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# Memorable tourist experiences in authentic Vicos, Peru

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## **Memorable Tourist Experiences in Authentic Vicos, Peru.**

**Miranda Cornelisse**

### **Abstract**

The desire for new experiences which are truly authentic and meaningful has become an important mainstream in the tourism industry and is in line with the increasing search for authentic experiences in the present-day experience economy. The discussion about what authenticity exactly is and what it means for the tourism industry continues however. This research focussed on which concept of authenticity in tourism literature is most connected with Gilmore and Pine's (2007) theory on the search for authenticity in the current experience economy. Especially with a view to the upcoming target market generation Y, this case study zoomed in on the memorable tourist experiences of several generation Y tourists from the Netherlands who visited the "authentic" Andean Quechua community in Vicos in Peru. The memorable tourist experiences were measured and the physical aspects of the concept of authenticity were discussed during in-depth interviews. This case study consequently measured the memorable tourist experiences of generation Y tourists in Vicos in order to determine which concept of authenticity in tourism literature is most connected with Gilmore and Pine's (2007) theory on the search for authenticity in the current experience economy, according to the perception of generation Y tourists.

**Keywords:** Authenticity in tourism, authenticity in community-based tourism, memorable tourist experiences

### **Introduction**

A tourist experience is not only affected by touchable products and experienced services, but also to the degree in which a specific experience is unforgettable and thus, *memorable*. 'Tourism is one of the pioneering examples of the experience economy as evidenced in earlier literatures back in the 1970s' (MacCannell, 1973; 1976; Dann, 1977; Cohen, 1979, cited in Hosany and Witham 2009:7). The tourist experience is always unique, emotionally charged and of high personal value, tourism offers '...an alternative experience of time' (Wang, 2000:116) and tourists are looking for sensational authentic experiences (MacCannell, 1976, cited in Hosany and Witham, 2009:7). The desire for new experiences which are truly authentic and meaningful has become an important mainstream in the tourism industry (Yeoman, 2008) which is in line with Pine and Gilmore's (1999 and 2007) theory of the experience economy, defined as an economy in which consumers are

looking for authentic, memorable experiences. Although this general search for authenticity may seem relatively easy, the discussion about the meaning of this concept in tourism literature continues.

Authenticity (see MacCannell 1973, Wang 1999, Chhabra 2008 among others) can be viewed from two different angles '...as genuineness or realness of artefacts or events and also as a human attribute signifying being one's true self or being true to one's essential nature' (Steiner and Reisinger, 2006 cited in Chhabra, 2010:795). Despite all debates about the meaning of authenticity for the tourism industry it is not really important how authenticity is viewed by others but by the tourists themselves. The essentialist concept of authenticity for example (Chhabra, 2010), a concept of authenticity which is related to museum usage, is not important to tourist experiences and with that to the *memorable* tourist experiences, according to Bruner (2005). Experiences which are unique and memorable have become important to the present-day experience economy. In contrast, Chhabra (2010) concluded that essentialist authenticity is definitely important for the upcoming target market generation Y, defined as people who were born between 1978 and 2000, and arguing that they prefer tourism products which have strong traces of essentialist authenticity. This essentialist concept of authenticity would in that case indeed be important for *memorable* tourist experiences, and therefore the present-day experience economy.

In order to determine what is meant exactly by authenticity in connection with Pine and Gilmore's (1999,2007), theory on the search for authenticity within the experience economy Kim (*et al*, 2010) developed a scale to measure Memorable Tourist Experiences (MTEs). This reliable measurement scale assists in understanding the concept of authenticity in especially the field of tourism and may help improve the effective management of tourist experiences

In view of the debate about the meaning of authenticity in tourism literature (Wang, 1999 and Chhabra, 2010) and the development of a scale to measure MTEs this case study was concerned with the MTEs of Dutch tourists who stayed in the Andean village Vicos in Peru and, how these MTEs relate to the concept of authenticity within the experience economy, as outlined above.

