
Academic Research Paper

Authenticity in Historical Art Cities according to the Resilience orientation

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Abstract: This research aims to validate the Consumer-Based Model of Authenticity by applying it to the realm of large historical art cities destinations. Building upon existing literature models that explore authenticity, cultural motivation, and loyalty, we apply a conceptual model that contributes to a comprehensive understanding of these significant factors. By incorporating these dimensions, our aim is to advance the theoretical framework and empirical knowledge pertaining to authenticity within the context of historical art cities, destinations known to be subject to phenomena such as ‘touristification’ and gentrification, in which authenticity is both jeopardized by mass tourism and at the same time an effective strategy for building resilience in heritage cities in regard to their cultural and environmental integrity. A survey was conducted on a sample of 129 respondents. The questionnaire was administered via Prolific to both tourists who have previously visited Rome and those who have never visited the city. To test the conceptual model, factor analysis and SEM were employed through R software. From a theoretical perspective, the research findings offer insights that contribute to a deeper comprehension of the nature of authenticity in the resilience of heritage cities’ context. This study explores the interconnections between the factors influencing authenticity and their subsequent impacts within a heritage city as a destination. By investigating the antecedents and consequences of authenticity, this research sheds light on the intricate dynamics and relationships at play in the realm of heritage cities. Understanding the interconnections between authenticity and resilience offers valuable insights into preserving the unique cultural identity of heritage cities while adapting to tourism challenges. The study provides destination managers with a valuable tool to systematically measure the impact of marketing and communication policies on the perceived authenticity of visitors over time. It offers insights into the extent to which these strategies can influence tourists' future intentions to visit. Furthermore, authenticity acts as a powerful approach to protect historical art cities from the negative effects of mass tourism and touristification. By preserving their unique identity and cultural heritage, authenticity promotes sustainable development economically and environmentally. This research empowers destination managers to assess the effectiveness of their efforts in enhancing perceived authenticity and its subsequent influence on tourists' decision-making processes.

Keywords: *Authenticity, cultural tourism, historical art cities, cultural motivation, loyalty*

JEL Codes: Z30, Z32

1. Introduction

In the last decades, tourism has reshaped destination geography, characterized by the "world tourism cities" (Maitland & Newman 2009), as a tourism attractor. Each city is a tourist destination, connected with other cities regardless of the region or country tourism development in which they are located. This is not a polarized development of a city within a potential destination (Smith 2006) but a network of independent destinations represented by world cities. They represent, at the same time, a hub for world tourism, a place of origin, and a destination for significant tourist arrivals (Ashworth & Page, 2011). Radical changes in recent decades have definitively challenged the ways of managing tourism offerings in urban spaces of world cities. Cities have become spaces of relationships, humanized (Sachs-Jeantet, 1996), and transformed into places whose economy is based on the productive activity of knowledge accumulation. Urban space concept is based on the relationship between social relations and space (Gospodini, 2001). It expresses the complex relationships between human and local elements according to the levels of cultural space, leisure space, and landscape space. From the tourism perspective cities create new experiences and products (Ashworth, 2015). Indeed, as Maitland (2008) states, city's atmosphere and identity and the urban, historical, and social space create tourist attractiveness and experience. The world's tourism cities therefore plan for the extension of products and experiences to broaden their set of offerings needed to compete within the global network.

With this eye, the widespread belief that attractions of great historical or artistic value per se present an unchanging ability to attract tourists over time due to their uniqueness and rarity is challenged. For these cities, the perceived authenticity of cultural heritage is an essential qualifier of both the experience that feeds its attractiveness and uniqueness and for heritage management guidelines and strategies (Jigyasu & Imon, 2022).

Authenticity finds significant application in cultural heritage experience research, referring to which the accuracy of representations and the risk of commodification resulting from cultural consumption constitute a structured and ongoing field of interest in scientific research (Rickly, 2022). Authenticity is rooted in the hyper-competitiveness of tourism previously addressed, authenticity is indeed conceptualized as an attribute that describes a genuine, real experience (Le et al., 2019; Taylor, 1991) and the demand for authenticity has had a profound impact on tourists' decision-making process for years (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). As a fundamental motivation for visitors (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010), authenticity is one of today's key trends in tourism, especially in cultural tourism (Jiang et al., 2016; Yeoman et al., 2007). Authenticity represents for historical cities a significative opportunity for their competitiveness, as these urban areas have unique historical and cultural assets that can provide immersive and meaningful experiences for tourists (Jansen-Verbeke, 1998). Authenticity is a key factor for these cities, as it represents the genuine and original features that contribute to the cultural identity of the place (Pendlebury et al., 2009). The historical cities are being considered a sort of 'open-air museum', containing within themselves all the typical elements of urban tourism (i.e., shopping and entertainment, gastronomy and culinary experiences, urban landscapes, accessibility, and infrastructures), which affects the perception of authenticity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a particularly significant impact on tourism in historical art cities, traditionally afflicted by the phenomenon of overtourism and therefore not considered safe in terms of social distancing. In the last decades urban spaces dedicated to tourism experienced a complete transformation into actual tourist destinations (Belhassen et al., 2014) and city centers experiences notable negative consequences (Velasco et al., 2019) as being subjected to the processes of 'touristification' (de La

