

Diaspora, authenticity and the imagined past

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ABSTRACT

Ancestral tourism in Scotland, a sector of the heritage tourism market sensitive to consumer personalisation, has particular propensities towards process-driven co-created experiences. These experiences occur within existing categories of object-based and existential notions of authenticity alongside an emergent category of the 'authentically imagined past'. The latter of these modes reveals a complex interplay between professionally endorsed validation of the empirical veracity of objects, documents and places and deeply held, authentically imagined, narratives of 'home'. These narratives, built up in the Diaspora over centuries, drive new processes towards authenticity in tourism. We conducted 31 interviews across 27 sites throughout Scotland with curators, archivists, and volunteers to explore these notions of authenticity within the ancestral tourism context.

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Introduction

Ancestral tourism has been identified as a key area of growth by Scotland's National Tourism Organisation, VisitScotland, with a market in the Scottish Diaspora estimated at 50 million people in countries such as Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand (VisitScotland, 2013). This paper reveals how ancestral tourists appear not to seek authentication of this form of heritage consumption in a conventional sense of indirect professional assurance, but seek confirmation of longstanding ancestral narratives (real and imagined), developed in the Diaspora itself. As a result, tourists seek to produce authentication through co-creation, with direct staff contact, participatory interpretation, and contribution of and to archival and object-based records. This presents heritage practitioners with direct, focused, and potentially rich, mutually productive encounters with tourists, yet also presents ethical challenges when intervening to disprove or modify often deeply held, but empirically dubious, notions of personal 'imagined pasts'.

Conceptual debates on 'authenticity' in the tourism literature have been present since its introduction to the tourism lexicon in the early 1970s (see MacCannell, 1973). In particular, a body of work focusses on authenticity as a process, negotiated (or renegotiated) between a tourist site and its visitors (Bruner, 1994; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Daugstad & Kirchengast, 2013; Frisvoll, 2013; Wall & Xie, 2005). This complex process often takes place around sites of staged authenticity (e.g. Daugstad & Kirchengast, 2013; Frisvoll, 2013) and is increasingly viewed as a participatory, or co-created process (see Cohen & Cohen, 2012). In particular, we focus here on the specificity of historical relationships between zones of supply and demand that produce tourists' notions of 'authenticity', sometimes in tension with those held by heritage practitioners in the destination itself. While notions linking religious pilgrimage and authenticity among tourists are related to our context (Andriotis, 2011; Belhassen, Caton, & Stewart, 2008), these are largely determined by adherence to particular creeds and institutions. It is

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selves, they may yet evoke an 'authentic' second-order existential experience (Gonzalez, 2008; Guttentag, 2010; Richards & Wilson, 2006; Wight & Lennon, 2007).

The intimate relationships between ancestral tourists and the 'home' destination can muddy conventional distinctions between 'objective' and 'existential' modes of authentication. Wang (1999: 351) conceives of existential authenticity in both 'personal and inter-subjective' terms in relation to a range of liminal experiences consumed through tourism. The 'inter-personal' dimension of the process of existential authentication that Wang (*ibid*: 364) proposes as emerging through shared touristic experiences, such as 'family ties' and 'communitas', are independent of the existence of the destination as such. We reconcile this with our own contextual understanding of how existential authenticity is produced and consumed by drawing on Steiner's and Reisinger's (2006: 309) proposition that, the historically informed world is comprised, in Heideggerian terms, by a dyad of one's personal ('heritage') and collective ('destiny') histories. In the case of ancestral tourism, the objective existence of the destination as an empirically verifiable place of 'origins' acts as the catalyst bridging the gap between 'heritage/destiny' in which a sense of the 'true existential self' is rediscovered in collective terms.

This may find expression in the relationship between notions of 'object based' and 'existential' authenticities (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010), denoting in the former a reliance on physical artifacts and association with the individual or collective essential sense in the latter. The physical mobility of cultural objects and their historico-cultural mutability of reception has led to pragmatic recognition of often blurred lines between these two categories, or at least their lack of mutual exclusivity (Bryce et al., 2015; Lau, 2010; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Rickley-Boyd, 2012).

