A consumer-based model of authenticity: An oxymoron or the foundation of cultural heritage marketing?

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1. Introduction

Authenticity is acknowledged as a universal value and an essential driving force that motivates tourists to travel to distant places and times (Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1973; Naoi, 2004). The quest for authentic experiences is considered one of the key trends in tourism. Authenticity is accordingly crucially important for tourism, especially heritage tourism (Apostolakis, 2003; Tourism Trends for Europe, 2006; Yeoman, Brass, & Mcmahon-Beattie, 2007). Because of that, the concept of authenticity is of particular interest in the marketing of cultural heritage sites. It is helpful for understanding tourist motivation and behavior as well as strategic and tactical implications concerning tourist destination management.

Despite its clear importance authenticity is a problematic and insufficiently explored concept, which hinders its practical application (Wang, 1999). In terms of the nature and implications of this concept, various approaches and authors not only provide different views, but seemingly contradictory positions. These are particularly noticeable when sociological and business/marketing views are compared. The fragmentation of the authenticity construct is reflected in the various descriptions, interpretations and conceptualizations. Authenticity is namely conceived as a value (Olsen, 2002), a motivational force (Cohen, 1988; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006; MacCannell, 1973; Naoi, 2004), a ‘claim’ (Peterson, 2005), a perception (Cohen, 1988), and the choice people make (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). Various meanings and types of authenticity (e.g. as attribute of objects, an existential experience of ‘true self’) are in addition imposed by different research traditions (see Wang, 1999 and Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). It is thus no surprise that Reisinger and Steiner (2006) conclude that the different views on (object) authenticity are conflicting and irreconcilable. What is surprising is their suggestion that because of its problematic nature scholars should abandon the concept altogether. Here, we concur with a response to this suggestion whereby Belhassen and Caton (2006) argue that authenticity is indeed alive in the minds of tourists and tourism managers and plays a significant function, and so it is up to scholars to study the concept. What is more, we argue that different notion(s) and aspects of authenticity should not be avoided but exposed and studied even more thoroughly in order to better understand and possibly utilize them.

The key issue from the managerial standpoint is namely not its ultimate conceptual resolution, but primarily the question of how various notions and meanings can be constructively applied. Unfortunately, as established by Franklin and Crang (2001), traditional studies of tourism often offer overly critical and dysfunctional approaches to studying contemporary phenomena in tourism. In this respect, our intention is to be relevant primarily for management and marketing purposes. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it is an attempt to examine, measure and statistically model the relationships between the concept of perceived authenticity and its antecedents and consequences – in
our case, cultural motivation and customer loyalty, which are often used in models of consumer behavior and have been recently extensively studied in tourism (e.g. Chi & Qu, 2008; Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Second, through a consideration and analysis of various dilemmas that characterize the conceptualization of authenticity and its relationships with several related concepts the paper aims to probe beyond immediate tactical actions. Instead, it seeks to provide managerial implications and inspire deliberations that are strategically relevant. In addition the paper addresses several specific conceptual questions related to the nature of authenticity and related concepts. One such question is whether the key types of authenticity (object-based and existential authenticity) are mutually related or independent constructs, as some authors suggest (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006, Wang, 1999). Another one is whether authenticity is primarily the driver (motive) or the outcome (experience, evaluative judgment) of tourist behavior. Regarding the nature of authenticity, a further interesting question is if the tourist’s perception of authenticity is cognitively- or emotionally-based. In addition, an important question is whether authenticity can be validly measured as a latent psychological construct since the majority of studies assesses this concept either through an exploratory approach (i.e. they qualitatively describe it; Goulding, 2000; Leigh et al., 2006; Kim & Jamal, 2007; McIntosh, 2004) or measure it directly (e.g. by means of direct, bipolar ‘authentic-inauthentic’ scales; Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003; Waitt, 2000; Naoi, 2004; Waller & Lea, 1999).

In line with its purpose, the paper first exposes the various tensions and types of the authenticity concept in traditional and sociological tourism literature and discusses its managerial relevance in general terms. Next, its implications are discussed from a marketing management point of view and a consumer-based model of authenticity is proposed. In the third part, the methodology and results of the empirical examination of the structural equation modeling are presented, followed by a discussion, managerial implications and future research suggestions.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Tensions and contradictions of the authenticity concept in tourism

The explicit and comprehensive study of the authenticity concept in tourism is related to the sociologist MacCannell (1973) who argued that a better understanding of tourist experiences can be accomplished through an examination of the various structural tendencies that shape tourists’ reality and experiences. As such tendencies he pointed out the distinctions between the modern and primitive, the sacred and the shallow, insiders and outsiders, reality and show, tourists and intellectuals. More recently Costa and Bamossy (2001) arrived at a similar finding, namely that the concept of authenticity reflects the immense complexity of the interacting phenomena. This interaction involves a cultural conflict, an identity quest, the purpose of use (e.g. ‘primitive’ use versus commercial use) and various dialectical tensions which exist between tradition and change, history and modernity, reality and fiction, and culture and individuality. Such a structural view profoundly influenced subsequent studies and the contemporary conceptualization of authenticity in tourism.

From the managerial standpoint this suggests that tourism managers should devote more attention to subtle and deeply ingrained societal changes that exist outside the tourism market yet which essentially shape tourist behavior and experiences. In addition, instead of principles of coherence and mutual harmony with tourists (which is the basic axiom of marketing efforts to satisfy customer needs in a profitable way), managers need to be more attentive to the conflicts, contrasts and tensions in contemporary society.

Initial dispute regarding authenticity concept is the question whether authenticity is an objectively identifiable property of objects and cultures or a subjective, socially and individually constructed perception of them. According to Reisinger and Steiner (2006) and Wang (1999), classic authors (i.e. objectivist and modernist) argue that there is an evident, objective basis or standard for judging (in)authenticity. Instead, constructivists suggest that tourists’ experiences can be authentic even when they are perfectly aware that the setting has been contrived (Cohen, 1988). For such a conception of authenticity, Wang (1999) used the term constructive (or symbolic) authenticity. By conceiving authenticity as constructed, thus as an experience or as a perception, constructivists overcome some dilemmas based on the assumption that authenticity can be experienced and judged only from the ‘outside’ – from a historical, cultural distance and with intellectual proficiency (of anthropologists or curators in museums).

This discussion is obfuscated by another important question, namely to what does authenticity actually pertain (i.e. what can be authentic). Here Wang (1999) draws a sharp distinction between the authenticity of objects and existential authenticity which can be entirely unrelated with each other. For him, existential authenticity is not object-based but activity-based and can be divided into two dimensions: intra-personal (bodily feelings) and interpersonal (self-making). In a similar vein, Reisinger and Steiner (2006) claim that existential authenticity and object-based authenticity are entirely different concepts and cannot be explored concurrently. Apart from introducing two basic types of authenticity (i.e. object-based and existential), these diverging views also reflect the incommensurability of different epistemological and philosophical positions, that have a stake in the conceptualization of authenticity. The ‘liberation’ of existential authenticity from object and place namely relies on existentialist and phenomenological traditions (Olsen, 2002).

