

Different but Similar: Social Comparison of Travel Motives Among Tourists

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ABSTRACT

Although previous research suggests that people prefer to think of themselves as being authentic (or individualistic) travellers rather than stereotyped tourists, there have been few studies investigating the external validity of such claim. This paper addresses this research gap by investigating tendencies to dissociate the self from typical tourists in terms of travel motivation. Findings suggest that people perceive their own travel motives to be different from those who they perceive as typical tourists and that these tendencies generalize across people involved in different forms of tourism. This paper discusses the results from a social psychological perspective and provides implications for future research and destination management alike. © 2014 The Authors. *International Journal of Tourism Research* published by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine the following scenario: someone just came back from a two-week holiday trip at a well-known island beach resort. When telling about the trip in retrospect, this person emphasizes that he or she had rented a car in an attempt to escape the ‘overcrowded and touristy places’. The motivation for this decision was to discover the rural parts of the island and to get in touch with local residents. At the same time, he or she comments that most of the other tourists at the resort would simply prefer to lie at the beach, without having much of an interest to explore the natural and cultural habitats of their holiday destination. The hypothetical scenario displayed here is a reflection of MacCannell’s (1973) early notion that ‘[t]he term “tourist” is increasingly used as a derisive label for someone who seems content with his obviously inauthentic experiences’ (p. 592). In this particular context, we seek to illustrate how people may rely on social comparisons in order to position themselves as authentic (or individualistic) travellers by means of contrasting own travel motives to those of other tourists.

The argument that people wish to perceive themselves as being different from the mainstream tourist population has a long history in tourism research (see e.g. MacCannell, 1976; Culler, 1981; Crick, 1989). At the same time, there have been different views about whether tendencies to dissociate the self from others are more frequent and/or less frequent across some tourists. Some (e.g. Jacobsen, 2000) have argued that dissociating tendencies are characteristic for the so-called ‘anti-tourist’ who has a particular interest in establishing a distinction between own travel experiences and the inauthenticity of mass tourism. Others (e.g. Bowen and Clarke, 2009) have taken a more general approach by arguing that dissociating tendencies can be found in all tourists since the concept of being a tourist is linked with a predominantly negative image.

An important contribution to this debate has been made by Gillespie (2007) who highlighted the ambiguous nature of tourist identities. He emphasized that the tendency to positively dissociate the self from typical tourists is often contradicted by the fact that people nonetheless engage in similar travel activities, which, in turn, makes them become typical tourists themselves.

Previous research suggests that people prefer to think of themselves as being authentic (or individualistic) travellers rather than stereotyped tourists (Prebensen *et al.*, 2003; McCabe, 2005; Week, 2012). It is therefore somewhat surprising that only few empirical studies investigated how people maintain this distinction on-site. One notable exception comes from Uriely *et al.* (2002) who found that backpackers downplay their visits at popular tourism sites, which the researchers interpreted as an attempt to hold up the opposition between backpacking as an ideology and conventional mass tourism. In the same vein, Gillespie (2006) found that backpackers tend to criticize the photographing behaviours of other tourists even though they may behave in similar ways themselves. Although these findings suggest that tendencies to dissociate the self from typical tourists represent an important part of being a tourist, the degree to which these findings can be generalized still remains unclear. This is because these studies are based on small and/or homogenous samples (e.g. backpackers).

It is therefore of great importance to address this research gap by investigating the social comparison of travel motives (1) within a larger sample and (2) across people involved in different forms of tourism, not only within backpackers. The findings of such an investigation will have both theoretical and managerial implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Travel motivation

The study of motivation is concerned with processes that initiate, maintain, energize and direct goal-focused behaviour

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(Klinger and Cox, 2004). Motivational processes are grounded in internal motives such as needs, cognitions and emotions, and/or external events that derive from environmental, social and cultural sources (Reeve, 2009). Since motivation is one of the most important variables in order to explain tourist behaviour (Crompton, 1979; Pearce and Caltabiano, 1983; Fodness, 1994), the study of travel motivation and its correlates has received a constant interest within tourism research. For example, studies have investigated travel motivation with regard to travel experiences (Pearce and Lee, 2005), personal values (Li and Cai, 2012), cultural values (Gnoth and Zins, 2010), environmental attitudes (Luo and Deng, 2007) and cultural heritage (Kim and Prideaux, 2005). Travel motivation has also been shown to be important in order to identify market segments (Park and Yoon, 2009), to explain consumption patterns (Swanson and Horridge, 2006) and to understand revisit intentions (Li *et al.*, 2010).

