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Tourists' Experiences When Walking in the Cityscape

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Cities have always been attractive destinations for travelers. However, tourism studies often discuss cities from a destination development perspective. The debate on how tourists themselves experience the cityscape, when walking around in the streets, has largely been overlooked. This is surprising as walking in the streets of a city allows for multiple facets of experiences to emerge, including aesthetic, educational, entertaining, and escapist elements, which facilitate memorable experiences. This study, an autoethnography, explores the deeper meaning of the experiential cityscape. It raises the following research questions: How does the experiential cityscape unfold? How does the tourist gaze form while walking in the streets of a city? The study seeks to uncover the underlying motivations for tourist experiences in the cityscape and investigates how experiential consumption may influence the tourist gaze. The findings suggest that the tourist gaze develops by walking around in the city and allowing experiences to unfold. The buildings one passes, the unexpected sight that emerges around the corner, the peacefulness of a park, the beautifully tiled walls, or the history of an old door can all be part of the experience. The cityscape may arise from the food the tourists ate at the tiny café where they sat to watch the authenticity of local life, or from the street art they admired, which unexpectedly led them in a different direction. Such elements form part of a city's experiencescape.

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INTRODUCTION

Let us think back to our most recent city break and imagine ourselves walking around in that city. What shaped our experience of the city and how? Was it the beautiful buildings or the derelict ones? Was it the trees aligning the streets or the hustle and bustle of the traffic? Or was it the encounters with other people that shaped our city break? It could have been all those factors or none of them. Experiences emerge, they cannot be predicted, and cities cannot be pre-experienced. In this context, we are indebted to Wordsworth's walking and simultaneously composing for many of his best works (Strachan 75). Although he mostly walked in the countryside, he also appreciated cityscapes. In his poem "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802", he writes of the "ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples" he can admire from the bridge and says, "Dull would he be of soul who could pass by / A sight so touching in its majesty", which thus relates to how this study examines walking as experiencing in the cityscape of today.

The attraction of cities is evidenced by increasing numbers of domestic visitors, while worldwide international tourist arrivals increased by 5% in the first quarter of 2025, according to the World Tourism Barometer (UN Tourism). During this period, Europe alone welcomed 125 million international tourists (UN Tourism). Major cities such as Paris (over 75 million tourists), Rome (over 37 million) and London (over 35 million) are the most visited (Radicalstorage). However, such visitor numbers also pose challenges, especially for local people, as seen in the locals' protests against overtourism in Barcelona, Venice, and Lisbon (Euronews). Nevertheless, banning tourism altogether is not an option. Instead, aiming to understand how the experiencescapes of locals and tourists together co-create the cityscape could be a step towards finding a balance where the experiential cityscape is at heart.

With an eye on how urban walking can be a transformation and can foster a more slow-paced tourist experience, Farkić et al. show how the impact of tourism on the cityscape could also initiate positive tourist-local interaction, without jeopardizing locals' well-being (212). The aim of this study is to investigate the experiences that arise for visitors to cities. Specifically, the study investigates how walking in the city influences the tourist experience and considers how the experiencescape inspires the tourist gaze.

Addressing these questions is clearly relevant due to the rising challenges of overtourism, where cityscapes are changing. As mentioned, the local inhabitants of some European cities, such as London and Barcelona, have raised their voices and taken to the streets to express their concerns (Kehoe). Locals feel neglected and overwhelmed by the numbers of tourists currently visiting their cities. Further, tourists have also 'taken over' parts of the cities in the sense that housing and eating out are becoming much too expensive for people who want to live there. Tranquil areas that were formerly 'hidden gems' for locals are in some cases becoming crowded with tourists.

Walking is an important yet understudied topic in tourism (Ram & Hall 281). Nevertheless, there are notable exceptions on the topic of urban walking and its integral role in tourism experiences (Farkić et al. 212). This study takes a novel theoretical approach to the debate on challenges that arise from increased tourism in cities. Instead of focusing on co-destruction (Boadi et al. 9; Li et al. 660), exploring the opportunities of walking in cityscapes could promote experiences that initiate city-tourist interactions as well as enhancing well-being (Vespestad et al. 928). Grounding the study in ethnographic data establishes its organic validity, while also allowing us to appreciate the city from both an emic and an etic perspective, seeing these as complementary, as also recommended by (Luna and Gupta 47).

