

Authenticity and Tourism in Kazakhstan: Neo-nomadic Culture in the Post-Soviet Era



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For Lucile, Jasmine and Zoya

Also dedicated to the People of Kazakhstan

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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List of Abbreviations

CBT	community-based tourism
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Community of Independent States
ETPACK	Ecological Tourism and Public Awareness in Central Kazakhstan
FIT	free independent traveller
IBPP	Institution Building Partnership Program
KTA	Kazakhstan Tourism Association
NABU	The German Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VFR	visiting friends and relatives
WOM	word of mouth
WTO	World Tourism Organization

Glossary

<i>Ak Orda</i>	Kazakhstani presidential palace
<i>Aul</i>	Kazakhstani village
<i>bauirsak</i>	traditional doughnut
<i>bes barmak</i>	traditional dish made out of horse meat
<i>buzkashi</i>	traditional Central Asian sport played with a headless goat carcass
<i>dombra</i>	traditional guitar made out of two strings
<i>dastarkhan</i>	traditional table filled with dishes
<i>Khan Shatyr</i>	an entertainment centre in Astana city
<i>kilim</i>	flat tapestry-woven carpets or rugs
<i>körpe</i>	traditional mattress
<i>Kanshengel</i>	‘Tulip’ tour village
<i>kuyrdak</i>	traditional dish made from roasted horse
<i>kykpar</i>	traditional goat game in central asia (also called buzkashi)
<i>kymiz</i>	fermented horse milk
<i>kyrt</i>	cow salted dry cheese
<i>kystau</i>	winter settlements
<i>lagman</i>	traditional soup originally from Uzbekistan
<i>mereke</i>	traditional festival
<i>nauryz</i>	Kazakhstani New Year
<i>samovar</i>	a large container for heating water, traditionally used in Russia and Central Asia for making tea

Shabanbai Bi 'Kyzylarai' tour village

shubat camel milk

tapochki slippers

zhaylau summer pastures settlements

Abstract

The country of Kazakhstan is not a well-known tourism destination, either globally or within Central Asia. Although the number of inbound tourists remains relatively small, the country possesses numerous tourism attractions based on its past Soviet times, nomadic culture and a variety of unique landscapes. As heritage is intrinsically a contested phenomenon subject to visitors' interpretations, the concept of authenticity applied to Kazakhstani cultural heritage has become particularly relevant to the specialists of cultural and sustainable tourism development in the country. Whereas the tourism industry tends to provide its own definitions of the traditional or typical, it is therefore important to gain an understanding of tourists' perceptions of authenticity of objects and experiences, as well as to understand how Kazakhstani tourism attractions and destinations are constructed and marketed by the private and public sectors.

This PhD research investigates the perception of authenticity in Kazakhstani tourism practices through the lenses of visitors, community members, policymakers and tourism developers involved in the development of eco-cultural tours. The thesis adopts an explorative/interpretive qualitative method. The fieldwork takes place in Almaty, Karaganda and Astana cities where policymakers and tourism developers are interviewed. Two embedded case studies in Central and South Kazakhstan serve as sources of empirical evidence to interview visitors and community members and evaluate how various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity allow higher levels of cultural-heritage penetration. Multiple sources of data include semi-structured interviews with groups of experts in nomadic culture, government officials, international and local visitors, local home-stay providers and tourism operators.

Using a grounded theory methodology, the thesis introduces the conceptual theory of transnomadic authenticity by constructing relationships among four major themes: 'the characteristics of the tourism experience', 'the destination context', 'global travelling trends and mobilities' and 'visitor profiles'. By advancing theoretical understandings of the role authenticity plays in visitors' access to cultural heritage, the

thesis provides a rich and broad context to comprehend how the model of transnomic authenticity can be used in visitors' perception of travelling destinations.

The thesis explores new directions in which to apply the concept of authenticity in eco-cultural tourism and makes important contributions to current debates in the authenticity literature about various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity. The thesis specifically details what attributes of the performative aspects of the tourism experiences authenticated by tourism suppliers and made available to visitors are influencing the host–guest relationship.

The study underpins the managerial implications of the process of commodification of Kazakhstani cultural heritage by detailing various stakeholders' authentication positions regarding topics identified as being important sources of authentic tourism experiences for visitors. This PhD research examines in particular the role authenticity plays in the planning and development of Kazakhstani tourism and local community participation and empowerment. The research also makes a practical contribution to literature associated with the incorporation of the notion of authenticity in future tourism products and experiences and their marketing to potential visitors.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale and significance of the study

During the 1920s and 1930s, the cultural landscapes of Kazakhstan underwent tremendous processes of transformation as the people moved from pastoral nomadic activities to large-scale tilled soils (Svanberg, 1999). According to Laruelle (2008, p. 14), the nomadic lifestyle that was prevalent in the beginning of the 1930s transformed rapidly during Soviet times and this led to profound cultural and sociological changes for the nomadic populations:

The brutal transformation of nomadic and semi-nomadic livestock breeding into an agricultural based system regulated by Soviet Union rules gave birth to a new form of transhumance pastoralism that deeply reshaped the Kazakhstani society during the second half of the twentieth century.

Svanberg (1999, p. 1) argues that “the Soviet system was the prerequisite for the creation of Kazakhstan.” Yet, despite major changes in nomadic traditions induced by the forced collectivisation during the Soviet era, Schreiber (2008, p. 90) affirms nomadic lifestyles never really disappeared:

Nomadic lifestyles never really died out [...]. Since the end of the Soviet period the nomadic way of life has demonstrated its ability to support life at a time of material penury and difficult self-discovery for the Kazakhs. The yurt, in some places preserved with much care, has regained its place of honour. Knowledge about the weather, the characteristics of plants, water and animals are once again being applied.

Kunanbaeva (2008), however, states that the *nomadic cycle* of seasons has endured changes due to the rapid modernisation of the country. The changing aspect of the material culture in Kazakhstan has transformed elements of the traditional nomadic culture into new evolved lifestyles and traditions. For Schreiber (2008, p. 91), the transhumance movements characterising nomadic migrations evolved to semi-nomadism with the acceleration of sedentarisation of former nomadic populations in the villages in the winter time:

Nomadic migrations are no longer exceptional, and in summer you can find mobile nomads' settlements called *zhaylau* in many steppe valleys and mountain pastures [...]. In winter camps, called *kystau*, things have changed slightly from a century ago, with herdsmen now living in huts or houses in most cases supplied by electricity [...]. These communities of herdsmen, who during the warm season follow the food and water with their herds, but in winter occupy fixed dwelling places, are called semi-nomads.

According to Laruelle (2008, p. 18), "the reconstitution of national traditions and the renaissance of a local nomadic folklore have been central to the restoration of a lost identity since the independence of Kazakhstan from the Soviet Union in 1991." Others see the evolution of Kazakhstani nomadic culture not as an immutable way of life based on its intrinsic cultural values, but rather as one based on the reintegration since the 1920-1930s of the Soviet period into the national history accounts; this latter perspective acknowledges the complexity of the reconstruction of the Kazakhstani identity and its many paradoxes in the post-Soviet era (Massanov, Abylhojin, & Erofeeva, 2007, as cited in Laruelle, 2008).

Kazakhstan has faced drastic changes in its cultural, economic and political situation since independence. Economic changes as well as major political events, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Summit in November 2010 and international sports competitions, such as the 7th Asian Winter Games in February 2011, have forced the national government to look more closely at the development of its tourism industry. While the country hosted the 18th World Tourism Organization (WTO) assembly, in the capital city, Astana, in September 2009, the Minister of Tourism and Sport of the Republic of Kazakhstan declared that "today tourists seek new ideas and travel destinations, are interested in the history of nomad civilizations as well as ecological and active tourism" (Dosmukhambetov, 2009). This perspective was reinforced by the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Kazakhstan which stated that "ecological tourism is considered one of the priority directions for the development of the country" (Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2010).

The modernisation of Kazakhstani lifestyles and international tourism development has led to an increase in the number of visitor arrivals, with visitors primarily looking for Silk Road, adventure and extreme tours (Werner, 2003). The Travel and Tourism Competitive Index 2013 issued by the World Economic Forum (2013) ranks Kazakhstan

in the 88th position out of 139 and evaluates the number of international tourist arrivals in the country in 2011 at around 40,930 visitors. The growing development of the business and ecotourism sectors in the country is attracting visitors coming essentially from the Community of Independent States (CIS), China, Germany and Turkey (Euromonitor, 2013). As Schreiber (2008, p. 91) details, travellers who visit Kazakhstan are able to experience the lifestyles of semi-nomadic livestock breeders again:

Semi-nomadic livestock breeding is recovering well in the country, with families gradually gaining a position of modest prosperity to the extent that the travellers who are invited in for a bowl of *kymiz* (fermented horse milk) inside the yurt may find to their surprise that a refrigerator and a TV set have been added to the room's many colourful decorations.

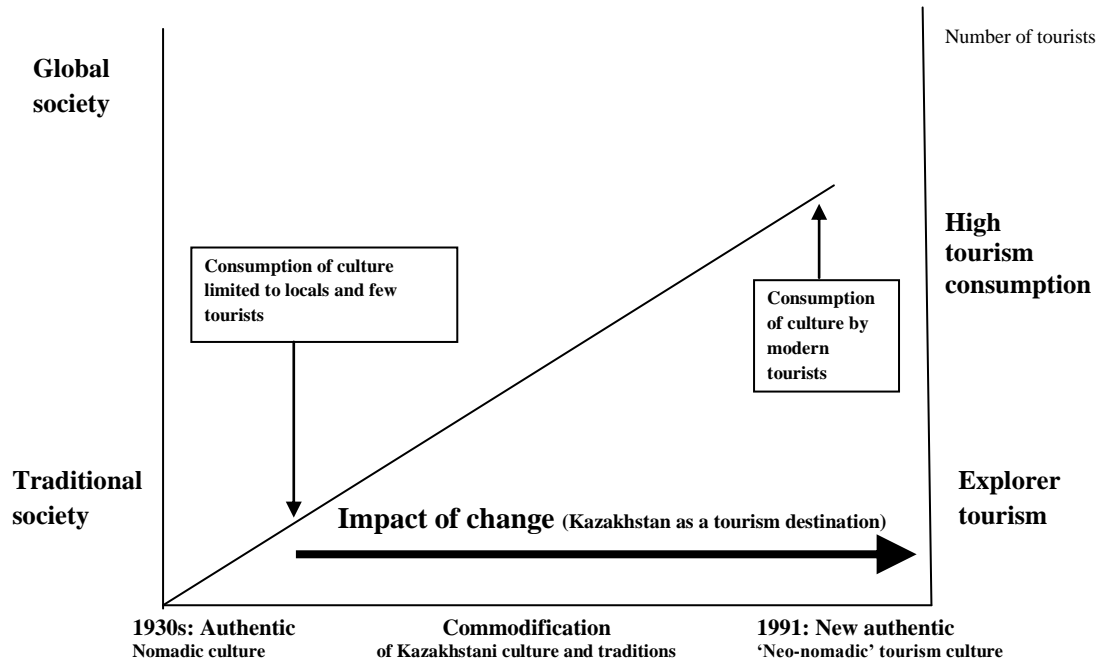
As Kazakhstan keeps defining the dynamic nature of its cultural heritage and the potential of its eco-cultural tourism practices to attract new visitors, it becomes important to define the various stakeholders' perceptions of the 'old' and 'new' authenticity as they apply to the Kazakhstani cultural heritage.

