. Finally, the process for conceptualizing the participants' responses comprises three steps of coding in the NVivo software (Van Aken et al., 2007: p. 139). The three steps of coding are defined below as "open coding," "theoretical coding," and "selective coding."

3.4.1.1 Open coding

Open coding was the first sort of coding used for analysis. During the procedure, codes were produced in parallel; as a new subject or notion arose from the empirical data, it was labelled or categorized appropriately (Van Aken et al., 2007: p. 139). As a result, many replies were categorized separately at first. During this activity, relevant themes and categories that emerged from the literature were also considered. Ultimately, the goal of this preliminary coding was to create a primary coding template, which also included sub-codes. In order to provide a consistent data analysis, this template would then guide and formulate the rest of the coding process.

3.4.1.2 Theoretical Coding

The causal linkages, relationships and coherences between the codes were to be identified in the second phase. Many existing codes were integrated into new themes, then adjusted and renamed as a result of this process. This was exemplified with codes such as "accommodation", "tickets/transportation", "attractions", "events/activities", which all can be related to a broader concept of what tourists search for and plan in advance, before deciding on which destination to travel. Consequently, recognizing code linkages aids in inductively connecting initial open coding to more general patterns of analysis (Van Aken et. al., 2007: p. 140).

3.4.1.3 Selective Coding

Finally, by combining open and theoretical codes, selective coding was applied. The main and most important themes and subjects were determined through selective coding. This procedure aided in defining the scope of research, as well as revealing and structuring the analysis' findings (Van Aken et al., 2007: p. 140).

3.5 Limitations

In this subsection the factors that restricted the process of research will be discussed. Moreover, the limitations of this project guided and formulated the final scope and approach of conducted research. The factors that affected the course of this paper are related to the collection of primary and secondary data, but also in the way the data analysis was performed. Conclusively, the

limitations of this study restrained its overall quality and the inclusion of multiple perspectives regarding the topic in question. Finally, the reported limitations act as an acknowledgement of the things that could be approached differently or added, if further research were to be conducted, and will be presented below in the corresponding sections.

3.5.1 Primary Data

The number of participants must be big enough in order to achieve data saturation and to answer the research topic (Kvale, 2008 p.43-44). Unfortunately, the pandemic crisis had a negative impact on empirical data collection, making it difficult to find a sufficient number of interviewees. As a result, the number of participants was limited to a maximum of seven. Some people who had shown an initial interest in this study, had to politely withdraw.

From the conducted interviews, out of 7, the 3 were e-mail interviews. The same interview guide was sent to the interviewees that responded via email, however, since the communication was not oral to follow up with sub-questions, the interpretative technique was not fully employed. The reasons that the interviewees chose to respond via e-mail was that some of them felt more comfortable answering questions in written form because they could better organize their thoughts and/or it was proved to be more practical for them in regard to time, because this way they could respond whenever it is convenient for them.

As previously mentioned, recruiting, and interviewing additional stakeholders would be more engaging in order to integrate diverse viewpoints. Furthermore, empirical data could be gathered in a different manner. There are a variety of approaches for gathering primary data, such as the use of questionnaires or surveys, that may have resulted in a higher level of participation, allowing for a different approach, such as the use of the positivist paradigm and quantitative approaches.

Furthermore, the interview guide may have been constructed differently. Although the substance of interview questions is derived from the paper's literature section, there may be subjects of interest that were not covered. In addition, interviews might have been performed in a variety of ways, other than over the phone or by email. Face-to-face interviews would be ideal, however due to the pandemic restrictions, this method of conducting interviews became challenging. The usage of video calls would also be beneficial in order to decipher the interviewees' physical and facial

emotions and expressions. However, the participants preferred to be interviewed by phone, or to express their ideas in writing via email, since it was more convenient for them.

Additionally, since there are different types of tourists, who also belong to different age groups, with various preferences and attitudes, the intention was to ensure participation of multiple age groups. However, it was generally difficult to achieve homogeneity among respondents, as it was ultimately agreed to include travellers, who have at least some relevant travel experiences, without adding multiple inclusion criteria for choosing participants. I have not chosen a specific context, i.e., how tourists from Greece or Denmark perceive authenticity, or how tourists who travel to Greece or Denmark perceive authenticity, and hence, left the topic broad. However, the aim was to gain an initial unravelling of a broader role of authenticity in tourism, as seen from the tourists' side, with no geographic restrictions. Subsequently, the cultural, but also the socio-political background of participants varies greatly, as they are persons coming from different countries and having unique characteristics. The specified background of participants was not considered thoroughly or properly when recruiting subjects for interviews, which also undoubtedly has a great impact on the conducted analysis of this paper.

Regarding the interview approach and its content, different techniques and methods could be utilized. For instance, the inclusion of two rounds of interviews would be preferable, in order to be able to critically reflect on the responses of the interviewees, and consequently to improve the empirical data extraction of the second round. However, due to a lack of time and flexibility from both sides, this was sadly not possible. After conducting the first 2 interviews, I personally experienced a change and an improvement in my ability to conduct the upcoming interviews; thus, dividing interviews in rounds would allow for a more successful conversation and the gathering of more relevant data to address the research question.

Moreover, regarding the nature and the actual content of the interview questions, it would be desirable to add questions which would entail photos. Based on those pictures, participants could express themselves in a different way and to ultimately provoke multiple responses to them. In addition, the collection of empirical data could move beyond the traditional structured interview, i.e. a good alternative, or complementary method is to add field observations, however that was not feasible due to the total absence of visitors in Copenhagen, as a result of the pandemic lockdowns and travel restrictions. Furthermore, digital observations could have been utilised, i.e.,

the use of observations from online groups, such as Facebook travel groups, in which many tourists and travellers provide their feedback and insight. Lastly, the overall structure of the interview guide, the categorization of questions, as well as the content of the questions could have been formulated differently.

3.5.2 Data Analysis

As previously stated, various data collection procedures, rather than interviews, may have been preferred. The analysis of this study would have been impacted as a result. A statistical analysis could have been possible with a bigger sample size. Consequently, a variety of different analytical techniques or software may have been more suited. Different methodologies or technologies may have been used, instead of NVivo software for a qualitative analysis.

Moreover, in regard to structure and the presentation of the analysis, it was influenced by the studies, articles and theories presented earlier in the respective literature review chapter. The analysis presents the findings based on the different tourism chronological phases, which are the pre-trip, on-site, and post-trip phases. However, results could have been presented differently, for instance, based on the different authenticity approaches, as described in literature, such as objectivist, constructivist, or existential authenticities.

In terms of the paper's analysis, there is one crucial component that influences the quality of every research project and its analysis section. The consistency of findings is referred to as reliability. Only when a different researcher can replicate the same results, under identical conditions, is a study regarded trustworthy (Roberts & Priest, 2006); thus, if a separate interviewer could elicit the same responses from the participants for analysis. Consequently, the paper's reliability is restricted, since all interviews are transcribed and analysed by the same individual.

Finally, any useful study, according to Kvale (2008), should be able to transfer its findings to real-world settings, or relevant situations (Kvale, 2008, p. 120-129). Therefore, in order to ensure that knowledge gained from a research effort can be extended, a representative sample is usually chosen at random using statistical methods (Kvale, 2008, p. 120-129). Moreover, relevant demographic and ethnographic data must be examined in order to ensure correct sampling and promote generalization. In conclusion, since the above-mentioned approaches were not used

extensively, the quality of the analysis and its findings are restricted. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized.

3.5.3 Secondary Data

Literacy research of this project consists mainly of studies and articles, in which the topics of tourism authenticity, tourism experiences and tourism chronological phases are investigated. Despite the abundance of references in the paper, it would be preferable to include more reports, surveys, or databases that are relevant to the subjects at hand. However, due to the subjective nature of the research topic, it was unfeasible to gather data and conclude about a specific approach. As a result, the relevant subtopics, which are presented in this paper and are related to the broad topic of authenticity in tourism, could be different, or more themes could be added. Moreover, there may be important subthemes or concepts that were left out.

Lastly, since literature review investigates authenticity, which is a concept that is highly subjective and relies on individual perceptions, there is one major factor that it would be worth examining and mentioning, and that is culture. Travellers' attitudes towards the pursuit for authenticity, and what they frame and perceive as authentic experience, may be partially affected by their cultural background. However, this factor has not been considered or mentioned appropriately.

4. Analysis

As stated earlier, although the term authenticity has many dimensions, I will discuss in this chapter factors and aspects of tourism experience that can create different meanings around the term, depending on the context and the subjectivity with which an individual can approach the topic. How tourists perceive the concept of authenticity, throughout the three chronological phases of travelling, is what I will be discussing in this chapter. Most dominant topics around "authenticity" in tourism will be presented and analyzed, based on the findings from the data collection, aiming to give answers to the research question.

I will be discussing how authenticity is understood and viewed through the eyes of the tourists, from many different aspects. Since as already mentioned and stated in the literature review, there is no specific definition of authenticity and it may have many interpretations due to its subjective nature, I will unfold the findings regarding the process of the entire tourism experience.

The theory suggests three main phases which have a chronological distinction: pre-trip planning and anticipation, destination on-site phase and post-trip recollection (Clawson & Knetch 1966; Iso-Ahola 1980; Meng, 2006), and the findings from the data collection were separated based on these phases in the following sub-sections. The findings will be mainly discussing examples that tourists could give from their own travel experiences and everyday life, in accordance with the theory and I will explore whether there is coherence or contradiction, as well as if there are new topics emerging. In order to examine further than the actual realization of the travel experience which occurs on the site, the analysis will discuss themes from all three phases. The separation of the three phases of the tourism experience is done for the sake of creating a connection of experiences before, during and after the travel, which will unfold the interpretations around authenticity throughout.

Through this analysis, to make my points clearer for the reader, I will use the support of quotes collected from the tourists during the primary data collection **(Appendices A, B, C, D, E, F, G).** Moreover, the NVivo file, which includes the conducted interviews can be seen in **Appendix: (Analysis_Conducted_Interviews.nvp)** or by clicking the following link: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1bnSOTgYHoEtckwutNIMjyOYWdbruP6T4?usp=sharin

g . This analysis has the aim of reaching a deeper understanding of the perceptions around the authentic tourist experiences, and the findings will be discussed to support or oppose the theory.

4.1 Understanding authenticity in the pre-trip phase of tourism experience

In the planning and anticipatory stage, according to the findings, the research the tourists make can be separated in two categories. First, the one with all the practical connotations, such as flight tickets or transportation in general from/to the destination, costs, accommodation, currencies and money exchange, information about vaccinations needed, weather conditions, connectivity and Wifi. The second category includes aspects such as information about the destination in relation to activities, events, attractions and sights, and neighborhoods. On a different note, there are those who prefer packaged trips (accommodation, transportation, activities) and those who choose the non-packaged, and book themselves separately the travel services as per their needs and preferences. First, I will briefly go through the practical aspects of planning in order to understand what is it that tourists dedicate time to in the pre-trip phase. Having a spherical overview, of their way of thinking, may lead to a better understanding of their perception of authentic experiences. Then, I will discuss in detail the planning process, which is connected to how they choose the experiences that they anticipate, in relation to authenticity.

4.1.1 Aspects of searching and planning

Most interviewees gave practical answers such as how far ahead they decide and plan their trip; their research is mainly about the transportation from/to the destination and the accommodation. The majority needs at least 2-3 months ahead to prepare for a leisure trip, and to take time off the responsibilities such as P4 (Appendix D, Q1). Some interviewees mentioned that they also search for other practicalities about the destination such as weather, clothing, money exchange, or a need for vaccinations, for example P7 (Appendix G, Q1).

For the planning and the booking of the basics, the opinions and habits are perceived differently. Also, a participant mentions that planning has also to do with the costs, therefore depending on the budget will search for a *"good season price-wise"*.

Being mobile and connected at all times is also considered an important aspect to take into consideration when planning a trip, as P7 says: *"Wifi or prepaid sim card is a must, so that's one of the first I'd plan to find or work with – buy a prepaid sim card at the airport is the most important thing to stay mobile."* (Appendix G, Q3).

The accommodation planning is something that all interviewees consider as especially important to arrange a priori. All of the interviewees replied that they prebook accommodation, at least for the first 3-4 overnights. Accommodation is connected with cost management, as well as location and transportation. Two of the interviewees also highlight the importance of time consuming when planning ahead, so they book accommodation to save time from the on-site phase: *"I plan ahead whatever is time-sensitive. Meeting people, first accommodation and transport to it"* (Appendix G, Q3).

Examining the second category that does not involve the practical arrangements when planning the trip, was the idea generation around the chosen destination. In particular, P4, when selecting the place to visit, spends time. The reason as we understand from the reply is not economic, but rather to make sure that the destination fulfills the prerequisites, as they mention:

> "*I check if there are districts in the city that I am visiting that are not so popular, but they have something to show me. Something more original, more unique. Not this over tourism in the main touristic areas, like Acropolis in Athens. Every town or capital has this town center that is always crowded and promoted. I want to see also the other side of cities."* (Appendix D, Q1).

We can also understand that seeing authentic parts of a city, avoiding the main touristic areas and the popular spot in a city, is something that some tourists consider seriously. Mkono (2012) refers that travelers are interested in authenticity of encounters, to explore cultural expressions that have yet to be discovered, and seek out the scenic, the local. Tourists show concern for the authenticity of the places they visit in this way (Matos & Barbosa, 2018).

Theory says that brainstorming about tourism experiences is an example of how tourist can co-create their experiences even before travel (Campos et al. 2015). The fact that they mention the quest for something original and unique, indicates that the pursuit of authenticity in the tourism experience starts from the pre-trip phase and the idea generation, long before the realization of the

actual trip. Attention is paid into searching for neighborhoods, less promoted district areas for two reasons. In terms of searching for authenticity, some avoid going to "must go" places that most of the times are crowded, which is something that also P1 agrees with, when mentioning that: *"we try to choose something that is not so crowded, then it is difficult to know the place and feel comfortable"* (Appendix A, Q1).

On a different note, Wang et al. (2002) suggest that Social Media enable users to create virtual travel communities, allowing travelers to gather and share information, build connections, and exchange their thoughts and reviews (Wang et al., 2002). During the planning process, tourists are interested into finding ways to interact with locals and gather information from them. P3 says that locals are a great source to seek information and therefore, *"I visit local websites, facebook groups and pages in order to gather information from locals on what to do and where to go"* This goes even further when P3 books *"accommodation in local home, provided by families, but also to 3,4- or 5-star hotels"* to explore characteristics of the hospitality and the culture of the place to visit (Appendix C, Q1). Similarly, P7 admits that asks the locals for recommendations: *"I would let myself stay in one place longer and take tips from locals and travelers and meet on the spot"* (Appendix G, Q2). This shows us the trustworthiness that locals have about their destination in the viewpoint of tourists.

4.1.2 Types of experiences that tourists search for

Not having mentioned the term "authenticity" yet in the so far asked questions, interviewees were asked about their preference regarding types of experiences and booking tools. In order to examine whether there is a specific pattern, for instance, if they choose packaged services or if they book independently and each aspect of their trip separately. Also, which types of experiences they feel more interested in searching and planning. Here, the opinions are quite diverse and depend on many factors. Examples can be the distance of the location from ones' home country, or concerns about their safety in the destination.

Some trust travel agencies to create a package for them, others book everything separately themselves. P1 referring to this question: *"Sometimes we go through a travel agency and then book like a package that includes the plane tickets and accommodation and sometimes the transportation from the airport to the hotel"* (Appendix A, Q2). On a second note, the same

interviewee, admits that this happens mainly for countries that they have heard that are not safe to travel: *"If it is a country where I know maybe it is not that safe to travel, I would book it with a travel agency. Definitely I would feel much safer"* (Appendix A, Q2). The fact that they book through a travel agency, makes them feel safer, which by their words: *"And it will give me more confidence. And if it gave me trust, that would make my travel experience much better"* (Appendix A, Q2). Here, the feeling of safety, enhances the travel experience, according to the interviewee.

On the same topic, P3, due to their occupation and their travel experience, says that they plan and book all services by themselves: *"Accommodation, hotel, landscapes I want to visit, attractions and sightseeing, tourist guides to see archaeological or historical places and landmarks"* They are the same who earlier admitted to choose accommodation in the houses of locals that are considered to be: *"in my opinion the best source of information, because things change in a destination, so even if you go back, you will have to be updated about the destination, you know, what has changed"* (Appendix C, Q3).

Regarding the types of experiences that a tourist searches for, before arriving at the destination, I can bring the case of P2 and the examples mentioned. P2 is a backpacker and does not go through travel agencies to plan or book a trip. What P2 says basically, is that being a backpacker has changed their travelling habits and practices towards many directions: *"We are backpackers, we are doing our own experience"* (Appendix B, Q2). In their research, Park and Santos (2017) suggest that backpackers, in particular, are said to be driven by a need for new and diverse experiences, as well as a desire to escape the monotony of daily life (Park & Santos 2017).

Additionally, backpackers mentioned that starting from the idea they have when choosing a destination and planning their trip, until the realization of the trip in the on-site phase, many things can change. They say that before booking the flights and accommodation, they need to have an idea about the destination and what they wish to do, although this is something that may change on the destination, because it may seem they will like it, but when they arrive, they do not. In their words:

> *"But we never book something in advance. So mainly, we have booked the first two or three nights. And we see what is going on, we have an idea about the places we like to stay, and sometimes you have an idea and say, okay, this place must be amazing, here there are lots*

of good things around, maybe we plan to stay a week. And then we arrive, and it is not that nice, I will feel not so welcome". (Appendix B, Q2)

What emerges here as a concept is also the feeling of being welcome in the destination one chooses to visit. Here, according to the interviewee, this feeling improves the tourism experience. According to Tasci and Knutson (2004), there is a close relation between the familiarity of a destination and tourists' perceptions of the authenticity of a place and its local community. When tourists seek familiarity in their trips, the sensation of "being at home" is viewed as particularly important in achieving this perception (Tasci & Knutson, 2004).

4.1.3 Use of technology for planning

In the pre-trip phase, all interviewees when asked, agreed on the use of technology as a facilitator for their research. Either to gather information about the country or destination they intent to visit, about all the practicalities mentioned in the section above, or using digital tools to actually plan itineraries, seek recommendations, read reviews from other travelers and book accommodation, transportation, or activities. P3 mentions: *"I visit local websites, facebook groups and pages in order to gather information from locals on what to do and where to go"* (Appendix C, Q1). P4 searches for several things online and: *"also the "must know" things about the place that I can find from reviews or from locals. I have used also the Rome2rio application a couple of times, it was useful when I was on the destination"* (Appendix D, Q3). This agrees with what theory suggests, as mentioned above, that Internet and especially, the social media platforms function as facilitators when collecting information via virtual travel communities (Wang et al., 2002).

In the study of Filieri et al. (2015) is mentioned that websites like TripAdvisor have grown in popularity among visitors, to the point where they may have an impact on the travel decisions of the nearly 200 million people, who visit the site each month for restaurant, accommodation, and vacation recommendations (Filieri et al. 2015). Indeed, most interviewees verify that they trust Tripadvisor and Booking.com not only to book services, but also to read reviews (Appendices D, C, F, Q2). Some of them admit that: *"Due to digital transformation travel agents are less approached & research about planning a trip is done through online mode (travel reviews website)"* (Appendix E, Q2). Another specific reference of what tourists use to search are national

organization websites: *"sites like https://www.inspirock.com/ and https://roadtrippers.com"* (Appendix G, Q2).

It seems that the quest for authenticity is affected by the use of technology, thus the usage of digital tools assists nowadays in seeking authenticity and connecting people. Applications help with the brainstorming and searching of information about experiences, and authentic experiences are initially constructed "digitally" today.

4.1.4 Anticipation

Aiming to give answers to the research question, I am exploring in this section how the idea generation and anticipatory phase are related to what tourists perceive as authentic experiences. To do that, I seek a deeper understanding of what tourists anticipate and attempt to explore, what are the feelings that they wish to experience and what are the purposes of their travels. Moreover, the aim was to explore from the findings if and how is authenticity perceived in the context of anticipating the tourism experience. Some anticipate seeing the attractions as P6 says: *"... see the well-known attractions from close"* (Appendix F, Q4) and P2 agrees to some extent, but not completely, by mentioning:

> *"Yeah, of course, the main attractions are always the must-see things but sometimes we try to search things off the beaten track. Let us say in Peru, everybody is running to Machu Picchu. We never been in Machu Picchu we visit places they are similar but not that well known. So, we do not run to the places or the big tour buses are going and mainly we have a scooter or something and driving around and say ah let us stop here let us stop there. So, a little of the local life"* (Appendix B, Q4).

