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Deposited on 28 January 2020

AUTHENTICITY AND DISORIENTATION IN THE TOURISM EXPERIENCE

It is argued that some travellers seek unique, exotic and authentic tourism encounters that correspond to a search for the experience of difference, foreignness and disorientation. Despite the growing number of studies researching the concept of authenticity in the tourism experience, there is a relative lack of academic work looking at stakeholder perceptions of authenticity in relation to disorientation and the tourism experience. Using a grounded theory methodology drawing on interviews with various stakeholders involved in Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism, the study reveals that experiences of disorientation can be encouraged by tourism suppliers and influence visitors' perception of authenticity across various dimensions of cultural heritage tourism. By travelling outside of their usual comfort zones, visitors experience disorientation that increases their level of emotions, understanding and interaction with foreign environments and makes their tourism experience more 'authentic'. Integrating potentially 'disorientating activities' such as wandering in steppe landscapes or exploring culinary traditions into future tourism experiences has implications for future tourism development whereby business and government can reinforce tourism experiences being offered and create unique selling points. Such an approach enables a greater diversification of the types of tourism development supported by the Kazakhstani government.

- In the Kazakhstani context, disorienting experiences contribute to shape visitors' perceptions of authenticity of the places they visit, whether among nomadic cultural landscapes or in local homestays when testing culinary traditions.
- Disorientation if carefully managed can generate positive emotions for the visitors involved, contribute to the uniqueness of their tourism experiences, and increase the likelihood they will return to visit their hosts again.
- In disorienting nomadic eco-cultural encounters, tourism suppliers can maintain satisfaction of risk-avoidance visitors by offering guesthouses with more comfort or by preparing and informing them better about the tourism activities proposed during the tours.

1. Introduction

'When I think of my happiest adventures in foreign parts of the world, they've often been after wandering off the beaten track […]. Making discoveries by getting lost isn't only a matter of drifting through the streets as the fancy takes us' (Smith, 2015).

Travel can take individuals outside their everyday life and into new cultural realms, with unfamiliar encounters fostering new insights into existing understandings of the world (Anderson, 2015; Edensor, 2007; Richards & Wilson, 2004; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). MacCannell (2001, pp. 31-36) shows that some tourists are conscious of something "beyond", a search for the unseen within their tourist experience which looks for the unexpected or a "chance to glimpse the real" in a foreign environment. These types of travel encounters can involve disorientation resulting from visitors' loss of the familiar when they find themselves outside of their comfort zones (Ward et al., 2001) or when they experience culture shock (Hottola, 2004). Western tourists' confrontation with cultural differences and the complexities of 'exotic' encounters can induce an 'authentic' tourism experience which affects understandings of themselves and their travel practices (Munt, 1994; Noy, 2004). Experiencing a culture shock can increase the perceived authenticity of their relationship with their environments and hosts, inducing a social change practiced at the individual level (Edensor, 2000; Hottola, 2004; Lozanski, 2013; Tiberghien, Bremner, & Milne, 2017).

Paying greater attention to overall visitors' emotional connections and motivations in wilderness areas with a view to enhancing their experiences and avoid

dissatisfaction (D. McIntosh & Wright, 2017; Prakash, Perera, Newsome, Kusuminda, & Walker, 2019) is a growing area of concern in tourism studies. In eco-cultural tourism settings, where ecological and cultural aspects of a landscape are combined to create experiences for tourists (Wallace & Russell, 2004), there is a dearth of research looking at the factors that enable a potential positive and authentic tourism experience for the stakeholders involved. As authenticity emerges from social processes and is subject to the interpretation of both tourism providers and tourists visiting destinations, it is important to understand stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity in the construction of visitor experiences, activities and practices so that both tourism suppliers and visitors are satisfied and understand one another.

Despite the number of studies researching the concept of authenticity in the tourism experience (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Park, Choi, & Lee, 2019; Rickly-Boyd, 2013; Tiberghien, 2018), there is a relative lack of academic work looking at both the supply and demand side perceptions of authenticity in relation to disorientation and the tourism experience. Some effects of culture shock and disorientation during the tourism experience such as intercultural adaptation (Hottola, 2004) and nostalgia (Graburn, 1995) are discussed in the literature. However, few studies examine why some tourists aim to be disoriented and psychologically 'disconnect' from their usual comfort zone in order to increase the level of emotions of the places they visit. Moreover, the link between increased level of emotions and the extent to which this state of mind leads to an authentic experience has been rarely considered. Some authors (Tasci & Knutson, 2004; Y. Wang, 2007) examined how the authenticity of the visitor experience is constructed in familiar and contrived environments. There is little research available looking specifically at the extent to which experiences of disorientation induced by the visit to unfamiliar environments can lead to visitor' perception of authenticity of the places and people they encounter. Additionally, few studies have examined the link between disorientation and potential visitors' satisfaction about their tourism experience.