1.1.1 Authenticity and neo-nomadic culture

The perception of a 'real' travel experience is built upon the notion of a genuine local tourism experience, which raises the issue of what is defined as authentic, original and local (Belhassen & Caton, 2006; M. Smith & Duffy, 2003; Yeoman, Brass, & McMahon-Beattie, 2007). For Smith and Duffy (2003, p. 114) "the attribute 'authentic' is usually given to something that is genuine and original, that can be certified by evidence, or remains true to a tradition."

Prideaux and Timothy (2008) argue that the changing aspect of the material culture with time ultimately creates a new authenticity. The explanatory model below (Figure 1.1), adapted to the Kazakhstani context, details the commodification processes resulting from the growing number of visitors that influence cultural change and the authenticity of cultural products.

Figure 1.1: Influence on culture as tourism moves from small scale to mass scale



Source: Adapted from Prideaux and Timothy (2008, p. 3).

The desire for new authentic tourism products is explained in the above model as being the result of the visitors' need for new iconic places in 'off the beaten track' tourism destinations where the consumption of culture is limited to locals and few tourists. As Prideaux and Timothy explain (2008, p. 3):

The model may also be used to classify heritage destinations and visitors using a spectrum that commences with the authentic and then plots the evolution of the authentic through commodification and ultimately the metamorphosis of the authentic into a new authenticity.

In line with the framework of this model, various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity as they relate to nomadic culture are investigated in this thesis. In particular, stakeholders' authentication positions of what is described in the research as *neo-nomadic tourism culture* are examined. This terminology has been chosen by the researcher to qualify 'the new state of authenticity' of the Kazakhstani cultural heritage which has endured a steady commodification process of its cultural artefacts and traditions for the sake of tourism development.

For Wang (1999, p. 350), "authenticity is relevant to some kinds of tourism such as ethnic, history or culture tourism, which involve the representation of the Other or of

the past.” As Jamal and Hill (2004, p. 354) argue, when developing a framework for indicators of authenticity in cultural and heritage tourism:

It is essential to understand tourists’ perceptions and experiences of objects, events and their properties, as well as to understand the role of the private and public sectors in the packaging and marketing of tourism attractions and destinations.

Reisinger and Steiner (2006) and Wang (1999) state that objectivist and modernist authors argue that there is an evident, objective basis for judging authenticity. Conversely, constructivists suggest that tourists’ experiences or perceptions can be authentic even when they are perfectly aware that the setting has been contrived (Cohen, 1988). Much of the debate surrounding authenticity evolves around the question of what can be authentic. For Reisinger and Steiner (2006) and Wang (1999), existential authenticity is not object based but activity based and can be divided into two dimensions: intra-personal (bodily feelings) and inter-personal (self-making). For Kolar and Zabkar (2010) and Lau (2010), these diverging views also reflect the different epistemological and philosophical positions that have a stake in the conceptualisation of authenticity. Kolar and Zabkar (2010, p. 653) suggest that from a managerial point of view, “tourism managers should devote more attention to subtle and deeply ingrained societal changes that exist outside the tourism market yet which essentially shape tourist behaviour and experiences.”

In regards to these theoretical assumptions when considering the Kazakhstani Soviet and post-Soviet heritage, the study examined questions of authenticity regarding Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism practices. The literature has some models available – objective, constructive, existential and experience-based aspects of authenticity (Cohen, 1988; Jamal & Hill, 2004; MacLeod, 2006; N. Wang, 1999), the ‘life cycle of authenticity’ (Xie & Lane, 2006), and performative aspects of authenticity (Knudsen & Waade, 2010) – but all of these were developed and tested on samples and populations other than those of interest to the researcher. Likewise, theories focused on questions of authenticity in tourism do exist, but they are incomplete as they do not address potentially valuable variables of interest to the researcher, which are questions of authenticity of various stakeholders involved in the development of eco-cultural tourism in Kazakhstan.

From a practical perspective, tourism researchers need to develop theories that explain how people are experiencing a phenomenon. For Kolar and Zabkar (2010, p. 659), “the pragmatic, experiential, and, above all, consumer-based approach that is currently neglected in tourism research should be given more attention.” In particular, there is a need for research to be conducted about: how the notion of authenticity is understood, perceived and constructed by multiple stakeholders involved in the development of eco-cultural tourism; how the managerial implications of the process of commodification of authenticity contribute to reaching equilibrium between various stakeholders’ authentication positions so that the eco-cultural tourism experience remains appealing for visitors; and in what ways a deeper understanding of authenticity can be used to inform the planning and future development of tourism.

In particular, there is a need to address the role authenticity plays in the host–guest relationship and how the perception of authenticity can lead to better understanding of destinations’ cultural heritage.

1.1.2 Authenticity and eco-cultural tourism in Kazakhstan

For Reisinger (1994, p. 24), cultural tourism can be defined “as a genre of special tourism based on the search for and participation in new and deep cultural experience, whether aesthetic, intellectual, emotional or psychological.” While cultural tourism usually involves exposure to a culture in an indirect way, ethnic tourism is defined as a component of cultural tourism involving a direct experience with another culture (Wood, 1984). Community-based tourism (CBT) centres more particularly on the involvement of the host community in planning and maintaining tourism development in order to create a more sustainable industry (Hall, 1996). Carr argues (2008, p. 36) that “the diversification of indigenous cultural tourism products from ‘handicraft, heritage and history’ categories, to include a focus on ‘habitat’ (V. L. Smith, 1996, as cited in Carr, 2008) has increased with the popularity of adventure tourism and ecotourism operations.” Such forms of tourism, called ‘eco-cultural tourism’, “are sustainable and differ from mass tourism in profit levels, distribution of gain and control of the enterprise” (G. Wallace, 2002). Eco-cultural tourism can thus be presented as a concept in which ecological and cultural aspects of a landscape are combined to create experiences for tourists (G. Wallace & Russell, 2004).

One of the main discourses of cultural tourism is derived from the idea that nostalgia for the past (Graburn, 1995; Graburn, Butler, & Pearce, 1995; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) is experienced primarily by citizens of developed countries who aim at going to the countryside as a way to escape modernity and get back to a simpler way of life (MacCannell, 1992). Visitors are, therefore, becoming increasingly concerned about the authenticity of eco-cultural tourism practices when they visit culturally and environmentally remote regions. Wallace and Russell (2004, p. 236) argue that “eco-cultural tourism reflects present-day practice, but also acts as a model for how cultural and eco-tourism could be employed by local people to build an empowered, sustainable future in similar settings.” What tourists usually see is the performative aspect of local cultures – a ‘performed authenticity’ created, staged and carried out for external consumption (MacCannell, 1976). It is important, therefore, for the researcher to place this ‘authenticity’ in the context of how and why the tourism industry defines and presents its version of the genuinely local in both ecological and cultural aspects of tourism experience (Jamal & Hill, 2002, 2004).

With the increasing commodification of cultural heritage and the demand of various types of ethnic tourism, community-based tourism (CBT) and ecological tourism in Kazakhstan (Schreiber, 2008; Werner, 2003), visitors can discover the country with tourism operators working with home-stay providers who have ancestral links to the villages (Carr, 2008). In this way, the eco-tourist “yearns for a specialised, exclusive experience” (G. Wallace & Russell, 2004, p. 236).

1.2 Research aim and objectives

The overall aim of this study is to investigate the perception of authenticity in Kazakhstani tourism practices through the lenses of visitors, community members, policymakers and tourism developers involved in the development of eco-cultural tours. Using two embedded case studies in Central and South Kazakhstan, the study aims to advance theoretical and empirical understandings of various stakeholders’ perceptions of authenticity in the comprehension of destinations’ cultural heritage. The research explores new directions in which to apply the concept of authenticity in eco-cultural tourism by theorising the link between both the perception of authenticity and the access to higher levels of cultural penetration and as a basis for interaction and social exchange within the host–guest relationship.

1.2.1 Research questions

An ongoing literature review allowed a background understanding of the different issues and themes around the notion of authenticity in eco-cultural tourism and helped to inform four main research objectives in this study:

1. To critically discuss models and dimensions of authenticity in the Kazakhstani tourism destination context.
 - a. How can the notions of global nomads and existential migration be integrated with existing models of authenticity and mobility studies?
 - b. What are the systems and models for managing equilibrium between various stakeholders involved in the authentication of cultural heritage?
 - c. What are the various parameters of the host–guest relationship that facilitate access to the ‘backstage’ of tourism encounters?
 - d. How do various stakeholders’ perceptions of authenticity affect the host–guest relationship in eco-cultural tourism experiences?
2. To record and review various stakeholders’ perceptions of authenticity in Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism practices.
 - a. How do perceptions of authenticity of community members, policymakers and tourism developers contribute to informing the characteristics of visitors’ tourism experiences?
 - b. How do visitors’ perceptions of authenticity influence the performative aspects of the tourism experiences made available to them by tourism providers?
 - c. How and why do perceptions and experiences of authenticity vary across key stakeholder groups?
3. To examine in what ways a deeper understanding of authenticity can be used to inform the planning and future development of tourism.
 - a. How can the concepts of intimacy, disorientation and reciprocity contribute to augmenting the authenticity of the visitors’ experiences?

- b. How can the notion of authenticity in tourism products and experiences be used as a mode of promotion for the host communities?
 - c. How can the concept of authenticity add to stakeholders' modes of reciprocity when developing tourism?
4. To evaluate the contribution of grounded theory methodology when exploring various stakeholders' authentication positions in eco-cultural tourism practices.

The 'Kyzylarai' tour in Central Kazakhstan and the 'Tulip' tour in South Kazakhstan, both described in Chapter 2, served as case studies through which to evaluate stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity of various elements of Kazakhstani cultural heritage tourism.

1.3 Organisation of the thesis

Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical foundations of the concept of authenticity in cultural heritage tourism and examines how the perception of authenticity of multiple stakeholders can be used to enhance the host communities and visitors' experiences. The review begins with introducing the notions of global nomads and existential migration as they apply to the question of authenticity in mobility studies. It is then followed by an examination of the commodification of authenticity and the visitors' access to cultural heritage. A life cycle of authenticity (Xie & Lane, 2006) as a system for managing equilibrium between various stakeholders involved in the authentication of cultural heritage is presented. The review then develops various dimensions and aspects for addressing authenticity in cultural-heritage tourism (Jamal & Hill, 2004) and defines epistemological approaches that frame the construction of authenticity in eco-cultural tourism practices. Other dimensions that form part of this review include a definition of the notion of authentication examined from the perspectives of both tourism providers and visitors. The review then extends to look at the distinct social processes associated with each mode of authentication and, in particular, considers the performative practices of authentication that affect the host–guest relationship. The review of the literature concludes by exploring factors that influence and affect the host–guest relationship, in particular the notions of intimacy, reciprocity and serendipity that affect the nature of their exchanges.

