

# Authenticity in Tourism in Small Island Destinations: the Residents' Perspective

1-1-2013

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## Original Citation

Croes, R., Lee, S., & Olson, E. (2013). Authenticity in Tourism in Small Island Destinations: the Residents' Perspective. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 11(1-2), 1-20.

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Croes, R., Lee, S., & Olson, E. (2013). Authenticity in tourism in small island destinations: The residents' perspective. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 11(1-2), 1-20.

## **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

### **Authenticity in Tourism in Small Island Destinations: A Local Perspective**

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Submitted for consideration of publication in Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change

### **Abstract**

The study explored the meaning of authenticity in the context of a small island destination from the resident's perspective, departing from the main stream literature which predominantly focuses on the demand side of the equation. Photo-elicitation was used to investigate the conception of authenticity. The finding suggests that the notions of authenticity are unique, vast, and individualistic, and an encompassing definition of authenticity is difficult to concur. As a follow-up, an empirical study was conducted to further understand what cultural resources could be derived from the specific meaning of authenticity. Two themes emerged from: (1) when residents interact with tourists, cultural attributes are more important than tradition; and (2) tourists are involved in creating an authentic process for residents. The younger generation appears to be frustrated with the impact of tourism on the cultural identity of the island. In conclusion, the concept and practice of authenticity is not static, but rather an evolving practice that embraces new cultural forms. Cultural tourism could become a potent vehicle enhancing the quality of life of residents and the essence of the distinctiveness of Aruba contributing to a sense of place, pride, and culture.

**Keywords:** authenticity, small island, Aruba, tourism specialization, cultural tourism

## Introduction

Authenticity has emerged as a relevant policy discussion in the planning process of small island destinations in their efforts of reinventing themselves. The emergence of authenticity has been fed by the standardization of products on a global scale due to economies of scale requirements and the proliferation of products propelled by the postmodern tourism demand for more choices and higher quality products (Richards & Wilson, 2007). These changing patterns in production and consumption are challenging destinations and compelling them to engage in reinvention strategies. Reinvention strategies entail shifting from traditional, mass tourism to high quality-orientated tourism that promotes facilities to entice up-market visitors (Ioannides & Holcomb, 2003). It is suggested that mass tourism has been stagnating and declining, propelling the search for alternative tourism, including cultural tourism (Markwick, 2008).

The development of tourism in small island destinations has been particularly challenged by the new trends induced by globalization. Tourism development in these small islands has been transformational, because tourism has not only brought more income and jobs, but tourism has ushered a more diversified and multicultural society. The 'construction' of this new, cultural reality in small island destinations is not without its pitfalls (Razak, 1995). The transformation towards more diversified and multicultural societies is threatening the identity of these islands and is affecting their uniqueness. The seemingly erosion of their uniqueness is inciting ire of the local population due to the resulting confusion regarding how to respond to the undermining of the local culture.

Typically, small islands have built their tourism product mainly through the exploitation of the factors of production and the focus on creating volume (Buswell, 2011; Croes, 2011;). Volume was needed to overcome the small size problem of the market. Small islands have focused on volume, bringing more tourists, and at the same time more migrants were required to fill job openings. This strategy has been applied in the Caribbean (e.g., Aruba, The Bahamas, and Jamaica) and Mediterranean islands (e.g., Malta and Mallorca). As a result of globalization and the volume strategy, offerings from small island destinations look similar with little distinction among them. This sameness in offerings is affecting the model of tourism development, reflected in stagnation in the value of the product and by a divided society as noticed in, for example, the Caribbean (Cole & Razak, 2011; Croes, 2011) and Mallorca (Buswell, 2011).

Determining what cultural resources should be employed to provide a unique experience in a growing divided society is the crux of the search for authenticity in product offerings. Authenticity is strongly related to identity of place and to everyday cultural practices (Tucker, 2003; Richards & Wilson, 2007). In the case of Goreme, cultural tourism provides new choices and opportunities for residents and creates new cultural identities, practices, and relationships that inevitably emerge through tourism. Residents result in reexamining and acting upon their place and themselves in new ways (Tucker, 2003). Authenticity stokes local pride, references the character of the destination, and is the filter for determining what cultural resources best reflects everyday practices. In other words, the tourist-host encounter is the key component of delivering authentic experience. Thus, authenticity has become a critical aspect in furthering tourism development in these small island destinations. Stakeholders fear that activities and events may lose their authenticity as residents no longer may be related to these activities and events thereby compromising diversification of tourism offerings and expansion of tourism (Buswell, 2011; Cole & Razak, 2011; Razak, 2007).

Despite its potential relevancy, authenticity could be a “problematic concept.” The meaning of authenticity has often been recognized as difficult to assess (Chronis & Hampton, 2008; Salome, 2010). The multiplicity of meaning makes its understanding and application in the context of tourists’ motivation and the re-creation of an authentic experience at a destination ambiguous at best or futile at worst. In a similar manner, the vagueness in its meaning makes the application of authenticity in the planning process of small island destinations very challenging. And yet, there is an increasing interest in the meaning and realization of authentic experiences (Richards & Wilson, 2007). Understanding how authenticity plays out in the production and consumption of tourism in small island destinations could facilitate the upgrading of the product.

Authenticity may spur an increase in spending behavior. The literature indicates that the variety of offerings can induce more spending only if it contains quality and authenticity (Jennings & Nickerson, 2006). The production of “authentic” tourist experiences can affect the interpretation of a tourist of what an “authentic” tourist experience entails. Tourists define authenticity in the objects observed, in the experienced context or in the search of the self-actualization. On the other hand, it is important that not only travelers perceive such products or services as authentic but also local residents arouse the proud from providing and promoting the authentic experiences to travelers.