## **Tourist Experiences**

The tourist experience is a complex combination of especially subjective factors that shape the feelings and attitudes towards a tourist's visit: One part consists of consumer behaviours such as needs, wants and motivation while the other part consists of the destination related aspects such as imagery, accommodation, attraction, ambience and so on. Together with earlier experiences and factors such as climate and pollution, tourist experiences are influenced by many elements which can only be controlled partially by the tourism industry itself (Page and Connell, 2006), and previous studies have shown that many of these factors are not directly related to the acquisition of specific products or services (Mendes et al., 2010). The tourist experience is clearly related to satisfaction, and thus is a tourist experience '...a subjective mental state felt by participants' (Otto and Ritchie, 1996, cited in Mendes *et al.*, 2010:112). The experience is complex, it does not start at arrival, neither does it consist of separate elements nor does it end at the moment the actual trip ends:

While products are tangible and services intangible, experiences represent events that commit people in a particular manner and, as such, are memorable. While services end with the performance, the value of the experience is cognitively stored by the individual. The experience felt by visitors begins before arrival at a destination and ends with recollections of the experience and plans for future visits (Pine and Gilmore, 1999 in Mendes 2010:112).

It is that memorable experience which has become an important phenomenon in tourism and leisure; it creates a holistic and long lasting personal experience and indeed:

'...consumers are in search of experiences that 'dazzle their senses', 'engage them personally', 'touch their hearts' and 'stimulate their minds' (Schmitt, 1999), whilst indulging in '...fantasies, feelings and fun' (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982).om the Burning Man Festival in Nevada (Kozinets, 2002), to swimming with Dolphins (Curtin, 2006) and white water river rafting (Arnould and Price, 1993), people are in search of unique, memorable and extraordinary experiences"'(Hosany and Witham, 2009:4).

Pine and Gilmore (1999) argued that services in the field of business started to look like commodities due to technology, increasing competition and the increasing expectation of consumers. Business consequently needed to start creating unforgettable (satisfactory) experiences and providing these to their customers. A tourist experience in these days is consequently not only affected by products, services, but moreover by the degree to which the experience was unforgettable. Further, they mention in their later research (2007:13) how consumers determine the value of their paid experiences: 'People increasingly see the world in terms of real and fake, and want to buy something real from someone genuine, not a fake from some phony.' Authenticity in this context means everything that has not been developed for pure beneficial purposes, but rather is indeed genuine, unique or authentic.

People are thus increasingly looking for authentic experiences instead of manufactured ones. This search can be related to Maslow's (1943) self-actualisation concept in which people desire to meet a deeper meaning and finding a sense of worth, beyond material possessions. Experiences can help a person to move towards self-actualisation and thus develop themselves beyond goods and services. The desire for new experiences which are truly authentic and meaningful has become mainstream, more and more people are taking time to travel the world in an authentic way. 'This authentic experience is about avoiding areas and activities where there are many other tourists, indicating a desire to explore the untouched and unexposed' (Yeoman, 2008). Authenticity has turned into a valuable concept in tourism. In order to meet tourist desires and to be competitive, many tour operators consequently offer 'authentic' tours and holidays. However, what exactly is authenticity according to tourism literature?

### **Authenticity**

The original usage of the term authenticity originates from the museum '...where persons expert in such matters test whether objects of art are what they appear to be or are claimed to be, and therefore worth the price that is asked for them' (Trilling, 1972:93 cited in Wang, 1999:350). This mainly museum usage was expanded to tourism and was introduced by MacCannell in 1973. He introduced the concept of authenticity in tourism in combination with tourist motivations and tourist experiences.

Authenticity in tourism ‘...connotes traditional culture and origin, a sense of the genuine, the real or the unique’ (Sharpley, 1994:130 cited in Wang, 1999:351) and is nowadays often expressed in tourism products such as art, festivals, rituals, cuisine, dress or housing.

On the other hand, although the concept of authenticity is widely used, its vagueness has also been noted.. Wang (1999) concludes that the conventional concept of authenticity, which is related to the museum usage, could not always be related to tourist motivations or experiences in combination with visiting friends, beach holidays, nature tourism or personal hobbies such as shopping, hunting or sports. These tourism activities had nothing to do with MacCannell’s usage of the term, that is the objective , or conventional concept of authenticity. Wang argues that authenticity actually ‘...refers to the authenticity projected onto toured objects by tourists or tourism producers in terms of their imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, powers, etc.’” (Wang, 1999:352). In other words, authenticity within this concept is in fact symbolic instead of ‘genuine’ and is socially constructed rather than concerned with the establishing the origins of an object.