Tourism managers can hardly be neutral in the face of these diverging views. Conceiving authenticity as a phenomenon per se does not allow any possibility for managing (creating, presenting, communicating) it, so the constructivist position (Chhabra et al., 2003; Cohen, 1988; Leigh et al., 2006; Peterson, 2005) seems a managerially more adequate stance. On the other hand, managers must acknowledge the distinction between object-based authenticity and existential authenticity, as they pertain to different entities (i.e. object/offering and tourist existence/self) that should be considered separately. Yet the key managerial challenge is the assumption that both types of authenticity are independent, unrelated and cannot exist concurrently. Management namely seeks to positively influence tourist existential experiences via objects/offerings, primarily by offering them authentic artifacts. Because of this, a theoretical and empirical examination of the (in)dependence of both types of authenticity is the focus of this paper.

Managers must, however, acknowledge the actual context that affects perception of authenticity. Today’s societal context and tourists are often conceived as postmodern so corresponding conceptualizations of authenticity have evolved (Goulding, 2000; Jensen & Lindberg, 2001). However, as some authors argue, postmodern tourists are concerned with authenticity only in a cynical sense as they in fact seek inauthenticity (Ritzer & Liskas, 1997; in Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). The idea that authenticity has no relevance for postmodernists and that tourists reject it entirely is, on the other hand, problematic and misleading. The demise and ‘death’ of big ideas, sacred values and authorities is indeed one of the central ideas of postmodernism – and probably also led to disenchantment with the idealistic, univocal and ‘absolute’ notion
of authenticity. However, regarding the quest for (in)authenticity we tend to concur with authors who argue that people in post-modern societies are in fact more interested in authenticity and strive to overcome inauthenticity (MacCannell, 1973; Goulding, 2000; Lewis & Bridger, 2000). Postmodern society is namely characterized by fragmentation, confusion, emptiness, alienation and by a crisis of morality and identity. Hence, people have become more concerned with identity, meaning and values (Cova, 1999), but also with nostalgia and history (Goulding, 2000).

The key dilemma of tourism management here is how postmodernism can constructively contribute to the understanding of authenticity concept as a tourist driver. It seems that its key contribution lies in a reconceptualization of traditionally assumed motives, sought experiences and judgment criteria in the quest for authenticity. Postmodernism suggests that tourists do not judge authenticity from an intellectual distance but through emotional experiences. The postmodern tourist is namely an affective-driven, experience-seeking hedonist (Jensen & Lindberg, 2001).

From this standpoint, the classic modernist stance that is rooted in a clear distinction between social domains, actor roles and a categorization of social phenomena is problematic. It results in a persisting binary and exclusivist (i.e. either/or) position regarding authentic and inauthentic, object and existence, commodity and culture, and between tourist and intellectual. Yet the contemporary tourist might be conceived as an adventurer who does not separate consumption from any other experiences in life (Jensen & Lindberg, 2001). An emphasis on analytical clarity is thus dysfunctional from the managerial standpoint when it results in an attempt to examine the various types of authenticity in isolation.

In this respect, we take the postmodernist position, which acknowledges fragmentation, imperfection, and blurred boundaries and allows for an interaction among various entities and types of authenticity. In accordance with the constructivist position (Chhabra et al., 2003; Cohen, 1988; Leigh et al., 2006; Peterson, 2005) we postulate the following two guiding principles for the treatment of authenticity. First, authenticity is a socially and, above all, individually-constructed and evaluated perception or experience. It is a matter of extent (rather than an either/or issue); hence, its extent could be evaluated. Second, managers can influence authenticity (claimed, presented, assured, authorized, and promoted). Regarding the epistemological position, we adopt a postpositivist stance, which maintains that objectivity, although desirable, can only be approximated. Thus, a critical stance and reflexivity are warranted (Ryan, 2000).

Another diverging point that is especially challenging from a managerial position is assumed opposition between authenticity and commoditization. According to the proponents of the critical school (see e.g., Halewood & Hannam, 2001; Shepherd, 2002; and Waitt, 2000), anything that is created and offered for commercial purposes automatically loses its authenticity; that is, it loses its “natural” meaning and value. Accordingly, the tourist is seen as morally inferior, characterized by “false consciousness,” which cannot be intellectually satisfying (MacCannell, 1973). From the standpoint of contemporary tourism trends (see e.g., Tourism Trends for Europe, 2006; and Yeoman et al., 2007) such a depiction of the tourist/consumer seems distorted, if not entirely inadequate, and will be addressed in this study’s next section.

2.2. Conceptualizing authenticity from the marketing and tourist perspectives

In tourism management and marketing, authenticity is not seen as antithetical to commercial endeavors; instead it is seen as a much-warranted element of tourist offerings (Apostolakis, 2003; Yeoman et al., 2007). Rather than mutual exclusivity, the practice and theory in this field emphasizes the compatibility and convergence of authenticity and marketing, especially in heritage tourism (Apostolakis, 2003). What’s more, several authors have argued recently that business interests and authenticity can be mutually beneficial. This is evident in certain manipulations like conservation that are often necessary for tourists to recognize the authenticity of cultural heritage (Naoi, 2004). Commercial presentation often keeps traditional cultures and customs alive that they would otherwise be “modernized” and lost (Cohen, 1988). Without a doubt, tourism brings both beneficial and adverse effects for local economies, residents, and the integrity of heritage (see e.g., Van der Borg, Costa, & Gotti, 1996). The basic meaning and intent of the commoditization of cultural heritage, however, is not destroying its authenticity, but exposing its exchange value (Goulding, 2000).

From the managerial standpoint, the dynamic nature of authenticity along with the process of its fabrication and verification (i.e. authentication) is particularly important. Peterson (2005) asserts that authenticity is a claim and that ‘authenticity work’ can take a number of forms like ethnic/cultural identity, status identity, authentic experiences, technological mediation (e.g. Internet ‘tribes’), or self-construction and appearance (e.g. the spontaneous hillbilly look of some country singers). However, from the management and marketing point the key concern is whether the authenticity claim will be acknowledged by the tourist. In contemporary tourism, vendors in fact offer and prove authenticity (e.g. with certificates of authenticity issued by authorized institutions) and tourists are its ‘receivers’ (Chhabra, 2005). The commercial replication of history is thus authentic when tourists perceive it as such, which confirms that authenticity is a matter of extent, rather than an either/or issue. As found in various studies, tourists indeed perceive commercial presentations of history, heritage and culture(s) as (more or less) authentic (Chhabra et al., 2003; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003; Waitt, 2000; Waller & Lea, 1999). An important question here is how tourist perceptions correspond with two basic types of authenticity, namely object-based and existential.

Various studies provide rather indirect, yet insightful answers to this question. Yu and Littrell (2003) for instance found the existence of four factors of authenticity that all relate to craft souvenirs. McIntosh (2004) reports that by an authentic experience tourists mean becoming ‘personally involved in the experience’, to experience the ‘natural context’ and ‘daily life’, but also to experience ‘true facts, arts and crafts’. Goulding (2000) found three different types of visitors in regard to how they perceive authenticity. ‘Existential’ visitors, emphasizes the importance of enjoyment and escape and mainly perceives authenticity through exhibited artifacts, ‘aesthetic’ visitors, perceives history mainly through art, while ‘social’ visitors emphasizes the importance of learning and social experiences and are especially interested in watching demonstrations and making purchases in museum shops. Notably, tourist perceptions in these studies are clearly related with both objects (arts, crafts, artifacts, souvenirs) and existential experiences (personal involvement in daily life, escape). What is more, both types of authenticity seem to appear concurrently and to be related.