They continue their thought by admitting that they prefer to avoid the crowd and the mass tourism (Appendix B, Q4). Here, we see "the local life" mentioned as one of the things that tourists anticipate. Theory says that anticipation and expectations, which are mostly formed before the travel, have a significant impact on the on-site experiences, such as how people view a place and its hosts (Dunn 2006; Hospers 2009). Apart from observing the local life, others anticipate exploring cultures and interacting with the locals, such as P3 who likes improvising and using their words: *"I am curious to see what my final thoughts and memories will be. What is separating this*

culture from others. I really look forward to that as well. So, interaction and communication with local communities" (Appendix C, Q4). Basically, what we see dominant in their opinions and feelings before travelling, is the willing to have a communication with the local communities. P4 even discusses about authentic tourism experiences in the anticipatory stage by saying:

> *"What I anticipate the most when planning a trip is the feeling of getting another perception, knowledge about another culture, listening to a different language, observing how people live in a different place. And since we are talking about authenticity, there is nothing more authentic than experiencing first-hand real life, as it happens."* (Appendix D, Q4)

We can see here, that even before travelling, tourists can relate their anticipation of meeting new cultures and observing the local life with the authenticity in tourism experiences. On the same note, P2 gives an example of a previous trip, to show what is the originality they seek for in their experiences:

> *"For example, you go to Indonesia. So, you sit on the beach, and half an hour later, you have a lot of local around you, and everybody likes to take a picture with you, and they want to know where you are from and they invite you in their house. But it is for them something special to have a white person in the house, kitchen, you drink the coffee or tea, and the neighbor sees that you have a white friend, that is an example. So, I do not know in how many different houses I have been already invited for tea or coffee and they never asked for money, but we always live a little you know, expensive status, but these are people that have really nothing, this is the real life we are real looking for."* (Appendix B, Q4)

Others anticipate the feeling and experience of being on the road (Appendix G, Q4), and sharing moments of exploring new places and cultures with their family (Appendix A, Q4). For others, local food is something they anticipate, as they find it to be part of an authentic travel experience, as P5 mentions: "*to get authentic experience of the destination & local food."* (Appendix E, Q3) and also P6: *"To discover the food treasures of the places to visit"* (Appendix F, Q4). Some also mention the disruption of their routine and relaxation as part of their anticipatory stage (Appendix A, Q4), because as theory says, travel can move people out of their daily lives and into new cultural domains (Tiberghien et al., 2017).

Lastly, another experience that some anticipate for is to explore landscapes, nature, and heritage of the destination to be visited. P5 mentions they anticipate visiting UNESCO world heritage sights (Appendix E, Q4). While P3 is vividly describing what they anticipate in regard to nature: *"If I go to national parks, to places of worldwide heritage, then of course it is something that I anticipate a lot. To see exotic life, creatures, plants, and the landscape."* (Appendix C, Q4). Here we may understand that for some tourists, exploring landscapes along with flora and fauna can also be perceived as authentic tourism experiences. As found in literature, tourism, as a driver for authenticity, provides tourists with access to natural and cultural places that they might not otherwise encounter in their daily lives, allowing them to fully express their "authentic self" (Brown, 2013; Wang, 1999).

To conclude the analysis of the pre-trip phase, participants' attitudes and viewpoints are aligned with the theory, to some extent. Tourists are interested in communicating with locals, as well as in searching of less crowded or less promoted neighborhoods; thus, the concept of authenticity in the pre-trip phase is emerging, even if the question is not directly made around it. Although, despite these hints, the majority of the interviewees, focused their attention into discussing more practical issues in the pre-trip phase of their tourism experience. Moreover, technology was found to play an important role, nowadays, since it gives the travelers all around the world the possibility to extend their knowledge and insight on destinations they want to visit. According to the empirical data, all aspects of a trip are researched using technology, either through Google, Tripadvisor, and /or the social media platforms, and in general there is an uptake of technology in seeking authenticity.

4.2 Perceptions of authenticity in the on-site phase of tourism experience

When tourists reach the destination and the experience becomes realized, the findings also indicate that the concept of authenticity in the tourism experience takes a more concrete meaning, because it is built around a specific context. These contexts, as discussed with the interviewees, will be presented and analyzed in this sub-chapter with the aim to shed more light into the research question of this thesis. How do tourists perceive authenticity in their tourism experience, in particular for this sub-chapter, in the on-site phase?

4.2.1 Types of tourism experiences

When it comes to the types of experiences preferred on the destination, the findings indicate that there is a combination of many activities that satisfy the tourists. In order to be more concrete for the reader, and to be more focused on the highlights that arise from the research, the next lines will present and analyze the main topics emerged around the concept of authenticity in tourism experience. The dominant themes are related to personalized experiences, mainstream sites vs. less touristic areas, culture and events, and local cuisine.

The majority of the interviewees choose the personalized services and experiences in their trip as opposed to the mainstream, for example, P4 mention about their travel style: *"I want to create a personal travel style, away from the mainstream, and to discover my own identity. Even if I book a package or not, I create my own personal experiences"* (Appendix D, Q5). Another interesting point of view is when tourists choose to book tours only when those are organized from locals as P7 says: *"I only take organized tours if they are locally organized. I think it's nice to have a day off of thinking and planning your next move and take a locally organize day trip somewhere."* (Appendix G, Q5) which can make us think that tourists pay attention to whom and where they will spend their money to. In fact, in a study from Ketter (2020) about the trends of European Millennial travel, it is mentioned that Schiopu et al., (2016) argue that in their pursuit for authentic experiences, the Millennial generation support small-scale and locally owned businesses, which helps to boost local economies (Ketter, 2020). For the reader to follow up on the argument, in brief, the Millennial generation is set to be born the years from 1980 to the mid-1990s (Cavagnaro et al., 2018).

Regarding the mass tourism and the results from the primary data, there is an interesting aspect when tourists do not avoid it, because they choose to observe behaviors, for example P3 says, as a tourist, they *"believe that when you go somewhere as a tourist, and you are surrounded by many other tourists, just like you, then you also to get to witness the culture of the locals. So, you get to see how they treat the tourists"* (Appendix C, Q5). This gives a shift in what we normally hear from tourists, that they either join mass tourism or avoid it, both sides for their reasons. But in this case, we have a tourist that enjoys and cares to observe how locals behave around tourists.

Another viewpoint is the combination of what is considered mainstream to do or see in a destination, with going "off the beaten path" occasionally. An example for this is P4 who mentions:

"I will visit the main attractions, but I will also go to not so famous places, to the suburbs of cities and see different districts that are not for tourists." (Appendix D, Q5). They argue that this way they aim to create a personal travel style, away from the mainstream, and discover their own identity. Again, here, the study from Ketter (2020) suggests that some of the features of the Millennial travel trend, is the proactive planning and execution of one-of-a-kind personal experiences, which are tailored to the tourist's specific interests, personality, and lifestyle (Ketter, 2020). P2 gives the example of Machu Picchu in this matter: *"...of course, the main attractions are always the must-see things but sometimes we try to search a little off the beaten track. Let us say in Peru, everybody is running to Machu Picchu. We have never been in Machu Picchu, we visit places they are similar but not that well known"*, and when asked if they avoid the mass tourism, they admit they mainly they do (Appendix B, Q5).

Theory says that tourists are better able to recognize the authentic aspects of their visit, or what draws them specifically to the location by comparing their knowledge of a place with the reality of their tourist experiences (Chhabra et al., 2003). Culture is a highly significant part of tourism experience; all interviewees refer to culture as one of the most important motivations to travel, and also one of the best ways to experience authenticity in their travels, as it allows them to explore the culture of the destination, and therefore understand what genuine and real means for that particular destination and its local community. Theory verifies that travel is one of the few opportunities for people to compare and contrast their own values and perceptions with those of others. Concepts such as similarity, exoticism, and authenticity are all part of the intercultural dynamics linked with travel (Safaaa et al., 2017).

P3 enjoys being surrounded by locals when visiting a place because: *"where I am the tourist and I am surrounded by locals and I blend in I would say, in order to feel the true spirit and culture of the place"* and continues by saying that: *"For me, it is getting interesting when the natural landscape has also shaped the culture and history of the people"* (Appendix C, Q5). Their thought goes even further, when they talk about local events by mentioning: *"And I like to join and watch events, local or traditional events of any kind. I love them, I get to see people in their natural setting doing what they like the most"* (Appendix C, Q5). Again, here we have the case of the tourist, who likes to observe local life as this seems to be representative of experiencing authenticity and real life. We can also understand, from their perspective, that culture is

interdependent and interconnected with the local life, the history, the traditional events, and all these together can also be impacted from the natural landscape of a destination. According to Asplet and Cooper, (2000), authenticity is frequently associated with a specific area (origin), because tourists are driven by the desire to learn about another culture (Park et al. 2019).

Local food and/or cuisine is considered another essential aspect of authentic tourism experience from the tourist perspective, and a way of exploring habits of the local life. Without being asked directly, all the interviewees mention it, when asked what is it that they search for in a travel experience. P3 says: *"And forgot to mention before local cuisine. I know is a cliché, but local food shows aspects of history and civilization."* (Appendix C, Q5). For others, food can be a travel motivation, and when it is connected with the local communities it can be another example of searching for authenticity, when travelling and relying on the trustworthiness of what the locals recommend. P1 says: *"I really like food and sometimes I travel because I would like to try their food. So, I go around, and I go by, looking for the local restaurants. I hate to go to these international restaurants, so I talk to the locals asking, "where should I go?"* (Appendix A, Q5).

Indeed, research indicates that food is an important part of society, and it has symbolic implications in the context of tradition and special occasions, such as a way of learning about different cultures and gastronomy (Chang et al. 2011).

4.2.2 Strict schedule vs. "going with the flow"

When asked about their preference in regard to the program of their trip, the majority replied that in general they would like to be mindful about timeframes, but they end up being flexible with time and going with the flow. Their preference relies on various reasons. Theory says that tourists' own itineraries, detours from scheduled activities, spontaneity, and unpredictability are all factors in the creation of experiences (Ek et al., 2008).

Some choose it because they do not wish to get stressed in their holidays as P4 mentions *"in general I go with the flow; I do not have specific hours or places to eat or have a drink for example. Whatever I like along the way"* (Appendix D, Q6), others because no matter how well organized they might be, they end up having to let go of the strict schedule. P3 says: *"Well, I prepare a very strict schedule in advance. I say to myself and I strongly believe it, that being a tourist and*

traveling is all about getting experiences and capture as many images as possible." But then also admits: *"Anyways, I have a strict schedule, but if it is not possible to stick to it, then it is also fine. I will go with the flow."* (Appendix C, Q6).

Some others choose to either have a fixed schedule or go with the flow, depending on their mindset and their relationship with time in general. For them, time plays an important part in connection to their social roles and when in holidays, they can be more flexible in order to enjoy life as it comes, as P7 quite characteristically reflects:

> *"I'm very happy to go with the flow when possible as it allows you to just be and actually enjoy the experience of living. As our lives are already set in a sort of a frame, which allows us to function as people by actively participating in our social roles, this liminal time space of going with the flow allows you to look past it and just be. If you take time and travel alone, it opens a timeframe where you have no responsibilities of a social role (as a friend, as a family member, as an employee or a researcher). Of course, you are being mindful and respectful, but it lifts a burden of a "must".* (Appendix G, Q6)

And some others, due to the fact that this way they have understood to be a better way to explore and create authentic experiences when travelling. It means that by letting themselves flexible with what comes next, they embrace the unexpected, and that is where they find authenticity. These findings are in line with previous research, which indicate that the most memorable tourism experiences are those that are unexpected, original, or unique (MacCannell1973; Kim et al., 2012). In this sense, according to primary data, as also verified from the theory, authenticity is also connected with being open and welcoming surprising and unforeseen situations and events, as well as improvising. In other words, it is another form of disrupting their routine. P2 gives a vivid example of this perspective:

> *"I have an example of one year in a small island in Cambodia. The next year, we said, okay, let us go back maybe for the first days, 10 days, maybe two weeks. So, we flew back to Cambodia. We went to Cubase, and the city in Phnom Penh where we arrived. And then we made our way down to the little island. And they ask us how long you will stay, and we said at least 10 days, maybe two weeks, and then we start laughing, like making a joke, maybe longer. Finally, we end up there for six weeks. And the idea and the background*

were to go visit Myanmar that year and we never made it to Myanmar. So, we made it the following year. So, you go with the flow." (Appendix B, Q6)

4.2.3 Transportation during travel

Transportation is another topic of great importance for tourism experience. When asked if they prefer to use public means of transport, private transportation or walk once they are in the destination, the interviewees had various insights to share.

Some prefer a combination of all three depending on the circumstance because *"it is fun to experience them all"* (Appendix G, Q7). Some use private transportation for long distances, while others prefer it for short distance in order not to drive and get tired (Appendix E, Q7). In some cases, they would use private transportation only if there is no other option (Appendix B, Q7).

Walking is an activity that most tourists prefer, whenever it is possible, for several reasons. P3 says that walking is their way of exploring new places: *"If I want to explore a place, I will walk. But walking is the main way to discover a place I would say and is my favorite. You never know where it will take you. You may go for a walk and end up in a totally new place."* (Appendix C, Q7). Other prefer walking as a way of exploration, but only if the circumstances allow, such as weather conditions, time to spend and duration of the trip (Appendix A, Q7).

Public transportation usage was the most interesting to discover from the insights of the interviewees. It was a surprise to unfold the several reasons behind the choice of tourists to use public transportation. Apart from the economic aspect for some, since public transportation is cheaper than private and the convenience from how easy and/or fast one can move around a destination, other reasons given were worth exploring. P3 says that transportation is to sense the everyday life of the people: *"People use it to go to work, to go out with friends, to return from work, to visit friends, so you get to see the real side of the individuals"* (Appendix C, Q7) To further elaborate, they give an example by comparing different experiences from using public transportation in different countries:

> *"To give you an example, when I was younger, the first time I used public transport around Europe, in Germany, England, Holland, I was surprised by the number of drunk people in the streets, in the bus stops, in the metro, and it seemed normal. Later, however I realized*

that it is, every Friday or Saturday night. Anyway, you know in Greece, you do not see that. So, if you dig into that you will understand that it has to do with cultural differences. In Greece for instance, if you take the bus or metro during the day, you see many angry people. And I have witnessed that also in other countries in the Balkans. Or in Spain, Portugal, and Italy, whenever I used the bus or the metro, people were talking out loud, as we Greeks do." (Appendix C, Q7)

From this example, one may understand that while using public transportation when travelling, sometimes one might also discover cultural and habitual differences, and this is something that tourists care to explore. Similarly, for others it is a matter of feeling the rhythms of the everyday life of the locals. In some circumstances, public transportation can be a tourist attraction in and of itself, contributing to the image and identity of a destination (Hall et al., 2017). P1 mentions: "*I'd like to take the public transportation when I go on holidays because also you feel the vibe. It's nice to take the public transportation in another city to see how it works*" (Appendix A, Q7).

Lastly, on a different note, another participant, mentioned they prefer using public transportation to help with the CO2 reduction goals in the cities (Appendix D, Q7), which makes us understand another aspect that tourist have started thinking about when they travel. The tendency is to start thinking sustainable options. Thus, the same participant, even though they were not given this option when asked the question, they suggested using bicycles whenever possible: *"The bike. Is not part of your question, but in Europe it is convenient to use a combination of train or metro and bike. You take it with you and then when you get out of the station you just bike."* (Appendix D, Q7). Either it is used as an option of sustainable choices or a way to explore cities under a different lens, this is suggesting that there are tourists who wish to create experiences that feel authentic and suitable for their selected destinations.

4.2.4 Use of technology during travel

From what we discussed in the pre-trip phase of tourism experience; the use of technology was already a topic relevant since digital tools are perceived to be useful when planning. The tourism and hospitality industries have seen substantial changes as a result of the rapid growth of information and communication systems and technology, such as easier booking and contact between tourists and hosts (Pavlovic, 2016).

In the phase that tourists are already on the destination, all participants acknowledged that they find technology extremely helpful at all times when travelling. They all use Google for general information or Google maps. Most of them use Booking.com and TripAdvisor to read reviews from previous tourists regarding hotels and restaurants.

One of them mentions that when using applications to facilitate travelling, language can be a barrier, even if the application is useful, it should not only be used in the local language but a universal one (Appendix C, Q8). Some consider technology to be vital as they say: *"Your phone is like a compass of a (post)modern age"* (Appendix G, Q8), while others combine the use of applications to view recommendations, but also ask personally for recommendations from the concierge of the hotel, in which they are staying (Appendix F, Q8). Examples of other applications used from tourists, when they are in destination, are Rome2Rio, Hangouts, Zomato, Swiggy, OLA, Uber Cab (Appendices D, E & G, Q8).

Apart from using applications to facilitate research and navigation, some tourists use this tool to engage into conversations with locals or other travelers. The ones that choose this method, do it from Facebook travel groups. They join the groups that are created for the country they have visited, join conversations, and ask for recommendations during the trip and usually leave the groups after the trip. (Appendix B, Q8).

Related to authenticity and understanding how tourists perceive it, even when they do not refer to it directly, we can assume that even with the use of technology, what people trust the most is what can be written or said from locals or other travelers, when it comes to experiences, originality and convenience when travelling.

4.2.5 Interaction with locals

When the discussion reached the contact and interaction with the local community, while tourists are in the destination, once again the majority replied that they enjoy meeting and talking to locals, for various reasons. Sometimes, only in the form of short chatting (Appendix A, Q9), or cultural exchanging information (Appendix E, Q9). Or else, to another extent, when tourists meet locals, they become friends and keep communicating even after travel: *"Yes and keep this contact. This contact is kept, nearly every week with Indonesia as an example"* (Appendix B, Q9). In this case,

we have surpassed the chatting with locals, and stronger bonds are created between tourists and locals, where communication is occurring even when the duration of the trip is done. This is also in agreement with the literature, which indicates that in the hospitality and tourism industries, interpersonal encounters occur in numerous situations, from informal to formal, and are considered as particularly vital (Tan et al., 2013; Andrades & Dimanche, 2014).

In the between spectrum, there are those who are interested in meeting and communicating with locals, as part of their experience during travel, for example P3 mentions that it is one of the reasons for traveling: *"It is an important part of the journey, otherwise what is the point of travelling thousands of kilometers? Just to see sand, beaches, and buildings? No*." (Appendix C, Q9). Moreover, there are also those who take the initiative of meeting locals in their everyday settings, to observe and gain knowledge of their lifestyle as P4 says: *"I would prefer having my coffee or tea in places that locals do and observe how they live their lives, how they value or not coffee time, how they talk to their friends and why not, get to talk to them too"* (Appendix D, Q9). Lastly, on this topic, one of the interviewees gives a psychological perspective to meeting locals as a traveler. For them, communicating with locals, while on destination, becomes part of knowing oneself, improving communication skills and getting out of the comfort zone and feeling accomplishment along the way. In their word, P7 says:

> *"In a strange way, alongside the fact that it is the best way of getting to know a place, I feel meeting locals or even other travelers while you travel is a way of getting out of your comfort zone if you're an introvert. I guess I am much happier with myself if I manage to have that chat and make a connection with a local than an extravert would be, as in a weird way I feel accomplished."* (Appendix G, Q9)

4.2.6 How and where do tourists find authenticity during travel?

In this section, I will discuss the findings about how and where tourists find authenticity. What is it that makes a travel experience authentic for them? The conversations went into various directions as everyone perceives authenticity subjectively and through different experiences. However, results from primary data show that there is a common ground when tourists reflect on how they find authenticity. The basis, where they all start from, is when they have a say in creating their own experience. Co-creation in tourism experience is considered to be significant for authenticity,

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either through a state of doing or a state of being, for example, either by choosing an activity over another depending on their preferences, or by participating into the local life of the visited place. The main themes that come to light from their insights will be highlighted in the following lines.

4.2.6.1 Co-creating authenticity through a combined experience

Some say that authentic experience is an overall feeling and a combination of places, people, activities, and traditional events. Tourists are more likely to have a memorable experience if they have immersed themselves in an activity or place (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). In other words, even within one tourist's mindset, the concept of authenticity becomes a blended feeling of an overall experience, without being able to separate the one thing from another. For some, you can find an authentic experience even in a staged experience as P7 characteristically says: *"I'd say every experience is authentic even if the event you participate in is staged as no one can have what you are experiencing. You can have an authentic experience of very unauthentic events/monuments/etc. is what I am trying to say"* (Appendix G, Q10). Wang (1999) mentions that tourism items, such as artwork, festivals, rituals, cuisine, clothing and housing among others, are sometimes classified as "authentic" or "inauthentic" based on whether they are created or performed by local people according to tradition. He also clarifies the distinction between the two categories of tourism authenticity: tourist experiences (also known as authentic experiences) and toured items, which are two distinct qualities of authenticity, but are sometimes confused (Wang, 1999).

