

Just Within Your Breach

The Authenticating Discourses of Finnish
Wilderness Destination Marketing Organizations

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Abstract

Authenticity has been widely regarded as a central topic to tourism research, as it is one of the main drivers behind tourists' travel motivations. However, the research has largely focused on the tourist's side, leaving authentication – the creation of authenticity – a less explored area, especially in the context of wilderness destinations. To address the gap in research, this thesis studies the different authenticating discourses used by five Finnish destination marketing organizations (DMOs) when promoting wilderness destinations on their websites. Through analysis of cultural practices, four authenticating discourses were found: Pristine Wilderness, Enchanted Reality, Transformed Life, and Affected Body. The discourses, with Pristine Wilderness acting as the framework for the other three discourses, aim to authenticate the destinations by constructing them as untamed and pure, magical, and full of existential pleasures and invigorating bodily sensations. It is claimed here that the discourses promise fulfillment of the fantasy of authenticity through what is here referred to as breaching, the renegotiation, and breaching, of known boundaries. Through breaching, the tourist is promised a transformation, either in the world perceived by the tourist, or within the tourist themselves – as the result of the transformation is either a more authentic world or a more authentic self. The thesis further consolidates the link between authenticity and wilderness and expands the study of authentication by introducing the four found authenticating discourses and the concept of breaching as a part of authentication.

Keywords Authenticity, Authentication, Wilderness, Tourism

Työn nimi Murtumispistettä etsimässä: Suomalaisten erämaaturistikohteiden käyttämät autentikoivat diskurssit

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Autenttisuutta pidetään yhtenä turismitutkimuksen keskeisimmistä käsitteistä, sillä se on matkustusmotivaatioon vahvasti vaikuttava tekijä. Autenttisuuden tutkimus on kuitenkin suurilta osin keskittynyt turistin kokemusten tutkimiseen jättäen autentikoinnin – autenttisuuden rakentamisen – vähemmälle huomiolle, etenkin erämaaturistikohteiden kontekstissa. Tutkimusaukkoa täydentääkseen tämä maisterintutkielma tutkii viiden suomalaisen erämaaturistikohteen verkkosivuilla käytettyjä autentikoivia diskursseja. Verkkosivujen tekstisisältöjä lähestyttiin kulttuurisina teksteinä, ja analyysin perusteella löytyi neljä autentikoivaa diskurssia: Koskematon erämaa, Lumottu todellisuus, Muuntunut elämä ja Vaikuttunut keho. Koskemattoman erämaan diskurssi toimi muiden havaittujen diskurssien alustana, ja yhdessä diskurssit pyrkivät autentikoimaan kohteita konstruoimalla ne koskemattomina ja villoina, maagisina ja täynnä eksistentiaalista nautintoa ja kehollisesti virkistäviä tuntemuksia. Tämän tutkimuksen argumentti on, että nämä diskurssit lupaavat turistille autenttisuuden fantasiaa murtamiseksi kutsutun käsitteen kautta: turistikohteet lupaavat turistille muutosta kuvailemalla turistin kokemusmaailmaa määrittävien lainalaisuuksien uudelleenmäärittämistä ja murtamista. Turistille luvataan murtamisen seurauksena muuntunutta – ja autenttisempaa – kokemusta maailmasta tai itsestä. Tutkielma tukee autenttisuuden ja erämaan välillä havaittua yhteyttä ja jatkaa aiempaa tutkimusta autentikoinnista tarjoamalla neljä havaittua autentikoivaa diskurssia sekä murtamisen osana autentikointiprosessia.

Avainsanat Autenttisuus, autentikointi, erämaa, turismi

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1 INTRODUCTION

The field of tourism is a topic of copious academic interest, as scholars have sought to explore what exactly compels tourists to roam (see Grayson & Martinec 2004; Lin & Liu 2018; MacCannell 1973; Olsen 2007; Thomsen & Vester 2016; Vidon 2019; Vidon, Rickly & Knudsen 2018; Wall-Reinius 2012; White 2007; Wang 1999). Central to this conversation is authenticity – the magnetic pull that motivates travelers to seek the wild, original, and untouched (Backhaus 2003; Cohen 1988; Knudsen & Waade 2010; Kolar & Zabkar 2010; Vidon, Rickly & Knudsen 2018; Wall-Reinius 2012; Wang 1999; Zhou et al. 2018). Introduced into the field of tourism study by MacCannell (1973), authenticity is an often used, yet an elusive concept (see Cohen 2007a; Mkonko 2012; Rickly-Boyd 2012). Initially seen as the historical genuineness of an object (Trilling 1972), the concept of authenticity has grown to include more authenticities, such as existential and socially constructed authenticity (Wang 1999), moving authenticity away from the genuineness of objects or sites and towards a sensation and an experience. Destination marketing organizations (hereafter referred to as DMOs) have found the use of authenticity and apply it to their marketing efforts to encourage travel (Arnould, Price & Tierney 1998; Carina, Keskitalo & Schilar 2017; Lin & Liu 2018; Saarinen 2004; Vidon 2018) in a saturated market where service providers need to differentiate from competition, with authenticity as an advantage (Avraham & Daugherty 2012; Gilmore & Pine 2007; White 2007; White, Morgan, Pritchard & Heimtun 2019). And, in the light of previous research, they are right to do so: tourists who suffer from the alienation resulting from living in the modern society (Knudsen & Waade 2010; Knudsen, Rickly & Vidon 2016; MacCannell 1973; Wang 1999), tourists *are* compelled by authentic destinations and experiences (Brida, Disegna & Osti 2013; Carina, Keskitalo & Schilar 2017; Gilmore & Pine 1998; Saarinen 2004; Schänzel & McIntosh 2000; Tyrväinen, Uusitalo, Silvennoinen & Hasu 2014). To tap into this need, DMOs can, through discourses, authenticate – make authentic – their destinations to motivate the tourist to visit (Knudsen & Waade 2010; Penrose 2020).

As authenticity acts as the antonym for the mediatized modern society, it is often associated with the brute, untamed, and pure world (Gilmore & Pine 2007; Knudsen & Waade 2010; MacCannell 1973; Vidon 2019; Wang 1999; White 2007). One of the places to seek for that ‘unspoiled’ world is the wilderness. An undercurrent within the authenticity research, studies focusing on the link between authenticity and the wilderness have proved wilderness a wellspring of authenticity (Cronon 1995; Fredrickson & Anderson 1999; Handler & Saxton 1988; Curtin 2005; Wang 1999).

However, most of the studies conducted within the context of wilderness and nature tourism focus on the tourist experience of authenticity (Curtin 2005; Fredrickson & Anderson 1999; Fältön 2021; Lindberg & Jensen 2021; Vidon & Rickly 2018; Wall-Reinius 2012), leaving an important question: what kind of discourses do DMOs use to authenticate their wilderness destinations? So far, the attempts to address the topic have been limited: Keskitalo and Schilar (2017) inspected discourses of Arctic and Northness and included the role of DMOs but underscored how DMOs *co-create* these discourses with tourists. On a study unrelated to wilderness, but tied to authentication, Penrose (2020) showed that museums can, through storytelling, authenticate their destinations and thus encourage experiences of existential authenticity. In her study, Vidon (2018) provided a historical overview of the different ways the wilderness has been authenticated but provided only a brief glimpse into the discourses of a wilderness service provider, leaving the topic under-researched. To understand how wilderness destinations are authenticated through online discourses is the first step in exploring how wilderness DMOs – and other DMOs – can utilize authentication to effectively influence the tourist decision making.

To address the gap in research, this thesis analyzes authenticating discourses of five Finnish wilderness DMOs: Visit Levi, Ruka-Kuusamo, Visit Pyhä-Luosto, Visit Ylläs, and Koli. The aim is to provide an overview of the different online discourses used. The discourses are analyzed and treated as mediated instances of authentication applied by the DMOs in order to build an emotional relation between the tourist and the destination (see Cohen & Cohen 2012; Knudsen & Waade 2010; Penrose 2020). The findings of the study present four different discourses of authentication: Pristine Wilderness, Enchanted Reality, Transformed Life, and Affected Body. The found discourses consolidate findings of previous literature and confirm their presence within the wilderness context: when promising real and authentic experiences to tourists, DMOs authenticate their respective destinations by claiming pure and untouched nature, transformative self-growth, invigorating bodily experiences, and by elevating the destination's properties and, in specific, its nature's properties, to a 'magical' level.

