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Objective Authenticity in Cultural Tourism: Thinking the Unthinkable

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Abstract : Tourism studies carried out on the 'Experience Economy' (Pine and Gilmore 1999) and on 'Authenticity' (Pine and Gilmore 2007) are mostly founded on a subjectivist epistemology. In this article it is argued that an objectivist approach offers a valuable counterpart. This approach will be developed on the basis of the ideas of Kruithof (1994) who proposes a switch to a realistic epistemology. Musschenga (1994) who analyses the concept of intrinsic quality and Apostel (1994) who pleads for an objective framework of moral obligations. Within this objectivistic oriented line of thought it is possible to qualify objectively the value of built heritage in order to contribute to the maintenance and the development of the material authenticity of the cultural tourism supply on the one, and to the contribution of real content for cultural tourism experiences on the other hand.

Key words: Cultural tourism, Authenticity, Subjectivity, Objectivity, Intrinsic values, Ethics.

Manuscript Text

The global advance of free market thinking has also led to increasingly radical statements in the world of art and culture about how to deal with the remnants of art and culture from the past. 'Market or Die' often seems to be the be all and end all, but the slogan 'conservation through development' expresses a more conscientious point of view. This approach that stresses conservation begs the question of *how* the remnants of art and culture can be both developed and conserved in the *correct* fashion and, last but not least, with the necessary focus on authenticity.

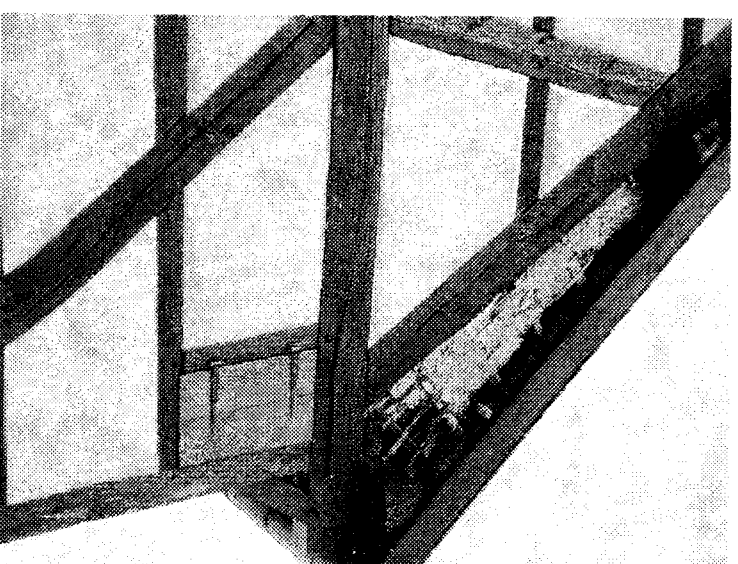


Figure 1 : Restoration and conservation side by side.

Dematerialisation

The question of authenticity surrounding matter and objects is not one that Pine and Gilmore, the authors of the bestseller titled 'The Experience Economy' (1999), explore in their follow-up piece 'Authenticity' (2007). According to Pine and Gilmore, authenticity should not be ascribed to matter and the only thing to stand central should be the subjective experience of authenticity at a cultural tourist attraction for example. As a matter of fact, within the context of the 'Experience Economy', authenticity is mainly understood as 'the experience of authenticity' by many tourism researchers. As a result, the notion of authenticity is removed from the world of the object and placed into the world of the subject where it is related to the sincerity of the individual (Boswijk et al. 2005). The object, the material and the product all disappear from view in favour of the psychological and the

personal perception of the tourist subject. This process is called 'dematerialization'. Within this line of thought, value becomes a function of 'psychological self-determination', i.e. which means that the individual decides what is valuable in his or her life. Therefore, it can be postulated that the individual also decides what is authentic in his or her life, i.e. what the subject experiences as authentic (Boswijk et al. 2005). This article offers a counterbalance to this subjectivism: a phenomenon with which many in the world of arts and culture management feel ill at ease. We will show how authenticity can be approached in an objective manner and how the role of the expert changes with this approach, both when developing and presenting the tourist product and when knowledge is transferred during education on cultural tourism. Built heritage will be the main focus of a case study because the way monuments are handled perfectly illustrates the tension between authenticity and experience.