4.2.6.2 Co-creating authentic experience through the "local food and tradition"

Food is considered another motivation for traveling and thus, another way for tourists to find the authenticity they seek. Most of the times, food is also associated with the place which has it and the traditions around local food, or in general traditional events involving food. P6 finds that: *"Places, local food, and traditions make an experience authentic for me"* (Appendix F, Q10). Another connection made from a participant, was to include food, events, and craftwork under the concept of tradition, which they find authentic experiences: *"Tradition: as local food, local festival, handcraft"* (Appendix E, Q10).

4.2.6.3 Co-creating authentic experience through the "places and sights"

Attractions and sights are related and connected with certain places, some of which also relate to the history, culture, and traditions of a place. P4 says: *"And I also like going to museums because this way you learn a lot about a country's history and culture"* (Appendix D, Q10)

According to Wang (2000), 'existential authenticity' refers to a visitor's experience in which the human dimension plays a crucial part in authenticating a site (Wang, 2000). Some interviewees relate places with nature and the landscapes, as P2 mentions: *"...to see the life there, to see what's going on there, to see the beauty of the nature, of the culture of the local people. And this is what sticks in your memories"* (Appendix B, Q10). Here, nature and local life are connected with what is created as a memory from travelling. P2 continues by giving examples from their travels in order to make clearer how they find authenticity through creating experiences:

> *"I can give an example. We were in Cuba, and we reached our next destination and we checked in, and then the second day is the weekend and there is the festival here. So, of course you know, you go you see how they celebrate what they are doing. Or in Myanmar, we end up on a big, huge Buddhistic cleaning celebration with 1000s of people and we were in between. Okay, so of course it depends. Then of course, go and have a look you do not have to be in the center of it, but go and have a look."* (Appendix B, Q10)

For them, when on a destination, being invited and joining festivals or celebrations becomes a way of experiencing authentic life, as it is happening at that specific moment in that specific place.

Another perspective given of how to find authenticity in places, was from P4 who says: *"For example, I enjoy street art a lot and street musicians or events. I also like finding graffities in neighborhoods"* (Appendix D, Q10). Street art and graffities created in local neighborhoods, are considered a way of exploring authentic aspects of life in a place, as they say: *"...I travel for the real thing, whatever that is in real life."* (Appendix D, Q10).

Similarly, districts and neighborhoods are becoming a more widespread trend for tourists to explore. P1 says that downtown, for them, is a place built to please a tourist and they do not usually consider it the real part of a culture, that is why they also say: *"So, I think when you go a little bit outside, you can see the real culture, the real vibe, the real feeling of what the destination is about. In other sense, and what is authentic",* and they normally prefer exploring other parts of the city

that tourists cannot find in the main attractions. They also believe that observing the difference of cultures, how people dress, and live their lives, is one of the benefits and charm of travelling (Appendix A, Q10).

4.2.6.4 Co-creating authentic experience through public transportation

Public transportation, according to the findings, is one of the most preferred ways in which tourists experience authenticity. Apart from the practical benefits that some mention, they actually choose to use public transportation in order to feel the rhythms and the vibe of everyday life and meet its locals in one destination. P3 says*:*

> *"the most important reason I think to take public transportation is to sense the everyday life and rhythm of the people. People use it to go to work, to go out with friends, to return from work, to visit friends, so you get to see the real side of the individuals"* (Appendix C, Q10).

For them, exploring behavior and habits, while people are on the move, is an interesting way of reaching an authentic experience. According to Thompson & Schofield (2007), tourists' experience with means of public transportation may influence their satisfaction with the destination and/or the experience itself, particularly due to the fact that using public transportation is not used only for mobility, but also as a way of interaction with the locals (Thompson & Schofield, 2007).

More specifically, backpackers, according to what is mentioned in Park and Santos (2017) study, they are said to prioritize social contacts with locals and other visitors, willing to take risks in quest of authentic experiences, and be drawn to natural environments (Park & Santos, 2017). P2 gives an example of how tourists may create and participate in their own experiences, by why they feel excited to use public transportation when travelling:

> *"As an example, you go to Nicaragua, they have this old American school buses. 30 seats inside but there are already 60 customers inside. Plus, there are coming these women that go on the bus to sell the food and these are real experiences. You know, if you are on the private transportation to bring you from A to B, maybe just stop somewhere to make a break, but people in public transportation, you meet locals, you see how it is. {…} that is*

things you remember later" (Appendix B, Q7)

For P2, these are the authentic experiences they seek for when travelling, for them public transportation is one of the ways of experiencing real life and collecting memories, and these authentic experiences become the highlights of their travels.

4.2.6.5 Co-creating authentic experience through interaction with the locals

What becomes the most dominant aspect of finding authenticity in our discussion with the interviewees so far, has always to do with people who live in a destination and the interaction that tourists may have with them. Co-creation requires the visitor's active engagement and involvement during the experience, by encouraging participation in events alongside other participants in the experience location, and by considering specific experiences that inspire the tourist to interact with others (Campos et al., 2015). Results from the findings show that tourists value the most experiencing local life and all the aspects that come with it, either by watching locals' behavior and understanding their habits, or by meeting with them and participating into events organized by locals.

P3 says about his pursuit of communication with locals: *"I arrange many things with locals. From initial advice to living with them. And once I am there, I go out, and if I have questions, I ask. I do that, to get a sense of how people behave to strangers and tourists. Now that I am thinking about it, even when I do not have questions, I tend to communicate with them, to interact and see what happens."* (Appendix C, Q10) In this example, what seems also interesting, is the fact that tourists may be intrigued by understanding the behavior that locals have towards tourists. For P3, authenticity is experienced in a unique way for everybody, and additionally they mention that: *"Because being a Greek, I know that the word "authentic" itself is a Greek word that means "someone or something that is genuine and original" but if we put it in different context, I do not know if there is a definition for authenticity".* However, they continue by saying:

> *"At the end however, it is about the people. What I am trying to say is, that when I look back at my journeys, I have been in many places that have really beautiful landscapes, really nice buildings, or many attractions. Many events. But what stays with me, is how I created a bond with the people. How I felt when speaking with them. How they treated me.*

How much they made me feel ok, safe and that I am welcome. So, the stories and the memories are created by people." (Appendix C, Q10)

For P3, the dominant travel memories and most authentic ones, are the bonds created with people. They say: "Another thing that I truly value. When you become part and participate in events, then you feel connected with people and their culture. And then you respect it, and you embrace it as your own" (Appendix C, Q10). The beauty of surprise events, according to Arsenault and Gale (2004), is that they provide unique opportunities for human interaction, generate a connection with the destination, and establish a bond amongst people (Wei et al., 2019). We can see here again that the feeling of safety and being welcome from the locals, is important when creating and enjoying a travel experience. Being welcome for tourists can be indicated from the fact that sometimes locals invite them to join rituals and events, then tourists actively make the experience of the locals i.e., an event, as their own experience. And when you feel part of an experience and share it, this experience remains in one's memory as authentic.

To conclude the analysis of the on-site phase, authenticity in tourism experiences is viewed as a combined, overall feeling, in which communication and interaction of tourists with locals is the most important aspect of having authentic experiences. In general, what is perceived as dominant, while seeking authenticity, is exploring different cultures and experiencing "the real life" in the visited destination. An emerging theme, when seeking authenticity from the tourist perspective, is the use of public transportation, as a way to sense and understand the rhythms and the flow of the everyday life of the local communities. Moreover, local events function as facilitators for tourists to experience the real life of a destination and its people. Furthermore, in continuation of the use of technology in the pre-trip phase, findings show that technology is useful and helpful for the tourist in the on-site phase as well. When seeking authenticity, the trend is to move far away from the bucket lists destination, and pursue a more focused way of traveling, possibly with longer stays and more quality time spent on exploring cultural and habitual aspects in a destination, rather than visiting main attractions. Finally, findings show that, when seeking authentic experiences, the emerging themes are overlapping, interrelated and interdependent.

4.3 Perceptions of authenticity in the post-trip phase of the tourism experience

Now, we are on the phase that occurs after the travel, when tourists return back in their homes and go through the recollection of their tourism experience. In the post-trip phase, tourists have the opportunity to reminisce and reflect on their experiences. In this phase, the concept of authenticity may gain a new perspective, due to the fact that the context now has changed, and we need to re-examine how they perceive authenticity after having had the experience, and if its meaning has changed. The new context, as discussed with the interviewees, will be presented and analyzed in the sub-chapter to follow. The aim is to continue exploring the research question that is set for this thesis, in particular for this sub-chapter, how do tourists perceive authenticity in the post-trip phase of their tourism experience?

4.3.1 Reflections about the knowledge gained

As we discussed in the previous chapter, authenticity is a complex concept and thus, easier to be defined within a context. Therefore, in order to understand how tourists perceive authenticity in their experiences after leaving the destination, initially I made the interviewees reflect on the lessons learnt from previous travels. Their insights in this matter were mainly associated with practical aspects, which is similar to their insights when asked about the planning in the pre-trip phase, such as accommodation and transportation bookings, or better time management. An overall improvement of the planning process is what they learnt, and what they should improve upon.

Going further to other aspects that are related to the authentic experiences, some had reflections on how time management may affect the authentic experiences one might have in the destination, and how visiting a place in different periods may have a different impact on the tourist. For example, P3 admits that: *"Now, in the future, if I visited the same places, I would add different aspects. Because the time is never enough. And as I said before, when you go back to a place, things have changed. So, I get the feeling that I have to rediscover it, in a new way"* (Appendix C, Q13). For them, revisiting means rediscovering, maybe because for them a destination is non-static, they focus on the life that exists on a destination and not what is built with stones. Also, maybe the need to rediscover, means that the individuals themselves have evolved as personalities

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and as tourists, so their interpretation of an authentic experience may have also changed. And that creates the need of deconstructing the already gained knowledge and reconstruct a new one.

Moreover, tourists may realize, once they return home and reflect on their journey, that they gained valuable insight, and an inside knowledge, which could not be obtained otherwise; i.e. they learnt things that one may not find written in reviews or recommendations - at least not easily without a thorough research -. For instance, P1 reflects back to a trip in Sicily, where during early afternoon hours everything was closed, and they did not know the reason. They found out that it was because of the 'siesta' habit the locals have. They say: *"I remember the first day, we were just like let us go and have some lunch. And the surprise was that everything was closed. And we were like, what, what is going on here? And we were asking everywhere. I am like, everything is closed because of the siesta. And as you said, no one, no one tells you that"* (Appendix A, Q13). This is something they remember as an authentic experience from their trip, even if they might not have a good impression or they were caught off guard in a situation, it still remains an authentic experience they lived firsthand.

4.3.2 How were the expectations reached in relation to the anticipation they had in the pre-trip?

Expectations usually are connected with the anticipation. Despite this connection, a surprising reveal from the discussion about the expectations that tourist had before travel and if those were met during travel, is that their reflections were related mostly to locals and cultural attributes, which verifies what we discussed in the previous section, that the predominant aspect affecting the authentic experiences for the tourists, are the people living in the visited place.

To refresh the memory from the pre-trip phase, their anticipations were on one hand to experience the local life and the local food, explore different cultures, interact, and communicate with the locals, and on the other hand to explore landscapes and hidden parts of a destination and have a disruption of their routine. When talking about the expectations they had and if those were met, most interviewees mentioned expectations that are related to culture and people, which created either positive or negative impressions, and influenced their opinion of whether the expectations were met or not.

There is the perception that some do not set expectations before travelling, in order to not have stereotyped images about the destination before visiting it, P7 says: *"I do not set expectations that would make the trip. It is the experience itself that makes it memorable"* (Appendix G, Q12). So, they let themselves free of expectations in order to have the experience create the memories and the impression from a destination with the hope to find authenticity.

Regarding authenticity and expectations, what stands out in the findings is the human factor. For P3, traveling is a learning process when it comes to the cultural aspect and they never get disappointed, as they say:

> *"If for instance, I speak about the human aspect of traveling and cultural aspect, I never get disappointed. On the contrary, I always learn something new, even if there are cultures and behaviors that I do not like or feel close to. But regarding sightseeing or building or attractions, yes, I have been disappointed in the past. The more you travel, the more you focus on the human aspect I believe."* (Appendix C, Q12).

The expectations of the tourists are not reached sometimes due to various reasons. It could be because of attitudes that one cannot tolerate, or bad experiences that affect the general impression. It can also depend on the synchronicity of the travel experience with the inner needs and preferences of the tourist. For example, P1 gives an example of having certain expectations about the landscape of a place, which was used for the setting of a movie:

> "*I wanted to go to Sicily, because I saw in the movie of Aquaman, that the setting was Sicily. And I said, oh my God, it is beautiful, I want to go to Sicily. And of course, I googled the city, where it was the setting of Aquaman. And then yeah, we went there. And it completely covered my expectations of these small streets, you know these old stones. And the streets are very narrow and are kind of medieval, maybe kind of mystical, some mystery and something that is hidden."* (Appendix A, Q12).

In this aspect, authenticity was perceived as the real version of a setting one sees in a movie and in this case, it was reached. However, when it came to the authenticity of real life in the place, the same person admits that habits of the locals affected their experience:

> "*I think part of the culture is that they take a siesta. So, intersecting from two o'clock or one o'clock, afternoon, until four o'clock, everything was closed, but really, it was dead.*

Everything. You could not find any food, any people on the streets. During that period of time, you could not do anything." (Appendix A, Q12)

Although, this is still an authentic experience, because they explored cultural and habitual aspects, it still limited the satisfaction of the travel experience itself. This maybe arises the question about authenticity and satisfaction. The fact that tourists may experience authentic life and situation in a place or circumstance, does not necessarily mean that they like it. According to Hottola (2004), tourists' lack of familiarity when they find themselves outside of their comfort zones or when they experience culture shock, might cause confusion in these types of travel experiences (Tiberghien et al., 2017).

Some tourists are aware of something 'beyond' a search for the unseen within their tourist experience, which seeks for the unexpected or an 'opportunity to glimpse the real' in a foreign place, according to MacCannell (2001). Especially when it is related to the experience and how tourists realize the authentic factor in it, it seems from the results that tourists are interested into "looking behind the curtains", what is the real life like. P2 refers to examples from previous trips, where they felt that the scenery was built only for the tourist and they could not have access or experience the real life, the life that locals do. On top of that, they were taken advantage of financially, as tourists, which caused dissatisfaction and eventually an earlier departure from the destination. The examples that P2 gives:

"But if you look behind the curtain, it's really sad to visit Cuba. I think if you are a white European, you have tons of money you can spend there and they will try to rip you off in every corner, and this is something that I hate. Okay, you can charge a little more to tourists, but do not try to overcharge them 1,000% in Cuba. And the same goes a little bit in Costa Rica. We were planning to go five to six weeks to Costa Rica. And finally, after two and a half weeks, we made our way out of Costa Rica. And spend much more time in Nicaragua, which we really enjoyed." (Appendix B, Q12)

In this case, they felt they were not having an authentic experience of the place they visited; they could not understand how locals live, because they were not allowed to see this aspect in the destination. Since, the authenticity was missing from their experience and the anticipation was to connect with locals and see the real life. As a result, they could neither get a deeper understanding

of the culture nor interact with locals, therefore for them, the expectations were not reached, and the experience was not satisfactory.

4.3.3 The role of authenticity in relation to the memories that remain from the tourism experience

For most, authenticity plays a key role for their tourism experience. Most of the times, when they find it, it shapes the experience in such a way that it makes the experience memorable. Therefore, I assume, based on the findings, that whichever experience remains in the tourist's mind, is also related to the authenticity disclosed in it. Some of the interviewees had many interesting memories to share and those memories are associated with their perception of authenticity in their experiences and how important is authenticity for them.

4.3.3.1 Exploring cultures and finding reasons to revisit

When discussing about the recollection of experiences from previous travels and what role has authenticity in those, the central perceptions were about exploring different cultures, which becomes the main motivation for travelling, as well as returning back to a destination for a second time. What seems interesting about their replies, is their fascination into finding true identity, looking behind the curtains or the masks and follow the genuine parts of local life in the destinations they visit. By exploring this identity, some of them feel that they also explore their own, personal identity. Travelling can become like a mirror for them. P3 reflects:

> *"It is why I travel. Why I like to travel. To explore other civilizations, other cultures, other mindsets. And when you do that, you can better understand yourself and your own culture. Because things that you would have taken for granted, now you have to revise them and think over"* (Appendix C, Q14)

They continue by saying that they find traveling exciting due to the fact that they leave one reality and switch to another one, which most probably is different for them. They realize this by participating in the reality of the locals, by identifying authentic personalities, what is hidden behind the "masks" that one might wear. Also, they believe that as we, as individuals evolve, same

goes for societies and cultures, which is one of the main reasons, they visit same places more than once:

> *"And visit places more than once. You have to participate in the everyday lives of locals, go out and live with them, so in general be socially active with them, as they would normally do in their routine. Interact and discuss with them, wide open, about everything, even if something might be disturbing for you or them. And you will get to see the real persons and identity behind their masks. This is what I seek, if I had to name my number one goal of why I travel, and why I continue to find exciting to travel. And also, societies and cultures evolve and change. And this makes it more interesting".* (Appendix C, Q14)

For others, it is important to leave a place and having explored to some extent its culture, while acknowledging that this cannot be possible within a few days' time, suggesting that one should return back, if they are interested to explore in deeper levels. P4 mentions: **"I want to leave the** *place and have the sense that I was able to understand the locals and their culture. Of course, just a little bit, I cannot understand and know everything about a nation in a couple of days or in a week.*" (Appendix D, Q14). This implies that time is also an important factor to bear in mind when tourists seek to explore cultures and experience authenticity, as it is not easy to understand deeply another culture or live like the locals, if the stay is limited in time. This is something that also P2 mentions: "*Experience is also in a place to enjoy a little more and you cannot see every single thing, you try to see the most important things for you. I will say if you have not seen everything you always have a reason to come back to see the other things*" (Appendix B, Q14). For them, depending on the duration of the trip, they put quality over quantity. And if they feel that there is more to see and experience in a specific place, they return back.

Some associate authenticity with the atmosphere and the vibe of a place, such as P1 who says*: "It's important. At least for me to feel that authenticity. Because then I am satisfied that I could learn something new. And experience and feel the atmosphere, the vibe of the place"* (Appendix A, Q14). In the pre-trip phase, I discussed that tourists search for the feeling of being welcome in a place, or else they seek hospitality, which can also be part of feeling the vibes and the atmosphere, as P1 says. They also give an example of how cultural connection can bring people together, even if they do not speak the same language: *"The people yes, the people also, I went to the hairdresser. And the girl did not speak English. So, it (the language) was Italian. And I was speaking Mexican.*

Yeah, but somehow, we got to understand each other. And it was really nice. And I think is also a part of how welcoming people are and warm. If you feel comfortable, if you feel welcome in the city, the hospitality" (Appendix A, Q11) Similarly, the feeling of warmth and hospitality, is mentioned by P3 as they say: *"....warmer people, who are extremely open and helpful, and you get the feeling that they do it because they want to, not because they want to behave well, because they were taught that way. So, if I had to name it, it would be perhaps hospitality? I do not know. And these people also want to establish a contact and then reach out to you, even when I get back home. I like that."* (Appendix C, Q11).

According to these findings, it seems that hospitality and a warm welcome are considered important for the tourist experience, and there is an overall association between an authentic tourist experience with the feelings that locals can create and express to tourists. According to Wang (2007), as visitors subconsciously seek for 'home' in their travels, the visitor and tourism encounters with local communities constantly generate personalized authenticity - even if they have never been to the location before (Wang, 2007).

Other examples of tourists connecting and sharing moments with other tourists and/or local communities, which are considered authentic, is given from P2:

> *"...and we went to nature protected forests to see families of monkeys and I remember some French students were there to study this monkey and at midday we made the lunch break at the beach...; Or in Ecuador in the Amazon, we booked a two-day trip where we slept with the Amazonas and on breakfast, we got served maggots, these small white worms. I came to the kitchen and I said none for me, thank you. Claudio tries. He said they were nice crispy and juicy inside."* (Appendix B, Q11)

They conclude with a sense of humor in their voice that they like to try local food, but not that local. For them though, it is this experience that stands out and becomes memorable, as it is authentic. According to Campos et al. (2016) study, even though they are aware of the temporary nature of relationships and the fact that they may involve strangers, people expect to get pleasure from socializing and sharing emotional moments with others. They want to feel a sense of belonging, or communitas (Campos et al., 2016).