Calle, 2019) and ‘gentrification’ (Bobic & Akhavan, 2022). While historical centers hold universal significance in terms of cultural, historical and social aspects, their value is globally acknowledged and over time they became famous tourist attractions. Today mass tourism and globalization represent a significant threat to historical cities, by challenging them with tourists overcrowding and depopulation. In particular, the escalation of urban tourism has caused cities to undergo a process of environmental, economic and social change not sustainable in the long term. This is a particularly significant concern in European historical cities, where the Covid-19 pandemic has had a much deeper impact on tourism flows due to their high dependence on international arrivals (Euromonitor, 2021). At the same time, these cities have shown a quicker recovery compared to other destinations, with international arrivals already returning to pre-pandemic levels (Eurostat, 2023). Although there is a widespread belief on the ability of tourism to benefit the hosting community, by generating employment and fostering the growth of local businesses (Egresi, 2018), tourism is also a consumer of environments and local communities (Orbasli, 2000). Within this context, the concept of tourism resilience becomes a major issue in historical art cities, because all these negative phenomena (i.e. touristification, gentrification) undermine authenticity itself, as cities lose their cultural and environmental integrity (Drost, 1996) and the compensatory process of preservation is often only object-oriented (Nasser, 2003; Bobic & Akhavan, 2022). Furthermore, in the case of historical art cities, authenticity can be understood as a strategy to promote tourism resilience in times of crisis, as a subjective judgement of truthfulness and a qualifier of attractiveness and uniqueness.

Based on these premises, this paper aims to investigate, in a post-pandemic tourist industry, how authenticity contributes to the overall resilience of heritage cities, dwelling in particular on the perceived authenticity of a large historical city, understood as both the perceived authenticity of cultural heritage and the perceived authenticity of lived experience. According to these aspects, we investigate the relationship between cultural motivation, perceived authenticity, and loyalty in an historical city, specifically focusing on Rome. By examining the dynamic interplay between perceived authenticity and the resilience of heritage cities, through a quantitative research method, this research aims to provide valuable insights for destination managers, marketers, and policymakers in their efforts to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of heritage cities as authentic tourist destinations. In terms of resilience, we frame authenticity as a strategic tool for destinations to overcome economic shocks and flourish when confronted with new challenges or trends, disruptions and crises.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1. Authenticity

The debate about the concept of authenticity and its dimensions has grown rapidly among tourist scholars for many years. MacCannell (1973) was the first to introduce and define the concept of authenticity in a comprehensive and explicit manner. According to Wang (1999)’s literature review, authenticity is a construct consisting of three theoretical dimensions: objective authenticity, constructive authenticity, and existential authenticity. The concept of objective authenticity is traced back to the context of certified cultural heritage, this perspective adopts a positivist approach as it conceptualizes authenticity as a measurable and inherent attribute of the original object, site, or artifact (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). On the other hand, constructive authenticity is a more nuanced concept, shaped by individuals’ perceptions and attitudes and influenced by symbolic, contextual, and negotiated aspects (Chaabra, 2008; De Bernardi, 2019) that merge into a collective process of social recognition of authenticity. Existential authenticity is an activity-related concept, as it refers to phenomenological traditions and subjective interpretation. Existential authenticity is independent from objects or sites (Olsen, 2002) as it is composed of two subdimensions: intrapersonal existential authenticity (physical feelings and self-creation) and interpersonal existential authenticity (social and

family ties) (Wang, 1999). Today, great attention is placed on the relation between existential authenticity and both two other dimensions of authenticity (Zhang & Yin, 2020) and between authenticity and performance indicators, as tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Yi et al., 2022). In the context of tourist experience, according to Park et al. (2019), objective authenticity doesn't influence tourist satisfaction; nevertheless, existential authenticity has an impact on tourist loyalty and satisfaction as it relates the object to individual perceptions and experience. Existential authenticity is indeed closely linked to objects and context, and previous studies (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Zhou et al., 2013) have validated the positive impact of the object-based component on the existential component of authenticity. In Wang (1999)'s perspective, authenticity theoretical dimensions should not be considered exclusive or contradictory, but rather one the complement of the other. Based on this, in this study we represent authenticity through two separate constructs, one referring to the object-based component and the other representing the existential component. Furthermore, in line with the consumer-based approach proposed by Kolar and Zabkar (2010), in this study authenticity is intended as an evaluative judgment concerning a tourist's experience in a tourist destination. According to this perspective, authenticity refers to the perceived genuineness, originality, and cultural integrity of a tourist experience, which therefore refers both to the "objects" with which tourists come into contact and to the existential experience they have during the vacation (Wang, 1999). Authenticity appears thus to be strongly related to resilience. As it contributes to creating meaningful and memorable experience through the preservation of cultural heritage and – in cities – through the enjoyment for tourists of local traditions and cultural attractions, authenticity is considered an effective tool for enabling heritage cities to survive and thrive in times of crisis and shocks, such as the recent pandemic. In the context of resilience, authenticity plays therefore a pivotal role, as it enhances heritage cities' ability to cope with the challenging effects of tourism (Hopkins & Becken, 2014; Bui et al., 2020)