Upon analysis, the discourses present a shared trait: when engaging in authenticating discourses, the DMOs describe transitional and transformative processes and occurrences which help the tourist to reach 'true authenticity' – either as a truly authentic place, world, or feeling of self. Referred to here as 'breaching', these passages describe how different boundaries of the tourist's world are bent and, ultimately, breached. Breaching consists of passages that renegotiate the tourist's social roles, laws of time and nature, and the trapping comforts and stress of modern life, and ultimately, promising

deliverance from these boundaries. Whether or not breaching is a purposeful strategy, this study suggests that it is a touristic promise that presents the tourist a world that is more free, magical, and visceral. By discussing breaching, this study continues the notion of transition and transformation being an essential part of authentication (Knudsen and Waade 2010) and reflects it upon Knudsen, Rickly and Vidon's (2016) view of authenticity as a fantasy, providing a more detailed inspection of a performative strategy that highlights tourism's role as the antidote for the alienation the modern tourist experiences in their everyday life.

This thesis is structured as follows: first, a thorough look into the study of authenticity within the field of tourism research is provided while establishing the link between authenticity and wilderness. Then, the sources for data, the destinations, are introduced, alongside methodology, analysis for cultural practices. Research findings, the authenticating discourses, are introduced and discussed in the perspective of previous literature. In the conclusion, these findings are discussed further and the concept of breaching is introduced. Finally, managerial implications and avenues for future studies are discussed.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Authenticity as motivation for tourism

Within the field of marketing – and especially in that of CCT – authenticity has been a point of interest in several contexts, including reality television (Rose & Wood 2005), advertising (Mikkonen 2010; Beverland, Lindgreen & Vink 2008; Becker, Wiengand & Reinartz 2018), and branding (Ulin 1995, Beverland 2005; Spiggle, Nguyen & Caravella 2012), to name a few. A “cornerstone of contemporary marketing” (Beverland, Lindgreen & Vink 2008, 5), authenticity is a sought-after quality with a consumer demand that “has existed for hundreds of years” (Grayson & Martinec 2004, 296). According to Gilmore and Pine (2007), this demand for authenticity can be credited to the advent of the experience economy: as consumers have started spending in experiences, the need for all things authentic have grown in importance, leading authenticity to become an imperative for businesses and an important asset for differentiating from competition. Indeed, it seems that, in tourism, authenticity is a motivational factor for tourists' choice of

destination (Grayson & Martinec 2004; Vidon 2019). This argument is supported by the copious amount of academic research suggesting that tourists seem to seek experiences and destinations deemed authentic (Curtin 2005; Schänzel & McIntosh 2000; Saarinen 2004; Carina, Keskitalo & Schilar 2017; Tyrväinen, Uusitalo, Silvennoinen & Hasu 2014), further legitimizing authenticity's appeal and power as a tool used in destination branding, also when mediated through textual content online (Jiménez-Barreto, Rubio & Campo 2020). The pull of authenticity originates from the alienating effects of living in the modern society, first argued by MacCannell (1973). As Vidon (2019) states, modern life is characterized by a feeling of lack (see also Knudsen, Rickly & Vidon 2016), motivating the tourist to seek a chance for reconnection with their real selves (see also Knudsen & Waade 2010; Gilmore & Pine 2007; Vidon 2018; Wang 1999). Also, White (2007) suggests that in the process of becoming modern, societies have lost their vital ideals – which are now sought from tourism.

Accordingly, Knudsen and Waade (2010, 5-6) call for a reinvestment in authenticity on both sides of the touristic transaction: “the consumer (e.g. tourist, traveler) is re-investing in authenticity as a way of intensifying experience, while the local tourist managers and authorities are re-investing in authenticity to brand their city or region” – even as it may be the search for a mere fantasy that they are investing in (Knudsen, Rickly & Vidon 2016). However, even as the positive link between authenticity and desirable destination image can seem unequivocal, it must be noted that the results of a study by Rahman et al. (2021) suggest that the mediated authenticity of a destination did, in fact, not affect the cognitive and affective image of the destination formed by tourists.

2.2 From objective authenticity to authentication

For over half a century, authenticity has been heralded as one of the key aspects when researching motivations for travel (e.g. Grayson & Martinec 2004; Cohen 2007a; Pearce 2007; Olsen 2007; Mkono 2012). Studies have ranged from the origins of feelings of authenticity in tourists (Waller & Lea 1999; Knudsen & Waade 2010), authenticity as a motivational force for tourism (MacCannell 1973), a staged experience (Arnould, Price & Tierney 1998); Knudsen & Waade 2010), a product of co-construction (Keskitalo & Schilar 2017), a selling point in souvenirs (Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes 2011), and heritage destinations (Zhou et al. 2018) – and more.

Currently, scholars seem to agree that, as a concept, authenticity has proven infamously elusive (see Cohen 2007a; Mkono 2012; Olsen 2007; Rickly-Boyd 2012) – a consequence of, according to Cohen (1988, 374), an attempt to “uncritically introduce” a philosophical concept into sociological analysis. On a similar note, Taylor (2001, 7) has claimed that “there are at least as many definitions of authenticity as there are those who write about it.” For the purpose of this study, authenticity can be defined as “real” and “true” (see Cohen & Cohen 2012; Knudsen & Waade 2010), that can also have intrapersonal effects of existential kind (see Wang 1999). Despite the debate around the concept, there are some aspects to authenticity that are currently largely accepted. First, authenticity seems to originate from a desire for something ‘real’ to counterbalance the seemingly empty modern life (see Knudsen, Rickly & Vidon 2016; MacCannell 1973; Vidon 2019; Wang 1999; White 2007). And, powered by that desire, authenticity works as a pull factor for tourism, motivating the tourist to travel (MacCannell 1976; Knudsen, Rickly & Vidon 2016) – even as some scholars claim that as much as authenticity is sought after, it can never truly be attained (Mkono 2013; Ringgaard 2010; Vidon, Rickly & Knudsen 2018). Regardless of the areas of unanimity, the locus of authenticity has been a topic of much debate. Whereas Trilling (1972) and MacCannell (1973) saw authenticity tightly bound to toured objects, Cohen (1979; 1988) and Arnould, Price, and Tierney (1988) viewed it as an experience resulting from the interaction between the tourist and the destination (and those brokering the destination).

In his influential input to the discussion, Wang (1999, 352) added a third dimension, the *existential authenticity* – “existential state of Being that is to be activated by tourist activities.” With existential authenticity, the object of the tourists’ desire shifted: instead of merely seeking the authenticity of the destination or the Other, the tourists were now seen as travelers engaged in the transcendent pursuit of “authenticity of, and between, *themselves*” (Wang 1999, 364). Even as, after existential authenticity’s emergence, Steiner and Reisinger (2006) claimed all other forms of authenticity inferior in their explanatory power, Knudsen, Rickly, and Vidon (2016) argued for psychoanalytical authenticity, calling authenticity a fantasy that is ever tempting, but always out of the tourist’s reach.

Considering how much attention authenticity has received in the previous research, the process of becoming authentic had long remained somewhat a mystery (Cohen & Cohen 2012). Following Wang’s (1999) categories of authenticity, constructed authenticity is authenticity granted upon a site, object, or event. The process of endowing something with authenticity is authentication, processes whereby “something – a role, product, site, project or event – is confirmed as “original”,

”genuine”, ”real” or ”trustworthy” (Cohen & Cohen 2012, 1296). Authentication, alongside the recipient’s imagination, are used when communicating stories to enhance the perceived authenticity (Penrose 2020; see also Knudsen & Waade 2010). Even as authentication is directly linked to Wang’s (1999) constructed authenticity, it does not exclude other forms of authenticity. As Cohen and Cohen (2012, 1296) note: “while objective (object) authenticity and existential (subjective) authenticity denote different types of (personally experienced) authenticity, constructed authenticity does not; rather, it relates implicitly to the process of social construction of the other two types.” As Penrose (2020) notes, authentication can result in experiences of existential authenticity. Similarly, also objective authenticity can result from authentication (Cohen & Cohen 2012).