Chapter 3 introduces the research design and describes the methods used in the study. The chapter begins by presenting the research framework and paradigm and the main reasons for using a qualitative research design. The discussion then focuses on the relevance of using the methodology of grounded theory as an appropriate method for the study. An embedded case study in Central Kazakhstan and a second one in South Kazakhstan serve as sources of empirical evidence to explain how various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity allow higher levels of cultural-heritage penetration. This is followed by an overview of the data collection process and the criteria used to recruit the research participants. Multiple sources of data including semi-structured interviews with groups of experts in nomadic culture, government officials, international and local visitors, local home-stay providers and tourism operators are detailed. A description of the different steps and the context necessary for the analysis and interpretation of the data then follows. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the process for generating a theory using the grounded theory approach.

Chapter 4 presents the findings that focus on the perceptions of authenticity of community members (home-stay providers), policymakers (officials from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of the Republic of Kazakhstan), tourism developers ('Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan' and Tulip tour operators, and local and international NGOs) and specialists of nomadic culture in Kazakhstan. Using the cases of Kyzylarai and Tulip tours in Central and South Kazakhstan, the chapter is divided into three sections: an overview of the rebirth of nomadic culture in the country and its characterisation; tourism providers' authentication positions regarding various topic areas and indicators of authenticity incorporated into eco-cultural tourism experiences in the country; and the attributes of the performative aspects of the tourism experiences made available to visitors. Key findings of the chapter are illustrated by authenticity concepts taken from the academic literature to clarify the depth and complexity of various tourism providers' perception of authenticity in Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism practices.

Chapter 5 addresses the findings related to visitors' perceptions of authenticity when undertaking eco-cultural tours in Kazakhstan. The visitors were both Kyzylarai and Tulip tour clients, and Free Independent Travellers (FITs) comprised of expatriates, international travellers, Kazakhstani and international students. The chapter is also

divided into three sections: visitors' evaluations of an authentic tourism experience in Kazakhstan; a detailed overview of the visitors' perceptions of nomadic culture and the characteristics of its renaissance from the identified study themes in Chapter 4; and visitors' quests for authentic experiences. This last section considers the attributes of the performative aspects of authenticity as they relate to the visitors' travelling experiences in Kazakhstan. The structure of the chapter follows the structure of chapter 4 to inform various themes and categories of the transnomadic authenticity model developed in chapter 6. Key findings of the chapter are illustrated by authenticity concepts taken from the academic literature to clarify the depth and complexity of various visitors' perceptions of authenticity in Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism practices.

Chapter 6 draws on cross-cutting themes identified from the various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity identified in chapters 4 and 5. The chapter starts with an introduction and a presentation of the model of 'transnomadic authenticity' in Kazakhstani tourism encounters using the grounded theory methodology. By outlining the tensions between tourism providers and visitors' perception of authenticity in Kazakhstani tourism encounters, the chapter presents the themes and their categories that ground the transnomadic authenticity model. Four elements undergoing dynamic and interactive changes are then discussed as factors that influence the qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity. The qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity are detailed at the end of the chapter.

The concluding chapter recapitulates the main study findings and the theoretical and empirical contributions of the thesis. The chapter starts with an overview of the research and answers to the major research questions. A proposition to integrate the transnomadic authenticity model into cultural-heritage tourism is then examined. The chapter describes in particular the various parameters of the host–guest relationship that facilitate access to the 'backstage' of tourism destinations. The thesis ends with a brief analysis of the future research agenda needed to broaden the scope of implementation of some of the qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity.

Chapter 2: Constructing Authenticity in Cultural-heritage Tourism

This literature review examines the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of authenticity in cultural-heritage tourism. It informs in particular how multiple stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity can be used to enhance visitors' experiences.

The chapter begins with a review of the global travelling trends and movements of people that induce the quest for authentic tourism products and experiences. A review of the main authenticity aspects inherent in a tourism experience is then presented. The associated and growing commodification of cultural artefacts and experiences performed by local tourism providers for external visitors' consumption are subject to analysis following the theoretical framework developed by Jamal and Hill (2004) that addresses authenticity in cultural-heritage tourism.

These theoretical underpinnings set the background to then examine different dimensions of authenticity applied to various themes in the study as sources of authentic experiences for visitors.

2.1 Searching for authenticity in contemporary tourism places

According to Clifford (1997, p. 1), travel is an integral part of the "new world order of mobility". Fast and cheap transportation methods inherent in globalisation have accelerated the number of people travelling around the world (Burns & Novelli, 2008; D'Andrea, 2006; G. Richards & Wilson, 2004). The search for meaning in modern societies and the search for the 'primitive Other' in Western travellers' visits to 'off the beaten track' destinations encourage pilgrimage to sites of differentiation (MacCannell, 1992).

Urry (2000) argues there is no single authentic dwelling when people are moving from place to place. As such, "dwelling is emergent, temporal, plural, imagined, and, most importantly, contextual and object-involved" (Y. Wang, 2007, p. 799). The disappearance of pre-modern cultures and the increasing threat of extension of others like the nomadic culture encourage travellers to discover them before they cease to exist. The search for authentic tourism destinations has become synonymous with the discovery of 'real' cultural aspects before they disappear.

2.1.1 Tourists, existential migration and neo-nomads

Richards and Wilson cite Kaplan (1996) when theorising notions of global nomads and mobilities among backpacker tourists; they explain that the process of travelling like a nomad does not represent just the 'Other' to be visited, but also an idealised form of travel as liberation from the constraints of modern society:

The global nomad crosses physical and cultural barriers with apparent ease in the search for difference and differentiation [...]. Once they have consumed the experiences offered by one place, they need to move on to find new ones. Just like the traditional nomadic peoples, the global nomad constantly moves from place to place.

G. Richards and Wilson (2004, p. 5)

For global nomads, "leaving home and travel can be the expression of a spiritual quest, but also a way to find one's values better reflected in foreign cultures rather than in their own home cultures and families" (Madison, 2006, p. 11). The idea of self-transformation when travelling presupposes how the relation to dichotomous themes such as 'freedom' and 'belonging' transforms during relocations. D'Andrea specifies that:

For global nomads, mobility is more than merely a spatial displacement. It is also a component of their economic strategies, as well as of their own self-identities and modes of subjectivity.

D'Andrea (2006, p. 105)

In parallel to theories underpinning global nomads' motivations to travel, Madison reveals that individuals who choose to leave their homeland to become foreigners in a new culture are driven by existential meanings:

Voluntary migrants are seeking greater possibilities for self-actualising, exploring foreign cultures in order to assess their own identity, and ultimately grappling with issues of home and belonging in the world generally.

Madison (2006, p. 1)

What Madison (2006, p. 9) refers to as 'existential migration' comprises individuals interested in "sustaining enhanced possibilities for self-awareness, independence and freedom, authenticity and 'homecoming' arising from confrontation with the non-ordinary." D'Andrea conceptualises the interrelationship between the movements of peoples and subjectivity formation into a theory of 'neo-nomadism'. He explains (2006,

p. 98) that 'expressive expatriates' or, more generally, global nomads are individuals cherishing values of "autonomy, self-expression and experimentation." Furthermore, the process of travelling allows them to reject 'mainstream' (sedentary) societies towards countercultural (nomadic) lifestyles. When defining the different processes inherent in expatriation, D'Andrea associates the notion of neo-nomadism with the idea of self-transformation:

The co-presence of multinational backgrounds, nomadic practices and transpersonal experiences in the biographies of expressive expatriates is defining features of 'neo-nomadism' [...]. Neo-nomads migrate through sites of experience, in search of more excitement and insight into their inner self.

D'Andrea (2006, p. 116)

Some authors argue that the idea of 'self-transformation' while travelling is strongly correlated to the visitors' search of authenticity. Wang summarises the underlying reasons behind visitors' construction of authentic tourism experiences while on travel:

Today, everyone lives in 'travelling cultures', where people go places and dwell on travel. As a result, most of them end up arriving where they started from, willingly but unconsciously [...]. Therefore, there is no single, fixed, authentic home/self to be found and, in fact, this unspecific sense of home/self sought in touristic experiences is being constantly constructed (through both imagination and materiality) by the tourist self and the toured object jointly.

Y. Wang (2007, pp. 796-799)

For other authors, the idea of the tourist finding the 'genuine Otherness' in other cultures is motivated by existential reasons in narrating one's self-identity. Smith and Duffy assert the search for self-identity one self in travels can be linked to the search for authentic tourism experiences as a way to counterbalance something missing in their own societies:

Perhaps, the tourist's search for authenticity in other cultures is a search for something lacking in their own, perhaps even a search for an elusive self-identity [...]. The ways that tourists conceptualize, define and describe their tourist experiences reveal that travel stories assist individuals in narrating self-identity.

Smith and Duffy (2003, pp. 115, 116)

The concept of an authentic travelling experience invariably restates the dichotomy between visitors' perceptions of authenticity and those of community members,

policymakers and local tourism developers, in particular the *processes* by which they authenticate tourism products and experiences:

The ways in which people decide to perform and present themselves cannot be taken for granted, but require an unpacking of the multiplicity of factors and competing agendas that determine how people actively and consciously construct cultural heritage.

MacCarthy (2012, p. 2)

Meanwhile, “what is considered objective knowledge is always the result of a perspective, and plural meanings can be extracted and constructed from the same experience from different perspectives” (N. Wang, 1999, p. 354). Xie (2011), when building on Bruner (1994), Wood (1997) and Taylor (2001), reaffirms the important question related to the politics of authentication of tourism experiences and objects: Who has the right, authority, or power to define what is authentic? It can be argued that, as authenticity emerges from the social processes, an understanding of the stakeholders’ views in the development of eco-cultural tourism practices is essential in the construction of future visitors’ tourism experiences. In particular, it becomes important to explain “how authentication is carried out as a particular culture’s form of expression by institutionalising and authorising social practices and knowledge” (Xie, 2011, p. 41).

2.1.2 Authenticity, commodification and cultural change

The question of authenticity is central to much literature on cultural heritage and tourism development (Cohen, 1988; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Jamal & Hill, 2004; N. Wang, 1999; Xie, 2011). Prideaux and Timothy (2008, p. 9) argue “Heritage is inherently a contested phenomenon, especially when communities are comprised of multiple ethnic groups, belief systems, cultures and social mores.” Prideaux and Timothy (2008, p. 4) also detail that the development of tourism induces cultural changes that give birth to “new forms of cultural expression that have to be accepted both by the tourist and that also fits into newly globalised form of culture that the local community has adopted.”

Of critical importance in the development of indicators of authenticity are the politics of representation, particularly in cultural and heritage sites and attractions (Richter & Harrison, 1992). For Jamal and Hill (2004, p. 369) “the dynamically constitutive nature

of heritage (both past and living) is a similarly important consideration for other national and public spaces characterised by emergent economies, globalizing cultures and hybrid populations.” When referring to the work of Bahbah (2004) about *The Location of Culture*, Hollinshead (1998, p. 123) argues “culture and ethnicity are in fact dynamically produced, reproduced and transformed.” For Xie (2011, p. 32), “the significance of the debate of authentic culture depends on what Bahbah called an ‘active agency’, where cultural meaning should be negotiated by a variety of parties.”

Smith and Duffy highlight the many paradoxes inherent in defining a ‘genuine’ cultural-heritage in tourism experiences:

While the issue of authenticity pervades the discourse of heritage, cultural and nature tourism, there is no simple, objective way of defining what is real, traditional or natural. In so far as authenticity is defined in terms of the existence of alternative (non-modern) forms of life, or of untouched wilderness, then the very presence of the tourist makes such experiences problematic.