In relation to the above mentioned about the importance of hospitality for tourism experience, when tourists feel they are welcome, they also seek the communication and interaction with the locals. Sometimes, this interaction may lead to a bonding or friendship. P3 says in regard to this: *"the strongest memories and highlights are related to people and bonds that I have built with them. And I maintain these relationships"* while they continue giving an example from a trip to Portugal: *"With one of those guys, I still have a relationship today, he is called Pedro, really nice guy, he came to Greece and I showed him around, and when I went next summer to Portugal, he helped with my trip in Porto"* (Appendix C, Q11).

Literature argues that tourists build relationships between places, objects, and people in tourism to experience existential authenticity (Park et al. 2019). While P7 acknowledges that memories and highlights from previous trips are connected with authentic moments, such as meeting people and feel comfortable with the unexpected, as they say: "*I leave with memories of people I have met, what I've got to experience with them and thanks to them. Things take their own turn if you are open to meeting people and going around so you would always experience something unexpected. Clearly, that is what stands out and I memorize it best*" (Appendix G, Q11) while at the same time keeping your own identity, having the freedom to create your own experience and break free from it, if it does not satisfy you, as P7 mentions: *"I think authenticity is so personal it is always important. In my case, I need the freedom to break away from a position. So, I can meet people, but leave anytime I feel like. The ability to leave makes my experience feel authentic. I'm miserable when or if I have to travel in groups, as I do not get to experience the place without breaking free of other's expectations first.*" (Appendix G, Q14)

4.3.3.1.2 Local food and supermarkets

For some, part of authentic experiences, through exploring different cultures, is also local food, as already mentioned when I was discussing about types of tourism experiences. According to a tourism & travel trends report in 2015, 88 % of destinations consider culinary tourism strategic in defining their brand and image (Resonance Consultancy, 2015). Local food can be a reason for a tourist to revisit a place, or in the case of P1, they choose a restaurant more than once as it becomes a highlight in their memory: *"Let us say, last time we have been to Sicily. And I loved the food.*

Like, one of the first things that comes to my mind is going to this restaurant. And actually, we came back two times because it was very good" (Appendix A, Q11). Their thought takes an interesting turn when they mention that going in supermarkets, while traveling, is considered for them an authentic experience, because to some extent, they understand characteristics of the culture this way, at least the food culture. P1 says:

> *"And also, I love to go to supermarkets, I think it is a very important part of the trip, to feel the feeling of the people and the culture because you get to see the difference, what kind of things they have, what kind of things they do not have, people buying what they use, what they cook, or like when they do their shopping {....} In the culture, and for example, even to see which vegetables and fruits are local, what can they consume?"* (Appendix A, Q11)

According to Hall and Sharples (2004), aspects of flavor, appearance, freshness, and quality are now acknowledged as vital, not only because of the significance of food in the local economy, but also because what, why, and how we eat reveals something about ourselves, why we travel, and the society we live in (Hall & Sharples, 2004). As I have mentioned throughout this thesis, authenticity takes a personal meaning through the voice of each individual, and the example of going in supermarkets, while traveling, can show us how details of everyday life for a specific local community can become a motivation for exploring cultural aspects from the tourists' perspective, leading to authentic experiences for them.

4.3.3.2 Co-creating spontaneous experiences

Findings indicate that, in order for tourists to explore different cultures and understand the way of living of the local communities, having experiences that are impulsively created on the spot are useful. Most interviewees agree that that unexpected events are welcome when they travel, as those take them away from their comfort zone and support the purpose of exploring how real life is in the specific place, which consequently becomes an authentic experience for the tourists. P2 says: *"...I don't want to have like in Cuba, you go to a resort and they showed you everything that in normal life is not happening. So, it has to be authentic"* (Appendix B, Q14). But also acknowledges at the same time, that this way of experiencing authenticity is not developed or reached from the beginning, but rather is a learning process that comes with experience to the travelers: *"It was a learning process, as into my first years when I was 18,19,20 we were not going backpacking in*

this age, so I was more like, let's try to book somewhere and that the package there has your accommodation has your food in the hotel and a look around what's going on" (Appendix B, Q14).

In Campos et al. (2015) study, is mentioned that according to Mathisen (2013), active engagement in an experience affects emotions and cognition, and that this type of involvement is linked to existential authenticity and personal value perception (Campos et al., 2015).

Another example of co-creating experience by spontaneity is given from P4 when they describe an incident from a previous trip that is perceived from them as an authentic one. They say:

> **"***I find meaning when I involve myself in events, not something that is already organized and is massively provided to tourists, where you have a "no say" in the experience that you are choosing. For example, in Budapest my friend and I were walking around the city, where at some point we ran into a Greek street musician with his band. We were familiar with his face because we had also seen him in the streets of Athens. We talked and it turned out that he was making a tour around some European cities to promote his street music. The next day the band invited us to a small artistic event they were participating. I hope you get the idea, what I mean is that I really like it when experiences are spontaneous."* (Appendix D, Q11)

4.3.3.3 Technology as a facilitator for collecting memories

As discussed in other sections, technology is considered to be a facilitator when it comes to finding and choosing experiences, which are perceived to be authentic from tourists. Apart from the usage of the Internet and applications in gathering information, organizing a trip, and purchasing tickets, it is also used at the end-when leaving reviews and uploading photographs to social media platforms (Pavlovic & Celic, 2018).

In agreement with that, results from the research show that digital tools, also, facilitate the collection of moments and sharing of moments of tourists with other tourists and/or friends and family. P2, for instance, create movies out of the photos they take from their trips, which later show to friends and discuss their experiences, as they say: *"a little movie out of the trip, or some photobooks and sharing the experiences with friends who say "Ah, you have been there and there", so sitting together, talk a little, give them maybe idea for the next holidays."* They have also created

a digital diary: *"I have a kind diary and Facebook posting some pictures of me, then you have it for the following years. You always going to have a look on this and then the memories are coming back, like your memories seven years ago as an example"* Not only this is a way to share your memories but also a way to keep the memories alive because by looking at the photos, they remember the settings and the feelings but also other experiences related to the space and time that the photos were taken at: *"…but you see a picture and then maybe you remember the story around. For example, in January while we were, we will watch the movies Claudio made out of the pictures. And we say oh my god, do you remember this 10 year ago. You see the pictures and memories are coming back with it"* (Appendix B, Q14).

To conclude what was discussed on the above section of the post-travel phase of tourism experience, and in relation with the authenticity and the aim to provide answers for the research question, I discussed the knowledge gained from the tourists' experience and the lessons learnt, the expectations – in relation to the anticipatory stage- and the role of authenticity when collecting memories. What stands out, once again, as predominant theme, when reflecting on authentic moments and experiences, is the exploration of different cultures and aspects within them, the creation of personal relationships with the locals and sometimes the maintenance of those relationships, which ultimately are the main drivers for tourists to revisit a destination. Moreover, I discussed how food becomes a motivation for some tourists to seek authenticity and how technology enables the process of memories sharing for tourists with family, friends, and fellow travelers. Finally, considering the aforesaid, the following discussion chapter will aim to provide answers to the research question, based on the analysis results.

5. Discussion

From the research findings, various interesting insights emerged about the perspectives that tourists have. More specifically, the perceptions that tourists have in regard to authenticity in tourism experiences through the three different chronological phases; the pre-trip, the on-site, and the post-trip. The distinction between the phases was made in order to explore how authenticity is viewed and valued from tourists before, during and after a travel, since authenticity may be perceived and pursued differently, depending on the context and the circumstances. Therefore, a holistic approach was utilized to explore what is considered an authentic experience from the tourist perspective. Theory was mainly validated, although, according to the analysis of the primary data, some themes emerged, those that were repeated from the interviewees and became dominant.

Generally, what seems to be the major connotation, which tourists make with authenticity, is exploring new cultures and experiencing whatever is that makes life 'real' in a place. When considering the significance of culture, it is important to remember that it involves both things such as monuments, traditions, and arts, and also activities such as a way of living. In this context, tourists, who are interested into exploring cultures, will likely visit monuments and places, but they will also dedicate time into consuming the way of life in other destinations. To put it another way, exploring cultures for tourists, according to the findings, comprises not only the consumption of cultural and historical objects, but also people's general lifestyle.

Local food, local events and public transportation are aspects through which tourists find authenticity in their experiences. Food is considered an inseparable feature of culture and most tourists, in their search for authenticity, are motivated to explore food products, and unique traditions that accompany the local cuisine, including ingredients, cooking styles, and dining rituals. What stood out, from the findings, regarding local food, is that tourists may go to supermarkets while being at a destination in order to see the products that locals choose to use and understand habitual aspects in regard to their cuisine and food culture. Not necessarily explicitly, but this fact implies the connection of the aim to get behind the scenes and experience the same as locals do, in a non-staged setting that is not built for touristic purpose.

Similarly, local events serve as enablers for tourists to experience what real life looks like in a destination and how its people act and/or behave among them and in front of tourists as well. For this reason, flexibility in scheduling and planning, or else the tendency of "going with the flow" and spontaneity are considered key elements of authenticity seeking, when it comes to experiencing moments that cannot be replicated. The overall inclination is towards creating their own unique experiences over fixed and packaged ones, and to travel by themselves as independent travelers. Moreover, in their search for authentic experiences, they are more likely to plan their own itineraries, rather than participate in packaged tours. Examples given for spontaneous, unexpected events, when tourists felt that had an authentic experience, were when they were accidentally close when a local event was taking place and they were invited to join, observe and/or actively participate.

Going off-beaten tracks is another tendency that tourists show in search for authentic experiences. They are not only interested in accumulating experiences, but also in visiting off-the-beaten-track destinations, or neighborhoods within a destination, in order to explore a different lifestyle, to visit new places and to obtain new knowledge. Moving away from mainstream attractions, they mostly avoid mass tourism and search for less crowded and less promoted areas, in order to 'escape' from what is built for them and experience what is built for the locals. In order to do that, they pay attention to dedicating more quality time in a more focused way of traveling, most probably spending more time to visit fewer areas or attractions, thus prioritizing quality over quantity in their travels. The aim is to get a deeper understanding and experience. Implicitly and indirectly, this way of experiencing tourism also promotes sustainable travel, as by avoiding over-touristic areas, preferring locally owned businesses, choosing locally organized tours, and booking accommodation with locals instead of hotels, they support local economies.

In addition to the above, the use of public transportation from the tourists is another emerging theme when seeking authenticity, according to the findings. From the tourists' perspective, the use of public transportation is a way to feel and comprehend the patterns, the pace, and the flow of the everyday life of the local areas. It was given as an example from the interviewees, to show that by using public transportation, they can observe habits and behaviors of the locals, which consequently will lead to better understanding of their culture, not only via verbal but also nonverbal communication. The overall idea, once again, is to use what locals use and live- even

temporarily- like them, to avoid what is constructed as a product and/or service only for tourists, see what happens behind the curtains, and thus, reach a more authentic experience in their travels.

Moreover, the use of digital tools such as mobile phones, applications and platforms was found to be of particular significance, nowadays, in all three phases of the tourism experience. Technology functions as a facilitator in obtaining information on destinations, as well as in the searching and booking for accommodation and tickets. The development and growth of information and communication systems has resulted to faster data exchange and better communication. Hence, technology can influence the idea generation and decision making of the tourists via recommendations, and reviews, which were posted by other tourists regarding local hosts, tourist attractions and events, restaurants, and other services. Inevitably, the tourism experience is connected to the use of technology and the Internet and plays an important role in the quest for authenticity. Apart from the anticipatory phase with the collection of information and the planning of the trip, the use of the Internet and apps is also present in the on-site phase, while exploring the destination with the assistance of mobile phones and travel apps. Finally, technology is present in the post-travel phase, while posting reviews and recommendations and sharing experiences and photos on social media platforms with family, friends, and peers.

All aforementioned insights are connected with the most predominant theme in the conversations around authentic experiences; the communication and interaction with the local communities. Tourists show an interest to communicate with the locals early on from the pre-trip and anticipatory phase, with the form of either searching in Facebook travel groups for recommendations or preferring to book accommodation in houses in order to live with locals, instead of choosing hotel rooms. During the travel, some tourists are genuinely interested into engaging in discussions with the locals, to ask for advice, to explore new perspectives and to expand their horizons. What stands out, once again, when reflecting on authentic moments and experiences, is the exploration of different cultures and aspects within them, the creation of personal relationships with the locals and sometimes the maintaining of those relationships, which constitute the main reasons for tourists to revisit a destination. Sometimes, the exchange of moments, ideas and experiences among tourists and locals, is not limited in the on-site phase, but can be expanded in the post-travel phase when the communication and the relationship is maintained and becomes established.

General remarks from the findings are that tourists are motivated to see the world, interact with it, and experience it. They are open-minded travelers that want freedom and flexibility in their travels and view travel as a great way to learn about the world and themselves. Traveling and authenticity seeking are correlated with the discovery of personal identity. The more experienced the tourist is, the better they know what they seek, and which are the ways to reach it. The knowledge gained from their tourist experiences, and the lessons learnt, result to a more concrete perception about the role of authenticity when traveling and collecting memories. For them, seeing behind the curtains and realizing what is built for tourists and what is not, has become the main concern when choosing experiences that are perceived as authentic.

Results from the interviews show that even talking about authenticity requires an experience. It seems, that experienced travelers are more likely to understand the term and actively seek authenticity through different ways in their experiences, while they are able to differentiate the staged from the unstaged. The approach of existential authenticity is present in most of the examples given and the ways that tourists feel and talk about authenticity in their experiences. A mindset of being present and being alert to experience the moment as it comes, a need of self-knowledge through traveling and connecting in a personal way with the people and/or the place visited have emerged.

Finally, findings show that, when seeking authentic tourism experiences, all the above-mentioned emerging themes are overlapping, interrelated and interdependent, throughout the tourism experience chronological phases.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to explore how authenticity in tourism experience is perceived from tourists, how and where do they find it. A qualitative study was conducted using a constructivist paradigm in order to collect data on the topic. In specific, the research examined the perspective from the side of the tourist and attempted to give answers to the research question:

> *How do tourists perceive authenticity throughout the tourism experience chronological phases?*

The initiative to research authenticity from the tourist viewpoint was inspired from the fact that Skipit is interested in endorsing neighborhoods and areas outside the promoted inner cities, with the purpose to guarantee that tourists experience the city like locals; resulting to authentic experiences.

Due to the nature and perception of authenticity to be interrelated and interdependent with tourism experiences, it was decided that there is a need to explore the diverse conceptualization of authenticity in different chronological phases of the tourism experience. Theory suggests three main phases to assess the tourism experience; the pre-trip, the on-site and the post-trip. Research was conducted to cover all phases, and findings indicate that authenticity is dependable on the circumstances and the context, and therefore, may differ in meaning and interpretation each time that the context changes.

The analysis of the data collected shows that, although authenticity may appear to be a topic discussed in the pre-trip phase, when anticipation and expectations take place, however, it is not considered as the main interest for tourists to search or plan for, before traveling. In the on-site phase, authenticity becomes much more essential to seek for and discuss about. Similarly, in the post-trip phase, authenticity plays a key role in recollection, reflecting upon experiences and sharing those experiences to inform and inspire others.

The importance of the role of authenticity in the travels is influenced by the actual travel experience, which an individual may have, and the need to experience ones' authentic self through tourism experiences. Findings show that tourists are indeed interested in finding authenticity away from stereotyped images, packaged tours, strict schedule, and preconceptions of the visited places. The emerging themes from the data are mostly aligned with the existential approach of

authenticity, as it seems that there is a need, through traveling, to experience the authentic state of being, to find meaning and purpose and to reflect on memories and experiences. The more one seeks and finds authentic experiences, the more one values authenticity and becomes present and mindful in the moment, embracing spontaneous and unexpected events and activities, while on a destination. Traveling gives the opportunity to reflect and consider ourselves in different contexts, dedicate time to explore and understand cultural, societal, and habitual aspects. Dominant types of experiences include blending in the everyday local life of a place, creating opportunities to interact and develop relationships with locals.

Exploring cultures is crucial when experiencing authenticity but one must keep in mind that cultures are dynamic rather than static. Cultures change and evolve over time, absorbing influences from various directions, making it challenging to determine exactly what is considered original and authentic. Spending longer time in one location while traveling is said to provide a deeper, more authentic travel experience. The idea is to explore one's own version of the location, getting away from the familiar; in search of something new to see, smell, or taste. Consequently, tourists use the term "authentic" to signify what is not built for their sake alone. In this scenario, authenticity in the experience may be valued more in what is created for the locals over in what is created for tourists. As a result, findings imply that the local people, are the gate keepers of what is traditional and/or authentic.

In the search for authenticity, co-creation offers an appealing option. Value is created with this approach, because tourists participate in the construction of their own experience by interacting with one another, the tourism provider, and local people. Technology was found to be a significant facilitator in the process of co-creating tourism experience. The use of technology was only assessed and viewed under the prism of being an enabler of exchanging information, connecting people, and sharing experiences.

Conclusively, existential authenticity could be a key element to shape future tourism trends. Therefore, perhaps the issue should not be directed on how we define authentic travel experience, but more as to where we look for it. Because as it seems, in the end, it should be acknowledged that one's definition of authentic differs from another's, as authenticity is primarily found internally rather than externally.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Interview: Liliana (P1), 38 years old, from Mexico, student & worker in travel & restaurant industries, conducted on 04/05/21

Conducted by Lorinda Sopoti (L)

[Minutes:Seconds]

— Start of Interview —

<div align="center">

Pre-trip Phase

</div>

1) *[00:01] L: Can you hear me? Okay, good. Thank you very much, again for participating and helping me with research. From what you saw in the interview guide the questions are separated in the phases of tourism experiences. So it's before someone goes on a trip, the duration during the trip, the experience and the reflections after they return back. So maybe, if you are okay, we start with the first question. And then you can, you can say, some of your experiences on how far in advance you book, travel, maybe it's different each time, right, but you can just choose and how the time that you have, you have to plan ahead your trip affects the research that you make about the destination that you have chosen to go.*

[01:14} P1: Well, normally, I think I plan my trip one month, or two months. It depends in which season, we want to travel, because if it's summer, we know that it's going to be overbooked. And then, of course, the prices will rise when the summer approaches, so if it's summer, it will be maybe three four months in advance. But if it's any other time of the year, it will be one month in advance.

[01:51} L: Okay

[01:52] P1: And yeah, and the chosen destination. We tried to, we try to choose something that is not so crowded, that is not depending on the season that we're going, which is something that is not going to be too crowded, and then difficult to know the place and feel comfortable.

[02:17] L: Okay. But since you are saying that, especially for the summer season, you have to pre book, for example, two or three months ahead, then I guess that you have enough time to make the research about the place that you are going to visit, for example, what would you like to see, the accommodation and stuff like that?

[02:30] P1: Yeah, exactly, yes.

[02:31] L: So it's not something that you prepare last minute, and you don't have time to see what are you going to do there?

[02:51] P1: You know, and actually, I hate to travel like that, because I think I will plan holidays, during you get to make the most out of it, and you're going to spend money, you better get to know the destination, like hotel, spend that much time and of course, it's something that it needs to be well located in terms of maybe not downtown, but something that is easy to get to, for example, if I happen to take the public transportation from the airport, or to take public transportation to other locations that I would like to get to see.

2) *[03:42] L: Okay, so this gives me the pass for the next question that is concerning the ways that you use to make the research when planning a trip, for example, do you just go online? and google the destination and see from there when you can look at the hotel or activities or you can do, or do you get advice from travel agents? Or do you go through review websites like TripAdvisor or do you use applications that give this kind of information? What kind of info do you make?*

[04:27] P1: Well, sometimes I think we do it in two different ways. Sometimes we go through a travel agency and then book like a package that includes the plane tickets and accommodation and sometimes the transportation from the airport to the hotel. And that could be one way but then also we do it independently, in our independent way. If, for example, we have a place that we really want to visit, we just go, like, independently to the airline, to hotels, sometimes to booking.com., to hotels.com and then we find a hotel, something that looks okay, that is not expensive, that is well located, that looks okay, regarding our resources.

[05:45] L: Okay. But since you have this double way of searching, does it then depends on the destination that you will choose, or the continent that you will choose, the way that you will make the research also, for example, do you prefer to go to the travel agents and, you know, book this package you said, if it's going to be a continent or a country that you are not very familiar with, and you feel safer to go through a travel agency? Or it doesn't play any role in your decision making?

