

Place Authenticity: measurement and influence on holiday destination selection

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to extend the concept of authenticity to the context of places, to propose a measurement scale, and to analyze the influence of such construct on the consumers' choices in a tourism context. The scale was developed in five steps: (1) literature review and qualitative research with tourism technicians and consumers for generating scale indicators; (2) item validation by marketing and tourism experts and the conceptual proposition; (3) first survey, with 152 cases, for exploratory factor analysis; (4) second survey, with 152 cases, for confirmatory analysis and to test the influence of this construct on tourist destinations selection; (5) last step, it contemplated a third survey with 196 cases suitable for external validation of the proposed scale. Two dimensions were identified as essences of the place authenticity: originality and tradition. Results show the suggested scale has an explanatory capacity of 76%. In addition, this new concept explains 21% of the influence on the choice of holiday destinations.

Keywords: Place authenticity; Scale development; Authentic tourism.

Resumo

Autenticidade de lugar: mensuração e influência na seleção de destino de férias

O objetivo deste estudo foi estender o conceito de autenticidade para o contexto de lugares a fim de propor uma escala de mensuração e analisar a influência desse construto nas escolhas do consumidor no âmbito do turismo. O desenvolvimento da escala contou com cinco etapas: (1) revisão da literatura e realização de pesquisa qualitativa com técnicos da área do turismo e consumidores para gerar indicadores para a escala; (2) validação dos itens por especialistas da área de marketing e turismo e a proposição conceitual da escala; (3) primeiro *survey* com 152 casos para análise fatorial exploratória; (4) segundo *survey* com 152 casos para análise confirmatória e teste de influência desse construto na seleção de destinos turísticos; (5) a última etapa contemplou um terceiro *survey* com 196 casos aptos para a validação externa da escala proposta. Foram identificadas duas dimensões como essências da autenticidade de lugar: a originalidade e a tradição. Os resultados evidenciam que a escala sugerida demonstra capacidade explicativa de 76%. Além disso, esse novo conceito explica 21% de influência na escolha do destino turístico de férias.

Palavras-chave: Autenticidade de Lugar, Desenvolvimento de Escala; Turismo Autêntico.

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Resumen

Autenticidad del lugar: medición e influencia en la selección de destinos turísticos

El objetivo de este estudio fue extender el concepto de autenticidad en el contexto de lugares para proponer una escala de medición y analizar la influencia de esta construcción en las opciones del consumidor en el contexto del turismo. El desarrollo de la escala tuvo cinco pasos: (1) revisión de la literatura e investigaciones cualitativas con los técnicos de turismo y los consumidores para generar indicadores de escala; (2) validación de los elementos por los expertos de marketing y turismo y propuesta conceptual; (3) primera encuesta con 152 casos para el análisis factorial exploratorio; (4) segunda encuesta con 152 casos para el análisis confirmatorio y prueba de la influencia de este concepto en la selección de los destinos turísticos; (5) tercera encuesta con 196 casos convenientes para la validación externa de la escala. Dos dimensiones fueron identificadas como esencias de autenticidad del lugar: la originalidad y la tradición. Los resultados muestran que la escala sugerida demuestra capacidad explicativa del 76%. Además, este nuevo concepto explica el 21% de influencia en la elección del destino vacacional.