In addition to these two concepts, the objective and the constructed, Wang (1999) also created a third option. The first two concepts discussed above are both object-related and both ignore, more or less, the differences between tourist *experiences* and toured *objects*. A tourist experience can be defined as: ‘...one in which individuals feel themselves to be in touch with a ‘real’ world and with their ‘real’ selves.’ (Handler and Saxton, 1988:243 cited in Wang, 1999:351). Both the objective concept as the constructive concept of authenticity are object-related, while existential authenticity, Wang’s (1999) third option, is activity-related, and ‘...refers to a potential existential state of Being that is to be activated by tourist activities. [...] Existential authenticity can have nothing to do with the authenticity of toured objects ‘ (Wang, 1999:352). In other words, authenticity has nothing to do with the objective (museum usage) or the constructive (social construction) of a tourism attribute or product. It is all about the existential state of *being* which is to be activated *by* tourist activities. Brown (1996 also called it an ‘...authentically good time’ (cited in Wang, 1999:352) which is related to activities instead of objects.

According to Chhabra (2010) there are four discourses about authenticity: essentialist (Wang's objective authenticity); constructivist; negotiated and existentialist. The essentialist discourse treats authenticity as '...in the spirit of frozen heritage' (2010:795-796) and advocates among others cultural continuity by local communities. It states that authenticity is a tangible asset, a tourist quest for authenticity to escape from daily life, somewhere else in other cultures and in purer, simpler lifestyles (Chhabra, 2010). The constructivist ideology believes that authenticity is dictated by the tourists' perceptions of authenticity and advocates, among other things, consciously created pseudo-packages. Authenticity in this case is adapted to suit audience needs and a capitalist approach is pursued (Chhabra, 2010:795).

The negotiated ideology aims to find consensus between the other two ideologies of first, essentialist and constructivist: where authenticity can be sustained while adapting to the requirements of the market. The second negotiated ideology finds consensus between the existentialist and essentialist concepts, which results in theoplicity, in experienced authenticity through the combination of the three elements belief, action and place. In this theoplicity, objective and subjective experienced authenticity meet each other. The existentialist theoretical stream advocates optimizing experience, and within this theoplicity, cultural and social meanings are integrated in the meanings of physical objects. The second negotiated version thus advocates a pure subjective ideology in which subjective negotiation of meanings define authentic experiences (Chhabra, 2010). This discourse uses terms such as *self discovery* and *being true to yourself* and stands clearly for optimizing experiences.

The term authenticity can ultimately be viewed from two different angles '...as genuineness or realness of artefacts or events and also as a human attribute signifying being one's true self or being true to one's essential nature' (Steiner and Reisinger, 2006:299 cited in Chhabra, 2010). Chhabra concludes that the discussion about objective authenticity might be exhausted in academic literature, but the demand for objective authenticity still exists and will continue to prevail, especially among new generation Y (2010:805). As noted above, this refers to those born between 1978 and 2000 and will form the most significant emerging market as the

baby boomers transition to old age. This new generation desires authentic products to be essentially authentic instead of existentially allyauthentic. In other words 'This generation is keen on "time travel" experiences and does not desire authentic products to be changed which can provide a more entertaining experience' (Chhabra, 2010:805).

On the other hand, to create a desire among generation Y to visit authentic places, it is important to use the negotiated or constructed version of authenticity, where products are modified to maintain tourist attention, but keep strong traces of essentialist authenticity. Chhabra is convinced that generation Y, as soon as they are grown up, will form the biggest supporters of traditional authenticity (2010:807).

Bruner (2005) sees authenticity as something what has been socially constructed and therefore does not support either Chhabra's opinion on essentialist authenticity, or MacCannell's objective authenticity. Rather, he argues that it is not important whether a tourist experience as an artefact or event for tourists in general is authentic or not. Next to the essential question who determines whether something is authentic or not (2005:60) he rejects the entire idea of genuine authenticity in tourism:

Authenticity is a *projection* of tourists' own beliefs, expectations, preferences, stereotyped images, and consciousness onto toured objects (Bruner, 2001 cited in Wang, 1999:355).