Common to these studies is the idea that perceived authenticity is a consequence/output of their experience with a certain place (culture, museum, site). The relevant literature, on the other hand, implies that authenticity can also be considered as an antecedent/input of tourist behavior, as it is often considered as an important driver, value, motive or interest (Grayson & Martinez, 2004; Leigh et al., 2006; Poria, Reichel, & Biran, 2006; Yeoman et al., 2007). In order to explicate differences between both types (object-based, existential) and notions of authenticity (drive vs. experience), some illustrative examples are presented in Table 1 in a 2 × 2 matrix form.
Table 1

Examples of key types and notions of authenticity in tourist consumption.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Input/Drive</th>
<th>Output/Experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Object-based</td>
<td>Object-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to visit and see original sites/artifacts, purchase souvenirs</td>
<td>Experience, knowledge and enjoyment in genuine objects, arts and crafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential</td>
<td>Existential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in escaping everyday life and mass tourism, getting in touch with true self, self actualization</td>
<td>Sense of enjoyment and escape, experience of true self in the context of a foreign place, time and culture</td>
</tr>
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The contemporary authenticity quest (see Yeoman et al., 2007) and asent of the new tourist-consumer (see Middleton & Clarke, 2004) suggest that in contemporary tourism management the traditional notion of the tourist (i.e. passive, immoral, uninterested and condemned to inauthenticity) is inadequate. Consumption is namely more and more acknowledged as a ‘mode of free expression of the creative subject’ (Miller, 2001; p. 4). The contemporary tourist may thus be seen as an amalgam of an intellectual and a consumer, while the critical school conceived of these two as playing opposing roles (see e.g. MacCannell, 1973 and Halewood & Hannam, 2001). Consequently, we may expect that today even ‘unserious’, leisure tourists are ever more intellectually and existentially motivated than in the past. This is in line with the findings of McKercher (2002) and McKercher and Du Cros (2003) who found that cultural tourists are not a homogenous segment and that for some cultural attractions represent the central purpose of visiting a specific destination, while for others they do not. Nevertheless, additional insight into this issue is needed as many studies of authenticity were only carried out with segments of serious cultural tourists (Kim & Jamal, 2007; McCain & Ray, 2003; Waitt, 2000).

2.3. A consumer-based model of authenticity

Current trends in tourism coupled with the postmodern view suggest that a more affirmative and operative framework is needed for an examination and application of authenticity within tourism marketing. One problem of the critical school (Halewood & Hannam, 2001; MacCannell, 1973) is namely its entirely dismissive stance towards the tourist and consumption. Even comprehensive attempts to investigate consumer role(s) and developments often result in doomsayer conclusions, like that of the vanishing consumer and the twilight of consumerism (see e.g. Gabriel & Lang, 1995). Another problem of such a view is that it treats the tourist in a one-dimensional role, as a metaphor (e.g. as a chooser, identity-seeker, hedonist, victim, rebel, citizen etc.) rather than a complex being where all these concepts interact and affect authentic experiences. For this reason, we adopt the consumer-based perspective which fosters a more affirmative, nuanced, realistic and multi-conceptual investigation of tourist perceptions and behaviors (Costa & Bamossy, 2001; Goulding, 2000; Jensen & Linberg, 2001; Leigh et al., 2006). Such a perspective enables a more integrative view of authenticity, along with a more realistic representation of contemporary tourists and more operative implications for tourism marketing. The consumer-based perspective allows for a dynamic conceptualization of authenticity in which the influences and consequences of authentic experiences are investigated. A process-focused model is proposed which also allows for an examination of relatedness among both key types of authenticity (object-based and existential). By treating both types of perceived authenticity as an evaluative judgment, which can serve as a performance indicator, the model as a whole represents a model that complements other evaluative consumer-based concepts and models (i.e. satisfaction, quality, value etc. models) that have recently been often studied (Chi & Qu, 2008; Del Bosque & San Martin, 2008; Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006). This in turn authenticity as an evaluative judgment may additionally enrich the understanding of tourist experiences and behaviors and serve for marketing management purposes. Following these arguments and in line with the managerial position we propose a parsimonious consumer-based model of tourists’ authentic experiences (Fig. 1).

The key goal of the proposed model is the conceptualization and empirical verification of the relationships among the concepts of tourists’ cultural motivation, authentic experiences and behavioral consequences, as represented by the construct of tourist loyalty.

Theoretical explanations of the relationship between authenticity and motivation are namely very diverse and sometimes even tautological. They describe authenticity as either a motivational factor behind tourist behaviors, an experience or as a perception of an object (place) or existence. Apostolakis (2003) hence argues that previous researches were not completely successful in establishing the linkage between motivation and authenticity. Moreover, Steiner and Reisinger (2006) define (existential) authenticity as a choice people make, thus conceiving it as a behavioral construct. This results in a conceptual mess and obfuscation among the antecedents, indicators and consequences of authenticity.

In line with the consumer-based approach we treat authenticity as an evaluative judgment that pertains to tourist experiences with a certain site, culture, object or destination. Accordingly, we define authenticity as tourists’ enjoyment and perceptions of how genuine are their experiences (of a cultural attraction). This perception pertains to either objects or tourists’ existential experiences, which represent two separate constructs in the model, allowing for an exploration of their connectedness and mutual influences. With such a conceptualization we seek to transcend the exclusivist divide between objects and subjects. Tourists’ existential experiences are not ‘object- and context-free’. Consequently, Reisinger and Steiner (2006 p. 74) conceive objective authenticity as “how people see themselves in relation to objects” (emphasis added). This is further confirmed by Waitt (2000) who found that historical authentication relies mainly on physical artifacts. We thus hypothesize that:

H1: Object-based authenticity positively influences existential authenticity.

Both types of authenticity also need to be separated from the concept of cultural motivation which is also crucial for understanding tourist behavior in heritage tourism (Poria et al., 2003). Cultural motivation is defined as a set of cultural motives which are shifting towards a more general interest in culture, rather than very specific cultural goals (Tourism Trends for Europe, 2006). McKercher (2002, p. 30) defines the cultural tourist as “someone who visits, or intends to visit, a cultural tourism attraction, art, gallery, museum or historic site, attend a performance or festival”. Similarly, cultural tourism is defined as “the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experience to satisfy their cultural needs” (Tourism Trends for Europe, 2006, p. 5). Accordingly, we treat cultural motivation as a cluster of interrelated, intellectually-based interests in culture, history and heritage. Such a conceptualization is in line with the ‘4I’ motives proposed by Middleton and Clarke (2004), the motivational spectrum suggested by Bywater (1993) and the motives proposed by Swarbrooke (1999). In this sense, cultural motivation is not defined as being an exclusive property of serious cultural tourists but is instead a matter of extent and is also found among less serious tourists (Hughes, 2002; McIntosh, 2004).