[06:26] P1: I think, when being within Europe, I think I would do it independently. If it's a country where I know maybe it's not that safe to travel, I would book it with a travel agency. Definitely I would feel much safer. And it will give me more confidence. And if it gave me trust, that would make my travel experience much better. For example, going back to the applications, I also yeah, I use applications, about which are the best beaches to visit. Applications, but also these websites where you can see nice destinations.

3) *[07:37] L: Okay. So going to the next one, then since you always plan ahead, then what parts of the trip do you plan most? I mean, we discussed that sometimes you plan independently or travel through a travel agency, which means that you have a package. let's assume that in the independent booking you make, which parts do you plan ahead? The accommodation and transportation or maybe something more? Like for example, if you book also museum tickets or not, so I'm just giving you an example.*

[08:22] P1: No, not really, not really. No, I think we plan in advance just the accommodation, the transportation not really, we like to use a public transportation yeah. So, we from the time that we get to the airport, we will find a way to get into the train or Metro and just find our way to the hotel.

[09:01] L: okay. So, except for the accommodation then the rest you just book it when you go there.

[09:11] P1: Yeah, we take it as it comes. Yeah.

4) *[09:16] L: Okay. And the last one in this phase, in the before going to the trip phase, is what is it that you anticipate the most when you plan the trip that you want to go? Maybe the thing that you will change places or the feeling that you will take a break from your routine or something like that. What is it that you anticipate?*

[09:48] P1: Okay, can you repeat the question, please?

[09:50] L: Yes. What is it that you anticipate the most when you plan the travel, for example, you anticipate taking a break from your everyday life and getting to relax more, or you anticipate having more free time with your family and doing activities altogether? What is it that makes the travel you want to have, become more attractive in your mind? What is it that you will get from it?

[10:29] P1: I think what I anticipate the most is to know a new place yes, is part of taking a break for the routine. But I think like a break from the routine you could also take it in your own country, just take the days off, but then the experience of going to a new place, a new culture and share with your family. I think that's it, to have those memories. I think that's the most important part.

On-site destination phase

5) *[11:09] L: Okay, that's great. Then now we can move. Let's assume that you are already on the destination now. You are looking for some type of experiences as a tourist with your family. So, what type of experiences are you more interested in, for example, you said in the previous question that sometimes you book packages that you can have accommodation and transportation or maybe more activities, or you like the type of experiences and say "okay, let's go and see on the spot" what we would like to do, or you are more like an adventurous kind of person, or you are the kind of person that would like just to go to the must go places every time, not getting that much off track? Or maybe you like totally personalised experience, something that would definitely fit your personality and not something that goes within packages. What is your kind of experiences?*

[12:34] P1: Yeah, actually, I like a little bit of, I like to go to the must-go attractions, not all of them. But I think the most emblematic places of each city, that means the most for the culture, I really would like to go, but also when it comes to food, I really like food and sometimes I travel because I would like to try their food. So I go around and I go by, looking for the local restaurants. I hate to go to these international restaurants, so I go to the local and I talk to the locals asking "where should I go?" I like not to plan anything, I don't like to have any schedule when I travel, so I just like to be relaxed. I also like, a little bit of not adventurous, but just to go around to explore without any guides, yeah.

[13:53] L: it's like you were walking in your own city. Exploring new streets for example.

[13:59] P1: Yes, yes exactly. And actually yeah sometimes I use apps, like perhaps TripAdvisor, to see what's the restaurants, but at some point sometimes you don't know if you can trust, because you never know if this is a little bit manipulated, and is not what the people most liked, but what they got paid for. So, but yes, I sometimes use some applications to try to find good places.

[14:39] L: Okay. Apart from the TripAdvisor, do you have any other example of what kind of applications you use?

[14:48] P1: Like I would say cheap advisor and… I don't know which other one.

[14:56] L: For example there is a very known one, is the City Map.

[15:02] P1: No, no, I don't use city mapper, is really recently that I got to know about this new app. So no, I wouldn't say that used that one.

[15:14] L: But since you are in this mentality, I guess that maybe in a future trip, then you can maybe search a little bit more what applications are there?

[15:26] P1: Yeah, yeah, exactly. But if somebody recommends me a good application to travel around, I will definitely take a look.

[15:36] L: So you will trust this kind of recommendation?

[15:40] P1: Yes, yes, yes, I'm always asking for recommendations.

6) *[15:44] L: Okay, that's, that's good to know. The next one is that if you prefer a strict schedule, or go with the flow, but I think you already answered this one, so I get that you go with the flow.*

[15:49] P1: Yes, I go with the flow, yes.

7) *[15:51] L: And I guess I also know the next one, from what I understood from your reply, but I will ask you either way, because I guess it depends on the activities that you want. So, if you prefer to walk, or take public transportation or hire private transport?*

[16:18] P1: No, I definitely walk. Walk or take public transportation.

[16:25] L: So depends on the access and the distance, I guess.

[16:30] P1: Yeah, yeah. The conditions, if it's raining, if we are tired, protected, or also if it is long, and also depends on the time you have. Because you know, if you have three days, in one destination, I would not spend one day just walking and walking to get to a place, because we want make the most out of our time.

[16:59] L: Okay, but I also guess, I mean, it depends on the destination, if it's a small city, for example, you cannot compare Paris to I don't know, any other, let's say, a small city in Denmark.

[17:18] P1: Yeah. Yeah, no, definitely. But also, I think, I'd like to take the public transportation when I go on holidays because also you feel the vibe. It's nice to take the public transportation in another city to see how it works.

[17:33] L: Yeah, so you see how the everyday rhythm of the local people is, and you get to have the feeling of sharing this, this experience?

[17:50] P1: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

8 + 9) *[17:52] L: oh, the next one, I think we already mentioned it, if you use applications that familiarise you with a place and recommend you activities to do. So I think you already answered that. The point is, if you are interested in meeting local people. You mentioned earlier that you tend to ask local people about food and recommendations. In general, would you be open? For example, let's say, for example, that you are sitting somewhere in a neighbourhood, in a table outside, and people go walking back and forth. Would you be open if someone, a local one, would come and talk to you and your family and start a conversation? about anything?*

[18:45] P1: Yeah, definitely. Yes.

[18:50] L: You are interested in meeting local people. You are not one of the tourists that say no, I just go see, eat, drink and take pictures. And not have any kind of local feelings, memories.

[19:13] P1: Is not that I would like to go out with them. But sometimes if you're in a destination, a local may ask "so where are you coming from", it's just nice to make a small talk.

[19:28] L: But I guess that also depends on the language barrier, right? It's not the same if you are going to Copenhagen where you can speak in English with anyone. On the contrary, let's say you go to Vietnam. And then yeah, even if you wanted to, maybe it's not that easy to get to meet them or talking.

[19:50] P1: Yeah, exactly, yes.

10) *[19:52] L: Okay, so now we go to the next one. Um, I guess you have some kind of ideas. Since you have a specific personal style of travelling, what is it that makes an experience authentic? According to you? I mean, I guess you seek authenticity because from what I've heard, you try to go with the flow in a city and not have a specific schedule that will deprive you from seeing some other parts that normally you wouldn't. And you like local food, so you explore in this kind of way, you would like to talk to people that live in the place you visit. So I guess some of this part make play a more authentic role in the experience that you will have. But what is it that you believe that makes an experience authentic? When you travel?*

[21:11] P1: I think going in most of the city's downtown, every downtown of a city is to please a tourist. So I think that's not the real part of a culture, downtown. So I think when you go a little bit outside, you can see the real culture, the real vibe, the real feeling of what the destination is about. In other sense, and what is authentic.

[21:58] L: Okay, so you, in that sense, like to explore places that you normally you wouldn't find somewhere?

[22:10] P1: Yeah, definitely. Because I think that's the charm and that's the benefits of travelling to see how other people is, how the people dress, how people are in everyday life. See the difference of cultures.

Post-trip phase

11) *[22:31] L: Okay, that's great. So, now we have, we have returned home. And we reflect on our experiences. And one of the first questions is, which are the memories that you leave the place you visited with? And what was the highlight of your trip? Maybe this time, you can speak of a specific example that you have in mind, for example, last time you travelled somewhere or a very, very memorable travel you had in mind, maybe that helps you bring back the memories.*

[23:14] P1: Yeah. Let's say, least time we've been to Sicily. And I loved the food. Like, one of the first things that comes to my mind is going to this restaurant. And actually we came back two times because it was very good. But also, I'm passionate I would say about food, and also the beach was amazing. I loved also the display of the streets, going into these old rocky streets. That was really authentic going to the churches. The people yes, the people also, I went to the hairdresser. And the girl didn't speak English. So it was Italian. And I was speaking Mexican. Yeah, but somehow we got to understand each other. And it was really nice. And I think is also a part of how welcoming people are and warm. If you feel comfortable, if you feel welcome in the city, the hospitality. But that is for me very important. I really like to, I love to appreciate the architecture, the art, the the nature. And as I said before, the food.

[25:00] L: So I guess everything else that you said are the best memories that you have from Sicily, and the highlight would be the food.

[25:09] P1: Yeah, the food. And also I love to go to supermarkets, I think it's a very important part of the trip, to feel the feeling of the people and the culture because you get to see the difference, what kind of things they have, what kind of things they don't have, people buying what they use, what they cook, or like when they do their shopping.

[25:43] L: That's, that's really interesting. I haven't thought about it. I mean, I normally love going to supermarkets myself, too. And that's, that's something, something that you can say it's indicative of an authentic experience, because actually, it's not built for tourists. So you see exactly what kind of products they have. Which means consequently, that these kinds of products are also more used in their local cuisine.

[26:20] P1: In the culture, and for example, even to see which vegetables and fruits are local, what can they consume?

12) *[26:29] L: Yeah, totally. That's so interesting. I'm really glad that you mentioned it. Then we can go to the next one, maybe you can have also in mind your trip to Sicily in this one and say if your trip reach your expectations, in which way?*

[26:53] P1: It didn't reach my expectations. But it wasn't because the place was not good enough. But I think the geography of the place was not the best. Because there's some kind of mountains. So it takes a long time. Even though it's an island, it takes a long time to go from one city to the other. I think part of the culture is that they take a siesta. So from intersecting from two o'clock or one o'clock, afternoon, until four o'clock, everything was closed, but really, it was dead. Everything. You could not find any food, any people on the streets. During that period of time, you could not do anything. But other than that, I actually I wanted to go to Sicily, because I saw in the movie of Aquaman, that the setting was Sicily. And I said, oh my God, it is beautiful, I want to go to Sicily. And of course I googled the city, where it was the setting of Aquaman. And then yeah, we went there. And it completely covered my expectations of these small streets, you know these old stones. And the streets are very narrow and are kind of medieval, maybe kind of mystical, some mystery and something that is hidden. Yeah, it was very nice.

[28:50] L: Okay, so that was the good part, of your expectations.

[28:53] P1: Yes.

13) *[28:58] L: Good to know. So now that you have, for example, this knowledge from maybe the distances or the siesta hours in this nation, you have this knowledge now since you have experienced it. What would you improve or do different in a next trip? Let's say you go to another place but you have the knowledge that you get it from your previous tips, what is it that makes you improve your research or your planning?*

[29:35] P1: Definitely, because when we came back, we thought it was not a good position to book the hotel where we were living for the whole week. Because what we should have done is to book two nights in one city and then moving around the island. So we could just know all the islands. Because staying in one place, it was impossible to travel during the day to go to the other side of the island and going back to the same. So logistically, we will do it different next time.

[30:21] L: Okay. Yeah, I mean, you definitely cannot prepare and plan 100% each destination, but sometimes your previous experience helps with the next ones if you are willing to reflect, right? and learn.

[30:44] P1: Yes, exactly. Yeah.

[30:48] L: And in this way, I guess it's not only, for example, for the distance or the accommodation, but maybe someone would also be careful with the weather or other conditions.

[30:58] P1: Yes. Because actually, we went there, I think it was August or September. Oh, my God, and it was 40 degrees. So we were dying.

[31:12] L: So that's something that you can learn from. Really do better in the next destination?

[31:23] P1: Yes, definitely. Yes. Because when you look at it, when you think about, it is like, Oh, it's only 44 degrees, it will be fine. But we could not even move.

[31:40] L: No. 44 is only good if you are swimming.

[31:48] P1: And drinking cocktails all day. No, you want to go sightseeing, because then it's really uncomfortable with the sun. And in my case that I have kids, they were hysterical.

[32:00] L: Yeah, of course. That's not. Maybe that's also why the local people have the siesta?

[32:07] P1: No, definitely not! Because they are of course gone when the heat is extreme. The most warm hours of the day, they just go away.

[32:22] L: Yeah, I mean, if you think about it, then every culture has its own, you know, patterns or traditions because of the conditions they live in, I guess. So if they have this kind of thing, especially during the afternoon hours, the early afternoon hours when the sun is at the hottest spot, then I guess it has to do with the conditions that they need to change or avoid or adjust to. So you understand from this kind of things. You understand more and more each time. But you have to be there and realise, realise yourself and live the experience to understand this. You cannot know it before you go? Well. Not this kind of things are not written in reviews or websites.

[33:25] P1: No,no,no you don't find them anywhere.

[33:27] L: Yeah, I guess. Yeah. And I guess, since the conversation is leading there, in the last question, I guess that's also the role that authenticity plays in our travel experience, that you get to know things and experience something that you will not find it written, it will be just a feeling. It will just be a knowledge. It will be something that will create a memory and perception in your mind, but you will not find it, in written.

[34:03] P1: No, definitely. I remember the first day, we were just like, Oh yeah, let's go and have some lunch. And the surprise was that everything was closed. And we were like, what, what's going on here? What's going on here? And we were asking everywhere. I'm like, No, everything's closed because of the siesta. And as you said, no one, no one tells you that.

[34:29] L: So it's just having to live firsthand.

[34:35] P1: Exactly, yes.

14) *[34:38] L: So about the last question. I think we are already discussing it throughout but if you have something to add up so that we can conclude about the role of authenticity in the travel experiences.*

[34:55] P1: Definitely is important. It's important. At least for me to feel that authenticity. Because then I am satisfied that I could learn something new. And experience and feel the atmosphere, the vibe of the place. It is definitely super important.

[35:25] L: is what makes you feel that it was worth travelling. Right?

[35:29] P1: Yes.

[35:33] L: That's really important. We don't understand it subconsciously. That's why we travel.

[35:40] P1: Yeah, no, like, of course, everybody should have their own preferences. But I don't know, the standard people that they travel to all inclusive. And they just stay in the all-inclusive, and they never leave the hotel. Because I mean, you can travel to an all-inclusive to your own home, I guess.

[36:04] L: Yeah, yeah, I understand your point. Okay, I think we are we are covered.

[36:12] P1: Yeah. So I think I forget about my age. I'm 38 years old. I'm from Mexico. And I'm a student and I also work in the travel industry and the restaurant industry. And I wouldn't say that I'm an experienced traveller. I like to travel and like to travel a lot. But I wouldn't say that I'm an experienced traveller.

[36:43] L: You're still learning.

[36:45] P1: I'm getting there. Yes.

[36:51] L: I guess that you, we are all learners in that way. I guess. You cannot reach any kind of experience when we talk about the travelling?

[37:03] P1: No, because I think there's a lot of factors that you cannot control when you're travelling since is not your culture is not your country. Yes, so. And everything can happen. So yes, you should take things as they come.

[37:20] L: Of course, nothing is for granted. You have improvised. Okay, then, I would like to thank you very much. I will close the recording now. Just a second.

— End of Interview —

Appendix B

Interview: Sina (P2), 38 years old, from Germany, worker in travel industry, conducted on 05/05/21

Conducted by Lorinda Sopoti (L)

[Minutes:Seconds]

— Start of Interview —

Pre-trip Phase

[0:01] L: Okay, can you hear me? Okay, great, then maybe we can start with the first question. I separated as you can see in the, in the document I sent you I separated the phases of the travel and the tourist experience in three, which is the preparation you actually make when you plan one. And the part when you are on the destination, and the phase when you go back home, and you reflect on what you experienced. Yes, so it's all about the concept of around authenticity, but you will see that some questions indirectly, may not actually ask that but may indirectly can again suggest sometimes the direction that the choice, think about authenticity will be the first one. You can tell me how far in advance you book normally a travel and how the time that you have to plan ahead affects the research you can make about the destination that you have chosen.

[01:31] P2: So mainly, we have an idea in our mind, or two or three even, and travelling in the beginning of January, we are not fixed sometimes, you know, we have these five months. So we are not like somebody that has two weeks holidays and can go from Saturday to Saturday. You know, we're quite flexible with the days. So mainly it's around the fifth of January, or even depends or something like this and we start planning let's say for end of September, then we see how our system works. So it would be fine for the departure so and then we start searching for flights. And we're not just searching let's say okay, we go to Thailand. So we're gonna say maybe Thailand, maybe Indonesia or maybe let's fly to Malaysia depends on the flight of course. So when we find a good offer, we do a reservation, but we find a great offer sometimes end of October, let's say and then end of September or beginning of October, and we do the booking then, beginning of October for early January.

[02:57] L: So basically some months around three to four, let's say.

[03:01] P2: three to four months.

[03:03] L: And you mentioned destinations mainly in Asia right. I guess because…

[03:14] P2: long distance travel we did the Caribbean or South Central and South America. We prefer Southeast Asia, mainly.

[03:27] L: Okay. So I guess that you because of your occupation, you can have winter for the Europe, I mean, the season then you search for destinations that the weather is not cold.

[03:45] P2: Exactly, to avoid the wind.

[03:49] L: Okay. And so since you will have these three to four months to plan ahead. What kind of research do you make about the destination? I mean, you normally go and say okay, I want to go to that country. Do you get advice from travel agents? Do you go and search websites with reviews? Do you have applications in your mobile that give you recommendations or tips about the country that you are going to visit? How you organise your research?

[4:33] P2:   Yeah, so mainly we are not going with any travel agencies. We are backpacker, we are doing our own experience. We have been doing our own thing. And we like okay, we always have an idea before about the countries, we are not going with not having any ideas and book something, so from a traveller books, from research, from Reports from other people we find online. That's a nice place to go. But before we book the flights, of course, and then we have an idea about the country and what we want to see. And let's go with the example of Thailand, let's say, flying into Bangkok and going through the south on the west coast and then make the turn and travelling up on the East Coast, to not go back and forth from right to left and move to South Central again, to have a plan where to go. But we never book something in

advance. So mainly, we have booked the first two or three nights. And we see what's going on, we have an idea about the places we like to stay, and sometimes you have an idea and say, Okay, this place must be amazing, here there are lots of good things around, maybe we plan to stay a week. And then we arrive and it's not that nice, I will feel not so welcome. Then maybe we just saved three days, we change the things we like to see and then we continue and mainly we are using, now since a couple of years, we are using like platforms like Booking. Before we were just travelling to a place maybe with Lonely Planet book in my hands and then searching around for accommodation. So the last five or six years, we were doing the three bookings but always two or three nights before. So when I am in destination, and we are there for one or two days, then we have the idea okay, we stay one more week or we just stay two more nights. And then we start to research for the next destination and make a booking like mainly in booking.com or whichever TripAdvisor for accommodation, also in TripAdvisor you will find a lot of recommendations, things to do, things to avoid, things you have to do. Sometimes, as well, we do a research for restaurants, just to see how it's rated. Not that much for the restaurants. But especially for hotels, we are using these platforms now. Or in South, South Central America we used a lot of Airbnb, but it was much cheaper, let's say in Mexico, which was much cheaper than using booking.com. But in general, we tried not to be with Airbnb, it changed a lot in the last few years. You know, the general idea with Airbnb was to accommodate somebody in your house. And now you know, the situation like here in Mykonos, all the homes they gave it to seasonal workers to make Airbnb out of this. For every hotel now it's an Airbnb. So it's not the same meaning anymore, like it was two years ago.

3) *[08:29] L: Yes. So you already answered the third question that I was going to ask you which parts or expenses of the trip do you plan ahead? So you say that you mainly focus on accommodation, at least for the three or four nights before? And then on the spot? You have already made your research but you haven't booked something. So on the spots going with the flow you book activities and places there, right?*

[08:57] P2: Exactly, exactly.

[08:59] L: Okay, but do you think that the way that you handle this and arrange your planning has something to do with seeking the authentic part? Like you want to go there and see actually with your own eyes? What is considered living?

[09:19] P2: Yeah, of course, the main attractions are always the must-see things but sometimes we try to search a littlethings off the beaten track. Let's say in Peru, everybody is running to Machu Picchu. We never been in Machu Picchu we visit places they are similar but not that well known. So we do not run to the places or the big tour buses are going and mainly we have a scooter or something and driving around and say ah Let's stop here let's stop there. So a little of the local life.