Bruner consequently focuses on the creation of a new culture, one which has been developed for tourists and their expectations only. 'Performances for tourists arise, of course, from within the local cultural matrix, but all performances are 'new' in that the context, the audience, and the times are continually changing' (2005:5). He explains the existence of border zones which are located in an actual place in the world but have been created as a cultural imaginary or fantasy. These places are not showing real life cultures, but constructed theoretical ones. 'In the border zone each group knows its part in the touristic drama. It is like a hospital setting in which the patients are compliant, the nurses caring, the doctors knowledgeable, and the administrators efficient so the hospital works well as a system' (Bruner 2005:18). The border zone is not fixed and can exist anywhere; both locals and tourists take



account of the other in an ever shifting and evolving border zone of engagement (Bruner 2005). One example Bruner describes is the Mayers Ranch in Kenya where tourists can visit the Masai and drink tea on the Mayers' lawn. 'This site enacts a colonial drama of the savage pastoral Masaai and the genteel British'"(2005:33). Bruner's general experience is that these border zones are experienced as enjoyable by tourists (2005:60) so Yang and Wall (2009: 251) conclude that:

Although previous studies have raised debate about whether a cultural product modified for tourists can have real "authenticity", more recent studies have reported that tourists seem to appreciate staged performances and selling packaged cultural experiences does not necessarily undermine perceptions of authenticity.

Causes of this appreciation are the limited time of tourists, the wish to enjoy and relax during a trip, and the limited pre-existing knowledge of the visited culture. Tourists are often exposed to staged performances, but when these performances are done well, most tourists are satisfied with this staged authenticity and believe that they have had an authentic experience (2009:251). The researchers conclude that authenticity is shaped by local values, stereotypes, personal feelings, concerns, experiences and commitments, the interaction between consumer and suppliers, and the social atmosphere. Authenticity is a relative, interpreted and socially constructed concept which has been negotiated among a variety of stakeholders that include both minority people and the tourists who visit them.

Wang's (1999) existential concept of authenticity *seems* to be linked to the constructive concept, but the important difference is that the first one is activity-related while the second one is object-related. In the search for the degree of authenticity within tourist *experiences* it is Wang's concept of authenticity which is the most important one. This is because of the discussion whether toured objects are 'real', 'genuine' or 'authentic' or not are all purely based on tourists' perceptions, and thus on '...a projection of Western consciousness' (Bruner, 1991 cited in Wang, 1999:355). In order to measure authenticity in tourist *experiences*, it is therefore not important to measure the degree of authenticity of the object itself, moreover to measure the authenticity of the *experience*, that *memorable* tourist experience as defined by Gilmore and Pine (2007).

However, this case study did not only focus on Wang's existential authenticity, but also on the definition of authenticity in connection with the community-based tourism project in Vicos as a toured object (essentialist, constructive or negotiated authenticity).

### **Scaling Memorable Tourist Experiences**

In order to measure not only the tourist experiences itself, but also the *memories* which are significant in relation to the search of authentic experiences within the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999 and 2007), Kim (*et al*,2010) developed a scale to measure Memorable Tourist Experiences (MTEs). These days it is not enough to measure satisfaction and quality alone in order to give an adequate description of the experiences tourists seek, as Kim (*et al*. 2010) believe that the MTE represents the new standard in tourism. For example the research of Ooi (2005) on tourists' different interests and backgrounds which led to diverse interpretations of a single tourist product, tourists' different moods, personal feelings and with that different experiences shows that 'Even if all tourists say that they enjoyed themselves during an experience, it does not necessarily mean that they all had the same existing and memorable experiences'"(Ooi, 2005 cited in Kim et al, 2010:2). As a consequence, research on tourist experience has shifted from the objects themselves to the tourists' subjective interpretation on the meanings of those objects (Uriely, 2005 in Kim et al. 2010:2).

After reviewing research on tourist experiences, Kim (*et al*.) focused on memory research and found various factors which influence the memorability of an event. These included affective feelings, cognitive evaluations and novel events and listed sixteen potential constructs of MTEs. After their data collection and the refinement of the measurement scale, seven scale items, with twenty four indicators, remained: hedonism; refreshment; local culture; meaningfulness; knowledge; involvement and novelty, regarded as important components of the tourism experience which affect a person's memory (Kim et al., 2010).