Smith and Duffy (2003, p. 133)

The past is enigmatic and can only be comprehended using imprecise and socially constructed interpretations (Hewison, 1991). Prideaux and Timothy detail the issues encountered during the commodification processes of cultural heritage for the sake of tourism development:

At which point in time a culture should be frozen to be packaged and exhibited to tourists is therefore an important question that will ultimately be decided by the major stakeholders and the level of demand by tourists for specific tourism experiences.

Prideaux and Timothy (2008, p. 4)

Xie (2011, p. 38) argues that tourist attractions such as theme parks and folk villages “market authenticity but may prevent tourists’ assumed desire for genuine experiences.” He further details that cultural performance tends to rely on caricature and stereotype. The structured aspects of tourism events and the lack of intimacy between visitors and performers (Conran, 2006) favour a bigger temporal distance between one another. The access to cultural heritage consequently remains hidden to the gaze of visitors.

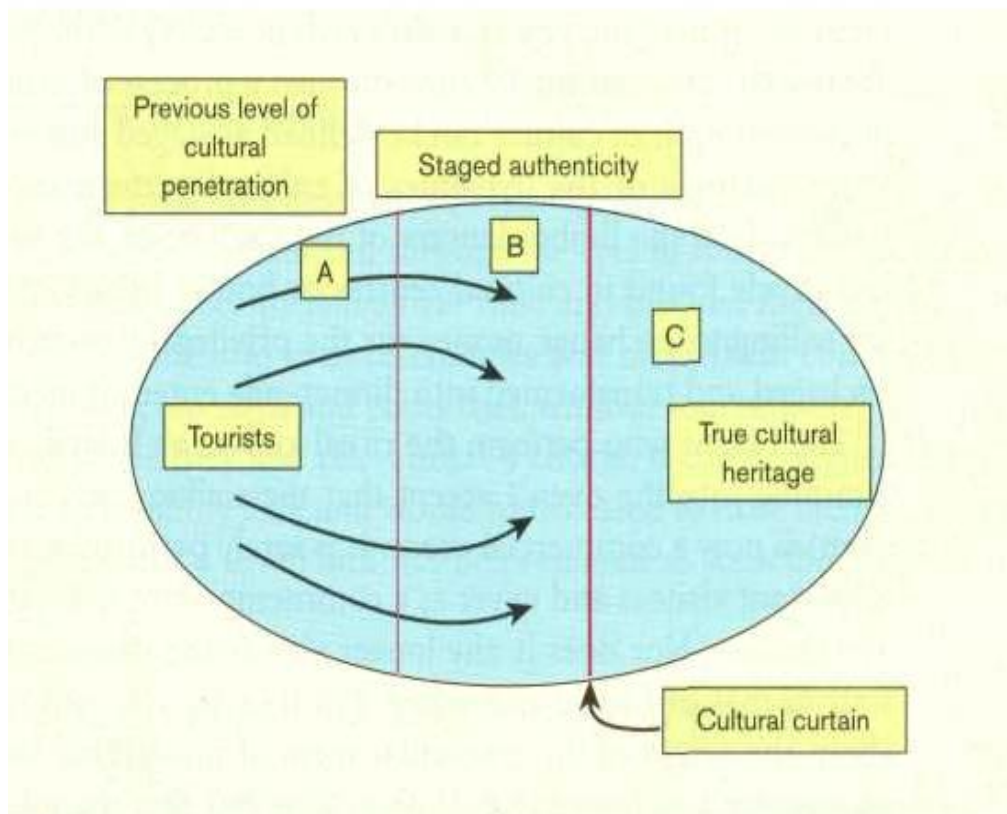
Despite the number of studies researching the question of authenticity in cultural-heritage tourism, there is no common agreement about how to interpret the various

meanings of authenticity given by tourists visiting 'off the beaten track' destinations. For some authors, the different views on authenticity are conflicting and ambiguous (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006) or reflect the immense complexity of the interacting phenomena (Costa & Bamossy, 2001, as cited in Kolar and Zapkar, 2010), while for others, a single real authentic culture does not exist (Bruner, 2005, p. 146). Jamal and Hill (2004) developed a framework for indicators of authenticity to analyse the relationship between various stakeholders involved in tourism development. By using various aspects of authenticity (objective, constructive and personal) in cultural-heritage tourism, Jamal and Hill's framework aims to assist managers and scholars to develop effective indicators for monitoring and managing cultural objects, sites and destinations (see Table 2.1 further in the chapter). As Kolar and Zabkar (2010, p. 652) point out, the key issue from a managerial point of view "is namely not its ultimate conceptual resolution, but primarily the question of how various notions and meanings of authenticity can be constructively applied in tourism."

2.1.3 The access to 'real culture': the 'front stage' and the 'backstage' dichotomy

MacCannell's (1973) theoretical development of staged authenticity, built upon Goffman's (1959) idea, discusses how local communities' daily activities can be performed specifically for visitors. Numerous tourism case studies debate a key question in the commodification of cultures: What can be adequately presented to visitors so that they have the perception of an authentic tourism experience? MacCannell's work (1976) reveals the complexity of the term authenticity and its multiple uses. Tourist settings can be viewed as a continuum, with the first and foremost region being the one that is most for show purposes and the sixth or backmost region being the one that is most authentic and "motivates touristic consciousness" (MacCannell, 1976, p. 102). Cooper (2005), when modelling the question of authenticity and levels of cultural penetration in tourism, details three main stages showcasing MacCannell's adaptation of Goffman's idea of a 'front stage' and 'backstage' region for tourism (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Levels of cultural penetration



Source: Cooper (2005, p. 244).

The three levels of the above model can be detailed as follows:

- Level A equates to the degree of previous visitors' tourism experience and cultural penetration.
- Level B represents the 'new' dimension cultural penetration, one which is considered to be authentic by the visitors even though the cultural performances are in fact staged and the host communities are acting in what it is considered to be the front region. Nevertheless, at level B, even though sometimes an object is being 'staged' through various modifications, its authenticity can still be perceived and even appreciated by the guests.
- Level C occurs where hosts' genuine cultural-heritage is maintained and cultural integrity and identity is kept by letting visitors on the other side of the cultural curtain (the 'backstage' region). This is the intimate and authentic part of the tourism destination that is sought by visitors.

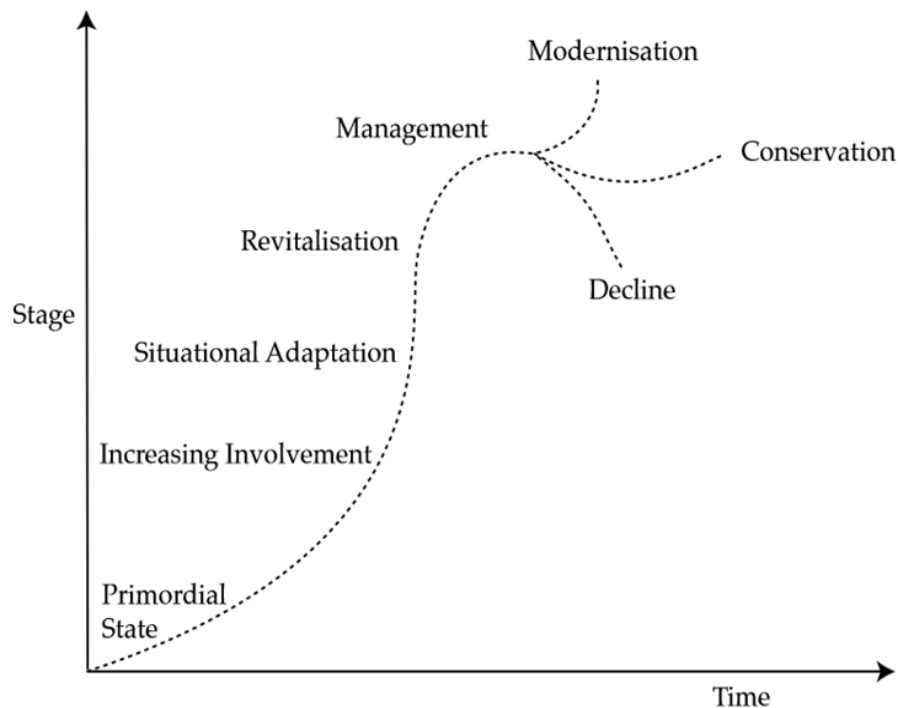
The critical issue in this model is the change of meaning of cultural products and human relations that occurs during the process of commodification. MacCannell (1973, p. 594) mentions that even the back regions can be staged ("false backs") and "localities can be staged as being remote in order to induce tourists to 'discover' them." Thus, misleading tourists to accept contrived touristic attractions as authentic creates a "false tourism consciousness" (Cohen, 1988, p. 373).

Taking into account the complexities around the question of authenticity in tourism studies, Xie and Lane (2006) observe that the power to authenticate tourism sites and experiences lies not only in the 'front stage' and 'backstage' dichotomy, but in a negotiated power between all agents involved in cultural-heritage development. These agencies include the government, ethnic communities, tourism businesses and the tourists, and the process results in a *cycle of authenticity* of tourism sites.

2.1.4 The cycle of authenticity

Xie (2011, p. 42) argues that "the meaning of authenticity is not history rather it is a nostalgic process realised in material objects, such as performing arts or craft, sites, special places and even whole landscapes." Drawing on mutually compatible ideas from Wallace (1956), Willis (1994) and Hitchcock (1999), Xie and Lane (2006, p. 548) have proposed the idea of applying a life cycle model to the impact of tourism on the authenticity of aboriginal arts performances, as "each stakeholder is actively involved in each stage of ethnic tourism development and the power relations are the essential ways to probe authentication." The life cycle model (Butler, 1980) is adapted in ethnic tourism (Figure 2.2) as a system for managing equilibrium between various stakeholders involved in the authentication of cultural heritage (Xie & Lane, 2006, p. 548). For Xie (2001, p. 12), the equilibrium can be understood as a way of "boundary maintenance" (Barth, 1969) whereby "exogenous factors, such as tourism development, may affect the boundary between what people do for visitors and what they do for themselves".

Figure 2.2: The cycle of authenticity in aboriginal arts performances



Source: Xie and Lane (2006, p. 548).

Xie and Lane (2006) argue that social structures comprising elements of tradition, heritage and culture face gradual changes which take place at a micro level with a traceable and identifiable cycle. They propose a model based on five stages to track the changes of ethnic tourism; the model considers who are the stakeholders involved in the authentication of ethnic tourism and how to balance economic development and cultural preservation in the process of authentication. Of particular importance are the criteria that are used to assess the perception of authenticity by the stakeholders involved in the development of ethnic tourism; these criteria measure the positions and tensions of the various stakeholders when authenticating ethnic tourism products.

Xie and Lane (2006) propose that the relationship between ethnic tourism and authenticity is subject to a change and potential revitalisation process that consists of at least five stages:

- *The primordial state*, when tourism is at its raw stage of development and performances are the product of spontaneous improvisations and intimate cultural experiences are more likely to happen between visitors and the local

community. Ethnic and cultural performances at this stage are not commercially oriented and are performed within the everyday lives of the local community and occasionally a small number of visitors.