Cultural motivation pertains to internal (i.e. push) elements of motivation and precedes the pull motivation, which is focused on certain attributes or objects (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Because...
motivation affects tourists’ expectations (Gnoth, 1997), we assume that cultural motivation positively affects perceptions of both types of authenticity, namely object-related and existential. This is in agreement with the findings of Chhabra et al. (2003) who found that involved and knowledgeable tourists perceive higher levels of authenticity. In accordance with these views the following hypotheses were developed:

\[ H2: \text{Cultural motivation positively influences object-based authenticity.} \]

\[ H3: \text{Cultural motivation positively influences existential authenticity.} \]

In addition to the concept of cultural motivation which provides an insight into the question of what precedes authentic experiences, the model also includes the consequences of authenticity. They are represented by the concept of loyalty, which is a key outcome of consumer decision-making in the services sector (see e.g. Hesckett, Jones, Loveman, Sassar, & Schlesinger, 1994). A similar importance of loyalty is evident in tourism where it has been intensively investigated lately (Chi & Qu, 2008; Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006; Hou, Lin, & Morais, 2005; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Despite its importance, loyalty has rarely been investigated in relation to authenticity, especially in cultural tourism. Consequently, the existing knowledge about the relation between authenticity and loyalty is largely limited to a theoretical understanding of their relationship and indirect empirical arguments. As Poria et al. (2003) found, perceptions in heritage tourism are positively related to authenticity. In accordance with these views the following hypotheses were developed:

\[ H4: \text{Object-based authenticity positively influences loyalty.} \]

\[ H5: \text{Existential authenticity positively influences loyalty.} \]

Finally, literature in the tourism context supports the direct influence of motivation on loyalty. For instance, the direct influence of (push) motivation on loyalty was found by Yoon and Uysal (2005). The next hypothesis was therefore included in the model:

\[ H6: \text{Cultural motivation positively influences loyalty.} \]

3. **Empirical study**

3.1. **Research design/methods**

3.1.1. **Measurement development**

To operationalize the authenticity concept we accepted the typology proposed by Wang (1999) and adapted it to the actual context of cultural heritage sites. For this purpose, the object-based component refers to perceptions of the architecture, impressions of the buildings, peculiarities about the interior design of the sites and the streetscape. Especially physical artifacts were found to be vital to the perceived authenticity of heritage sites (Naoi, 2004; Waitt, 2000). However, unlike these two studies we did not assess object-based authenticity directly (in terms of how original these artifacts are) but only in a ‘constructive’ sense (e.g. how inspiring artifacts are), which is in line with Wang (1999) and Stein and Reisinger (2006). The existential component of authenticity relates to the perceptions, feelings and emotions of site visitors, such as the uniqueness of the spiritual experience and a feeling of connectedness to human history and civilization. The notion of ‘getting closer to history’ is namely very important for experiencing the authenticity of heritage sites (Chhabra et al., 2003; Goulding, 2000; Naoi, 2004). Also important in the perception of authenticity is the feeling of enjoyment when visiting cultural-historical sites (Goulding, 2000). When developing measurement items for both components of authenticity it was thus necessary to capture the emotional and cognitive processes involved in the evaluation of authenticity (for more here, see McIntosh & Prentice, 1999). Because of the lack of previous scaling efforts on authenticity, a combination of sources was applied in the construction of object-based and existential authenticity. For the purpose of our study, both object-based and existential authenticities are associated with reflective (effect) indicators, not formative (causal) indicators. This is in line with the conventional measurement practice which is based upon reflective measurement (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001), whereby indicators are assumed to reflect variation in each authenticity. Indicators for each authenticity ‘measure the same thing and should covary at a high level if they are good measures of the underlying variable’ (Bagozzi & Baumgartner, 1994: 331). The context of Romanesque tourist sites and sacred objects was considered in the development of the measurement items (see Table 2 for the list of items included in the questionnaire).

The cultural motivation variables for the model are operationalized on the basis of previous conceptualizations and studies, with some modifications and developments in the context of consumer-based authenticity. Basic motives that are relevant to visitors of cultural-historical sites are taken from the typology suggested by Middleton and Clarke (2004) (“relax mentally”, “have a good time with friends”, “increase my knowledge”, “discover new places and things”, religious motives), while the specific motives to visit a cultural-historical site were developed according to the typology of Swarbrooke (1999) and McKercher (2002) (“visit cultural attractions/events,”, “visit historical attractions/events”, “interest in history”) which also corresponds to the overall and specific motivations as applied by Poria et al. (2006). Cultural motivation is thus measured as the importance of all relevant basic and specific motives (see Table 2). Statements for assessing object-based authenticity and existential authenticity are measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree).

Loyalty is measured as a readiness to visit a site again or recommend it to one’s friends/relatives. Destination loyalty is operationalized in line with the prevailing operationalization of (re)visit intentions and recommendations in tourism literature (e.g. Castro, Martín Armario, & Martín Ruiz, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008;
The purpose of the study was to learn about perceptions and behaviors from visitors at 25 of the most visible Romanesque sites during the week and on weekends with the aim to include both holiday and culture tourists. The sample consisted of two types of travelers, based on how relevant a specific Romanesque site was for their excursion: 1) those on a specific thematic cultural trip with Romanesque sites as the focus of their travel; and 2) those on vacations with Romanesque sites considered places for new discoveries and learning. This distinction is not reflected in further analysis since they do not differ significantly in their motivation, evaluation of authenticity and loyalty (with the exception of their drive to discover new places and things, which was higher for those on a specific, thematic cultural trip).

3.1.3. Data analysis procedure

Several research approaches were used for this study. First, we applied exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to derive the underlying dimensions of object-based authenticity, existential authenticity, cultural motivation and loyalty. Following from the EFA, we used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the conceptual model that examined the antecedents and consequences of object-based and existential authenticity. The application of structural equation modeling has been growing in the social sciences since it provides researchers with ample means for assessing and modifying relationships among examined constructs and offers great potential for furthering the development of theory (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996).

Implementation of the statistical approach is enabled by the LISREL 8.72 computer program.

Common factor analysis was used to identify underlying factors for the whole set of items operationalizing authenticity in the study, following the procedure by Steenkamp and van Trijp (1991) and Gerbing and Hamilton (1996). The principle axis factoring method with an oblique factor rotation seemed appropriate because the two underlying dimensions were assumed to be correlated with each other; hence the oblique factor rotation should more accurately represent the clustering of variables (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995). The cut off factor loading for discarded items was 0.60, while items with cross-loadings above 0.35 were also discarded. Two items were excluded from further analysis for object-based authenticity and three for existential authenticity, bringing the meaning of both constructs to a clearer object/existence divide. According to the results of EFA, four items were eliminated for motivation, including three quite basic tourist motives (“relax mentally”, “be in a calm atmosphere”, “have a good time with friends”). The remaining items of the concept of cultural motivation relate to central, yet specific motives relevant to a visit to a cultural-historical site and justify our interpretation of the construct of cultural motivation. Although having only five items for the cultural motivation construct seems limiting, they are nevertheless applied only to the distinctive type of tourist motivation. Besides, in the present case the aim was not the further exploration of potential (individual) heritage motives (as, for instance, in Poria et al., 2006), but the measurement of cultural motivation as a single construct.