Although they conclude that they have successfully developed and validated a MTE scale, the data were collected using convenience sampling at one university in the

USA. The limited ability to generalize the study results is consequently undeniable. But despite this limitation, it was decided to apply the measure to a Dutch group of generation Y tourists who visited the tourist product Vicos in Peru, in order to measure the *memorable* tourism experiences.

### **The Tourist Product of Vicos**

The province of Ancash is situated at the north of the province Lima and counts more than one million inhabitants. The city Huaraz is situated in an Andean valley which forms an agrarian centre for grain, potatoes and corn.

The area is popular among (inter)national hikers and mountaineers who want to climb the tropical mountain range *Cordillera Blanca* and *Negra*. The highest mountain is the Huascarán with 6,768 meters in the Huascarán National Park, which is listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The small community of Vicos is sited on the outskirts of the HNP, but a part of their property is actually situated within the park itself.<sup>1 2</sup>

The *Vicosinos* have been living in Vicos for centuries and experienced a long period of exploitation and misery which started after the colonization by the Spaniards. From 1594 to 1957 Vicos was owned by many different landlords who treated the *Vicosinos* as slaves. In 1957 however, the situation changed drastically. The Cornell University in Ithaca (USA) started the Peru-Cornell project Vicos. Through this project the Department of Indigenous People investigated what influences new agricultural techniques had on 'less-developed' farmer communities such as Vicos. Although the university had good intentions, the pressure from Lima increased and the city of Huaraz needed to sell the land back to the community of Vicos. The community of Vicos bought its independence finally back in 1962 after centuries of oppression by others (Cornelisse, forthcoming).

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<sup>1</sup> For a map of Peru showing Parc Nacional Huascarán (Huascarán National Park) see: <http://www.youthinternational.org/images/map-peru.gif>

<sup>2</sup> For a regional map and location details of Vicos see: <http://nona.net/features/map/placedetail.2186124/Vicos/>

The community has been passing on its customs, religion, legends and stories for centuries now. They believe that the *Apus*, the gods of the mountains, have donated the land to the villagers and that God has blessed the community of Vicos. The villagers are the conservators of knowledge which makes it possible to regenerate life and to survive in the Andean mountains. It is their missions to live in harmony with nature, with everything the *Apus* have donated (Cornelisse, forthcoming).

An NGO started a community-based tourism project in Vicos in 1999. Seven basic tourist lodges with beds, cold water and compost toilets were built on the field of seven Quechua families within the village Vicos. The first tourists were welcomed in May 2002 and nowadays this small-scale project receives almost a hundred international tourists a year.

**Plate 1:** Landscape in Vicos



**Source:** Author photo

### **Authentic Vicos: Tourist experience-related**

‘Previous visitors praise the great hospitality, the authentic culture and its beautiful surroundings. Vicos is the *experience* that today's curious traveller is looking for!’ (RESPONS, 2011). As one tourist stated: “This home stay turned out to be one of the most authentic *experiences* I had during my stay in Peru.” (RESPONS, 2011)

**Plate 2:** Tourist lodge.



**Source:** Author photo

Since these quotes are all related to tourist experiences that were authentic, Vicos suits Wang's (1999) existentialist concept of authenticity in which people experience an existential state of being that was activated by tourist activities organized by the community of Vicos.

### **Authentic Vicos: Object-related**

Although the community presents its tourism product as authentic as in the essentialist concept of authenticity, observations have shown that the tourism product has been changed in order to meet the wishes of visiting tourists. In this Andean community tourists consequently experience mainly staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973) from an essentialist point of view, Tourists eat for example, traditional Andean potato meals however, these meals have slightly been adjusted to Western tastes.

Other staged elements are visits to craftsmen, listening to myths and watching performed rituals (Cornelisse, forthcoming). According to the essentialist concept of authenticity, the tourist *product* of Vicos is therefore inauthentic. On the other hand, according to the constructivist concept Vicos is indeed a good example of an authentic tourist product. The conclusion of the first negotiated concept of

authenticity (essentialist and constructivist) is that Vicos finds its balance between genuine authenticity and the adjustments in order to create some level of comfort that tourists wish or expect to have during their stay in an Andean village as Vicos.