2.2. The historical art cities and the experience environment

Culture and tourism have an enduring and intertwined relationship, as cultural sites, attractions, cities today still represent a fundamental motivation for travel (UNWTO, 2023), while travelling itself contributes to the creation and enrichment of culture (Richards, 2018). Cultural attractions like monuments, historical building and historic centers often serve as the primary motivation for visiting a specific destination, by engaging tourists in authentic immersive experiences that allow them to witness the 'extraordinary' or the 'wonderful' in both tangible and intangible dimensions (Rojek, 1997). Cultural tourism involves different forms of travel (Richards, 2018), including tourism to urban areas as historical art cities, where cultural attractions such as monuments, museums, building and theaters are prominent and the city itself could be defined as an 'open-air museum' (Günlü et al., 2009). The authentic experience is particularly meaningful in historical cities, as they provide tourists an opportunity to not only engaging with extraordinary cultural objects and experiences, but also experiences local life, shopping experiences and urban attractions such as festivals, cultural centers and much more. While on the side of their cultural significance, historical cities stand as authentic living testimonials to human culture and collective memory with their historic centers and artistic masterpieces, on the other side heritage cities are as well part of urban tourism (Adamo et al., 2018). In Van Den Berg et al. (1995)'s tourist city model, products as history, local cultures and attractions represent the primary asset for unique tourism offerings (Balkaran & Maharaj, 2013; Vengesai et al., 2009). In urban tourism, the dimensions of cultural motivation come together with other competitive assets of the city, such as supporting infrastructure or activities (Ben-Dalia et al., 2013), activities as shopping, dining, sports facilities, or outdoor activities (Camilleri, 2019), external and internal accessibilities (Ouariti & Jebrane, 2020; Wessels & Tseane-Gumbi, 2022). Consequently, heritage cities are an extraordinary context in which the city itself represents an authentic immersive experience, and as a result more factors influence perceived authenticity. In this sense, it's important once again to highlight the difficulties and challenges of historical art cities. The Covid-19 pandemic

has unleashed an unprecedented and rapid onslaught on a global scale, with extensive travel bans, quarantine restrictions, closures of borders, resulting in severe economic consequences for the tourism sector (Gossling et al., 2020) and more specifically for urban destinations (Ntounis et al., 2022). As the Covid-19 pandemic can be considered an ‘acute shock’ (Leitner et al., 2018) on global levels, the implication of authenticity on tourism resilience is not to be underestimated in the case of historical art cities. As previously stated, the concept of authenticity in historical art cities can be viewed both as an efficient approach to support tourism resilience during periods of crisis and as a valuable asset threatened by the deteriorating consequences of mass tourism. Furthermore, from a tourism perspective, the concept of resilience – intended as the ability to recover, adapt and thrive in the face of challenges, disruptions and shocks – in regard to historical art cities involves the immutability of their historic centers. Paradoxically, historical art cities as Rome, which have unique and rare attractions and are therefore recognized as World Heritage Sites (UNESCO) face challenges in terms of their ability to embrace new types of experiences and ways of using spaces. In front of crisis and shocks, it’s not possible for historical art cities to act on the configuration of the city and its spaces, as UNESCO both preserves and enhance city’s uniqueness and at the same time draws a line in city’s management. In simpler terms, impressive historical sites like Rome, which attract tourists due to their exceptional and rare attractions, may struggle to adapt to new trends and changes. Intangible attributes such as the authenticity of the tourism experience thus represent a maneuverable margin for destination management to make the city flexible and open to change, despite the rigidity of its offerings.

2.3. Research hypotheses and conceptual model

In recent years, the need to study the tourism phenomenon by using a tourist-based approach has been called for by several scholars (see: Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Zhong et al., 2023; Manimont et al., 2022; Jie & Hemchua, 2022). A tourist-based perspective provides a way to understand and investigate tourists’ perceptions and behaviors in a more in-depth and realistic manner, offering a dynamic framework for conceptualizing authenticity and enabling the exploration of the influences and outcomes of authentic experiences (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010).

