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Literary tourism: authenticity and memory

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Abstract

The concern with the authenticity of the tourist experience and the role of literary tourism as a proposal for the interpretation and enjoyment of the cultural heritage of a destination are subjects increasingly debated in tourism literature. The goal of this article is to contribute to this debate through a literature review focused on the role that literary tourism may play in the development of more original and differentiating tourism proposals which contribute to the dissemination and affirmation of the authenticity of the local heritage, preserving the memory of the past and, consequently, the local identity. The aim was to develop a starting point for an exploratory research on the role that literary tourism plays in the enjoyment of authentic experiences between local communities, their history and tourists/visitors.

Keywords

Authenticity • Cultural heritage • Memory • Literary tourism • Identity

1. Introduction

The fast pace of modern times, anchored in increasingly massified and generalised behaviour, leads us to a growing awareness of the definitive loss of our past. Aware of this loss, tourists today are driven by a set of feelings of searching for traditions and that will allow them to go through remarkable and unique experiences, resulting from a relationship with the past. Thus, curiosity about places where memory remains crystallised has increased because the reunion with these places allows, in a way, to rebuild a time continuity of our existence.

This article aims to reflect on the role that literary tourism can play in the exaltation of the collective memory of a people, namely through the literary references of its authors, which will be decisive for the preservation of local culture and the development of different ways of promotion and enjoyment of the territory.

Reconnecting with the past, the opportunity to reconstruct memories and preserve a legacy for future generations is increasingly a current concern that the tourist industry must address. The tourist offer must respond to a demand for unique, authentic and memorable experiences.

Analysing the importance of local authenticity in tourism proposals based on literature could make a decisive contribution to offering unique and genuine tourism products that guarantee the preservation of local identity.

Therefore, we believe that this work presents a structured literature review that allowed us to contextualise and relate the concepts, in order to create a useful working tool for a reflection on the contribution of literary tourism to an offer of authentic tourist experiences. These ones foster the preservation of the memory of local communities and establish a good relationship between locals and visitors/tourists.

2. Methodology


Literary tourism proposals have been established as one of the pillars of the cultural structure of the experiences offered to visitors. These are increasingly eager to enjoy an authentic cultural experience based on local identity. The aim of this research is to analyse the role that literary tourism can play in offering authentic experiences to its audience. Therefore, this study is based on a qualitative and descriptive literature review, carried out from the survey of theoretical references about the authentic experiences provided in the context of literary tourism.

As this is a literature review article, the research methodology consists of a review of theoretical, historical, and case study literature, duly referenced.

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3. Literature review

3.1. Authenticity and memory

The phenomenon of globalisation, which we associate with democratisation, massification and mediatisation, has led to an irreversible change in the habits and customs of local communities, calling into question the transmission of values between the past and the future. This depreciation of local culture as a repository of collective memory leads to the loss of the identity of each place. In fact, memory as a process of storing information, materialises in the recollection of the past, rooted in current daily life. In other words, places of memory are, above all, evidence of the past, testimonies of a community identity that leads us to the concept of authenticity of places.

Authenticity is a concept that has existed for centuries (Erickson, 1995), however, its study only began to be done systematically in the Social Sciences from the second half of the 20th century (Starn, 2002). In the 1970s, this concept gained importance, especially in museums, which began to attach special significance to the preservation of their collections (Chhabra, 2008), in order to maintain the original authenticity. Subsequently, the concept came into wider use, raising more and more questions about its interpretation.

According to Odete Paiva, based on the International Cultural Tourism Charter, "authenticity describes the relative integrity of a place, an object or an activity, in relation to its original creation. In the context of living culture practices, authenticity responds to the evolution of traditional practice. In the context of a historical place or object, it can encompass the accuracy or breadth of its reconstruction to a known prior state" (Paiva, 2017, p. 96).

In this sense, we can affirm that authenticity and memory are closely linked because both are associated with the veracity of things. Authenticity refers to the fact that something is original, genuine, true, and memory is the ability to remember and retain information about the past. Therefore, it is important to note that authenticity is crucial to ensure that memories are not distorted or modified over time in order to have an accurate understanding of the past and, conversely, it is necessary to rely on memory to determine the authenticity of something. Memory is key to maintaining the authenticity of memories and authenticity is important to determine the veracity of something we wish to remember.

3.2. Authenticity in Tourism

Tourism is understood as a convergence of people, places and objects. People travel to and interact with places through an activity mediated by either an industry or a resident community. Due to this convergence, research on the links between authenticity and tourism reflects different aspects and interests.