Despite the importance of experiences in tourism (Björk et al. 26), there is a gap in tourism literature on how walking can influence our experiencescape and the formation of the tourist gaze (Falton 235; Kahana 1; Urry and Larsen 2; Wang and Witte 768). This provides us with an opportunity to address the challenges of the streets and the city from a novel perspective, which allows for a more comprehensive approach to the topic. Along with its methodological and theoretical contributions, this study could be a first step to open the debate on how cityscapes can be viewed from a holistic perspective in order to foster a more sustainable and even regenerative (Bellato et al. 1161; Bellato and Pollock 558) future for the cityscape and for all those who experience it.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cities are experiencescapes for locals and tourists (O'Dell and Billing 14) and are linked to people's gaze (Jokinen and Vejola 23). The tourist gaze, as introduced by Urry, maintains a focus on the visual and on consuming places in urban areas (*Consuming Places* 1). The tourist gaze changes, being dynamic and evolving, as also pointed out in literature (Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* 1 ; Urry and Larsen 3). Walking in the same experiential landscapes, the locals' and the visitors' gaze can and will differ (Urry, *Leisure and Travel* 1), depending on factors such as locals being subject to time constraints and often choosing familiar paths, whereas visitors may have a more exploratory approach and wander about in the city at a slower pace, despite navigating in the same space as the locals (Dihingia et al. 1). The role of the gaze is also said to link tourists and flâneurs in that flâneurs aimlessly stroll around in the context of masses, while the tourist is a strolling anonymous pedestrian who is able to travel and gaze in a liminal space (Jokinen & Veijola 26).

The term 'walking' (in English) historically refers to moving around or embarking on a journey. Walking is body language and an early connection between walking and traveling was pilgrimages (Amato 1). Walkability has, according to Farkic et al., become a buzzword from an urban planning perspective but has received little attention in tourism literature (212), although there has been an increased focus in relation to nature and natural spaces (Mykletun et al. 1; Ram and Hall 281). Given that walking is a common activity amongst visitors to cities (Dihingia et al. 1; Kim and Jeong 1), it is surprising that the effects of walking in a cityscape remain mostly unnoticed in the tourism literature, thereby leaving us with an incomplete understanding of the walking experience (Dihingia et al. 1), particularly from the micro perspective of the tourist.

Studies of tourist experiences are central in tourism literature and have in the last 20 years evolved into a separate stream of research (Björk et al. 26). The focus on the tourist gaze as a foundation for how tourists experience places is well-established (Urry, *Leisure and Travel* 1; Urry and Larsen 2). The tourist gaze continues to be a concept of relevance in tourism studies (Ekici Cilkin and Cizel 188; Falton 235; Stone and Nyaupane 877), because it lies at the heart of the individual's experience, and it is dynamic and varies with the context and the experiencescape of tourists (Bitner 57; Gyimóthy 111; Mossberg 117; Vespestad and Hansen 109).

Pine and Gilmore's model of experiences (*The Experience Economy* 39) can be useful in this context because it includes educational, entertaining, escapist and aesthetic elements (Figure 1), that together form our experiences as tourists. These experiential elements move along the continuums of absorption/immersion and levels of passive/active participation. This study adopts the perspective of experiences first introduced by Pine and Gilmore around the turn of the century ("The experience economy"), which has later developed into an established stream within tourism and marketing (*The Experience Economy* 1; Cova and Shankar 87). It involves a shift towards transformations as the value outcome sought by customers (Pine 3). Fundamental within these perspectives are interactions between people, both amongst visitors themselves and between visitors and locals at the destination.