This paper examines the role disorientation plays in the perception of authenticity of the tourism experience in Kazakhstani eco-cultural encounters. More specifically, it argues that in unexpected and serendipitous tourism encounters causing visitors' disorientation, visitors' level of emotions, understanding and interaction with foreign environments is increased. This in turn leads to visitors experiencing existential authentic moments during their travels in cultural landscapes and with

local hosts in home-stays. The paper then details the impact disorientation has on tourism suppliers' managerial practices.

2. Authenticity, Disorientation and the Tourism Experience

2.1 Perception of authenticity and experiences of disorientation
For Crouch (2012, p. 20), "doing tourism can be germane to our negotiation of identity amid moments of disorientation and belonging". Disorientation is commonly defined as the condition of having lost one's bearings (The Collins English Dictionary, 2013) or "the holistic consequences of leaving one set of socio-spatial relations and moving to another" (Anderson, 2015, p. 2), leading travellers to experience geographical, emotional, psychological as well as physical dislocation. For Hottola (2004), disorientation can be experienced when visitors first encounter an unfamiliar setting. Visitor disorientation can be experienced when tourists' environmental stimuli and levels of emotions are beyond their assessment and management skills (Ryan, 1996; Tasci & Knutson, 2004) or when they encounter things they do not understand (Xie, 2011). The tourist aspirations for cultural difference, spatial proximity and conceptualization of the "Other", as well as their perception of authenticity of a place, is argued to be influenced by their cultural background, goals, motivations and expectations (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; N. Wang, 2000), preconceived images (Waller & Lea, 1999) as well as pre-existing knowledge of the destination (Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003; A. J. McIntosh & Prentice, 1999). By comparing their knowledge of a place with the reality of their tourism experiences, the visitor is better able to distinguish the authentic aspects of their visit or what draws them specifically to the destination (Chhabra et al., 2003).

Wang (2000) discusses 'existential authenticity' as the experience of the visitor where the personal dimension plays a significant role in authenticating a site. As a catalyst for authenticity, tourism enables access to natural and cultural spaces that some visitors may not encounter in their daily life, where they can effectively realise their 'authentic self' (Brown, 2013; N. Wang, 1999). In disorienting tourism encounters, this state of mind necessitates some form of psychological adaptation to the places they visit. Visitors' memories and perception of destinations, in particular unfamiliar ones, induce a psychological adjustment to environmental stimuli and affect behaviour and thresholds of sensations (Furnham, 1984; Norwich, 1993;

Wapner, Cohen, & Kaplan, 1976). A high level of emotions about foreign encounters can be reached during what Csikszentmihalyi (1975) described as optimal human experiences, a mental state of 'flow' whereby people are challenged and experience a loss of self-consciousness and time. Among the seven elements of peak-flow described by Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987), disorientation in time and space constitute important parameters in the search for the ultimate authentic tourist experience as a means to achieve and maintain visitors' optimal level of emotions. The intellectual enhancement and self-actualisation (Maslow, 1970) fostered by the exploration, understanding and discovery of new places allow an immersive and meaningful visitor experience (Cohen, 1995; Tasci & Knutson, 2004).

2.2 Perception of authenticity, experiences of disorientation and host-guest tourism encounters
The link between disorientation and the perception of authenticity of a place can be experienced within local tourism encounters at the intersection of familiar and unfamiliar environments. Mura (2015) suggests that the quality of heritage tourism is improved when visitors find 'authenticity' in homestay environments. For Tasci and Knutson (2004), the familiarity of a destination and visitors' perception of authenticity of a place and its local community are interrelated. When looking for familiarity in their travels, the feeling of 'being at home' is seen by tourists as being of particular importance to creating this perception. Wang (2007) argues that as tourists subconsciously search for 'home' in their travels, the production of customised authenticity is constantly constructed (through both imagination and materiality) by the visitor and in tourism contacts with the local populations - even though they have never previously been in the country. Wang's (2007) study shows that customised authenticity is produced in home-oriented environments, which visitors find satisfactory despite its staged nature. The authentications produced require an intimate, reciprocal and empathetic collaboration of tourist and practitioner with the goal of an authentic experience of the "Other'' (Tiberghien et al., 2017).

Conversely, Furnham and Bochner (1982) argue that visitors' new social situations, induced by the differences between sojourners and host communities within the tourism encounter, create a degree of difficulty and require adaptation. Edensor (2000) proposes that some tourists, when seeking out spaces that are not commodified for tourism purposes (for example the lack of organisation of a tour or

the involuntary effects of performances), can be disoriented by the unpredictability of performative tourism encounters. The visitor's perception enters into a liminal state and produces a sense of self-awareness, resulting in an experience that is existentially authentic (Hughes, 1995; N. Wang, 1999). This serendipitous moment, when a tourist ceases to be a tourist (Ryan, 1991), is thought to be automatically authentic (Cary, 2004; Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra, 2013).

3.   Research Setting

The modernisation of Kazakhstani lifestyles and international tourism development have together stimulated an increase in the number of international visitor arrivals to the country in the past fifteen years, reaching more than 4.5 million in 2017 (World Economic Forum, 2017). Visitors to Kazakhstan primarily look for adventure and extreme tours (Werner, 2003). Tourism suppliers capitalise on the dynamic nature of Kazakhstan's cultural heritage and the potential for eco-cultural tourism to attract new visitors (Tiberghien, 2018).