One of the most common approaches within the study of travel motivation has been focussing on differences between push and pull factors (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979). Whereas the former are commonly portrayed as factors that influence people in their initial decision to go on vacation, the latter are often described as factors that influence people in their choice of a certain type of vacation. Dann (1977), for example, identified anomie and ego-enhancement as the two main forces underlying travel motivation, which he considered both to be push factors. On the basis of findings from qualitative interviews, Crompton (1979) identified a total of nine different travel motives that were further classified into either social psychological needs (i.e. escape from a perceived mundane environment, exploration and evaluation of self, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of kinship relationships and facilitation of social interaction) or cultural needs (i.e. novelty and education). Further analyses showed that motives in the first category were unrelated to destination characteristics, whereas motives in the second category were at least to some degree linked to destination characteristics. Inspired by the empirical studies of Dann (1977), Crompton (1979) and Pearce and Caltabiano (1983), Fodness (1994) applied a functional approach to explain and understand travel motivation. On the basis of findings from factor analysis, he suggested a set of five different functions that may underlie travel motivation: two utilitarian functions (punishment minimization and reward maximization), two value expressive functions (self-esteem and ego-enhancement) and one function that he described as a search for knowledge.

Iso-Ahola (1982) proposed a social psychological model in which there are two basic motivational forces that serve to explain leisure behaviours including those in the context of tourism: escaping and seeking. In this model, motivation is viewed as a process driven by expectancies concerning desired psychological outcomes with each of the two forces having both a personal and an interpersonal dimension (Iso-Ahola, 1982). On the one hand, people engage in leisure activities because they want to escape their personal and/or interpersonal environment. On the other hand, people engage in leisure activities because they expect personal and/or interpersonal rewards. Whereas both tendencies simultaneously

influence tourist behaviour, the degree to which each of them is more or less prevalent might differ between groups, situations and activities (Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987). Accordingly, the psychological benefit of tourist experiences stems from an interaction between escaping routine or stressful environments and seeking opportunities for intrinsic rewards (Dunn Ross and Iso-Ahola, 1991). In their study, Snepenger *et al.* (2006) were the first to operationalize and empirically test this social psychological model within the context of tourist and recreational experiences. Overall findings from confirmatory factor analyses supported the four-dimensional structure that was initially proposed by Iso-Ahola (1982): personal escape, interpersonal escape, personal seeking and interpersonal seeking.

Differences and similarities among tourists

In his seminal paper on the sociology of international tourism, Cohen (1972) was the first to introduce the idea of differentiating between non-institutionalized and institutionalized forms of tourism. Whereas the former referred to travel behaviours that are undertaken in a more self-organized and/or independent matter, the latter referred to travel behaviours that follow certain routines set by the tourism industry. Each of these two forms of tourism were further divided into two distinct tourist types: explorer and drifter (both non-institutionalized forms of tourism), and individual mass tourist and organized mass tourist (both institutionalized forms of tourism). The underlying assumption is that tourists can be distinguished according to their individual standing on a novelty-familiarity continuum, that is, to which degree they seek either novel and/or familiar travel experiences (Cohen, 1972). This phenomenological framework has inspired much of the empirical research on tourist typologies including those concerning variation within different forms of tourism such as backpacking (e.g. Cohen, 2011) or charter tourism (e.g. Wickens, 2002).

From a methodological point of view, there are two approaches that can be distinguished within empirical research on tourist typologies. One line of research addresses questions concerning whether people who are involved in similar forms of tourism also share similar characteristics (e.g. Uriely *et al.*, 2002; Maoz, 2007; Reichel *et al.*, 2009). This approach aims to understand variation in tourist experiences from an individual perspective and investigates differences and similarities within tourist types. Loker-Murphy (1996), for example, demonstrated that backpackers are not a homogenous group to the extent that they differ with regard to their motivational profiles. Another line of research addresses questions concerning whether people who are involved in different forms of tourism can be distinguished on the basis of their individual characteristics (e.g. Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995; Mohsin and Ryan, 2003). This approach aims to understand variation in tourist experiences from a comparative perspective and investigates differences and similarities across tourist types. Ryan and Mohsin (2001), for example, found that backpackers and other tourists tend to have similar attitudes towards destination characteristics, whereas duration of stay and type of accommodation are important distinguishing factors between the two groups.