Studies have addressed host-tourist interactions and found that a sense of authentic happiness can emerge among locals if they positively interact and find emotional inspiration by common communication links with tourists (Li et al. 660). This can in turn promote support for tourism (*ibid*.). Although recent studies have been conducted in a rural context, it is pertinent to discuss this in a city context, because interaction between locals and tourists in cities enables knowledge exchange and co-creation of value. This can therefore be related to the educational element in the experiential model of Pine and Gilmore (*The Experience Economy* 39), as seen in Figure 1.

When visiting a city, we commonly seek to experience the authenticity of the place (Rickly 1), such as going to authentic Parisian street cafés. Authenticity is therefore a concept that should be brought into the discussion of the experiential cityscape (MacCannell 57; Wang 768; Rickly 1) because the authentic city is fundamental for locals as well as visitors. Nevertheless, authenticity is also a ubiquitous concept and one of the most studied concepts in tourism for over 40 years (Rickly 1). The authenticity of life within the cityscape is also what locals feel is at stake in cases where unprecedented tourism development and heavy visitor flows seem to take over

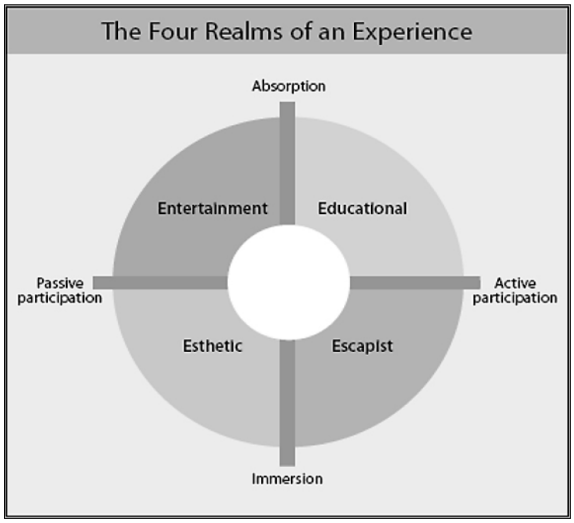


Figure 1 The experience realms (Pine and Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, Figure 2-1, p. 39).

elements of the cityscape previously dominated by locals, which can thus result in localism (Towner and Lemarié 93).

As outlined above, and as identified in a recent systematic review of research on walking in tourism (Dihingia et al. 2), there is an evident need to address the gap in the literature regarding the experiential landscape of cities as it unfolds when tourists walk around. The concept of walkability refers to the safety and convenience of walking in an urban area, and is also connected to people's motivation to walk, which has been applied in urban planning studies. It can also be useful in the present context because tourists' experiences of walking in cities are related to the navigation of spaces (depending on their understanding of the spaces), while a walkable space creates opportunities for meeting, mingling, and sharing with people (Dihingia, et al. 2). To uncover a deeper empirical understanding of what walkability might mean for the tourist and to unravel how walking might shape how tourists experience and gaze at the urban landscape, this study raises the following research questions: How does the experiential cityscape unfold? How does the tourist's gaze form while walking the streets of a city?

METHODS

To reveal how the experiential cityscape unfolds while walking, this study adopts an ethnographic approach (Tavakoli and Wijesinghe), following an interpretivist paradigm. Qualitative approaches are embraced within social sciences due to their ability to explain complex phenomena of interest that require deep inner reflection (Poulos). The study is an autoethnography, a branch of ethnography that allows strong researcher involvement in writing about a topic of personal significance (Buzard; Cova and Cova; Poulos). However, autoethnography has also been criticized for being self-centered (Buzard). Inspired by seminal works in consumer research (Holbrook), this study adopts an introspective approach to explore the deeper meaning of the experiential cityscape, because autoethnography requires 'deep reflection on both one's unique experiences and the universal within oneself' (Hill and Knox viii). Experiencing while walking in cities is strongly connected to wondering and wandering, and autoethnography was thus considered suitable in this study context (Beeton; Buckley; Hackley).