Ancestral tourism and the 'Imagined Past'

Cultural heritage in the broadest sense is an archive of selective stories that particular cultures, nationalities or religions, choose to tell about themselves to themselves and others or, as Lowenthal (2011) and Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) argue, an act of faith in how people in the present wish or imagine the past to be. The increasing self-conception of tourist-consumers as autonomous subjects, oscillating between individual and group identities in relation to particular sites is a function of late-capitalist consumer-culture (e.g. Baudrillard, 1998; Jameson, 1991) and heightened when an 'ancestral' stake is present or 'imagined' in relation to particular destinations and histories. Salazar (2012: 865–870) hints at this when he states, "an individual's propensity to produce imaginings is the primary fact [and that] tourists are invited to participate in a performance that will bring an imagined past back to life". Several authors have framed discussion of the tourism 'imaginary', myth-making and the construction of tourist-subjects with reference to the 'exotic' and the desire to consume 'difference' (e.g. Bryce, MacLaren, & O'Gorman, 2013; Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Salazar, 2012). In the ancestral context, this is not so much *difference* as a felt *tension* between subjective proximity and historico-spatial distance experienced by professional practitioners and, based on their accounts, by ancestral tourists themselves.

This tension is, of course, also related to the notion of nostalgia and emotion evoked by tourism suppliers and experienced by tourism consumers. It may be determined by producing a 'preordained' discourse of place that is 'familiar' only through textual reproduction. Frow (1991: 125) identified this reproduction as "a form of knowledge that can be recognized in and has a greater force than the appearances of the world" or indeed the socio-historical reality of the destination itself.

Travel to reengage with individual or group ancestry is not limited to the Scottish context, with motivations to reengage with former 'homelands' existing in various global Diasporas (Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Jacobson, 2002; Kwek, Wang, & Weaver, 2014). McCain and Ray (2003) note 'legacy' tourists as those with a direct cultural or ancestral connections with particular destinations. Their motivation to visit is likened in heroic or quasi-religious terms to a 'quest' or 'crusade' by Basu (2005) who favours the term 'roots tourism'. Other authors identify the transition from desk-based ancestral research to related tourist consumption as 'genealogy tourism' (Santos & Yan, 2010; Savolainen, 1995; Yakel, 2004). In this paper, 'ancestral tourism' is adhered to as a superordinate term, conceived of as an embodied outcome of subjectively felt nostalgia and longing for a 'homeland' spatially and temporally at remove from Diaspora communities (Alexander, Bryce, & Murdy, 2017).

'Highlandisation'; invented tradition and the 'authentically' imagined past

Remembering one's cultural heritage or national roots is an often-febrile mixture of the search for historical verisimilitude and wishful thinking, and is a relatively recent historical phenomenon often associated with the European Enlightenment and 'Modernity' (Anderson, 2006; Mee, 2007; Rigney, 2001; Smith, 2008). Scotland is a small Northern European nation of c.5 million inhabitants and was one of Europe's oldest independent states prior to the Acts of Union with England, creating Great Britain in 1707. Scotland maintains and projects powerful heritage signifiers, evoking images of a 'timeless' Celtic culture, rooted to the land (McCrone, Morris, & Kiely, 1995).

The opportunities offered by Britain's expanding colonial empire and economic shifts in the Highlands¹ provided the necessary conditions for large-scale emigration from Scotland from the late 18th to mid-20th centuries. Around 60,000 Lowlanders between 1701 and 1780, and 10,000 Highlanders between 1768 and 1775, left Scotland largely for British North America (later

¹ Broadly understood as the area above the geological 'highland fault line' which separates the more populous and industrial central belt and more remote northern parts of Scotland.