Finally, for the loyalty construct two items that were connected to “other” Romanesque sites were excluded. It seems that these items captured a more general view of loyalty (the intention to visit heritage sites in general) and were not connected to the site-specific loyalty.

The properties of the four proposed research constructs (one exogenous: cultural motivation; and three endogenous: object-
based authenticity, existential authenticity and loyalty) were tested with structural equation modeling (SEM). SEM enables the modeling of latent variables while taking into account the (un)reliability of their indicators. It provides researchers with comprehensive means for testing proposed hypotheses as well as assessing and modifying theoretical models (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Data entry was checked to ensure that the variables were recorded appropriately. No outliers or missing values for the variables in the analysis were recorded. The approximate normality was examined with PRELIS: no non-normality was found when items were examined for skewness and kurtosis. A variance-covariance matrix with raw data as the input was applied (Bollen, 1989). According to Cudeck (1989), variance-covariance matrices should be used in order to avoid inaccurate standard errors, although in most cases this has no effect on overall goodness-of-fit indices and parameter estimates because maximum likelihood functions are scale-invariant and the resulting estimates scale-free (Bollen, 1989).

We decided to follow the sequential approach of the evaluation of both the measurement and the structural model sequentially, as recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The estimation procedure used was the maximum likelihood (ML) in LISREL 8.72 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2002).

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Measurement model

According to Anderson and Gerbing (1988) two-step approach, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is conducted first in order to establish confidence in the measurement model, which specifies the posited relations of the observed variables to the underlying constructs. In the measurement model there are five measurement variables for tourist cultural motivation, two variables for object-based authenticity, three variables for existential authenticity and two variables for loyalty (see Table 3). All of the indicators of the t-value associated with each of the completely standardized loading exceed the critical value at p less than a 0.05 significance level. The measurement model possesses a unidimensional measurement of constructs such that each observed variable is related to a single latent variable (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Although Bentler and Chou (1987) noted that having two measures per factor might be problematic, covariances among the factors in our analysis enable the identification of a viable system of equations (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996).

The goodness-of-fit indices for the measurement model are within an acceptable range. The Satorra–BentlerScaled χ² is in our model significant (χ² = 235, df = 48, p = 0.00). As χ² is heavily influenced by sample size (Bentler, 1990) since specified models are subject to rejection in sufficiently large samples, Baumgartner and Homburg (1996) recommend that researchers should not rely solely on the χ² statistic but report multiple fit indices representing different types of measures, i.e., the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and incremental fit indices such as the comparative fit index (CFI) and normed fit index (NFI). The fit between the structural model and data is therefore evaluated by means of the following standard indices: the 90 percent confidence interval for the RMSEA (0.051; 0.065) is acceptable as values under 0.08 are deemed acceptable (Hair et al., 1995). For the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), higher values indicate a better fit and the GFI of 0.906 is acceptable. Finally, among incremental fit measures, NFI and CFI should be above 0.90. With NFI equal to 0.976, CFI to 0.981 and the non-normed fit index (NNFI) to 0.974, the model is acceptable (Bollen, 1989; Hoyle, 1995).

The item and construct reliability are tested. Indicators included in the analysis are reliable and values for composite reliability are above the critical limit of 0.80 (see Table 3). According to average variance extracted (AVE), existential authenticity construct is close to the critical limit of 0.50; while all the other constructs have good reliability. The model is also tested for convergent and discriminant validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). All t-values of the loadings of measurement variables on the respective latent variables are statistically significant and convergent validity is thus supported (see Table 3). Discriminant validity is assessed with a χ²-test for pairs of latent variables with a constraining correlation coefficient between two latent variables (ψij) to 1 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). All unconstrained models have a significantly lower value of χ² than the constrained models leading to the conclusion that discriminant validity is supported (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982). The results of the confirmatory factor analysis show that the hypothesized measurement model fits the data reasonably well and the overall fit indices are appropriate.

The data are also tested for common method bias (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) using Harman’s single factor test. The one-factor measurement model loading all items on one factor has much worse fit indices (χ² = 1287, df = 54, p = 0.00, RMSEA = 0.14, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.11, GFI = 0.723, NFI = 0.869, NNFI = 0.845, CFI = 0.873) than the proposed measurement model. Common method bias is therefore not present.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct and indicators</th>
<th>Completely standardized loading (t-value)</th>
<th>Construct and indicator reliability</th>
<th>Variance extracted and error variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Cultural) motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discover new places and things</td>
<td>0.531 (3.74)</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase my knowledge</td>
<td>0.719 (5.45)</td>
<td>0.517</td>
<td>0.483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting cultural attractions/events</td>
<td>0.838 (8.70)</td>
<td>0.699</td>
<td>0.301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting historical attractions/events</td>
<td>0.888 (7.46)</td>
<td>0.789</td>
<td>0.211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in history</td>
<td>0.487 (2.63)</td>
<td>0.237</td>
<td>0.736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object-based authenticity</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The overall architecture and impression of the building inspired me.</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>0.716</td>
<td>0.284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I liked the peculiarities about the interior design/furnishings.</td>
<td>0.627 (5.43)</td>
<td>0.393</td>
<td>0.607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential authenticity</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the visit I felt the related history, legends, and historical personalities.</td>
<td>0.718</td>
<td>0.515</td>
<td>0.485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoyed the unique religious and spiritual experience.</td>
<td>0.467 (6.37)</td>
<td>0.218</td>
<td>0.782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt connected with human history and civilization.</td>
<td>0.786 (6.05)</td>
<td>0.617</td>
<td>0.383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to visit this Romanesque site again.</td>
<td>0.790</td>
<td>0.623</td>
<td>0.377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend this Romanesque site to my friends.</td>
<td>0.938 (7.35)</td>
<td>0.879</td>
<td>0.121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2.2. Structural model and hypothesis testing

Following the proposed measurement model of this study, an empirical structural equation model is developed in order to test if the hypothesized theoretical model is consistent with the collected data. The model includes the exogenous latent variable cultural motivation and the endogenous latent variables of object-based authenticity, existential authenticity and loyalty. According to the proposed structural model, object-based authenticity is explained through cultural motivation. Existential authenticity is explained through both cultural motivation and object-based authenticity and, finally, loyalty is explained by both object-based and existential authenticity as well as cultural motivation (see Fig. 2). It is useful to report the percentage of variation in the endogenous constructs accounted for by the exogenous constructs or $R^2$ for each structural equation. The exogenous variable of cultural motivation can explain 26% of the variation in object-based authenticity. For existential authenticity, the model explains 28% of the variation with cultural motivation and object-based authenticity. Finally, object-based and existential authenticities together with cultural motivation explain 54% of the variation in loyalty.

A model might explain significant amounts of the variation in endogenous variables but not fit the data well. The proposed consumer-based model of authenticity is acceptable also according to the global fit measures and given the high power of the model (with a sample size above 500 and df. 48) (MacCallum, Brown, & Sugawara, 1996). Although the overall model has a statistically significant value of the chi-square statistic ($\chi^2$ = 235.2, df = 48, $p = 0.0$), the other fit statistics are within an acceptable range (90 percent confidence interval for the RMSEA = (0.05; 0.06), CFI = 0.91, NFI = 0.98, NNFI = 0.98, CFI = 0.98).