Palabras clave: Autenticidad del lugar; Desarrollo de escala; Turismo auténtico.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the concept of authenticity has been used in different areas of knowledge, such as psychology, philosophy, marketing, among others. Ibarra (2015) indicates that authenticity is a complex concept, which needs consensus in its definition and measurement. What defines the perception of the authentic object causes many concerns, especially in marketing. Authenticity is used in everyday life, related to the truth implied in something or someone. Previous studies have investigated authenticity at an individual level (Vasconcellos, 2012), in comparative terms among realities (Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006) and also in product and service marketing (Beverland, 2005, 2006; Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008; Alexander, 2009; Molleda, 2009; Kadirov, 2010; Kadirov, Varey, & Wooliscroft, 2013). Kadirov et al. (2013) point out that authenticity is something that would be increasingly inherent in the *mindset* of both those responsible for communication and marketing strategy, as well as consumers. The criteria that allow people to define what is authentic are varied. Brands can convey the idea or just be understood as authentic for different reasons. For decision makers in public and private organizations, the knowledge of what defines “being authentic”, as well as the influence this concept has on consumer decisions and their measurement, are relevant elements for its own applicability (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2013). Other studies (Wang, 1999; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Kadirov, 2010) classified the types of authenticity and even proposed scales applicable to products. Especially about the authenticity of place, Ramkissoon and Uysal (2010) developed a scale in which the lack of detail of their methodological process and the obtaining of analysis data was observed. Thus, one of the research *gaps* dealt with in this study is the proposal for the rigorous development of a user-friendly collection instrument that would allow the manager to more clearly identify the influence of authenticity and the aggregate differential in touristic location and destination choices.

From an administrative point of view, especially for public tourism management, knowing and measuring the influence of place authenticity can enhance results in this industry, which is as competitive as any in the hyperconsumption society (Lipovetsky, 2007). For 2018, the Economic Forecast prediction, published in February 2017, indicates the recovery of the world economy is expected to continue and will even grow in 2017 and 2018, accompanied by a resumption of global trade. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) presents tourism as the key strategic activity for the development of countries in the projections between 2016 and 2020. That said, the assertive management of tourism, faced with aggressive competition, motivates the development of authentic elements that stimulate the choice of destinations due to unique and genuine experiences.

In Brazil, the Brazilian Tourism Company (Embratur) (2017) announced, in the second half of 2017, the intention to develop metrics that will triple the 10% share in the budget revenue of receptive tourism and the enactment of specific legislation with the General Law of Tourism. This brief global and national scenario points to opportunities for a more articulated and assertive tourism management with the main local actors. But how do you get more *prospects* interested in a particular location? How to arouse consumer interest in a potential location? Would it be enough to disclose its name and location? How to provide more tourist stimulus? Is place authenticity a solid argument for promoting a place? These and other questions about tourism development as an economic element are part of the routine of area theorists and managers. Thus, the aim of this study is to deepen the concept of place authenticity as a place promotion element. To do so, the study focuses on three elements: (1) to define the concept of place authenticity; (2) to propose a way of measuring place authenticity; (3) to verify the influence of this concept in the choice of tourist destinations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The literature review is divided into three main parts: (1) concept of place brands; (2) concept of place authenticity; (3) classifications and dimensions of authenticity.

Placebrands

The concept of place branding is a location marketing strategy that covers the brand issue (Kotler, Heider, & Rein, 1993). Guerreiro (2006) and Vela (2012) complement that market brand management techniques should be used to effectively manage localities in a competitive globalized reality. One must invest in differentiation, in competitive advantage. *Place branding* aims to: (1) develop a strong and engaging positioning and image to different audiences; (2) make the locality attractive to current and prospective buyers and users of its goods and services; (3) be efficient in providing products and services; (4) value the image of the place in such a way that the added value of the locality is noticeable (Kotler, Gertner, Rein, & Haider, 2006).

The territory brand largely involves the reinvention of places from the brand development process (Vela, 2012). The interaction between tangible

points, such as physical and geographical resources, added to the cultural and historical elements of the locality, can provide the elements needed to work a location as a product. These factors “contribute in a decisive way to the formation of their identity, and must integrate the essence of the positioning strategy and the location brand” (Guerreiro, 2006 p. 6). Characteristics of the place’s identity make it possible to construct an image that makes this place distinct from any other, to the point “the mere mention of a city name can bring to light an image stored in an individual’s mind” (Petroski, Baptista, & Francisco-Maffezzoli, 2013, p. 5).

Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2007) reinforce that place brands are often confused with communication images. In some cases, slogans and logos are associated as trademarks without interacting with the other parts of the set that makes them up (e.g. identity and personality). Vela (2012) argues the communication of the place should be aligned with the deeper characteristics of the place and the visitor profile to be attracted. Therefore, place brand management must be carried out in a structured manner (Pinto & Meneses, 2008; Petroski et al., 2013). Place marketing managers should consider building place branding as a “continuous, coherent and global process, and simultaneously integrated into a marketing strategy” (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2007, p. 3). To build an appropriate *place branding* strategy, it is suggested to apply the concepts of place authenticity to evoke, in communication, the essential and unique elements of a given place.

Authenticity and place authenticity

Being originally studied by psychology, Vasconcellos (2012) and Ibarra (2015) state that authenticity is a latent concern of the individual, since comparison and differentiation are present in human needs. In modern societies, the cult of individual and oneness motivates the search for mechanisms that enable individuals to feel this way: unique. Taylor (2011) points out that one of the decisive aspects for authentic positioning is the definition of one’s own identity, i.e., the set of attributes, such as personality, physical characteristics and self-perception. “Being authentic” to the universe of brands, especially to place brands, can be defined as the coherence between identities and personality decided a priori by managers and incorporated into brands and into the image perceived by consumers. Only in this way, one can verify whether this construct influences the perception of something to be authentic (Vasconcellos, 2012). Gilmore and Pine (2007) and Ram, Björk and Weidenfeld (2016) argue that tourists generally seek to live unique experiences. Vela (2012) adds that this understanding of symbolic place systems is important for selecting a travel destination. That said, choosing a location to visit can be a way for consumers to reassert themselves as having a particular personality or belonging to a particular group (Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Vela, 2012).

From this perspective, authenticity as an element to be developed in the identity of a place brand could motivate the same consumer behavioral pattern as compared to product brands. Grayson and Martinec (2004) and Ram et al. (2016) reinforce that, although the definition of something authentic is related to something real and genuine, the consumer’s perception can occur by different dimensions of place authenticity.

Ratings and measurement

One of the proposed challenges was to analyze, in previous research, the classifications and the possible dimensions applied to authenticity and that could be applied to place authenticity. Several theorists have devoted themselves to developing categories and dimensions of authenticity. For example, the recognition of authenticity by the social environment (Wang, 1999; Kadirov et al., 2013), the tradition indexed to a place or the production process (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Beverland et al., 2008; Ram et al., 2016), proven legitimacy, as well as originality and provenance (Wang, 1999; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Kadirov, 2010; Ram et al., 2016).

In the analysis of brand and product authenticity scales, the concept of authenticity seems to be more associated with brand reliability (Kadirov, 2010; Napoli et al., 2013). Ramkissoon and Uysal (2010) developed a place authenticity measurement scale, but with certain weaknesses in the methodological rigor of the procedures for developing and analyzing the scale. For these authors, the central element is based on the image of the place and the historical documentation. However, it is worth reflecting on whether the attributes associated with the image are, in fact, a new construct or just a new guise for the perceived image of the place.

Lu, Chi and Liu (2015) verified how the perception of authenticity influences the image formation of the place and the subsequent satisfaction of the tourist. For this, they used a four-item authenticity scale, based on previous studies and results of conducted focus groups. However, such a scale is directed only at the historical dimension of the site. As in the study by Ramkissoon and Uysal (2010), the approach of Lu, Chi and Liu (2015) did not focus on the development of a place authenticity scale with methodological rigor.

From the dimensions proposed by Beverland (2006), Molleda (2009), Kadirov (2010) and Napoli et al. (2013) to measure product authenticity, elements that identify the originality/legitimacy of the brand were highlighted. In research conducted by Gilmore and Pine (2007), we identified dimensions applicable to localities (natural authenticity) as well as the issue of social influence and opinion in the perception of (influential) authenticity. Ram et al. (2016) add that tradition has shown a great power of perception of place authenticity in their study. In Ramkissoon and Uysal's (2010) scale proposal to measure place authenticity, this concept is considered to be a moderator in the relations between destination image, motivation, information seeking and future behaviors.

