

**MEDIATING MEANING: PERSPECTIVES ON BROKERING
QUALITY TOURIST EXPERIENCES**

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PURPOSE, FOCUS AND DEFINITIONS

Human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience. Furthermore, there is an inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension to this construction. We do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth.

(Schwandt, 2000, p.197)

In the course of making these constructions we often engage with people (and non-human elements) who and which serve to mediate our experiences. Specifically within tourism contexts, these people, who may also be considered as 'stakeholders', include other tourists, tourist providers, governments, communities, and indigenous groups as well as other interested and related organisations, agencies, and service providers. There are also, of course, *non-personal* mediators, including, for example, signage, design, aesthetics, overall settingscapes, activityscapes, peoplescapes and experiencescapes. Although these and media contribute to the mediation of experiences, they are not the focus of this chapter. The particular focus of this chapter is the role of the human mediator or broker in facilitating or in some cases inhibiting quality tourist experiences. We begin the chapter by defining the way in which we use these terms, and then we introduce the reader to a dichotomy of broker types based on whether the brokering role is a formal or informal one. After examining the experiential elements that are mediated by both types of brokers, we then introduce two heuristic models that provide theoretical lenses with which to explore how different types of tourists and different types of tourist settings may drive differing needs and expectations for mediation from different types of brokers. In acknowledging that the dimensions and mechanisms of mediation are complex and poorly understood, the chapter concludes by highlighting a number of avenues for research to help demystify brokering and its important contribution to quality tourist experiences.

A common use of the term 'brokering' in the tourism literature is in reference to 'cultural brokering' (Cohen, 1985). Almost two decades ago, Cohen argued that the contemporary tour guide's role had moved away from its original role of pathfinder towards a mediatory role of which there are two components: social mediation and cultural brokerage. According to Cohen (1985), social mediating involves being a go-between, linking visitors to the local population, and to tourist sites and facilities, and making the host environment non-threatening for the tourist. Cultural brokerage, or the bridging of cultural differences between hosts and visitors and translating 'the strangeness of a foreign culture into a cultural idiom familiar to the visitors' (Cohen, 1985: 15) is the second component of the guide's mediatory role, also considered by Cohen as a primary role of the professional tour guide.

In this chapter we use the term 'brokering' and 'mediating' interchangeably to encompass both of these roles. We define brokering as any active attempt by an individual to mediate the tourist experience of another individual. A broker or mediator is someone who assists in sense-making and in the tourist's (re)constructions of his/her experience as well as the (re)presentation of that experience'. Thus we see it as much more than as Cohen proposed, '*harmonising the expectations and desires of the parties involved, and managing their interaction*' (Cohen, 1992: 225). Nor do we see the role of brokering as limited to tour guides and indeed a contribution of this chapter is to explore the roles played by those other than tour guides. Moreover, in contrast to what Cohen implies, brokering does not always facilitate a 'quality' experience. The efforts of mediators can contribute positively, negatively or neutrally upon the sense-making processes of those with whom they are engaging. This is partly a consequence of sense-making being ultimately in control of the individual rather than the mediators. As intimated in the introductory quote, it is the individual her or himself who makes the decisions regarding the (re)construction of

the tourist experience along with the subsequent evaluation of whether it was a quality experience or not.

Having discussed the terms brokering/mediating and broker/mediator, we turn our attention to a more detailed consideration of the term quality tourist experience. We have already seen in Chapter One that within the tourism literature there are a plethora of meanings associated with the concept of a 'quality tourism experience', as well as a 'quality tourist experience'. As previously stated, the term 'quality tourist experience', rather than quality tourism, is the focus of this chapter, since we are taking the perspective of the tourist when considering what is quality. Moreover, when the phrase quality tourist experience is broken down into its integral components of 'quality' and 'tourist experience'; a range of individual interpretations and discursive representations results. This multiplicity of interpretations and constructions is due in turn to the multiple social (and political) constructions of reality (lived experience termed by Schutz, 1967 and earlier Dilthey (1833-1911) as *Erlebnis*) of the complete term.

For the purposes of this chapter, we define quality as a classificatory term used by, in this case, tourists to describe their (re)construction of a tourist experience. This term may mean excellence, a matching of expectations to lived experience, a perception of getting value for one's money, or however the individual tourist chooses to define it. Put more simply '[i]f [women and] men define situations as real [in this case quality], they are real[quality] in their consequences' (Thomas and Thomas, 1928: 572) regardless of other people's (re)constructions or attempts at (re)presentation(s) and evaluations. This latter social constructionist perspective is supported by postmodern writings in regard to the use of the terms 'authentic' and 'authenticity'. There are a number of parallels between the problematic nature of the term authentic/ity and the term 'quality'. Primarily, each is dependent upon who is doing the 'deconstruction' and subsequent (re)construction or interpretation. Urry (1990, p.100) iterates this same point that '*tourism is a game, or rather a whole series of games with multiple texts and no single, authentic [quality] tourist experience*'. Given the social constructionist/constructivist theoretical leanings of this chapter and 'postmodern' skepticism to definitive conclusions, we maintain in this chapter a stance that 'quality' is a self-defined term and in order to understand its meanings, researchers need to interact with the person using the term in order to gain an insider's (emic) perspective.