One study that is important in this context comes from Larsen *et al.* (2011) who compared backpackers and 'mainstreamers' on relevant dimensions such as travel motives, perceived risk, tourist worries and tourist role preferences. They found that participants within these two categories had similar travel motives (i.e. knowledge, ego-enhancement, reward maximization and socially being together), with only punishment minimization and self-esteem being more important for 'mainstreamers' than for backpackers. And although there were differences with regard to participants' views about themselves (with backpackers having a higher preference for the drifter role, and a lower preference for the individual mass tourist and organized mass tourist roles), the overall structure and rank order of such role orientations remained similar in both groups (with the explorer being the most preferred and the organized mass tourist being the least preferred tourist roles). Their findings suggest that backpackers may not be as different from people involved in other forms of tourism as many have thought – at least when it comes to travel motivation.

This study is part of a larger research project investigating differences and similarities across people involved in different forms of tourism. Therefore, in this study, participants were classified according to the approach by Larsen *et al.* (2011) who defined backpackers as tourists who stayed at a 'HI-hostel' (i.e. staying at one of several Hostelling International facilities in Western Norway). They found that this unobtrusive operational criterion yielded reliable demographic differences between their groups of backpackers and 'mainstreamers' along the lines described in previous studies (see e.g. Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995).

Social comparisons among tourists

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) states that people have a tendency to compare their own abilities and opinions to those of others because there exists an inherent need for self-evaluation. The basic assumptions here are that social comparisons are likely to occur when there are no objective criteria available, when there is lack of information about own abilities and opinions and when there are others with similar characteristics. As an example, people might compare their own views and opinions to those of other group members in order to collect information about their relational standing within that group (e.g. tourists at a specific holiday resort or tourists in general). Previous research suggests that people constantly relate information of others to themselves (Dunning and Hayes, 1996) and that they do so spontaneously without evaluating the appropriateness of the comparison object (Gilbert *et al.*, 1995). Social comparisons are considered an essential part of psychological functioning that influence peoples' judgments, experiences and behaviours (Corcoran *et al.*, 2011). For example, comparisons between the self and others help people to evaluate own performances (Taylor and Lobel, 1989), to process complex information (Mussweiler and Epstude, 2009) and to maintain self-esteem (Brown, 1986).

Applied to the context of tourism, research in this vein addresses questions concerning how people perceive themselves and others while being on vacation (e.g. Larsen and Brun, 2011; Doran and Larsen, 2014). For example, Jacobsen (2000) investigated how charter tourists see

themselves with regard to their attitudes towards the role as a tourist. Although it was found that most participants had either positive (9%) or neutral (81%) views about tourists, some expressed negative (10%) views about tourists. Jacobsen (2000) concluded that participants in the latter category were representative of an 'anti-tourist' attitude, which he referred to as the tendency to take role distance to those who are thought to represent typical tourists. Similar tendencies have been reported by Prebensen *et al.* (2003) who asked German tourists visiting Norway to indicate whether they consider themselves as being a 'typical German tourist' or a 'non-typical German tourist'. They found that almost 90% of their participants considered themselves to be non-typical German tourists. What is more, when the two groups were compared with each other, there were no differences concerning their views about what defines a typical German tourist, their travel motives or their travel activities.

Galani-Moutafi (2000) questioned whether there are any differences between travellers, tourists and ethnographers when it comes to the construction of their travel experiences. The author put forward the idea that various types of visitors are similar to the extent that they all engage in a search for the self in the reflection of the experiences of the other. Empirical support for this view comes from McCabe and Stokoe (2004) who interviewed day visitors at a national park in order to investigate how meanings about place and identity are constructed by talk. One interesting finding was that participants distinguished between 'good' and 'bad' types of visitors and that participants categorized themselves and others alongside these moral categories. For example, one participant positioned own behaviours as morally superior by emphasizing the importance of walking without reading at the same time and hence respecting other peoples' rights of way. McCabe and Stokoe (2004) concluded that people seem to construct their tourist experiences also by means of contrasting own behaviours to those of others. This conclusion is also in line with findings from ethnographic studies indicating similar tendencies among serious wildlife tourists (Curtin, 2010) and senior mobile car tourists (Holloway and Green, 2011).