- *Increasing involvement*, when the tourism market is maturing and attracts an increasing number of visitors, which implies an increasing commodification of performances. The power at play between different stakeholders involved in the tourism setting is negotiated between different interests, ranging from ethnic identity to a revival of indigenous cultures through the tourism performances. At this stage, tourism can be used to reinforce both the native culture's uniqueness and the host–guest relationship in a mutual beneficial creative reciprocity.
- *Situational adaptations*, when the commodification of local cultures is changing the meaning of the cultural products and practices that have become a means to promote cultural identity. Recognisable features and signs of traditional culture are commercialised according to what can be expected by visitors, sometimes to the extent of being remodelled to match the 'ideal' perception of the tourist. At this stage a form of cultural involution can be witnessed (McKean, 1989) as tourism infuses new meanings to current cultures and creates an hybrid culture.
- *Revitalisation*, when the original meanings of traditional cultures are revived so that they can be perceived as objectively authentic by the visitors. Cross-cultural interactions between hosts and guests are favoured in a way that reduces stereotypes and increases mutual understandings of both hosts and guests. At this stage authenticity can be also contrived but it is perceived by visitors as aesthetic, enjoyable and nostalgic experiences.
- *Management: modernisation, conservation or decline*, when multiple stakeholders are involved in the shaping and presentation of the tourism experiences. In modernisation, cultural performances can be detached from their context to be presented to the 'front stage' for the gaze of the visitors. The host–guest relationship is essentially transactional and a 'folklorization' of traditional cultures is taking place. In conservation, a cultural-heritage industry is planned that favours the establishment of tourism attractions based on genuine cultural heritage. Tourism is seen as a means to preserve and even

enhance the cultural value of sites. Finally, decline is associated with an extreme level of commodification of cultural performances that leads to the disappearance of the local traditional culture.

Xie and Lane (2006) argue that the S-shaped-curve model adapted to the question of authenticity may vary due to rapid changes in cultural fashion and the complex nature of ethnic tourism. In particular, the capacity of living cultures to adapt to changes has a different curve than a fossilised village where visitors are usually looking for objective authenticity. The cycle of authenticity model encompasses all stakeholders (tourism businesses, governments, local communities and visitors) involved in the development and management of cultural sites and their conservation. Xie and Lane (2006, p. 557) highlight that “it can also be a way by which local communities can take control over the management of their traditions within the thriving tensions and pressures of the globalization.”

In line with the cycle of authenticity model, Xie (2011) identifies various stakeholders involved in the processes of authentication and the criteria these stakeholders are using for assessing the ‘degree’ of authenticity of cultural tourism settings. In his research into Chinese ethnic tourism stakeholders, Xie classifies five main stakeholders. The first category of stakeholders is the hosts (home-stay providers, local communities), who are showcasing their cultures on the ‘front stage’ while usually keeping the ‘backstage’ for themselves represent. The secondary category is the guests (visitors), who are gazing upon the tourism settings proposed by the local communities. The third category of stakeholders is represented by governments (tourism officials) who are involved in the framing and legal aspects of tourism development nationwide, regionally and locally. Tourism businesses (local tourism providers) who are managing the sites and the home-stay providers comprise the fourth category of stakeholders. And the last category of stakeholders is composed of local and international experts represented by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international organisations and academics whose level of expertise can help to give an international legal framework and finance tourism sites.

Cohen and Cohen (2012) argue that a certain amount of tension emanates from the processes of authentication between the different players involved in the development of tourism. Xie (2011), when referring to Oakes (1997) and Swain (1993),

explains that various processes influence the development of ethnic tourism in China. By drawing five pairs of paradoxes involving the various identified stakeholders described above, Xie (2011, p. 61) conceptualises the various tensions and interrelationships between culture, economics, politics and authenticity. By proposing a conceptual scheme of authentication, Xie (2011, p. 64) argues that this framework presents “interactions of power, legitimacy and urgency among stakeholders in authenticating ethnic tourism and provides a basis to compare the roles of different stakeholders while examining the degree of authentication.”

1. *Authenticity and commodification.* The main aspect of spontaneous relationships between hosts and guests disappears in favour of packaged, contrived and planned tourism activities. Staged cultural performances resulting from the commercialisation of tourism activities are changing the nature of the host–guest relationship as the host community is adapting the visitors’ demands for cultural products and performances. By managing cultural resources in a sustainable manner, local communities have a mean of rejuvenating their identity through folk villages.
2. *Economic development and cultural preservation.* Tourism is seen as a means to gain economic independence and modernise local communities but with the potential to cause a loss of traditions and cultural identity. Economic development can help to reinforce the sense of pride and cultural uniqueness for both hosts and guests, and empower local communities regarding their cultural heritage.
3. *Cultural evolution and museumification.* Local communities may express the need to be “frozen in an image of itself or museumized (including in living villages)” (Cohen & Cohen, 2012) to counter the growing cultural evolution inherent in the modernisation of the local communities’ lifestyles. This process is giving local communities the opportunity to be an essential part of the process of cultural evolution.
4. *Ethnic autonomy and state regulation.* State regulation is causing a growing standardisation of cultural performances, which become staged for the visitors. Local communities express the need to recognise and protect their cultural

heritage and to have explicit recognition of their right to develop their 'versions' of cultural tourism.

5. *Mass tourism development and sustainable ethnic tourism.* Mass tourism in developing countries is usually associated with a larger number of visitors who are visiting controlled and planned staged tourism attractions in purpose-built villages. In doing so, the sustainability of original ethnic villages is preserved as well as the 'backstage' of local populations.

The following section presents the theoretical framework on which the study will be grounded. It addresses the question of authenticity in cultural-heritage tourism, and discusses indicators for addressing the object and experience of place, as well as 'sense of place' in Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism encounters.

2.2 Addressing authenticity in cultural-heritage tourism

MacLeod (2006, p. 179) states that a number of scholars have written about the role that tourism has played in the adaptation of cultural forms; for example, 'tourist art' (Graburn, 1976), the increasing labelling of places as heritage destinations (Hewison, 1987; Walsh, 1992) and the commodification and adaptation of rituals, dances and festivals for tourist consumption (Greenwood, 1989). According to MacLeod (2006), the importance of the concept of authenticity lies between the tourists, the nature of their relationships with their hosts, and the cultural products that are presented to them. For MacCannell (1976), real events and culture are increasingly being hidden from tourists' eyes and, instead, a variety of artificial experiences are being staged for their consumption. Tourists actively search for the pseudo-event, a contrived and artificial experience (Boorstin, 1964).

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) describes three types of time involved in heritage tourism: 'historic time', 'heritage time' and 'visitor time'. These three categories help to situate the three dimensions of authenticity from Jamal and Hill (2004, p. 358), and are detailed in Table 2.1 below. Historic time refers to the time when an object or event has been evaluated for its authenticity, typically assessed by historians, scientists or archaeologists who are evaluating the time, date and location as markers of authentication of objects of interests. Heritage time refers to the constructivist approach and relates to the meaning visitors can give to the object or event being

evaluated in terms of its authenticity. At this stage, the role of both the public and private sectors is essential in shaping the heritage story and narratives of the place that will be interpreted and consumed by the visitors. Finally, for Jamal and Hill, the visitor time can be associated with:

A transcendence of time, when the tourist is aware that an event took place in another time, but is also aware of that moment's importance in relation to the tourist's own life, so that the experiential moment can be simultaneously in the past, present and even future.

Jamal and Hill (2004, p. 357)

Table 2.1: Dimensions and aspects for addressing authenticity in cultural-heritage tourism

Dimensions of authenticity			
Aspects of authenticity	Objective (real)	Constructive (socio-political)	Personal (experiential and existence-based)
Time	Historic Time	Heritage Time	Visitor Time
Space	MacCannell's (1999) 'backstage'; real and genuine found in pre-modern locations, outside one's own spurious society (For example, sights, markers, scientifically dated material artefacts, 'genuine' objects (Bruner, 1994))	Production (manufacture) of attraction, community, destination; enclavic space (Edensor, 1998) (Socio-political landscape influencing nationhood, destination image, sense of place, heritage/historic reconstructions, etc.)	Interactive, performative touristic space; heterogeneous space (Edensor, 1998) (Tourists and residents engage in sense-making, narrative and interpretive meaning-making encounters with situated place and contextual space)
Approach	Scientific and positivist paradigms Realist; essentialist (authenticity is a fixed property of object/event); pre-modern as original/unique	Constructivism and social constructionism; postmodernism Meanings negotiated and emergent; political contest among stakeholders; space is mediated by ideological and technological forces; symbolic and constructed authenticity (N. Wang, 2000)	Interpretive and narrative approaches Psychological (perceptions/emotions); experiential and existence-based, where meanings emerge through the social relations that are situated and embodied in the touristic space (and place)

Source: adapted from Jamal and Hill (2004, p. 358).

For Y. Wang (2007, p. 795) the varied approaches ranging from objectivism and constructivism to existentialism “have formed two trajectories of attachment in understanding authenticity: the object (as the Other, the toured) and the self (as the Centre, the tourist).” Smith and Duffy similarly argue that:

There are two aspects to authenticity that can be combined in the tourist experience to create what the tourist will consider to be a ‘genuine’ holiday experience, namely, judgements about the authenticity of the toured objects and felt reality of the tourist experiences themselves.

Smith and Duffy (2003, p. 132)

The three dimensions of authenticity (objective, constructive and experiential) are now described in further detail.

2.2.1 Objective authenticity

The objective approach highlights that the visitor’s authentic experience depends upon the tourist recognising the authenticity of the visited objects or experience. According to N. Wang (1999), objective authenticity refers to the authenticity of originals; consequently the objective authenticity of a lived experience corresponds to the authenticity of the objects of the experience. Importance is placed on objects made from what is considered to be authentic materials and by indigenous craftspeople or on events and rituals that we perceive as being traditional emanations of genuine cultures.

Sometimes, the perception of authenticity depends on the types of tourists evaluating the craft-making. Littrell, Anderson and Brown (1993) analysed what characteristics authentic crafts possess according to external criteria (aesthetics, production techniques), time of manufacture, and internal criteria (whether crafts are appealing or useful when they arrive home), as well as other criteria related to authenticity (total number produced, uniqueness to region, and whether crafts were made in new or different ways). Yu and Littrell (2003) discovered four factors of authenticity that relate to craft souvenirs: personal aesthetics, uniqueness and workmanship, cultural and historical context, and artisans and materials used. As tourists visit places of social, historical and cultural importance, they extend their searches for authenticity in craft souvenirs (Yu & Littrell, 2003).

Moscardo and Pearce (1986) examined in a scientific way the potential (in)authenticity of various components of elements and features in Australian historic theme parks, including machineries, craftspeople activities, demonstrations, buildings, shops and refreshment areas. When looking at their technical aspect, Moscardo and Pearce (1986) classified these elements and features as part of the 'objective' aspect of authenticity because they carefully reproduce the settings of the past. Moscardo and Pearce further argue that the historical setting is likely to be both presented as authentic and accepted as such by tourists motivated to visit some aspect of a past society or culture.