Introduced to the research by Selwyn (1996), authentication has often been divided in two categories: hot and cool, with cool authentication referring to formal declarations of authenticity made by established authenticating agents, whereas hot authentication refers to emotionally loaded and belief-based statements by people or instances that lack well-recognized authenticating agent (Cohen & Cohen 2012). Even as authentication has remained an understudied topic (see Cohen & Cohen 2012), it has received some attention as a tool used by DMOs to motivate travel. Or, as Knudsen and Waade (2010, 5), put it: “authentication – the production of authenticity – has become a strategy to appropriate sites/places and a strategy to invest emotionally in places.” In his study of the Anne Frank Museum, Penrose (2020) studied authentication as a means to encourage experiential authenticity – or, existential authenticity – through storytelling. Furthermore, it must be noted that, even while not explicitly mentioning authentication, some studies can be seen as ventures into the topic. For instance, in their study of the communicative staging of wilderness servicescapes, Arnould, Price and Tierney explored different communicative strategies of tapping into the tourist’s pre-existing schemas of the wilderness. This, at least in Knudsen and Waade’s (2010) view of performative perspective, can be considered a method of authentication.

2.3 Authenticity (and authentication) in the context of wilderness

As the longing for authenticity is a result of the modernized society, it’s fitting that authenticity is often sought from (and found in) wilderness – or, as Cronon (1995, 80) calls it, “the ultimate landscape of authenticity”. Leaning on the notion of Handler and Saxton (1988), Wang (1999) agrees that nature tourism and experiences of wilderness can provide a suitable outlet for tourists to

experience their real selves. Similarly, Curtin (2005, 11) comments how “urbanisation and post-modernity have rendered a romantic notion of nature and wildlife, and a yearning for new, exciting, adventuresome, life-enhancing, memorable, and authentic experiences”, while Sæþórsdóttir (2004) spoke of wilderness as a source of freedom that is contrasted with the constraints of urban living, similar to Cronon (1995). Authenticity manifests in liminal sensation of naturalness, freedom, nostalgia, romanticism, simplicity, spontaneity, and connectedness (Wang 1999), and wilderness provides an exemplary context for experiencing it – or, at least, the fantasy of it (Vidon, Rickly, Knudsen 2018). Furthermore, Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) noted that travels made into the wilderness can provoke feelings of self-reflection, transcendence, and emotional and spiritual growth – in other words, sensations very much described as authenticity (see Knudsen & Waade 2010; Wang 1999).

As a concept, wilderness is a contested one (Hallikainen 1998; Saarinen 2004; Sæþórsdóttir 2004). Even as Northern Finland has statutory wilderness areas with specific parameters, the concept still differs from “social wilderness” - the socially shared ideas of what wilderness is (Hallikainen 1998). For the purpose of this study, the definition of wilderness follows the definition provided by The Helsinki Term Bank for Arts and Sciences (Tieteen termipankki n.d.), defining wilderness “a large tract of primitive country with its land and waters, native plant and animal communities, substantially unmodified by humans and their works”. However, as this study inspects wilderness within the framework of tourism, Saarinen’s (2004) notions of ‘touristic wilderness’ apply: when wilderness becomes a part of tourism, it is molded into a commodity with marketed ideals of freedom, naturalness, and authenticity and references to the cultural characteristics connected with wilderness.

As wilderness itself is a social construction (Cronon 1995; Hallikainen 1998; Saarinen 2004), the constructing parties can also try to authenticate them with discourses of the authentic. While studying how guides verbally frame a rafting experience, Arnould, Price, and Tierney (1998) noted that discourses that frame wilderness destinations as “wild”, “unpredictable”, and “full of wonders”, can imbue the destinations with an aura of transcendence and authenticity. Similarly, Keskitalo, and Schilar (2017) found a connection between authenticity and discourses of traditionality, naturalness, the Arctic, and the wilderness. These notions are also in line with Vidon’s (2018, 232) description of an authenticated wilderness, “a place to go to be made whole, to heal the wounds of (post)modern urban life and to mend one’s broken psyche in the cleansing uninhabited wilds. Here in wilderness lies the promise of the authentic, that missing thing that may fill the lack and make

one whole again, free (at least for a moment) from the alienating condition that has caused such discomfort, and perpetual desire”.

Most of the studies around authenticating discourses in the context of wilderness destinations have focused on the tourist experience (see Rickly & Vidon 2017; Ringgaard 2010; Salet 2021; Wall-Reinius 2012). While there have been some ventures into the DMO-used discourses of authenticity in nature destinations, the studies have yet to provide a thorough and focused glimpse into the topic. For instance, Imboden's (2012) comparative study compared the adventure discourses used by the national DMOs' in Sweden and Switzerland. Even as the study provides insights on how wilderness is treated as a discourse by a Scandinavian DMO, the study did not address authenticity per se. In their research, Keskitalo and Schilar (2017) inspected how DMOs and tourists cocreate discourses of Arctic and Northness, providing insights valuable to this study, but treating authenticity only as an aspect of the North – similarly, Selberg (2010) researched authenticating discourses that use spirituality as the source for authenticity. Perhaps closest to the topic of this study is that of Vidon's (2018) which focused on providing a historical overview of how the wilderness has been authenticated. Exploring the connection between wilderness and authenticity through mainly historical sources, such as the Wilderness Act in the US, the study presented only one example of a service provider's discourses that connect wilderness with authenticity as a means to attract visitors – leaving the current use of authenticating discourses used by wilderness DMOs unexplored. Indeed, it seems that Cohen and Cohen (2012) were right in pointing out the lack of interest in the process of constructing authenticity – authentication – as there remains a gap in how discourses are used to authenticate wilderness destinations. Using Selwyn's (1996) and especially Cohen and Cohen's (2012), hot and cool authentication as a point of reference, this thesis studies the authenticating discourses used by five different wilderness DMOs in Finland. However, as all the DMOs are, by definition, recognized authenticating agents, their acts of authentication are, in principle, cool authentication. And yet, most of the found discourses rely on emotionally laden and belief-based statements that cannot be disputed or verified – pointing to hot authenticity. As the discourses are firmly footed on both modes of authentication, this thesis looks beyond the binary hot-cool categorization of authentication and focuses on authentication as a means of producing authenticity while placing specific importance on the different discourses found to address the gap in previous literature.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Selection of research context

The context of this thesis is the marketing communications of wilderness destinations – and specifically the construction of authenticity through authenticating discourses. In this thesis, wilderness destinations refer to tourist destinations that use wilderness, ‘erämaa’, in Finnish, as a selling point for recreational travel. As opposed to simply ‘nature’, ‘wilderness’ relates to ideas of untouched and ‘real’ nature (Saarinen 2019), a “contrast to civilized life” (Arnould, Price & Tierney 1998, 99).

The destinations central to this thesis are Ylläs, Pyhä, Levi, Ruka, and Koli. Several factors were taken into account while selecting the destinations suitable for this study, most important being the popularity of the destinations. The availability of research material was also a central factor. This criteria also influenced the decision to limit the study to the context of Finland to limit the risk of erroneous data due to faulty translation. The sample also provides some variability, as Ylläs, Levi and Pyhä are located in Lapland, with Koli situated in North Karelia – and Ruka right at the border of Northern Ostrobothnia and Lapland. Levi, the northernmost of the group, resides in the municipality of Kittilä. Ylläs, only roughly 60 kilometers from Levi, is located in the municipality of Kolari, while Pyhä is located within two municipalities, Pelkosenniemi and Kemijärvi. All three are located in the Lapland Province. At the border of Lapland and Northern Ostrobothnia resides Ruka, located in the municipality (and town) of Kuusamo. Geographically, Koli differs from the rest of the destinations as it is located in the North Karelia region, spanning over the municipalities of Joensuu, Lieksa, and Kontiolahti.

All of the destinations are popular and well-established destinations for tourism, with accommodation and activities available throughout the year, ranging from hiking paths to horseback riding, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and downhill skiing. All the destinations in question are situated next to one – or several – notable and popular national parks, with prominent fells adding to the range of activities offered at the destinations (Lapland.fi n.d.; Luontoon.fi 2022). Each of these destinations rank among the most popular wilderness destinations in Finland (Metsä.fi 2021), with Ruka-Kuusamo leading with 664 000 registered overnight stays in 2021. Levi comes second with 363 000 registered overnight stays in 2021, followed by Ylläs with 247 000 and Pyhä-Luosto with 177 000 registered overnight stays. In 2021, the number of registered overnight stays in

Koli was 95 700. (Visitory.io 2022). However, it should be noted that the overnight stays registered at Koli can be affected by the fact that Koli resides within three municipalities, which can result in fewer overnight stays when compared with the other destinations. Nevertheless, Koli National Park maintained its status as a popular destination with 256 900 visits in 2021 (Metsa.fi 2022).