The hypotheses are tested by examining the sign, size and statistical significance of the structural coefficients (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996). The hypotheses about the relationships among the constructs tested in the final model are supported (see Table 4). Parameter estimates for the relationships of the antecedent cultural motivation with object-based and existential authenticity (H2 and H3) are statistically significant and consistent with the proposed direction in the hypotheses. The effect of object-based authenticity on existential authenticity is statistically significant and positive (H1) and moderately strong on loyalty (H4), while the effect of existential authenticity on loyalty (H5) is weaker but nonetheless statistically significant. Also significant is the effect of cultural motivation on loyalty (H6). As shown in Fig. 2, all of the path coefficients from cultural motivation to object-based and existential authenticity were statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. The magnitude of coefficient scores indicated that cultural motivation has the largest influence on object-based authenticity and, in turn, on loyalty than existential authenticity.

Since many equivalent models can fit the data equally well as judged from any goodness-of-fit measure, we use a series of nested models to exclude all equivalent models on substantive grounds, as proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). As a comparison with the proposed (theoretical) model (MT), we design a constrained model (MC) with an eliminated link between the two endogenous constructs (existential authenticity and loyalty) with the lowest correlation among the endogenous variables. As our proposed model is already a saturated model, no unconstrained model (MU) is designed. The chi-square difference tests between our proposed and constrained model show that the fit of the more restricted model is significantly worse, which suggests the acceptance of our proposed model. Consequently, the proposed model is considered the most suitable model to be utilized for testing the proposed hypothesized relationships of the structural equation model for this study.

4. Implications and discussion

The relevance of the proposed model stretches beyond specific issues of structurally modeling the relationships among examined constructs. Regarding this paper’s purpose, the verified model exemplifies how authenticity can be examined in a managerially-relevant manner and how important it is for understanding the loyalty of cultural tourists. It enables an empirical examination of the interrelatedness of two types of authentic experiences on one hand, distinguishing it from tourist motives on the other. It is argued that two key imperatives should be followed in the future. First, the pragmatic, experiential, and, above all, consumer-based approach that is currently neglected in tourism research should be given more attention. Second, more explicit and confirmatory conceptualization of authenticity, coupled with an empirical examination of its antecedents and consequences is warranted rather than implicit, nuanced, and descriptive theorization(s). Following these two imperatives may prevent the authenticity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Proposed direction</th>
<th>Standardized path coefficients ($t$-test)</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1: Object-based authenticity positively influences existential authenticity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0.37 (3.82)</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: Cultural motivation positively influences object-based authenticity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0.51 (2.12)</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: Cultural motivation positively influences existential authenticity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0.23 (3.22)</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4: Object-based authenticity positively influences loyalty</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0.41 (4.25)</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5: Existential authenticity positively influences loyalty</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0.29 (5.02)</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6: Cultural motivation positively influences loyalty</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0.21 (2.67)</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
concept from being prematurely abandoned. It is indeed vital, inspiring, and in line with contemporary trends in tourism. Moreover, as described in the next paragraphs, the proposed approach yields a rich array of theoretical and managerial implications.

4.1. Theoretical implications

The confirmed measurement model and examined reliability and validity indicators attest that the proposed instrument validly and reliably measures the constructs in the model. The proposed measures are internally consistent and convergently valid, while the discriminant validity is also acceptable. This suggests that object-based and existential authenticity can be validly measured as latent psychological constructs, which are distinctive from (cultural) motivation yet related with it, and with loyalty which attests to the nomological validity of the measured constructs in the model. Perceived authenticity can thus be validly conceived and measured as an evaluative judgment which is dependent on tourist experiences. These findings are very important because conceptual clarification and differentiation have been the key concerns of understanding authenticity. In particular, this holds for the constructs of cultural motivation and authenticity as both concepts are often implicitly treated as identical (i.e. as a universal tourist driver).

In addition, the results confirm the assumed relatedness of the object-based and existential authenticity concepts with antecedent, cultural motivation and consequence that is loyalty. Authenticity is thus not a ‘standalone’ concept, but should be understood as a mediator of tourist long-term behavior intentions. We conceived it as a central link between tourist cultural motivation and tourists’ intended behaviors in the future. Since the structural model shows an acceptable fit and all the proposed hypotheses are confirmed, we can confirm the assumed importance and centrality of authentic experiences for understanding the loyalty of cultural tourists. The resulting model explains the relatively high shares of variance of the examined constructs, especially for the loyalty construct, where 54% of the variance is explained by the constructs of object-based authenticity, existential authenticity and cultural motivation. Interestingly, the models of Gallarza and Gil Saura (2006) and Chi and Qu (2008) which use satisfaction as a key mediating concept for explaining tourist loyalty, exhibit a smaller share of explained variance (i.e. 33% and 45%, respectively) on loyalty than the proposed authenticity model. While caution is needed with such comparisons, due to possible influences on the share of explained loyalty (such as the forms of tourism and the types of respondents), they provide additional support for treating authenticity as an evaluative judgment that importantly affects tourists’ long-term behavior.

From the standpoint of the conceptual questions elaborated in the introduction, it is also important that both types of authenticity not only coexist but also are significantly related. The finding that authentic experiences with tourist offerings importantly affect the existential experiences of tourists suggests that these two concepts not only could, but also should, be explored concurrently. According to the results authenticity is thus not a phenomenon per se, whose ‘exclusive’ types cannot be explored concurrently, but a highly relevant concept for explaining tourist behavior where conceptual exclusivism can be counterproductive.

The proposed conceptualization and measurement of authenticity is also relevant to the discussion of the nature and dynamics of this concept from the perspective of the tourist as a consumer, in particular for the question of whether authenticity is a cognitively- or emotionally-based construct.

According to the postmodern notion a tourist acts as an affective-driven hedonist (Jensen & Lindberg, 2001). Consequently, both object-based and existential authenticity measures included an affective component as well (note that several items which measure both types of the authenticity construct emphasize ‘feelings’ and ‘enjoyment’). Taking this into consideration the resulting valid and reliable measurement model allows for the assertion that both objective and existential authenticity are largely emotionally-based constructs. However, this does not preclude the presence nor the importance of the cognitive component, especially due to the significant relatedness of both types of authenticity with cultural motivation (which is defined as a set of intellectually-based interests), but also due to the finding of Chhabra et al. (2003) who established that tourist knowledge affects perceived authenticity. The proposed conceptualization of both types of authenticity and the results we obtained provide strong support for the postmodern view of the tourist, whereby a tourist seems to be an amalgam of a hedonist and an intellectual.