The host community may also be affected in terms of how it interprets an authentic experience. This process of interpretation could be fraught with multiple interests, needs, ideologies, and power relationships (Tucker, 2003). Authenticity is a quality embedded in the places and people that tourists visit. If the meaning of authenticity is not widely shared within the host community, it may lead to a lack of the self-identity in the product that is being offered to the tourists, and consequently could erode the quality of the product offered. Most studies depart from the tourists’ perspective regarding authenticity, neglecting the important role played by stakeholders at the destination. Thus, two research questions are investigated 1) what is authenticity in small island destinations; and 2) how does the local community perceive authenticity with the influence of tourism?

This study aims to explore the meaning of authenticity as it pertains to the specific situation of Aruba, a small island destination located in the Caribbean. Tourism has had a major impact on economic growth, development, and quality of life in Aruba over the last half century. Tourists have been drawn to the small island for its sun, sea, and sand product. Aruba has been relatively successful in upgrading its tourism product over time (ECLAC, 2007). However, the island appears to be shifting from a volume to a value strategy due to land constraints and a concern for its environment (Razak, 2007). As the shift occurs, the island has been looking at new and unique product offerings to enhance the tourist experience (Cole & Razak, 2011; Croes, 2011). In this shift, the role of cultural entities, events, and new experiences will play a stronger role in attracting visitors to the island (Cole & Razak, 2004; Markwick, 2008; Murphy, 2008). Thus, the island has embarked on a quest for steering its product towards more authentic experiences.

### **Literature review**

The study of authenticity in tourism dates back to the early 1970s (MacCannell, 1976, 1979). Since then, a plethora of researchers have studied the matter (Adams, 1996; Brown, 1996; Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003; Chronis & Hampton, 2008; Cohen, 1988; Daniel, 1996; Gable & Handler, 1996; Harkin, 1995; Graburn, 1983; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Taylor, 2001; Wang, 1999). For example, Chhabra (2005) suggests that authenticity has been traditionally defined from a supplier side or from a tourist side. From this regard, authenticity may be expressed from the role of a supplier or the desires of a tourist. However, distinctions between the two sides do not appear to be consistent towards a clear and concise definition of authenticity.

Authenticity from a tourism perspective has its roots in cultural authenticity (see Table 1). Some of the earliest studies focused on authenticity as the main motive for tourism. MacCannell (1976) exposes the notion that the quest for authenticity is the result of the alienation of the individual caused by modernity. This quest for authenticity is sought in tourism, which is manifested as reaching out to the past or another place. In this regard, authenticity is viewed as perceptions of the quality of the place.

Wang (1999) follows in MacCannell's footsteps by embracing the notion that modern society is the culprit of the feeling of alienation which provides the motivation to search for experiences in tourism. Wang (1999) also stresses that authenticity is object-related, and the main motivation for tourism is gazing at these objects while these objects provide pleasure, relaxation, and bonding. Both MacCannell (1976) and Wang (1999) view tourists as agents implying that residents are spectators of tourism influences. Cohen (1988) however takes an issue with the previous views asserting that authenticity should be released from the object and assets that authenticity should be analyzed from the views of ongoing relationship between tourists, product, and residents as a social construction.

[Insert Table 1 near here]

In general, three strands of defining authenticity are found in the literature: the objectivist, the constructionist, and the existential authenticity approach (Wang, 1999). Objective authenticity refers to the authenticity of originals (Boorstin, 1964). This strand in the authenticity literature conceives authenticity in the originality of an object, in the historical accuracy of events and in the place where the event took place as defined by experts and professionals. From this perspective, authenticity is non-negotiable. For example, tourists may see an object in a museum and perceive the object as being authentic. Chronis and Hampton (2008) relate their ethnographic study at Gettysburg by scrutinizing a large arsenal of tangible manifestations of the tourism space. In their scrutiny, they looked at weaponry and personal items of the soldiers preserved in the museums; they also investigated the landscape containing the canons, the buildings, and carriages. Their study indicated that the meaning of authenticity is reflected in the look of the objects and in marks such as the date embossed on the canons. In other words, an object should be proved authentic through external criteria. This essentially means that because the object looks authentic, it is indeed authentic. This perspective could be applied to residents' perception because residents may be concerned of keeping objects and localities in their original form.

The constructionist viewpoint of authenticity shapes how authenticity is projected onto objects by supply-side producers in terms of "imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, and

powers” (Wang, 1999, p. 352). According to this perspective, attractions are staged by tourism operators depending on how they interpret authenticity thereby converting the concept as a social construct (Cohen, 1988; MacLeod, 2006; Tucker, 2003). For example, a visit to the Walt Disney World Resort showcases multitudes of cultures and time periods (i.e. Mexican pavilion at Epcot theme park and Frontierland at the Magic Kingdom theme park). Tourists perceive that the symbols of architecture, food, dress, music, and landscaping are symbolically authentic when visiting such recreation lands.

In essence, the main point of constructionist authenticity is that tourists are not looking for objective authenticity, but rather symbolic interpretations, which usually does not have to do with reality (Wang, 1999). Authenticity of the objects is the result of human interpretation. The context of perception is what distinguishes the constructionist viewpoint from that of the object. In this viewpoint, the role of authenticity has to do with the perception of the object. One of the main assumptions in constructivism is that there is not a real world. Reality is best seen as one’s interpretations, and that various meanings can be created by a variety of perspectives (Wang, 1999). Reality is a social construct based on accepted norms and ideological perspectives. These perceptions of the setting shape one’s viewpoint of authenticity. Thus, authenticity is a project and perception of a resident’s own beliefs, stereotypes, and expectations, where meaning evolves over time (Bruner, 1991; Laxson, 1991; Silver, 1993).

Existential authenticity, on the other hand, is preoccupied with the notion of “being” which is triggered by tourist activities (Wang, 1999). In other words, the meaning of authenticity is related to the response triggered by the experience enjoyed. Tourists and locals engage each other without cultural mediators, instead of observing each other. Tucker (2003) describes how the meandering tourists visiting the Turkish village of Gerome go beyond the gazing to individuate their experience and identity. These tourists avoid predictable and controlled situations to experience the unexpected providing them the freedom to reject the contrived experience. Essentially, the notion of “being” in the context of tourism is grouped by Wang (1999) in four meanings: (1) bodily feeling; (2) self-making; (3) family ties, and (4) touristic communities.