3.2 Data collection & analysis

The material for the research consists of the marketing communications material produced by the respective DMOs of the five selected wilderness destinations. In this context, DMOs refer to the official destination marketing organizations of the locations in question, namely, Visit Levi (Levi.fi), Ylläs (Yllas.fi), Pyhänturi (Pyha.fi), Ruka-Kuusamo (Ruka.fi), and Koli (Koli.fi). DMOs seek to drive up business by attracting visitors and investors to travel destinations while also increasing awareness about the respective destinations (Golinvaux & Evagelou 2017). Material for this study consists of different types of content provided by the official websites of the previously named destinations, as well as their brand-building brochures available online. The sampling was done manually by reviewing the web pages in their entirety. The aim was to detect passages that either directly dealt with authenticity, or with topics related to it, such as nostalgia, pristine wilderness, traditionality, magic, otherness, invigorating bodily feelings, and self-making. The sampling was done between May 2021 and October 2021. As the web pages are constantly updated, the sampling provides a snapshot of the contents of the pages.

This study is positioned in the field of qualitative marketing research and it assumes the position that communications materials, including text, images and videos, produced by companies – in this case, the DMOs – can be approached as cultural texts that can be analyzed in order to “learn about the cultural discourses and discursive practices through which social reality is produced” (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 69). This *analysis of cultural practices* (henceforth referred to as ACP) is a methodology that places focus on the cultural dynamics of the marketplace and how social order is achieved by using representations, cultural categories and visibilities. The method does not aim to provide answers on what compels individuals to act the way they act – instead, it is a form of analytics that seeks to illustrate the ways in which social reality is represented and constructed by different texts. (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

This perspective acts as a flashlight of sorts, shedding light on the concealed details of the discourses used to authenticate the destinations. According to Moisander and Valtonen (2006),

when the yet-to-be analyzed materials are seen as texts, they are assumed to be riddled with practices, institutional structures, relations of power, among others. However, objects' meanings are rarely innate. Instead, they inherit their meaning from the ways – and the contexts wherein – they are represented. Furthermore, this meaning is not fixed, but constantly negotiated. In this thesis the marketing communications materials produced by DMOs are treated as texts that involve cultural knowledge, established discourses, values, ideas and ideals – and much more. It is through interpretation and analysis that these inner workings of the texts are brought to light. The sampled material was compiled and manually processed in order to find similarities in discursive practices see (Moisander & Valtonen 2006). Passages with similar representations and discourses were then compiled to form larger categories – authenticating discourses.

4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

When analyzed, the texts provided by DMOs in Levi, Ylläs, Pyhä, Ruka, and Koli showed similarities in content. These similarities, or themes, are different authenticating discourses, relating to different dimensions of authentication. Of the analysed material, four discourses that perform authenticity were identified: Pristine Wilderness, Enchanted Reality, Authentic Life, and Bodily Feelings. These themes will now be examined in detail.

4.1 Discourses of authentication

4.1.1 Pristine Wilderness

Prominent on all the studied websites, the theme of Pristine Wilderness is the discourse of the wild, untouched, lush, clean, and imposing. This discourse provides the foundation for the other found discourse – it is the bedrock of authentication. Used in describing especially the nature – but also services, activities, accommodation, and overall atmosphere – of the destinations, Pristine Wilderness consists of terms, wordings, categorizations, and representations that emphasize the untamed character of the nature in the destinations. And, according to Vidon, Rickly, and Knudsen (2018), such pristine environments are well-suited for seeking the fantasy of authenticity. Indeed, in the discourse of Pristine Wilderness, nature is represented as old and, subsequently, untouched – as can be seen in the description of the nature in the national parks near Ruka:

“In Oulanka, the force of the freely flowing rivers and the diversity of Finnish nature becomes palpable. Echoes from thousands of years away rise in the glittering lake scenery of Hossa, Finland’s newest national park, and in the landscapes of the Riisitunturi fell, one will, by latest, reach the true Lapland state of mind.”

As the passage shows, nature is described as an ancient entity, and something freely flowing and, therefore, untouched. When framed as part of Pristine Wilderness, nature can provide an antidote for the alienating modern world by presenting the tourist with a landscape that is “immediate, non-commercialised, brute natural world, characterized by the *real* authentic” (Knudsen & Waade 2010, 1) – or at least performed as such. In terms of performative authenticity, the DMOs can perform the destination as untamed wilderness, thus authenticating the destination to elevate and intensify the tourist’s experience and the desire to visit the destination.

While studying Instagram posts by tourists visiting Swedish national parks, Fältön (2021) noted similar recurring themes that were connected to wilderness – original, desolated, wild, and pristine. And, similar to the passage presented above, the wilderness extends its influence on the very essence of the tourist. What Fältön (2021) referred to as a ‘regenerating’ effect, is here presented as a ‘Lapland state of mind’ – implying that the search for the authentic wilderness is, in fact, search for the authentic self from within the wilderness (Vidon, Rickly & Knudsen 2018; Wang 1999).

Pristine Wilderness is untampered by the human touch, and its biosphere is diverse, full of life, and potentially inconvenient and dangerous. In Ruka’s Magical Pond Igloos, the lodging is “surrounded by wild forest, with only the necessary walkways crossing the area”, and “in the winter, snow covers the roof and there are no heated windows to melt the snow.” Lodging within Pristine Wilderness is communicated as contingent on situational factors depending on the nature. While it may be inconvenient at times, it has the potential to enhance the feelings of freedom (Arnould, Price & Tierney 1998). The sacrifice of the creature comforts of modern life can be compensated with personal significance of an existential kind (Varley & Semple 2015). Another manifestation of the unpredictability of Pristine Wilderness is danger. In Koli, some of the spots for sightseeing are framed as “natural attractions where one goes at their own risk, as there are no viewing platforms or fences”. According to Knudsen and Waade (2010, 16), when put at risk, the tourist’s body is vitalized and reconnected to the world – and the tourist’s notion of their own body at stake becomes “an expression of

4.1.2 Enchanted Reality

Nature does not only lend destinations aspects of wilderness, but also magic. Especially the DMOs located in Northern Finland partake in the discourse of Enchanted Reality. Keskitalo (2009) has stated that the North is often mythologized – arguably by the South as an effort to underline the South’s modernity. The discourse builds on this othering of the North and frames the destinations as “mystical”, “magical”, “exotic”, or even “divine” places that are detached from the mundane world. It has been shown that tourists can partake in imagining and re-imagining locations as fantastical alter-realities (Lovell & Thurgill 2021) to enhance the experience – and to escape their urban reality into the fantasy of authenticity (Vidon, Rickly & Knudsen 2018). A distinct feature of post-postmodern authenticity, tourists can negotiate their reality and their experience of it, thus reconstructing and performing the destination and experience as authentic (Canavan & MacCamley 2021; Knudsen & Waade 2010). The discourse of Enchanted Reality invites the tourist to interpret the destinations’ nature as a supernatural agent that possesses the power to mesmerize the tourist with “winter wonderlands” or summer days that defy time with their duration. At times, Enchanted Reality is accessed through a liminal space, as is the case on Levi.fi’s route instructions. The transition from the mundane reality to the Enchanted Reality becomes evident as the DMO states that “as the scenery grows stunning, you know you’ve arrived.” Similar themes of liminality and transition are also found outside of Lapland, as Koli.fi frames the Porttilouhi gulch as a passageway to an altered reality:

“Located in Juua, the Porttilouhi gulch takes the traveler to another world. Sometimes dubbed as a fantasy world, the gulch’s bottom is full of stones covered with soft and sinking moss. While standing on these stones, the traveler can admire the enchanting Porttipuro river that runs on the bottom.”

Once within the Enchanted Reality, the tourist is overcome with a feeling of an altered, and often magical, feeling. For instance, Pyhä.fi describes “the Midsummer magic of the fell”, while stating that the snowy landscapes and “winter’s magic” conjure a specific feeling, the Fell Feeling. Similar discourses can be found on Levi.fi, where the DMO describes “the Levi spirit” that awaits the traveler in the destination.

Nature – especially one elevated to a magical level – plays a central part in creating the Enchanted Reality. Especially the DMOs operating in Northern Finland pictured the nature in the respective destinations as something akin to magic. ‘Magic’, as a term, can help DMOs build a romantic narrative of the destination (Rickly-Boyd 2012), with romanticism further adding to the perceived authenticity (Wang 1999). In Enchanted Reality, the wondrously silent – noted also by Wall-Reinius (2012) – nature and seasons take on a new, animated, and mystical form, starting from the “eight seasons” that can be experienced in both Pyhä and Ylläs, and continuing with Levi’s snow that “shares its stories” with those who stop and listen. In Enchanted Reality, the air itself is pierced with ever-changing lights and colors, like the blog post on Pyhä.fi describes kaamos, the darkest season of the year:

“The light really is something unique. It feels as if I awake each day to a sunrise and sunset that I have never before seen. There are so many different colors and nuances of light in the sky, they paint the clouds and the scenery. This is, especially if you value nature and picturesque things, something truly special.”