Knowing the Truth

There can be no doubt about the possibility of an objective approach to reality, or so says Cohen in his next explanation about knowing the truth: 'True' or 'False' always relates to the assessing subject's opinion of an object under evaluation. It comes from a position of knowledge, not from the subject's state of being. Does my opinion reflect that object's true nature? Or does my judgement say more about the judging subject, that is to say me, than about the object itself? The core of scientific relativism lies in the thought that the former statement is not only *mostly*, but *always* the case. If an opinion of mine were to correspond with what is actually true of the object under assessment, is that coincidence? If it were, we would be ignorant of the fact. Against this opinion on whatever claim of truth, including those made by science, it must be *formally* suggested that we are cutting off our nose to spite our face. This opinion is then the only one to be exempt from the subjective tint to which any other opinion would inevitably be subject.' (Cohen 2010: 246) We can indeed try within a set of specific procedures and mentalities embodied in mathematics, experimentation, precision measurement and logic to establish valid relationships between the assessing subject and assessed object in order to arrive at true judgements about the nature of things in an ever-ongoing enterprise.

Objectivity versus Subjectivity

At the end of the previous millennium, questions about objectivity versus subjectivity, whether intrinsic values, issues about values or questions about ethical procedures in relation to nature and environmental issues, stood at the heart of the philosophical debate in Belgium. These kinds of questions can be linked directly to cultural-historical objects and therefore fit within the framework of research into experiences of cultural tourism. The philosopher Kruthof (1994) posits that, within the subjectivist axiology, values do not belong to the intrinsic qualities of material or mathematical objects and so have no universal status. Values exist only by the grace of the assessing subject that ascribes them to the objects: 'An object has qualities that motivate us to value it, but the value aspect itself is created solely by the attitude of that person who finds the subject valuable.' (Kruthof 1994: 15) In some environmental philosophies, man is the measure of all things and without people, the ecosystem has no value. Art and culture within this line of reasoning have as much value as a cultural tourist, for example, experiences and assigns. Everything revolves around the valorising act of the subject, the person. In the objectivist point of view, this extremism is rejected and the reference point for the value lies in the selfsame characteristics of the data observed. The value of the object is determined by the qualities with which the subject comes into contact. Kruthof explains that he has great difficulty with both theories as he believes that the phenomenon of appreciation is a relationship between a subject and an object and therefore concerns the unit of an act and an object. He rejects extreme objectivism because it reduces the valuing subject's role too strongly. He argues against extreme subjectivism saying that the qualities of the object to be valued have a much greater influence on the content of the opinion than this theory recognises. Those who support these extremes argue an anti-dialectic approach and try to reduce the object to the subject or the subject to the object. Walking the middle way in line with the *in medio virtus* school of thought is a tricky affair as 'He who does not wish to yield to such a dogmatism must be prepared to attempt a difficult tightrope walk, as he is constantly threatened with falling into either the objectivist or the subjectivist abyss'. (Kruthof 1994: 16) The title of this article must be read in this context, not as an obligation to only view (cultural tourist)

attractions from an objectivist point of view from now on, but, in a time in which subjectivism is a shared point of view among most tourism researchers, to add back the objectivist take and research what the delicate interaction between the two can deliver (Melkert and Vos 2010).

Discovering the Properties of Objects

How does Kruthof describe this interaction between objectivism and subjectivism? The key word here is empiricism. The subject discovers and recognises the object's qualities. The valuation that follows can then be the result of the qualities discovered and/or recognised. This stands alongside the possibility that the subject ascribes, determines and chooses the values, and the situation in which the subject is set in motion to view something as valuable because of a context. Kruthof however warns against a unilateral subjectivist approach here: 'The idea of what is valuable includes a great deal more than the value detected by a valorising being. Man discovers but a part of something's value. He experiences time and time again that valid things exist, of which the value had not been discovered by someone beforehand. (Kruthof 1994: 23) The value forms as it were an unlimited area whereby the discovery of ever new subfields by ever different subjects is an unending, cumulative and iterative process. That is why, according to Kruthof, the term 'to discover' best expresses the subject's dependence from the object during this valuation. In order to exclude the valorising subject from making a mistake or incorrect assessment in assigning a value, support, according to Kruthof, can only be found in the object itself. Opinions that are based solely on the subject cannot exclude a subjective arbitrariness. Or in other words: a valuation can only be of use if it refers to the intrinsic characteristics of the object to be valued. And so it becomes essential to notice the object's characteristics in detail. This is where it becomes of interest to people working in (cultural) tourism education as Kruthof states: 'The greater the knowledge of an object, the more the consensus about the object's value increases'. (Kruthof 1994: 26) A negative value judgement often seems to point to a lack of knowledge of the object's characteristics. As a consequence: 'Knowledge of the object is not an incidental requirement to a value judgement, but an indispensable condition. (Kruthof 1994: 26) An educator may then happily conclude that a proper education does indeed help

Kruthof's argument teaches us that, when dealing with cultural tourist objects, its characteristics need to be properly researched and recorded before a value can be assigned. One of the object's values open for discovery is its authenticity. This method of working is nothing new. It has been applied to the preservation of monuments and historic buildings since its inception during the French Revolution. It is certainly the case that in the light of the objectivism versus subjectivism debate that this (antiquated) way of working can once again be examined closely and viewed as something positive. An interesting connection can simultaneously be made with cultural tourism research. After all, international market research within the framework of ATLAS's (Association of Tourism and Leisure Education) Cultural Tourism Research Project has shown that the culture seeker is highly educated and highly appreciates the authenticity of the cultural-historic heritage (Munsters 2001).

