What is Authentic Travel – An Experiment in Polyscopic Knowledge Representation

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Abstract— *Authentic travel is an approach to travel and travel business developed and successfully practiced by the first author. Authentic travel has proven to be not only a source of customer satisfaction and a profitable business, but also an instrument par excellence of cultural exchange and empowerment. We take up the task which is common in knowledge representation: Partly tacit, experiential knowledge of an expert is made explicit and communicated in such a way that it can be understood and practiced by others. We apply polyscopy, a general information-design method developed by the second author, to our task. Polyscopy allows for combining results and insights from a variety of disciplines as distinct ways of looking or scopes, and for using them as justification (or 'proof') for establishing a more general, high-level result. In the application at hand, the high-level result is the rendition of an expert procedure so that it can be understood and practiced by others. The justification is an inter-disciplinary explanation of why this procedure works, as well as a multiple-perspective survey of its favorable side effects on local economy and culture, cultural exchange and the traveler. Our results illustrate the use and the usefulness of polyscopy in knowledge representation.*

Index Terms—*knowledge representation, e-business, interdisciplinary research,*

> " *I saw the people in our group change completely during those three days we were together: their eyes began to shine, their conversations deepened. As if some magic had been happening to us. Of course, we were seeing some pretty nice places in Norway. But that was obviously not the main thing that was going on.*"
>
> Comment by a participant after the Authentic Travel Study Tour in Norway, Spring, 2005

1. INTRODUCTION

THE purpose of this article is to present a discovery made in the travel industry by the first author [1,2], by using the Polyscopic Modeling *information design* method developed by the second author [3,4]. (We use italics to distinguish our custom-defined concepts.)

Guided by the intuition that tourism travels can and need to be something quite different from what is nowadays common, Karin Fürst of Authenticore, Norway, developed a new method for working in travel industry. This method, which she is calling *authentic travel,* proved to be highly successful in practice, both as a source of customer satisfaction and as a source of income. Furthermore, as detailed below, *authentic travel* can have lasting positive effects on the well-being of the traveller; on cultural exchange and preservation, on local economies and cultures endangered by globalization, and even on the preservation of natural environment.

If Karin Fürst were working in an academic laboratory, her method would easily find a place in the organized body of knowledge within research publications. But as it is, her discovery is largely in the way of doing, it is practical or 'tacit'. The challenge taken up in this article may be understood in the classical knowledge representation context: To turn the tacit knowledge of an expert into explicit information which can be communicated and used by others.

One of the reasons why it is interesting to apply knowledge representation to *authentic travel* is that it's main part is a method for producing a certain specific kind of experience. Since modern economy is becoming an 'experience economy', where the quality of experience is the main value driver [5], knowledge representation needs to be able to describe the quality of experience and the ways to create it. This is especially true in the case of the experience of *authenticity,* which has been recognised as an endangered and now more and more valued 'cultural species' [6].

As an academic specimen, this article is an instance of transdisciplinary or more precisely *design* research [7], where we transcend the borderlines of *traditional* academic specializations and methods in order to create the kind of information which is needed.

some basic ideas and terminology which form the core of our Authentic Travel International (ATI) project, which is described in an accompanying article in this volume [8].

This article is also a methodological experiment. What is most remarkable about *authentic travel* is that it works surprisingly well in

practice. We take up the challenge of explaining how and why it works. As detailed below, we respond to this challenge by applying the Polyscopic Modeling method.

2. POLYSCOPIC MODELING METHOD

Here we briefly explain our method. This section may be omitted by the reader who has no methodological interests.

A. A method for multidisciplinary research

By using the Polyscopic Modeling method developed by the second author, we undertake to go one step further than what is common in knowledge representation: Structure the insights associated with *authentic travel* in a similar way as one would normally do when developing a scientific theory. Polyscopic Modeling is envisioned as a method which allows for the creation of results and theories in any area [9].