Accordingly, this research adopts the Consumer-Based Model of Authenticity (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010) by applying it to the context of heritage cities, as cities have played a central role in the recent development of the cultural tourism market (Richards, 2022) and offer a crucial context for the study of authenticity, as typically urban dimensions and external factors can influence the perception of both object-based and existential authenticity. The aim of our study is to investigate how cultural motivation influences object-based authenticity and existential authenticity in historic cities.

In line with Kolar and Zakbar’s (2010) model, we define authenticity as the extent to which tourists perceive their experiences at a cultural destination as enjoyable, genuine, and true. As existential authentic experiences are always related to a context and to objects (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Zhou et al., 2013), the following hypothesis is presented:

H1: Object-based authenticity positively influences existential authenticity.

According to Kolar and Zakbar (2010), cultural motivation is a key factor in understanding tourist behavior at heritage tourism destinations (Poria et al., 2003). In the adopted model, cultural motivation is treated as a “cluster of interrelated, intellectually based interests in culture, history and heritage”, implying that cultural motivation can be found even among tourists that are not necessarily exclusive cultural tourists (Hughes, 2002; McIntosh, 2004). This motivation can influence both existential and object-based authenticity. The following hypotheses are therefore adopted:

H2: Cultural motivation positively influences object-based authenticity.

H3: Cultural motivation positively influences existential authenticity.

Besides considering cultural motivation an antecedent of the authentic experience, Kolar and Zokbar (2010) also include consequences of authenticity, loyalty. Perceptions in heritage tourism exhibit a positive correlation with loyalty, suggesting that positive experiences are likely to enhance loyalty as well (Poria et al., 2003). Furthermore, existing literature in the field of tourism provides evidence for the direct impact of motivation on loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). The following hypotheses are added to the model:

H4: Object-based authenticity positively influences loyalty.

H5: Existential authenticity positively influences loyalty.

H6: Cultural motivation positively influences loyalty.

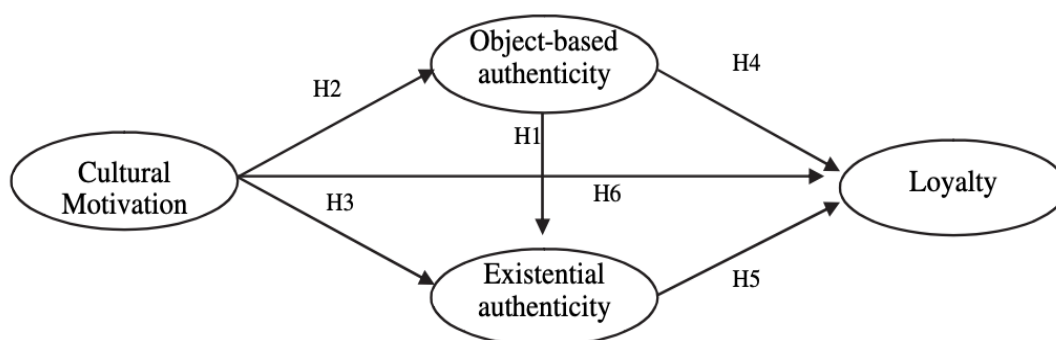


Figure 1. Conceptual consumer-based model of authenticity. Adopted by Kolar & Zakbar, 2010.
 Source: Author elaboration

3. Materials and methods

This study aims to validate the model by Kolar and Zabkar (2010), by extending its application to the domain of heritage cities. The dimensions and variables considered in this research are presented in Table 1. The model's conceptual development draws upon existing literature models that delve into the aspects of authenticity, thereby enriching the framework with a comprehensive understanding of these crucial factors. By incorporating these dimensions, we aim to advance the theoretical foundation and empirical understanding of authenticity in the context of heritage cities.

Table 1. Dimensions, subdimensions and questionnaire variables.

Dimension and subdimensions	Reference	Variables
Authenticity	Object-based authenticity	Kolar, T., and Zabkar, V. (2010). A consumer-based model of authenticity: An oxymoron or the foundation of cultural heritage marketing? <i>Tourism management</i> , 31(5), 652-664. OBJ1: "the destination remains itself regardless of the passage of time." OBJ2: "the atmosphere of the destination is unrepeatable elsewhere"; OBJ3: "the atmosphere of the destination is unique".
	Existential authenticity	Kolar, T., and Zabkar, V. (2010). A consumer-based model of authenticity: An oxymoron or the foundation of cultural heritage marketing? <i>Tourism management</i> , 31(5), 652-664. EXI1: "during my stay, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in the culture of the place"; EXI2: "I felt connected to the history of the destination." EXI3: "I felt part of the local community."
	Cultural motivation	Kolar, T., and Zabkar, V. (2010). A consumer-based model of authenticity: An oxymoron or the foundation of cultural heritage marketing? <i>Tourism management</i> , 31(5), 652-664. MOT1: "to increase my knowledge and culture." MOT 2: "to experience local customs and culture"; MOT3: "to experience different cultures"; MOT4: "to visit cultural attractions and events."
Loyalty	Kolar, T., and Zabkar, V. (2010). A consumer-based model of authenticity: An oxymoron or the foundation of cultural heritage marketing? <i>Tourism management</i> , 31(5), 652-664. LOY1: "I will visit the destination in the future"; LOY2: ""I will recommend the destination to other people through my social networks"; LOY3: "I will recommend visiting the destination to my friends".	