Just as quality remains a contested term, 'experience' is also an elusive concept that can refer to both a process and an outcome/endstate or product. For example, experience may be described as an individual's inner state, brought about by something which is personally encountered, undergone or lived through (Cohen 2000, p.251). It can also be a package which can be purchased such as 'What an unforgettable experience CANADA FLY/DRIVE FLY QANTAS TO VANCOUVER FROM \$1399*' or 'Alaska 7 NIGHTS NOW FROM \$995* A special experience at a special price' (The Courier Mail, 23 February 2002). Another perspective that is generally supported in the literature is that the tourist experience is a process involving progression through a series of stages (beginning with anticipation and leading to planning, travel to, on-site [and multiple iterations of travel to and on-site activities] return travel and recollection (Jennings, 1997; Killion, 1992; Jubenville, 1976). While these multiple perspectives pose a special challenge for those wishing to research 'the tourist experience', the point we wish to make here is that mediation can impact on many elements of the experiential product and therefore one's endstate, and can occur at any and all stages of the experience. Consequently, the number and complexity of interactions as well as the historical/temporal and sociocultural nature of tourist experiences are manifold involving numerous participants and contexts.

STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

Types of Brokers

Participants who potentially contribute to the tourist experience include tourists, tourism providers, government bodies, hospitality employees, host community members and others. Moreover, each

of these may identify with numerous stakeholder groups and may thus interact directly and indirectly in multiple ways and at different stages of the travel experience. One way of making sense of these multiplicities is to distinguish between those who play a *formal* mediating or brokering role, and those who do so informally. For example, tour guides formally undertake brokering as one of a number of other job roles such as group management, navigation, health care and safety (Bras, 2000; Gurung, Simmons and Devlin, 1996). Guides are formally engaged in brokering, in the sense that it is a role associated with being a tour guide, and they are intentionally recruited, trained, and remunerated at least in part for playing the role of broker (Ap and Wong, 2001; Yu, Weiler and Ham, 2001). This includes guides in the commercial and public sector, those who work for protected areas/ parks (year-round, seasonal and volunteer), those who are tour managers and conduct extended tours, city-guides who lead mainly day tours, attraction and museum guides, and those who are employed as specialists such as indigenous guides and study tour leaders. It is not only employers, but also governments, protected area managers, host communities and of course tourists who expect tour guides to broker experiences (Yu and Weiler, in press).

Others who are expected to mediate the tourist experience are shown in the upper half of Table 1, for example travel agents and consultants, hotel concierges, and information centre staff (paid and volunteer), and many forms of non-personal mediation are also used to mediate the tourist's experience. These non-personal media can be considered as indirect mediation, in that someone determines what they will include or exclude, and while critical to the tourist experience, they are not, as mentioned earlier, our focus here.

Table One about here

Having noted that tour guides and other formal brokers are 'expected' to mediate the tourist's experience, it is important to comment here that the nature of this mediation is seldom monitored or assessed by tourism industry employers, let alone by other stakeholders. Nor are the outcomes of mediation evaluated, except where they are directly related to the goals of the business or organisation. So, for example, an adventure tour operator might monitor the extent to which clients 'had an adventure', typically gauged by tourist satisfaction, repeat travel and profit margins. A historic site or zoo might also assess how well its staff mediated the experience by visitor numbers and profits, but also, say in the case of school groups, by how much the children learned (e.g. factual recall), a rather crude measure of mediation effectiveness. So, generally speaking, being an effective mediator, while expected, is not necessarily a criterion of performance evaluation or reward, since we generally have no reliable ways of assessing it. The fact that we have a poor understanding of tourists' expectations and needs with regard to mediation makes it all the more challenging to implement appropriate mediation training and evaluation. We acknowledge that there is a wide body of literature that focuses on service quality and hospitality sector service experiences. However, methods such as SERVQUAL do not attend directly to issues related to the quality of the service in mediating the tourist experience. For example, questions such as 'Overall I thought the service from the staff was: Excellent Average Good Poor' are presented without explicit consideration of mediation. Of course, the original SERVQUAL instrument and its variations use multiple scale items, but generally they all seek to derive a single overall measure of 'attitude toward service' and, to our knowledge, none of the scale items attempt to diagnose how different tourists experience and take away meaning from their experience-broker (Williams and Buswell, 2003). We believe the same is true of other quantitative and qualitative methods such as transactional/exitsurveys, total market surveys, and customer/user surveys: these are not without their benefits, but to date the focus of these has not included an assessment of the effectiveness of the service encounter in mediating meaning for visitors and/or in helping tourists make sense of their experience in a way that is relevant to their own lives. This is, we argue, in part because these methods adopt an 'objective' rather than an 'emic' (social constructivist) perspective when trying to gauge the impact of service on the tourist experience.

In summary, with the exception of a few isolated studies in the tour guiding area (Bras, 2000; Yu, Weiler and Ham, 2001), there has been limited investigation of mediation and the tourist experience, and we really have a very poor understanding of the expectations of tourists regarding mediation, what factors influence the performance of mediators, and the impact of their brokering on the quality of the tourist experience.

Table 1 makes use of the formal/informal dimension to contrast those who are expected to mediate with those who are not required to do so as part of their job or role. Examples of the latter include waiters, back-of-house accommodation staff, local residents, taxi drivers, and employees at the local pub, gas station and grocery store. Tourists themselves sometimes act as brokers (e.g. a business traveller or student who returns home or who takes the family to a place where they once worked or studied), as does anyone hosting a visiting family member or friend.