This study encompasses two case studies, the 'Kyzylarai' and 'Tulip' tours (Figure 1).
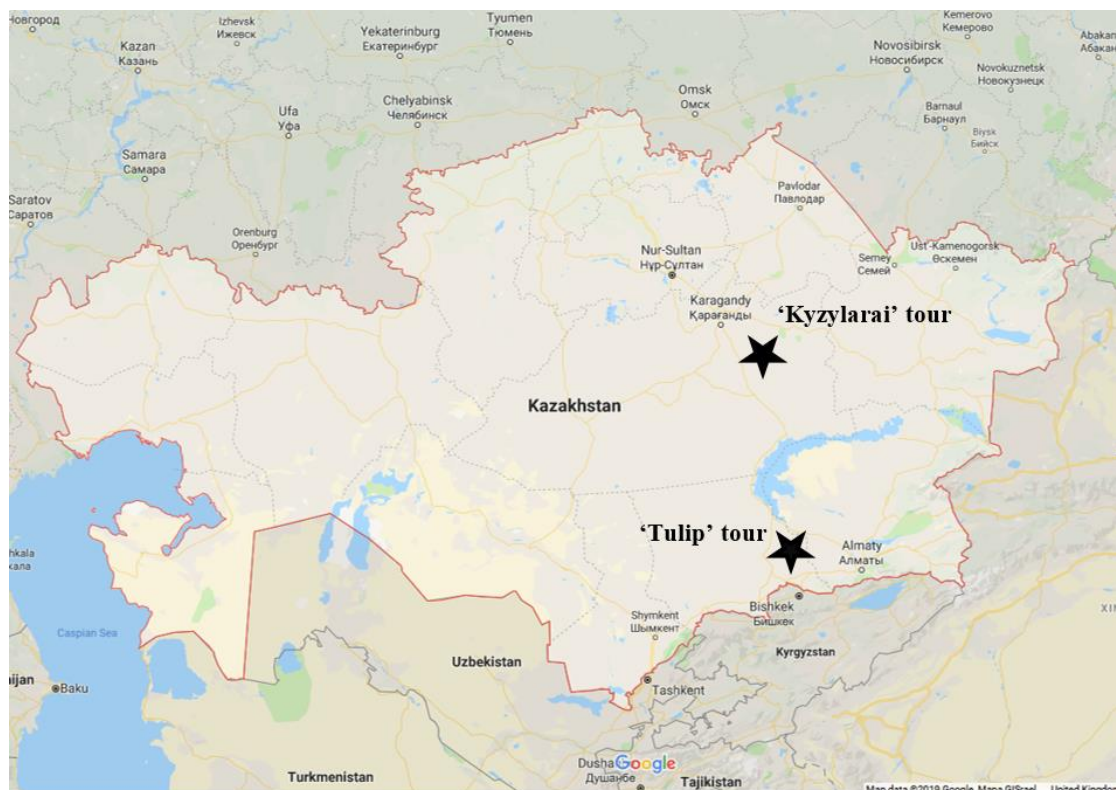

Figure 1: Location of the 'Kyzylarai'and 'Tulip' tours (incorporating Shabanbai Bi and Kanshengel villages respectively)

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Both tours included archaeological sites from the Bronze Age and various aspects of the remains of the nomadic culture heritage. The major point of contrast between the tours relates to interaction with villages. The Shabanbai Bi village visited during the 'Kyzylarai' tour and the Kanshengel village visited during the 'Tulip' tour offer contrasting situations in terms of research setting, number of stakeholders involved, structure and organisation of the tourism experience. The three-day 'Kyzylarai' tour was one of the first community-based eco-tours in Central Kazakhstan managed and developed by national and international organisations. Eco-sites with a network of home-stays accommodating visitors were built in the village of Shabanbai Bi with the local population producing handmade felt products and numerous national fermented-milk products, such as *kymiz* (horse milk), *shubat* (camel milk) which were made available to the visitors. The 'Kyzylarai' tour combined visiting the granite sepulchres of Begazy and rock paintings dating from the Bronze Age and mausoleums of the period of the Kazakh-Jungar wars dating from the eighteenth century. The three-day 'Tulip' tour encompassed a visit to the petroglyphs from the middle and late Bronze Age at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Tamgaly and travel to the Kanshengel village, where several yurts were installed and equipped with beds specifically for visitors as well as proper sanitary conditions and toilets. This tour encompassed a visit to a camel farm where visitors were offered the opportunity to taste *shubat* and derived camel milk products (*kurt*) from the traditional nomadic culture.

4. Study Methods

As authenticity emerges from social processes and is subject to the interpretation of both tourism providers and tourists visiting destinations, a multiple-stakeholder approach was adopted to understand the perception of authenticity and disorientation in the construction of the tourism experience in eco-cultural Kazakhstani encounters. The research focused on the social construction of meaning, using a constructivist/interpretive research position to interview various stakeholders involved in the development of eco-cultural tourism in Kazakhstan. This approach enabled the researchers to emphasise the significance of context in understanding various stakeholders' positions. Given the exploratory nature of the study, a grounded theory methodology was adopted. Following the constructivist position applied in tourism

studies where the researcher composes the story and accordingly, the story reflects the viewer as well as the viewed (Hallberg, 2006), a constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003) was used in this study.