B. Combining points of view

The main element of Polyscopic Modeling is the conscious *design* of way we look at a subject or *scope.* Multiple *scopes* are considered as necessary and combined in order to see the subject in a holistic way.

When the *scopes* reflect basic insights from various disciplines, Polyscopic Modeling is used a methodological tool for interdisciplinary research.

The *epistemology* of Polyscopic Modeling, according to which all *information* is 'recorded experience,' facilitates combining different points of view and information which originates from different *traditions.* While heterogeneous pieces of information may reflect different worldviews and ontological assumptions, in Polyscopic Modeling they can be combined because they all reflect human experience.

C. Concept design

In Polyscopic Modeling concepts (and *scopes*) are defined by *postulation* i.e. by making a convention. The words are italicized when we want to emphasize that they are used as *postulated.*

In this text most of the defined words are adopted directly from Karin Fürst's original *authentic travel* terminology.

D. Polyscopic information

The essence of the Polyscopic Modeling method is represented by the Polyscopic Information Ideogram (Figure 1). The information which is produced by this method (represented by the acronym "i") consists of a holistic 'main message' or 'result' or 'main point' (represented by the circle), which is solidly *founded* by using multiple points of view and heterogeneous information sources (the square). Our purpose is to distil the essential insights from the *authentic travel* method and express and *found* them by using this approach.
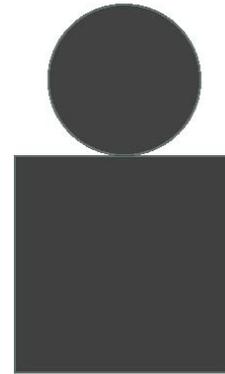

Figure 1: Polyscopic Information ideogram represents information (the 'i') as consisting of a holistic and concise *high-level* part (the circle) and an analytical and detailed *low-level part* (the square) which serves to the former as foundation.

E. Information for choosing the direction

Allegorically, the Polyscopic Modeling method may be understood as 'climbing to the top of the mountain' (towards clearer and more 'holistic' insights) in order to see and choose a suitable general direction. Our over-all *main result* will be that **authentic travel is the 'right' or meaningful direction for travel and travel industry**.

As an academic specimen, this article is an instance of what the second author has been calling *design research* (Karabeg, 2005), where we transcend the borderlines of traditional academic specializations and methods in order to create insights and results which are needed.

The *authentic travel,* which is defined here, is the central theme of the Authentic Travel International project which is described in the accompanying article in this volume [8].

3. MASS TOURISM

To set the stage for our theme, we briefly describe the mass tourism, which is the competitor and the distant alternative to *authentic travel.*

F. Travel industry and its impact

With the estimated 6 trillion dollars of yearly revenue, travel is one of the world's largest industries and largest employers [10].

People travelled from early history. Travel allows us to get away from the context of our daily life and experience new people, new cultures and even ourselves in a new way. It is the age-old way of inter-cultural exchange and communication. For an individual, the time of travel is the period when one is exploring new possibilities and when one is are open to new insights and change.

Therefore every change to travel and travel industry may have profound economic and cultural impact. It is therefore interesting to ask "What is travelling like today? How is it

changing?"

G. *Disadvantages of mass tourism*

The global travel industry is dominated by trans-national corporations (TNCs). A large area in a certain country is bought, levelled and recreated based on a *total concept.* The traveller has everything there: lodging, food, entertainment.

As the way to travel, the mass tourism has the disadvantage that it tends to disconnect the travellers from both the local environment and culture, keeping them in a sort of artificial paradise.

As an element of the economy, in many places in the world the dominant one, mass tourism has the tendency to draw the revenue away from the (usually poorer) locality where it is created, and towards the (usually richer) locality where the share-holders of the TNC venture reside.

As the source of employment, the mass tourism has the tendency to change the local worker from the status of a farm owner, fishermen or host, to the status of a low-wage employee.