Among the harbingers of Enchanted Reality are the northern lights. As many other natural phenomena, also the unpredictable bursts of solar wind take on a new and supernatural form in Enchanted Reality. In Ylläs.fi, the northern lights become the tail of a fiery fox:

“Those hiking in the nighttime are recommended to look up towards the sky. There, they can see thousands of stars shine, and the whisk of the fiery fox, the northern lights.”

In the data, at times, the northern lights are portrayed as phenomena of nature, but often they take on an active and mystified role. For instance, they can be nature's very own “show of colors” or an enchanted sight that “allows the traveler to experience the magic.” In Ruka, it is believed that the northern lights can be an omen of good fortune, attributing actual magical properties to the phenomena – much like the fireflies that were represented with mystical agency, described by Jyotsna and Maurya (2019). White *et al.* (2019, 21) argue that the mystification of the North is intentional: it promotes the North as “a wonderful dreamscape of Northern Lights and beautiful and picturesque winter landscapes” as an effort by tourist professionals to increase the attractiveness of the destination. The discourse extends to lodging, as well: accommodation that has large windows facing the sky are said to “bring the sky and the northern lights so close that one can touch them”, further building on the magical qualities of the lights of the Enchanted Nature and transcending the limitations of physical space.

As the Enchanted Nature differs greatly from ordinary nature, it – and descriptions of it – can often be met with disbelief. This leads to a discourse of nature so wondrous; it has to be seen in order to be believed. The difference between ordinary nature and Enchanted Nature becomes evident in an insert from Pyhä.fi's blog post:

“Here, the world is completely different. The thick snow, and everything else here, are things that can't be found down there. They create kinds of new dimensions that you can't imagine unless you see it yourself.”

Here, seeing is not only believing. It is also a part of the authentication of the place through sensory information and bodily proximity. And, through media on the DMOs' sites, the DMOs facilitate an emotional investment in the place (Knudsen & Waade 2010). And, after seeing the Enchanted Reality, the tourist's imagination can take the reins, leading to the tourist, if willing, negotiating the experience to an almost supernatural level (Canavan & McCamley 2021). The discourse of unbelievability extends to all studied Northern destinations, with either nature or “the atmosphere” or “the feel” being the creators of a setting so unique, it has to be witnessed. Outsiders brought to locations imbued with this unique aura can, at first, be skeptical, but after witnessing the location, they become believers, as well – as is the case with Ruka's Oulanka river that simply has to be experienced in order to fully appreciate it:

“The researchers asked why I wanted to choose Oulanka river for the location of the photo shoot, and I explained to them the unique biodiversity of the national park, the way the river landscape changes with the seasons, and the way the scenery shifts with the sudden turns of the river. But, in the end, I have to say: it's impossible to explain Oulanka, it has to be experienced.”

On instances like these, seeing is believing – after having seen the Oulanka river, the researchers understood the magic of the locale. However, sometimes the magic of the Enchanted Nature eludes the visitor even after having experienced itself. In Ylläs, those visiting the sauna gondola that is suspended “between the earth and the sky” will have “assure themselves from time to time of the reality of their experience”. In Pyhä, a landscape surrounding a venue for a festival, is described as something that would not be within the reach of imagination – so wondrous it is. Testimonials like these further solidate the unbelievable properties of the Enchanted Nature. These properties are so potent that even the local residents can be taken aback by the preposterous nature. This becomes clear in an interview on Levi.fi, wherein a life-long resident of Lapland is continuously mesmerized by the place she resides in:

“Even after having lived her entire life in the magical nature of Lapland, Riikka says that she is still sometimes mesmerized. Mesmerized by how amazing it all can be.”

The theme arises also in Ruka.fi, where a local cross-country skiing enthusiast still has to stop in awe at the mystical wonder of his favorite skiing spot in Ruka. Indeed: true magic is something that never stops being magical. The magical qualities of the Enchanted Nature are met with vivid sensations that compel the tourist to stop and bask in the wonders of the mystical – and mystified – wilderness: the elevated state of the affected body results in a strong emotional connection with the place (Knudsen & Waade 2010). These strong and transcendent sensations detach the destination further away from the mundane, and inauthentic, imbuing the destination with a force opposite from the superficial everyday: profound and striking authenticity. Authenticity may be a fantasy, but it exerts a strong, visceral grip on the tourist (Vidon, Rickly & Knudsen 2018), and the DMOs are not afraid to tempt the tourist with the promise of that fantasy.

4.1.3 Transformed Life

The discourse of Transformed Life paints a picture of a life that’s both simple and vivid, a life wherein the tourist can find their true, inner core that had previously been buried beneath the layers of dull everyday life. Wilderness destinations provide escape from all that is inauthentic and imbues every moment with real and vivacious sensations, creating an entirety that can be experienced as living a Transformed Life. The different authenticating discourses often intertwine to depict a way of living that’s free from everything necessary, leaving behind only the true and purposeful essence of authentic living – as the musician Samuli Putro, when visiting a music festival in Pyhä, paraphrases in an interview conducted by Pyhä.fi:

This [place] opens you and makes you ponder upon deeper things, ones you wouldn’t even dare to think about in your everyday life. If you ask me, that’s pretty much the essence of Northern Finland. When you remove a person from a city and throw them in the middle of nature and fresh air, they start thinking about things they didn’t even remember were there [...] Here, it feels like time, in a strange way, stretches. Everything takes place in the moment, but simultaneously it feels like you’ve been here for a week, even though it’s only been a day. And the event is present all the time, but that’s not the important thing. The important thing is that you just ARE here. It feels like, in itself, even being here has some sort of purpose.

One of the key offerings of Transformed Life is escape: escape from stress, work, hurry – escape from the normal, inauthentic urban life. In a wilderness destination, the tourist becomes finally free from the lacking everyday life and all that comes with it. Escape can take many forms, such as escaping into nostalgia in Ylläs:

“Take a break from the modern world and enjoy some relaxing moments in our old and original lumberjacks’ sauna. This wood-heated sauna welcomes up to ten persons at a time to relish its gentle heat with time and no hurry.”

A discourse like this frames the modern world as something to escape from, something constraining and, ultimately, inauthentic – whereas Levi can provide something “old and original”, like a wood-heated sauna, echoing Wang’s (1999) notion of authenticity’s link to nostalgia. Once the tourist enters into that old and traditional sauna, they must relinquish their hurry and stress and settle into the slower pace of Transformed Life. Indeed, Transformed Life seems to be the antithesis of a busy and stressful life. In an authentic life, everything happens exactly when it needs to happen. In Levi.fi, the DMO describes a retreat into silence as an antidote to the demands of the everyday life:

“In silence, you don’t have to always be alert and wait for what will happen next. [...] Lapland’s magical silence beckons you to rest.”

Here, Enchanted Nature acts as a mediator of Transformed Life, which has the power to offer escape from the ordinary and modern and rejuvenate with its purposeful aura. DMOs deliver cures for different ailments of the urban everyday – which they readily point out on the websites. Ruka.fi, for instance, offers Ruka as the solution for the “anxiety brought on by the upcoming autumn”, while Koli describes the Valamo monastery a place where “the step slows almost by itself” and “the busyness is left behind, allowing the mind and body settle”. As noted above, the concept of escape necessitates confinement of sorts. This confinement is often found in the urban life in the South. Ruka.fi points out that “While Southern Finland was having a snowless Christmas, Kuusamo reported snow levels of “almost record-breaking caliber”. However, it must be noted that the studied DMOs were not always dedicated to the discourse of escape – instead, in an interview on Ruka.fi, a local entrepreneur insists that an article about him won’t contribute to the narrative of “escaping the urban rat race”, as one can also experience work-related stress in the North. However, the interviewee concludes by framing the “uplifting fell landscape” as a balancing element to the stress.

Recurring themes in the discourse of Transformed Life are those of self-realization, transformation, and renewal. It seems that authenticity, and Transformed Life, hold the promise of offering self-realization: the sensation of discovering something that was once lost or deeply buried, leaving the tourist with a sense of purpose and renewal – a notion supported by numerous studies.