Authenticity is a recurring concept in tourism literature at least since the early 1960s, when sociologists and anthropologists began to study the social, economic and cultural impacts of tourism, namely by trying to assess the authenticity of destinations, environments and tourist attractions from the "concept of commodification or commoditisation - the transformation of goods, services, objects and cultural manifestations hitherto considered outside the system of value and economic exchange into products bought and sold in the market" (Köler, 2009, p. 292).

From the late 1970s onwards, the "commercialisation of culture is viewed by UNESCO (1976) with serious reservations, given its propensity to destroy local culture by replacing it with products manufactured and staged specifically for the tourism market." (Köler, 2009, p. 293).

MacCannell was largely responsible for the prominence that authenticity came to have in tourism research stating that "the attraction of tourists to places of social, historical or cultural significance is comparable to the desire of pilgrims to visit sacred sites". (MacCannell, 1973; Paiva, 2017, p. 97) However, MacCannell (1999) also warns that the commercialisation of tourist attractions and the consequent loss of original meaning make these cultural elements inauthentic and "unreal," and compromise the quality of the daily and tourist experience. (Köler, 2009).

The author presents authenticity as a central motivation of tourism activity, and several authors even state that "the search for authenticity has become a central theme in tourism literature" (Belhassen, Caton and Stewart 2008; Paiva, 2017, p. 97), most of them being unanimous in stating that authenticity is now a primary concern of tourists, directly influencing their decisions, in the choice of destinations, leisure activities to be carried out, visits to be selected, among others.

Authenticity is seen as the pursuit of knowledge, but also as added value of the tourist experience, so Waller and Lea state that "the demand for authenticity is real and destinations should invest time and money in promoting it to tourists". (Waller and Lea, 1999; Paiva, 2017, p. 103). However, when we question the concept of authenticity in tourism, we are especially evaluating cultural authenticity because tourists are looking for authentic experiences that allow them a unique and genuine way to get in touch with the local culture, looking for the uniqueness and diversity that each destination has to offer and therefore escape from mass tourism.

In fact, considering that, according to UNWTO (2019, p. 31) cultural tourism "is a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination", the authenticity of the tourist experience will be validated by the tourist, bearing in mind that "these attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and

cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions". (UNWTO, 2019, p. 31)

As such, understanding the concept of authenticity becomes fundamental, both to understand tourists' demand for authentic experiences and to understand how tourism destinations can create authentic and genuine tourism products that reflect the local culture in a true and original way.

In practical terms, authenticity in tourism refers to an original experience that is true to reality, such as experiencing different ways of life; contacting manifestations of a people's identity, attending cultural events, discovering places that maintain traditional methods and ways of life, among others. This way, tourists understand as well the difference between the visited destination and their own origin, with the tourist experience emerging as a window to their culture, heritage, history and identity, in other words, "the journey must provide encounters, marvels, amazements, vertigo, which resonate in our hearts and blend us into the landscape" (Serres, 2001; Galvão Filho and Marandola, 2017, p. 33).

From this perspective, the demand reflects the need of tourists who try to find something different from their everyday life, who want to experience new realities and enjoy the feeling of being where things are real and original, associating the authenticity of these experiences with the change of scenery, a better understanding of the place visited and its development. This explains the search for the past, with the attempt to return to a "Golden Age" in which everything seems simpler and more authentic.

Regardless of the fact that it is demonstrated by numerous researchers that authenticity in tourism is a complex and multifaceted concept, understood in different ways according to the perception of the tourist (Cohen, 1988), it can be defined as the experience of immersion in a specific culture or environment that offers tourists a genuine and unadulterated view of local life. It is the feeling of being in a real place, where visitors can learn about the culture, customs, history, and daily life of the local inhabitants.

MacCannell 1999 argued that tourists seek authenticity through experiences that allow them to get in touch with the "real" local culture. Cohen (1988) considers that authenticity is a subjective concept that depends on the perception of the tourist and that cultural authenticity can be achieved through the active participation of tourists in local cultural activities. Dann (1981), when referring to the process of commercialisation of authenticity in tourism, states that cultural authenticity can be preserved in tourism if commercialisation is controlled and tourists are encouraged to interact with local culture in an authentic way. Richards (2007) considers that cultural authenticity in tourism can be achieved through the creation of authentic and creative tourism experiences that reflect local culture in an authentic and original way.