On the basis of the above studies, we assume that the processing of social information plays an important role in the construction of the tourist experience and that tendencies to dissociate the self from typical tourists are therefore not limited towards seemingly non-institutionalized forms of tourism such as backpacking. The present research is in the tradition of studies comparing psychological characteristics across different groups of tourists (e.g. Larsen *et al.*, 2011) and aims at testing the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: People involved in different forms of tourism do not differ in their self-reported travel motives.

Hypothesis 2: People tend to perceive their own travel motives to be different from those who they perceive as typical tourists.

Hypothesis 3: Tendencies to dissociate the self from typical tourists generalize across people involved in different forms of tourism.

METHOD

Participants

Participants in our study ($N=474$) constitute a convenience sample of international (97%) and domestic tourists (3%). The mean age was 36.6 years ($SD=13.83$), with 46.7% of the participants being women. The sample included participants with various nationalities, of which the majority came from Europe (82.0%), followed by North America (9.3%), Asia (5.3%), Oceania (2.3%) and South America (1.1%). Participants were classified according to their last night's accommodation: camping facility ($n=99$), private pension ($n=49$), HI-hostel ($n=35$), hotel ($n=134$), cruise ship ($n=52$) and not specified ($n=105$).

Data collection was conducted at places that are frequented by tourists visiting Bergen, Norway – independent of their choice of accommodation. Such examples include local tourist information offices, famous heritage sites and scenic nature spots. All of these places tend to attract all groups of tourists (e.g. cruise ship passengers, backpackers, campers and hotel guests). Research assistants approached potential participants (i.e. tourists) and asked them if they were willing to participate in a study concerning various aspects of travelling. After a brief introduction, participants were ensured that all collected data would be treated confidentially. In case of a positive response, participants were handed out a self-administered paper and pencil questionnaire. There was no financial compensation offered at any time of the data collection.

Questionnaire design

All variables were measured by means of a three-page self-administered paper and pencil questionnaire. Apart from some items assessing socio-demographic information (e.g. age, gender and nationality), the questionnaire included items measuring various aspects of travelling, but this paper exclusively reports results related to the social comparison of travel motives. The questionnaire was administered in English only and took approximately ten minutes to fill in. Participants' own travel motives were measured with 12 items adopted from Snepenger *et al.* (2006). These items aim to measure the four motivational dimensions proposed by Iso-Ahola (1982): personal escape, interpersonal escape, personal seeking and interpersonal seeking (Table 1).

Because this study examines comparisons between the self and typical tourists, items were provided in two different variants: one set of items was introduced with a statement asking participants to indicate their own travel motives (i.e. self) and one set of items was introduced with a statement asking participants to indicate to which degree they thought typical tourists to be motivated by the same issues (i.e. typical tourists). This implies that participants responded to similar items but with formulations and instructions being slightly adjusted towards different foci. Index variables were computed by averaging ratings concerning own travel motives on each of the four motivational dimensions (Table 2). The same procedure was applied for ratings concerning typical tourists' travel motives on each of the four motivational dimensions (Table 2). The exact wordings for instructions were as follows:

- Below are some motives why people go on vacation. Please indicate to which degree you are motivated by the following:
- Almost the same questions, but this time we want you to imagine a typical tourist. Please indicate to which degree you think typical tourists are motivated by the following:

DATA HANDLING AND DATA ANALYSIS

Some participants in our study did not answer all questionnaire items ($n=68$, 14.3%), leading to some missing data. Missing values on the index variables (i.e. participants who did not answer any of the items) were deleted listwise in the statistical analyses.

RESULTS

In the first step, we tested whether there were significant differences between people involved in different forms of tourism (i.e. accommodation) in terms of self-reported travel motives. One-way independent analysis of variance was conducted in order to compare the effect of accommodation on each of the four motivational dimensions (i.e. personal escape, interpersonal escape, personal seeking and interpersonal seeking). Results showed that there was no significant effect of accommodation on self-reported motives for personal escape [$F(5, 462)=1.05$, $p=0.388$], interpersonal escape [$F(5, 462)=0.66$, $p=0.653$] and personal seeking [$F(5, 462)=0.34$, $p=0.890$]. Since the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated for the interpersonal seeking dimension, the Welch F -ratio is reported. Results showed that there was also no significant effect of accommodation on self-reported motives for interpersonal seeking [Welch $F(5, 162.100)=2.08$, $p=0.071$]. As can be seen in Figure 1, also the rank order and structure of self-reported travel motives was similar across people involved in different forms of tourism (support for Hypothesis 1). This means that participants in all groups judged personal escape and personal seeking to be the most important travel motives, followed by motives for interpersonal seeking and interpersonal escape.