[T]ourism is a mediated activity. This mediation intervenes between and helps shape the relationships of the parties we usually think of as tourism's "hosts" and "guests" (cf., Smith, 1989). Recognition of tourism as a mediated activity, subject to a wide variety of interventions and an equally diverse array of interpretations as to the meaning of those interventions, encourages us to pay more systematic attention to those actors and institutions that stand outside the host/guest relationship but that so greatly influence the consequences of tourism. (Chambers, 1997, pp. 3-4)

These informal brokers/mediators differ from formal brokers in that they do not have a title, badge or uniform that identifies them as a broker, their position does not require them to undertake the role of broker, and they are not recruited, trained or remunerated for doing so.ⁱⁱ Indeed, most mediators, and informal brokers in particular, share a tendency towards invisibility (Chambers, 1997, p.6) and thus their mediation largely goes unnoticed and unrewarded. However such mediation, whether formal or informal plays a very important role and influences tourist experience.

This is not to say that the tourism industry is naïve with respect to the importance of customer service and communication with visitors. Superhost was developed in Canada in 1985 in preparation for the 1986 World Exposition in Vancouver, as a way of facilitating training and recognition for good customer service and community relations with visitors. Similar programs have since developed in the U.K, Australia, New Zealand, and several countries in Asia and the program is widely acknowledged as important to the tourism industry. However, for the most part these programs are aimed at delivering skills that will enhance sales and revenue and reduce customer dissatisfaction and complaints, rather than necessarily improving the ability of the resident or employee to mediate or broker the experience. And of course, these programs are not focused in any way on researching mediation and its impact on the tourist experience. It is thus fair to say that we have only a vague understanding of visitors' needs and expectations regarding mediation. The ways in which tourists vary with respect to their mediation needs and expectations, and the reasons why particular tourists might make differing uses of formal versus informal brokers, are explored in a later section of this chapter.

To summarise the above, there are a myriad of individuals brokering the experience of the tourist both within and outside the tourism industry, beginning long before the tourist leaves home and continuing after their return. While many are stakeholders in the tourist experience, most do not have a formal role to play in mediating the tourist's experience, and yet mediate they do. Moreover, the multiple interactions that occur between various stakeholders have ongoing and cumulative impacts on participants in all groups, so that the tourist experience is in a constant state of flux. The complexity is further iterated when all of the permutations of interactions with the overall tourism system (Mill and Morrison, 1992; Hall, 1994) are considered. This makes it difficult to identify and describe the nature of any one 'mediation', let alone quantify and evaluate its contribution to the experience and to sense-makingⁱⁱⁱ. And while it seems logical to suggest that people who are likely to come into contact with tourists should be trained in mediation skills, the enormity and complexity of this task, let alone assessing and rewarding them for effective

mediation, has meant that mediation has been largely ignored by both the tourism industry, tourism educators and researchers.

We have concluded that the role of a mediator is to specifically contribute to a tourist's meaning making processes, essentially by mediating our constructions of experiences and interpretation of (re)presentations. Consequently, mediation is a process of interaction between the tourist and other individuals and/or groups amongst whom some individuals will perform the role of mediator. From the perspective of the tourist, the mediator's primary purpose is to contribute to their sense-making processes in order to assist in interpreting settings, situations, peoples and their (re)presentations.

Brokering of What?

But what exactly is being brokered, and what mechanisms can a broker use to mediate the tourist's experience? In a general sense, brokering is about providing or limiting access to a number of identifiable elements such as particular places, spaces, people, information, cultures and environments. Brokers can, for example, mediate a wildlife tourist experience by withholding or limiting directional information and other clues that help to locate hard-to-spot wildlife, which in turn can limit the tourist's level of access to this experience. Furthermore, whilst official or government personnel may broker access to specific sites and communities for specific time periods, local residents may find ways to discourage access through misleading and even false information. Mediators may also provide access by negotiating cheaper entry fees and deals on restaurant meals and other services, sometimes in return for benefits from service providers.

For example, during fieldwork by Jennings (1992-1999), long term yachtspersons sailing around the world reported having been officially granted cruising permits (site access and duration of access) but occasionally were 'scared or warned off' by the locals. Similarly local indigenous host community members talked about making some yachtspersons unwelcome and forcing them to move on despite having permits for access. The reason for this action was based on the hosts at the local level perceiving a lack of quality (as in reciprocity) associated with the interactions between hosts and guests. Further in some nations, although there may have been no cost to anchoring in some waters (only official or socio-cultural mores), government officials would unofficially 'charge' for initial entry, access and/or duration of access. Rural farm families also act to mediate the public and private spaces of their farming operations and family life in order to manage the impacts of the introduction and integration of farm tourism into their lives as well as the number and nature of interactions between family, farm employees and tourists (Jennings and Stehlik, 2001)

Mediating is also associated with information giving and enrichment. Moreover, the way in which a broker provides (or withholds) information adds an affective dimension to the message which can reinforce or indeed overpower the words. A broker can even be a role model and/or personally engage in the experience, providing access to a type (or quantity or duration) of experience not otherwise accessible to the tourist. Both an informal and a formal example of this are simultaneously found in the work of Jennings (1999), informal in that it was not managed by the tourism industry, but formal because it was brokered by the local chief, the local authority figure. In the sections of her study dealing with tourist experiences of long term yachtspersons, she comments that the yachtspersons variously reported attending and being included in local cultural events that were off limits to other tourists. The brokering or mediation of this was managed by the local chief on behalf of the host community with the long-term yachtspersons (Jennings, 1992-1999). The inclusions and information sharing were based on the yachtspersons respecting and following local socio-cultural mores, engaging in acts of reciprocity, and having time to build relationships with the host community and authority figures. Consequently, based on positive host-guest interactions in day-to-day living, the brokering of 'quality' tourist experiences was achieved by the yachtspersons.