Since mass tourism obviously violates many of the purposes and benefits that have motivated tourism and travel in the first place, the question may well be asked, how could mass tourism become the dominant mode of operation of the travel industry? The obvious reason is that mass tourism tends to be economically far more efficient than the competing approaches to travel. Furthermore, its advantage tends to increase with the known trends associated with globalization. The TNCs have the power to influence the public opinion through advertising and other means, so that *their* values become also the values of the traveller.

Here we have a classic example of the development of a *power structure* [11] where a certain necessary element of culture (travelling) is transformed by strong market forces.

H. *Authentic Travel International project*

Authentic Travel International (ATI) is an international initiative to reverse this trend.

By bringing this theme to the IPSI community we want to contribute to this initiative in two ways:

- By creating a 'top of the mountain' view of travel and travel industry which can allow us to choose the direction consciously. This approach is followed in this article.
- By creating another way of doing travel business which is economically more efficient (a *beneficial power structure*). This approach is pursued in the accompanying article [8].

4. AUTHENTIC TRAVEL DEFINITION

Authentic travel is the specific way of working in travel industry which has been developed by the first author.

We define *authentic travel* in terms of its main *aspects.*

I. *The product*

The product of *authentic travel* is not a thing or a service but an *authentic experience.*

While the quality of an *authentic experience* is perhaps the main characteristic of *authentic travel,* this quality is not easy to express in scientific terms. Within the ATI project, the challenge of communicating the essence of *authentic experience* is taken up by artists and media designers.

But perhaps the best and only true way to define what an *authentic experience* is – is to let one experience it.

J. *Authentic travel method*

Authentic experiences are created by connecting the traveller with what is genuine or *authentic* in the local environment and culture, and by connecting the traveller with the local environment and culture in an *authentic* way. The *authentic travel method* is a concrete, practical way of pursuing that orientation. An *authentic travel business* is the one which practices this method.

The key element of the *authentic travel method* is what Karin Fürst has been calling *touching the human core* [2]. This *core* is "the power which says 'yes' to life". When the *core is touched,* the result is a glaring sense of meaning, interest, connectedness and joy, or in other words, an *authentic experience.*

The approach is centred around the *ildsjel* concept ('ildsjel' is a Norwegian word which literally means 'fire-soul', and which may be translated as 'enthusiast' or 'torch bearer.' This word is used for people who naturally serve as source of inspiration and driving force). The *ildsjel* is a natural catalyst of *authentic experience.* It appears that *authenticity* is the quality of the *ildsjel* which is transmitted to the traveller through direct contact and through suitably chosen *activities.*

The essence of the *authentic travel method* is in "removing the intermediaries and empowering the local people" in order to create an as direct as possible contact of the traveller with what is authentic and local. The local people are not only the natural guides, being the ones who know what is most genuine and authentic in the local environment; they are also the best mediators, being the ones who can most vividly express the local environment, because they embody it, being the products of that environment.

Nature and culture-related *activities* play an important role. Those activities are designed to

bring the traveller in close contact to *authentic* local nature and culture on one side, and *authentic* local people on the other. Often the *activities* are chosen to reflect or instil certain specific values.

K.   Product development

Product development in *authentic travel* is called *destination development.*

The *destination development* is done by *authentic travel consultants.*

The challenge is to introduce the new thinking and values and to restructure everything else on that basis. The obstacle is that the mass tourism had had such pervasive influence on values, that most often the local people find it difficult even to imagine that the traveller may be interested in elements of local environment and culture which are commonplace and mundane from the local point of view.

The most important element in *destination development* is working with the *human core* of the local hosts. It is through the direct contact and interaction with the locals that the *consultant* is able to empower *them* to develop an *authentic* product of *authentic travel.*

Destination development focuses on two distinct components which are identified as *hardware* and *software.*

The *hardware* is the infrastructure including such things as architectural sites, nature places, activity organizers, gastronomic experiences etc. The key is to find the places (both natural and human made) which have the power to incite *authentic experiences.* The further challenge is to make those places shine to their full potential. To this goal the *developer* brings a trained eye, and certain artistic insights.

