

## Moving beyond tourists' concepts of authenticity: place-based tourism differentiation within rural zones of Chilean Patagonia

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This paper explores the potential for rural and remote zones of emergent destinations to base their tourism development on endogenous resources and place-based differentiation through analysis of a two-phase case study within the geographic zone known as Patagonia. The first phase of the research explored independent tourism consumption within a new independent travel circuit designed to integrate rural zones of the Aysén Region of Chile with adjacent tourism zones in the Santa Cruz Province of Argentina, including the iconic Mount Fitz Roy and the town of El Chalten. This phase sought to understand perceptions and preferences relating to authenticity. Results highlighted differences between host and guest concepts of welcome; which, negatively impacted consumption in the rural Chilean zones of the circuit. The second phase explored local service provider perspectives within these zones, surfacing place-based customs and practices that, while authentic, were not recognized, understood, or valued by the visitors who participated in phase one. Discussion proposes that subtle aspects of local cultures, such as those identified by the current study, represent unrecognized endogenous assets that can be leveraged within differentiation strategies for place-based development, thus providing emergent destinations with alternatives to place-neutral strategies, like commodification and standardization.

**Keywords:** authenticity; identity; sustainable tourism; construction (of place); commodification; endogenous

### Introduction

The past decade has witnessed that a growing number of countries, including Australia, Hungary, India, New Zealand, the Philippines, Scotland, and Taiwan, recognize and reflect the behaviors and preferences of independent travelers within their tourism policies and strategies (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2010; Newlands, 2004; Nurko, Koniszcz, & Berry, 2012; Richards, 2008; Richards & Wilson, 2004; Slaughter, 2004; Speed & Harrison, 2004). In 2012, the Chilean government published a new National Tourism Strategy, announcing aggressive growth plans during the period of 2012–2020, with emphasis on both national and international independent travelers. For Chile, these travelers span a wide variety of demographic groups, including young professionals, families, and retirees;

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