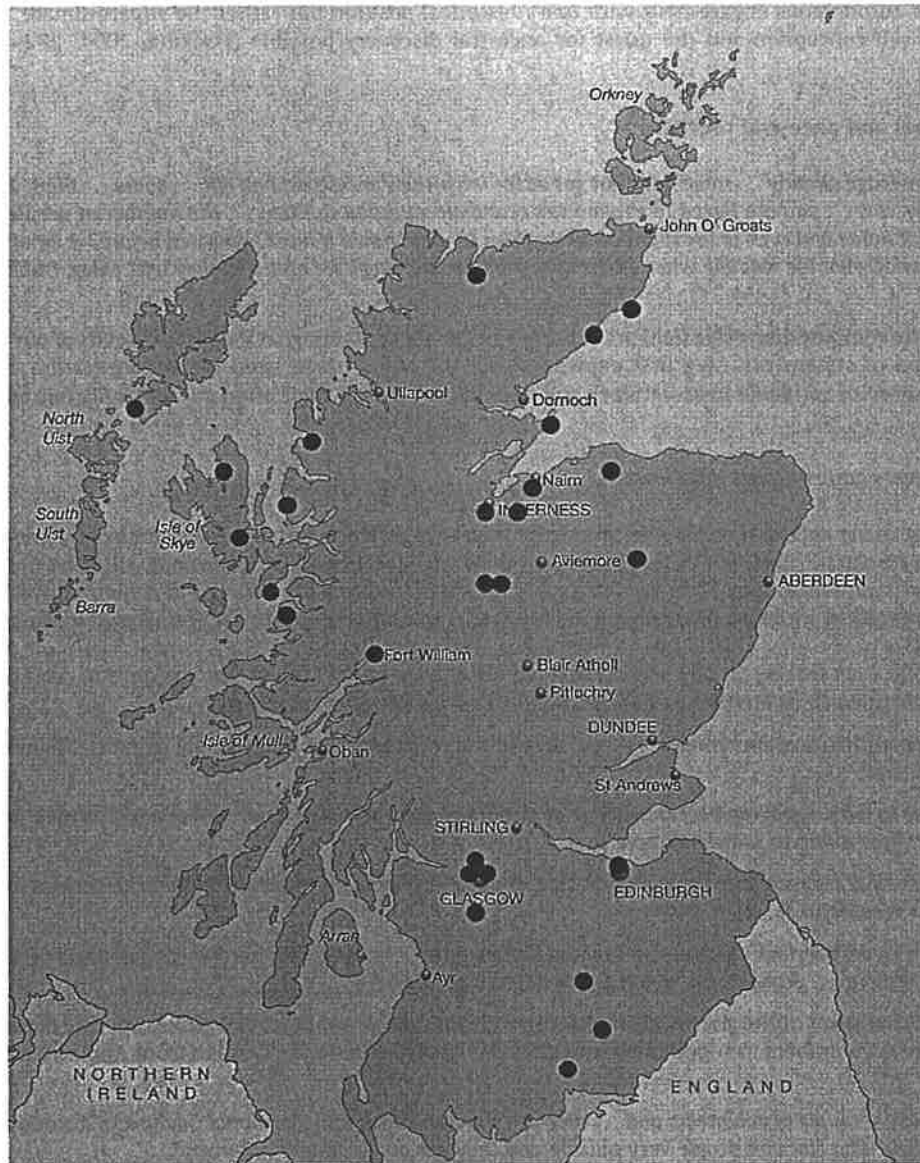


Fig. 1. Research sites in Scotland.

Analysis is based on illustrative quotes from our research sites and organised around two existing (object based and existential authentication) and one emergent (of the 'authentically' imagined past) themes. Foucauldian notions of discourse and subjectivity are used, not so much as a 'method', but as a particular set of *attitudes* towards the data. It is necessary to take a 'historicist' approach in the Foucauldian sense, which seeks to conceive of 'the now' as an artefact of a history about to be written. Foucault's (1989a: 182) archaeological metaphor invites analysis based on lateral and oblique relations among discursive objects within which we venture to conceive of as layers of historical 'sediment' (Foucault, 1989a). Furthermore, as Rouse (1994: 93) explains, the emphasis of this Foucauldian approach is not intrinsically on the empirical veracity of particular statements and the bodies of knowledge to which they adhere, but the "epistemic context within which those bodies of knowledge became intelligible and authoritative".

This approach necessarily leads us to analyse our data as the articulation of both practitioners' and tourists' encounters with their own subject positions as events filtered through and made possible by the particular historical conditions necessitating emigration and contemporary cultural and economic circumstances enabling return. In other words, the notion of existentialism, insofar as it is understood to denote the quest for authenticity by the individual subject amidst the dislocation of modernity, are present in all three modes of authentication we discuss below. Yet, while acknowledging this desire, we return to the notion that none of its forms can be conceived of or articulated through, in this case ancestral tourism con-

What this indicates on the one hand is that the active participation of tourists in, as much as practicable, 'pre-authenticating' who their ancestors were, where they came from, when and why they left is expected and *required* by heritage practitioners in order for them to fully engage professionally. On the other hand, there is a sense that the drive to optimize tourists' experience *as consumers* may push practitioners to either offer them a version of what *might* be useful, or to rush through an exercise, which would, ideally, benefit from more time and focus. This led us to reflect on the significance of Baudrillard's (1998: 151–152) notion of 'free time'. In this conceptualisation, supposed 'free' time needs to be purchased in order to be consumed. These encounters suggest that it is not simply tourists as consumers who are subject to this tension, but heritage practitioners themselves, increasingly aware of and subject to often ethically disfiguring pressures to modify established professional practise for commercial need (Pollock & Sharp, 2007).