Both the objective and existential strands of authenticity in tourism focus on the tourists as the unit of analysis, neglecting thereby the residents as an important player in the realization of authenticity. While tourist motivation and experience are important for tourism studies, the role that residents play in creating authenticity is equally important to understand. If one assumes that authenticity is a dynamic concept evolving over time as a result of social forces, the social context becomes a crucial unit of analysis in understanding the meaning of authenticity. Authenticity is considered as a concept derived from social interaction; various actors give meaning to the concept of authenticity, and altogether they construct a kind of authenticity (Salome, 2010).

The meaning of authenticity reveals some interesting concepts, such as past, future, preservation, change, static, dynamic, control, and happenstance. Tourism inevitably brings together a variety of people who constantly deal and negotiate new identities, practices, and relationships. The context of this process shrouded in the dichotomy globalization-localization seems to influence the outcome of the quest for defining oneself, resulting in alienation, belonging, pride, or shame. This context is problematic in relation to the concept of authenticity in the sense that globalization creates sameness thereby robbing small islands from their vernacular differences (Croes, 2011).

In addition, the literature is not clear whether the context of negotiation among stakeholders will either remain a situation (e.g., past or future) or the context that will reveal a process of continuing quest for new forms of identity. The literature seems to claim that the attitude towards change (resistance or acceptance) will shape the nature of negotiation and hence sustainability of cultural tourism at a destination (Tucker, 2003). Determining the meaning of authenticity is therefore fraught with tension and uncertainty. The purpose of this study is, therefore, an attempt in clarifying the meaning of authenticity as it plays out in a small island destination from the resident's perspective. Additionally, this study aims to determine whether the concept of authenticity is helpful in understanding cultural tourism as a strategy to provide increasing returns to tourism specialization.

### ***The meaning of authenticity in Aruba***

Aruba has developed and positioned its tourism sector as one of the premier destinations in the Caribbean. The push towards tourism development was primarily aimed to create jobs and to enhance the quality of life of its population. Tourists are drawn to the island for a variety of reasons, including the island's stellar natural beauty, rich cultural life, and spirit of its people. The number of arrivals has increased steadily over the past twenty-five years. While Aruba received 181,200 arrivals in 1986, by 2010 the arrivals accounted for 825,500 tourists (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

The Aruba's tourism specialization strategy of the past twenty-five years was founded on volume, i.e., more arrivals and immigrants and guest workers. One of the impacts that this development has had on the island is in its demographic profile with former emigrants returning home and also immigrants choosing to come to Aruba searching for new opportunities. Immigrants now represent 18% of the population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010). The population of Aruba almost doubled from 59,444 in 1986 to 110,000 in 2010. The infusion of a foreign element has had its effects on the cultural and social fabric on the island.

According to Razak (2007), this foreign presence has bothered tourists and locals alike, albeit in different ways. The diluting effects due to the foreign elements was not appreciated by the tourists who come to the destination especially attracted by the Aruban culture and ethos of friendliness, hospitality and gentle demeanor. On the other hand, the locals felt that the foreign presence was eroding the Aruban culture by not speaking the local language Papiamentu (emigrants often speak Spanish instead) and by entertaining a different cultural ethos.

By early 2000, the Government of Aruba decided to spin the local culture as a more prominent component of the range of tourist offerings and activities. Cultural identity was reflected by four elements: geographic areas, local icons, such as language, food and music, attachment to neighborhoods, and the native ethos (e.g., friendliness, hospitable, traditions). The strong cultural diversity present on the island however makes any attempt to define and provide the authentic configuration of the Aruban reality very challenging. While the study conducted by Razak (2007) applied some interesting concepts derived from a hybrid of different disciplines, the study did not discuss the meaning of the authenticity concept. The current study not only examines the meaning of authenticity but also shows how residents construct their own meaning of authenticity in a cultural diversified society, which is at the heart of the authenticity debate in Aruba.



## Methodology

### *Pilot Study: individual stakeholder meetings*

In order to fully understand the meaning of authenticity as it pertains to the island of Aruba, the researchers followed three interrelated steps. First, the researchers interviewed 104 individual stakeholders on the island. Participants were invited from a cross-functional and representative makeup of stakeholders. These stakeholders included private organizations (i.e. managers of hotels, restaurants, and attractions) as well as public organizations (i.e. industry leaders from associations, related government officials, and other organizations impacted by tourism such as education, social, and religious organizations).

The individual stakeholder meetings were approximately hour-long sessions. Each meeting started with a brief presentation of the project. The remaining time was an opportunity for stakeholders to state their relationships with tourism, the challenges of tourism, and related additional information. The following questions were asked at every stakeholder meeting: (1) how does Aruba' tourism development optimize the internal supply to meet the evolving tourist demands; (2) what are the prominent features of Aruba from a tourist perspective; and (3) what is the local residents' attitude towards tourism development and in Aruba? These questions stemmed from the Cole and Razak Report (2003) and the Murphy Report (2008) which basically documented the perceptions of the changing tourist's preferences combined with the growing concern of residents with the erosion of the identity of the island. For example, the Murphy Report (2008) detailed the growing frustration with the presence of foreigners on the island, suggesting that the flow of immigrants was the culprit for endangering the traditional friendliness and hospitality spirit of Aruba. The researchers were interested in further exploring the suggestion of the Murphy Report regarding the negative perception about immigrants and the potential effects of this perception on the production of tourist offerings in Aruba.