Source: Author elaboration

As one of the most important and globally well-known tourist destinations, Rome offers both attractions and experiences that encompass ancient wonders and vibrant contemporary life. The city's timeless monuments epitomize its historical significance and provide a unique backdrop for exploring the concept of authenticity. A total of 129 questionnaires were collected. Factor analysis (Gorsuch, 2013) and structural equation modeling (Rosseel, 2012) were used to test the conceptual model, with the support of "R" software.

4. Results

4.1. Sample characteristics

The sample of this research was composed of a total of 129 respondents, 58.14% of the respondents were women, compared to 41.86% of the male respondents. Regarding education, the sample shows a diverse range of educational backgrounds: 20.16% completed only middle school, while 22.48% hold high school diplomas and the same percentage holds a Ph.D. or a master's degree and the majority of them hold bachelor's degree (34.88%). The sample is mostly composed of respondents between the ages of 21-30 years. The majority of the respondents have been to Rome at

least once (89.15%), while the remaining 10.85% never visited Rome. (Tab.2).

Table 2. Participant sample.

Gender		Education	
Male	41.86%	Middle school	20.16%
Female	58.14%	High school diploma	22.48%
		Bachelor's degree	34.88%
		Ph.D. or master's degree	22.48%

Age		Visited Rome at least once	
18-20	25.58%	Yes	89.15%
21-30	27.13%	No	10.85%
31-40	22.48%		
41-50	15.50%		
51-60	6.98%		
>60	2.33%		

Source: Author elaboration

4.2. Authenticity

To measure authenticity and empirically test the proposed model (Fig.1), the study employed a comprehensive analysis of the authenticity dimension variables: objective-based authenticity (OBJ), existential authenticity (EXI), cultural motivation (MOT), and loyalty (LOY). This analysis was conducted using "R" software, utilizing factor analysis and structural equation modeling techniques. Factor analysis is a widely used statistical methodology for exploring the interrelationships and patterns within a large set of variables (Awang et al., 2015). Its primary objective is to identify a reduced number of latent factors that can account for the observed associations among the variables. By condensing the variables into a smaller set of factors, factor analysis facilitates the identification and comprehension of the underlying dimensions present in the data. The objective was to unveil the distinct facets of authenticity represented by the OBJ, EXI, MOT, and LOY factors. Each factor captures a unique aspect of authenticity, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Following the factor analysis and the identification of the latent factors, the study advanced to structural equation modeling (SEM). SEM is a statistical approach that evaluates and validates theoretical models by examining the relationships among latent variables. This methodology allows for the estimation of both direct and indirect effects among variables, providing insights into the causal links and overall model fit. By employing structural equation modeling, it was possible to empirically assess the consumer-based model of authenticity and investigate the interrelationships among the authenticity dimensions (OBJ, EXI, MOT, LOY). This analytical framework facilitated the examination of direct and indirect effects among the latent variables, offering insights into the degree of alignment between the model and the observed data. Overall, the combined use of factor analysis and structural equation modeling aimed to measure authenticity and evaluate the validity of the proposed model. Through the analysis of relationships among the authenticity-related

variables, it was gained a deeper understanding of the underlying dimensions and their impact on the overall concept of authenticity within the specific context of the study.

Table 3. Results of the factor analysis.

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Object-based authenticity (OBJ)				
The destination remains itself regardless of the passage of time	0,122	0,565		
The atmosphere of the destination is unrepeatable elsewhere	-0,112	1,050		
The atmosphere of the destination is unique	-0,141	0,805	0,157	
Existential authenticity (EXI)				
During my stay I had the opportunity to immerse myself in the culture of the place	1,002			-0,122
I felt connected to the history of the destination.	0,748			
I felt part of the local community.	0,444	0,135	0,128	0,162
Cultural motivation (MOT)				
To increase my knowledge and culture.	0,780			
To experience local customs and culture	0,562			0,340
To experience different cultures				0,871
To visit cultural attractions and events	0,839	-0,109		
Loyalty (LOY)				
I will visit the destination in the future	0,309		0,518	-0,152
I will recommend the destination to other people through my social networks			0,601	0,141
I will recommend visiting the destination to my friends			1,095	-0,104

Source: Author elaboration

Table 3 presents the results of the factor analysis conducted using the "R" software. The analysis reveals the relationships between the factors and the corresponding dimensions of authenticity: Existential Authenticity (EXI), Objective-Based Authenticity (OBJ), Motivation (MOT), and Loyalty (LOY). The loadings for each factor indicate the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables and the corresponding factor (Fabrigar et al., 1999). Factor 1 corresponds to the Existential

Authenticity variables (EXI) and is positively influenced by the variables EXI1, EXI2, and EXI3. Factor 2 corresponds to the Objective-Based Authenticity variables (OBJ) and is positively influenced by the variables OBJ1, OBJ2, and OBJ3. Factor 3 corresponds to the Loyalty variables (LOY) and is positively influenced by the variables LOY1, LOY2, and LOY3. Factor 4 corresponds to the Motivation dimension (MOT) and is positively influenced by the variables MOT1, MOT2, MOT3, and MOT4 .