'There isn't an Artefact for Every Family but Hopefully there is Something': Existentially authenticated experience

Often less formal authentication, in the form of reproduced versions of place, of a wider and looser sense of connection with cultural heritage is sought (Bryce et al., 2015; Ryan & Gu, 2010). Yet it would be simplistic to claim an absolute boundary between these theorized forms in practitioners' experience of dealing with ancestral tourists. Instead, we noted a 'transition' between the two, typified, for example by Katey at the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) Culloiden Battlefield Visitor Centre:

"You get the group who identify with the idea of Culloiden and want to find out where their family would have stood at the battle based on their own name or perhaps even grandparents' name".

Here we see the more abstract identification with ideas of places and events with which tourists may identify, such as sharing a surname with someone in the battle. Yet this experience is produced by professional reassurance at a reconstructed heritage site. Such a search for existential authentication may be weighted towards partial notions of ancestral connection; disregarding the complexity of the events the site might represent (Horne, 1986; Pollock & Sharp, 2007). This provokes challenges to curators charged with producing a full historical interpretation. These may likely be absorbed and diverted somewhat or in total by large national or civic organisations like NTS and National Museums of Scotland (NMS) with outward facing, public remits, where David (NMS) stated firmly:

"We make it clear ... that we really can't answer genealogical enquiries and so [ancestral tourists] seem to know that. We can show them the broader narrative, the broader context for their ancestors, the way they lived, worked and died".

Here we see the traditional distance between curator and tourist maintained in national institutions. However, much of our research took us to smaller, community based museums and heritage sites where curatorial, guiding, managerial and even retailing responsibilities were conflated because of both scale and lack of funding. Again, this mandated a consumer-facing role in which previously hierarchical divisions may dissolve. Once again, the demand for 'authentication' as a process, in existential terms this time, presents both opportunities and challenges for staff (Chhabra, 2008). For example, one participant (name and institution withheld) related:

"... some [tourists] are not even sure they are connected to [the area], but they have a family story that they are maybe from Scotland".

While Rachel at the Highland Folk Museum related encounters where ancestral tourists asked:

"... 'have you heard of this graveyard or name?' ... because Gaelic names change so much so they might have a name and it just does not mean anything to them and they cannot find it on a modern map so they are wondering do we know where this was".

Once again professional practice is adapted to respond to the particular needs of ancestral tourists to not simply 'gaze' at heritage but to seek active authentication of connection. This can be stimulated in part by opportunities presented by object-based evidence of one family to construct and authenticate wider 'existential' stories of belonging for tourists with perhaps less defined connections to place. As Gordon from Applecross Heritage Centre related:

"[They were] a very successful family in terms of academia and business here in Applecross with descendants all over the world. So you can allow people who maybe are not directly connected ... to see the sort of importance that their ancestors may have placed upon education or business here and what sort of life people had here 100/120 years ago, so there is not an artefact for every family but hopefully there is something which indicates what their families lived like".

Similarly, Ewen at Clan Macpherson Museum, Newtonmore, saw the value in 'compensating' ancestral tourists for whom object-based authentication was not possible with a sense of 'existential' connection, in this case, to clan identity:

"The Diapsora covers people, Macpherson people, who have gone overseas ... some have done pretty well and some of them are quite ordinary folk but nevertheless, there is still a record here of where and how their ancestors lived".

This would seem to reinforce Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1998) contention that tourism's commercializing effect on museums and museums' status as primary markers of destinations' heritage identity are mutually reinforcing elements, through the possibilities of use and appropriation' of the same discursive formation (Foucault, 1989a: 201).