The present autoethnography is based on personal experiences of walking in European cities as a tourist, ensuring solid ecological validity (Bell et al.). The data were collected between 2023–2025 from fifteen stays in cities. One of the cities (London) was in an English-speaking country, whereas in the other cities English was used as a second language, and could be regarded as an influential factor for tourist communication and experiences. The length of the stays generally ranged from two days to three weeks, although one stay lasted for eight weeks. The author's experiences and diaries, notes and photos taken when walking in the cities formed part of the data in the analysis process. In autoethnography the researcher is visible in the research process, and writes in the first person from memory and experience (Poulos). It is therefore pertinent to present the researcher's background.

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I am a Norwegian woman, born in 1979 in a small village on the south-western coast of Norway, later moving to other places in Norway and abroad for study and work. From early childhood I have been used to walking, both at home and while traveling. I share my love of walking with many others, as walking is the preferred way of moving around in various cities (Ram and Hall), also in combination with public transportation. The reason might be that walking allows for experiences to happen. City walks while traveling, along with my background as a tourism researcher, support the organic validity of this study and inform the emic perspective (Bell et al.) through in-depth knowledge and emphasis on an experiential viewpoint. The quality of the study is maintained by aiming to involve both emic and ethic philosophies, using a 'within-cultures' as well as a 'between-cultures' perspective, in line with seminal research (Gullestrup; Triandis).

THE EXPERIENTIAL CITYSCAPE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

WALKING SHAPES THE EMBODIED GAZE

Travelers and locals have always been attracted to cities. Nevertheless, how people experience cities and how they develop their experiencescapes has been somewhat neglected in tourism studies (Dihingia et al. 1). In this autoethnography, the findings reflect the tourist perspective and the narrative is based on experiences of walking in cities. It is based on the embodied experiences of being a walking tourist; the impressions that invite the tourist to stop and think and spark curiosity and interest in the history of buildings, in the culture, the people, and the cities themselves. Walking around in cities is very common today (Kim and Jeong 1), as most cities have pedestrian zones. Here, tourists take in the city through their experience (Kuuru). This study builds upon consumer culture theory, where the tourist (Cova and Shankar) takes center stage through embodied experiences in the cityscape. Therefore, it brings forth the essence of cities in a way that allows for many aspects of the experiences to emerge, where the experiential cityscape unfolds naturally instead of only in a preplanned and preorganized manner. This provides space for an emerging experiencescape when walking.

When tourists walk in cities, their gaze takes form based on their expectations and preparations, but most of all it develops through the embodied experiences that arise from the activity of walking. The tourist gaze can be linked to the romantic gaze, which people often experience in natural surroundings, as Falton found in her study of national parks (255). In cities a romantic gaze can be directed at the genuineness of the culture or the authenticity of old buildings or of local street life. Tourists' collective gaze can emerge through the social experiences of walking together and of new experiences of what they discover on their way, or by taking selfies or photos of their travel companions (Ekici Cilkin and Cizel). Their gaze is continuously challenged and is fluently formed around their experiential landscape.

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENTS OF CITY WALKING

A way of learning is through walking in the cityscape, and walking can also represent learning through embodied practices (Cova and Cova). Further, the act of walking increases tourists' ability to understand the geography of the city as well as to learn directions and find their way around. The findings reveal that the elements of experiences unfold naturally as tourists move through the experiencescape of the city. The cityscape can thus be argued to be a unique setting where tourists encounter 'unintended' learning in their experiencescape. Examples of this are learning about food at the market and learning the language through interactions with people, signs, or menus. Also important is learning about traditions, history, or religion by visiting historic buildings or entering churches encountered by chance. Tourists can learn about ways of living by observing street life or the everyday life of locals that unfolds in front of their eyes, or by engaging in conversation with local people. Such learning can be positive or negative and can induce good or bad feelings. We may pass a homeless person living in cardboard boxes, which naturally makes us aware of the downsides of city life, inequality, and the challenges that some people must face every day. Such sights clearly influence the tourist gaze.