The Intrinsic Values of Objects

The question is whether authenticity is seen as an intrinsic value of the cultural-historic heritage, and whether this impacts on the way authenticity is handled in the day-to-day practice of cultural tourism and cultural tourism research. Musschenga has researched the intrinsic value of natural heritage. This value has been used as an intellectual weapon in the fight against anthropocentrism that environmental philosophers blame for the damage done to nature and the environment. It must moreover serve as the basis for measures to preserve nature and the environment, even if they go against other human interests. Musschenga discerns three definitions of intrinsic value. The first definition is synonymous with non-instrumental value: 'an object has intrinsic value if it is a goal unto itself'. (Musschenga 1994: 114) In the second definition, the term refers to the moral value that an object has as a result of its intrinsic qualities: 'If something has intrinsic value, it is good at all times, everywhere and for everyone; in short universally good. (...) The intrinsic qualities of an object are its non-relational qualities'. (Musschenga 1994: 114-115) In the third definition, the concept corresponds with that of the objective values. On further consideration, these approaches offer no support in searching for the answer to the question of how we should properly deal with material inheritances: 'The observation that

something has intrinsic value has no moral relevance in itself. Moral relevance arises only within the framework of an ethical theory of obligation.

However, even without a theory of moral obligations, focusing on intrinsic value as a counterweight to damage caused by humans has quite clearly had a positive effect on nature and cultural preservation. Introducing zoning to protect cultural heritage from the pressure of too many visitors is a tactic that cultural tourism has used for quite a while now. Examples include building a replica of the Lascaux Caves to replace a visit to the real caves, allowing a limited number of visitors per unit of time to the Sistine Chapel in Rome and visitors being obligated to wear slippers on the parquet floors at the Chantilly castle in France. These are all measures taken by cultural guardians where the cultural tourist product is suffering under the overwhelming stream of visitors and, as such, these measures correspond to the idea of what cultural tourism studies call 'visitor management' (Munster 2007).

An Objective Value Ethic

Regardless of whether values are intrinsic or not, the search for answers to the demand for an ethically responsible way to handle authenticity is a relevant one. It would also be of interest were this ethic also to be objective as we could then discuss matters based on evidence instead of on the basis of a subjective experience. Research by Apostel (1994) into an objective value ethic offers a reason to move in this direction.

According to Apostel, world views determine ethics. 'What we as ethical actors think about human nature, about historical trends, about the nature of reality, goes a long way in determining what we experience as good or bad, forbidden or obligatory, right or wrong.' (Apostel 1994: 7) The problem is that we have fragmented human, social, historical and natural views or none at all. How are we then ever to arrive at an ethic? Apostel puts forward that an objective world of ethical facts also exists in the objective world of objects and processes. He speaks here of ethical realism: 'He who is an ethical realist believes that true ethical facts exist independent of any way of thinking. For example the cruelty of pointlessly torturing a child or the unjust distribution of possessions' (Apostel 1994: 9) These ethical facts

are determined by an independence of (our) conscience. 'Without people there are no concepts or terms, but without people we still have what is understood through these concepts and what is indicated through these terms' (Apostel 1994: 9) According to Apostel, ethical truth is additionally based on an agreement with reality: 'Therefore opinions can be expressed that correctly describe these ethical facts. This elucidates the claim of ethical judgement to truth and explains them: ethical judgements are true if they correspond with ethical facts and are false if they do not.' (Apostel 1994: 10) Ethics develop analogously to science and ethics progress, just as science does. The last statement corresponds with Cohen's claims earlier in this work. Ethical facts are special in that they invoke emotions and desires, in stark contrast to scientific facts.