In the second step, two-way mixed analysis of variance was used in order to examine whether people tend to perceive their own travel motives to be different from those of typical tourists and if these tendencies are represented similarly across people involved in different forms of tourism. There was one within-subjects factor (i.e. social comparisons), which compared judgments of own travel motives and judgments of typical tourist's travel motives for each of the four motivational dimensions (i.e. personal escape, interpersonal escape, personal seeking and interpersonal seeking). In addition, there was one between-subjects factor (i.e. accommodation), which compared social comparisons across people involved in different forms of tourism. Results yielded significant main effects of social comparisons for each of the four

Table 1. Items to measure own travel motives (Ms1–Ms12) and typical tourists' travel motives (Mt1–Mt12) on a scale from 1 (not important) to 10 (very important)

Items		<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Travel motives
Self					
Ms1	To get away from my normal environment ^a	470	7.63	2.24	Personal escape (Ms1–Ms3, $\alpha = 0.70$)
Ms2	To have a change in pace from my everyday life ^a	469	7.57	2.19	
Ms3	To overcome a bad mood ^a	460	3.83	2.62	
Ms4	To avoid people who annoy me ^a	461	3.22	2.56	Interpersonal escape (Ms4–Ms6, $\alpha = 0.76$)
Ms5	To get away from a stressful social environment ^a	468	5.15	3.00	
Ms6	To avoid interactions with others ^a	466	3.12	2.57	
Ms7	To tell others about my experiences ^a	469	4.36	2.61	Personal seeking (Ms7–Ms9, $\alpha = 0.56$)
Ms8	To feel good about myself ^a	469	7.04	2.63	
Ms9	To experience new things by myself ^a	468	8.30	1.98	
Ms10	To be with people of similar interests ^a	466	5.65	2.79	Interpersonal seeking (Ms10–Ms12, $\alpha = 0.64$)
Ms11	To bring friends/family closer ^a	470	5.53	2.96	
Ms12	To meet new people ^a	465	5.72	2.61	
Typical tourists					
Mt1	To get away from their normal environment ^b	453	7.87	1.85	Personal escape (Mt1–Mt3, $\alpha = 0.57$)
Mt2	To have a change in pace from their everyday life ^b	447	7.91	1.78	
Mt3	To overcome a bad mood ^a	441	5.38	2.41	
Mt4	To avoid people who annoy them ^b	443	4.79	2.50	Interpersonal escape (Mt4–Mt6, $\alpha = 0.73$)
Mt5	To get away from a stressful social environment ^a	448	7.11	2.41	
Mt6	To avoid interactions with others ^a	446	4.39	2.44	
Mt7	To tell others about their experiences ^b	448	7.11	2.15	Personal seeking (Mt7–Mt9, $\alpha = 0.55$)
Mt8	To feel good about themselves ^b	446	7.51	2.15	
Mt9	To experience new things by themselves ^b	448	7.04	2.02	
Mt10	To be with people of similar interests ^a	449	6.58	2.01	Interpersonal seeking (Mt10–Mt12, $\alpha = 0.76$)
Mt11	To bring friends/family closer ^a	448	6.61	2.23	
Mt12	To meet new people ^a	446	6.45	2.18	

Note: Cronbach's alpha = α .

^aOriginal item from Snepenger *et al.* (2006).

^bItems that were slightly adapted in order to match the focus of this study.

Table 2. Sample sizes, means and standard deviations for measures of travel motives as a function of people involved in different forms of tourism (i.e. accommodation) and comparisons between the self and typical tourists (i.e. social comparisons)