The educational aspect (Pine and Gilmore *The Experience Economy*) of walking in the city can also be related to informational facts and educational visits to museums. In addition, we very

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often accidentally pass educational signs in the city about buildings, the history of sights or historic events, or short biographies of famous people from the place or who have stayed there. However, we can also educate ourselves about everyday life, by, e.g., visiting the local fish market, where we can learn about the appearance and taste of different kinds of fish and seafood, their names in the local language, and associated local food traditions. Visits to the local fish or other markets soon became a favorite activity for us on holiday, being an experiential setting conducive to co-creation.

Through the embodied practice of walking, we also learn more, because it already leads to active involvement; according to Pine and Gilmore, the active end of the continuum promotes learning to a greater degree than passively observing. Examples could be historical walking tours or thematic tours such as those 'in the footsteps of well-known poets or painters'. Learning through and about everyday life can be achieved through active involvement, which clearly influences our gaze. Learning through interaction with locals from a co-creation approach also evokes positive emotions (Li et al.), while tourist-local co-creation is also connected to authenticity.

ENTERTAINING EXPERIENCES 'EN ROUTE'

The experience model proposes that entertainment is an aspect of value in experiences. Entertainment does not require deep involvement; it can be personal and unintended. As we walk in the city we experience many passively absorbed encounters that can be entertaining. These are often objects or events we happen across by chance in the city. In relation to such entertainment, the tourist and context are center stage, which implies that there are great individual differences in what people find entertaining and amusing. Depending on our motivation for being in the city on that day and time, we will also be more or less open to entertainment. Surprise as an experiential element (Pine and Gilmore *The Experience Economy*) also plays a role here, as it can strengthen the perceived entertainment value.

Amusement can easily appear as we walk around in the city. I remember that my gaze was entertained and amused when I walked past a bicycle parked at the seaside in Portugal, because it had the name of my best friend, who happens to enjoy cycling. I therefore took a picture of the bicycle and sent it to her immediately. Most people would not find this amusing of course, but it serves as an example of how we can be entertained or amused by encounters along the way when letting the experiencescape unfold on our walks. People value different aspects of the city and in the city, and this is what forms our tourist gaze. This aligns with visual appreciation in the classic tourist gaze literature (Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*; Urry and Larsen).

ESCAPE IN THE CITY

The active-passive continuum in the realm of experience model (Pine and Gilmore *The Experience Economy*) favors active involvement to experience escapism. There are several ways to achieve this in a city context. For example, we might find escape in the tranquility of a botanical garden or park. Walking in the city can be noisy and full of impressions, but taking a 'breather' in a park can then offer a sense of escape that can provide well-being for visitors and locals alike (Vespestad et al. 8), while also upholding a somewhat romantic gaze of nature (Falton 235). Escapism can also derive from the sense of being a temporary citizen of the city. This can emerge from doing as the locals do: walking where they walk, and experiencing the authentic life of the city as it naturally unfolds.

Since active involvement is important in experiencing escapism, the escapist feeling is more likely to emerge when walking, because walking activates the body. For example, walking can lead us to a viewpoint of a city which we did not plan to visit. This would provide a different experience than taking a taxi to a commercialized viewpoint full of tourists and street sellers. This also allows for psychological immersion, offering peace of mind. Another example that offers escapism is the presence of water (the sea, rivers, ponds, or water fountains) in the cityscape. Such places become spaces for people to sit down or walk along the water, as they can inspire thoughts and reflection, also offering a mental escape and well-being (Buckley). Water, just like parks, trees, and flowers, can offer a natural escape from the hustle and bustle of the city and even an escape from tourism itself (Vespestad et al. 2).

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AESTHETICS – BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Nature in cityscapes is important for the sense of escapism, but it also has a profound influence on what people perceive as beautiful. It offers aesthetic qualities that soften the hard surfaces of a city, such as concrete, asphalt, steel, and glass. Nature in cities is typically perceived as aesthetically pleasing; parks or trees also invite us to take a 'city time-out' by offering a clear contrast. Further, nature offers distance and perspective in the human-made cityscape, by, e.g., taking in the views from hills or tall buildings. Here we can compare the experience of flat cities to that of hilly cities. An example from Lisbon could be when I surprisingly came across Teatro da Garagem. After walking for hours in about 35 degrees, I saw a very modest sign, which seemed insignificant from the street, but it caught my interest and I decided to go inside. This decision resulted in not only an amazing view of Lisbon, but also offered a great atmosphere, and the best drinks of the holiday; our children still talk about the pink smoothies served in beautiful glasses.