With the blend of unique landscapes and cultural heritage associated with the Silk Road, Central Asian states have long fascinated travellers. In Kyrgyzstan, for more than one and a half millennia, Sulaiman-Too Sacred Mountain (Figure 2.3) in the Fergana Valley "was a beacon for travellers [and] revered as a sacred mountain. Its five peaks and slopes contain numerous ancient places of worship and caves with petroglyphs as well as two largely reconstructed 16th-century mosques" (UNESCO, 2013). In 2009, the site was added by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) onto the list of World Heritage sites which are currently visited as 'genuine' cultural-tourism products by international and domestic visitors.

Figure 2.3: Sulaiman-Too Sacred Mountain



Source: UNESCO (2013).

Original objects provide genuine touristic experiences for those who recognise the authenticating signs. The commercialisation of culture and standardisation of tourism experiences contrast the originals to the ones that are perfectly replicated. For Jamal and Hill (2002, p. 84) “an authentic historic event or site is one that has been scientifically and objectively situated in the original time period, setting, materials, etc., of that era.” Objective authenticity places emphasis on both the integrity of the materials and the context within which an object is made. Shifting from this perspective, Jamal and Hill (2004, p. 359) suggest that “a destination’s sense of place is not one that is static and objective, but is one that is constructed, contested and lives within a performative space.”

2.2.2 Constructive authenticity

Constructive authenticity of an experience is relative and negotiable (Cohen, 1988) and context dependent (Salamone, 1997). For Macleod, authenticity is a *dynamic process* that changes over time:

Reality is a constructed phenomenon created in our own minds, which are influenced by our personal worldview and external social, cultural and political factors. Thus, the notions of what is authentic are not static but evolve over time and are relative and negotiated.

Macleod (2006, p. 184)

According to N. Wang (1999, p. 355) “authenticity is thus a projection of tourists’ own beliefs, expectations, preferences, stereotyped images and consciousness onto toured objects, particularly toured Others.” From this perspective, authenticity can be linked to an experience of collective identifications made by the individual. The analysis of rituals and the research on how such experiences are constituted can reveal how authenticity is influenced by subjective and collective views on consensus, creativity and existentialism in the tourist role (Olsen & Timothy, 2002). Constructed authenticity can also be the result of projected dreams, stereotyped images or expectations of the consumed objects, or what Culler (1981) calls ‘symbolic authenticity’.

Historically and culturally the question of authenticity in tourism is correlated to tradition and origins even if those are invented (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) and to the cultural background and the interpretation of history (Bruner, 1994). The objects and events of a particular time period may be appropriated to construct a story (or a myth)

that conforms to the economic, social and political interests in a particular domain (Bruner, 1994).

An example of constructive aspect of authenticity can be illustrated in the ‘construction’ of the national flag of the Republic of Tajikistan (Figure 2.4), adopted in November 1992 after the fall of the Soviet Union. The flag is composed of three different-coloured stripes, with the colours being used as symbols to depict the national identity: the red represents the sun, the victory and the unity of the nation; the white stands for purity, cotton (one of the main crop cultivated in the country) and mountain snows; and the green corresponds to the colour of Islam and the bounty of nature. The crown in the centre of the flag symbolises the Tajik people, while the seven stars signify the Tajik magic number seven – a symbol of perfection and the embodiment of happiness (CIA, 2013).

Figure 2.4: Tajikistan national flag



Source: CIA (2013).

As Jamal and Hill (2002, p. 87) suggest, “authenticity is not a quality of objects themselves, but one that is ascribed to them, often by those with the authority to do so.” Residents consume and renegotiate touristic images to create a new form of authenticity for themselves. The tourists themselves are also involved in this process, what Cohen (1988, p. 380) describes as the creation of ‘emergent authenticity’, which implies that any cultural artefact can become over time and under the appropriate conditions widely recognised as an authentic manifestation of local culture and thus be authenticated by visitors appropriately. This form of authenticity gives also the possibility for local populations to incorporate new meanings or messages in their cultural products as a means to convey additional information for the tourists. Thus,

they become new cultural expressions that can be authenticated and recognised by experts, as well as by visitors aiming at living new tourism experiences.

2.2.3 Experiential and existence-based authenticity

Scholars have argued for a more existential approach to the question of authenticity (Hughes, 1995; N. Wang, 1999), with individuals seen as creating a sense of truth within themselves (MacLeod, 2006). For N. Wang (1999, p. 356), with regard to the issue of authenticity in tourism, “the approaches of postmodernism seem to be characterised by deconstruction of authenticity.” Cohen (1988) highlights the question of how to generate a perception of authenticity that takes into account new expectations of consumers in terms of lived experience. According to Cova and Cova (2002), the search for postmodern authenticity is translated from a day to day search for experiences in a postmodern era in which the consumers are looking for an authenticity that is lost. From a postmodern perspective, existential authenticity can be defined as a special state of living in which an individual is true to oneself (Berger, 1973). According to the philosophy of existence, Taylor (1991) argues that the idealistic view of authenticity states that human existence finds its sense only in the affirmation of him, its true nature and its autonomy. The quest for authenticity is linked to the quest for One Self and the image of one self. N. Wang says that the ideal of authenticity can be characterised by either nostalgia or romanticism:

It is nostalgic because it idealises the ways of life in which people are supposed as freer, more innocent, more spontaneous, purer, and truer to themselves than usual [...]. It is also romantic because it accents the naturalness, sentiments, and feelings in response to the increasing self-constraints by reason and rationality in modernity [...]. Tourism is thus regarded as a simpler, freer, more spontaneous, more authentic, or less serious, less utilitarian, and romantic, lifestyle which enables people to keep a distance from, or *transcend* daily lives.

N. Wang (1999, p. 360)

N. Wang (1999, pp. 362-364) further divides existential authenticity into two dimensions, namely *intra-personal* and *inter-personal authenticity*. Intra-personal authenticity comprises sensuous and symbolic bodily feelings where the body becomes a display of personal identity and is the inner source of feelings and sensual pleasure. What is referred to self-making or self-identity is the potential of tourism to

enable the tourist to realise their potential; for example, travelling 'off the beaten track'. Wang states tourists also search for the authenticity of, and between, themselves. This inter-personal authenticity, as exemplified in family tourism or in *touristic communitas*, occurs as "an unmediated, pure inter-personal relationship among pilgrims who confront one another as social equals based on their common humanity" (Turner, 1973).

Existential aspects of authenticity can be found in local food making and various types of outdoor activities as they connect visitors to a 'sense of place'. Sims (2009, p. 329) says that local food and drinks "enable host communities to capitalise on visitors' desire for some form of 'authentic' experience that will enable them to connect with the place and culture of their destination." Macleod (2006, p. 187) argues that "tourism activities that involve a close association with the countryside such as camping, hiking or cycling are popular because they allow individuals to test themselves and rediscover their essential selves." These tourists are seeking authenticity within themselves rather than in toured places or objects (N. Wang, 1999).

The experience of drinking tea in a yurt-camp and embarking on an eco-cultural tour in Mongolia (Figure 2.5) can be used to exemplify existential authenticity, as it allows tourists to test themselves and rediscover their essential selves. Meanwhile, tourists can have a sense of existential authenticity by sharing their experience with the semi-nomadic livestock-breeding community (Werner, 2003).

Figure 2.5: Two yurts in the Mongolian steppe



Source: Wikipedia (2004).

As Kolar and Zabkar postulate:

The key dilemma of tourism management is how postmodernism can constructively contribute to the understanding of the concept of authenticity as a motivational factor for tourists [...]. Postmodernism suggests that tourists do not judge authenticity from an intellectual distance but through *emotional experiences*.

Kolar and Zabkar (2010, p. 654)

As the emphasis is made on the emotions visitors experience during tourism encounters with local populations, it is important to define various authentication positions of visitors, tourism organisers and local residents in the Kazakhstani context. The next section highlights and defines from the literature the notion of authentication with both tourism providers and visitors, and provides further detail on the various meanings of authenticity given by host community members, tourism providers and tourists within the host–guest relationship.

2.3 Authentication and the host–guest relationship

Many academics (Conran, 2006; Trauer & Ryan, 2005; Tucker, 1997, 2003; Y. Wang, 2007) have debated the impact of tourism on local communities, both socially and economically, and in particular the complex relationships between hosts and guests. According to Trauer and Ryan, this social construction includes various factors affecting stakeholders involved in the tourism process:

The factors affecting the experience of place include the attribution of meaning by tourists, which meanings are determined by tourists' own past travels, experiences and perceived and 'actual' knowledge, the reaction of 'hosts', the promise made by the commercial sector, the 'actual nature' of the place (its history, culture, topography and aesthetics) and the nature of the company that a tourist enjoys.

Trauer and Ryan (2005, p. 481)

For Silver (1993, p. 303), "how authenticity is constructed for different clienteles tend to portray predominantly what Westerners have historically imagined the Other to be like." The dialectic of authenticity reflects "what tour operators think of a Western need to experience authentic and primitive natives rather than about the natives themselves" (Bruner, 1989, p. 440, as cited in Silver, 1993).

2.3.1 Politics of authentication and the host community

Despite a growing interest in cultural value (Gilmore & Pine, 2007), emotions and re-investment in authenticity (Knudsen & Waade, 2010), the notion of authenticity and its impacts on local tourism remains quite abstract for local populations. The difficulty with the concept of authenticity in tourism studies is that it is a criterion used by tourists as observers but “whether the ‘tourees’ observed by the tourists possess such a concept and, if so, which traits of their culture they consider as authentic, is almost never raised” (Cohen, 1988, p. 374). Cultural arts and performances are also being created for the sake of tourism by the local populations which, according to Cohen (1988) participate in a form of ‘cultural continuity’ that the host communities totally integrate as a new form of cultural expression.

As Xie (2011, p. 37) points out, “it is important to shift the direction of research from authenticity to *authentication* and identify the positions of the stakeholders who authenticate ethnic tourism and its resources.” Defining what is authentic – or what is not – is also highly dependent on the political context of the destination. When referring to the landscapes of Mongolia, Buckley, Ollenburg, and Zhong argue that constructing tourism products is highly dependent on a local political willingness:

As indigenous people and traditional cultures become increasingly proud of their heritage and alert to preserve and profit from it, they are increasingly eager to present cultural landscapes as destinations [...]. Constructing tourism products based on their cultural landscapes may become one way for these peoples to reaffirm their own territorial and cultural identities, either for internal or for external political reasons.

Buckley et al. (2008, p. 57)

Notions of wilderness and primitiveness in tourism are often constructed and defined through a Western lens. From one perspective, it could be argued that tourism marketing tends to give a partial image of the tourist destination. Smith and Duffy (2003, p. 118) claim that tourism destinations are often portrayed according to visitors’ desires for exoticism, thus inducing an unchanged image of the place:

The images presented by the tourism industry are often imbued with notions of the remote, the primitive, the unspoilt, and these are used as markers of tourists’ desirability [...]. Tourists themselves collude in the creation and perpetuation of an idealised and authenticated image of their chosen

destination, one that excludes the inconveniently placed signifiers of modernity, of poverty, environmental degradation, or social and political decay.

Smith and Duffy (2003) further discuss the fact that these images have important ethical implications for the locals and may force them to change and accommodate their lifestyles to ensure that tourists are not disappointed. The challenge then lies in the capabilities of the local communities to engage in productive exchanges with visitors and understand tourists' expectations so that both hosts and guests enrich their experiences of one another (Brown, 1992; Cone, 1995).