The cases studies were chosen through judgmental sampling to select unique cases that were especially informative about the development of eco-cultural tourism in Kazakhstan; this sampling method is preferred in situations when an expert uses judgment in selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind (Neuman, 2009). After the researcher met with various stakeholders (policymaker and tourism developers) involved in eco-cultural tourism in the country during the first international ecotourism conference held in Karaganda city in August 2010, a multiple-stakeholder approach was chosen to understand the development of Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism.

The multi-stakeholder approach allowed the researcher to first interview all the different groups of populations involved in the development of the Kyzylarai and Tulip eco-cultural tours. Both case studies represent key eco-cultural tourism practices in terms of approaches, content and activities proposed to visitors compared with those of a single case alone. In order to understand the complexity of ecotourism development and nomadic culture in the country, a panel of international and Kazakhstani academic experts selected from their publications, knowledge and expertise about nomadic culture and tourism development in Central Asia were contacted and additionally interviewed. During the first qualitative stage, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with local government officials, tourism operators, home-stay providers, NGO coordinators and experts in nomadic culture. The interviews were then transcribed. During the second qualitative stage, local and international visitors were interviewed. Looking at two different case studies involving different stakeholders in various geographical locations allowed theoretical saturation to be maximised, with informants chosen deliberately for contrast (age, gender, employment status, and geographical origin).

The number of in depth semi-structured interviews conducted for the study is detailed in Tables 1 and 2. The interviews with tourism providers and visitors consisted of the same open-ended questions so the views of the participants emerged naturally and were not predetermined by the researcher. The design of the interviews facilitated genuine unguarded responses to the questions asked (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Some questions used in the semi-structured interviews (eg "How would you

define an authentic tourism experience in Kazakhstan? Do you think having previous knowledge of the nomadic culture and Soviet or post-Soviet era can influence the perception of authenticity while touring in the country?) involved elaborate answers from the participants.

The study incorporated nineteen interviews undertaken between August 2011 and May 2012 with various tourism providers who were directly or indirectly involved with the development of the eco-cultural tours in Kazakhstan. Local government officials, home-stay providers, NGO coordinators and tourism operators were interviewed for both the 'Kyzylarai' tour and for the 'Tulip' tour. The Minister of ecotourism development of the Republic of Kazakhstan was interviewed in the capital city Astana. An additional five interviews were conducted with international and Kazakhstani academic experts selected for their expertise in nomadic culture and ecotourism development in Kazakhstan.

Categories of tourism providers	Number of semi-structured interviews Supply side
Government officials	4
Tourism operators	5
Tourism home-stay providers	6
NGOs	4
Experts in nomadic culture	5
Total tourism providers	**24**

Table 1: Breakdown of tourism suppliers for the study

Twenty-five semi-structured interviews altogether were then undertaken with visitors during the 'Kyzylarai' tour and the 'Tulip' tour in August 2011 and May 2012 respectively. As part of the theoretical sampling strategy characterising the grounded theory methodology, a further twenty-nine semi-structured interviews were undertaken in Almaty with Free Independent Travellers (FITs) travelling in Kazakhstan between August 2011 and September 2012. This group comprised local and international students, expatriates living and working in Kazakhstan, and international travellers that were met and interviewed by one of the researchers during their travels in Kazakhstan.

Categories of visitors		Number of semi-structured interviews Demand side
Students	International	3
	Kazakhstani	15
Expatriates living and working in Kazakhstan		6
International travellers		5
'Kyzylarai' tour visitors		7
'Tulip' tour visitors		18
Total visitors		**54**

Table 2: Breakdown of categories of visitors for the study

The demographic profile of visitors is detailed in Table 3. More than half of the visitors were between the ages of 20 and 30, and almost three quarters were international visitors. A large majority of visitors were either fulltime employed or students.

Variable	Categories	Number	Frequency (Valid %)
Gender	Male	22	40
	Female	32	60
Age	20-30	28	52
	30-40	12	22
	40-50	4	7
	50-60	8	15
	>60 years	2	4
Employment status	Fulltime	23	43
	Student	22	41
	Homeworker	5	9
	Retired /Other	4	7
Geographical origin	Local	15	28
	International	39	72