Here, we see not so much a desire amongst professionals to help ancestral tourists to consume or co-create connections to a lost homeland through object-based or existential authentication but, rather to negotiate the encounter of the 'authentically imagined' Scotland with the existing place and culture. Such projections onto the historical and contemporary actualities of 'place' recalls the post-facto reconstruction and modification of 'reality' (Foucault, 1989b) and the 'invention of tradition' (Trevor-Roper, 1983). It is the transformation of a destination into a land of origins and ancient provenance *by* and *for* this section of ancestral tourism demand. Such a conceptualisation depends on the existence of a market with historical lived experience of the *idea* of a specific ancestral destination.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper approached and contributed to the literature on 'authenticity', both from historicist and process-related perspectives. It accepted the value and validity of the already well-rehearsed notions of object-based and existential authenticity and of subsequent interventions which doubt the utility of attempts to arrive at absolute assurance of 'the authentic' in a largely commercial, socially subjective sphere such as Tourism (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). However, it interrogated the very notion of 'authenticity' as an object of desire, or will-to-knowledge, as a historically contingent 'positivity' in discourse (Foucault, 1989b). If, as Foucault (1981) argued, discourse is productive of knowledge in a historically mobile sense and institutions and institutional practice respond and adapt accordingly, then we can conceive of 'authentication' as a 'process' as well as a 'value'.

Using extant literature and the data gathered, we argued that ancestral tourism shows particular characteristics that distinguish it from other varieties of heritage consumption. These lie in the personal or collective attachments and associations ancestral tourists have with the destination as a place of memory, return and even 'belonging'. These create often more intimate relationships with the destination than perhaps the more abstract notions of consuming place through the desire for 'difference' or 'exotic escape'. Moreover, the fact that versions of long-lost 'homelands' are maintained, reproduced and inevitably adapted, over centuries in the Scottish case, within diaspora communities means that the relationship between ancestral tourist and the place of return are inevitably more complex than in standard heritage tourism markets. The object of this research was to explore the particular consequences of this market's desire for authentication of their links with a 'homeland', real or imagined, alongside the ethics and practice of those professionals and volunteers charged with maintaining the integrity of national and regional cultural heritage. These accounts of practitioners at heritage sites across Scotland demonstrate that ancestral tourists pre-authenticate their claims to belonging within the place of return in three ways.

The first is through the object-based contribution to the process of authentication given the provision of family records or artefacts maintained in the diaspora or publically available online, thereby enabling collaborative co-creation of experience at heritage sites. While research on the role tourists have in co-creating experiences is not new (see Mossberg, 2007), to date research has focussed mainly on the time and effort spent by tourists before, during and after vacations and how these resources contribute to perceptions of experience value (e.g. Prebensen & Foss, 2010; Prebensen, Vittersø, & Dahl, 2013). Our research reveals a highly personalised form of co-created experience, which is unique to each visitor. The second is the existential authentication produced by tourists and professionals where a sense of verifiable collective belonging is the evident outcome, but where potentially ethically problematic drives to 'compensate' tourists who have been disappointed by lack of more object-based associations was also apparent.

The third perhaps most closely reflects the discursive divergence between 'Scotlands' produced at 'home' and those in the diaspora. Here we see an empirical example of Cohen and Cohen's (2012) 'hot' authenticity, stoked in the invented traditions and origin myths of the diaspora (Bruner, 1994) clashing with the 'cool' authenticity of Scotland's heritage sector. We contribute to extant literature on processual authenticity in tourism by drawing attention to the pressure that can be experienced by those 'who authenticate' (Wall & Xie, 2005). In our study providers were not concerned with how to stage an experience to provide authentication of a place which meets the perceived needs of particular tourist segments (Daugstad & Kirchengast, 2013; Frisvoll, 2013). Authentication, in our research takes place at a granular level as each individual tourist's family history requires unpicking and reconstructed in such a fashion that provides some kind of satisfactory ancestral tourism experience.

In relation to this, we reveal the diverse range of responses that providers have to the authenticity negotiation process. Some providers attempt to compensate visitors who arrive with loose affiliations to Scotland by offering existential connections with a region. Other providers feel duty bound to engage in 'myth busting' with visitors whose knowledge of their ancestral heritage is generated through popular culture. We thus observe the profound sense of responsibility felt by some providers towards their visitors and who wish to avoid disappointing them, even if this meant turning a blind eye towards dubious genealogical research.

This need not, however, be a zero sum game for practitioners when they attempt to take seriously imagined pasts as historical artefacts themselves or as versions of identity developed elsewhere, ostensibly sharing the core referent of the 'home' destination. There is scope for practitioners to respond through the sensitive business of working with this section of the market to gently steer tourists towards that which is empirically verifiable whilst acknowledging the historical provenance of 'imagined' ancestral narratives. What is vital, however, is the recognition that all three of these *produced* authentications require the kind of intimate, empathetic collaboration of tourist and practitioner and the mutual identification with the *aspi-*

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