What is perceived as aesthetically pleasing differs; beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The visual is also emphasized in seminal studies of aesthetically pleasing elements as being predominant in forming our tourist gaze (Ekici Cilkin and Cizel; Stone and Nyaupane; Urry, *Leisure and Travel*; Urry and Larsen). If we consider the word sightseeing, we can easily understand the importance of the visual for visitors (and locals) in a city. Visuals play a key role in forming the gaze through marketing, e.g., pictures of spectacular sights, streets full of umbrellas, or great street art turning into 'Insta moments'. Instagram has boosted the spread of photos and has hence increased tourism to specific spots in cities. One example is the sights in the *Game of Thrones*, and 'picture spots' in Dubrovnik, which is now on the verge of overtourism due to this increased focus.

An example of differences in what people find aesthetically pleasing is from Milan when I was walking with three friends and suddenly stopped and said something like: 'Oh, look at that beautiful door'. The others looked at me as if I was from a different planet and clearly could not see anything but an old wooden door. Aesthetics depends partly on interest and background, and from a tourist perspective it is formed in comparison to what is common at home. The adapted gaze upon the cityscape is in the eye of the beholder.

Architecture also has an important impact on what we visually experience in cities. Architecture can be pleasing or challenging. It can be an attraction in the cityscape, but it can also inspire the visitor to be active in the experiencescape, such as the skaters and basketball players by the Casa da Musica in Porto. Architecture can lead to debate as opinions often differ; should new buildings be in line with the traditional architecture, should a building be modest and functional or perhaps a landmark feature? In some cases, there are architectural elements, sculptures or murals that challenge our mind through their aesthetic or controversial qualities. No matter the original idea behind it, we as visitors will experience it differently, based on our likes and dislikes, cultural background and dispositions. Furthermore, visitors and local inhabitants might have very different opinions.

CHALLENGES FROM TOURISM IN THE CITY

Challenges that can result from city tourism can change the cityscape. One example is from the well-known Livraria Lello in Porto, where as a tourist I was disappointed when arriving there, not due to the lack of authenticity or of the beauty of the building, but because of the number of tourists. To me, much of its authenticity was diminished due to the one hour wait and my impression that it had become a tourism machine. Similarly, I did not even enter the beautiful Majestic Café in Porto due to the long line of tourists. Instead, I just glanced briefly through the window (because as a tourist I had to see what the others were queuing for). Instead, I went to a tiny café in a nearby alley with just me on the outside and two old locals inside. I perceived it as more authentic, although other tourists may have viewed it differently if they applied a different gaze.

Increased littering and lack of waste management is another issue that arises from increased tourism to areas of the cities that are unprepared for it. In my hometown in Norway, a new promenade and playground have been developed by the harbor, which has increased the numbers of visitors (locals and tourists alike). This was according to plan, but sufficient trash bins

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were apparently not part of the plan, resulting in the degradation of an otherwise well-planned open space. It would only take small measures to resolve the problem.

Challenges can arise in encounters between tourists, and between tourists and locals (such as in Notting Hill in London). The old saying 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do' is embraced by some people, but is generally not something that comes easy; some might find it challenging, while others take no interest in trying to do as the locals do. For example, taking local public transport can be quite difficult for visitors. Tourists might want to do as the locals do, as it is both less expensive and more environmentally sustainable to take public transport, but it can cause problems if they do not understand the language, or the routes and logistics of buses or trains. Hence tourists will often turn to easier options such as taxis, which could lead to an increase in traffic.