The researchers found that a pertinent theme from these stakeholders was that they were concerned with the tourism development strategy that was currently in place, confirming what was suggested by the Murphy Report (2008). Specifically, the stakeholders commented that the current strategy could be attributed to the transforming of the social make-up of the island, and that this social transformation is working to the detriment of the tourism industry. Specifically, the stakeholders were concerned that too many tourists and too many foreign workers are changing the unique dynamic of the semblance of Aruba society and life. While the previous reports were implying that foreign presence could be equated with the flow of immigrant workers, our discussion was hinting at both tourists and immigrant workers alike as the culprits for the changing face of Aruba.

The stakeholders were concerned that the notions of authenticity were affecting the tourism product and quality of life. However, when the researchers probed about the meaning of authenticity, responses were vague or very emotionally charged with anti-foreigners epithets. It remained unclear whether identity and authenticity were related to the preservation of the past, or whether identity and authenticity were a dynamic concept changing over time. In addition, it was not clear whether the authenticity was place bound or was more related to people (born in Aruba, naturalized or immigrant, speaking the Papiamentu language or demeanor).

### *Study 1: focus group*

The ambiguity in responses of the stakeholders prompted a more structured focus group format attempting to elicit meaning in the concept of authenticity. It was decided that a focus

group methodology should be employed to obtain in-depth information describing community members' perceptions of authenticity. In particular, the focus group explored how local communities describe and define authenticity, how they desire to keep their own identity or cope with new identity forms, and how to promote their uniqueness to tourists (Agar & MacDonald, 1995; Milman, 1993; Morgan, 1998).

Interviews with community leaders from different sectors were considered necessary to understand the ways in which these sectors shape tourism development and influence the local residents. To serve this purpose, the focus group included 15 stakeholders from diverse fields such as (1) local artists, (2) members of nonprofit organizations, (3) other community leaders who were knowledgeable about cultural happenings (e.g. educators) and (4) persons in charge of local tourism events. It was noted that the focus group included not only stakeholders directly involved in tourism decisions but also those who merely associate themselves with tourism. Yet, they shared a common interest in the culture, identity, and authenticity of the island.

### *Photo elicitation*

After a literature review, photo-elicitation techniques were selected as an effective method for gathering data on perception of authenticity. Photographs of the island were used to process the focus group as Pritchard and Morgan (2003) suggest that photographs have become a key medium for our understanding of the world and offer particular perceptions of a society and can create new ways of regarding people and places. Photo-elicitation employs one or more images, and informants are asked to comment on them. The purpose is not to analyze the images but to assess the reaction of the respondents to them, attributing social and personal meanings and values. A photo-elicitation method is based on the idea of inserting a photograph, either generated by the subject or by the investigator into a research interview (Lederman, et al., 2002). Thus, the notion of recording not only encompasses a variety of practices and rituals in itself, but also it extends beyond ideas of collection and record and into the realms of self-making, authentication, and socialization processes which are bound up with the embodied doing of tourism (Crouch, 2000).

Two researchers went out to two touristic areas in Aruba to obtain photographs pertaining to authenticity. The researchers captured digital photographs of products, nature, interactions of tourists, and various buildings that would be typically viewed by a tourist during their visit to the island. It was noted that existing images were used rather than having participants to describe their own images. First, the city of Oranjestad, which is the capital of Aruba, was selected because of its proximity to many areas favored by tourists. In this city center, there are numerous hotels, restaurants, museums, and shopping areas frequented by tourists as well as locals. Additionally, the cruise terminal is located in this part of this location. The second area selected to capture photographs is known as the "strip," a high density cluster of hotels, restaurants, and shopping areas that is located near the beaches favored by tourists.

In total, 76 photographs were organized in a slide show, and each photograph was labeled with a number. In addition to the 76 photographs, two false photographs were purposely included to see if the participants could consider if the photograph was authentic or inauthentic: one photograph of painting that was created by an artist in the U.S., and the other photograph of a beach and palm tree that was taken from the Dominican Republic. Examples of photographs are showcased in the Appendix.

### *Procedures*

There were specific steps involved to prepare the focus group with local communities. First, during the beginning of the focus group session, two pages of paper were given to participants: the first page included 76 item numbers with an option of choosing yes or no right next to each item, and the second page included a matrix for participants to organize their answers so that they can compare their answers with others. The matrix table served three purposes: 1) to prevent participants from dominating the entire discussion; 2) to force participants to share their opinions over their subjective agreement and disagreement; 3) and to identify commonality and difference. Second, each photograph was shown to participants, and they were asked to answer whether the image they saw from the photograph was authentic or inauthentic to them. Photographs were advanced to the next image within two seconds to force participants to answer quickly. Third, participants were asked to organize their answers by listing photograph numbers into authentic or inauthentic box. Fourth, participants exchanged their answer sheet with another participant to another to compare their answers. Fifth, discussion began by sharing similarities and differences of their answers. Finally, the two fake photographs were revealed to the participants. The two false photographs acted as a filter whether participants were able to recognize photographs of authentic Aruba.

The length of the discussion of the focus group was 60 minutes. The discussion was led by one trained moderator, and two assistant moderators were present during the session to help guarantee reliability and consistency across the focus group. The focus group session was digitally tape recorded. The assistant moderators took notes during the session. Debriefings were conducted and field notes were taken right after the focus group.

### *Authenticity of natural environment*

In answering the research question of what constitutes authenticity in small island destinations, the natural landscapes are extremely important to the Aruban tourist product, and all participants confirmed the beaches are an important part of the product as well as to the local population. From the focus group, participants gave vivid details and descriptions of the natural landscape photographs. The authenticity of the natural environments was vetted by identifying objects that were related to the environment, such as palm trees, white sandy beaches, and the blue waters. Specifically photographs of the landscapes, oceans, and nature were shown to the respondents.

However, on several photographs pertaining to nature photographs, the cultural leaders were mixed on their conclusion of authenticity. Several participants were challenged by the beach photographs. While one participant stated that “The white sand, the blue waters, the wooden boat. That’s typical Aruba” another had a different perspective, and stated the photograph of the beach landscape was not authentic. The participant stated,

It could be some island. An island in another hemisphere...I know the palm tree was not from Aruba. They simply put the palm tree there.... So seeing this implanted palm tree did not make sense to me.