Such examples are not limited to developing countries. So-called 'new Australians' (first generation immigrants) as well as international students often play an informal brokering role when hosting relatives and friends visiting Australia for the first time. It seems likely that they would select and interpret local sites, customs and events through quite different lenses than a paid tourist guide might use, and quite possibly in a way that is more relevant, personal and meaningful to the visitor. Research in the interpretation and guiding literature has demonstrated that facilitating meaning for visitors is very much affected by the guide's ability to connect with what the tourist knows and cares about (Weiler and Ham, 2001; Ham and Weiler, 2002). An informal broker may in some cases be in a much better position to do this, particularly when, as in the case of visiting friends and relatives, they are likely to have more in common with the visitor than does the formal broker.

Of course, both formal and informal brokers are influenced by others such as employers, communities, other tourists, and other stakeholders in regard to the access they provide. Tour operators and other employers may prescribe itineraries and even scripts that limit where tour guides can take visitors and what they can say. Protected area legislation may require the inclusion of particular messages and the exclusion of others, or may restrict visitors to particular modes of transport thereby restricting the ways the experience can be mediated. This in part occurs in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, where tourist access to sites is brokered by commercial operators. The operators' access is mediated in turn by a permit system which prescribes the number of passengers, number of sites, days of access and times of access to those sites. Along with the permit system instituted by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), there is an expectation that during the 'travel to' phase of the tourist experience the operators and guides will provide an educative component on how to behave in marine environments, that is, an explanation of codes of conduct. Payment of an environmental management charge is also added to each passenger's fare in order to assist with the further management and monitoring of tourist impacts on the reef. This charge generates funds for further research which in turn results in decision-making regarding brokering and mediating access to sites. The charge is also associated with the notion of 'user pays' access, which in turn has ramifications for a tourist's interpretation of the quality of the experience in regard to 'value for money'. Whilst these last three comments are also tied to management issues, they also serve to demonstrate the complexity and multiplicity of interactions that are associated with 'front stage' and 'back stage' management of mediation and brokerage of tourist experiences.

Apart from the types of management intervention in mediation and brokerage of tourist experiences discussed above which attempt to positively influence quality, management can also directly influence the quality (and safety) of tourist experiences in a negative manner. In doing so, management may usurp the role of tour guides who also act as an intermediary between management and tourist as well as tourist and experience. Rafting guides for example size up skill and ability levels prior to the commencement of rafting experiences (Arnould, Price & Tierney 1998; Holyfield 1999). The turning away of unsuitable customers by rafting guides may however be in direct conflict with management's hands-off approach to mediation, in an effort to increase customer numbers and maximize profits (Holyfield 1999). These differences in brokering by stakeholders with different agendas have implications not only for the tourist's experience but also for the environment and host communities, as discussed elsewhere in this book.

Both formal and informal brokers often have the freedom to use their own judgement, coloured by factors such as what they personally perceive to be the economic, social and environmental benefits and costs of giving a tourist access to a particular experience. This is particularly the case for informal guides who are, as mentioned earlier, largely invisible and free to facilitate or inhibit access to experiences quite indiscriminately for different individuals and groups, and at different times of the day, week or year. Even for formal brokers, the lack of monitoring and enforcement of legislation, standards and ethics provides considerable latitude in how tourist experiences are mediated. As Bras (2000: 207) concludes in her in-depth study of tour guides on the island of Lombok in Indonesia:

Mediation is an essential element in what they do, but the majority does not act as mediator out of a sense of the responsibility to satisfy all parties involved . . . their goal is not necessarily becoming a bridge actor defined as someone who flattens cultural differences and gets rid of other obstacles . . .

Thus, depending on the tourist, the guide sometimes tells accepted, controlled narratives, and at other times combines familiar sites with unfamiliar ones within an integrated narrative. In some cases, they provide behind-the-scenes access. Because guiding is a risky business (from an employment perspective), they propagate whatever approach brings them the expected benefits, for example, income and tips (Bras, 2000: 118).

Bras also observes that one cannot analyse Lombok tour guides as one homogeneous group, a point that has been reinforced elsewhere including Yu's research on guides of inbound Chinese tour groups to Australia (Yu, 2003). While some Chinese inbound tour guides have been known to mediate tourists' experiences in profound and positive ways, at other times guides act in self-serving ways, such as restricting who tourists may interact with, where they may shop, and even when they can and cannot go outside their hotel, in some cases by using dishonest and illegal means such as holding the passports of tourists to control their experiences (Yu, 2003). In such cases, the broker is in a position to influence in a very significant way the quality of the tourist's experience.