The feeling of safety is also relevant when addressing walking in cities, where tourists might be led to or from certain areas according to their perception of safety in different streets, based on, e.g., the number or type of people in different areas of a city. Tourists could also consider safety based on traffic, lighting, or crime rates in cities (Dihingia et al.). As a tourist in London, I was well aware of the risk of theft in some busy streets, leading to a superfluous shout when the umbrella I had attached to my purse accidentally 'bumped into me', making me think it was a pickpocket (as I had just passed a beggar on the street). Safety could also be linked to language if tourists are afraid they cannot make themselves understood. Further, language can be a barrier preventing tourists from behaving more sustainably and following the local customs, such as by being unable to read signs. Both challenges of tourism and challenges experienced by tourists influence the experiencescape of tourists and locals. Some of these challenges, e.g., overcrowding, displacement of locals for the benefit of tourist facilities, or gentrification can also be perceived as a loss of authenticity.

AUTHENTICITY

When studying the cityscape, authenticity deserves to be addressed as it is one of the most debated concepts in tourism research (Rickly 1), but most importantly because it is influential in how we experience places. Theoretical research has demonstrated that the significance of authenticity in tourism experiences is indisputable (MacCannell 91; Rickly 1). There are three main approaches to authenticity that are commonly addressed, namely: 1) objective, i.e., real or genuine authenticity as judged by experts, 2) constructive, i.e., socially created authenticity, and 3) existential, which better explains the complexity of tourist experiences, because it is related to an experience of the authentic self (Wang 768).

In some cases, one might speak of an authenticity dilemma where tourists' search for authenticity can be perceived as intrusive in areas that were previously reserved for locals. In turn this can increase the cost of living and lead to nightlife noise, among other negative effects. Nevertheless, searching for authentic experiences through, for example, adapting to local food traditions could enable more seamless integration between locals and visitors in cities. Familiarization with local cuisine can give tourists wonderful experiences, such as eating snails with my children at a streetside restaurant, although I was the only one that preferred eating whereas the others found more joy in picking the snails out of their shells. In turn this inspired them to play restaurant with live snails in the park.

Authenticity can provide immersion into an experience. It can promote involvement in local activities, as well as contributing to positive destination image formation. Therefore, it can be argued to be central to the experiencescape. Along with pre-conceived notions of a place, knowledge, motivation and expectations, authentic experiences can influence the tourist gaze.

SHARED MEMORIES OF AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES – MULTIPLE AND DYNAMIC GAZES OF THE CITY

Authentic experiences can inspire memorable experiences and return visits. Creating authentic family moments can result from a single experience in a city, but from multiple dynamic gazes of family members. Imagine a visit to a tiny authentic Italian restaurant on a street in Lisbon, not authentically Portuguese, but equally an authentic experience because the owners were Italian. It created an authentic memory that the whole family cherishes.

There is also authenticity in memories, as in revisiting places of importance to us. This could be revisiting the church where we were married or visiting a café we always return to. It could be to experience the existential authenticity that arises within us when we revisit a place of importance to us, as opposed to the genuine authenticity of a historic building. These examples show the dynamics of a tourist gaze, which might change over time and according to the occasion, but which give us a sense of well-being.

In tourism, well-being is gaining momentum with an increasing number of studies addressing the concept (Lindberg et al. 346; Yi et al. 378). Recent studies show, for example, that food festivals foster well-being, not only during the festivals but also by sharing memories afterwards (Rossetti et al. 11). Food and beverage tasting experiences are important aspects of tourism experiences (Rossetti et al. 11; Williams et al. 327). Carmer et al., in their study of co-creation in tourist experiences of tasting spirits, suggested a conceptual framework that emphasizes co-creation in the pre-experience, on-site experience, and post-experience (757). This can also be applied to meals that help to form the cityscape. The role of food can be considered a catalyst for well-being. It could be related to trying new types of food, authentic food or even just being cooked for instead of having to cook ourselves as we do at home (Yoo et al. 3230).