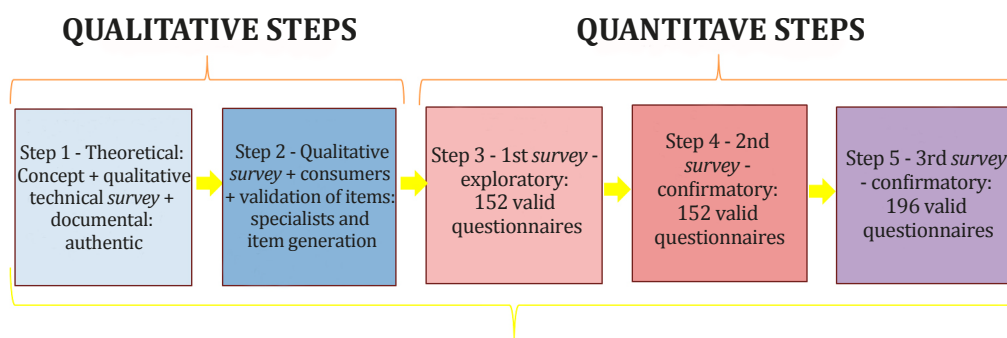
METHODOLOGY

The methodological procedures of this study followed the recommendations of Netemeyer, Bearden and Sharma (2003) on the construction of measurement models. The study included five main steps, from a qualitative study, with 12 in-depth interviews, and three *surveys* for measurement validations and influence analysis, totaling 500 independent observations.

Proposal of dimensions

The five steps used in the study to develop the scale are illustrated in Figure 1. In the first stage, theoretical research on the construct (study reference) and in-depth interviews were conducted with four tourism and marketing technicians and 12 potential consumers, allowing one to map possible dimensions of place authenticity. In the second stage, the scale was conceptually validated by four marketing and tourism experts; In steps three and four, two independent sample *surveys* (152 cases each) were carried out to lead the validation process with exploratory and confirmatory analysis, respectively. The fifth stage consisted of a new *survey*, with 196 valid cases, for external validation of the proposed scale and validation against the Ramkissoon and Uysal's (2010) scale. In summary, 20 interviews were conducted between different consumer profiles, tourism experts and marketing researchers, as well as 500 observations distributed across three different *surveys*.

Figure 1 - Scale development and validation steps



Source – Model inspired by Netemeyer et al. (2003) and adapted by the authors (2017)

Step 1 - Qualitative: conceptual support

The first stage of this research was elaborated from three elements, namely: (1) the theoretical support already presented in the literature review; (2) in-depth interviews with tourism experts and consumers, and (3) document analysis in the annual reports (2012-2014) of brands of cities regarded as authentic, made available by Embratur.

To recognize practical elements for strengthening place-branding strategies, four interviews were conducted, two of which with tourism experts and two with public representatives, tourism planning consultants from Paraná and Santa Catarina, who could clarify the development profile of the localities. In addition, according to the traveler profile indicated by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and Embratur, eight interviews with potential consumers were conducted, two (one male and one female) in each age group, namely: between 25 and 29 years old; males between 30 and 40 years old; between 25 and 29 years old; and between 30 and 40 years of age. The questions asked involved knowledge about authenticity, place brand, place authenticity, and the influence of place authenticity on the choice of tourist destination. The end product of this step was the suggestion of an initial scale to measure place authenticity.

Step 2 - Qualitative: conceptual validation and item generation

To validate the indicators suggested in the first stage, the material was presented to two marketing specialists and two tourism and urban management experts. In order to avoid overlaps and give relevance to the scale proposed, the final qualitative version included two dimensions and 17 indicators. The scale underwent a face-to-face pre-test with five consumers for face validation (Netemeyer et al., 2003).