To further address this issue of quality given that, as discussed earlier, quality is entirely self-defined, it is important to examine the tourist's perspective and to identify the factors that might contribute to the differing needs or expectations of tourists with respect to the experience and specifically mediating or brokering roles.

Theoretical Lenses

This section considers background information regarding factors that influence the tourist's need or desire for mediators or brokers, drawing on selected literature to present two heuristic models to assist in the study of the mediation of meaning in tourist experiences from a social constructivist perspective. The two heuristic models are Cohen's (1972) seminal work on traveller types and roles; and Cohen's (1979) representation of tourist settings.

Factors that influence the tourist's need or desire for mediators or brokers

The tourism literature has engaged in considerable debate over the past few decades in trying to better understand the tourist, by developing categories or *typologies* of tourists, and some of these models are useful in informing a discussion of the relationship between mediation and a quality tourist experience. In reviewing these models, the reader will note that a common theme being explored here is the nature of the experience that the tourist desires or expects, and this in turn influences the nature and type of mediation sought, including self mediation by the tourist her or himself as found in the work of Jennings (1999) in regard to long term cruising yachtspersons and as discussed by Markwell (2001) in regard to tourists and their bodies 'mediating the tourist-nature experience'.

A plethora of traveller types has emerged in the tourism literature ranging from Cohen's (1972) fourfold typology to Pearce's (1982) 15 travel-related roles. Traveller roles and interactions have been explained by using either or both of two types of typologies: the interactive typology and the cognitive-normative typology (Craig-Smith & French, 1994). Interactive typologies focus on the interactions between tourists and host communities and destinations, while cognitive-normative typologies focus on tourists and their motivations. While both are relevant to the role of the mediator, our focus here is on the interactive typologies since these are consistent with the theoretical paradigm informing the discussion in this chapter – social constructionist/constructivism or the interpretive social sciences. Interactive typologies provide a lens to view possible (re)constructions of reality. Again these views are not definitive, as the 'reality' of tourist

experiences are always historically and socioculturally framed and constructed from the tourist's own (re)construction of such experiences. More specifically, the interactive typologies enable us to (re)present the lived experiences (*Erlebnis*) or achieve *verstehen* (empathetic understanding) as per Weber and Dilthey's application of the terms in regard to mediated experiences.

While there are various interactive typologies, most are developments of either Smith's (1977; 2001) host-guest model or Cohen's (1972) familiarity-novelty model. Smith's host-guest typology serves to inform the initial discussions in Chapter 1 and so will not be repeated here. Cohen's (1972) seminal paper on traveller types and roles emphasizes the relationship between tourists on the one hand, and the tourism industry and host communities on the other. Based on the work of Schutz (1932/1972), who was credited with the founding of social phenomenology, Cohen's model is strongly linked to social constructionist perspectives and is useful as a heuristic device to learn more about the role of mediators and brokers in regard to quality tourist experiences.^{iv}

In Cohen's typology, the world is ordered using categories of 'strangeness and familiarity' (Dann & Cohen, 1991: 164), and specifically using Schutz's terms '*Wirbeziehung*, We-relationship' and '*Ihrbeziehung*, They-relationship' (Schutz, 1967). Using Schutz's two categories/concepts, Cohen identifies four basic relationships depending on the degree of 'familiarity' (We-ness) or 'novelty' (They-ness) sought by travellers from the tourist industry and host communities as part of the overall travel experience. These four categories are drifters (who seek exotic experiences and immersion in a host culture), explorers (who arrange their own travel and seek experiences off the beaten track), individual mass tourists (who make use of travel agencies to pre-plan their travels and look for limited opportunities to encounter strangeness) and organized mass tourists (who travel in pre-determined groups and largely avoid strangeness in their experiences) (Cohen, 1972). In his discussions, Cohen uses the term 'novelty' interchangeably with 'strangeness'. Dann (1993: 104) proposed that Cohen's typology is closely linked to Simmel's (1950) work on 'the stranger' because '*the tourist roles [in Cohen's typology] transcend spatial and temporal boundaries to the same degree that Simmelian forms which they portray, and on which they are based, are also universal and perennial (Simmel, 1950)*'. The reader is also referred to the work of Gudykunst (1983) 'Toward a typology of stranger-host relationships' for another discussion of the 'stranger' and the sociology of tourism and to Yiannakis and Gibson (1992) for an overview of this literature.

Paralleling the development of tourist typologies has been an exploration of classificatory systems for the *setting* of the tourist experience. For example, MacCannell (1973), Cohen (1979), and Pearce (1982) have focused on the nature of front and back stage interactions, drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical references (1959) to discursively explain tourist experiences and (re)presentations of tourist experiences. Implicit in these classifications, especially MacCannell's work, was the pejorative notion that anything not back stage resulted in 'duped tourists' and subsequently by association tourists who were not receiving quality experiences. Such a stance however, does not take into account the expectations of the tourists themselves, and whether they believed that they had a quality experience or not. Perhaps the writers were assuming an etic (outsider's) perspective founded on an objective epistemological stance instead of attempting to achieve *verstehen*, empathetic understanding (Weber, 1978) (see also the work of Schutz (1899-1959) and Dilthey (1833-1911) and Schutz's (1967) *Wirbeziehung*, We-relationship). MacCannell's model was later modified by Cohen (1979). Cohen's modification considered touristic settings from two 'points of view', that of the setting and that of the tourist. From the 'setting's point of view', the experience can be either 'real' or 'staged' and from the tourist's point of view the setting may be perceived as either 'real' or 'staged'. This modification presents a two by two classification of touristic settings, see Figure 1. This second work by Cohen (1979) is adopted as a second 'ideal type' (heuristic device) from which to view the on-site phase of the tourist experience, particularly in regard to front-stage/back-stage settings.^v Cohen's model is useful for highlighting how, even though hosts can control the level of authenticity provided by the setting, the perceptions of the same setting may be different for different tourists as noted in the next section.