From the tourist-as-a-consumer standpoint, a discussion of the similarities between authenticity and satisfaction in the context of cultural tourism also seems relevant. The two key similarities among them are evident in their components and in their mediating role. Satisfaction is namely found to encompass cognitive and affective components, yet is considered to be the key driver of consumer loyalty (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, & Bryant, 1996; Oliver, 1997). Similarly, authenticity is also conceived as a mediating, evaluative construct which includes emotional, pleasurable components (Jensen & Lindberg, 2001; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Wang, 1999). A comparison of both concepts might thus be beneficial for further understanding how tourists’ evaluate authenticity and how it affects tourist loyalty in context of cultural tourism. In satisfaction models, expectations for instance play an important role in explaining satisfaction and loyalty. Fornell et al. (1996) found that expectations positively influence satisfaction which, in turn, affects loyalty. Furthermore, it was found that motivation affects tourists’ expectations (Gnoth, 1997) and that authenticity is judged by reference to previous expectations (Hughes, 1995). Accordingly the positive effect of cultural motivation on perceived authenticity and loyalty that was found in our study might be explained by the positive expectations caused by (higher) cultural motivation.

4.2. Managerial implications

In the present study a managerial standpoint is adopted in the examination of the authenticity concept. In terms of managerial implications, the results are therefore primarily relevant for the management and marketing of cultural heritage sites. The study findings indicate that, for successful marketing to result in improved tourist loyalty, site managers need to consider how tourists experience, perceive and evaluate object-based and existential authenticity. According to the results the basic assumption that management can positively influence tourists’ existential experiences via the authenticity of objects/offerings was justified. The next question then is how the perception of object-based authenticity can be improved and it is here that an inspection of the measures used for object-based authenticity provides several possible suggestions. Managers must, for instance, consider and expose how ‘inspiring’ the overall appearance of core objects is like buildings and architecture. On the other hand, the pleasantness of interior design, peculiarities and furnishings are also found to be important for tourists. However, contrary to common logic objects do not ‘work’ or speak for themselves and tourists do not automatically recognize their ‘inherent’ authenticity as being valuable. For this purpose, various potentially interesting elements of exhibited objects must be presented in a way that inspires and pleases tourists. This means that objects are not only presented in an objective and expert way, but also in an enjoyable, engaging and
understandable manner. In short, cultural artifacts must be conceived from the consumer standpoint and consequently offered in a way which satisfies their needs and expectations. For this sake, in addition to the tactical marketing tools epitomized by 4 Ps (or 7 Ps in services marketing), some strategic approaches might be advised like, for instance, a means-ends approach. According to this approach consumers evaluate products through their consequences so each offering can be described as a bundle of attributes, yet also as a bundle of more or less abstract benefits and finally in terms of personal goals and values (Gutman, 1982). Preferred associative networks of product attributes with their corresponding benefits/values are then the basis of purchase decisions, which are also relevant in our case. As indicated by the confirmed H1 in the structural model, a causal relationship exists between both types of authenticity, which supports the assumption that object-based authenticity is an important means for existential authenticity – which is related with the ‘higher’ level goals and values of tourists (note that some authors conceive of authenticity as a value – e.g. Olsen, 2002 and Chow & Amir, 2006). When managers have an insight into associative networks which at a specific site excel or are preferred among a certain segment of tourists, they can efficiently segment the market and develop a marketing strategy. Understanding the means-ends linkages is especially useful for positioning decisions. If a particular product or brand is successfully positioned on the basis of benefits or values, competitive imitation is harder to achieve than when the focus is on an attribute basis (Vriens & Hofstede, 2000). Tourist vendors should therefore consider positioning based on links between site benefits and values, rather than solely on the links between site attributes and tourist benefits.

Means-ends theory thus represents useful implications based on the finding that objective-based authenticity influences the existential one. Yet it does not provide a complete answer to the question of how existential expectations are to be fulfilled among tourists. A consideration of the items of existential authenticity suggests that, in order to facilitate tourists’ existential quest, managers should focus on how tourists establish and perceive their connectedness with history, religion, spiritual experiences, humankind and civilization. The perception of existential authenticity is thus related with the sense of belonging and with establishing a link with the collective nature of the human being. On the other hand, the quest for existential authenticity is propelled by the need for a resolution of tensions in contemporary society that are so essential for the conceptualization of authenticity (e.g. modern/primitive, sacred/shallow, reality/show, etc.). To this end, an approach called cultural branding which addresses ‘acute contradictions in society’ and is also relevant for tourist destinations (Holt, 2004) seems of particular interest. This approach relies heavily on identity myths which consumers experience via ritual action. Following this approach, marketing managers should therefore put more attention on innovative approaches like storytelling in order to improve the perception of existential authenticity with tourists.

However, perceived authenticity must be considered with respect to other key concepts in the model as well, as cultural motivation itself positively influences perceived authenticity and loyalty. In order to improve both, managers should respond to and satisfy cultural and intellectual motives of interest. In particular, this requires emphasizing the broader socio-historical context and cultural role of heritage attractions, along with their potential for increased knowledge and discovery of new places, which are important for cultural tourists. To that end, the focus should be on activities that address tourist motivation before they visit a certain attraction or during a visit. At the same time, the direct link between cultural motivation and loyalty brings some additional implications. According to the results, the more culturally motivated a tourist, the higher the loyalty that can be expected. For this purpose, the active involvement of tourists in cultural learning and discovering is highly advised even after a visit to a particular attraction. The construct and meaning of cultural motivation is thus important for the marketing strategy, in particular for segmentation and promotional purposes, but also as a means of improved loyalty.

As indicated by the SEM model, cultural motivation is validly conceptualized and measured as an intentional variable on the population which includes leisure and serious tourists, which concurs with the findings of McKechnie (2002) and McKechnie and Du Cros (2003). These findings suggest that the traditional division into serious and leisure tourists may not be an adequate basis for the segmentation of contemporary cultural tourists. Instead, cultural motivation is to be treated as an important but not defining or exclusive characteristic of cultural tourists. For a more subtle differentiation of cultural tourists, other relevant variables like values (including authenticity) are advised that result in rich and sophisticated orientations (see e.g. Chow & Amir, 2006). Alternatively, various other specific cultural motives and benefits can be used for segmentation purposes (see e.g. Poria et al., 2006 and Prentice, Witt, & Hamer, 1998).

The proposed model and obtained results also provide several implications regarding tourist loyalty to heritage attractions. In our case, the ‘attraction’ is an international tourist route that encompasses 25 historical sites and, in such cases, tourist loyalty is of particular relevance and returning tourists are especially valuable. Still, it must be noted that in our case, loyalty to a particular site rather than to whole route is considered in the final (confirmed) model. The resulting model explains the relatively high share of variance in the loyalty construct (54%), suggesting that the concepts in the model are important elements of any strategy aimed at improved tourist loyalty. This is particularly important in light of the fact that both the proposed model and measurement instrument are relatively parsimonious, which attests to their efficiency and usefulness. Although desirable from a scientific standpoint, having an extensive set of evaluative variables is impractical for managerial purposes. To this end, workable customer satisfaction models often measure key concepts with few variables (e.g. ACSI by Fornell et al., 1996). In our case, the proposed model and questionnaire can thus be used for evaluative purposes as well. For such use authenticity can be employed as complementary or even as alternative performance criteria next to customer (tourist) satisfaction. For this purpose authenticity can be combined with other relevant concepts like quality, value and satisfaction, where its measurement might be adjusted to a particular tourist entity or context (site, festivity, souvenirs etc.) if needed. For the purpose of performance measurement, a distinction between expected and perceived (experienced) authenticity (see Table 1) might also be useful. Tourist expectations regarding authenticity namely reflect previous experiences with heritage sites, but also the promotional promises of vendors. Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar (1998) argue that positively raised expectations importantly affect brand equity. Such an effect can also be assumed in tourism. It is thus of vital managerial relevance how operators first generate and later fulfill the positive expectations of tourists. The positive expectations of tourists can accordingly serve as indicators of a positive image or brand equity of a particular destination.