That authenticity therefore falls under 'ethical facts' can be defended by the observation that people desire authenticity and take pleasure from it. So the cultural tourist looks for authenticity as an experience that he can then recount elatedly. It also explains the indignation invoked by the destruction of art, architecture and historical buildings through the agency of such phenomena as mass tourism. It is one of the reasons for taking authenticity as a quality of matter and objects seriously, given the fact that damaging or counterfeiting these things results in a similar chain of condemnatory reactions. The Venice Charter, drawn up during a meeting of the *International Council on Monuments and Sites* (ICOMOS) in 1964, gives this condemnation a voice. This international charter articulates the philosophy that determines how to handle the restoration and conservation of valuable buildings and monuments (cultural heritage). It rejects reconstructions and states that new sections of old buildings should be recognisable as new.

Restoration Ethics

Because the question of proper handling in this case refers to handling historical buildings in particular, it may be wise to consult both the first person to invent a restoration practice, the French architect Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814 - 1879) and an English champion of the preservation of monuments and historic buildings, William Morris (1834 - 1886). The statement 'To restore an edifice means neither to maintain

restore De Oude Stroopkokerij. The architect's experience with similar projects previously, his knowledge of the region's history of construction and his study of historical examples that include open air museums such as the Koninklijk Domein Bokrijk in Belgium, helped this architect make the right choices. Because the property is not the type of building that Morris would elect to leave untouched, the actions taken during the restoration are easy to justify.

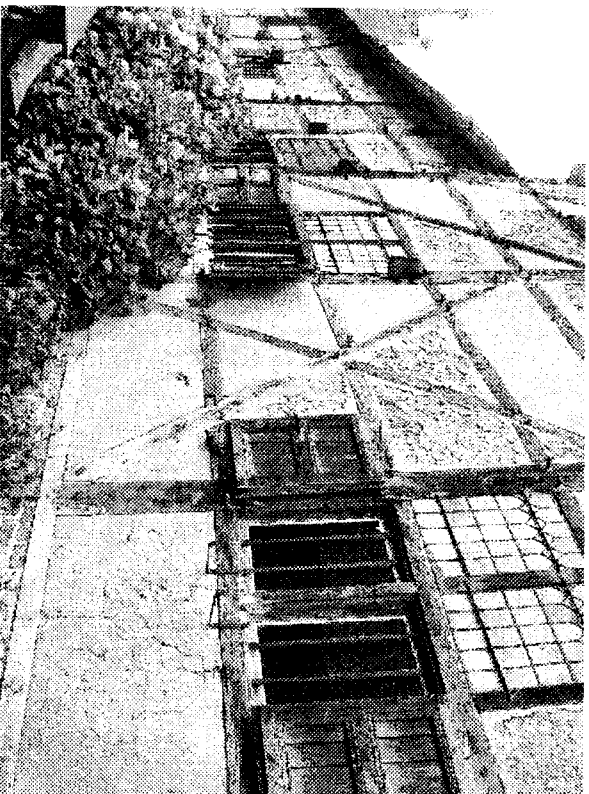


Figure 3 : Historic example in Bokrijk.

The owner based his decisions chiefly on the investigation into the premises history. Construction historians can, once an investigation into the history of a construction has been performed, tell a lot about the creation and age of a building. They also have knowledge about materials and work methods that are typical of certain periods in time. They will firstly start working empirically and try to learn as much as possible from the structure and materialisation of the building in question: that is to say the manner in which the building was created and the materials which were used. Next they will place the information obtained in this way next to details from primary sources such as deeds of purchase or sale and constructional drawings and historical photos found in archives. They will then consult

secondary sources: studies on the history of the inhabitants and users, the village or the city where the building stands and the surrounding region. They will use all this information to create a detailed image of the building's creation, its use throughout time and the changes that have been effected over the course of the years. In short, they map out the building's biography. If construction historians are consulted at an early stage, they can help adapt the plans to the situation that history has produced, and maintain or even improve the existing quality. Thus the entrepreneur learns how to arrive at certain Unique Selling Propositions (USPs) derived from the nature of the building that he wishes to transform. He can meet with the construction historian beforehand to discuss the nature and scope of the research, report and recommendations. Using the knowledge gleaned from the construction history report, the architect can work with the owner to further elaborate on the owner's design and structural requirements. The building's history and individuality have a role to play right from the very beginning, and can be worked into the plans. Once the transformation is complete they also contribute to the building's look and feel. The additional information can also be used to give shape to what the catering business has to offer. It could result in interesting dishes on the menu or a description in the guestbook, and old prints and photos could decorate the establishment in a very fitting way. This particular entrepreneur had in his possession a veritable treasure chest of objects the family had collected over the course of just under two hundred years and so needed to invest very little effort in finding appropriate items. Furthermore, it may be wise to form an alliance with local historians and then search together for appropriate items for the location or region, and then collect them together over time and add them to the interior.