Table 3: Demographic profiles of visitors for the study

Analysis of data followed Charmaz's (2005) constructivist approach of grounded theory. The three major stages of data analysis involved in grounded theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, were conducted (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The interview transcripts were coded line by line to retrieve and develop recurrent themes. This process allowed the researcher to pinpoint gaps and hence focus subsequent data collection; in particular, after the set of interviews from the Tulip tour. The researcher coded the transcripts line by line, looking for recurrent themes in the interviews. Some lists of word tables broken down by specific questions were then created and reported in Excel sheets. Multiple iterations of coding were used to confirm the validity of the data analysis. The researchers then identified

relationships between themes in order to understand the observable facts that they created. From the within-site and cross-site analyses, themes such as disorientation in relation to perception of authenticity started to emerge. The third stage involved validating and refining these themes with the integration of secondary literature. The researchers made sure to compare systematically the themes with the evidence from each case in order to assess how they fitted with the data, and all tourism stakeholders interviewed provided the background context under which sets of themes occurred. The researchers used a replication logic from the 'Kyzylarai' to the 'Tulip' tour to enhance confidence in the validity of the themes which, in turn, provided an opportunity to refine and extend the theme of disorientation and its relationship with perceptions of authenticity. Following Glaser's (1998), approach, the terms 'majority', 'several' or 'some' were used where applicable in subsequent sections to indicate a sense of consensus when no exact number or statistic can be given to reflect a finding.

5. Tourism providers: Favouring Visitor Disorientation

5.1 Authenticity, disorientation and avoiding visitor disappointment
For tourism operators, disorientation can be achieved more easily if visitors do not know too much detail about the traditional nomadic culture upon arrival in Kazakhstan. One specialist in nomadic culture defined his perception of the typical foreign visitor travelling in Kazakhstan as the one 'looking for absolute things in life', 'in search of disorientation', and 'one who has a deep intellectual curiosity about foreign cultures and can bear to live in a different environment and endure the gap in this difference'. One of the 'Kyzylarai' tour operators emphasised that visitors' perceptions of authenticity and disorientation will vary according to their expectations and knowledge of the place before undertaking eco-tours and by what they experience while on site:

> "There is a big gap between the visitors' idealistic views and the reality of their tourism experience. The real experience encountered while on site is a balance between their inner self aspirations and their expectations. That's why their level of preparation and information gathered about the nomadic culture are important to reduce the cultural gaps between hosts and guests upon their arrival."

Here, the authenticity felt is personal and based on visitors' experience and expectations while undertaking the tours. The tourism providers commented that the visitors' knowledge of nomadic culture will determine their appreciation of their tourism experience. The 'westernised' yurt-camp organised in the steppes landscapes for the needs of the visitors during the 'Tulip' tour (Europeanised food, levels of comfort in the yurts) was intended to reduce the cultural gap between hosts and guests and avoid visitors' disorientation, at the potential cost that these adjustments might not have entirely been perceived as authentic and satisfactory by visitors. The proposed adjustments of their tourism experiences settings made by the tourism home-stay providers in order to limit visitors' disorientation and therefore make sure they are not unsettled could render their experience of the place inauthentic. As one 'Tulip' visitor detailed:

> "Some visitors are very informed and 'feed themselves' with documentaries showing staged aspects of the nomadic culture before their arrival. It is a good idea to organise ethnic villages so that the visitor's perceptions are met. But that might not be authentic anymore."

One of the home-stay providers from the village of Shabanbai Bi emphasised in particular the mystery that the inhabited steppes held for some international visitors:

> "Upon arrival, visitors have romantic and idealised views of traditional Kazakhstani nomadic culture, typically steppes landscapes and mobile dwellings (yurt-camps)."

Several tourism providers including NGOs coordinators and home-stay providers stressed that in order to avoid being disappointed, visitors needed to be better informed in advance that the traditional nomadic lifestyle did not exist anymore and that people were no longer actually living in yurts in rural areas. As a home-stay provider of the 'Kyzylarai' tour mentioned, "the level of disappointment depends on visitors' expectations", again suggesting that tourists' perception of authenticity and experience of disorientation varied according to their previous travelling experiences and exposure to other cultures. Conversely, for the visitors who had no previous experience in yurts, the setting up of yurt attractions by home-stay providers from the

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Tulip tour was understood by them to be constructed architectural shelters in which visitors were in a playful search for enjoyment and experience some disorientation.

5.2 Beyond staged authenticity and disorientation
Several tourism providers involved in the 'Kyzylarai' tour including home-stay providers, NGO coordinators, the guide and the operator Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan aimed to create a different type of tourism in remote rural villages. Traditional nomadic lifestyles were used by tourism providers as an additional component in the tourism adventure to enhance the visitor' experience of disorientation. Home-stay providers from both tours, and a majority of governmental officials, suggested a number of ways that local people could enhance visitors' perception of authenticity through staged experiences reinforcing visitor surprise and disorientation. For some home-stay providers of the 'Kyzylarai' tour, the perception of experiencing something authentic entailed that visitors should be "disoriented by the unexpected", and led them to set up yurts and organise events specifically for tourists as well as offer dairy products made out of camel and horse milk in the steppes rather than in their own village. On the other hand, NGO coordinators and tour operators emphasised the need to 'un-stage' the local population's lives and increase participatory activities with their guests as a way of augmenting visitors' perception of authenticity while on sites: "visitors should be invited to witness and be part of how local people are practising their traditions for themselves, and not the other way around." Two experts in Kazakhstani nomadic culture expressed the idea that this experience of disorientation increased the level of emotions encountered with the local populations, and made the visitors' experiences more authentic:

> "People look for disorientation when they travel, and it's still possible to be 'disoriented' in Kazakhstan. Human interactions make the experience authentic. The visitor's interpretation and understanding of the 'Other' is based on the nature of the interaction as well as the degree of satisfaction of his experience. A Kazakh person who cooks remains authentic. The emotion felt while interacting with local populations is authentic!"