Transformation of the self is a household promise of the tourism industry (see Bruner 1991), and this tantalizing promise has been discussed within the previous study of authenticity with numerous depictions. What Wang (1999) called an existential state of Being, is described by Handler and Saxton (1988, 243) as an experience in which “individuals feel themselves to be in touch both with a real world and with their real selves”. Similarly, this is what Knudsen and Waade (2010) describe as the revitalized body, when experiencing authenticity, feeling alive and reconnected with the world, with the latter notion reflecting Handler and Saxton’s (1988) description of authentic experiences. Within the Scandinavian context, the promise of reconnection with the world is deeply embedded within the Nordic outdoors ideal, the *friluftsliv* (Gelter 2000). Varley and Semple (2015) also claim the promises and ideals of authentic experiences, reconnection, and revitalization to be of specific importance within areas of Nordic tourism. The discourse of Transformed Life taps into this need of reconnection through simple pleasures, wholeness, and liberating the inner, authentic self. The discourse is so powerful and tempting that it has become embedded even in the slogans and advertisements of some of the destinations, such as Levi’s “Levi Sparks Your Soul” slogan and Pyhä’s “Expedition to your core” ad. In Ylläs.fi, the theme of Enchanted Nature once more melds with the theme of Transformed Life to deliver a powerful promise of the Northern wilderness’ gift of rediscovery:

“Lapland’s nature is filled with life, and yet silence and tranquility soothe your mind. Time loses its meaning. On the seven fells of Ylläs, you rediscover yourself.”

As is with Pristine Wilderness, the destination becomes a backdrop for the tourist’s true destination: their inner selves – instead of seeking a destination or a specific activity, the tourist is seeking their authentic self (Wang 1999). In the data, stillness often becomes a transformative power: in order to start leading the Authentic Life, the tourist has to stop in their tracks. Or, as is stated on Levi.fi: “Transformation requires pausing”. In Ruka, “the dark and silent forest calms the busy mind”, and after the initial shock, one can find themselves filled with tranquility. After slowing down, the affected body opens to the world and is revitalized, leading up to a sense of reconnection (Knudsen

& Waade 2010). Instead of Ruka's landscape, the tourist is engaged in the search for "the landscape of the soul" – as the destination is dubbed on Ruka.fi.

Even as the tourist can experience Transformed Life as something akin to an ignition or a spark, the benevolent effects of self-realization can linger on, even after returning to normal life. Duncan Redpath, who experienced a spark of self-realization upon arriving in Levi, describes the long-lasting effects of having felt the Transformed Life:

"I carry Levi's magic with me wherever I go. When I'm working on the oil rig in the middle of the sea, I have a picture of the Levi landscape taped to the screen of my work computer. This way, I can dive into my mind's landscape in no time."

Similar occurrence also took over a family that spent a summer in Pyhä. After spending a summer there, the family reached the "fell feeling", which, to the family in question, refers to "the lack of hurry, spending time outside, rest, peace, and wellness" – and this feeling followed the family also to their normal life. It seems that once experienced, Transformed Life lingers on as a sort of compass, reminding what 'real' and 'purposeful' life feels like – and as it can be reminisced in the middle of the urban everyday (see Brown 2012), it frames the life outside the wilderness destination as something undeniably less than authentic.

4.1.4 Affected Body

The last discourse unearthed from the data is that of the Affected Body. For Knudsen and Waade (2010), the body was always at stake when experiencing or creating authenticity. Before Knudsen and Waade, Wang (1999) stated that intrapersonal, or bodily, feelings play an important role in experiencing authenticity, as the tourist body is allowed more freedom than in everyday life. According to Knudsen and Waade (2010), the body can, even when removed from the destination, still register the authenticity of the destination through mediation. The discourse of Affected Body not only emphasizes the visceral feelings tourists feel when visiting the destination, but also attempts to evoke these sensations in the yet-to-be tourist searching for information of the destination. The depictions of heightened bodily sensations become a tempting promise and an invitation to imagine such a feeling, such as the passage from Koli.fi shows:

Have you already had the chance to experience how it feels like to walk the tops of fells, above the clouds of mist, on a crisp Autumn's day? Or sensed the near-mystical, undisturbed silence amidst the wintery snow-covered spruce trees?

According to Knudsen and Waade (2010), when the body is the medium of experiencing, creating, and recreating authenticity, it deals with affectedness as its currency. Emotions, feelings, and bodily fluids are the proof of the transaction. Similar to using pain and physical exertion as a means of escape from the dulling pace of everyday life (Scott, Cayla & Cova 2017), revitalization and feelings of authenticity are promised as the outcome of placing the body under physical stress. On a blog post at Ruka.fi, an account of running in the fells is framed as narrative of earning revitalization, extraordinary feelings, and pleasure through pain:

As I reached the top of the Konttainen fell, I burst out laughing as I see the scenery unfold before me. The feeling is somehow just absurd, I'm starving, and my legs feel like a pair of wooden blocks, but the landscape is so ridiculous that I can't help but laugh.

Once again, the wilderness acts as an enhancing backdrop for experiences. Exerting the body becomes a transformative act that is rewarded with heightened emotional and physical stimuli and increased vitality (Knudsen & Waade 2010; Wang 1999). If the tourist eats a dry crispbread under the crisp and star-spotted firmament at Pyhä, the taste is “heavenly” – as does a home-made cinnamon roll after an active day. In the studied destinations, the bodily feelings are heightened, visceral, and grounding. The experiences have also the capability to remove the tourist from their immediate surroundings and bring them closer to the cultural and historical Other through bodily experiences (see Knudsen & Waade 2010), like is described on Levi.fi:

This new experience is felt all the way to the soul. Calm your mind by lying on a soft reindeer skin rug, while the blaze of the fire warms your body, and listening to the gentle drum playing. The magic of Lapland is ever so present in this experience when the vibration of the drum relaxes your body and makes it easy to rest for a moment.

What is described above is the empathetic understanding of the other that takes place through the body (Knudsen & Waade 2010). In the passage above, the body, warmed by the fire, performs the authenticity of the moment by vibrating with the Othered drum. As a result of the empathic understanding, the barrier between the tourist and the Other – arguably the Sami – is erased and registered, through careful Othering and mystifying of the Sami culture, as “the magic of Lapland”.

Thus, the Affected Body acts as a mediating discourse for the Enchanted Reality, emphasizing the mystified aura of the destination. This reflects the findings of Jyotsna and Maurya (2019), who showed that a destination can refresh the body, while also extending a transformational effect on the tourist's mindset. The Affected Body has the power to tear down borders between the self and others. This extends even to animals, as Levi.fi recommends the tourist to "breathe in the world's purest air together with the animals of the woodlands". Similar promise is present on Ylläs' website, where the DMO implores the tourist to feel their "heart race together with the speeding dogs" when partaking in a sled dog ride. The Affected Body is indeed open to the world and open to understand the Other, no matter how distant the Other is (Knudsen & Waade 2010).

As Affected Body can act as a mediator for Enchanted Reality, it can similarly mediate Authentic Life. A passage on Levi.fi, highlighting the fresh, clean air of the North, the body becomes not only the witness, but also the authenticator, of the experience:

When one takes a deep breath in the North, they can almost sense how the entire body is cleansed and revitalized. According to measurements of clean air, only one tenth of the population get to breathe clean air. In Levi, healthy air is for everyone to enjoy.

