

Tourism Social Science Series

Volume 24

**Authenticity & Tourism: Materialities,
Perceptions, Experiences**

Tourism Social Science Series

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Authenticity & Tourism: Materialities, Perceptions, Experiences

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This volume is dedicated to Professor Daniel Knudsen, our friend, our
mentor, our favorite philosopher.

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Preface

October 2016. I am standing on a train platform in Bolzano-Bozen, in the heart of South Tyrol and gateway to the Italian Dolomites, having just spent three days at the “Authenticity & Tourism” workshop. Enjoying the ambiance of the variety of languages that surrounded me on that platform, an animated voice with familiar accent caught my ear: *Americans!* In most instances I would keep to myself, but hearing them mention “the folks back in Kentucky” drew me closer and I felt compelled to say hello and comment on the small world – me born and raised in southern Indiana, United States, running into people from the “Bluegrass” state in Italy.

When asked why I was in Bolzano, I said simply, “a conference”, hoping not to have to talk about authenticity anymore, at least for a few days anyway.

Immediately, though, they asked for further details; “oh, well, um, on authenticity in tourism,” I said.

“Oh! Really!,” replied one man.

“That sounds interesting!,” exclaimed his companion.

Then, the first man pushed, “like what about authenticity?”, to which I responded, “well, the big question that is debated in my area of research is whether authenticity matters to tourists.”

Thinking, hoping, this would sum it up and the train would arrive already. It, of course, only opened the can of worms

“Of course. Of course, it matters! It matters so much when *I’m* traveling”, he started to explain.

I could not help myself, “oh yeah. So what types of things are you looking for when you travel? Authenticity in what sense?”

The man, and his two companions, paused for a moment of thinking before they started to mumble and get a bit tongue-tied, finally saying, “well, um, you know ... the culture, stuff like that”, as another spoke up, “right, the places and the people, and...”, interrupted by another, “yeah, yeah, like that and history....”

Just then the train pulled into the station and through the noise and rush to get on board and find our seats, I did not see them again, which was fine. I was not especially in the mood to spend the next four hours to Munich discussing the issue (the past three days had been enough). As I settled into my seat, I jotted down notes on the encounter and chuckled. *Does authenticity matter?* Of course it does, but in ways no one has been able to fully pin down, not even the tourists who are out there searching for it. Perhaps that is what makes it so interesting for academics and for tourists – the chase.

This book has been inspired not by this moment alone, but innumerable moments like this: encounters with tourists through research, with fellow tourists while on holiday, and with myself reflexively questioning what I hope to find (and why I am sometimes disappointed with the reality). With a decade of research on the topic, I am only slightly further along in understanding this elusive concept, but just as eager to keep chasing it.

Jillian M. Rickly