Shi et al. (2019) report that destination authenticity is an important factor for tourists, although their motivations are diverse according to age, gender and country of origin. This perspective is corroborated in the work of Farmaki and Pappas who, in 2020, investigated the perspective of tourism industry professionals on tourist destination authenticity and concluded that it is an important factor for tourist satisfaction and that the tourism industry must find ways to preserve and promote destination authenticity. The same was emphasised by Huang et al. (2019) showing that the results of their study indicate that authenticity is an important factor for destination image, motivation and satisfaction of Chinese tourists.

Interestingly, even though "the discussion has not led to a broad consensus, which would make authenticity the anchor of a general paradigm for the study of modern tourism" (Cohen and Cohen, 2012, p. 1295), authenticity has been widely invoked in practice to brand tourism products such as "authentic" food, places and experiences (Belhassen and Caton, 2006; Rickly-Boyd, 2012).

In conclusion, the concept of authenticity seems inevitable and important in practice, but despite the efforts devoted over decades, its theoretical status remains unclear, especially in tourism literature (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006), and there is no consensus about the concept of authenticity (Richards, 2007). Consequently, even though authenticity plays a vital role in understanding the touristic experience (Cohen, 2004), there are several authors who question its validity, as the concept cannot be explained in the conventional sense of the term.

3.3. Authenticity and literary tourism experience

Although it is not easy to find a definition of literary tourism that encompasses all its forms and dimensions, one can say that it is undoubtedly a form of cultural tourism whose main motivation is to visit certain places guided by literature.

Today, literary tourism, is becoming increasingly popular. Basically, all forms of tourism offer experiences (Richards, 2011). However, each tourist seeks experiences based on their motivations. Many of them prefer to participate actively, making the moments authentic, which allows us to feel the spirit of a place and the specificities of cultural characteristics. An authentic experience aims at the active participation of tourists in learning about arts and traditions, thus maintaining the living culture of the receiving communities (UNESCO, 2006). The Association for Tourism and Leisure Education and Research (ATLAS) research indicates that, the experiences mostly enjoyed by cultural tourists tend to be those small-scale, less visited places that offer a taste of local or authentic culture. Tourists increasingly say that they want to experience local culture, to live like locals and to find out about the real identity of the places they visit (Richards, 2009).

In fact, literary tourism, as one of the newest forms of cultural tourism, is increasingly in demand. A literary place can be

considered as a place to which visitors attach meaning, that is its value. That meaning can result from reading a literary work as well as from the author's own life (Herbert, 1996, p. 78).

Driven by the desire to see the landscape that inspired the literary text, the tourist wanders around the places offered by the work. They want to see, live and in colour, the real places that they have visited through reading. Literature not only creates a desire in people's perception to visit places, it also inspires people to visit authors' homes - places where the book may have been written, or inspired by, and the graves of deceased authors. For these literary tourists, the writer is an inspiration (Yiannakis and Davies, 2012).

Based on this reasoning, literature is a signpost for the culture and customs of a place, or even the cultural or natural heritage of unique locations, so we can corroborate Magris' assertion that literature "transports" the memories and discoveries of the journey (Magris, 2010 [1986], p. 18) and, at the same time, allows for the recovery and (re)construction of a memory of the place in the literary text and, consequently, its transformation into a tourist site. And even more, if their originality is preserved because the crucial element that literary tourists seek is authenticity. An authenticity that the tourist often associates with the "idea of place" that he has created by reading the book. It is often this notion of place that gives meaning to the tourist experience itself because literature and the act of travelling require a reconstruction of the past since, as Magris said, literature is the "archaeology of life" (Magris, 2010 [1986], p. 329) and travel "orients towards the origin" (Magris, 2010 [1986], p. 364).

As such, books are often a source of motivation for tourists in search of their own individual and/or collective essence and, for this reason, literary places are increasingly used to promote tourist destinations.

The literary tourist has a pre-knowledge of the territory, constructing the trip as a way of getting closer to the original, of confirming authenticity, as Westover (2009) points out. In this process of confirming or affirming authenticity, tourists also build their own reality based on what they are given to observe, reflect on and give their opinion of the place. In this way, the concept of literary tourism has gradually established itself, expanding the opportunities for those who like to discover what exists in the places to which literary texts refer. In fact, considering, as Squire (1996) said, that literary tourism is "travelling to places famous for their association with books or authors" (Smith, 2012, p. 8), literary works make it possible to recover and (re)construct memories of spaces, thus producing tourist space, i.e. "a physical or sociologically demarcated area for tourist visits (Jafari, 2002, p. 59). (Jafari, 2002, p. 591), which will prove right Nicola Watson, who describes the "business of literary tourism" as "the interconnected practices of distinguishing and visiting places associated with writers and their work" (Smith, 2012, p. 8).