While factor analysis elucidates the latent dimensions and their relationships with the observed variables, it is essential to further examine the interplay among these dimensions and evaluate the overall model fit. To achieve this, the application of structural equation modeling (SEM) becomes crucial as it allows for a comprehensive measurement of authenticity. This integrated approach ensures a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of authenticity and its impact on tourists' perceptions and behaviors.

4.3. Structural model and hypotheses testing

SEM allows for the examination of latent variables and their relationships, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying constructs. In this study, we employ a structural regression model that incorporates latent variables representing Existential Authenticity (EXI), Objective-Based Authenticity (OBJ), Loyalty (LOY), and Cultural Motivation (MOT). The model specifies relationships between these latent variables:

- H1:** EXI ~ OBJ
- H2:** OBJ ~ MOT
- H3:** EXI ~ MOT
- H4:** LOY ~ OBJ
- H5:** LOY ~ EXI
- H6:** LOY ~ MOT

where latent variables are defined as:

- EXI** ~ EXI1 + EXI2 + EXI3
- OBJ** ~ OBJ1 + OBJ2 + OBJ3
- LOY** ~ LOY1 + LOY2 + LOY3

Below the results are presented (Table 4 and Figure 2):

Table 4. SEM results.

Regressions	Estimate	Std.Err	z-value	P(> z)
EXI ~ OBJ	0.204	0.130	1.570	0.117
OBJ ~ MOT	0.157	0.056	2.796	0.005
EXI ~ MOT	0.878	0.093	9.403	0.000
LOY ~ OBJ	0.319	0.104	3.073	0.002
LOY ~ EXI	0.267	0.137	1.945	0.042
LOY ~ MOT	0.047	0.135	0.345	0.730

Source: Author elaboration

The results of the structural regression model indicate several important findings. Firstly, the model demonstrates good fit to the data, as indicated by various fit indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.960, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.947, and Normed Fit Index (NFI) of 0.905. These indices suggest that the model adequately represents the relationships among the latent variables (Bentler, 1990; Shi et al., 2019; Smith & McMillan, 2001). Examining the regression paths the hypotheses were tested through the examination of the sign, size and statistical significance of the structural coefficients (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996). Regarding the EXI latent variable, it showed a positive but non-significant association with OBJ (estimate = 0.204, $p = 0.117$). In contrast, OBJ exhibited a significant positive relationship with MOT (estimate = 0.157, $p = 0.005$). The most substantial relationship was observed between EXI and MOT, with a highly significant positive coefficient (estimate = 0.878, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the results indicated a positive and significant association between LOY and OBJ (estimate = 0.319, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that Objective-Based Authenticity influences Loyalty. The relationship between LOY and EXI was marginally significant (estimate = 0.267, $p = 0.042$). However, no significant relationship was found between LOY and MOT (estimate = 0.047, $p = 0.730$). The graphical representation of the findings is depicted in Figure 2.