Several participants stated that although the photograph of a beach and sea scene could have been taken in Aruba, the scene actually could have been from a variety of beach locales throughout the Caribbean and the world. In particular, when looking at the photograph of a beach and palm tree that was taken from the Dominican Republic, none of participants recognized the

fact that that photo was not taken of Aruba. Many participants appeared to be challenged if the photographs of the nature were to be considered authentic to Aruba.

The beach landscape is assessed not only as an important narrative of the physical manifestation of the island, but also as a narrative that has significantly shaped the identity of the island. While the beach plays an important role in the branding of the island as a tourist destination, it has also significance in determining the identity of the residents of the island. Respondents were therefore sensitive to the origin of the objects displayed in the beach landscape. Except for the white beaches and blue waters, all other objects were challenged as truly Aruban. Thus, identifying authenticity in small island destinations by natural environment seemed challenging.

#### *Authenticity of origin*

As stated, most of the studies on authenticity in the tourism sector focus on the demand side of tourism, specifically the tourists themselves. However, in most interactions, the supply side of participants includes employees, operators, and other stakeholders that actively participate in the exchange. There were several photographs that were shown to the participants of the focus group that showed tourists interacting with locals during typical hospitality interactions. For example, a street vendor was actively discussing a painting to a tourist. In another photograph, an employee was finishing a transaction in a quick-service food and beverage location with a tourist.

In the discussion, participants could not agree if such photos are authentic or not. For example, the photograph of the tourist interacting with the local vendor discussing the painting was intriguing to the participants. Many participants wondered if the original painter was from Aruba or if the painting was completed in Aruba. Many participants stated that in order for the painting to be authentic, the painter had to be from Aruba. The subject of the painting also proved to be worth of attention by the participants. Several participants felt that the subject of the painting had to be about Aruba. In this particular photograph, many participants stated the subject of the painting was not Aruban. To participants, the photograph of a painting by the US artist was not authentic because it was done by a U.S. artist.

Given the diversity of Aruba with influences from immigrants, it did not make much sense to conclude identifying authenticity based on participants. Most immigrants look like the locals. The influx of Spanish-speaking immigrants has generated apprehension, because while looking very much like locals, they entertain another language and cultural ethos. In the discussion about who is a local, the use of the local language Papiamentu became important, but also that according to the members of the focus group, guest workers lack the understanding and are not interested in carrying the local culture, such as being friendly and hospitable. If the input has to be local without any foreign element, very few would be left to be authentic.

#### *Authenticity of culture*

The authenticity of culture was also addressed during the focus group. Literature has shown that the unique attributes of a society, such as language, demeanor, way of living, and traditions can be deemed authentic to a culture. In this regard, what is authentic is considered unique when compared to other cultures. For example, traditions such as holidays can be defined as solely in the context of a culture. A tourist can then be exposed to some unique attributes of a

society when visiting the country. The way of one's perceived "way of living" can differ from culture to culture.

Local culture can be defined as the differences in living. One partaker said that authenticity in culture had to do with the process of how objects are arranged. When shown a photograph of a vendor selling merchandise items, the respondent noticed how numerous objects and products were arranged on a merchandise table. He stated that the unique manner of the layout of the objective was in fact specific to the Aruban culture. According to the contributor, the distinctiveness of the layout is perceived to be part of the cultural identity. It appears that the act of arranging things is more important for his local identity than the items that are used in the process. The process of arranging things seems to reveal the relevance of the ordinary and everyday life contrasting with a culture primed by simple tradition. Tradition is perceived as tradition with something else.

Self-perception is an important component of authenticity. For example, the researchers showed a photograph of a movie theater housed in a traditional style of Aruban architecture. Although the style of architecture was traditional, the structure was a modern building that utilized traces of Aruban architecture. Half of the participants stated the building was authentic. Stated by one participant who agreed the building was authentic:

When you see the image, you immediately will think about the typical row house in Aruba. I thought it was made here in Aruba, by Aruban neighbors. For me, authenticity is something that is made here.

These two examples illustrate how activities and objects are filtered in combining traditional and foreign elements and how this combination is conceived as authentic. Traditional is equated with place (born in Aruba) and time (history and past); while foreign elements are associated with guest workers and lifestyles borrowed from other cultures. Based on the focus group it was found that defining authenticity by nature or people was challenging. These two elements reveal a sense of ambivalence regarding the meaning of authenticity. Nature does not seem sufficiently distinguishable from others, while origin of country embedded in a multicultural population, such as Aruba, seems problematic.

However, the participants shared the common view about the authenticity related to culture in Aruba. In particular, the term of "local" and "authentic" were defined as those people who were born and raised in Aruba and goods that were made by their own people using their own materials. Local culture was implied in the discussions as being different to other cultural forms and expressions, as a way of life connected to how they organize things, how they blend with other foreign elements without foregoing the core values of being friendly, hospitable, proud, loyal and respectful. Authenticity in this context means differentiating especially from other groups that can compromise the real or imaginary lifestyle. Language or the use of Papiamentu is a powerful filter in attaching belonging to the local culture and seem to provide meaning to what is authenticity in the local context. Razak (2007) also found similar indications of how authenticity is being morphed through the dynamic transformative cultural process experienced during the last decade of the twentieth century in Aruba. Thus, it seemed plausible, that in a very diverse and ever transforming culture to assume that authenticity is better defined as a concept related to identity and culture of the island.

### ***Study 2: quantitative approach***

While the focus group provided clarity in terms of authenticity being embedded in the cultural lifestyle, it was still not clear what cultural resources could be derived from the specific meaning of authenticity. Are these resources to be sought after in customs and traditions or are the resources to be inferred from cultural attributes? The researchers considered answering these questions by investigating the perceptions of the residents regarding the impact of tourism on culture. Tourism can instill pride in the destination's population and understanding why and whether the pride perception is widely spread among the population could become a powerful attribute in the reinvention strategies of a small island destination. On the other hand, if tourism, for example, is perceived as disrespectful to the local population, this negative impact could hamper further tourism development.