Authentic travel is an art form, and the destination development *consultants* may be understood as artists and art instructors, helping the local people to turn what exists locally into theatre stages and objects of art.

On the logistic side, the goal of *destination development* is to create a *destination,* which is a flexible network of places and activities which can be combined to produce complete *events.*

To this task the *developer* brings a spectrum of possibilities how *authentic experiences* can be created.

The *software* development involves working with the people and their skills and attitudes. The key is in finding the local people who have the suitable talent, and then *touching their core* to instigate their 'fire'.

Three kinds of *destinations* are distinguished, according to the level of development. In the first, some *authentic travel* activity already exists (for example a hotel with an *ildsjel* owner and developed practice) which needs to be completed to a *destination.* In the second, possibilities and intentions exist (perhaps a farmer who can no longer live off his farm and

wants to engage in the new type of commerce), but little or no experience. In the third, there are attractive natural and cultural possibilities but no clear development or intention has yet been manifested. Specific strategies are developed for each of the three cases.

5.   OBSERVED BENEFITS OF AUTHENTIC TRAVEL

We now summarize the advantages of *authentic travel* as compared to mass tourism which follow from experience or common-sense reasoning.

L.   Benefits for the traveler

The authentic experiences are often transformative, but always inspiring and remembered. Experience shows that *authentic experiences* greatly enhance receptiveness and create the sense of connectedness. This can naturally be used for removing the normal cultural and other barriers and opening up communication channels between the traveller and the local environment and people. No less importantly, *authentic experiences* have also proven to open to enhanced communication amongst the travellers themselves, and to be the natural way to create a greater sense of coherence and togetherness between a travelling group of colleagues or business relations, family members or friends.

M.   Benefits for the local economy and culture

Authentic travel supports the authentic culture and the economy of the *destination.*

The central theme is mutual *empowerment.* The local culture truly becomes alive when it is delivered by the locals and received by visitors in an *authentic* way. The enthusiasm of the local *ildsjel* is nourished when it is received with enthusiasm.

N.   Benefits for the global culture

As an element of the tradition, travel has a cultural role. Since the beginning of history, people travelled in order to learn about other cultures and about themselves. In this time of cultural change, this role may be now as important as ever. But, as already mentioned, this role is now threatened by the inauthentic way of travelling and by one-sidedly commercial globalization. *Authentic travel* is an instrument of 'cultural environmentalism', i.e. of preservation and revitalization of endangered 'cultural species'.

6.   THEORIZING AUTHENTIC TRAVEL

In this section we embed the *authentic travel* into existing streams of thought, aiming to explain how it functions and why.

We approach this aim by pointing to a variety of specific theories and insights, stemming from various cultural traditions, which support the

ideas outlined above. In the Polyscopic Modeling method such sources have a similar role as witnesses in the court, each pointing to a specific realm of experience, each adding credibility to an over-all conclusion.

This example illustrates the use of Polyscopic Modeling as an interdisciplinary research method, by which basic insights from a number of disciplines are combined together and used as foundation for a more general (*high-level*) insight.

What follows is only a brief sketch of on-going research.

O. Cognitive science and phenomenology

Contrary to the teaching of Descartes and to age-old beliefs, consciousness is largely embodied [12,13] and thinking is largely emotional [14,15]. (Damasio, Varella, LeDoux,). Even good thinking habits are developed in children by doing something with the body [16]. In essence, *authentic travel* is exactly this: Doing something with our bodies, so that our minds can think and experience in new ways. The outer travel is consciously used as the vehicle for inner (cognitive and emotional) 'travel'.

The redemption of embodied knowledge has also been supported in philosophy. According to the ontology of Goethe, Sartre and Heidegger, true knowledge stems from direct experiencing and results in a quality of being. The issue of authenticity has been recognized as central [17]. Embodied knowledge has been neglected in academic and general culture.