2.3.2 Authentication and visitors

According to Waller and Lea (1999), the perception of authenticity is closely related to tourists' preconceived images of an authentic tourism experience. Yang and Wall (2009) found that tourists' responses to authenticity in folk villages focus on either local settings (situational authenticity) or the fulfilment of personal needs (behavioural authenticity). In line with Yang and Wall's (2009) research, Xie (2011, p. 184) points out that "tourists expect to see frozen aspects of ethnic cultures and do not generally realise ethnic culture evolves with time." Such sites tend to become 'frozen in time' as "exotic spectacles for tourist consumption, rather than being allowed to evolve and modernize as an integral and living part of the landscapes" (Suntikul, Butler, & Airey, 2010, p. 210, as cited in Cohen and Cohen, 2012). To some extent, the authenticity of the place is contrived and mediated by local hosts, who direct the guests to the 'most traditional villages', organise cultural performances and control the visitor's access to cultural information (Xie, 2011).

The debate around marketing authenticity in Third World countries implies that authenticity is constructed in multifaceted ways according to the various tourism stakeholders involved in the politics of commodification as well as the type of tourist consuming the image (Silver, 1993). From the visitors' perspective, authenticity is thus seen as an element for satisfying the tourists' desire to experience a genuine, timeless and unchanged tourism experience in remote regions of the world. For Silver (1993, p. 303), visitors' perceptions of authenticity are biased because "their understandings of indigenous people seem to derive most immediately and explicitly from images marketed in travel magazines, advertisements and brochures with a Western discourse." From this angle, the tourism industry reflects the Western views of what is

authentic and hence what visitors need to experience rather than what the indigenous people perceive to be an authentic tourism experience (Bruner, 1989). The development of visitors' positive or negative attitudes to the host population also depends on their previous travelling experiences (Hall, 2007; Pearce, 1982), which either confirm or challenge their pre-existing thoughts and perceptions about a tourism destination. According to Chhabra, Healy, and Sills (2003) tourist knowledge affects perceived authenticity.

The concept of authenticity in tourism inevitably raises the question of what kind of tourists are visiting a site, especially making the assumption that the ones who will be seeking authenticity could be considered a minority among the huge population of contemporary mass tourism. Cohen raises the issue in his early work about authenticity and commodification in tourism:

The greater visitors are concerned about the question of authenticity, the stricter will be their criteria by which they conceive of it... Tourists indeed appear to seek authenticity in varying degrees of intensity, depending on the degree of alienation from modernity.

Cohen (1988, p. 376)

Therefore, anthropologists and intellectuals, because they apply selective criteria to evaluate the authenticity of their tourism experience, are less prepared to accept contrived cultural tourism products or attractions. Cohen (1979, 1985, 1989) based his previous work around 'modes of tourism experiences' and classified tourists in relation to their attitude towards and expectations of authenticity. He categorises, in particular, five types of tourists: the existential tourist (one who spiritually abandons modernity, moves furthest away from the beaten track and tries to get as close as possible to the Other), the experimental (one who experiments with a range of Others), the experiential tourist (one who wishes vicariously to participate in the lives of other societies), the recreational (one who is seeking enjoyable relaxation, has a playful attitude to authenticity and is ready to accept a cultural product as authentic for the sake of the experience), and the diversionary tourist (one who is simply seeking amusement and has no concern for authenticity within their experiences).

Some scholars (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; N. Wang, 2000) claim that authenticity is a variable depending on visitors' goals, motivations and expectations. According to Xie

(2011, p. 39) “the search for authenticity remains a major driving force behind modern tourist behaviour since tourism permits the release of more ‘authentic’ selves”. The contemporary tourist “may be seen as an amalgam and a consumer and consequently even ‘unserious’ leisure tourists are ever more intellectually and existentially motivated than in the past” (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010, p. 655). McKercher and Du Cros (2002, 2003) have classified tourists into various heterogeneous segments depending on how important authenticity is to them when visiting cultural attractions. For some tourists, say McKercher and DuCros, authenticity can play a central role while for others it is secondary – these tourists “want authenticity but not necessarily reality” (McKercher & Du Cros, 2002, p. 41). As Kim and Jamal (2007, p. 182) highlight, when they reviewed recent studies that have attempted to identify the perceived authenticity of themed physical settings and events, “tourists subjectively construct their experience by actively negotiating meanings —toured objects being a related but secondary factor.”

McKercher and Du Cros (2002, p. 76) raise an essential question when explaining the relationship between the promotion of authentic tourism experiences and the necessary commodification of assets to turn them into consumable tourism products: How much commodification can occur before an asset ceases to be authentic? According to Greenwood (1989), in the process of commodification cultural products are losing their primary meaning for the local populations, who then, in turn, lose their enthusiasm for producing them as the number of tourists increases. Once a ritual or a cultural performance becomes staged, it becomes a solely ‘cultural commodity’ that can be embellished and adapted to the tourists’ tastes (Boorstin, 1964). Cohen (1988) argues that through the process of commodification, products can acquire *new meanings* for the local communities, meanings that are not mutually exclusive and can be added to the old ones; the new meanings, therefore, reflect the evolution of sociological and cultural changes in that particular destination.

Some deeply concerned visitors, as well as purists or experts in the assessment of cultural authenticity, consider that a craft must be ‘entirely’ authentic, i.e. in both materials and purpose – a situation that rarely happens in tourism settings. Some visitors though, namely the experiential tourists, are ready to accept a commercialised object as authentic if they are convinced the craft has been made by a member of the

host community and incorporates traditional or handmade designs, even though it may have been made in a different form or from a different material from the traditional craft or been specifically commercialised for the visitors (Cohen, 1988; Moscardo & Pearce, 1986). The recreational tourist might be satisfied with commercialised cultural products or experiences as a substitute for genuine tourism experiences if the modified product looks sufficiently like the traditional one to give the tourist the impression they are buying 'a piece of authenticity'. While diversionary tourists, according to Cohen (1988), would buy a craft that they like even if they know it has no link with the destination.

2.3.3 Authenticity and the host–guest tourism experience

Bruner (1991, pp. 243, 244) argues that even if visitors are fully aware that local populations perform their traditions explicitly for them, "their experiences tend to mirror their own imaginary projections about the Other." Many tourism advertising campaigns portray developing countries' destinations as having the potential to transform visitors, saying they will come back to their native countries 'refreshed' and 'renewed', or as a different person. As Bruner states (1991, p. 239), "the hyperbolic language of tourist discourse often offers nothing less than a total transformation of the Self." Additionally, the narratives in the tourism brochures sometimes serve to position the tourist and the native relative to each other and to provide each with some social role models (Bruner, 1986).

Within the tourism encounter, the host–guest relationship is complex and context dependent. Some authors argue that interaction between hosts and guests gives way to many different scenarios of authenticity. Aronsson (1994, p. 86), for example, refers to 'authentic meeting places' where visitors and local populations meet in encounters that are part of the everyday life of the local populations. When examining the question of authenticity at intra-personal and inter-personal levels, N. Wang (2000) claims certain tourism encounters favour the meeting of visitors and local populations in a way that is not related to the 'front stage'/'backstage' dichotomy. From his research on home-stay guest houses at Lijiang, a World Cultural-heritage site in China, Y. Wang (2007) argues that as tourists subconsciously search for 'home' in their travels, the production of customised authenticity can be created in tourism contacts with the local populations.

Authenticity and intimacy

There are debates about the nature of the tourism experience, in particular the experience of place, and whether it is largely socially constructed (Cohen, 1984, 1988) and dependent on several factors, including intimacy. Adapting the work of Piorkowski and Cardone (2000), Trauer and Ryan (2005, p. 482) detail four types of intimacy (physical intimacy, verbal intimacy, spiritual intimacy, and intellectual intimacy) which lead to two types of situation:

First, intimacies within a place are created by interaction with those local to that place, and second, that intimacy and meanings associated with a place emerge from the nature of the interaction between those who visit the place; particularly when those people possess meaningful relationships between them.

Conran (2011, p. 1455) highlights the importance of intimacy as a way to share tourism experiences, as “intimacy is an embodied experience that arouses a sense of closeness and a story about a shared experience.” Reflecting on her study about volunteer tourism in south Thailand, Conran (2011, pp. 1462, 1463) mentions that “just as volunteers and NGO coordinators perceive the close interaction with local people to be signs of the authenticity of their experience, local people perceive the intimate encounter as the authentic encounter.” She further suggests that the close interaction between the volunteers allows them to get to know the ‘real’ Thailand.

Adding to Conran’s perspective, Xie (2011, p. 38) mentions “the challenge within the ‘tourist-Other’ relationship is the lack of ‘intimacy’ required to fully appreciate the intricacy of minority culture and heritage.” In particular, Xie refers to the example of Chinese ethnic dance performances that take place in a designated area in Hainan folk villages and generally allow for little contact between the guests and their ethnic hosts.

Authenticity and reciprocity

In Mauss’s (1990) anthropological view, “a gift is never free” because the giver does not merely give an object but also part of himself. Gifts give rise to reciprocal exchange between giver and receiver, therefore leading to a mutual interdependence that can also *transcend* the relationship between the giver and the receiver. Mauss’s seminal exchange theory, when adapted to tourism studies, explains how local cultures and communities can respond positively to contact with visitor; in particular, local

communities' degree of resilience and their capabilities to interact with tourists can be enhanced, so that both hosts and guests return with some valuable experiences (Brown, 1992; Cone, 1995; Tucker, 2003). Wearing, Lyons and Snead (2010) argue that reciprocal relationships between host communities and volunteer tourists develop out of productive exchanges that enhance local communities' understanding of tourists' expectations.

Giving and receiving in the field of hospitality can lead to a transformation process between hosts and guests, with the guests arriving as complete strangers but departing as friends (2003). Referring to Burgess (1982), Selwyn (2000) and Wood (1997), Tucker argues that this exchange process engages principles of reciprocity between hosts and guests and a complex set of interactional rules involving shared values and trust. The potential of the host–guest relationship not only allows the opportunity for mutual knowledge between both parts but can also enhance understanding and acceptance through their interactions, when perceived notions and stereotypes are replaced by mutually positive perceptions of one another (Tucker, 2003).

Several scholars (Cohen, 1982; Pi-Sunyer, 1977; Xie & Wall, 2002) have highlighted the transformation of the host–guest relationship associated with the number of visitors on sites. They argue that even if tourists are initially considered as being part of the conventional host–guest relationship, the 'degree' of desirability to welcome them diminishes as their numbers increase. As a result, the initial nature of their relationship "originally based on customary and reciprocity, but neither precise nor obligatory, is transformed into a commercial one that is based on remuneration" (Cohen, 1984, p. 380).

Xie (2011, p. 38) states that "often, the more structured the event and the shorter the visit, the less opportunity tourists have to make genuine contact with the local communities." The dialectic of authentication is amplified between mass tourists who seek the authentic Other while being aware that the tourism setting will be changed with more visitors' arrivals, and the exclusive tourist who is looking for a one-to-one, intimate exchange with the local communities. Furthermore, this division does not necessarily include the tourists who are seeking for the authentic but also desire a high level of comfort with Western amenities. As Silver highlights:

It seems that tourists and indigenous peoples are incommensurately different within the touristic process, and indigenous peoples can only continue to be attractive to tourists so long as they remain undeveloped, and hence, in some sense, primitive.