**Plate 3:** Preparing potatoes



**Source:** Author photo

**Plate 4:** Tourists and local people

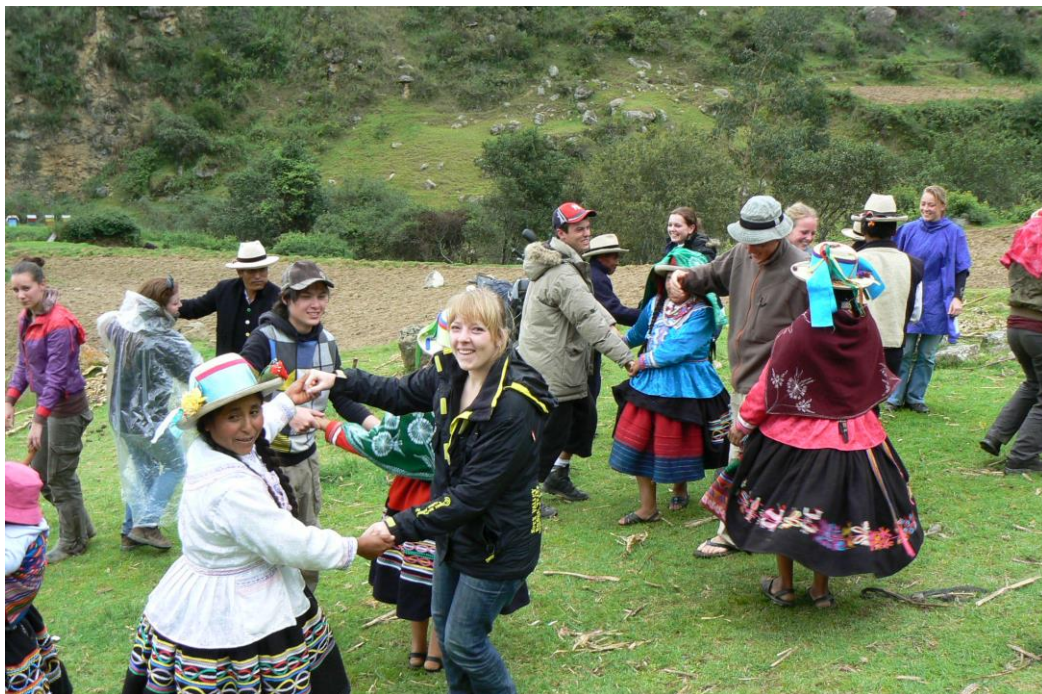


**Source:** Author photo

### **Authentic Vicos: Experience- & object-related**

The second negotiated concept of authenticity is a combination of the existentialist and essentialist concept (Chhabra, 2010). In this negotiated concept the objective authenticity (essentialist) tries to meet the subjective experienced authenticity (existentialist) (Chhabra, 2010). This concept advocates a pure subjective ideology, where subjective negotiation of meanings define authentic experiences (Chhabra, 2010). Given that the tourist *product* of Vicos can be noticed as inauthentic from an essentialist point of view and as inauthentic, depending on the tourist experience, this negotiated concept of authenticity is not relevant to this case study.

**Plate 5:** Local and tourists in a dance performance: Negotiating authenticity



**Source:** Author photo

### **Researching authenticity in Vicos: Memorable Tourist Experiences**

In order to be able to answer the main question a case study was carried out among Dutch students at the NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences in the age of 19 – 23 years who visited Vicos as tourists during field trips in 2010 or 2011.

The survey was anonymously distributed via internet to thirty five students, based on the framework proposed by Kim (*et al*) (2010). The themes of the survey were linked to the seven domains relevant to measure Wang's existentialist concept of

authenticity (by measuring the I) tourist *experiences* and II) *memories*, using likert scales

**Plate 6:** Negotiating authenticity: experiencing home life



**Source:** Author photo

**Plate 7:** Preparing food



**Source:** Author photo



As table 1 shows, all domains were clearly valued as memorable, there was strong agreement on the themes related to the domains of hedonism, novelty, involvement and local culture. All students who visited Vicos in 2010 and 2011 as tourists agreed that their stay as a tourist in Vicos was the highlight of their field trip to Peru. It was indeed an once-in-a-lifetime experience and the uniqueness of this tourist product made it that memorable. Refreshment though, was the only domain which was not valued as memorable; all these theses were most often answered with neutral.