NGO coordinators prioritised the quality of the interaction between tourists and the host communities when they were offered to witness traditional games from the nomadic culture or when visiting the camel farm and the fabrication of dairy products

from camel milk, recognising that these interactions may be disorientating for tourists but must move beyond superficiality in order to have a real impact on tourists' perception of authenticity.

In contrast to Palmer (1994), who views ethnic tourism as 'enclavic', with cross-cultural understanding limited by clearly differentiating the tourists and the locals, few special adjustments were made by home-stay providers and NGO coordinators from the 'Kyzylarai' tour in order to present something culturally authentic in villages. Home-stay providers of the Shabanbai Bi village and NGO coordinators emphasised that activities in the guest houses could encourage an experience of disorientation for tourists upon arrival in the villages. The opportunity to be part of the cooking experience was provided spontaneously by home-stay providers as part of their daily lives in the villages, and helped to reveal the 'backstage' of their lives. Similarly, a specialist in Kazakhstani nomadic culture stated that "to experience the highest level of authenticity, it would be ideal to 'give birth to a relationship' between hosts and guests". This idea entailed the creation of a feeling of belonging to a 'family' for the tourist, whose visit to Kazakhstan was sometimes perceived as the 'last frontier of the exotic'. As a mean to provide a satisfactory experience and meet visitors' expectations of intermingling with local populations that can lead to disorienting experiences, the immersive and unique tourism encounters in the guest houses provided by the tourism suppliers enabled visitors to fully experience the nomadic way of life.

6. Visitors: Experiencing Disorientation

6.1 Authenticity, disorientation, knowledge of the place and expectations
A strong theme to emerge was the need for visitors to be disoriented by unfamiliar environments and psychologically 'disconnect' from their usual comfort zone to increase their perceptions of authenticity of the places they visit. While contrasting visitors' perspectives on authenticity were identified in the study, their need for disorientation in regard to their experiences of difference and foreignness when travelling were witnessed by visitors on both the 'Tulip' and 'Kyzylarai' tours. One visitor of the 'Tulip' tour acknowledged the importance of their cultural background when evaluating the perception of their tourism experience in Kazakhstan, noting that their prior knowledge was based on a 'Western mindset'. For this international Tulip

tour client, the information about nomadic culture and post-Soviet heritage gathered before her travel increased the stereotypes about the destination and therefore influenced her perception of authenticity:

> "When you have an image of what you are supposed to see you have certain expectations. Meanwhile, one can witness a major culture shock if they do not prepare at all, but their perception of authenticity will be biased as they can't compare and think critically about the cultural artefacts that are presented to them."

During their travels in the 'Kyzylarai' tour, visitors were offered meals made out of horse meat prepared according to the Kazakh traditions, "as home-stay providers would do it for themselves". By mingling with home-stay providers during the *dastarkhan* (traditional table where horse meat was provided, Figure 2), tourists experienced some disorientation for which they had to adjust by asking questions to the tour guides about the ingredients and meanings of the meals and traditional Kazakhstani nomadic culinary traditions being offered to them.

Figure 2: A traditional dastarkhan organised for visitors during the Kyzylarai tour.
(*Source*: Genadiy Yakushev)

During the 'Tulip' tour, the traditional way of boiling water in a samovar (a large container for heating water, traditionally used in Russia and Central Asia for making tea) was perceived as an experientially authentic part of the tour as the experience was unusual and unknown to them. By being offered spontaneously the possibility to witness how local home-stay providers cooked meals and prepared tea during both the

'Kyzylarai' and the 'Tulip' tours, the cumulative effects of surprise and lack of knowledge about these culinary activities induced visitors' to experience an authentic 'backstage' of the tourist setting they did not encounter beforehand.

Interestingly, an international visitor on the 'Kyzylarai' tour insisted on the importance of having their tourism experience not being biased by any previous knowledge or expectations about the nomadic culture before arriving in the country, thus encouraging disorientation. When asked whether their tourism experience would have been more authentic if they had learned about nomadic culture in Kazakhstan beforehand, one international 'Kyzylarai' visitor explained:

> "An authentic tourism experience is not biased by one thing or another, whether by some previous images and expectations that I have in mind, or by some potential tourism events and experiences created especially for me."

Conversely, for another international visitor on the 'Kyzylarai' tour, an authentic tourism experience was the one that matched his preconceived expectations: "I want to see what I imagined, what kind of associations with the nomadic culture and post-Soviet heritage I had before coming to Kazakhstan." An international 'Tulip' tour client argued visitors' perceptions of authenticity of Kazakhstani nomadic culture changed when compared to what they knew about the country. Thus, this international visitor on the 'Tulip' tour pointed out that their knowledge about cattle breeding in their home country gave her a critical perspective on the local practices of breeding camels.