Figure One about here

DISCUSSION

Mediation, Tourist Typologies and the Tourist Experience

We now revisit our formal/informal role distinction to explore the relative contribution that each plays for different types of tourists and in different tourist settings.

All tourists have a need for both novelty and familiarity in their travel experiences, but some may desire more novelty and/or may be in a position (e.g. have the confidence, skill or resources) to explore further beyond the familiar than others. It is evident, for example, that some tourists for whom the destination is new and who have little familiarity with the host community and environment will find it helpful to seek out both formal and informal mediators to broker their experience via language translation, cultural interpretation, information, and so on.

So how then do the tourist types differ in their need or desire for mediation? We suggest that the mass tourist will expect and be comfortable with formal mediation delivered in a group setting, while the explorer and drifter may shun all forms of formal mediation and seek out informal mediators instead. This, then, implies that those who are seen to be mediators by virtue of their employment (e.g. tour guides, tourist information officers, and concierge staff) may be sought out for information by a narrower range of tourists than those who are informal mediators. On the other hand, formal brokers are easier to identify and may therefore be utilised by mass tourists more than informal brokers, particularly those with considerable mediation needs due to their limited travel experience, the nature of their travel party (e.g. children, persons with disabilities), limited time and inflexible itineraries, and limited resources (e.g. language skills) to seek out informal brokers.

Some experiences may simply demand mediation, for example, in some places it is not possible to swim with a dolphin or seal in the wild unless travelling with a group and accompanied by a licensed operator. Access to backcountry areas of some national parks requires visitors to book in advance and travel by public transport (e.g. Denali National Park in the U.S.) – there is simply no other way of accessing the experience. This issue is explored in the context of guiding on cruise ships, where tourists are highly dependent on their guide and this affects the nature of the guiding and the experience (Ham and Weiler, 2002). However, in most cases tourists have considerable latitude in their choice of mediation, whether it be formal or informal, pre-visit, on-site or at all stages, and most visitors self-select the media they wish to use (Ham, 1999).

Returning to Cohen's front-back stage model, it seems likely that mediation by a formal broker would be perceived as appropriate in a staged setting. Such a view is supported in the writings of Feifer (1985). Feifer, assuming a postmodern perspective, noted that 'institutionalised tourists' (Cohen, 1972) recognise that they are engaging in a 'game' or 'hyper-reality' (Ecco, 1986). This was a view also espoused by respondents in Jennings' (1999, p. 415) study of long term ocean yachtspersons.

... [A]n advantage of a package recognised by cruisers was that when tourists buy a travel experience package – a commodity, they know up from what they are paying and what they are getting for that money. Consequently, the package standardises the experience and ensures a familiarity about the experience.

As one participant commented:

You might be in Tahiti and they will have the girls doing the lei-lei dance. You know they will have their plastic girdles on and it won't be the real lei-lei that they normally do in the dances [for themselves]. Cruising man 356 (Jennings, 1999, p.417)

In such contexts, the broker's role in facilitating a quality experience would seem to be to ensure that visitors knowingly expect a staged setting, including at the pre-visit phase. As Jennings and Stehlik (2001) commented in regard to the representation of different types of farm tourism experiences, the formal broker has a mediating role, however, so too have the tourists:

Tourists will select from the array of farm experiences offered ... based on the experience they desire to engage. Consequently, tourists also mediate the nature of the authenticity of the farm tourism product they purchase. The challenge for operators, however, is to ensure that they present the farm experience authentically and ethically rather than as something it is not, in order that the tourists can make the right choices. (Jennings and Stehlik, 2001)

This contrasts with the broker's role in a real (back-stage) setting. The role of the broker here might be considerably more complex in facilitating appropriate access without compromising the experience, while preserving the integrity of the host community and environment. For example, beach boys particularly in Caribbean and South East Asia as reported by Dahles (2002) operate as small scale entrepreneurs in the informal sector to offer romance tourism (as opposed to sex tourism) experiences to women tourists. However, in assuming these brokering roles the beach boys are adopting positions that are counter to their mainstream societal values. Similarly some of the tourist women would also be acting counter to their own societal values. Subsequently, beach boys may or may not provide quality tourist experiences depending on how long women tourists are able to support the beach boys before their interest wanes when the women's money runs out (Dahles, 2002) and also as a result of the host community's reaction to the relationship between beach boys and women tourists. The roles of beach boys are not considered to be ones that maintain the integrity of the host community on a variety of levels – earning an income, following traditional pathways to relationships and lifestyle living. Similarly, the women tourists may be viewed derisively by the host community. The nature of interactions with others in the host community may be impacted upon.