**TABLE 1: MTE Factors and scores**

<p><b><u>1.Hedonism</u></b>                  Thrilled about having a new experience ++                  Indulged in the activities +                  Really enjoyed this tourism experience ++                  Exciting ++</p>	<p><b><u>5.Meaningfulness</u></b>                  I did something meaningful +                  I did something important +                  Learned about myself +</p>
<p><b><u>2.Novelty</u></b>                  Once-in-a-lifetime experience ++                  Unique ++                  Different from previous experiences +(+)                  Experienced something new ++</p>	<p><b><u>6.Involvement</u></b>                  I visited a place where I really wanted to go +                  I enjoyed activities which I really wanted to do ++                  I was interested in the main activities of this tourism experience ++</p>
<p><b><u>3.Local culture</u></b>                  Good impressions about the local people +                  Closely experienced the local culture +                  Local people in a destination were friendly ++</p>	<p><b><u>7.Knowledge</u></b>                  Exploratory +                  Knowledge +                  New culture ++</p>
<p><b><u>4.Refreshment</u></b>                  Liberating 0                  Enjoyed sense of freedom 0                  Refreshing 0                  Revitalized 0</p>	<p><b><u>Scores (themes most often valued):</u></b>                  Totally disagree = --                  Disagree = -                  Neutral = <b>0</b>                  Agree = +                  Totally agree = ++</p>

**Adapted from Kim (et al) ( 2010:8)**

As can be seen, the stay in Vicos was a memorable tourist experience for all generation Y tourists who participated in this case study. From an existentialist point of view, the tourist product Vicos can be valued as ‘authentic’. Of course this concept of authenticity fully depends on the memorable tourist experiences of individuals.

After the MTE-survey, students were invited for an in-depth interview. The topic of authenticity was discussed in an informal setting with three students who visited Vicos in 2011. The aim of the in-depth interviews was to determine what they thought of the tourist product Vicos in connection with object-related authenticity. Although the stay in Vicos was very memorable the discussion whether what they had seen was essentialist or constructive authenticity, returned during each interview:

“I am still wondering whether I really experienced the true local culture? I believe not. I saw some things which we did not experience during our stay, which actually play an important role in the daily lives of the villagers. Sometimes the villagers acted if they had nothing, but meanwhile they have a television and a mobile phone.”

(Dutch student, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2011 Author translation)

All the participants in this research were aware of some inauthentic or staged authentic elements in the tourist product of Vicos, from an essentialist point of view. Despite this awareness all three experienced and remembered their stay as “a wonderful stay in an authentic community” (student, 16<sup>th</sup> May, Author translation).

The tourists clearly did not mind the fact that the dishes were adjusted to their western taste, they enjoyed their visits to the craftsmen in the village and they certainly did not mind the fact that a table and chairs had been placed in the kitchen, specially placed for the tourists: “I knew that this furniture was there for us, because the host family was always sitting on the kitchen floor. Although the furniture was new and thus not authentic, I was rather pleased by the fact that I did not have to sit on that floor!” (student, 16<sup>th</sup> May, translated by Cornelisse)

As Bruner (2005) and Yang and Wall (2009) already had concluded, tourists can appreciate staged authenticity, because of their wish to enjoy and relax during a trip and the limited pre-existing knowledge of the visited culture. ‘Tourists are often exposed to staged performances, but when these performances are done well, most tourists are satisfied with this staged authenticity and believe that they have had an

authentic experience.’ (2009:251). Vicos is a good example of what Yang and Wall mean.

**Plates 8 & 9: Traditional gendered division of labour**



**Source:** Author photo



**Source:** Author photo

**Plates 10 & 11: Interacting with local inhabitants**



**Source:** Author photo



**Source:** Author photo

Chhabra's (2010) conclusion on the preference of generation Y to experience a negotiated concept of authenticity, in which authentic products are modified to maintain tourist attention but keep strong traces on essentialist authenticity, definitely meets the wishes of the students who were surveyed and interviewed. This first negotiated concept of authenticity is clearly related to Bruner's (2005) idea of border zones; these are located in an actual place in the world but have been created as a cultural imaginary or fantasy, thus as a tourist product. Vicos let tourists get familiar

with constructed lives of selected villagers, instead of with the real live of any villager (Cornelisse, forthcoming). This was done in a border zone which was a genuine Andean village, instead of in a fake and especially made for tourists village with purely beneficial purposes.

