

# Three types of Authenticity- Seeking and Implications: A Mertonian Approach

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# Introduction

- “Authenticity-seeking” has been one of lasting and central concerns in studying tourist motivations (Boorstin 1964; MacCannell 1973, 1976).
- However, it is ignored that there are different types of authenticity-seeking in tourist consumption of heritage and culture.

# Introduction

- As a result, in the past, Authenticity-seeking tourists are often seen as victims of commoditization of culture (Boorstin 1964; MacCannell 1973 )
- The impacts of authenticity-seeking activities on destinations are also perceived to be negative (Greenwood 1989). It is noted that there is dilemma of authenticity-seeking, i.e., the very act of authenticity-seeking brings an end to authenticity.

# Introduction

- This is one-sided description of authenticity-seeking in tourism.
- In order to give a more comprehensive understanding of authenticity-seeking in tourism, I'll classify three types of authenticity-seeking behaviors, based on sociologist Robert Merton's (1957) conceptualization of "locals vs. cosmopolitans".

# Merton (1957) on Locals and Cosmopolitans

- Merton (1957) defined cosmopolitans as people who are oriented toward the world outside their local community, as opposed to locals, who are oriented toward their community.
- The key difference between the local and the cosmopolitan is orientation.

# Merton (1957): Profiles of the Local and the Cosmopolitan

## **The local**

- Orientation to and interests in local affairs and hometown
- Low mobility
- Strong place attachment
- Sources of their influences in communication: personal network of local relationships

## **The cosmopolitan**

- Orientation to and interests in the larger world outside hometown
- High mobility
- Weak place attachment
- Sources of their influences in communication: Expertises and professions

# Hannerz (1990)

- Cosmopolitanism as orientation
  - a willingness to engage with the Other
  - Intellectual and aesthetical stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences
  - In search of contrasts and divergence rather than uniformity and homogeneity

# Hannerz (1990)

- Cosmopolitanism as competence
  - Competence of generalized kind, a state of readiness, a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting.
  - Competence of more specialized kind, a built-up skill in manoeuvring more or less expertly with a particular form of culture.

# Hannerz (1990)

- Despite that cosmopolitans are somewhat footloose, on the move in the world, mobility is not a criterion by which one distinguishes the cosmopolitan from the local
- Locals are also on the move, such as the exile immigrants, mass tourists, etc.
- He quotes Paul Theroux (1986: 133): people travel for the purpose of “home plus”: Spain is home plus sunshine, India is home plus servants, Africa is home plus elephants and lions, etc.

# Two types of tourist behaviors in the consumption of authenticity

## The local's way

- The home-centered tourist, live in his or her own hometown when traveling.
- Authenticity-seeking as visual consumption of novelty and symbolic consumption of “social status”, namely, the consumption of authenticity must be embodied as evidence of “I were there” through taking a photo there, without real understanding of other cultures.

## The cosmopolitan's way

- The world-oriented tourist, engaging with other cultures and divergence.
- Authenticity –seeking as taste –driving and competence-supporting appreciation of other cultures; the consumption of authenticity is embodied as real understanding of authentic other cultures, motivated by cosmopolitan interests, and enabled by cultural competence.

# The local's way of the consumption of authenticity

- Locals on the move, consuming “happy time” in novel environments
- Their foci are on novelty and differences, whether what they see are authentic matters little; Lack sufficient interest in deep understanding of the authenticity of other cultures.
- Authenticity as visual and symbolic consumption. The pictures of Authenticity as evidence of conspicuous consumption, evidence that can be shown in the network of relations in home society.

# Local mentality

- What Boorstin (1964) criticized was the local's way of consumption of authenticity.
- Local mentality: to see authenticity against the context of home; it is OK that it is novel and different from daily environment at home; whether it is authentic does not matter.

# From Locals to Cosmopolitans

- Cosmopolitan mentality:
- cultural orientation to and interests in authenticity of other culture.
- cultural sensitivity to authenticity.
- It is not enough that what they see are novel and different from the daily environment at home. It is crucial that what they experience are authentic.

# Peak experiences vs. supporting experiences (Quan & Wang 2004)

## Locals

- Peak experiences: authenticity as visual consumption of novelty and as symbol of “I were there”.
- Supporting experiences: “home plus”, home-related supports: foods, hotels, transportation, communication
- Single authenticity

## Cosmopolitans

- Peak experiences: authenticity as real understanding of other cultures.
- Supporting experiences: giving up home-related habits in a more or less extent, trying others’ ways of life
- Double authenticities

# The third type: Semi-cosmopolitans

- Peak experiences:
  - The cosmopolitan's way of consumption of authenticity
- Supporting experiences:
  - The local's way of consumption of home-related consumer goods and services, such as foods, hotels, etc.

# Conclusion

- There are three different ways of consumption of authenticity in tourism, based both on Merton's conceptualization of the local and the cosmopolitan and on the conceptualization of the peak and supporting experiences.
- The standards and extents of authenticity vary
  - The local's way
  - The cosmopolitan's way
  - The semi-cosmopolitan's way

# Conclusion

- Consequences of authenticity-seeking
  - The local's way: classic form of tourism, staged authenticity (MacCannell 1973)
  - The cosmopolitan's way: alternative tourism, backpackers, interactive authenticity (王宁 2007 )
  - The semi-cosmopolitan's way: neo-classic form of tourism, enclave authenticity

# Conclusion

- Implications for management
- A question for tourism suppliers and hosts: are we local (in Merton's sense) hosts or cosmopolitan hosts?
  - Local hosts: discrimination; lack of supply of multi-cultural forms of consumer goods and services.
  - Cosmopolitan hosts: understanding tourists' cultural differences and varieties: different backgrounds and habits; make tourists satisfied, based on negotiations of tourist order; supply of multi-cultural form of consumer goods and services.

# Reflexive Tourists

- Implications for management
- Questions for tourists
  - Are we “local” tourists or “cosmopolitan” tourists?
  - Are we aware of, and sensitive to, negative consequences that we bring about to hosts?
  - Do we intrude hosts’ spaces of privacy when we seek back-stage authenticity?
  - How to keep a balance between tourist demands for authenticity and hosts’ demands for development?
  - As tourists, we should have cosmopolitan mentality

# Four ideal types of relationships between hosts and guests and conflicts

- Relation 1: “local” hosts and “local” guests
- Relation 2: “local” hosts and “cosmopolitan” guests
- Relation 3: “cosmopolitan” hosts and “local” guests
- Relation 4: “cosmopolitan” hosts and “cosmopolitan” guests
- High conflicts
- Medium conflicts
- Medium conflicts
- Low conflicts

# Marketing Strategies

- Marketing and tourism supplies
- The local:
  - Marketing: spatial and cultural distance
  - Home plus attractions
- The cosmopolitan:
  - Marketing: high cultural capital, free from time-constraints, backpackers, vent-drivers
  - Sharing houses with hosts at destinations
- Semi-cosmopolitan
  - Marketing: high cultural capital, high economic capital, time-constraints
  - International and civilized standards of tourist infrastructures, facilities and services

Thank You!