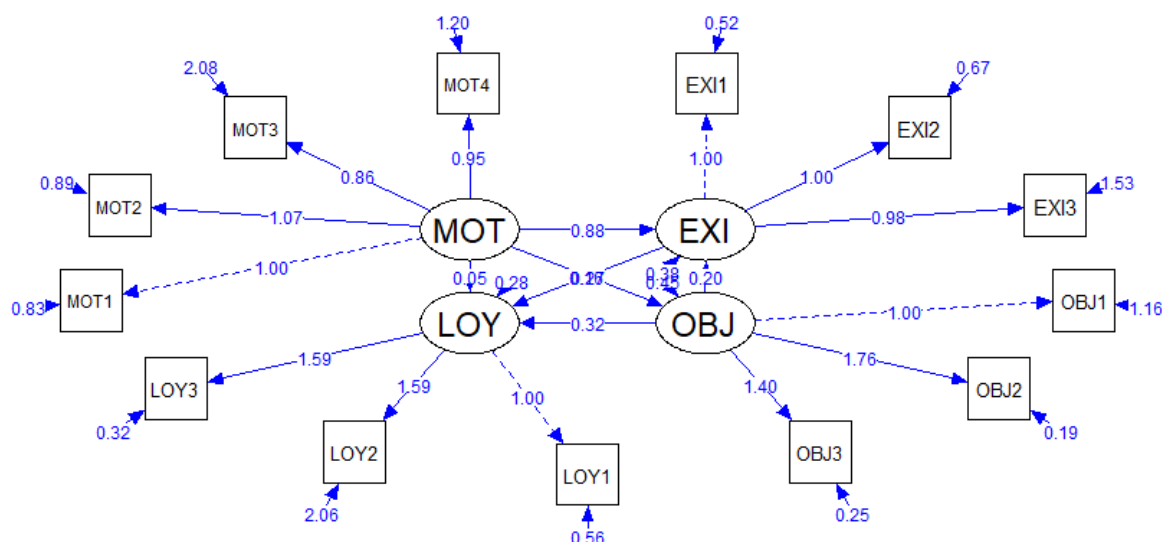


Figure 2. Structural Model Paths. *Source: Author elaboration*

The path diagram represents the relationships between latent variables and observed variables in the structural equation model. The latent variables are represented by nodes placed at the center of the circle. Each latent variable (EXI, OBJ, LOY, and MOT) corresponds to a construct that cannot be directly observed but is inferred from the observed variables, represented by nodes positioned along the circumference of the circle. Each observed variable is connected to its corresponding latent variable by an arrow, indicating the direction of influence. These arrows represent the paths or relationships between the latent and observed variables. The numbers on the arrows represent the weights of the paths. These coefficients indicate the strength and direction of the relationships between variables. By examining the path diagram, it is possible to assess the relationships between latent variables and observed variables and understand how the latent variables influence the observed variables and how different variables are interconnected. Additionally, analyzing the lengths and directions of the arrows it is possible to gauge the strength and direction of the relationships. Table 5 provides a comprehensive overview of the previously discussed research hypotheses, presenting a concise summary of the final results obtained.

Table 5 Test of the hypotheses.

Path		Result
H1	<i>Object-based authenticity positively influences existential authenticity.</i>	Not supported
H2	<i>Cultural motivation positively influences object-based authenticity.</i>	Supported
H3	<i>Cultural motivation positively influences existential authenticity.</i>	Supported
H4	<i>Object-based authenticity positively influences loyalty.</i>	Supported
H5	<i>Existential authenticity positively influences loyalty.</i>	Supported
H6	<i>Cultural motivation positively influences loyalty.</i>	Not supported

Source: Author elaboration

The research results confirm the presence of a positive relationship between culture motivation and object-based (H2) and existential (H3) authenticity and an impact of object-based and existential authenticity on loyalty (H4, H5), aligning with the results of Kolar and Zabkar's (2010) study. However, existential authenticity appears to be unaffected by object-based authenticity, and culture motivation does not appear to significantly influence loyalty. Subsequently, Hypotheses 1 and 6 were not supported.

5. Discussion, conclusions, and future implications

In the contemporary tourism market, tourists actively seek authentic and immersive experiences, at historical art cities, where authentic experiences related to the enjoyment of cultural heritage are accompanied by urban experiences (Richards, 2022). The concept of authenticity holds a key significance for these tourists (Morhart et al., 2015) and authenticity has become a pivotal component in shaping the expectations and desires of today travelers (Ram et al., 2016), driving their quest for meaningful and immersive tourism experiences at heritage cities (De Bernardi & Arenas, 2022; Cinar et al., 2022). Furthermore, authenticity in urban tourism could be defined as an attempt to find a competitive advantage that set the city apart from competitors (Banks, 2022) and heritage cities (i.e., Rome, Venice, Florence, Paris) can provide tourists with authentic experiences by offering them a storytelling about the past and the present of the city (Xu et al., 2022), besides engaging them in urban tourist activities. Thus, the purpose of this study was to validate Kolar & Zabkar (2010)'s model in the high specificity context of heritage cities, by using Rome as the application field of the research. In particular, this research aimed to understand how, starting with the cultural, authenticity affects loyalty in the context of a heritage city as Rome.

The partially confirmed measurement model and the reliability and validity indicators attest that the structural model reliably measures the constructs of perceived authenticity in the context of heritage cities. Perceived authenticity can be conceptualized and measured as an evaluative judgment that depends on tourism experiences. Furthermore, the results confirmed the relationship between object-based and existential authenticity with the antecedent cultural motivation and the consequent loyalty. Thus, authenticity is not to be considered as an "autonomous" concept but should be understood as a mediator of tourists' long-term behavioral intentions. Since the structural model shows an acceptable fit and the proposed hypotheses are mostly confirmed, we can confirm the assumed importance and centrality of authentic experiences in understanding the loyalty of cultural tourists in the city of Rome. However, our findings do not support the hypothesis that object-based authenticity positively influences existential authenticity (H1). The lack of a significant evidence on the impact of individuals' perception of object-based authenticity on their experience of existential authenticity challenges previous studies that supported this hypothesis (Kolar & Zakbar, 2010; Yi et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2013; Atzeni et al., 2021), while confirming Park et al.'s (2019) results. In the context of this study, if cities themselves represent tourist attractors, when it comes to heritage cities, we deal with special