It is therefore true that generation Y not only demands for a constructed authenticity which meets their wishes for comfort to a certain degree, all participants who were interviewed stated that it was the fact that only *parts* were specially made for tourists that made this product that unique and thus authentic. In particular, the fact that the tourist product was exploited in a real border zone, in the Andean village with real Quechua inhabitants, qualifies it as an 'authentic' tourist product from a negotiated point of view.

### **Conclusion**

The desire for experiences which are authentic has become an important mainstream in the tourism industry (Yeoman, 2008) and is in line with the current experience economy. This economy represents an economy in which consumers are looking for authentic experiences which are memorable (Pine and Gilmore, 1999 and 2007). Authenticity in tourism (. MacCannell 1973, Wang 1999, Chhabra 2008) can be viewed from two different perspectives, as I) object-related and with that the genuineness or realness of artefacts or events and II) as activity-related and with that as an aspect which takes part within human beings, signifying being one's true self or being true to one's essential nature (Steiner and Reisinger, 2006).

According to Chhabra (2010) generation Y tourists, who were born between 1978 and 2000 and who will soon form one of the most important markets after the baby boomers, are keen on the museum concept of authenticity and with that on the realness of artefacts and events, instead on the constructive concept of authenticity, on products that have been strongly modified to entertain tourists. This means that Chhabra (2010) believes that this emerging market prefers the theory of the essentialist authenticity. Although, Chhabra admits that the first negotiated concept of authenticity, in which the authenticity of products are purely adapted to attract the attention of tourists, is necessary in order to create a desire among generation Y

tourists to visit certain places. The traces with the essentialist authenticity at the same time, need to be strong in order to fulfil the desires of this upcoming market.

On the other hand, Bruner (2005) and Yang and Wall (2009) dispute this conclusion by stating that authenticity is something what has been socially constructed by different stakeholders. In tourism it is all about how tourists experience a certain tourist product or event, the essentialist or the first negotiated concept of authenticity Chhabra (2010) chooses is for that reason less or even not crucial.

For the reason of this on-going debate on authenticity in tourism, a small-scale case study was done in a community-based tourism project in Peru, in order to determine which concept of authenticity in tourism literature is most connected with Gilmore and Pine's (2007) theory on the search for authenticity in the current experience economy, according to the perception of generation Y tourists. It measured the Memorable Tourist Experiences (MTEs) among Dutch generation Y tourists who visited the Quechua Indian community Vicos, described as a typical authentic Andean village in Peru., using the measure developed by Kim et al. (2010) This not only measures the tourist experiences itself, moreover it measures the memories that are related to these experiences and that are very important in relation to the desire to have authentic and with that memorable experiences. The scale measures MTEs by focusing on important components of the tourist experience that affect a tourist's memory, such as hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement and novelty (Kim et al., 2010).

The study demonstrates that Dutch generation Y tourists *experienced* (activity-related perspective on authenticity) their stay in Vicos as memorable on especially six domains: hedonism, novelty, local culture, meaningfulness, involvement and knowledge. All tourists experienced the tourist product Vicos as unique and as a once-in-a-lifetime experience, it was an authentic and with that memorable experience. Only the domain refreshment was most often valued as neutral.

This activity-related authentic experience was however *influenced* by the toured *object*. The object was qualified as authentic because of its good balance between essential authenticity due to its genuine border zone (homestays in an existing

community) and constructive authenticity, the adjusted elements within the homestays to meet the tourists' level of comfort. This means that the tourists in this case study valued the first negotiated concept authenticity as positive.

In other words, in the search for authenticity in the experience economy of Gilmore and Pine (2007), this case study demonstrates that Vicos is one good example of what is meant with authenticity in the present-day experience economy, according to the perception of generation Y tourists: the participants showed that they appreciated their individual memorable tourist experience (existentialist), which was influenced by the first negotiated concept of authenticity (essentialist & constructive). Although the participants realized that some parts of the tourist product were false in their opinion, the genuine border zone qualified the tourist product Vicos as authentic and with that, their experience in Peru.

Although this study was based on a small sample, the mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods have resulted in a study which has potential: it raises a number of issues concerning perceptions of authenticity among younger tourists that could usefully be explored with a wider and more generalisable sample.

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