In fact, regardless of the individual attraction of each tourist to a given place, its presentation, the associated characters and events, the connections with the real or fictional life of the authors or the works are usually used in the promotion of these destinations. Therefore, literary tourism can and should be valued, which requires the creation of itineraries, cultural/literary routes or other events, such as festivals, which can add value to tangible and intangible heritage, given that literary sites, as we have seen, are "marketable" within the tourism sector. Associated with memory, this reconstruction of the past enhances and respects the written word, literature, as heritage, "both in its relationship with tourism (...) and in its role of national identity" (Robinson and Andersen, 2002; Henriques and Quinteiro, 2011, p. 601; Oliveira, 2017, p. 66). Literature conveys images of places - local landscapes, customs, dances, music, typical gastronomy - symbolic goods that provoke transnational imaginaries, which constitute references for readers from other cultures, other places. Without wishing to belittle all the reasons that drive visitors today, we would like to emphasise that the literary text, being a reflection of the cultural values of a community because it presents the image, albeit subjective, of the values that a particular community pursues and that support its identity, is one of the growing motivations for tourist activity.

In the process of growing, often excessively, cities have somewhat lost their identity. By becoming very large territorially, they have become undifferentiated, without their original collective values, which has led to a certain identity crisis among their inhabitants who are looking to tourism as a way of recovering their identity. In fact, by (re)valorising heritage, tourists find their origins. Thus, living in a society pressurised and worn down by the loss of its core values, and as a reaction to the complexity of the modern world in which social connections are failing or weakening, people dream of friendly, true relationships and genuine values - they want to find their roots. Tourist destinations should offer possibilities for socialising and/or meeting local communities.

In this regard, literary tourism proposals, by associating places with the lives of the authors and/or their characters in real spaces, will be considered more authentic (experiences of the authentic), provoking feelings of real, genuine and meaningful experiences (experiences of authenticity) and, at the same time, the words of the authors perpetuate the memory of the places, highlighting their identity references. The literary text allows to rediscover the place and to value it in the eyes of the tourist and the local community. In fact, as Robinson (2002) states, authors' houses are arguably the most powerful tourism resource. These places allow tourists to engage in varied emotional experiences or activities, and they are a source of intimacy, authenticity.

Therefore, literary routes can be a link between the place and the people, in order to create emotional bonds that connect

tourists to authors because, as Scarfuto (2013, p. 5) states, “routes have become historical representations for writers, readers, students and society in general”, which allows us to affirm that literary tourism can present itself as a differentiator in the touristic offer, considered an alternative strategy for harmonising (external) globalisation and (internal) local development, which makes it possible to maintain local identity as a factor of attractiveness, to strengthen community participation and to encourage public and private investment for the conservation and recovery of the sociocultural and physical environment of the destination/site.

4. Conclusions

The goal was to analyse the concept of authenticity in the context of tourism and the tourist experience, associating authenticity and memory as interconnected concepts in tourism because both refer to the experience of connection with local culture and history.

If we consider as Nora (1993, p. 25) that “memory hangs on places, like history on events”, then this is determinant to create a meaningful tourist experience because authenticity in tourism usually involves an experience that is perceived as genuine and authentic by tourists, which is more easily achieved by preserving the collective memory of a place, including its traditions and customs because it allows them to experience the culture and history of a place in a way that seems authentic and unique.

Literary tourism refers to memory since the work is the author’s testimony to a particular era. This type of tourism, as a form of tourism that combines entertainment and education, increases tourists’ knowledge and information, and helps them to get to know the society and culture of an era, but for this to happen it must be considered authentic.

Consequently, as Çevik (2022, p. 18) pointed out, “to ensure the authenticity of the place, it is necessary to investigate the connection of the place with the author, based on accurate data, and present the place in the closest way to the author’s time period. Explaining this process to visitors and providing evidence of the authenticity of the place or objects is also an essential criterion in meeting the authenticity expectations of tourists”.

In fact, although many of the objects and experiences in tourism today are manufactured to appear authentic in the eyes of the tourist, this work aims to contribute to show that literary tourism can have a positive and significant effect on the association of authenticity with the tourist destination offer, providing unique and differentiated experiences.

We live our lives today with the omnipresent concept of protecting the past to perpetuate the traces of knowledge and techniques that have disappeared. The search is centred

on identity and the valorisation of places, where proximity, social recognition and participation are easily combined. It is therefore becoming increasingly important to be able to re-interpret the elements of a given group’s past (their knowledge, skills and values) and consequently give them a new social value that generates identity and unity through emotion and memory.

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