Accommodation	Personal escape			Interpersonal escape			Personal seeking			Interpersonal seeking		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Camping facility												
Self	97	6.14	1.69	96	3.75	2.06	96	6.48	1.63	96	5.18	2.28
Typical tourists	97	6.88	1.49	96	5.48	1.73	96	7.10	1.60	96	6.26	1.50
Private pension												
Self	48	6.80	1.77	48	4.24	2.43	48	6.47	1.61	47	5.56	2.13
Typical tourists	48	7.54	1.47	48	5.81	1.83	48	7.57	1.52	47	6.55	1.94
HI-hostel												
Self	35	6.21	2.02	35	4.15	2.51	35	6.71	1.72	35	5.52	1.60
Typical tourists	35	6.99	1.64	35	5.42	2.16	35	7.26	1.57	35	6.36	1.91
Hotel												
Self	126	6.33	1.91	124	3.79	2.28	125	6.60	2.08	125	5.69	2.35
Typical tourists	126	7.01	1.55	124	5.33	2.26	125	7.22	1.61	125	6.82	1.83
Cruise ship												
Self	48	6.45	1.91	48	4.01	2.37	47	6.51	1.69	47	5.73	1.83
Typical tourists	48	7.06	1.76	48	5.64	2.15	47	7.32	1.61	47	6.80	1.97
Not specified												
Self	99	6.80	1.66	97	3.70	2.20	98	6.66	1.60	98	6.05	1.86
Typical tourists	99	7.13	1.34	97	5.25	1.69	98	7.11	1.32	98	6.45	1.58

Note: Index variables were also computed for participants with missing values on some of the items measuring each motivational dimension.

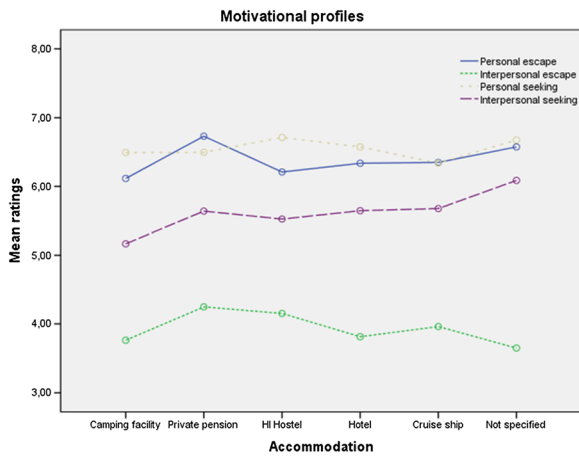


Figure 1. Motivational profiles of people involved in different forms of tourism (i.e. accommodation).

motivational dimensions: personal escape [$F(1, 447) = 59.52, p < 0.001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.12$], interpersonal escape [$F(1, 442) = 193.29, p < 0.001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.30$], personal seeking [$F(1, 443) = 56.64, p < 0.001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.11$] and interpersonal seeking [$F(1, 442) = 57.02, p < 0.001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.11$]. This provides evidence for an overall tendency to dissociate the self from typical tourists in terms of travel motivation (support for Hypothesis 2). At the same time, there was no significant interaction effect between social comparisons and accommodation for any of the four motivational dimensions: personal escape [$F(5,447) = 0.94, p = 0.456,$

partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$], interpersonal escape [$F(5,442) = 0.26, p = 0.934, \text{partial } \eta^2 < 0.01$], personal seeking [$F(5,443) = 1.05, p = 0.387, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.01$] and interpersonal seeking [$F(5,442) = 1.33, p = 0.250, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.02$]. This indicates that differences in the perception of the self and typical tourists did not vary between people involved in different forms of tourism (support for Hypothesis 3). As can be seen in Figures 2 and 3, participants in all groups judged travel motives for personal escape, interpersonal escape, personal seeking and interpersonal seeking to be less important for themselves than for typical tourists.

DISCUSSION

Participants in our study rated personal escape and personal seeking to be the most important travel motives, followed by motives for personal seeking, interpersonal escape and interpersonal seeking. This first descriptive finding indicates that there seem to be no structural differences between the groups in terms of travel motivation. Our findings further showed that participants tended to judge themselves as being less motivated by motives for personal escape, interpersonal escape, personal seeking and interpersonal seeking than those who they perceive as typical tourists. Given that similar patterns were found across the groups, differences in the perception of the self and typical tourists seem not to be limited towards seemingly non-institutionalized forms of