5. Limitations and future research

The discussion of the results and implications needs to be accompanied by limitations of the study, which may indicate future improvements and directions. One such limitation is the quite
eclectic combination of sources used for the construction of authenticity measures, due to the lack of consensus on operational definition(s) and scaling efforts with the operationalization of authenticity (see Leigh et al., 2006). Interestingly, apart from the traditional and often implied meaning of authenticity (i.e. something original vs. fake) there is almost no attempt to define authenticity explicitly as the majority of conceptualizations are merely descriptive or ‘typological’, where particular types seem to have nothing in common. Further development of the conceptualization of authenticity with the intention to limit its domain and encompass the spectrum of its key dimensions is thus warranted.

Another limitation relates to the specific context of the Romanesque sites to which the measurement instrument was adopted. Caution should thus be advised when it comes to generalizing the results to different tourist settings. In our case, there is a lack of evidence that would enable us to discern whether tourists similarly experience and perceive other historical, heritage and cultural settings. For managerial purposes it would thus be interesting to find out what are the other important and site-specific characteristics of heritage objects that affect tourists’ perceptions of authenticity. Waitt (2000), for instance, found that various physical elements of the setting and buildings like steps, streets and terraces are crucial for authentication, while Yu and Littrell (2005) found craft souvenirs to be such a factor. Practitioners should therefore be aware that there is a need to further study the various elements that affect perceived authenticity and to further develop measurement scales that would include and assess them in various contexts. For that reason, and for the sake of the means-ends approach advised in the managerial implications, it would be beneficial for future studies to include general and specific site and object attributes when explaining perceived authenticity.

Another reflexive explanation needed is related with the fact that evaluating the originality of toured objects was not assessed. One reason for this is site-specific and pragmatic. In the case of examined Romanesque sites, the originality of these settings is generally not questioned, while at some sites toured objects and artifacts are merely ruins and hence less relevant. Another reason for omitting this aspect of authenticity is theoretical, more precisely paradigmatic. According to postmodernists, consumers are not interested in the originality of objects in an absolute sense, but mainly in terms of enjoyment (Goulding, 2000; Jensen & Lindberg, 2001). This assumption might, however, be the point of justified critique. From both consumers’ and managers’ standpoints originality might be important. In particular, the managers should be interested and engaged in preserving and (re)presenting originality in toured objects. Bruner (1994), for instance, provides insightful managerial implications based on a critique of the postmodernist position and on findings regarding why originality matters for tourists and for managers. This suggests that future studies should include originality as an important meaning (aspect) of perceived authenticity. More importantly, this confirms that an improved understanding of such a complex, poorly defined, and inconsistently operationalized construct as authenticity is viable, mainly through arrays of propositions and criticisms. Although the rigorous statistical analysis by means of SEM modeling in our case attests to the validity and reliability of the measurement instrument, it is the critical analysis and dialectical approach that confronts the theoretical and paradigmatic differences. This reveals possible limitations and attests to the need to further develop the measurement instrument.

The managerial perspective and parsimony imperative resulted in a relatively limited number of variables and concepts being included in the study. However, the literature review and discussion of the findings indicate that several additional indicators of authenticity need to be considered in the future, such as activities, social interaction and bodily feelings (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Wang, 1999). In addition, researchers and managers should consider the diverse spectrum of factors that affect the perception of authenticity like personal involvement, the natural context, ‘daily live experiences’ and arts and crafts (Mcintosh, 2004; Yu & Littrell, 2003). Besides tangible attributes of the tourist offer, other existential factors could also be relevant. Peterson (2005) suggests that authentication can be constructed through a number of forms like ethnic/cultural identity, distinctive status identity, self-construction and appearance.

Further, linking the relationship of the authenticity concept with several other concepts is advised, namely the concepts of identity, individuality, meaning-making and anxiety (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006), but also with concepts such as sincerity (Taylor, 2001), reality and truth (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). According to Holt (2004), we may expect that identity is particularly important for existential authenticity, which is in line with the finding that aspirations of the modern tourist revolve around the question ‘who can I be’ on vacation (Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2002). Another concept of interest might be cultural distance, which also affects perceived authenticity (McKercher & Du Cros, 2003; Waitt, 2000).

From the managerial standpoint several additional concepts are of interest. In the first place, this pertains to evaluative concepts like satisfaction, value and quality. These concepts have recently been heavily studied in tourism, yet the lack of an empirical examination of their relatedness with authenticity is evident. On the other hand, there are several specific (sub)concepts that are highly relevant to complement the proposed model. Such a concept is, for instance, pull motivation which is a counterpart of push, internal motivation (Apostolakis, 2003; Gnoth, 1997). Other concepts closely related with motivation and loyalty, yet whose relations with the constructs in our model are poorly understood, are involvement and attachment (Hou et al., 2005). Another concept of interest is expectations which were found to be related with motivation (Gnoth, 1997), yet they are also crucial for the evaluation of satisfaction (Fornell et al., 1996; Oliver, 1997). This suggests that it would be beneficial to include tourists’ previous expectations regarding authenticity when explaining experienced (perceived) authenticity after a visit. Similar to the concepts of satisfaction and quality (see, e.g. Oliver, 1997 and Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988), the disconfirming of expectations also seems to be an important authentication mechanism.

Finally, use of the structural modeling (SEM) approach proved to be a limitation itself for a study of such a complex, multifaceted and controversial concept as authenticity. The further study of authenticity, especially when it is focused on its dynamic, idiosyncratic and holistic aspects, requires a combination of various methodological approaches. For this purpose, multistep approaches and research tools that combine quantitative and qualitative methods seems the right choice (see e.g. Verleye & Broekaert, 2000). Yet the treatment of the authenticity concept stretched beyond the methodology, suggesting that various theoretical and epistemological perspectives on authenticity should not be treated as mutually exclusive or superior/inferior alternatives. The existential perspective on authenticity was, for instance, recently offered as being the ‘most appropriate’ by several authors (Jensen & Linberg, 2001; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999). Despite its relevance, this perspective still has its own weaknesses (see e.g. Olsen, 2002). From the managerial standpoint the most critical one is certainly the treatment of authenticity as a phenomenon per se, thus the counterproductive liberation of authenticity from objects and places and above all – from the commercial sphere. More important than the “winner” of this contest is the finding that each of these perspectives enriches our understanding of authenticity and offers some specific theoretical and managerial
implications. The structural tensions considered in the introductory section (e.g. object – subject; tourist – intellectual; commodity – sacred; enjoyment – authenticity; ethical – harmful) should therefore be conceived as relevant and enriching contributions rather than antagonistic positions for improved understanding of authenticity.

References