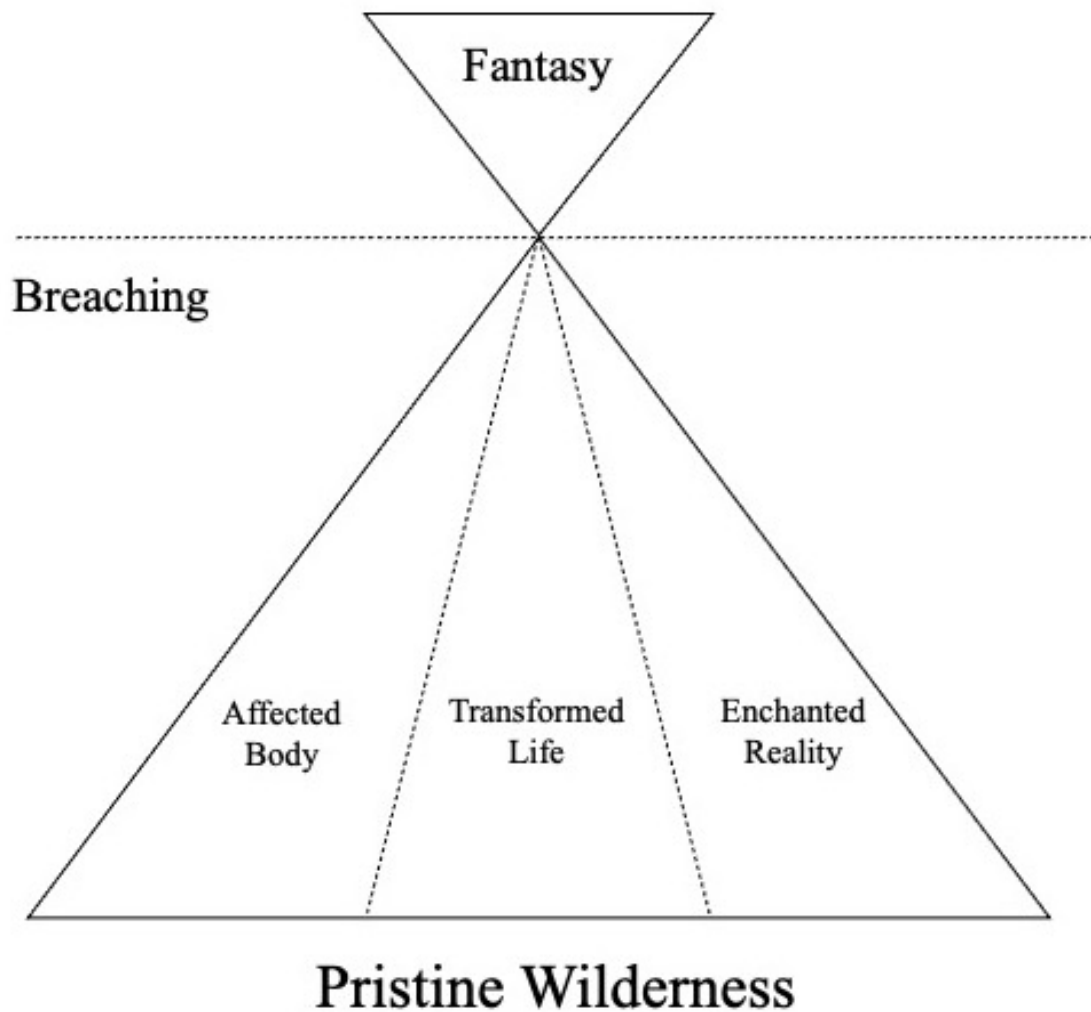
As the body registers the purity of the air, it is refreshed. Simultaneously, it is privileged to something special that only few get to experience. Levi is not an ordinary place – and those who are there, do not lead ordinary lives. And for proof, they need not to seek any further than their own senses and bodies.

4.2 Breaching into the fantasy of authenticity

While analyzing the data, a common thread appeared among the strategies the DMOs applied when authenticating the destinations through discourses. The DMOs frequently implored the tourist to actively imagine or feel how different barriers dissolved while describing the process: how temporal boundaries were broken, allowing the history to coexist with the present and how the creature comforts of modern life were stripped away, freeing the tourist from the social and societal pressure – in other words, inviting the tourist to participate in a fantasy of authenticity (see Knudsen, Rickly & Vidon 2016). Bodily and metaphysical barriers are also taken down, bending the rules of our perceived reality to bring forth an alternative and magical reality often associated with sensations of awe and existential fulfillment. This transitioning from one state to another is so profound and

drastic in nature that it is here proposed as *breaching*: breaching through the barriers that mark the boundaries of the tourist's experience of the world.

In the analyzed authenticating discourses, Pristine Wilderness acts as the foundation and framework, lending the other discourses its aura of authenticity (Cronon 1995; Vidon 2018). Building on that foundation, the other discourses attempt authentication through descriptions of self-realization, magic, and bodily feelings, all in the context of untouched and visceral wilderness. When taken far enough, the authenticating discourses reach a threshold – on the other side of that threshold lie fantastical things: magic, transformation, and freedom (Graph 1). In that region is the fantasy of authenticity (Knudsen, Rickly & Vidon 2016; Vidon, Rickly & Knudsen 2018), or the back region of the destination (MacCannell 1976), a liminal place of authenticity that, at times, is 'fantasy' not only due to its unattainable nature, but also because of its magical capability to transform reality and the tourist, ultimately filling the gaping void that compels the tourist to travel. And, crossing the threshold into the region of fantasy is what is here referred to as breaching. Breaching is often identified by verbal accounts of status quo being renegotiated: for instance, notions of time standing still or losing its meaning, nature taking on a magical connotation, or the self transformed, are markers of breaching. The type of breaching, and the boundaries breached, vary depending on the discourse. In the discourse of Pristine Wilderness, modern standards of living are often breached, replacing them with ascetic, rough, or even dangerous conditions. In Pristine Wilderness, the tourist is brought closer to authenticity by stripping them from the alienating convenience and returning them to a life that is dictated by the surroundings, the wilderness. In the discourse of Enchanted Reality, breaching renegotiates the laws of nature, attributing magical qualities and characteristics to natural phenomena, and thus framing the reality as something supernatural. Transformed Life deals with breaching of the tourist's identity, describing the tourist's 'true identity' as something that has been buried underneath the social and societal stress they endure in their day-to-day life. As these constraints are breached through, the tourist is finally able to find their real selves, their true nature. In the discourse of Affected Body, the tourist's body is used as a medium for either accessing their 'real selves' (for instance when, through physical exertion, the tourist feels more alive), or the destination. Breaching within this discourse deals with the tourist's body opening up and breaking through the barriers of the self and the destination. Here, breaching leads to the tourist experiencing the destination in a visceral and transformative manner, often resulting in experiences of existential pleasure.



Graph 1. Breaching in the authenticating discourses of wilderness DMOs.

Knudsen and Waade's (2010, 1) conceptualization of performative authenticity foreshadows the emergence of breaching, as the authors state performative authenticity underscores the "transitional and transformative processes inherent in the action of authentication". For Knudsen and Waade, these processes relate to the moments of authenticity that allow the tourist to surpass the constraints of their cultural, social, and temporal position and experience the world through the eyes of the Other, whether that is "the cultural 'other', or the geographical or historical 'other'" (Knudsen & Waade 2010, 14). Building on that concept, breaching focuses on the exact moment of that transformation and transition, drawing attention to the discourses that describe how the tourist's experience of the world is changed through interacting with an authentic destination – how the boundaries of the tourist's world are renegotiated, bent, and ultimately,

breached. The descriptions of these “transitional and transformative processes” include, but are not limited to, discursive depictions of history being present in the current moment (temporal breaching), personal freedom brought by authentic experiences (social breaching), immersion into a foreign and othered culture (cultural breaching), and attributing magical qualities to the destination (breaching of the laws of nature). The end result of breaching is liberation: an existence in a world that is magical and exciting, a world where the tourist can become free and embrace a profound connectedness with the world and other inhabitants of that world. The world that becomes available after breaching is everything the tourist’s normal world is not: an alluring fantasy that draws the tourist to travel (see Knudsen, Rickly & Vidon 2016; Vidon, Rickly & Knudsen 2018).

In tourism industry, promises of reaching the true, authentic nature of a destination are nothing new: already MacCannell (1976) claimed that touristic operators lure alienated tourists with promises of reaching the destination’s Goffmanian back region, the place where the local, and authentic, way of living truly resides. Breaching builds upon MacCannell’s line of reasoning and adds Knudsen, Rickly, and Vidon’s (2016) notion of authenticity as a fantasy to the equation. Breaching is the figurative fist banging on the door of the hidden back region – however, instead of a cultural back region, the door opens into a fantasy. In previous literature, the tourist’s search for authenticity has led to a return to a memory (Ringgaard 2010) or past (Selberg 2010; Wang 1999), a belief in a mythical (Cohen 2007b) or fantastical reality (Canavan & McCamley 2021; Lovell & Thurgill 2021), or a sense of self-realization (Wang 1999) or connectedness with the world and other people (Knudsen & Waade 2010). The back region is sought after in hopes for authenticity, but it is filled only with fantasy (see Knudsen, Rickly & Vidon 2016; Vidon, Rickly & Knudsen 2018).

It is known that the tourism industry promises alienated tourists the fantasy (Knudsen, Rickly & Vidon 2016; Vidon, Rickly & Knudsen 2018) and reconnection to the world (Knudsen & Waade 2010). As a concept, breaching does not compete with these reasonings – instead, it is a description of how DMOs perform that promise: fulfillment of the fantasy of authenticity is the promise, breaching is the description of how that promise would be redeemed. In MacCannell’s (1973; 1976) terms, it is an outright act of deceit, but from the perspective of post-postmodern authenticity (see Canavan & McCamley 2021) and performative authenticity (Knudsen & Waade 2010), it is a prompt for the tourist to intensify their experience and, possibly, experience passing sensations of authenticity.