For half of the FITs interviewed including expatriates, international travellers and students, the idea of travelling for a long time in the Kazakh steppes was perceived as a way to 'disconnect' from their usual comfort zones and take the risk of being disorientated, but was also seen as a mean to facilitate an authentic tourism experience while visiting villages in remote rural areas. One international FIT highlighted:

> "It becomes much easier to share an authentic experience if visitors are entirely 'disconnected' from what they know and the people they know. There shouldn't be any elements of comparison (money, codes of conduct ...) to be able to experience an authentic tourism event."

The idea of "longue durée" within the tourism experience (Xie & Lane, 2006) was

advocated by an international FIT who commented that "tourists would change the whole perception of their tourism experience and understanding of cultural differences if they had a chance to live in the country for at least a month and learn the local language". From this perspective, the visitors' enduring involvement in villages during their stay would greatly influence the perception of authenticity of their experience by reducing culture shock and the disorientation resulting from it.

6.2 Authenticity, disorientation and serendipitous tourism encounters
For FITs cycling in the steppes landscapes, 'being disoriented' by what they encountered during the tours, such as spontaneous populations welcoming them in the guest houses (Figure 3) was essential to encourage 'authentic' interaction with the local population as they aimed at exchanging information to better understand traditional Kazakhstani culture. In particular, two international FITs emphasised the importance of travelling in the country and interacting with local people without 'forcing' the relationship:

> "There is a great interaction and help between different people in the steppes. There is still a 'survival' feeling that makes people interact with each other. People take the time to exchange with local populations, and the host population will also take the time to ask questions, get interested in the visitors and sharing a 'one to one' relationship."

Figure 3: Home-stay provider serving tea, Shabanbai Bi village, Kyzylarai tour
(Source: Alexandr Yermolyonok).

In Kazakh rural areas, information exchange and interactions with local populations

increased visitors' emotions when encountering their hosts in the Kazakhstani villages, and made their encounters with local hosts more authentic.

Most visitors on both tours mentioned 'unexpected events' in the steppes landscapes as being serendipitous moments that contributed to experiences of disorientation and to their perception of authenticity of the places they visited, as one international visitor on the 'Tulip' tour detailed:

> "For me it is arriving somewhere and not knowing how to get from one point to another. It's also about unexpected and natural events, like listening to the wind in the steppes during the first night."

An international 'Kyzylarai' tourist believed the 'surprising parts' of their experience in the country were the most authentic part of their adventure:

> "For me, the moment of authenticity corresponds to the effect of surprise, an unexpected and wild tourism experience that I have lived during the trek. In Kazakhstan you should be prepared for everything."

Figure 4: Visitors starting the Kyzylarai tour near the Shabanbai Bi village, August 2011
(*Source*: Author).

Likewise, an international FIT highlighted the need to be 'surprised' and disoriented throughout their journey, to experience something they couldn't anticipate while travelling in the country. Conversely, some international 'Tulip' visitors and two international FITs proposed the idea of a "semi-controlled" tourism experience that

would necessarily take into account the uncertainty or unexpected events of the Kazakhstani tourism context and avoid excessive disorientation:

> "There is no space for the unexpected if people come with an organised tour. The unexpected is not necessarily a good tourism product so it should be controlled by the visitors themselves, or it should be stated and announced before and during the tour, so it becomes chosen and not imposed."

During the 'Tulip' tour, two international tourists mentioned that the lack of comfort and amount of information provided by the tour organisers may have resulted in disorientation and confusion.

7. Discussions and Conclusions

This study reflects on the multiple and complex stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity and disorientation in Kazakhstani cultural heritage and reveals that experiences of disorientation are encouraged by tourism suppliers in Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism encounters and also influence visitors' perception of authenticity.

This research first raises the important question about the equilibrium of perceived cultural authenticity that needs to be found between the supply and demand sides of tourism, i.e visitors' experience and expectations and what is being presented to them by tourism providers. The tourists' experiences of disorientation when travelling in eco-cultural tourism encounters were experienced on both the 'Tulip' and 'Kyzylarai' tours and by FITs. While tourism providers favoured experiences of disorientation by staging some cultural activities and performances (such as re-enacting yurts and offering traditional horse meat meals), they also run the risk of lowering visitors' perception of authenticity while assuming it will portray a more accurate version of their culture. The 'westernised' yurt-camp organised for the needs of the visitors during the 'Tulip' tour reduced the cultural gap between hosts and guests and avoided too much visitors' disorientation, at the cost that these adjustments could not be perceived as authentic and satisfactory by visitors. Conversely, NGO coordinators and tour operators emphasised the need to 'un-stage' the local population's lives and increase participatory activities with their guests as a way of augmenting visitors' perception of authenticity at the cost of inducing more visitors' disorientation. This exemplifies the complex and sometimes dichotomous views on

authenticity between visitors and tourism providers, the politics of commodification of the cultural sites in which they are embedded, and the characteristics of the cultural tourists experiencing the activities proposed to them.