Early studies have paid attention on the changes in style and form of traditional arts and crafts caused by the commercial demands of tourists for native wares (Schadler, 1979). Others, however, claim that tourism contributes to the renaissance of traditional art, crafts, dance and music (McKean, 1977). For example, in her dissertation, Kim (2003) found that residents appear to believe that tourism is a vehicle for the preservation and enrichment of local culture. Also, through cultural exchanges between residents and tourists, the exposure to cultural differences acts as a positive effect of tourism (Belisle & Hoy, 1980).

The researchers, therefore, investigated whether tourism development is transforming the place to such an extent that the self portrait of locals is not reflective of their own beliefs and expectations. Tourism does not simply reflect on the local culture, but it alters and re-creates the local culture. It is important to understand how residents perceive the impact of tourism on cultural values, especially since tourism may morph the local culture and hence its authenticity. Therefore, a survey instrument was conducted accordingly.

#### *Survey instrument*

The survey instrument consisted of fourteen questions from these dimensions regarding cultural impacts of tourism and nine questions regarding demographic characteristics. Kim (2002) measured cultural impact of tourism in three dimensions: preservation of the culture, deterioration of the culture, and cultural exchanges. The measurement items were adapted from Kim (2002) that originally adapted from previous studies of quality of life (Ap & Crompton, 1998; Lankford & Howard, 1994; Liu & Var, 1986; Tosum, 2002, & Weaver & Lawton, 2001). The questionnaire was screened by academic professionals to check on the design of the questionnaire and the quality of measures employed for face validity purpose. A 7-point Likert scale was used, anchoring at 1 (Completely Disagree) and 7 (Completely Agree).

#### *Data collection*

Aruba Tourism Authority took the initiative to collect surveys. In order to capture a wide variety of participants of local residents, the survey was administered at government-sponsored "town hall" meetings in four geographic areas on the island: Noord, Oranjestad, San Nicolas and Sta. Cruz. In addition, the surveys were administered to faculty and staff at the University of Aruba, EPI and Colegio Arubanoas as well as by local businesses and non-governmental organizations, such as Kiwanis, Rotary and the YMCA. Out of 1,200 surveys that were distributed, 922 surveys were collected, indicating a response rate of 76.8%. The sample size represents .8% of the total population in Aruba.

### *Sample profile*

The demographics of participants were presented in Table 2. The results of the demographic profile indicate that the gender of the participants was evenly distributed, representing 53% of females and 47% of male. The distribution of age also comparably represented while generation Y (age 15-30) was 31%, Generation X (age 31-45) was 31%, Boomers (age 46-60) was 29%, and Retirees (age 61 or older) was 9% of the total participants. The income was generally distributed, and the education distribution was also comparable.

[Insert Table 2 near here]

### *Analysis and results*

The Orthogonal (Varimax) rotated factor matrix was run identifying two factors. After examination of the factorability of individual variables using the measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) were measured, three variables that have MSA values under .50 were found, which had no significant correlations. Thus, these three variables were removed (i.e., alter behavior, commercialized, and Papiamento). After deletion, the Bartlett's test found that the correlations are significant at the .0001 level. The overall MSA value falls in the acceptable range (above .50) with a value of .918. VARIMAX rotated common factor analysis factor matrix explains the total variance of 54.90%.

Descriptions of the two factors are as follows. Factor 1 was labeled as "local attributes of culture." This factor is related to the various attributes of culture including food, pride, performing arts, music, and cultural exchange and explains 45.71% of the variance. Factor 2 was named as "cultural customs," This dimension explains 9.20% of the variance and includes items including cultural renewal, strengthening of traditions, and participation in traditional art forms.

[Insert Table 3 near here]

### *MANOVA*

During the interviews, stakeholders mentioned that younger people tend to appreciate tourism less and criticize tourism development impacting the culture of Aruba. A one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance was performed to investigate age differences on how local residents perceive cultural impacts of tourism. Internal reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, factor 1 being 0.874 and factor 2 being 0.613. Then, items within each factor were aggregated and each mean was used for further analysis. The results of MANOVA revealed that local attributes of culture scores were significantly different among age groups, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .025,  $F(3, 865)=8.337$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .028.

As shown in Table 4, an inspection of the mean scores indicated that Generation Y reported significantly lower levels of agreement with cultural impacts of tourism ( $M=3.44$ ) than Generation X ( $M=3.62$ ),  $p = .083$ , Boomers ( $M=3.76$ ),  $p < .001$ , and Retirees ( $M=3.88$ ),  $p < .001$ . Generation Y feels less likely that tourism encourages the production and availability of local foods, residents' pride in local culture, and promotion of authenticity compared to other generations.

[Insert Table 4 near here]

## Discussion

The purpose of this study is two-folded: 1) to explore the meaning of authenticity in the context of a small island destination and 2) to determine whether the concept of authenticity is helpful in understanding cultural tourism as a strategy to provide increasing returns to tourism specialization. This study aims to explore the meaning of authenticity as it pertains to the specific situation of Aruba. Like most destinations in the Caribbean, Aruba comprises a variety of cultures which influences the island's demographic, economic, and social structures. A great challenge in defining authenticity lies in how people with competing interest and background construct identity by evoking native culture history, customs and traditions and how the way in which people interpret and give meaning to the past and present play a central role in producing the shape of the future and in creating competitive advantage as a destination (Croes 2011; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2010).

The study drives several specific contributions to the literature on authenticity. First, the study examines the perspectives of stakeholders and local residents on the meaning of authenticity, departing from the main stream literature which mainly focuses on the demand side (tourists) of the equation. Thus, it fills a void in the literature that addresses the role of authenticity in tourism from a supply side perspective. Second, the study discusses authenticity from a small island perspective. Studies referencing authenticity in small islands from a supply perspective is lacking. Third, it applies a novel technique utilizing imagery of landmarks and entities on the island of Aruba for the purpose of identifying authenticity. And fourth, the study combines qualitative and quantitative methods, which are limited in the current literature on authenticity and cultural impact in tourism. This is a departure because most studies that examine authenticity do so with primarily quantitative approaches.