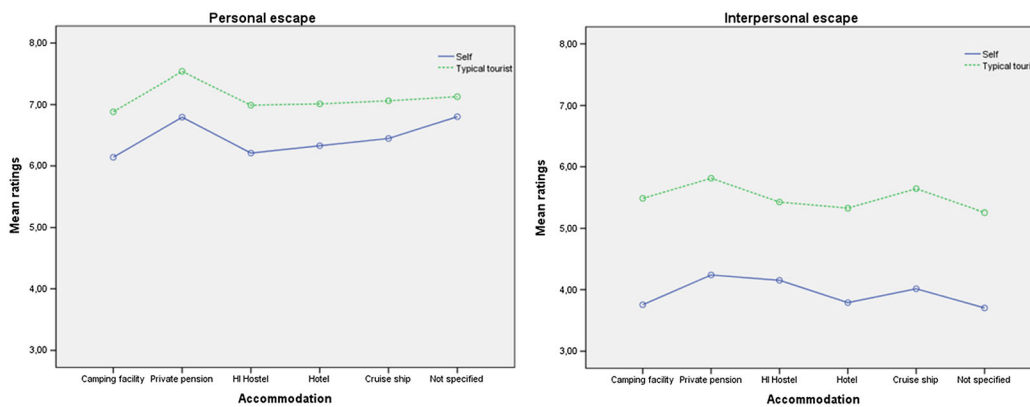


Figure 2. Social comparisons of people involved in different forms of tourism (i.e. accommodation) for the two escaping dimensions.

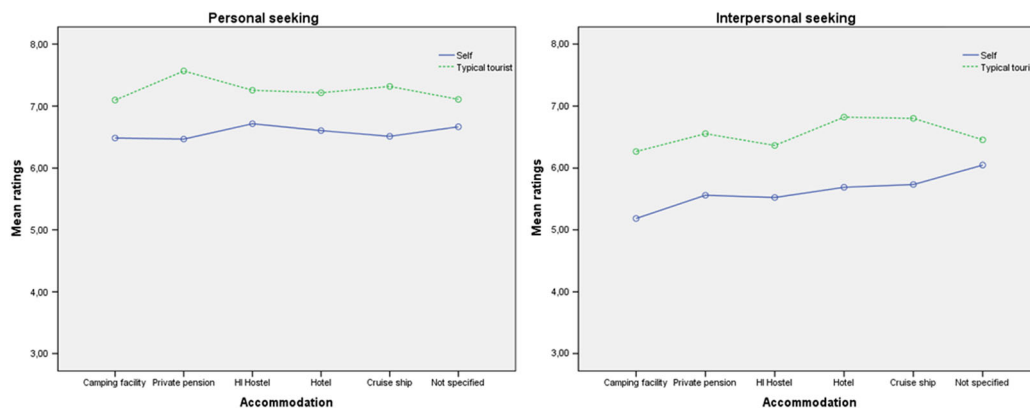


Figure 3. Social comparisons of people involved in different forms of tourism (i.e. accommodation) for the two seeking dimensions.

tourism such as backpacking. Quite on the contrary, tendencies to dissociate the self from the mainstream tourist population seem to generalize across people involved in different forms of tourism. This finding corroborates recent findings by Larsen *et al.* (2011) concerning differences and similarities between backpackers and 'mainstreamers'; our results indicate that people involved in different forms of tourism are similar to each other in terms of structure of travel motivation as well as in terms of perceived distinctiveness to typical tourists. In other words, our results led us to assume that most tourists consider themselves as individualists to some degree – independent of their choice of accommodation as an indicator of form of tourism.

Recent developments in the study of tourist experiences have emphasized the importance of focusing on subjective perceptions as a core element within the process of constructing the tourist experience (e.g. Larsen, 2007; Bond and Falk, 2013). For example, a recent study from Luring (2013) examined how charter tourists cope with the dichotomy of holding individualistic self-ideals while simultaneously being exposed to patterns of collectivistic consumption. It was found that people adjust their ideals and behaviours during the course of their vacation in order 'to minimize the gap between expected and enacted experiences, thus subjectively producing a desirable tourist product' (Luring, 2013, p. 233). Our finding that people contrast their own characteristics to those of typical tourists (a) strengthens the view that subjective perceptions play an important part in the construction of the tourist experience and (b) provides some additional insights with regard to tourist typologies. Although a classification of different tourist types may still be legitimate under some circumstances, these often externally based observations might not be applicable at all times. At least when considering psychological variables such as travel motivation, categorizations between non-institutionalized and institutionalized forms of tourism seem not necessarily to be in accordance with people's self-perception while on vacation: to be an authentic (or individualistic) traveller with characteristics different from those represented in the mainstream tourist population. Decision-makers in destination management could probably consider offering services and products that could fulfil people's desire to be perceived as an authentic (or individualistic) traveller despite the fact that tourists are often part of a larger tourism system with standardized vacation schemes. Highlighting every tourists individuality, and customizing services and products to this aim, is a difficult task, but could probably increase the experience of 'being special' in all tourists.