Steps 3 and 4 - Quantitative: *survey 1* and *survey 2*

Following the procedures of Netemeyer et al. (2003), in the quantitative stage, both collections were made with individuals from the sociodemographic profile proposed for the sample. Priority was given to digital collection via Qualtrics; however, there was also personal collection in different shopping malls in the city of Curitiba, made directly in the software through digital devices. The questionnaires aim to identify the respondent according to age (classified by age groups) and gender, to increase the “confidence” in freely answering the questions. Responses were obtained mainly from respondents from the states of Paraná and São Paulo.

152 valid answers were obtained for each step. Place selection was an open question for the participants and could lead to any location (whether a city, country or region). The proposal was to analyze the coherence with answers obtained in the qualitative phase. For both *surveys*, collections were conducted via Qualtrics. Scale depuration in *survey 1* - the exploratory stage - suggested keeping the two dimensions with 12 items. *Survey 2*, a confirmatory step, kept both dimensions and reduced the scale to eight items.

Step 5 - Quantitative: *survey 3* (external validation)

A third *survey* was conducted to obtain an external validation of the proposed scale against that of Ramkissoon and Uysal (2010). In result analysis, the descriptive analysis of the variables was conducted first, especially on asymmetry and kurtosis. Then, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted, a step in which the robustness and validity of each of the authenticity scales can be compared. 196 valid cases were obtained, collected primarily via Qualtrics software. Questionnaires followed the same validation process of the previous steps, having passed the pre-test and verified whether there was divergence between online and in-person understanding. This stage validated the proposed scale with two dimensions and eight items.

Descriptions of each step and details of dimensions and indicators are presented below.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Analysis of qualitative results (steps 1 and 2)

Qualitative information collected was grouped into two large groups: the technicians, which involve tourism professionals and marketing specialists,

recording a total of 5h25min in interviews, with 15 transcribed pages; and consumers, with 9h47min of interviews and 29 pages of transcript. With the information gathered, the objective was to relate some dimensions that could be applied on the scale as points of influence in the selection of locations. These place branding recommendations were important in validating whether consumers had the perception of authenticity applied to places and whether this is an influential element in their choice.

Initially, we found that only technicians demonstrated some familiarity with the concept of place brands. For consumers, it would be something associated with publicizing the place, having an attraction or product for which this place can be known. In the question intended to analyze what the interviewees understood by authentic place brands, one could see that some characteristics first employed to describe authenticity were adapted and applied to the localities. Such heed aimed to avoid bias in the construct description, as occurred in the construction of previous scales - like as Napoli et al. (2013) - in which authenticity appears more associated with brand reliability.

With these observations, it is clear that some dimensions and classifications presented by Wang (1999); Grayson and Martinec (2004), Gilmore and Pine (2007), Beverland (2006), Napoli et al. (2013) and Ram et al. (2016) were spontaneously cited in the interviews, such as quality, history/tradition and culture. Another essential point noted was the perception the term “authentic” allows a place to be seen as so (Wang, 1999; Grayson and Martinec, 2004). Moreover, it is emphasized the attribution of authenticity to a tourist destination is favored if there is another place for the consumer to compare it with.

Chart 1 - Proposed place authenticity measurement scale

Veracity/legitimacy
AUT 1 - The place is known for its unique features.
AUT 2 - The place is proven to be authentic.
AUT 3 - The place is unique in its tourist category.
AUT 4 - The location is original.
AUT 5 - The place is known for having unique products/services.
AUT 6 - The characteristics of the place are genuine.
AUT 7 - The place is true to its original features
History/Tradition/Culture
AUT 8 - History is important to maintain the originality of the place.
AUT 9 - The history of the place has recognized relevance.
AUT 10 - The place integrates history and modernity in a unique way.
AUT 11 - The place has a known and attractive history.
AUT 12 - The place has a cultural tradition.