The *authentic travel* creates an arena for direct body-to-body knowledge transfer. The traveller directly absorbs new ways of being. In mass tourism the traveller is even in a far-away exotic country remaining in an illusory cultural island where his own culture and ways prevails, skilfully protected from the influences of the local environment. *Authentic travel* makes the embodied and experiential knowledge of the world accessible to the traveller.

P. Social capital and salutogenesis

Salutogenesis is the creation of health. Research in salutogenesis is focused on understanding the factors which facilitate coping (remaining healthy and well in the presence of stress) and lead to continuous improvement of health, pioneered by Aaron Antonovsky [18]. The main insight which emerged from salutogenesis research is that the attitude or motivational factors play a far more important role in the creation of health than it was previously believed. Antonovsky's Sense Of Coherence, and especially its third and (according to Antonovsky) most important component called 'meaningfulness' reflects the importance of believing in something and being enthusiastic about the purpose. Other salutogenesis research has shown the importance of being in the environment of authentic togetherness [19].

On the other hand, sociological research has shown a clear trend towards alienation and disconnectedness, towards spending or wasting what Robert Putnam has called 'the social capital' [20]. (Ref: Book 'Bowling Alone'). The Sense Of Coherence is on decline.

Authentic travel recreates the sense of coherence by strengthening human bonds. The traveller is brought to the source, where true enthusiasm, true connectedness and true inspiration still exist, ready to be taken over. The *authentic travel destination* acts as a living museum or a laboratory. The effects of *authentic travel,* and in particular of its *ildsjel* element, may be understood as bringing the traveller to an environment where the Sense Of Coherence is in the air, and where the traveller can be 'infected' by it.

Q. Reflexive modernity and globalization

The sociologists point at the profound cultural change we are going through from traditional, to 'post-traditional' [21], from safe and orderly to 'risk society [22] from relatively constant and stable to 'fluid modernity' [23]. We are more and more exposed to uncertainties and compelled to create our own lifestyle, habits and values by *reflecting about* the essential issues [24].

Travelling is the time when we are accessible and relaxed; the time where we can use our resources to connect, go deeper, dispel illusion. *Authentic travel* is the way to use the travelling time in ways which are supportive of this purpose.

Furthermore, *authentic travel* exposes us to lifestyles, habits and values different from our own.

Globalization [25] is another important concept: The small and the authentic actors on the global arena are endangered. The economic concerns prevails over health and culture [25]. By supporting cultural and human authenticity, the *authentic travel* can be an antidote to the perils of globalization [8].

R. Environmental psychology

Scientific studies of restorative environments of Kaplan and Kaplan [26] and others allow us to understand the positive effects that environment may have on recovery from fatigue and restoration of interest and attention (the Kaplans' theory is also called attention restorative theory or ART). They allow us to point at specific advantages of *authentic travel* in this regard. Kaplan and Kaplan, for example, emphasize that four components need to be present if an environment should be attention restorative: being away, extent, fascination and compatibility [26].

Experimental research shows health advantages of exposure to natural environments [27]. The belief in healing power of certain nature places persists in many traditions. Whether we share those beliefs or not, it is common experience that certain places in nature have the

power to instil specific feelings and emotional states. In *authentic travel* special natural and architectural sites are used for creating *authentic experiences*.

S. Environmentalism and deep ecology

Within the environmental movement a realization has been ripening that the pollution and extinction statistics will not suffice to rescue the planet; rather, restoring our severed emotional relationship with the planet is the key [28]. James Lovelock's Gaia theory is a step in the same direction.   But how to pursue this direction in practice? David Allen claimed that we need to revive the oral tradition, tell the stories in the places where they happened, in order to heal the severed connection between us and the places [29].

Authentic travel restores our emotional bonds with nature and culture and historical sites, and ultimately with the planet.

7. AUTHENTIC TRAVEL INTERNATIONAL PROJECT

In this section we briefly explain how the work presented here fits into the framework of the Authentic Travel International (ATI) research project.