The roles that the formal and informal brokers play and their impacts on the quality of the tourist's experiences in these scenarios are largely unknown. However, two key factors appear to be relevant from a number of the foregoing examples: relationship building and clear and unambiguous communication. Relationship-building and communication are elements of mediation that are fruitful avenues for further research, a point to which we return in the final section of this chapter.

In summary, it seems likely that formal and informal brokers would play different roles not only with respect to the tourist types for whom they are mediating and the types of settings they provide access to, but also the nature and timing of the access and mediation they provide. This is another area in need of further research, also addressed at the end of this chapter.

Implications

Recognizing that mediation is central to any tourist experience (Chambers, 1997), it is important to develop an understanding of how mediation contributes to enhancing the tourist experience. Using the formal/informal dichotomy of broker types together with Cohen's two heuristic models we begin to unpack some of the reasons why visitors might seek out, and mechanisms by which the experience might be enhanced and negated by, mediation.

When and how does mediation contribute to or enhance the quality of the tourist experience?

In mediating tourist experiences, we have discussed the notion of mediating peoples, places, spaces, cultures and environments. The extent to which a broker provides information or otherwise facilitates spatial and temporal access to a desired experience, whether it is front stage or back stage, will enhance or inhibit quality in the experience. Precisely how to match mediators and mediated spaces to traveller types and desired travel experiences, however, is unclear. Moreover, given the self-defined nature of quality and in turn the sense-making processes of tourists, there may well be no way of determining the extent to which mediation contributes to a quality tourist experience. Thus, until such time that research tackles some of these issues and relationships, it is difficult to provide formulae for industry as to how to better manage mediation, how to market the broker's expertise and potential roles, and how to better recruit, train, and reward good mediators.

Furthermore, whilst we are suggesting further research, we need to remember that the travel experience is in a constant state of change and flux. It is ever dynamic and yesterday's answers may not necessarily fit tomorrow's context. The tourist experience is also temporally, historically as well as socially and culturally bounded. It is constituted of a multiplicity of interactions some of which may be managed but others which may well not be. To say otherwise would be to deny the theoretical lenses which have been applied to consider the mediation of travel experiences and the consequences for quality, that is, the theoretical lenses of a social constructionist/constructivist approach with a hint of postmodern scepticism in regard to definitively capturing reality. That being said and so as not to adopt nihilistic tendencies, we offer the following suggestions. First, when broadly considering the research agenda in regard to mediating meaning and its contribution to quality tourist experiences, researchers need to adopt more integrated and collaborative enterprises. This will enable a more holistic view to be obtained. Second, when determining the impact of mediators/brokers upon the quality of tourist experiences, researchers and the tourism and travel industry/system need to engage in emic as well as etic research. Emic research achieves an 'insider's' perspective. Such a perspective asserts that: '... cultural behaviour should always be studied and categorized in terms of the inside view - the actor's definition - of human events.' (Pelto & Pelto, 1978: 54). In adopting such an approach, understanding of the sense-making and (re)construction and (re)interpretation of tourist experiences by tourists themselves will be grounded in the every day experiences of those tourists.

Having commented upon the nature of an overall research agenda to be pursued in regard to mediating tourist experiences and perspectives of quality, we turn our attention to what makes a good mediator. Through our explorations of literature, the application of heuristic models and our own research, there appear to be two resonating themes – relationships built on mutual respect and trust at the relevant time and place, and effective communication. Education and training in regard to mediating and brokering quality tourist experiences hinge upon these two elements– 'good relationship building' and 'honest and open two-way communication between visitor and mediator'. Both are terms we would again suggest as also self-defined by users. Insights into the multiplicity of usage should also be part of any research agenda pursued.

If brokers are to facilitate an experience that is matched to the tourist's needs, desires and setting expectations, there needs to be two-way communication so that the tourist's perspective is being heard. Communication theory has long recognised that to be effective, communicators need to make their messages and communication style relevant to their listeners, and to do this, they need a sound knowledge of what the listener (the visitor) already knows and what the listener cares about. These make it possible for the communicator, in this case the mediator, to provide access to information, places, spaces, people, cultures and environments that the tourist will connect with the visitor. Connecting with the tourist's current schema or dataset of knowledge and feelings is essential if the tourist is going to be able to make sense of what s/he experiences. Further discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of communication and mean-making are provided in Ham (2002).

These points regarding communication theory also overlap into relationship building. Taking the time to know others beyond surface level interactions is important when we recall the point that meaning, knowledge, and sense-making are social processes. Relationship building, at the formal and informal level, has critical implications for the mediation of meaning as well as the quality of tourist experiences. We realise that the chaotic nature of interactions associated with tourist experiences means that not all interactions will necessarily be able to be based upon positive relationship experiences, however, for those in the tourism industry and related stakeholder sectors, such knowledge is paramount for 'business'^{vi}

For tourism industry stakeholders interested in engaging in relationship building, there exists a body of knowledge which addresses this very aspect in marketing, specifically relationship marketing as well as within leadership literature amongst other sets of literature. Other theoretical perspectives useful for informing or counter pointing a research agenda into mediation of quality tourist experiences include dependency theory, imperialism and neocolonialism, power theories, politics of decision-making, communication theory (cross-cultural communication and understanding), stranger theory (familiarity – novel –strangeness), uncertainty avoidance theory, politics of representation, space and place, stakeholder theory, community perspectives such as decision making and autonomy to identify just a few.