[10:01] L: So you try to avoid the mass tourism I understand.

[10:05] P2: The crowds, yes. But sometimes it's something really interesting and there will be a crowd. But mainly, we try to avoid the mass tourism, yes.

4) *[10:25] Okay. And the last question in this phase is what is it that you anticipate the most when you plan to travel, for example, you just want to take a break from your everyday life and routine, you just want to go and know a new place… whatever is the feeling that you wait for it the most, when planning.*

[10:54] P2: Okay, it's a little, it's a little mix of everything. First of all, to see different countries, different places, different cultures, to have contact with locals, we're not going to a big hotel to find other Germans

or Italians to hang out with. So we are looking more for localised. So, the main is to go away, we have the six months off, you know, to not start here or in Germany. So to go somewhere else, to enjoy the good weather, to have some new experiences. So and to mix out cultures.

[11:37] L: Okay. And sun.

[11:45] P2: And fun and Claudio just mentioned from inside, local foods, you know.

[11:52] L: Yeah, but it's also part of the culture, right?

[11:59] P2: For example, you go to Indonesia. So you sit on the beach, and half an hour later, you have a lot of local around you, and everybody likes to make a picture with you and they want to know where you're from and they invite you in their house. But it's for them something special to have a white person in the house, kitchen, you drink the coffee or tea and the neighbour sees that you have a white friend, that's an example. So I don't know in how many different houses I have been already invited for tea or coffee and they never asked for money, but we always live a little you know, expensive status, but these are people that have really nothing, this is the real life we are real looking for.

[12:48] L: That's a really good quote that I need to write down. So you are looking for the real life because that can also be interpreted as the authentic part of an experience right? Looking for the real life of the locals….

[13:12] P2: Exactly. I do not understand the people that are travelling around the world, to the Maldives, to Mauritius and Mexico but they're just being in the hotel complex. We do not understand this kind of people I mean, okay, if you have a nine to five job Monday to Friday and you make it to three weeks off a year and you just want to relax okay, but you know nothing nearly from this country then in the end, finally like I mentioned before.

On-site destination phase

5)   *[13:48] L: Yes, actually someone said to me about this all-inclusive hotels that if you want to just go and relax in a hotel you don't have actually to go out of your country or out of your city to do that you can find hotels to do that and go relax there but going out of your country to a new one means that you want to get to know the other country, not stay in a hotel all day So yeah, I guess yeah, I guess the mentality is that you are searching for the life like people you get there where you go. So now we have already gone I mean, as the conversation goes, we are already on the destination phase. And in the question, what type of experiences you are looking for as a tourist? I guess that we keep somehow the adventurous and going for culture and adventures.*

[14:57] P2: We like fun and culture, yeah.

6)   *[15:02] L: And not full packages you can book or a mass tourism city sightseeing. And the next one, I have a feeling that you go with the flow. You don't have the strict schedule, from this time to this time.*

[15:31] P2: I have an example of one year in a small island in Cambodia. The next year, we said, okay, let's go back maybe for the first days, 10 days, maybe two weeks. So we flew back to Cambodia. We went to Cubase, and the city in Phnom Penh where we arrived. And then we made our way down to the little island. And they ask us how long you will stay and we said at least 10 days, maybe two weeks, and then we start laughing, like making a joke, maybe longer. Finally, we end up there for six weeks. And the idea

and the background was to go to visit Myanmar that year and we never made it to Myanmar. So we made it the following year. So you go with the flow.

[16:23] L: Yeah, I can understand that if you go somewhere and you really like the vibes and the atmosphere in the people and the food or whatever, then you can stay longer and you enjoy it or you can plan to go back and even in places that you don't have the same feeling even if you have booked it, then you change it. Maybe that's also because of your experience as a traveller that's also why you don't book ahead activities and restaurants and stuff like that in advance but you just wait to go there.

[17:09] P2: Exactly. We don't mind you know and we are not like arriving somewhere with that plan of doing this and that, or this excursion tomorrow. And tomorrow it's not possible, but we can try today in the afternoon or why not then we do today in the afternoon, we don't mind we just want to see it.

7)   *[17:24] L: Yes, I understand. The next one is if you prefer to walk, take public transportation or hire private transport. I guess there are many aspects to that but you can give me some examples for your choices.*

[17:45] Yes, as an example, the first years we always did everything in public transportation and then to go from A to B and then when we reached the destination we rented privately to drive around and to be flexible, but public transportation to go from one overnight spot to the next overnight spot. Except in Mexico, there we rented a car, it was cheap, for three weeks and it costed less than $300, we said okay, let's make a road trip rent a car. Sometimes private transportation, if you do not have another choice except private transportation, then we will do it, but mainly public transportation, or doing a road trip on our own.

[18:45] L: Okay, but if I understand, it is a mix of having cheaper choices for the budget. And also seeing how the locals get their way or move around.

[19:04] P2: Exactly, but this is about the ways to see and realise. As an example, you go to Nicaragua, they have this old American school buses. I don't know 30 seats inside but there are already 60 customers inside. Plus they're coming these women that go on the bus to sell the food and these are real experiences. You know, if you're on the private transportation to bring you from A to B, maybe just stop somewhere to make a break, but people in public transportation, you meet locals, you see how it is. If you're in an already packed bus, when you're sitting there's not even one person sitting in and then they come in the bus and that's fun, that's things you remember later.

8)   *[20:00] L: Yeah. That's what creates the memories that stick with you, right? Now, you already mentioned, the next question is about some applications, or websites that you may use for recommendations about activities or places to eat, drink or visit you mentioned TripAdvisor earlier, where mainly you can use it for hotels and accommodation and sometimes for restaurants. Is there any other application that you use or some other websites that you, from your research, you have found that do the same? Or when you are outside? Because I guess sometimes, it's not easy to have Wi Fi everywhere or have data in your phone? My question is, do you have applications in your mobile that tells you Okay, you can go to this because the locals have recommended it or other tourists that have visited recommended it, when you are on the spot.*

[21:11] P2: Okay, so we search mainly in the hotels, wherever you are around the world, you will find some some Wi Fi to search. But mainly we are using the only application for this I have received booking.com and then the rest we're using websites, mainly when we are in the hotel accommodations, then we're checking out Google Maps, of course, if you're using a lot, you know, to find the hidden places for us to follow, we do not use a lot of apps, except Google Maps and booking.com. Some websites…and

ah Facebook, and you know, when I go to accounts, I join a lot of Facebook groups for this country, to have experienced Facebook groups as long as I'm in this country to ask for information. And then I mainly leave these groups after the trip.

[22:29] L: Okay. Yeah, I know, I am familiar. There are so many groups that give, every local for example I'm from Greece, and I will put a picture so about Greece, I will say okay, you can go there, you can go there. And then I can see someone from India do the same. So people exchange their information about their countries and their places and the things that they can provide.

[23:02] P2: Yeah, well, even other travellers, like pictures of Indonesia.

9)   *[23:09] L: Okay. The next one, you already answered it earlier, if you're interested in meeting local people you said that you, actually from what I understood, is that you love talking to local people. And not only for recommendations, but also to see the way that they live and they think and they talk, right. That's the whole cultural aspect of meeting some new people.*

[23:45] P2: Yes, and keep this contact. This contact is kept, nearly every week with Indonesia as an example.

[23:54] L: Okay, so not that once you leave the country, then you never talk, talk back to someone, you keep their contact information. And you, for example, you can speak with them again, if you go back or get some wishes, or birthdays and stuff like that. Right.

[24:19] P2: Exactly.

10)   *[24:21] L: That's, that's really nice. So if you travel everywhere, then you can say that you have friends all over the world. Now, the last one is about what makes an experience authentic, according to you. I guess it's a mix of everything that we've spoken so far, but I would like to hear your answer to that, more concretely.*

[24:50] P2: Yeah, authentic holidays for me is like to meet the local people. Of course you need some travellers to exchange the experience. But not being in the big five-star hotel and be locked in there. So to go around, to see the live there, to see what's going on there, to see the beauty of the nature, of the culture of the local people. And this is what sticks in your memories.

[25:27] L: Yeah. Okay. What about…, I have some examples here about the people and the places do you normally for example, are you interested into asking, since you meet local people, asking about their stories, their life stories and their traditions in order to understand better the culture? Is it also part of being in an authentic aspect when experiencing your holidays?

[25:57] P2: Mainly, so when you're somewhere, the general answer is yes. But generally you sit somewhere in the beach and you meet some locals. So maybe they have some kids and you ask for the name and you know, and how old they are and if you have more kids, to know about the life around them.

[26:20] L: Okay. Do you have any example of any country that you have been for example, let's say that you are again on the beach, or you are on the streets and you see some kind of ritual that you are not familiar with? Will you stay and see what it is? And what they are doing?

[26:51] P2: Yeah, of course, I can give an example. We were in Cuba, and we reached our next destination and we checked in, and then the second day is the weekend and there is the festival here. So of course you know, you go you see how they celebrate what they're doing. Or in Myanmar, we end up on a big, huge Buddhistic cleaning celebration with 1000s of people and we were in between. Okay, so of course it

depends. Then of course, go and have a look you don't have to be in the centre of it, but go and have a look.

[27:48] L: Like an observer kind of tourist. Since you are not familiar with it, I mean, it's not that you would avoid meddling in, but first in order to know something you have to observe it and see how it goes and ask and get familiar.

[28:09] P2: Yes, exactly. And if it's not for you Okay, go to the other direction.

Post-trip phase

11) *[28:14] L: Yeah of course. Now let's say that we have gone back home and we are talking about memories, maybe you now this time you have something specific in mind from what has been on your previous trip. The memories that you left the country with and what is it that you consider the highlights of the trip.*

[28:44] P2: Okay, I'm doing this already during the trip, but before we had all these smartphones and so on, so friends who are always asking and want to know how we are. So we made maybe once a week or every two weeks to send the email around with the pictures of what we did, and now, since Facebook let's say, I have a kind diary and Facebook posting some pictures of me, then you have it for the following years. You always gonna have a look on this and then the memories are coming back, like your memories seven years ago as an example. So, we're doing some you know all the 1000s of pictures you're doing, but you check them at home, we work a little on the pictures, Claudio sometimes makes a little movie out of the trip, or some photobooks and sharing the experiences with friends who say "Ah, you have been there and there", so sitting together, talk a little, give them maybe idea for the next holidays.

[29:52] L: Yeah. So I guess since you mentioned the pictures and taking photos, I guess that in general photography is what keeps memories alive more or less?

 [30:08] P2: Yes, yes but you see a picture and then maybe you remember the story around. For example in January while we were, we'll watch the movies Claudio made out of the pictures. And we say "Oh my god, do you remember this 10 year ago. You see the pictures and memories are coming back with it.

[30:36] L: Yeah, because you were there and the picture just brings back the whole surrounding. Can you give me an example of highlights of one of your trips. For example, something really memorable. Maybe some nice food or very friendly people in a specific country or an adventure you remember?

[31:10] P2: I wanted to revisit this temple in Cambodia. So we bought a three-day pass and the guide wrote us all about the temple and he was good, but you know there was a lot of self-going groups and he asked us "do you want to go with the flow or against the flow, is that okay?" We go against the flow and we started early morning like six when the temples were empty. And on the day there was a break or in Indonesia we did the full day trip. And we went to nature protected forests to see families of monkeys and I remember some French students were there to study this monkey and at midday we made the lunch break at the beach and his wife came to .. make fall down the fruit from the trees to our heads we were running … and during Twilight, so we went back to the forest to see unique little animals they looked like,… do you know, the movie, The Gremlins? Well, these little animals exist really. And so that changed my life. They're smaller than your hands. Oh, and this is memory I never forget. Or in Ecuador in the Amazon, we booked a two-day trip where we slept with the Amazonas and on breakfast we got served

maggots, these white small worms. I came to the kitchen and I said none for me, thank you. Claudio tries. He said they were nice crispy and juicy inside.

[33:44] L: So they were actually alive.

[33:46] P2: Before he put them into hot oil. Yes.

[33: 49] L: Okay. Things you never forget.

[33:58] P2: I like to try local food but not that local.

12) *[34:06] L: Yeah, I'm with you on that. So all these trips, I guess. Did they reach your expectations regarding the authenticity that you seek?*

[34:20] P2: Yes. In general Yes. Once I was in Hong Kong, I was a little disappointed maybe I expected too much. No two countries to be honest. There were really nice places to buy everything, but is just made for the tourists, you know the fame. The tourists they go for two weeks with the package. We are more than happy there. But if you look behind the curtain, it's really sad to visit Cuba. I think if you are a white European, you have tonnes of money you can spend there and they will try to rip you off in every corner, and this is something that I hate. Okay, you can charge a little more to tourists, but don't try to overcharge them 1,000% in Cuba. And the same goes a little bit in Costa Rica. We were planning to go five to six weeks to Costa Rica. And finally, after two and a half weeks, we made our way out of Costa Rica. And spend much more time in Nicaragua, which we really enjoyed.

[35:43] L: But why? What was it that you didn't like?

[35:47] P2: The rip-off. Let's say you just want to walk up the hill, and you have to pay an entrance fee to walk up the hill. We don't talk about a dollar, we talk about like 15 to $20. And, okay, Costa Rica is the destination, a lot of Americans go for their 10 days holidays, and they pay every price to get up. And this is destroying the backpackers paradise.

[36:22] L: Yeah, I guess. Okay. So, you are actually giving me like a controversy now in my mind, the backpackers the authenticity seekers versus the really rich tourists that don't actually care about authenticity, but they pay anything just for their comfort, and not caring about.

[36:53] P2: Yeah, they don't have to be really rich. Yeah, yeah. But as I spoke with some friends and they asked me "Why don't we make a trip together in New Zealand?", as an example. And I said, okay, you are going like for a round trip for two weeks, organised and staying one more week to relax. You spent the same amount of money in three weeks that we spent in two months. So if you are a backpacker you are always on a shoestring.

13) *[37:38] L: Now, it's something that we have discussed throughout the conversation. But if you have something specific of what is it that you have learned from your travelling experience, and that you would improve or do different in a next trip? Is there something specific that you can reflect on?*

[38:05] P2: Yes. So I would not just trust and go anymore without having booked an accommodation in advance. It's too much time you run around to try to find the place. So it's easy, you just open your booking.com as an example. You see you read some comments, you see it and you say, Yeah, okay, let's

book this place for tonight. And if you want to stay longer, do it there or do it again, or change the place if you don't like this. So this, definitely, I would never do again, just to have the backpack or the suitcases and just go and knocking the door. It's much easier to do the booking in advance and even if it's two or three days in advance or even if it is three hours in advance, it makes life much easier and Claudio is saying from inside, we are not really backpackers anymore, we became flashpackers. You know we take it with a little more comfort. Or to have a bus ticket for the public transportation, at least to take in advance, so we do not end up in the long waiting line, and say "Ah, maybe we catch two tickets, or maybe not". So just to have the tickets in advance to make the life easier.

14) *[39:29] L: So it's, it's some about the logistics, right? Time that you will save for yourselves. Instead of booking stuff and searching for stuff, doing something else maybe more creative or productive. Okay, and the last one which sums up the whole topic is about the authenticity and the importance that it has in your travel experiences? How important is it to find authenticity when you travel?*

[40:10] P2: 10 out of 10 or 9 out of 10. So, you know, I don't want to have like in Cuba, you go to a resort and they showed you everything that in normal life is not happening. So it has to be authentic.

[40:34] L: Okay. Okay. And I guess that this is something because you seem like a really experienced traveller. Is this something that has progressed throughout the years of your travelling? Or was it there in your mind from the beginning and then when you started your travels, I mean, when you started, was it the same or you just make progress and evolve and learn from one trip to the next? And it becomes more and more important?

[41:08] P2: Yeah. It was a learning process into my first years when I was 18, 19,20 we were not going backpacking in this age, so I was more like, let's try to book somewhere and that the package there has your accommodation has your food in the hotel and have a look around what's going on. And since I've worked in tourism, I changed. So after my first year in tourism, is when I had my last package holidays and then when I met Claudio he had already two years of backpacking experience so and I jumped in, I always had it in mind and we were talking with some friends about this, but this never happened. But before I came to Greece, I had the Monday to Friday nine to five job. And I really needed holidays, a lot of my friends they were driving somewhere, rented the house, we were people together and make party from the first day to the last day, this is not holiday for me. I hear also people that go in paradise camping and get drunk 24/7. So then then I said to my friends, no, I'm not joining and did holidays with my family or on my own with a package, and then I met Claudio and then after one and a half years, we did the first and I was so excited. And okay, three nights in Bangkok, then go there, then go there, then go there. And I stressed myself. As he was more or less following the things I was pushing, and doing what I want to see as much as possible. And with the years now and the experiences, it's like, oh, let's stay a little longer. Take it easy relax a little. Especially when we're in a nice area and we want to see the beach. With the cities, I'm still like, okay, let's see what we want to see and then let's move. Experience is also in a place to enjoy a little more and you cannot see every single thing, you try to see for the most important things for you. I will say if you haven't seen everything you always have a reason to come back to see the other things.

[43:50] L: Yes. So what we discussed, not make your strict schedule to see everything, but see less. Go deeper into this less and then yes, if you like it, you go back? Okay, we are done with my questions. It's just out of curiosity, because you have so many stories and so many countries that you have visited, is that I want to ask you, is there a number of countries that you have visited? Do you count?

[44:29] P2: I don't know if I'm gonna count Spain, this was a package. D you want to know the package or backpacking?

[44:49] L: No, I mean in general, generally your travels. Is there a number you get? Can you say that your visited for example, like 50 countries in your life? Until now?

[45:00] P2: Let's say around 25, 20 to 25. Yeah.

[45:06] L: That's so exciting. Okay, then I think we are done. Just give me a second to close the recording and get back to you.

— End of Interview —

Appendix C

Interview: Alexandros (P3), 40 years old, from Greece, yachting agent, conducted on 07/05/21

Conducted by Lorinda Sopoti (L)

[Minutes:Seconds]

— Start of Interview —

<div align="center">

Pre-trip Phase

</div>

1) *[00:01] L: Hi Alex. Thank you so much for participating in my research. I guess you already saw in the interview guide that the questions are separated in the phases of tourism experiences. There are 3 phases the pre-trip phase, the phase when you are on your destination, and the last phase when you are back home and you reflect on your experience. I guess we can start with the first question. So, how far in advance do you book a travel and how does the time that you have to plan your trip affects the research you make about the destination?   Forgot to mention that you could start also by describing yourself, so I can have an idea about your background, like age, nationality, what do you do for a living and how are you involved with tourism and travel experiences overall.*

[01:03] P3: Well, first of all, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Alexandros, I am 40 years old and I come from Greece. I am currently working as a yachting agent, which means that I work as an agent for pleasure yachts, the big yachts or the mega yachts that people own and use for their own pleasure or vacation. It is a part of my work to gather information about different destinations in various places around the world for my customers. Therefore, I have to travel a lot, which is one of things that I like about my work, as I am given the opportunity to travel in different continents and provide an overview of the destination. Since one part of my duties is related to concierge, as you can imagine, I have to build a holistic understanding about destinations in order to provide a comprehensive summary.

[02:16] L: Sorry, to interrupt, but could you briefly explain what concierge has to do with?

[02:24] P3: Yes of course. Concierge includes attractions, sightseeing, festivals, cultural events, local cuisine, pretty much anything in order to provide many options to my clients.

[02:40] L: Ok, thank you, it is clear…. you can go on.

[02:46] P3: Yes, and as I was saying, we have very demanding clients, all of them are rich and millionaires and they want a wide variety of options. Some of them are more interested in landscapes, other more interested in events, either cultural, religious or traditional, others are more interested in culinary options, others seek the thrill and excitement of adventures or sporting activities…depends on the customer really.

[03:22] L: Does that mean that they prefer more luxury, more comfort in their trips?

[03:29] P3: No, not necessarily. Although they are rich they seek many things, and of course not necessarily expensive options, they are open to anything as long as it falls within their interests. Now, having all that in mind, as you can assume, I have to make a thorough research in advance. Not only because it is my work, but because I like it. And this is why I chose this job, for me is mostly pleasure. I see myself as a constant tourist. So, I always make plans, these plans may change, but I have to be prepared and make sure that I will see as many things as possible, and I will have many experiences.

[04:12] L: And how does all of those affect your planning?