We therefore need to make sure the experts are able to ensure the maintenance and management of the material remnants and the supply of objective information on which the tourist's experience can be based. If the experts' expertise and enthusiasm can be activated by the interests of tourists, fascinating stories about the object of their studies will arise of their own accord. And if the experts are also given the opportunity to work on maintenance and management, the tourists benefit from the good condition of the corresponding buildings and artefacts as part of the deal. This is well and truly an offer that can't be beat

Ethics and Economy

In addition to the moral obligation to properly handle the material side of the art and culture that drives cultural tourism, there is also an economic reason. The historical identity of the art and culture is one of the inherent USPs that can be used as a distinguishing factor to market the cultural tourist attraction (Munsters 2007). Because such institutions as the Tourist Information Office have disseminated this identity for many years, and the public therefore has a preconceived set of expectations about said identity, we do not have to spend a great deal of money to delineate a clear image. It is a well-known marketing fact that if expectations are properly met on the spot, then customer satisfaction will be high. And so on the one hand we must look closely at which image is presented when attracting visitors and on the other we must work on maintaining the quality of the supply so that expectations are properly met. After all, a satisfied tourist just might return one day. Everyone working in cultural tourism therefore has a direct interest in making sure everything is and stays in proper working order.

Improving the Quality of the Cultural Tourist Product

Using Munster's model of the cultural tourism product (Munsters 2010), we can sketch an image of what consequences the above has for the cultural tourism supply: the core product, and for any other additional tourist products.

As concerns the core product, we can determine that those who operate monuments, museums, historical routes and cultural theme parks can benefit from the contribution of experts. Happily, this knowledge is transferred often and the contact between operator and expert proves long-lasting. Even at folk festivals, displays and events, a similar sort of expert contribution can contribute to the quality of the final product. The need for expert contribution to art exhibitions, art events and art festivals has always been placed beyond any doubt.

There is still a great deal of profit to be made from any additional product where culture is a component of a hotel and catering industry product. This is the case with historical establishments such as monasteries, castles or country estates that have been redesignated as restaurants or

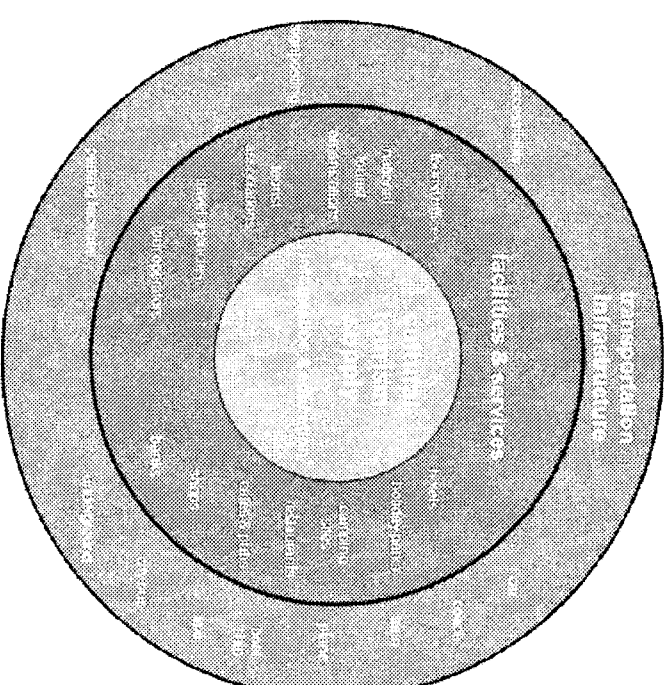


Figure 4 : The cultural tourism product.

hotels, old farms in the regional style offering bed and breakfast, and monumental residences that have been turned into holiday homes or apartments (Munsters and Freund de Klumbis 2005). It is also for this reason that this article has chosen a case study from the hotel and catering industry as best practice.

Education's Role

With cultural tourism education, it is important to pay attention to the question of how to promote a proper attitude toward the material remnants of art and culture from the past as well as the proper way to handle them amongst parties involved in cultural tourism - that is to say curators and volunteers, companies, visitors, inhabitants and policy makers. Courses on tourism are advised to offer their students a module in cultural history and/or art history at the very least, and in the best case scenario, the city and region's history. But then again, in cultural and art-based education a course

in cultural entrepreneurship should also be offered which breeds understanding for operational management in cultural tourism (Munsters 2007). Educational courses that already provide this type of interdisciplinary approach are supported in their continuation by the objective approach described above. This way of thinking might perhaps stimulate other education developers to consider giving these subjects a structural place in the curriculum. That which is true for all entrepreneurs also applies to all those involved in this educational issue: the product is never finished.

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