Second, this study adds to the literature on authenticity and the visitor experience by emphasising the role disorientation plays in visitors' perception of authenticity. In Kazakhstani eco-cultural encounters, disorientation aided in increasing visitors' level of emotions, understanding and interaction with foreign environments and made their tourism experience more 'authentic', whether among cultural landscapes or activities undertaken by tourists in local homestays. The nature of the activities of the eco-tours, such as 'Kyzylarai' wandering several hours in the steppes and mingling naturally with local populations, contributed to their experiences of disorientation in unfamiliar tourism encounters. Whether on the steppes, or with Kazakhstani families, these moments of 'flow' whereby visitors were challenged and experience a loss of self-consciousness and time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), and when tourists' environmental stimuli were beyond their assessment and management skills, allowed important level of emotions to their travels (Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987) that added to the existential authenticity of their tourism experience. The perception of nomadic lifestyle by some visitors from both tours created a culture shock while travelling in the country for which they had to adjust. The level of adjustments to the local settings and conditions simultaneously increased their level of understanding of the places they visited. Interestingly, some visitors suggested that enduring involvement in villages during their stay would not only greatly influence the perception of authenticity of their experience, but also reduce their culture shock and the disorientation resulting from it.

Both positive emotions (such as satisfaction, surprise and interest) and negative emotions (such as confusion) were experienced by visitors depending on their cultural background, aspirations for cultural difference and knowledge and expectations about the nomadic culture. Visitors acknowledged they had to confront their usual knowledge, preconceived images and expectations of the places when facing "unexpected" natural events and "going beyond their own boundaries" experiences in the home-stays, which created the authentic moments of their journeys. The process of discovering and adapting to new places and unfamiliar encounters was not necessarily seen as a preoccupation by some tourists, in contrast to the usual concern of tourists for homemaking through their travels as discussed by Wang

(2007), but rather a positive and sought after characteristic of their journeys. The adjustments required from, and induced by disorientation caused visitors to negotiate the 'extraordinary' in informal tourism encounters (Furnham, 1984; Hottola, 2004), a process that led to an increased level of emotions and existential authenticity of their tourism experiences.

Authenticity, disorientation and tourism suppliers' managerial practices
The authenticity of tourism destinations and cultural experiences offered is not only an important factor in relation to the planning and management of heritage tourism (Tiberghien, 2018) but also for the satisfaction of heritage tourists and the quality of their tourism experience (Park et al., 2019). Several tourism providers aimed to create a different tourism experience in Kazakhstani rural villages as they saw the experiences of disorientation as a means to augment visitors' perceptions of authenticity of the places they visited. Tourism operators may encourage home-stay providers to favour traditional nomadic culture activities with their guests as a means of enhancing visitors' perceptions of authenticity. In the Kazakhstani context, experiences of disorientation such as wondering in the steppe landscapes or discovering nomadic culinary traditions if carefully managed can generate positive feelings for the visitors involved and increase the likelihood they will return to visit their hosts again. Integrating and communicating about potential 'disorientating activities' for visitors such as wandering in steppe landscapes and tasting traditional meals into future tourism products and experiences in Kazakhstani nature-based areas could be a way to reinforce the uniqueness of tourism experiences, alongside the other types of tourism development supported by the Kazakhstani government.

For some home-stay providers of both tours, the perception of experiencing something authentic entailed a cultural exchange when visitors could be "disoriented by the unexpected" (such as the surprise of participating in local activities in the villages). In Kazakhstani rural areas, experiences of disorientation related to Kazakh culture provided an opportunity for personal enrichment and authentic tourism experiences when visitors had to adjust to the tourism setting. This perception was paradoxically reinforced by several visitors on the 'Kyzylarai' tour who mentioned the need for 'belonging' in the guest houses, a feeling similar to the concept of 'customised authenticity' developed by Y. Wang (2007) where visitors found themselves as 'part of the family' in authentic tourism encounters.

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The visitors' feeling of vulnerability caused by the loss of their usual points of reference induced by experiences of disorientation within the host-guest tourism encounter must be carefully managed to avoid undue risk. Acknowledging that disorientation is not for every visitor travelling to and within the countryis equally important in managing visitor satisfaction in disorientating Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism practices. Proposing guesthouses with tourism suppliers who understand the needs of visitors to 'control' the uncertainty of their tourism experience can be managed by offering them more comfort or by preparing and informing them better about the tourism activities proposed before and during the eco-cultural tours.

This study addresses a certain category of cultural visitors travelling in Kazakhstan, and its findings are hence context and case specific. Despite the design of the interviews facilitated genuine unguarded responses to the questions, some questions (such as whether previous knowledge influenced visitors' perception of authenticity) may have hindered the 'open' process of grounded theory. Nevertheless, the findings have resonance and value as a starting point for further work into adaptations of local heritage to satisfy visitors' desire for authentic tourism encounters. This necessitates an examination of the relationship between the characteristics of tourists' journeys (uniqueness, novelty and contrast with previous journeys) in different tourism contexts and an analysis of the host-guest relationship that can influence visitors' perception of authenticity. More research is required to evaluate the extent to which 'authentic' cultural tourism practices endorsed by local tourism providers can be maintained in rural areas to prevent them from being disorientated by non-traditional cultural encounters.

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