The overarching theme in the discussion with local stakeholders is their keen desire to identify what is distinguishable from others. The local identity seems in flux which is affecting a clear understanding of what is authentic Aruban. The ambiguity about the meaning of authenticity and the hybrid manifestations of authenticity in the Aruban context is infusing frustration and ire among the population. "What is Aruban" is a critical question as the tourism industry moves forward. To investigate the meaning of authenticity in a small island destination and how it relates to the tourist experience from the stakeholders' side, imagery was used as researchers acquired photographs on the island pertaining to "typical" sights an actual tourist would see on the island such as architecture, nature, merchandise, and cultural icons.

In the face-to-face meetings with over one hundred stakeholders on the island it was clear that the overwhelming majority, while supporting the tourism industry, were frustrated with the side-effects of tourism on the cultural and social fabric of the population. These side-effects induced by the presence of too many tourists and foreign immigrants were challenging the sustainability of tourism in Aruba, according to the stakeholders. Consequently, Aruba was losing its "charm", its identity and authenticity, and hence its uniqueness. Tourism offerings which no longer could rely on Aruba's tradition, friendliness and hospitality can endanger the future development of the industry, according to the stakeholders. However, the discussion with the stakeholders did not elicit the meaning of authenticity or did not get a definitive answer as to the question what is Aruban.

The use of photo-elicitation technique was a response to the vagueness to the question of what is Aruban. This technique was not centered on the analysis of pictures or images; rather the technique was focused on assessing the reactions of the participants to the images and the



meanings that were ascribed to the images. Participants were surprised by the technique, partially because it was novel in the context of Aruba. More importantly, the technique compelled the participation of every one of the participants and produced a lively discussion about the meaning of authenticity. The view of authenticity ran the gamut of the concrete understandings of locality, time, and context and to the reflection through multifaceted and integrated perspectives. It turned out that, unlike the expectation, participants connected authenticity with culture and infused it with a dynamic content. While at the beginning of the discussion participants were leaning towards infusing authenticity with tradition and the past, the discussion evolved at the end in accepting that in a multicultural society authenticity cannot be infused only with past elements or history. The everyday culture as manifested by a multicultural society should be part of Aruba's identity and hence determines what is authentic.

The preliminary conclusion from this focus group is that the notions of authenticity are unique, vast, and individualistic, and that an encompassing definition of authenticity is difficult to concur. The reason seems to be that authenticity is a moving target infused with constant negotiations within a constantly changing context as the Aruban case. The role of the past in defining the self as an imposed interpretation of what is typical Aruban style in some a priori form seems to collide with the relevance of inclusiveness and the everyday life. The participants at the focus group seem to resent the exclusion in determining what of Aruba should be exposed to tourists. Authenticity seems produced or invented in social processes, but authenticity seems coherent with a set of held beliefs and values. For example, speaking the Papiamentu language is strongly related to authentic expression of the everyday life. The conception of the meaning of authenticity in the Aruban case has its place in a specific social context and is constructed on the basis of existing ideas, traditions and values, and many of which were unaware by the group of respondents.

The researchers investigated further whether the presence of tourists is a catalyst for this collision and how this collision is manifesting itself in the Aruban context. A survey instrument was designed to probe further into this potential collision and the researchers were able to collect data from 922 respondents, scattered over four distinct regions on the island. The results reveal two interesting patterns. First, cultural attributes seem more important than customs or traditions when residents engage with tourists. In other words, cultural attributes, such as pride and cultural identity are the most impacted compared to the Aruba history and traditions. This seems to corroborate with the findings of the focus group that everyday life culture is relevant for defining authenticity. And second, the presence of tourists on the island is infusing a dynamic process with regard to the definition of identity and authenticity. There is a bubbling undercurrent in the perception of the next generation of Arubans regarding the role of tourism in defining the self and what is authentic about Aruba. This younger generation in sharing the frustration and limitations about the tourism impact on the local culture is implying that the local identity should be reinvented. In so doing, they seem to resist something of the traditional and of the past, yet embracing change and the future. This feeling is amplified by their sense of being left out.

Chambers (2000) claims that sticking to tradition and preservation is not authentic, implying that the process of reinvention and inclusion is what makes places interesting and unique. This implies that the everyday practice and behavior could become an important source of deepening tourism development in Aruba. Should tourism facilitate the understanding that the concept and practice of authenticity is not static, but rather an evolving practice that embraces

new cultural forms. Then cultural tourism could become a potent vehicle enhancing the quality of life of residents. This would be the essence of the distinctiveness of Aruba contributing to a sense of place, pride, and culture. This authenticity could become the core of Aruba's attractiveness as a tourist destination.

### **Implications**

If authenticity may play a critical role in filtering those cultural resources needed to undergird reinvention strategies, could the implementation of a reinvention strategy based on authenticity rekindle the fallacy a composition problem for small island destinations? Because small island destinations have their own dynamic patterns of “constructing” their identity and authenticity, they may create in the process the condition of a low substitution of elasticity between their tourism goods and the tourism goods of other destinations, and non-tourism-goods in the origin countries. In other words, small island destinations may be able to create unique conditions based on their idiosyncrasies infused by their construction of authenticity. This process of construction and the resulting meaning of authenticity are on itself unique to each island destination thereby converting that destination in a unique product. Therefore, the danger that a small island destination will grow at the expense of another, potentially resulting in an oversupply of tourism products seems limited.

This condition of uniqueness and difficulty in emulating authenticity and cultural resources could prove very critical in the further development of Aruba and other small island destinations. The results encourage stakeholders to look at how cultural identity is being formed and identified by residents. Stakeholders may also want to incorporate specific cultural programming that may address the unique needs and wants of residents. For example, stakeholders may want to collaborate with cultural leaders to promote the unique opportunities of the cultural environment of the island specifically through marketing events and activities.