(continues...)

Table 1 – Continuation

History/Tradition/Culture
AUT 13 - Cultural characteristics of the population make the place special.
AUT 14 - The place has a tradition of being a pioneer in its productions.
AUT 15 - Local culture stimulates innovation.
AUT 16 - The culture of the place is unique.
AUT 17 - Cultural tradition makes the place authentic.
(AUT = Authenticity Indicators)

Source – The authors (2017)

With data obtained from the literature, documentary research and interviews with technicians and consumers, one could list two possible dimensions of authenticity with 17 indicators in total, as shown in Chart 1. During expert analysis, one could see that, of these dimensions associated with place authenticity, two were identified as essential and central in the definition of place authenticity: truth/legitimacy, in which the place is true, legitimate, unique, exclusive and original; and history/tradition/culture, in which the site has a differentiated or relevant history, tradition and culture.

Analysis of quantitative results (Steps 3, 4 and 5)

Survey 1

Of the 152 respondents, 63.8% were women and 36.2%, men. The age group ranged from 26 to 37 years old. As for family income, in order to contain the recurring exchange rate fluctuation in Brazil, the dollar at the time of data collection (R\$ 2.659) was agreed upon to calculate annual income. 61.8% of travelers had annual incomes between US\$ 15,410 and US\$ 34,673, following the profile released by the Ministry of Tourism (MTur), in which the national traveler's income would be between US\$ 17,703 and US\$ 48,890 per year.

In the descriptive analysis of variables, an average of 7.84 was verified in the evaluation of the addressed items. Asymmetry and kurtosis indexes indicated an abnormal sample, but within reasonable distribution limits for the use of parametric techniques (Maroco, 2010). As for the relevance of the items proposed for scale formation, one observed that, through the Communalities test, there were no results below 0.5, meaning all proposed items showed to be important to measure the construct in the context of locations.

Then, an exploratory factor analysis was performed (Field, 2009), with *varimax* rotation and principal component extraction methods, in which the two dimensions predicted in the qualitative step were confirmed. Dimension 1 was called originality and dimension 2, tradition. During the scale reliability test, two items of dimension 1 (AUT 3 and 5) and three items of dimension 2 (AUT 8, 14 and 15) were removed, as they presented the lowest loading rates in each of the dimensions and improvement in alpha value when removed. Removing these indicators did not change the meaning of the dimensions. Other items had adequate loading rates, according to Table 1.

Table 1 – Exploratory factor analysis

		Place Authenticity		1	2	α
Originality	AUT 1 - The place is known for its unique features.	.882				0.940
	AUT 2 - The place is proven to be authentic.	.922				
	AUT 4 - The location is original.	.879				
	AUT 6 - The characteristics of the place are genuine.	.841				
	AUT 7 - The place is true to its original features	.846				
Tradition	AUT 9 - The history of the place has recognized relevance.		.793			0.945
	AUT 10 - The place integrates history and modernity in a unique way.		.788			
	AUT 11 - The place has a known and attractive history.		.840			
	AUT 12 - The place has a cultural tradition.		.799			0.945
	AUT 13 - Cultural characteristics of the population make the place special.		.826			
	AUT 16 - The culture of the place is unique.		.771			
	AUT 17 - Cultural tradition makes the place authentic.		.818			

Source – The authors (2017)

KMO and Bartlett tests, which analyze sample viability, were also significant ($p < 0.000$), indicating the collected sample was adequate.

Survey 2

Gender profile remained with a distribution similar to that of the first collection: 61.8% female and 38.2% male. Ages from 34 to 37 and from 38 to 41 are matched with higher percentages, with 21.7% each, and the age group from 26 to 29 years old had 15.8%, corroborating the data released by MTur for the 2016. In the income profile, there was a predominance between US\$ 15,410 and US\$ 46,230 per year.