features that stem from the fact that historic centers are a cultural tourism attraction surrounded by other attractions, not only intended for tourists but also for residents, as events, shopping, dining out and outdoor activities. The lack of correlation between object-based authenticity and existential authenticity can thus be explained by the co-presence of other factors that, in the case of urban tourism in heritage cities, affect the perception of existential authenticity. Furthermore, as previously stated in this research, the results of the ‘touristification’ process in historical art cities could often impact the dimensions of perceived authenticity, by effectively separating object-based authenticity – which focuses on maintaining the integrity and accuracy of the tangible elements that contribute to a place's authenticity – from existential authenticity – which, instead, relates to the personal and emotional experience of individuals within a destination. This unsupported hypothesis gives empirical foundation to the last assumption, demonstrating a possible influence of touristification of urban centers on the perception of authenticity. In regard to cultural motivation, understood as the antecedent of an authentic experience, the findings prove how cultural motivation positively influences perceived authenticity. In terms of resilience, as tourists are motivated to delve into local cultures, traditions and attractions and to experience existential authenticity, they contribute to the preservation and sustainability of these elements, therefore enhancing heritage cities’ resilience. Accordingly, H2 and H3 are supported hypotheses. Regarding the consequences of authentic experience, which are identified with tourist loyalty in this research, our results confirm the positive influence of both object-based authenticity and existential authenticity on loyalty. Accordingly, H4 and H5 are supported hypotheses. Last, according to our findings there isn’t a significant relationship between tourists’ cultural motivation and their loyalty towards a destination. Despite the assumption that greater cultural motivation would lead to increased loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Kolar & Zakbar, 2010) our research on perceived authenticity in Rome suggest otherwise. Cultural motivation thus does not seem to be sufficiently relevant to have a direct influence on customer loyalty in historical art cities, unlike authenticity, which thus appears to be a tool to support tourism resilience. In fact, cultural motivation has an influence on the perceived object-based and existential authenticity, which both influence loyalty, but cultural motivation isn’t directly correlated with loyalty. In heritage cities, other factors might have a mediation role in the relationship between cultural motivation and tourist loyalty, future research could extend Kolar and Zabkar (2010)’s model by identifying and introducing these intervening factors.

In conclusion, authenticity has a substantial impact on how tourists see and enjoy a destination – in this case, a historical art city. Indeed, authenticity is associated in literature to a value judgement, which can have an impact on the overall perception that tourists have of the destination (Marine-Roig, 2015), as authenticity is always the result of a social, negotiable and contested process of authentication (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Mkono, 2013; Hughes, 1995; Marine-Roig, 2015). Besides the influence of authenticity on visitors’ perception, some studies adopting an existential approach have explored the relationship between authenticity and tourism behavior, for example the cultural motivations of tourists - in other words, the motivation of tourists to engage in cultural heritage experiences - (Brown, 2013; Knudsen et al., 2016; Park et al., 2019) or their decision-making processes (Park et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020). Our study confirms the impact of authenticity on these dimensions, thus identifying authenticity as a precious tool for tourism diversification and destination positioning in a post-pandemic world. The impact of authenticity in tourism is not only on the creation of meaningful experiences for tourists, but it also contributes in building tourism resilience in an integrated approach that ensures both the consideration of tourists’ expectations and a sustainable development for the destination and its community. From a theoretical perspective, the research findings provide a way to better understand the multidimensional nature of authenticity in tourism (Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Kolar and Zabkar, 2010; Poria et al., 2003; Yeoman et al., 2007), exploring the relationships between antecedents and consequences of authenticity within a heritage city.

The study offers destination managers of heritage cities a valuable tool to support them in systematically measuring over time whether and with what intensity marketing and communication

policies can increase the perceived authenticity of visitors, verifying how this in turn affects tourists' future intentions to visit. Tourism management for an historical art city in the postmodern era is a complex issue, as the city is characterized by many different but interconnected objectives. Authenticity can act as a powerful strategic countermeasure against the challenges posed by mass tourism and touristification in historical art cities, as it preserves cities' unique identity and cultural heritage while ensuring long-term economic, social and environmental sustainability. With the preservation of both object-based and existential authenticity, the involvement of the community and the balance between tourism demand and local well-being, it is possible to endure tourism development whilst safeguarding cultural heritage and local community quality of life.

Some limitations of the research should be highlighted. It is important to note that the research is based on a convenience sample and as such the results cannot be generalized. In addition, the study does not test the applicability of the models on different tourist destinations, as the data collected refer to the perceptions of tourists visiting Rome.

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Conflict of interest

All authors declare no conflicts of interest in this paper.

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