[04:19] P3: Yes, well normally, I dedicate about 2 months to plan my trip. I try to see when the best time of the year is to visit a place, you know, I have to consider weather conditions, in order to be able to enjoy it and make sure that I will have easy access wherever I go, and also to check if there is anything special that I can do during my time there, for example a festival or a carnival, things like that. In these 2 months, I gather information about accommodation and how to get there. Also, since I might have to visit multiple destinations within the same country, I check accommodation in multiple places and also airplane tickets, in order to combine them effectively. But most importantly, I check the things that a normal tourist would do. Apart from that, I visit local websites, facebook groups and pages in order to gather information from locals on what to do and where to go. I keep an open communication with people, travelers and professionals in order to be able and do many activities. So, to sum it up, I tend to book accommodation in local homes, provided by families, but also to 3,4 or 5 star hotels to get an overview of hospitality and culture, I book activities, whatever there is available, from tour guides, such as simple hiking experiences to bungee jumping. Also, I go to parties, festivals and concerts, and of course to any event in the area. And of course I will combine all that with nightlife, restaurants, street food, anyway, to cover as many topics as possible. That way, I do my job well, but I get to enjoy it.

2) *[06:25] L: Wow your job sounds very exciting! Now, if we proceed to the next question, the next question is regarding the ways you make your research when you plan all these trips? You already mentioned some ways, but is there anything else you would like to add? Or summarize what you do? Do you also use applications or websites a lot, or seek advice from professionals?*

[06:57] P3: The better tool you can use is the internet, and I refer to Google. You start from there. Then you open numerous tabs, and you try to explore. Facebook is a super tool, it allows you to find amazing amount of information. Not only from groups of travellers, this is not how I do it. I just visit local groups of people, I ask for access and then I start asking, a lot of questions. People tend to respond, you know. If they see that you are a tourist they will immediately provide you with the best spots to see and what to

do. And then when I gather all the info I double check them. Let's say I create a list and prioritize what I will do. And also I try to verify and validate with many more people if my choices are indeed correct.

[08:10] P3: Well, yes, TripAdvisor is also good. I also have access to my business intranet and CRM system, which has much information about destinations, so this gives me an edge. Moreover, I create an agenda and an excel sheet. To write down expenses, my plan, things I want to see. I also ask for advice from colleagues, from travel agents, since I happen to know a few, and also from various travel websites, but I told you, I have to double check everything. It is not that I want to be sure that I will have the best experience, but also in case something goes wrong, I will have alternatives.

3) *[08:56] L: Okay. Sounds like you are an expert into planning your trips to get the most out of them. So moving to the next question, since you plan ahead, which specific parts of the trip do you plan the most? I mean, I can understand that you have to plan almost everything, since you also travel alone, but is there something that you have to pay extra attention to? Like accommodation, or events as you mentioned, or something else?*

[09:30] P3: Well, most of the times I travel alone, but during my trips, one of my friends or colleagues may come along, it depends on who is available. But as I already mentioned, I have to plan everything. Accommodation, Hotel, landscapes I want to visit, attractions and sightseeing, tourist guides to see archaeological or historical places and landmarks. I stay with locals, which are in my opinion the best source of information, because things change in a destination, so even if you go back, you will have to be updated about the destination, you know, what has changed.

[10:14] L: Okay, so you have a big agenda and things to take care of. And you trust locals as you say, which are good for inside information I guess.

[10:27] P3: Just to add to your question, I also plan restaurant bookings, nightlife, outdoor activities, and to visit events. In order to do all that, I sent emails directly to the companies or owners, I reach out to them over the phone, and plan accordingly. It is easy nowadays I think to do that. Regarding events and sights, I just go online and book my tickets.

4) *[10:58]] L: Okay, I believe I am covered from your answer in this aspect, so the last question of the 1st phase is related to your anticipation. So, what do you anticipate the most, I mean before you go, before you reach your destination? Is it the journey, that feeling of getting away, the people that you will visit, the places and sights you will see?*

[11:25] P3: That is tricky. Many things I guess. First of all, I want to deviate from my plan as little as possible. But that is not the case, almost every time. You make a plan, and once you are on the destination you create a new one, and then you also improvise. But I am used to that. So, as I told you I do a lot of things when I travel. However, as you can imagine, there are some things that stand out for me. One thing is the natural beauty of the destination. I really anticipate that. If I go to national parks, to places of worldwide heritage, then of course it is something that I anticipate a lot. To see exotic life, creatures, plants and the landscape. Then I would say is the overall contact that I will establish with the people of the country. I am curious to see what my final thoughts and memories will be. What is that separates this

culture from others. I really look forward to that as well. So, interaction and communication with local communities.

On-site destination phase

5) *[12:48] L: Okay, that's great, so contact with locals and the scenery, I mean the landscapes of the destination. Okay, now imagine that you have reached your destination. So, the 1ˢᵗ question in this phase has to do with the experiences that you look for as a tourist. I know that you visit many places due to your work, but I am talking about experiences that you want to have as a tourist. do you prefer activities or adventures, do you just want to relax, do you want to see the main attractions, what is it that you are after?*

[13:26] P3: Well, I may travel for work, but I see it the other way around. I travel for me, and combine it with work. But to answer your question, I think all of them. Whatever I can get as a tourist. But I would say that I tend to prefer more personalized experiences. Not that I do not go to see the main attractions, or that I will avoid mass tourism. Because I believe that when you go somewhere as a tourist, and you are surrounded by many other tourists, just like you, then you also to get to witness the culture of the locals. So you get to see how they treat the tourists. It is different from personalized experiences, where you are treated really nicely wherever you go, maybe it has to do with the fact that you must pay more. But by personalized, I mean, things that I personally arrange and plan, and mostly has to do with experiences where I am the tourist and I am surrounded by locals and I blend in I would say, in order to feel the true spirit and culture of the place. Now, regarding activities, not so much, I mean sport or outdoor activities, because I believe it just has to do with the landscape, not so much about the people.

[15:02] L: Okay, well, as I understand it, you want to combine many things in order to have many experiences, but you focus on the local communication rather than doing activities or sports, right?

[15:18] P3: Yes, you can say that. I do like sports and activities, but I believe that you can hike, or bike, or bungee jump in many different places around the world. For me, it is getting interesting when the natural landscape has also shaped the culture and history of the people. And forgot to mention before local cuisine. I know is a cliché, but local food shows aspects of history and civilization. And I like to join and watch events, local or traditional events of any kind. I love them, I get to see people in their natural setting doing what they like the most.

6) *[16:13]] L: Okay, so you like many things, you are active. So that helps to go to the next question, which is if you keep a strict schedule, if you prefer to keep a tight schedule or if you go with the flow? I can guess your response, since you have mentioned that in a sense. But I do not know, if there is anything you would like to comment on, or add.*

[16:40] P3: Well, I prepare a very strict schedule in advance. I say to myself and I strongly believe it, that being a tourist and traveling is all about getting experiences and capture as many images as possible. I do not know if it would make sense in English, but in Greek we say that it is good to make the eyes full, in the sense to allow your eyes to see as much as possible. I may get physically tired, but it is always worth it. Anyways, I have a strict schedule, but if it is not possible to stick to it, then it is also fine. I will go with the flow. But if I had to answer with a few words to your question, it would be a strict schedule.

7) *[17:33] L: Fair enough, makes sense. Now, the next question is if you prefer to walk, take public transportation or if you use or hire private transport? I guess, you do so many things that you mix these right? So what do you do, but what do you prefer as Alexandros, as a person when you travel?*

[17:58] P3: It really depends on the place, what you want to see, what you want to do, what is your plan. If you ask me, I do all of them. For example, if I have to go to a distant place, then I will book a car. If I want to explore a place, I will walk. But walking is the main way to discover a place I would say, and is my favourite. You never know where it will take you. You may go for a walk, and end up in a totally new place. In my tight schedule for instance, I also have a spontaneous walking session planned. Does it make sense?

[18:46] L: Yes, totally. You still have something that is not planned in your fixes schedule, okay. What about public means for transportation?

[19:03] P3: Anyway, regarding public transportation, it depends on the destination again. I would say that the ground rule is that I want to use them. For various reasons. They are cheaper compared to other means of transport, most of the times they are also quite fast and convenient. So why not? But the most important reason I think to take public transportation is to sense the everyday life and rhythm of the people. People use it to go to work, to go out with friends, to return from work, to visit friends, so you get to see the real side of the individuals. To give you an example, when I was younger, the first time I used public transport around Europe, in Germany, England, Holland, I was surprised by the number of drunk people in the streets, in the bus stops, in the metro, and it seemed normal. Later, however I realized that it is, every Friday or Saturday night. Anyway, you know in Greece, you do not see that. So, if you dig into that you will understand that it has to do with cultural differences. In Greece for instance, if you take the bus or metro during the day, you see many angry people. And I have witnessed that also in other countries in the Balkans. Or in Spain, Portugal and Italy, whenever I used the bus or the metro, people were talking out loud, as we Greeks do. Anyway, I think you get what I mean.

8) *[20:51] L: Yeah, it is the mentality and the difference between nations, yeah. Now, the question that come next is the following: When you are on the destination, do you use applications that familiarize you with the place, and that may also recommend you some activities, or places to eat, or drink or visit?*

[21:18] P3: No I do not think so. I have everything ready in advance. To be honest, even when I go to a place and a local recommends an app or website, most of the times it is only provided in the local language, and that is a barrier. Or, if I have others accompanying me, then they do it for me. But I use the apps that I already have. I mean, when I do my research, it may include apps to download as well. So, once I arrive to my destination, then I simply open and consult them.

9) *[21:57]] L: ok, so you have applications ready from the start, and before, when you do your research. Okay. Now, we referred to the next question indirectly, but do like meeting local people? Are you interested in that?*

[22:15] P3: Absolutely. I make it happen. I am open. And as I told you, I arrange many things with locals. From initial advice to living with them. And once I am there, I go out, and if I have questions, I ask. I do that, to get a sense of how people behave to strangers and tourists. Now that I am thinking about it, even when I do not have questions I tend to communicate with them, to interact and see what happens. It is

an important part of the journey, otherwise what is the point of travelling thousands of kilometres? Just to see sand, beaches and buildings? No.

10)   *[23:12] L: Yeah, you are right, I agree, but you know there are people who might not want this contact, anyway. And to finish with the 2nd phase, the question is how important do you believe that authenticity is? I mean, more specifically, what makes an experience authentic to you? Is it the place, the beaty of the place, is it the locals, the food, the tradition, or something else?*

[23:40] P3: Well, that is a really interesting question. Because being a Greek, I know that the word "authentic" itself is a Greek word that means "someone or something that is genuine and original" but if we put it in different context, I do not know if there is a definition for authenticity. I think each one of us, expresses and feels authenticity in their own unique way, right?

[24:17] L: Yeah, sure, sure.

[24:20] P3: Well, for me is a combination of all the things I mentioned already. At the end however, it is about the people. What I am trying to say is, that when I look back at my journeys, I have been in many places that have really beautiful landscapes, really nice buildings, or many attractions. Many events. But what stays with me, is how I created a bond with the people. How I felt when speaking with them. How they treated me. How much they made me feel ok, safe and that I am welcome. So, the stories and the memories are created by people. The rest are all good, dining out, visiting the pyramids, the Niagara Falls, doing as I told you bungee jumping or whatever you may like, but at the end, at least for me is the communication that matters. And on top of that, the traditional or cultural events or rituals. Another thing that I truly value. When you become part and participate in events, then you feel connected with people and their culture. And then you respect it and you embrace it as your own. I am not talking about specific types, just to be clear. It could be religious events, it could be cultural, historical, traditional, or of any other kind. But they give you the opportunity to share an experience with locals. And of course the same applies when you live with them and participate actively in their life. Because they are the ones who most of the times will ask you to join the events or depending on the culture, they will allow you to join an event.

Post-trip phase

11)   *[26:32] L: Okay, your insights about this are really great. So, now we assume that we returned home. And we reflect on our journey. So the question is, which are the memories that you left the place with? And also what was the highlight of your travel, of your trip? You can perhaps try to think of a time or a journey that you made and you outlined some important memories. If it helps.*

[27:04] P3: Yes, sure, but in general, in each trip I take, I try to also think of the highlights. As I told you before, the strongest memories and highlights are related to people and bonds that I have built with them. And I maintain these relationships. It happens also that when these people are going to visit Greece, I serve as their guide. So, every time, I try to summarize, based on my experiences of course, what are the characteristics of the people, of the locals. What is their culture or true identity, at least how I personally perceive that. There are places and countries that I love more than others of course. But that also depends on my own culture right? Because I find Portuguese and some ethnicities in Latin America to be closer to

my culture. Warmer people, who are extremely open and helpful, and you get the feeling that they do it because they want to, not because they want to behave well, because they were taught that way. So, if I had to name it, it would be perhaps hospitality? I do not know. And these people also want to establish a contact and then reach out to you, even when I get back home. I like that. Now, as an example, I have been to Portugal, many times, and I would say that is one of my top 3 destinations, I love the country, the people. It is a beautiful country, but for me the people stand out and their behaviour. One time, it was back in the final of the Euro 2004, when we Greeks won Portugal in the final and we were European football champions. I can tell you, that all Portuguese people were extremely sad, they were crying. And they had a better team, and they deserved to win the game, but they did not. And they love football, just to let you know, it is something like religion to my of them. Anyway, but all of them behaved super super nice. When we were going out of the stadium, random people, that they could see that we were Greeks, because we were wearing t-shirts of the football team, they were saying "Congratulations, you should be proud, you are the champions." They were also shaking our hands and saying congratulations, some of them with tears in their eyes. I remember also two more summers being in Portugal, in Lisbon and Faro, I was surprised by how helpful people were. They were so helpful, that you could feel that you could exploit them, in a good way, you could take advantage of them. And lastly, I remember in Faro, I was by the beach, and I had lost my phone, and people from 3 different stores came to help me, and they wouldn't stop searching. They gave me their phones in case I wanted to call someone, they offered me snacks and a soda, and I am talking about everyday people, not the owners of the stores or police officers. With one of those guys, I still have a relationship today, he is called Pedro, really nice guy, he came to Greece and I showed him around, and when I went next summer to Portugal, he helped with my trip in Porto.

12) *[30:46] L: Ow, really nice to hear. So, you even made a friend from a bad incident, from a bad experience, and it turned into a positive experience I assume. So, in that sense did your trip reach your expectations? And in what way?*

[31:09] P3: Well, yes, but that is one example. In general, wherever I go, I try to keep my expectations low every time. I plan in advance, but you never know what it will be the overall feeling. So, again it depends on what someone values. If for instance, I speak about the human aspect of traveling and cultural aspect, I never get disappointed. On the contrary, I always learn something new, even if there are cultures and behaviours that I do not like or feel close to. But regarding sightseeing or building or attractions, yes I have been disappointed in the past. The more you travel, the more you focus on the human aspect I believe. At first, you want to see the building, go out, have some fun, but at some point I think you become more mature as a tourist. I think it has to do with age and experience in travelling. I mean, I was lucky enough and I have been traveling all around the world since I was 15 years old, for other reasons. I was playing soccer semi-professionally, and had to travel a lot. Then, I was going on trips with family, friends or girlfriends. Then for work, and then at some point I also realized, that you can organize your trips, have fun and experience many things, even if you are alone. Sometimes, it is even better because you do not rely on others on what to do. So, I am saying that my standards are high when it comes to attractions, but about the rest I always think that I get something new from my travels. As an example, I travelled to London many year ago as a tourist. My first time was amazing. Sightseeing, attractions and that kind of things. Then I had to go again for football. I was staying for 2 months. And then suddenly, I had to rethink about London. I did not like it that much. No offense to the English, but let's just say that I had many bad experiences in a row. However, I went to London for a 3rd time, to see and explore a different side of the

place. And it worked. So, I have been there 3 times, and I have 3 different opinions, but that is good I guess, you just see things that you like and things that you do not like.

13) *[34:03] L: Yeah, I get your point. It depends on what you experience on the destination, if it is something bad or good, and then you feel the same way. Ok, from all your travels, what have you learnt and what would you improve for your next trips? Is it like a learning process? Have you changed things, and are you going to change something in the future?*

[34:3] P3: Practically I have changed many things in how I travel, and how I plan my trips. I have learnt from my mistakes, and also I had to evolve my skills I would say. Now with technology is much easier to avoid mistakes and organize a trip much better and in a more convenient way. But, regarding the actual content of the trip, as I told you before I have changed as a tourist and what I seek in travels. I used to go to more fancy places and visit the attractions. As I was traveling more frequently, I suddenly wanted more. And I was adding more activities and events to my travels. Now, in the future, if I tend to visit the same places, I would add different aspects. Because the time is never enough. And as I said before, when you go back to a place, things have changed. So, I get the feeling that I have to rediscover it, in a new way. And when I had some bad experiences, I always say to myself that I have to revisit the place, to change my attitude and opinion about the destination. Maybe I was unlucky. I do not want to jump to conclusions. So, I blame myself for my plan and how I organized it. I try to learn from my mistakes and be more organized. Most of the times, I accuse myself because I did not devote enough time to double check that an experience might be worth it, or I tend to trust some professionals or colleagues who visited the place, so I am thinking that it is safe to take their advice, and then as you can understand I get surprised, in a negative way. So, I have to be careful of my informants.

14) *[36:39] L: Yes, sometimes you trust the opinion and judgement of others but it seems at the end that they might have a different taste, they like to do other things. Ok, now, the last question, how important is the role of authenticity in your travel experiences? As you frame authenticity of course.*

[37:09] P3: I think we already discussed about it. It is why I travel. Why I like to travel. To explore other civilizations, other cultures, other mindsets. And when you do that, you can better understand yourself and your own culture. Because things that you would have taken for granted, now you have to revise them and think over. But I think also, that if you want to find true authenticity, at least as I think of authenticity, you have to work hard and plan your trips. And visit places more than once. You have to participate in the everyday lives of locals, go out and live with them, so in general be socially active with them, as they would normally do in their routine. Interact and discuss with them, wide open, about everything, even if something might be disturbing for you or them. And you will get to see the real persons and identity behind their masks. This is what I seek, if I had to name my number one goal of why I travel, and why I continue to find exciting to travel. And also societies and cultures evolve and change. And this makes it more interesting. I do no think that for instance our generation in Greece is the same as the one of our grandfathers, things change drastically, and I think for the best, and new cultures shape, or get reshaped.

[39:12] L: Yes, I agree. Alex, I would like to take this opportunity and thank you again, you had really valuable feedback. What you shared with me was really insightful and will come in handy. Let me just stop recording okay?

— End of Interview —

Appendix D

Interview: Andia (P4), 24 years old, Greek Albanian, IT student, conducted on 08/05/21

Conducted by Lorinda Sopoti (L)

[Minutes:Seconds]

— Start of Interview —

<div align="center">

Pre-trip phase

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1) *[00:01] L: Hi, Hello, can you hear me? Okay, great. So thank you very much for participating in my research. It's about the concept of authenticity in tourism experiences. And if you could make a brief introduction of yourself, just age nationality or occupation, for example, and then start with the first question. By telling me how far in advance do you book a travel and how you the time that you have to plan ahead your trip, affects the research you make about the chosen destination?*

[00:43] P4: If I start with introduction, my name is Andia, I am 24 years old, I am Greek Albanian and I am an IT student. Now, to your question, I do not have to spend too much time in planning. I mean, it is easy to plan a trip. I might book a flight like 30-40 days before my trip. Or it could be 2-3 months before, just so I have the time to get days off from work and have no class in university. I book flights, I book a hotel or a hostel, and I may book my tickets for transportation. But to select the place I want to go, I spent some time. I check if there are districts in the city that I am visiting that are not so popular, but they have something to show me. Something more original, more unique. Not this over tourism in the main touristic areas, like Acropolis in Athens. Every town or capital has this town center that is always crowded and promoted. I want to see also the other side of cities. And I believe I belong in the generation that is thinking of sustainability and preservation. I try to avoid destinations or neighborhoods that have over tourism or trying to find places that can benefit from visitors. That the visitors can help the local economy. I will not only visit the places that are promoted as a "must go" in travel websites. The last 2 years, the cities also pay more attention to less promoted areas. I have no knowledge about it, but from what I hear and believe, maybe the corona pandemic has created this need. To rethink how, when and where someone chooses to travel and how people come together.

2) *[02:43] L: Yes, this is indeed a very big conversation around how Corona has switched the attention to a different kind of tourism. And it's only now for months. But let's focus on our concept now. And go to the next question about*

the way that you make the research when planning the trip, I mean how do you find your way around, with reviews or advice from agencies?

[03:22] P4: If I book a package, then I see how I can commute to the place I go. For example, I check the attractions and museums and make a plan on how to move to the city. So, I mostly use maps, google maps. For the package I also use the internet. From travel websites I get offers and then see if there is one that is within my budget. But once I arrive to my destination, I do not follow groups or do organized touristic guides with groups. I also see reviews in TripAdvisor and booking.com.