T. Brief overview of the ATI project

The Authentic Travel International is a multi-disciplinary research project in which individuals from several academic and professional organizations and businesses participate. Professionals representing a variety of skills and background have come together around the task of creating a complete infrastructure for *authentic travel.*

U. The ATI project and authentic travel

The relationship between the *authentic travel* and the ATI project will become clear if we imagine *authentic travel* as (the principle of operation of) the combustion engine, and the task of the ATI project as the *design* and production of the automobile. Obviously, new kinds of wheels, transmission, steering etc. need to be created before the full potential of the new machine can be exploited. When, however, all the right elements are in place, the car production business can really take off. The situation with *authentic travel* is similar. The market potential is clearly there. But *authentic travel* needs a different business model, different values, different marketing and even a different language than   mass tourism. Those are developed within the Authentic Travel International project.

As in the case of the automobile, new technologies and new business models have emerged which facilitate success. The familiar e-business Internet technology allows us to link the typically small authentic business together into configurable networks, and organize travels as flexible, customizable value chains. In such 'distributed corporation' type of venture, it is the specific qualities that are associated with the brand which give identity to the business. Those are specified by the *authentic travel* definition.

The value-based marketing, specifically developed for this project, addresses and communicates the intrinsic values of *authentic travel,* and helps the *authentic travel* capitalize on its already mentioned clear advantages. The research presented here is intended to serve as foundation for that marketing.

V. The ATI project as political action

We like to think of the ATI project as a template for political action where the focus is changed from confrontations (such as 'down with the World Bank') and prescriptions (such as 'we need to develop a zero-growth economy') to *design* (creating things, such as research projects and businesses, which make the world a better place).

8. CONCLUSION

We have presented two brief sketches: of the *authentic travel* expert procedure, and of the Polyscopic Modeling approach to knowledge representation.   Although preliminary and incomplete, our discussion allows us to draw certain conclusions, both about *authentic travel* and about knowledge representation.

We have outlined the *authentic travel* expert procedure and then looked at it in a variety of ways. This allowed us to see the advantages that our procedure has in the most essential regards – from the point of view of the traveller, the economy and culture of the destinations, and the global culture. We have also placed *authentic travel* into several academic frameworks – cognitive science, philosophical phenomenology, sociology of globalization, medical salutogenesis, environmental psychology and ecology, and seen that our procedure corresponds well with what has been found or advocated in those areas. This, combined with the fact that the *authentic travel* has given excellent results in practice, allows us to conclude that *authentic travel* is the 'right' or meaningful direction for travel and travel industry.

Certain points are still missing in our attempted polyscopic analysis of *authentic travel*. For example, we were not yet able locate a theory which would provide an adequate explanation of the *ildsjel* concept and of the deciding effect that the *authenticity* of the *providers* has on the *authentic experience* of the *travellers,* which was observed in practice*.* We hope, however, that we have been able to provide a good-enough illustration of the main idea of our method, which is to establish the value of an expert procedure or product by looking at its (all) main aspects, and in that way showing that its effects are good on all sides.

The presented research is an integral part of

the Authentic Travel International project, where its goal is to define the main *product* and *product development* procedure and provide a basis for *value-based marketing* of *authentic travel.*

The more general meaning of the presented research needs to be considered in the larger framework of 'risk society' and 'reflexive' or 'fluid' modernity. We are living in the world where 'whatever makes money' is increasingly becoming the prevailing choice, and where 'whatever makes money' can no longer be trusted. By creating a better foundation for making choices, we may be able to contribute to the development of the condition where that which is really good for us is also that what makes the most money.

Our specialized disciplines have given us an abundance of insights which might help us along the way; and our specialized activist groups have given us an abundance of advices about how to handle specific issues. We now need to combine those insights and advices and devise truly good ways of handling the most basic of our daily life and culture, as we have attempted to do here with travel. This requires the change from the *traditional* analytical focus in research to the synthetic or *design* approach. We believe that the MIT research will play a leading role in this change, and that it will expand substantially as a result of this change.

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