Moreover, government officials may want to consider incorporating communication messages of how tourism development impacts the cultural identity of residents. In particular, younger residents perceive tourism development having lower impact scores on cultural identity. The government may want to directly communicate how tourism development has positively impacted cultural identity. A platform for interaction of all segments could be created within the cultural context to promote cross-generational interaction.

## Conclusion

Authenticity seems an effective filter in fretting about cultural resources to be employed in the reinvention strategies. For authenticity to play a role in a multicultural society the process of filtering the meanings of authenticity is critical. Investigating the various kinds of social processes and practices around the concept of authenticity can shed light into how specific stakeholders make sense of authenticity and how this is linked with their actions. By only including the conventional stakeholders could provide a bias conception of the meaning of authenticity. These processes and practices of inclusion or exclusion can also become constitutive elements of the social reality and thus have an effect on how fundamental cultural resources could become for tourism development in the case of Aruba.

The lesson from Aruba is that the inclusion from all sectors of society—those traditionally involved with tourism and those not directly involved with tourism—provides a well-rounded conception of authenticity. The process of inclusion in a multicultural society is on and by itself an interesting unique offering, manifested in a blend of everyday life cultural practices. Richards and Wilson (2007) claim that everyday life culture is becoming the hallmark of travel and tourism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the other hand, basing the meaning of authenticity on an elitist process is misleading at best and at worst could fuel the ire of the other sectors of society thereby resting the necessary support for the further development of tourism.

Migrating from a strategy based on volume to overcome the scale problem of a small island to a strategy based on cultural resources is a complex endeavor. The new strategy entails strong collaborative efforts among all stakeholders at the destinations. This implies that the traditional stakeholders should engage in power-sharing regarding information, decision-making, and the accrual of benefits. This new attitude is necessary because as Aruba moves forward with its tourism development, the production of the tourism product will become more complex. The complexity is undergirded in interdependent relationships and locked in ever-expanding business webs to add value. To add value to the tourism product based on cultural resources requires the ability at the destination level to pull diverse partners together and leverage all what they have to offer to create a memorable experience. Pulling and leveraging will entail a different partnership between the private and public sectors: inclusion should become the hallmark of this partnership.

Future research should point out whether the case of Aruba is applicable to other small island destinations. Research questions related to how stakeholders make sense and conceive authenticity in specific settings and how authenticity could be employed as an instrumental concept in tourism research and practice are relevant in the context of small island destinations. It is important to search for replicable conditions of a multicultural society, promoting authenticity as the filter for cultural resources, inclusion and collaboration. Centering attention on these conditions in small island destinations could yield a broad understanding on whether conditions could lead to shifting towards a workable and sustainable tourism strategy embedded on cultural resources.

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Table 1. History of approaches to understanding meaning of authenticity.

Year	Author	Approach
1964	Boorstin	Staged attractions; commodification of cultures giving rise to standardized experiences
1976	MacCannell	Interaction between human relationships in primitive societies
1988	Cohen	Ethnographic concept; made of natural materials and manufactured by hand
1991	Taylor	Artificiality; different meanings for different people
1994	Sharpley	Traditional culture and its origin
1994	Spooner	Genuineness, reliability of face value, interpretation of genuineness and our desire for it
1996	Adams	Products constructed by tourists and hosts themselves
1999	Waller and Lea	Four dimensions of consumer-defined authenticity
1999	Wang	Past and representation of others; perceived by the viewers
1999	McIntosh and Prentice	Interpretation provided for the displays and the reviewer
2002	Cohen	False reality
2010	Lau	Relationship authenticity



Table 2. Demographics characteristics.

Demographics	Frequency	Percent
Demographics	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	489	53%
Male	427	47%
Age		
Gen Y (15-30)	259	29%
Gen X (31-45)	283	31%
Boomers (46-60)	278	31%
Retirees (61 or older)	85	9%
Income (in US\$)		
20,000 or less	180	23%
20,001-40,000	190	24%
40,001-60,000	164	21%
60,001-80,000	120	15%
80,001-100,000	60	8%
Over 100,001	75	10%
Education		
Elementary School	42	6%
High school	367	50%
Associate Degree	170	23%

Table 3. Cultural impact factor structure.

Items	Local Attribute of Culture (F1)	Cultural Customs (F2)	Variance Explained	Cronbach
Tourism encourages the production and availability of local foods.	0.759			
Tourism increases residents' pride in local culture.	0.754			
Tourism promotes authenticity in Aruba.	0.737			
Tourism encourages the residents' participation and enjoyment of local performing arts such as music.	0.73		45.71%	0.874
Tourism helps to conserve the cultural identity and heritage of Aruba.	0.721			
The cultural exchange between residents and tourists is valuable for residents.	0.693			
Tourism encourages a variety of cultural activities by the local population.	0.586			
Tourists show respect for the cultural lifestyle of the local people.	0.468			
Local culture is being renewed as a result of tourism.		0.798		
Tourist interest in culture strengthens traditional activities and cultural pride.		0.657	9.20%	0.613
Tourism has stimulated the locals' interest in participating in traditional art forms.		0.647		

Note: KMO= .918; Chi-Square= 3596.307; df= 55; p < .001

Table 4. Means and standard deviations of cultural impact by generation.

	Age	Mean	Std. Deviation
Local Attribute of Culture	Generation Y	3.44	.78
	Generation X	3.62	.90
	Boomers	3.76	.83
	Retirees	3.88	.98
Cultural Customs	Generation Y	3.52	.87
	Generation X	3.50	.86
	Boomers	3.48	.91
	Retirees	3.71	.96

*Note:* Each dependent variable is measured on a 5-point scale.

Appendix Examples of Photographs (First is one of the “false” photos)



Source: traveldk.com