3) *[04:10] L: And what experiences on the trip do you plan ahead and how?*

[04:20] P4: The most important thing I check, and book is the hotel or a hostel, depends on the place, whatever is convenient every time, and search in the city map to find the best way to use transportation. What else? I search information about the destination in general, currencies, and also the "must know" things about the place that I can find from reviews or from locals. I have used also the Rome2rio application a couple of times, it was useful when I was on the destination.

4) *[05:02] L: Okay then and which part is that you anticipate the most when planning the travel?*

[05:11] P4: What I anticipate the most when planning a trip is the feeling of getting another perception, knowledge about another culture, listening to a different language, observing how people live in a different place. And since we are talking about authenticity, there is nothing more authentic than experiencing first-hand real life, as it happens.

On-site destination phase

5) *[05:38] L: Okay yes. I can see that from everything we have discussed so far. Okay, let's say now that we have reached the phase that you are on the destination and you're searching for experiences as a tourist. What kind of experiences are those? Adventures for example or you go to the must-go attractions first, or you book back package tours or just give me your insight.*

[06:19] P4: I cannot choose exactly, or I cannot say I belong only to one particular category. I want to create a personal travel style, away from the mainstream, and to discover my own identity. Even if I book a package or not, I create my own personal experiences. I will visit the main attractions, but I will also go to not so famous places, to the suburbs of cities and see different districts that are not for tourists.

6) *[06:57] l: Yes, I guess it also depends on the time, on the duration of the trip, I guess right? The next question is quite relevant with what we are discussing now. So, do you prefer to have a strict schedule, or you just go with the flow and why?*

[07:20] P4: The only schedule I like to make is about the transportation and some sights I intend to visit, such as museums, but in general I go with the flow, I do not have specific hours or places to eat or have a drink for example. Whatever I like along the way.

7) *[07:41] L: Okay. Since you mentioned transportation. Do you prefer to walk. do you take public transport, or do you take private transport, and for which reasons?*

[07:56] P4: 99% of the times I use public transportation for many reasons: It is economic. It's cheaper to move around and fast to cover the distances in a city, instead of walking. But I prefer to do both. I also use public transportation to go to the airport and from the airport. I think that this helps with the CO_2 goals that most countries have set. It's beneficial for many reasons. And I try to avoid the plane if I can, I mean in Europe, where I have traveled so far, it is easy to take the train, from place to place, or country to country, and there is this movement of shame. That you should feel ashamed if you use the plane if it is not necessary because it is not ecofriendly. And one last thing. The bike. Is not part of your question, but in Europe it is convenient to use a combination of train or metro and bike. You take it with you and then when you get out of the station you just bike.

8) *[09:10] L: Yes, I know, in Denmark, it is a very popular practice, what you mentioned. So, when on destination, you already mentioned something about the use of applications but when you are on the destination, do you use any applications that familiarize you with a place and recommend you activities to do or places to eat or drink?*

[09:43] P4: Google maps is always on when I am abroad. I also have Tripadvisor open, to check for reviews. I have also used Rome2rio. So, I use technology and applications to plan my own itinerary, before I go to the place but also when I am there, it helps me to organize a bit my daily program and plan. And except technology, I get information by joining conversations with locals about neighborhoods in a city.

9) *[10:18] L: Okay, and now, since you mentioned the locals, that gives me the path for the next question. So, I guess you're interested in meeting local people. And why is that?*

[10:30] P4: Yes, of course. For example, I would prefer to have lunch in a small, local restaurant rather than the hotel restaurant or the fancy ones. I would prefer having my coffee or tea in places that locals do and observe how they live their lives, how they value or not coffee time, how they talk to their friends and why not, get to talk to them too.

10) *[10:58] L: That's a really unique approach that you are mentioning now. So I guess it has to do with the authenticity we are talking about. But maybe let's hear from you. For example, what makes an experience authentic, according to your opinion? The people, the stories they have or traditions you may find? Give me your own insight.*

[11:29] P4: For me it is observing and seeing how people live in other countries. What they do, how they speak, which are their habits. Go in local neighborhoods and explore what is going on. Go to local events. For example, I enjoy street art a lot and street musicians or events. I also like finding graffities in neighborhoods. And I also like going to museums because this way you learn a lot about a country's history and culture. In general, I would not travel so many kilometers away from home just to see something fake, I travel for the real thing, whatever that is in real life.

Post- trip phase

11) *[12:18] L: Yes, I guess that is different each time. So maybe that's the beauty. Okay, so now we have left the destination, and we're back home. So the questions will be about the post-trip phase. And the first one is about the memories that you will leave the destination with and which was the highlight of the trip, maybe you can give me an example, in this particular one.*

[12:48] P4: I can give perhaps an example to let you know how I feel and what I remember from a trip. I find meaning when I involve myself in events, not something that is already organized and is massively provided to tourists, where you have a "no say" in the experience that you are choosing. For example, in Budapest my friend and I were walking around the city, where at some point we ran into a Greek street musician with his band. We were familiar with his face because we had also seen him in the streets of Athens. We talked and it turned out that he was making a tour around some European cities to promote his street music. The next day the band invited us to a small artistic event they were participating. I hope you get the idea, what I mean is that I really like it when experiences are spontaneous. I believe this way, you gain a better understanding of the vibes of the place that you are visiting. And at the end, this makes the experiences more memorable in my mind. At least for me, that's how it works.

12) *[14:06] L: Yeah, yes. Okay. That's a really good example to understand what you mean. So maybe let's stick with this specific trip and you can say me, if this one reached your expectations and in which way, or also you can talk in general, whatever you prefer.*

[14:32] P4: Definitely. I have many things to remember. These are memories for life. I feel full of images and emotions. And when I look at the picture I took and the videos we filmed, everything comes back to me. This night with the band, we met so many interesting people, and we celebrated, and we danced, it was amazing. And I filmed some of that, and then I make an album of memories. So, yes, I feel ok with the trip, because it gave me something.

13) *[15:10] L: Okay. That's good to know. Let's say that there are also not always the best aspects in one trip. So I want to know, something that you learned along the way and would improve or do different in the next trip?*

[15:32] P4: As a student, I didn't have the chance to go long distance trips yet, I have mostly visited European cities so far, but I think I have learnt something from every destination I have been to. What I am trying to say is, that the way I book, and plan things seems to work okay every time. I have not faced many issues, so I do not know. But if I go to another continent and spend much more money, I guess I will have to be more careful, and plan many things in a different way.

14) *[16:12] L: Okay, then, let's save this question for next time when you have some different experience. And now we can go to the last question. So you can tell me how important you find the role of authenticity in your travel experience.*

[16:36] P4: I have to say that it is very important for me. I go somewhere and I hope to find what I am after. I want to leave the place and have the sense that I was able to understand the locals and their culture. Of course, just a little bit, I cannot understand and know everything about a nation in a couple of days or in a week. And as I told you before, regarding the events and street culture, I like to explore this culture, like street music, street parties, food, dancing or shows. These are almost every time done by locals and people who will not get rich from that, and they do it because they like it.

[17:21] L: Okay, and as you said, I think it's that you just go for the real thing. That's the most important that I can keep in this aspect. Okay, I think we are pretty much covered. So just give me a second to stop recording, okay?

— End of Interview —

Appendix E

Interview Guide- Conceptualizing the authentic tourism experiences from the tourist perspective

Thank you for participating and for assisting in the research around the concept of authenticity in the tourism experiences as seen from the tourist perspective.

Authenticity is a complex concept to explore, which is why your insights are especially important for the quality of this research. I would like to encourage you to answer the best you can but at the same time please bear in mind that there is no right or wrong answer nor white and black. This is just an attempt to explore different aspects of what is perceived as being authentic in your experiences while traveling.

First, please make a very brief introduction of yourself if possible (i.e age, nationality, occupation/education, whether you are an experienced traveler or not) and kindly note that this information remains confidential and will be used only for the sake of analyzing the data.

Interview: Vineet (P5), 33 years old, from India, tourism researcher, conducted on 05/05/21

Conducted by Lorinda Sopoti (L)

[Mail Interview]

— Start of Interview —

Pre-trip phase

1) How far in advance do you book a travel and how the time you have to plan ahead your trip affects the research you make about the chosen destination?
Short distance trip are not planned in advance but yes for long term trips are usually planned 2-3 months before, & for choosing the destination friends, relatives recommendation & tourist reviews about the destinations are considered.

2) In which ways do you make the research when planning a trip (i.e.,advise from travel agents, travel review websites and applications etc.)
Due to digital transformation travel agents are less approached & research about planning a trip is done through online mode (travel reviews website).

3) What parts/experiences of the trip do you plan ahead and how? (i.e., places, people, sights, transportation, food plan, accommodation)
I look for experiences like natural surroundings, cultural heritage, local food & to get authentic experience of the destination & local food.

4) What do you anticipate the most when planning a travel?
Preferably to visit UNESCO world heritage sights cultural & heritage both.

On-site destination phase

5) What type of experiences are you looking for as a tourist? (packaged, personalized, adventurous, must-go attractions etc.)
Cultural, heritage & adventurous.

6) Do you prefer to have a strict schedule or go with the flow?
I use my own schedule.

7) Do you prefer to walk, take public transport, or take private transport?
Private transport for short distance destination & public for long distance destinations because of long drive tiredness.

8) When on destination, do you use applications that familiarize you with the place and recommend you activities to do, places to eat/drink/visit?
Yes-(Google Map, Zomato, Swiggy, OLA, Uber Cab).

9) Are you interested in meeting local people?
Yes, cultural exchange & to get firsthand experience.

10) What makes an experience authentic according to you? (i.e., people, places, stories, traditions, activities)?
People, Places, Traditions: People as local community provide authentic experience, Places: Physical presence at the place helps to get authentic experience by interaction. Tradition: as local food, local festival, handicraft, etc.

Post- trip phase

11) What memories did you leave with and which was the highlight of the trip?
Cultural Integrity & Admiration.

12) Did your trip reach your expectations and in which way?
Through satisfaction & buying handicraft as a souvenir.

13) What is it that you learnt and would improve or do different in a next trip?
To show respect to local culture & community.

14) How important was the role that authenticity had in your travel experience?
Authenticity is a main component of travel experience and must be maintained thoroughly.

— End of Interview —

Appendix F

Interview Guide- Conceptualizing the authentic tourism experiences from the tourist perspective

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First, please make a very brief introduction of yourself if possible (i.e age, nationality, occupation/education, whether you are an experienced traveler or not) and kindly note that this information remains confidential and will be used only for the sake of analyzing the data.

Interview: Efi (P6), 40 years old, from Greece, works in tourism industry, conducted on 05/05/21

Conducted by Lorinda Sopoti (L)

[Mail Interview]

— **Start of Interview** —

Pre-trip phase

1) *How far in advance do you book a travel and how the time you have to plan ahead your trip affects the research you make about the chosen destination?*

6 months, it gives me wider choices to look into deep details.

2) *In which ways do you make the research when planning a trip (i.e.,advise from travel agents, travel review websites and applications etc.)*

Searching on trivago, booking.com.

3) *What parts/experiences of the trip do you plan ahead and how? (i.e., places, people, sights, transportation, food plan, accommodation)*

Places of visit, accommodation and transportation.

4) *What do you anticipate the most when planning a travel?*

To discover the food treasures of the places to visit and see the well-known attractions from close.

On-site destination phase

5) *What type of experiences are you looking for as a tourist? (packaged, personalized, adventurous, must-go attractions etc.)*

Must go attractions and personalized ones.

6) *Do you prefer to have a strict schedule or go with the flow?*

I prefer to go with a strict schedule but at the end this is only a wish since travelling with companions usually ends to just go with the flow.

7) *Do you prefer to walk, take public transport, or take private transport?*

Prefer to walk and take private transportation.

8) *When on destination, do you use applications that familiarize you with the place and recommend you activities to do, places to eat/drink/visit?*

Yes, I use applications for recommendations and also take into mind the hotel's concierge suggestions.

9) *Are you interested in meeting local people?*

Sometimes, not always interested in.

10) *What makes an experience authentic according to you? (i.e., people, places, stories, traditions, activities)?*

Places, local food, and traditions make an experience authentic for me.

Post- trip phase

11) *What memories did you leave with and which was the highlight of the trip?*

Usually, a well said local story from the guide and beautiful taken pictures of the places of visit.

12) *Did your trip reach your expectations and in which way?*

Yes, my expectations are most of the times met and are satisfactory ones.

13) *What is it that you learnt and would improve or do different in a next trip?*

Next time would choose a packed holiday in order to be able afterwards to compare those in contrast with self-organized vacation/trip.

14) *How important was the role that authenticity had in your travel experience?*

From 0 to 10 scale, I would rate with 5 the role of authenticity.

— End of Interview —

Appendix G

Interview Guide- Conceptualizing the authentic tourism experiences from the tourist perspective

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First, please make a very brief introduction of yourself if possible (i.e age, nationality, occupation/education, whether you are an experienced traveler or not) and kindly note that this information remains confidential and will be used only for the sake of analyzing the data.

My name is Daša (Dasha), I come from Slovenia, Ljubljana and I currently work as an administrative assistant at an NGO dealing with questions of sustainability and public health. I am 31 years old, female and I am also working on my PhD in innovative tourism studies, focusing on hegemonic discourses of sustainable tourism. Alongside shorter trips in pairs or visiting friends, I usually travel alone and try to take as much time as possible at the destination. I'm a frequent traveller when the times permit.

Interview: Daša (P7), 31 years old, from Slovenia, works in an NGO, conducted on 06/05/21

Conducted by Lorinda Sopoti (L)

[Mail Interview]

— Start of Interview —

Pre-trip phase

1) *How far in advance do you book a travel and how the time you have to plan ahead your trip affects the research you make about the chosen destination?*

I usually book my flights about 2-3 months ahead. If it's a longer trip (as in my stay would be over three weeks) I'd usually only book the first accommodation in a destination, if I have less time on the destination or someone with me, I try to frame the trip by booking accommodations ahead. I usually pre-research a destination (costs, transport, basic information like money exchange, country's history, vaccinations needed etc.) and try to make connections in the period between booking my flights and departure (contact potential workaways, friends, make a reservation or two, look into activities and connections). So I'd say I take it seriously once the flight is booked.

2) *In which ways do you make the research when planning a trip (i.e.,advise from travel agents, travel review websites and applications etc.)*

If I have time for a short trip – a week or two, I usually look into flight connections first. There could be a good season price-wise and weather-wise when I'm free for a destination I'd never consider before, so I

research if using Wikipedia, national tourism organisation websites, sites like https://www.inspirock.com/ and https://roadtrippers.com/. I plan my trip according to activities I set out to do (based on event dates, weather etc.). If I can travel for a month or more I usually do a basic research as mentioned before, but I wouldn't be so strict. I would let myself stay in one place longer and take tips from locals and travelers and meet on the spot. I'd usually stay longer time in destinations I know well enough, so I'd have a research done but would decide what to do or where to go on a whim unless I'd have a next flight booked which would mean I'd have to get there by a certain date.

3) *What parts/experiences of the trip do you plan ahead and how? (i.e., places, people, sights, transportation, food plan, accommodation)*

I plan ahead whatever is time-sensitive. Meeting people, first accommodation and transport to it. I'd look into transport to see timetables but I'd stay flexible if possible. If there's an event I need or want to be at. For everything else like food or sites, I'd use Trip advisor on a spot. Wifi or prepaid sim card is a must, so that's one of the first I'd plan to find or work with – buy a prepaid sim card at the airport is the most important thing to stay mobile.

4) *What do you anticipate the most when planning a travel?*

The experience of being on the road.

On-site destination phase

5) *What type of experiences are you looking for as a tourist? (packaged, personalized, adventurous, must-go attractions etc.)*

It depends. There are cultural heritage sites I find are must to visit in a life time. Same goes with the events I hold close. I really enjoy meeting people, so I'd use hangouts, workaway, facebook groups, friends and their connections, couchsurfing when it was still a thing. I'd meet people while travelling and spent a part of the trip together whether it's just a meal, visiting or sharing accommodation. I only take organised tours if they are locally organised. I think it's nice to have a day off of thinking and planning your next move and take a locally organise day trip somewhere.

6) *Do you prefer to have a strict schedule or go with the flow?*

As mentioned that depends on how much time I have for travel. I'd generally set some fixed elements and be more flexible around it. I'm very happy to go with the flow when possible as it allows you to just be and actually enjoy the experience of living. As our lives are already set in a sort of a frame, which allows us to function as people by actively participating in our social roles, this liminal time space of going with the flow allows you to look past it and just be. If you take time and travel alone, it opens a timeframe where you have no responsibilities of a social role (as a friend, as a family member, as an employee or a researcher). Of course you're being mindful and respectful, but it lifts a burden of a "must". Not have a 100% set plan does that as well.

7) *Do you prefer to walk, take public transport, or take private transport?*

I actually like all of the above as transport, is an experience of itself and its fun to experience them all.

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8) *When on destination, do you use applications that familiarize you with the place and recommend you activities to do, places to eat/drink/visit?*

As mentioned I use a lot of them. Trip advisor, Google maps, Hangouts. Your phone is like a compass of a (post)modern age.

9) *Are you interested in meeting local people?*

Yes, I am very sad if I don't get a chance to chat with locals, so even if it's just a short trip I try to chat with receptionists and other front of house workers. In a strange way, alongside the fact that it's the best way of getting to know a place, I feel meeting locals or even other travellers while you travel is a way of getting out of your comfort zone if you're an introvert. I guess I'm much happier with myself if I manage to have that chat and make a connection with a local than an extravert would be, as in a weird way I feel accomplished. Again, if you hold a social role, this connection can be stressful, when you're a stranger that pressure is lifted.

10) *What makes an experience authentic according to you? (i.e., people, places, stories, traditions, activities)?*

I'd say it's the combination of everything you've mentioned in brackets (i.e., people, places, stories, traditions, activities), which always makes it subjective. I'd say every experience is authentic even if the event you participate in is staged as no one can have what you are experiencing. You can have an authentic experience of very unauthentic events/monuments/etc. is what I'm trying to say.

Post- trip phase

11) *What memories did you leave with and which was the highlight of the trip?*

I leave with memories of people I've met, what I've got to experience with them and thanks to them. Things take their own turn if you're open to meeting people and going around so you'd always experience something unexpected. Clearly, that's what stands out and I memorize it best.

12) *Did your trip reach your expectations and in which way?*

My expectations are always easy to reach. I don't set expectations that would make the trip. It's the experience itself that makes it memorable.

13) *What is it that you learnt and would improve or do different in a next trip?*

I learned that you never have enough time. So I always need to come to terms with it and accept it. Also, I usually always learn a trick or a practical thing that I need to improve. Such as how to pack your bag or gadgets that are useful to have. List of things you're always happy to have on a flight.

14) *How important was the role that authenticity had in your travel experience?*

I think authenticity is so personal it's always important. In my case, I need the freedom to break away from a position. So I can meet people, but leave anytime I feel like. The ability to leave makes my experience feel authentic. I'm miserable when or if I have to travel in groups, as I don't get to experience the place without breaking free of other's expectations first. So yes, very personal, very individual and very important.

— End of Interview —

Appendix H

Interview Guide- Conceptualizing the authentic tourism experiences from the tourist perspective

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First, please make a very brief introduction of yourself if possible (i.e age, nationality, occupation/education, whether you are an experienced traveller or not) and kindly note that this information remains confidential and will be used only for the sake of analysing the data.

Pre-trip phase

1) How far in advance do you book a travel and how the time you have to plan ahead your trip affects the research you make about the chosen destination?
2) In which ways do you make the research when planning a trip (i.e., advise from travel agents, travel review websites and applications etc.)
3) What parts/experiences of the trip do you plan ahead and how? (i.e., places, people, sights, transportation, food plan, accommodation)
4) What do you anticipate the most when planning a travel?

On-site destination phase

5) What type of experiences are you looking for as a tourist? (packaged, personalized, adventurous, must-go attractions etc.)
6) Do you prefer to have a strict schedule or go with the flow and why?
7) Do you prefer to walk, take public transport, or take private transport and why?
8) When on destination, do you use applications that familiarize you with the place and recommend you activities to do, places to eat/drink/visit?
9) Are you interested in meeting local people and why?
10) What makes an experience authentic according to you? (i.e., people, places, stories, traditions, activities)?

Post- trip phase

11) What memories did you leave with and which was the highlight of the trip?
12) Did your trip reach your expectations and in which way?
13) What is it that you learnt and would improve or do different in a next trip?
14) How important was the role that authenticity had in your travel experience?