Towards a specific research agenda

Generally, we believe that both formal and informal brokers have the potential to influence the quality of the experience in a profound way, both individually and cumulatively, but the roles of both, and in particular informal brokers, have been overlooked in research on the tourist experience. . Based in part on our use of Cohen's two heuristic models, we offer the following research questions as starting points for exploring how mediation relates or contributes to a quality tourist experience:

- What are the key attributes and characteristics of an effective mediator/broker?
- How and when do different types of brokers contribute to a quality tourist experience?
- What are the relative roles of informal and formal brokers in the experience?
- What processes can be used to better match tourist requirements in regard to brokering (e.g. differing tourist types) in respect to quantity and quality of 'access' and therefore subsequent influence on the quality of tourist experiences?
- Can interactions with formal and informal mediators and brokers be planned and managed to effect a higher quality tourist experiences?
- How is the role of the mediator/broker changing in relation to changing visitor profiles including growth in independent travel by relatively inexperienced travellers?
- How can the industry better respond (e.g. recruitment, training, accreditation, reward systems) to improve the effectiveness of mediators/brokers?
- How can mediators/brokers respond to increasing demand for more travel options, specialisation and flexibility in travel, destinations, tours, and products?

As a follow-on to the above questions, what are subsequent impacts on quality and tourist experiences? We are not providing answers to these questions, but rather we suggest that they are questions to which tourism industries and tourism system(s) would benefit from answers at the local, regional, national and international level. Bringing any one of the theoretical perspectives mentioned in the previous section to bear on any of these research questions would certainly make a valuable contribution to the literature.

As stated in the introductory quote, 'no process of meaning making exists in isolation' (Dunn 1998, 136); many parties are involved who serve to mediate the tourist experience and impact on the quality of the experience. And yet, it is not unusual to hear a tourist refer to a particular individual – a guide or a local resident or even a taxi driver – as 'making the experience' for them. How brokering mediates meaning and thereby facilitates quality tourist experiences at both an individual and a collective level is certainly a phenomenon in need of much further study.

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Table 1: Examples of Mediators and Broker associated with the Tourist experience

Stage of the travel experience:

Nature of role:	Planning and recollection (pre- and post-visit)	Enroute (travel to and from site)	On-Site
Formal mediating role:	travel agents, travel consultants government marketing bodies marketing of tourism operations via promotional materials and events	tour guides	concierges in accommodation sector staff and products in tourist information centres local government tourism staff and products tourism operations staff and products tour guides (local -- paid and volunteer)
Informal mediating role:	friends and relatives returning tourists non-tourism destination/site information mass media souvenirs, photos	other hospitality and tourism staff, transport operators, drivers non-tourism employees	other tourists other hospitality and tourism staff host/local community members non-tourism employees host family members streetscapes

Figure 1: Model of Tourist Settings based on Cohen (1979)

		Nature of the Scene	
		Real	Staged
Tourist's Impression of Scene	Real	A. Authentic and recognised as such.	C. Suspicion of staging, authenticity questioned.
	Staged	B. Failure to recognise contrived tourist space.	D. Recognised contrived tourist space.

ENDNOTES

- ⁱ The use of parentheses in this sentence in regard to “the tourist’s (re)constructions of his/her experience as well as the (re)presentation of that experience” may appear unusual to some readers. However the parentheses are specifically utilised to emphasise that the construction, interpretation or making of knowledge as per the introduction, is a continuous process between construction and reconstruction – that is knowledge or meaning or sense-making are constantly being mediated by us and others. Similarly, (re)presentation is used to indicate that presentations are not always authentic to the original version since they too are socially constructed and reconstructed. They change during the course of presentation as well as representations as was the case of construction and reconstruction since these are processes and end states of social interactions. To prevent the somewhat clumsy format and use of “construction and reconstruction” as well as “presentation and representation” along with their plural forms, this chapter will use the parenthetical devices throughout to remind readers of this constant state of flux.
- ⁱⁱ It should be noted that the distinction may not always be clear cut – there are those whose work in the tourism industry who may cross over between formal and informal, depending on the group or season. It is possible for an individual to move between being a broker and a non-broker, and to move between being a formal broker (e.g. an on-duty tour guide) and a non-formal broker (e.g. an off-duty guide who lives, shops and shares the community’s leisure/recreation/tourism facilities with tourists).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Sense-making is used interchangeably with the construction of knowledge, meaning making and interpretation of meaning in this chapter. Given the theoretical lens applied in this chapter, readers are reminded that all of these terms refer to social processes. For a further discussion of sense-making, readers are referred to Weick (1995).
- ^{iv} Cohen’s typology is not assumed by us to be the average or definitive typology as that is counterproductive to the underlying premise that there are multiple definitions, interpretations and (re)constructions of quality tourist experiences.
- ^v Again the same caveat that was mentioned above is relevant here and is repeated, this front-back stage typology is not deemed the definitive continuum, it is instead a heuristic tool.
- ^{vi} Unless of course, tourists directly seek to experience negative relationships as part of the overall tourist experience, such as in the BBC production, *Fawlty Towers*, which was based on experiences at the Gleneagles Hotel located in Torquay, Britain when managed by a Mr Sinclair (BBC America, 2004) or in experiencing thanna tourism which can be confronting or trying for tourists and during which positive relationship building may not be able to be achieved due to the overall nature and gravity of experience.