Well-being is a central aspect of the cityscape, which ideally should uphold the well-being of both its citizens and temporary visitors, keeping in mind that the well-being of both groups will differ individually. While some people love crowds and vibrant nightlife, others cherish the tranquility of parks or visits to the library. This means that the well-being of the travelers and the locals can also interact or be co-created through common activities (Vespestad 1277) or in common settings such as city parks (Vespestad et al. 1).

Seeking to uncover how experiential consumption may influence the tourist gaze, this study establishes that the tourist gaze that forms within people is influenced by authenticity or the lack thereof. Although tourists might be searching for authentic experiences, this search might also challenge the authenticity, and in turn lead to a loss of authenticity in the cityscape.

Theoretically, this study treats the city as an experiencescape for tourists and locals. Experiencescapes transcend the purely commercial aspect of servicescapes (Bitner 57) and include the interactions taking place in such spaces, creating personal and social experiences. Experiencescapes can be defined as metaphorical commercial landscapes of social interactions (Gyimothy 111) and can exist in relation to all kinds of experiences and contexts. Here, multiple dynamic gazes interact or co-exist.

Experiencescapes make available meaning and value for people (Arnould and Thompson 868). This is particularly relevant to walking in a city because we then allow ourselves to move according to our sense of flow, and according to what we perceive as meaningful. Different stakeholders have different experiencescapes in the city, which is where challenges might arise. Locals protest because of too many tourists or their intrusion into areas of the city that hold a specific meaning to them as locals, because that meaning is then disturbed. There are also tourists seeking to escape other tourists by trying to adopt the dos and don'ts within a local experiencescape.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study addresses growing city tourism from the perspective of the factors that influence the experiencescape in cities. This topic is relevant as more city-dwellers bring up the discussion of the challenges of increased tourism or even overtourism, which in turn changes the cityscape. The study delves into the experiential landscape that arises while walking in the city, drawing the conclusion that walking is not just walking. It brings about embodied experiences, which have an impact on the (tourist) gaze. Walking in the cityscape is a way of experiencing that promotes authentic experiences when moving through the city. Tourists seek authenticity and authentic city life, but they also interfere with the authenticity of a place. Hence, while tourists might search for authentic experiences, this can challenge authenticity, and then lead to a loss of authenticity, or continued negotiated authenticity (or the lack thereof).

A practical implication of this study is the necessity of managing situations of too many tourists causing crowding in a city, which could cause traffic jams or reduced accessibility for locals. If certain areas serve as pedestrian zones, there will be a natural reduction in the numbers of

people. Another positive benefit would be that walking is more environmentally sustainable than tourists being transported in groups simultaneously to well-publicized areas. Such measures could reduce the extensive use of taxis or tuk-tuks in busy areas of Sintra, Porto, and Lisbon. Only allowing tourists to walk into the areas could physically reduce the number of tourists and reduce pressure on the areas.

The tourist gaze develops by walking in the city and allows experiences to unfold, both positive and negative experiences that arise from urban encounters. Challenges can emerge if the cityscapes of locals and tourists collide. The experiential cityscape is the experiencescape where city experiences take place, where tourists form their tourist gaze.

Knowing how the experiential cityscape unfolds and how the tourist's gaze might form when walking in the streets of a city leads to a 'walking gaze' that reduces our pace, which allows for contemplation, and enables us to see the beauty contrasted by the challenges of the city. A walking gaze also encourages us to embrace authentic, non-touristic everyday life, by letting the experiencescape unfold in a meaningful way. Embodied experiences (co-)create cityscapes.

One might also contemplate on the resemblance to Wordsworthian poetry, which can be regarded 'as a poetry of movement'. Wordsworth himself was keen on wandering in a similar way to tourists, in search of solitude or sociability (Strachan 75). We can thus conclude this study, not only with his famous words "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (Wordsworth) but also with his lesser-known lines about a street musician in the city who makes passers-by stop in their tracks: "I am glad for him, blind as he is! – all the while If they speak 'tis to praise, and they praise with a smile" (332).

CONTRIBUTION

The author confirms that she has not used artificial intelligence in any part of this article.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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