At this stage, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. In the process of scale purification, items with the lowest loading were removed. Therefore, one had to adjust the model to achieve better adjustment indices. For this, items AUT 7, 13, 16 and 17 were removed due to their low loadings. Remaining items presented satisfactory loads, as seen in Table 2. Alpha values were greater than 0.8, the explanatory capacity of both dimensions based on the explanatory variable assessment (EVA) was above 50%, and the composite reliability (CR) presented results greater than 0.7, showing the reliability of the proposed scale. Adjustment indices confirmed the robustness of the measurement model. One may even see that the two dimensions considered as the essence of authenticity - history and legitimacy - have together an 76% explanatory capacity of the construct.

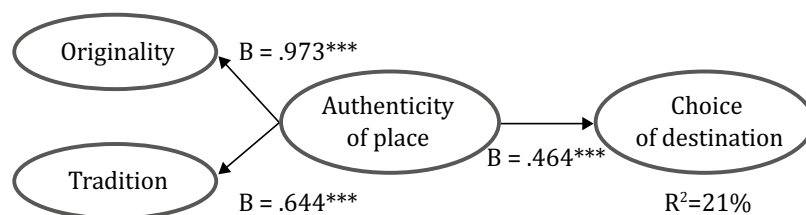
Table 2 – Confirmatory factor analysis

	Place Authenticity	λ	CR	EVA	α
Originality	AUT 1 - The place is known for its unique features.	0.852	0.927	76%	0.926
	AUT 2 - The place is proven to be authentic.	0.911			
	AUT 4 - The location is original.	0.910			
	AUT 6 - The characteristics of the place are genuine.	0.815			
Tradition	AUT 9 - The history of the place has recognized relevance.	0.907	0.928	76%	0.925
	AUT 10 - The place integrates history and modernity in a unique way.	0.921			
	AUT 11 - The place has a known and attractive history.	0.905			
	AUT 12 - The place has a cultural tradition.	0.756			

Adjustment indices: χ^2 59,525; GL 19; χ^2 /GL 3.133; RMSEA, 119; CFI, 963; NFI, 946; IFI, 963; TLI, 945.

Source – The authors (2017)

At this stage, we also verified the influence of place authenticity in the choice of a travel destination, as a way to validate the proposed scale, as shown in Figure 2. Respondents were asked to indicate a likely destination for a next trip and, in relation to the chosen location, to respond on a 5-point Likert scale: I will definitely visit; I am very likely to visit, and I shall visit this location on my next trip (Putrevu & Lord, 1994) ($\alpha = 0.863$). The model was run in the Amos software through structural equation modeling. Thus, place authenticity, composed by the dimensions of legitimacy and history, has an influence of 21% in the choice of a destination.

Figure 2 – Structural model

Adjustment indices: χ^2 86.920; GL 41; χ^2 /GL 2.120; RMSEA, 086; CFI, 966; NFI, 937; IFI, 966; TLI, 954.

Source – The authors (2017)

Survey 3

The third survey was conducted to obtain external validation of the developed questionnaire. Therefore, data were collected with the scale proposed in this study and also with the authenticity scale of Ramkissoon and Uysal (2010), so that 196 valid cases were obtained. Respondents had a mean age of 28 years, and 50% of the cases indicated age between 19 and 30 years. Regarding gender, 53% were women and 47% men.

To verify which scale would present the most robust and reliable results, a new CFA was conducted. Results indicated the scale proposed in this study was more robust, as it presented better loading and better EVA and CR rates. Thus,

the need for adjustments in the model was eliminated and adequate adjustment measures were still presented. Table 3 presents these results.