McCabe (2005) criticized that despite an emerging focus on subjectivities, tourist studies often lack an understanding of how people construct their tourist experiences within a broader social context. The present research aimed at addressing this gap by examining the social comparison of travel motives, and our results offer some additional insights about how people perceive themselves in relation to others while being on vacation. Maybe of particular interest are the results of our study with regard to how social comparisons may be related to social identity processes and how these, in turn, may influence the construction of the tourist experience. Social identities are 'that part of an individual's

self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). It can be speculated that to perceive oneself as a stereotypical tourist activates mental representations that are incongruent with people's self-perception of being an authentic (or individualistic) traveller. In this sense, differences in the perception of the self and typical tourists may allow people to maintain a positive sense of social identity (i.e. to be an authentic traveller rather than a stereotyped tourist), despite the fact that they are involved in tourism activities that are simultaneously shared by many others. Empirical support for this interpretation comes from Prebensen *et al.* (2003) who demonstrated that people tend to conceive of themselves as non-typical tourists while having similar travel motives and travel activities as those who perceive themselves as typical tourists.

Although this study provides further evidence for the claim 'that' people wish to distinguish themselves from typical tourists in terms of their individual characteristics, the question of 'why' still remains one that has to be addressed empirically. Findings from qualitative interviews suggest that people tend to dissociate the self from typical tourists by claiming a position that is perceived as morally superior (e.g. McCabe and Stokoe, 2004; Gillespie, 2006). Although this type of research is important in the sense that it contributes to exploring the nature of social comparisons and its underlying mechanisms, additional quantitative research is needed in order to test for the external validity of such findings. For example, future studies could examine whether tourists systematically perceive their own travel motives to be in line with a desirable standard while associating less desirable travel motives with other tourists (see also Doran and Larsen, 2014). In the same vein, self-favourable perceptions might be found not just on an individual level but also with regard to evaluations concerning different social groups. Future studies could therefore investigate whether tourists who are perceived as socially distant are derogated in terms of holding less desirable travel motives and/or engaging in less desirable travel behaviours. In directing questions such as these, one would have a more detailed understanding of what influences people to perceive own characteristics to be different from those represented in the mainstream tourist population, and if these tendencies are related to social identity processes.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although our empirical findings are consistent and compelling, there are still certain limitations. First, this study investigated the social comparison of travel motives, that is, participants were asked to judge the characteristics of themselves and typical tourists in terms of travel motivation. Future studies are needed to examine whether similar tendencies can be observed when participants are asked to judge the characteristics of themselves and typical tourists on other dimensions of interest. For example, the magnitude of the effect might change when people engage in social comparisons with regard to their actual travel behaviours.

Second, the operational criterion that was applied in order to distinguish between participants was based exclusively on information concerning last night's accommodation. Although it can reasonably be argued that backpackers and cruise ship passengers are exposed to different levels of institutionalization, self-report measures may offer some additional insights into differences and similarities among tourists. One way of addressing this issue could be psychometric scales that aim at measuring tourist role orientation as an indicator of tourist type (see e.g. Gnoth and Zins, 2010). This type of approach produces self-report data that allow for distinguishing between tourist types (e.g. individualistic tourists and mass tourists), which may then be used to investigate differences and similarities among these groups.

Third, some of the Cronbach's alpha values were relatively low. This may be due to the small number of items that were used to measure each motivational dimension (cf. Dunn Ross and Iso-Ahola, 1991). Future research may therefore attempt to replicate the findings of this study not only with respect to the measures applied in this study but also by including additional items in order to increase reliability.

CONCLUSION

Given the assumption that tourists do not represent a homogeneous group, scholars have made attempts of classifying tourists into distinct categories. For example, a common distinction has been made between those involved in non-institutionalized and those involved in institutionalized forms of tourism. The aim of this study was to investigate whether there are tendencies to dissociate the self from typical tourists in terms of travel motivation and, more importantly, if such tendencies are represented similarly across people involved in different forms of tourism. Our findings, particularly the finding that participants distinguished themselves from typical tourists in terms of travel motivation in a similar fashion, offer some important implications for tourism researchers and destination management alike.

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