5 DISCUSSION

This article's purpose was to address the gap in research on how DMOs appropriate online discourses to authenticate wilderness destinations. As such, the study explores an area that has been left largely unstudied (Cohen & Cohen 2012) and confirms that wilderness destinations do engage in authenticating discourses. In Knudsen and Waade's (2010) terms, this is an act of re-investment: authenticating can lead to emotional investment in the destination, driving the tourist's desire to visit the destination. In this study, textually constructed and mediated authenticity was studied by analysing authenticity-related discourses. And, by analysing textual content from five Finnish DMOs' websites, four authenticating discourses were found: the discourses of Pristine Wilderness, Transformed Life, Affected Body, and Enchanted Reality.

The appearance of these discourses reflects findings of previous research. For instance, the discourse of Pristine Wilderness, the bedrock for further authentication, consolidates the connection between wilderness and authenticity. The discourse of Pristine Wilderness was rich in performative descriptions and representations that described the destinations' nature as an untouched, and thus, pure, destination. Many connections between the discourse and findings of previous studies can be found: the DMOs framed the untouched nature as a source for authenticity (see Cohen 1988; Fältön 2021; Knudsen & Waade 2010; Saarinen 2004; Vidon, Rickly & Knudsen 2018), framed provided services as 'wild' or otherwise wilderness-related (see Arnould, Price & Tierney 1998, Keskitalo & Schilar 2017), and used the ascetic conditions of the wilderness as a romantic return to the past (see Wang 1999). Wilderness, especially when framed as 'true' and 'pure', and thus, unique, wilderness (see Imboden 2012), provides a counterpart for modern everyday life and thus alleviates the sense of alienation that troubles the tourist by providing existential pleasure (Fredrickson & Anderson 1999; Vidon, Rickly & Knudsen 2018; Wang 1999), replacing creature comforts with simpler options (Varley & Semple 2015), and placing the body at risk (Knudsen & Waade 2010). The discourse of Pristine Wilderness was often apparent in junction with the other discourses. Even as the discourses emphasized different aspects, they often shared a common source of authenticity: the wilderness. Contributing to notions made in previous research (see Fredrickson & Anderson 1999; Gelter 2000; Imboden 2012; Varley & Semple 2015), wilderness can act as an elevating force that enhances the tourist experience to an existential level. It is claimed here that that same power is extended to authenticity: wilderness has the power to lend its authenticity to things and activities that would not otherwise be considered authentic – echoing Cronon's (1995) notion of wilderness being authenticity in an ultimate form (see also Vidon 2019). This power is extended to other

discourses: it seems that the discourse of wilderness is used to *authenticate the authentication*. In other words, the DMOs' attempts of authentication could otherwise lack credibility, were it not for the wilderness' well-established aura of authenticity (see Vidon 2018). By exploring the use of wilderness in authenticating discourses in earnest, this study contributes to the brief venture by Vidon (2018), who pointed out the use of discourses of pristineness when authenticating a wilderness service provider – and confirms that the often-mentioned and prestigious aspects of wilderness are appropriated by DMOs to authenticate wilderness destinations.

Furthermore, the destinations, and especially the wilderness surrounding and permeating them, was often framed as an environment that has the power to liberate the tourist and allow them to be finally free from the constraints of their otherwise ordinary and constricted lives. Already noted by MacCannell (1973), the destination's promised capability to transform and liberate is a common mean of motivating the tourist (Brown 2012; Bruner 1991; Handler & Saxton 1988; Jyotsna & Maurya 2019; Knudsen & Waade 2010; Vidon 2019; Wang 1999). In the studied destinations, promises of self-realization and existential pleasure were found in abundance, establishing a link between the previously noted existentially fulfilling effects the wilderness can have on the tourist (Cronon 1995; Fältön 2021; Varley & Semple 2015;) and the authenticating discourses used by wilderness DMOs. The discourse of Affected Body describes the body that is affected, energized, and revitalized by the wilderness and its authenticity. In the data, the affected body allows the tourist to open to the world and reconnect with it. As Wang (1999) noted, the destination allows the body to enter an intensified and more free state. And, as Knudsen and Waade (2010) show, the body becomes a medium for understanding the Other and both the performer and the witness of the destination and experience's authenticity.

At times, the destination, and the wilderness itself, was described as enchanted, magical, and mystical, reflecting findings in previous literature (Cohen 2007b; Imboden 2012; Rickly-Boyd 2012; Wall-Reinius 2012). This discourse of Enchanted Nature was especially prominent on destinations located in Northern Finland. This comes hardly as a surprise, as the North is often exoticized and mythologized (Keskitalo 2009; Lindberg & Jensen 2021; Wall-Reinius 2012; White et al. 2019). Stepping away from objective authenticity (see Wang 1999), the discourse of Enchanted Nature mixes the discourse of wilderness with spiritual and mythical fantasy, drawing power from the tourist's willingness to participate in the active imagining (and re-imagining) of reality in order to elevate the experience (Cohen 2007b; Lovell & Thurgill 2021; Ringgaard 2010),

agreeing with Selberg's (2010, 238) argument that "the current tourist geography is becoming steadily more magical". That the studied discourses mixed reality with fantasy while engaged in authentication points to the direction of post-postmodern authenticity (Canavan & McCamley 2021). In post-postmodern authenticity, tourists can negotiate their reality, opting to believe in the fantasy (see Lovell & Thurgill 2021). This study implies that wilderness DMOs engage in this same renegotiation and construction of alter-realities. And this provides an intriguing perspective to Knudsen, Rickly, and Vidon's (2016) view of authenticity as a fantasy. In the wake of post-postmodern authenticity, should this fantasy be taken as a literal fantasy? The concept of breaching seems to imply this, as it represents the DMOs' promise of things that often are, in nature, impossible.

Furthermore, breaching provides intriguing avenues for future research. The prevalence of breaching in the data raises the question of breaching being an integral part authentication. MacCannell's (1976) claim of touristic back region could imply so. However, breaching extends the back region beyond cultural back regions. By including temporal, magical, and personal dimensions, it provides a fascinating perspective to touristic promises – could a majority of touristic promises draw their alluring power from promising a change to the tourist's current state of being? Previous research seems to imply so. As Vidon and Rickly (2018, 73) eloquently put it: "authenticity is an experience that lies at the horizon, in the next adventure, or in the past as a memory, and thus serves as a beacon, a siren song that inspires and drives". Also Wang (1999) proposed touristic destinations as liminal zones, implying transformation (see also Knudsen & Waade 2010). However, this study takes that implication further and proposes breaching, a depiction of a drastic change in the tourist's (and the tourist's world's) current state of being, to be a central component of constructing authenticating discourses used by DMOs.

As a descriptive study of the authenticating discourses Finnish wilderness DMOs use, this research's managerial implications are limited. However, the study does confirm that, within the context, the DMOs do engage in authentication through discourses. Seeing how frequent the use of authenticity was on the DMOs' websites, it can be assumed that utilizing authenticity to drive travel motivation is a premeditated decision. As the destinations, especially those located in Lapland, seem to be locked in a competition of which is the most authentic, a question of competitive advantage arises: does differentiation from the competition require an ever deeper plunge into authentication – or a step away from an oversaturated market of authenticity? However, to answer that question, or to assess the authenticating discourses' effectiveness in marketing

communications, further research is required. Therein lie the theoretical implications of this study. Avenues for future research could include assessing authenticating discourses' effectiveness in increasing travel motivation in the context of wilderness destinations and its effects on DMOs' revenues, followed by exploration of the effectiveness of different discourses across different demographics. Furthermore, the concept of breaching opens a variety of pathways for future research. First, further study on breaching is required to assess whether it is indeed (at least to a degree) a universal or perhaps, even fundamental, characteristic in authentication. As other forms of tourism, such as cultural and heritage tourism, apply discourses that imply transcendence of boundaries of temporal and cultural nature, it can be assumed that breaching is not bound to the context of wilderness tourism. Second, the effect that breaching has requires further study to assess whether it is an integral part of constructing and performing authenticity, or simply a characteristic born from coincidence. Researching potential tourists' responses to discourses and performances that include breaching could help answer that question and thus potentially open a new chapter in the study of authenticity in tourism.

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