Table 3 – External validation – proposed scale

	Place authenticity	λ	CR	EVA	α
Originality	AUT 1 - The place is known for its unique features.	0.853	0.847	59%	0.842
	AUT 2 - The place is proven to be authentic.	0.980			
	AUT 4 - The location is original.	0.653			
	AUT 6 - The characteristics of the place are genuine.	0.513			
Tradition	AUT 9 - The history of the place has recognized relevance.	0.868	0.868	63%	0.859
	AUT 10 - The place integrates history and modernity in a unique way.	0.658			
	AUT 11 - The place has a known and attractive history.	0.919			
	AUT 12 - The place has a cultural tradition.	0.690			

Adjustment indices: χ^2 57.296; GL 19; χ^2 /GL 3.016; RMSEA, 160; CFI, 899; NFI, 860; IFI, 793; TLI, 852

Source – The authors (2017)

In contrast, Ramkissoon and Uysal’s (2010) scale presented inconsistency in one of its dimensions, where the items did not reach significant loads, which led to the unfeasibility of calculating the extracted variance and composite reliability, in addition to a low Cronbach’s Alpha value for similar dimensions (Table 4).

Table 4 – External validation – Ramkissoon and Uysal’s scale (2010)

	λ	CR	EVA	α
The destinations is the locals’ way of life.	0.945	0.866	58%	0.865
The destination represents the local community.	0.970			
The destination is original, not manufactured or produced	0.558			
The destination allows for interaction with the local community.	0.790			
There are handmade souvenirs made by locals.	0.393			
The destination has a documented history.	Not sig.	-	-	0.737
The destination is proven by historians.				
The destination represents a scenic landscape.				
The destination represents the past.				
The destination is a reproduction of the original.				

Adjustment indices: χ^2 103.753; GL 34; χ^2 /GL 3.052; RMSEA, 161; CFI, 861; NFI, 810; IFI, 864; TLI, 816.

Source – The authors (2017)

The essence of the place authenticity construct addressed in this study and also by Ramkissoon and Uysal (2010) is convergent, but such scales, when tested and confronted, presented different behaviors. Dimensions found demonstrated

the ability to translate the essence of place authenticity and, when applied to the measuring instrument, they proved to be effective. The scale proposed here was more robust and reliable, and its external validity was confirmed. Given this verification, the scale can then serve as a basis for future studies, in order to choose a place authenticity scale to be applied with different application proposals.

FINAL REMARKS

According to previous literature (Wang, 1999; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Beverland, 2006; Beverland et al., 2008; Ram et al., 2016), the perception of authenticity in products and services tends to motivate the interest of choice and purchase. According to the main objectives of this study, the robust measurement of place authenticity and the relationship between place authenticity and choice of tourist destination are proven. This implies the relevance of using the term “authenticity” in the context of locations, as well as its relevance in the consumer’s decision-making process.

Barretto (2008) and Vela (2012) were already debating the influence of authenticity on place brands and tourism-related disclosures. But what transmits authenticity to a place? How could it be measured? These were the main objectives in conducting this study and developing a robust, easy-to-reproduce place authenticity measurement scale. The detailing of the scale construction steps aimed to demonstrate the methodological rigor, from scale conception to its external validation with independent samples. External validation confirmed the robustness and replicability of the proposed instrument when compared to the other scale in the literature. Both dimensions proposed in the study are guides for academics and practitioners of the area. In response to the reflections of Barretto (2008) and Vela (2012), communication elements that reinforce items of originality and tradition add value to the perception of unique and authentic experiences in a tourist destination.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since authenticity has become increasingly relevant in marketing (Kadirov et al., 2013), exploring such a construct against other dependent variables is interesting both theoretically and empirically. Future research may address the relationship between place authenticity and recommendations from the acquaintance network, or *word-of-mouth* (WOM) recommendation. One may also study whether the experimentation and satisfaction this place was able to provide to the tourist can also influence the perception of place authenticity and, thus, reinforce a recommendation.

Finally, considering that authenticity is a matter of individual perception (Napoli et al., 2013), future research may include data on the psychological profile of tourists, seeking personal characteristics or sociocultural frameworks that influence the assessment of authenticity perception.

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Received on: 11/10/2017
Approved on: 05/07/2018

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