Silver (1993, p. 310)

It then becomes important to define various notions of performativity within the host–guest relationship, depending on who has the authority to grant authentication of a tourism experience or cultural heritage artefacts (Buckley, 2002, 2004; Lorenzini, Calzati, & Giudici, 2011; Ryan, 1997).

2.3.4 Authenticity and performativity

It has been suggested that in tourism, authenticity is a feeling one can experience in relation to place (Knudsen & Waade, 2010, p. 5). According to Edensor (2000, p. 324) “performances vary enormously and depend upon the regulation of the stage and the players, and the relationship between the players.” Jamal and Hill (2004, p. 364), when referring to Edensor (1998), explain the importance of performance-based touristic space within the inter-connectedness of place and self:

Place, placeness, and sense of place, like authenticity, cover a spectrum from objects, events, and experience, all of which are generally inter-related within a performance-based touristic space that shapes individual, collective as well as place-based identities.

Jamal and Hill (2004, p. 364)

The idea of performance between hosts and guests implies the notion of a *relationship* between one another. Pearce and Moscardo (1986) proposed that tourists can achieve an authentic experience through relationships with people within tourism settings. In her study about tourists’ appreciation of Māori culture in New Zealand, McIntosh (2004, p. 9) explains that visitors refer to the idea of an authentic experience by being “personally involved in the experience”, but also by experiencing “daily life” of the Māori people. Besides giving importance to “the culture in its natural landscape” and “true facts, arts and crafts”, McIntosh further details that visitors define an authentic experience as being “not artificial”. Tourists prefer having “incidental contact” with Māori people talking about their experiences and own culture rather than an “organised, commercial experience”.

Taylor (2001) highlights that tourists appear to demand opportunities be provided for authentic and genuine interaction or sincere contact with indigenous peoples. For Graburn (1989), tourism is comparable to *a sacred journey*, a state of mind activated by tourists in their search for an experience that is existentially authentic. This existential state of Being created by certain tourist activities can sometimes allow access to a liminal moment in which the “tourist has ceased to be a tourist” (Ryan, 1991, p. 35) and to one of serendipity (Cary, 2004).

According to Cary (2004, p. 66) “something that is discovered and represented in a serendipitous moment (because it is not self-staged) is automatically thought to be authentic.” Turner (1969, p. 138) when qualifying the *tourist moment*, induces that serendipity can lead to self-transformative tourism experiences:

By articulating elements of self-discovery, belonging and the sacred, the tourist moment becomes a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person’s being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and sacred.

When building on his original dichotomy between the ‘front stage’ and the ‘backstage’, MacCannell (2001, pp. 31, 36) shows that tourists are conscious of something “beyond”, a search for the unseen within their tourist experience which looks for the unexpected or a “chance to glimpse the real”. During that particular moment, “there is a spontaneous instance of self-discovery as well as a feeling of communal belonging elicited by serendipity and represented in narrative” (Cary, 2004, p. 67).

By rethinking the relationship between travel, place and emotions, Knudsen and Waad (2010) introduce the notion of *performative authenticity* in tourism and spatial experience:

Performative authenticity wishes to point to the transitional and transformative processes inherent in the action of authentication in addition to the contradictory position existing between phenomenological and social constructivist perspectives in which meanings and feelings of self are both constructed and lives through the sensuous body.

Knudsen and Waad (2010, p. 1)

Knudsen and Waade (2010) argue that tourists not only gaze but are also bodies performing at specific sights. By including a tactile body, movements, actions and emotions into the notion of performativity, say Knudsen and Waade, visitors can

authenticate places through their emotional connection to them. Therefore, “performative authenticity is dependent on proximity and in between-ness” (Knudsen & Waade, 2010, p. 13) and applies, for example, in the human guidance to, and witnessing of, sights of difficult and undesirable heritage like Gulag tourism. When referring to Thrift (2004, p. 63), who asserts “the bodily perceived affects brings one’s own vitality, one’s sense of aliveness, of changeability (into play)”, Knudsen and Waade (2010, p. 16) argue the feeling of authenticity “has the expression of high intensity, affect, production and maintenance of energy” that connects the individual to the vitality of the world.

‘Hot’ and ‘cool’ authenticity

For Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 1296), “authentication endows an object, site or event with authenticity; it thus involves performativity.” Building on Selwyn’s (1996) essential work about ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ authenticity, Cohen and Cohen define and explain the distinct social and political processes associated with each mode of authentication of tourist attractions:

‘Cool’ authentication is typically a single, explicit, often formal or even official, performative (speech) act, by which the authenticity of an object, site, event, custom, role or person is declared to be original, genuine or real, rather than a copy, fake or spurious. Acts of ‘cool’ authentication may be based on scientific knowledge (Selwyn, 1996, p. 26), on expertise, on personal knowledge claims or on divine inspiration.

Cohen & Cohen (2012, p. 1298)

Cohen and Cohen, referring to Morrison, Hsieh and Wang (1992, p. 33), further argue that in contemporary society cool authentication can be associated with “certification procedures when some certain predetermined standards or qualifications are met”, also known in a wider sense as accreditation. On a global scale, some certifications are given by international organisations, such as UNESCO which aims at granting authentication to cultural heritage artefacts through its list of “World Heritage sites” (Buckley, 2004; Lorenzini et al., 2011).

In contrast, Cohen and Cohen define ‘hot’ authentication by explaining that individuals are entirely part of the authentication process rather than simply being a witness of a site, object or event authenticated by other entities or scientific knowledge:

‘Hot’ authentication involves a high degree of commitment and self-investment on part of the participants. It is an accumulative, self-reinforcing process: the performative practices by and between visitors help to generate, safeguard and amplify the authenticity of the visited site or event; it perceives the audience or public as implicated in the proceedings, and thereby opens a perspective from which the audience can be seen as constituting or transforming them.

Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 1300)

Table 2.2 summarises and contrasts ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ authentication positions.

Table 2.2: Comparing ‘cool’ and ‘hot’ authentication

Criterion	Cool authentication	Hot authentication
Basis of authority	Scientific knowledge claims, expertise, proof	Belief, commitment, devotion
Agent	Authorised person or institutions	No single identifiable agent, performative conduct of attending public
Approach	Formal criteria, accepted procedures	Diffuse and incremental
Role of public	Low, observer	High, imbricated, participatory
Practices	Declaration, certification, accreditation	Ritual, offerings, communal support, resistance
Temporality	Single act, static	Gradual, dynamic, accumulative
Conducive to personal experiences of	Objective authenticity	Existential authenticity
Continuance	Dependent on credibility of agent	Reiterative, requires continual (re)enactment
Impact on dynamics of attraction	Stagnating effect, fossilization	Augmentative and transformative

Source: Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 1303).

Cohen and Cohen further suggest that performative practices of hot authentication imply an engagement of the individual with a tourism site or object and that this process contributes to the search of one’s Self, a proposal built on the work of Jamal and Hill (2004), Kim and Jamal (2007), Reisinger and Steiner (2006) and N. Wang (1999). Thus, “existential authenticity can consequently be viewed as an experiential

reflection of the individual's performative participation in the process of 'hot' authentication" (Cohen & Cohen, 2012, p. 1302).

Cohen and Cohen finally posit that the process of authentication at the political level is rife with controversies and interpretations, in particular when it comes to authenticating cultural heritage artefacts:

Like any other process that creates symbolic goods, it is subject to conflicts of interest and hence implicated in the political process... Since in the domain of tourism there exist few independent authenticating institutions on the global level, the power to authenticate tourist attractions tends to be consolidated in the hands of national governments, which often exercise it "from above", with little consideration for local opinions and attitudes.

Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 1307)

Cohen and Cohen debate that "the modes of authentication are inextricably linked to how places are identified and how these identifications may be contested." This PhD thesis transposes to the Kazakhstani context the three levels of cultural penetration detailed in Cooper's model, associates Xie's (2011) five pairs of paradoxes relative to the cycle of authenticity model, and then applies them to the nation's development of eco-cultural tourism. Based on Xie and Lane's (2006) theoretical contribution, this study examines how the cycle of authenticity, coupled with the idea of higher cultural-heritage penetration associated with the 'front stage'/'backstage' dichotomy, can be enhanced to refine visitors' perception of authenticity of eco-cultural tourism sites. In particular, the next chapter contextualises the question of authenticity within the two eco-cultural tours in Central and South Kazakhstan that constitute the case studies and sources of empirical evidence for the research.

2.4 Summary

Theoretical foundations of the concept of authenticity in cultural-heritage tourism have been examined in this chapter, in particular how the perception of authenticity of multiple stakeholders can be used to enhance the visitor's experience while they undertake an eco-cultural tour. Current literature introduces various dimensions and aspects for addressing authenticity in cultural-heritage tourism (Jamal & Hill, 2004) and defines epistemological approaches that frame the construction of authenticity in eco-cultural tourism practices. This review also included a definition of the notion of

authentication examined from the perspective of both tourism providers and visitors, and extended further the discussion of the distinct social and political processes associated with each mode of authentication. The definition and discussion were used to help clarify the performative practices of authentication that are central to the development of the host–guest relationship, namely the intimate, reciprocal and serendipitous moments encountered during eco-cultural tours.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Method

This chapter details the main reasons for adopting the methodology of grounded theory using a qualitative case study approach, and then describes the methods used. This is followed by an overview of the two case studies in Kazakhstan that served as empirical evidence for the study and an explanation of how data were collected and analysed.

3.1 Research framework and paradigm

3.1.1 Determining a methodology

According to Walle (1997), some impacts caused by tourism development on indigenous populations can be researched quantitatively but qualitative components like the meaning of cultures, social relationships and objects can be understood by an awareness of the local experience. Phillimore and Goodson (2004, p. 3) argue that qualitative methods are employed “to collect data about activities, events, occurrences and behaviours and to seek an understanding of actions, problems and processes in their social context.” Qualitative analysis is part of the naturalistic method of inquiry, which assumes that reality is continually changing and that human social phenomena are so complex that it is impossible to discover anything approximating a scientific law (Oppenheim, 1992; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Seymour, 2001; Silverman, 2004).

Tourism knowledge gathering has been generally characterised by case studies, area-specific discussions, examples of best practices, and one-off or one-time research (Carter, Baxter, & Hockings, 2001; Hall, Williams, & Lew, 2004). Unlike more specifically directed research, case studies investigate a problem that requires a holistic understanding of the event or situation in question. The assessment of theory building from case study research depends as much upon the concepts, frameworks, or propositions emerging from the process, as upon the empirical issues such as the strength of the method and the evidence grounding the theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). As Platt (1992) suggests, the case study as a research strategy has grown out of the methodological traditions of both qualitative inquiries such as grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the logic of experimental designs.

Taking into account the exploratory nature of doctoral study and the limited amount of existing academic literature surrounding the subject of authenticity in Kazakhstan, grounded theory, rather than the phenomenological approach, was considered an appropriate methodology to adopt for this research. The type of problem best suited for a phenomenological approach is one in which it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon. In particular, it helps to understand these common experiences in order to develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Although phenomenology emphasises the meaning of an experience for a number of individuals, the intent of a grounded theory study is to move *beyond* description and to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a process or action or interaction (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Furthermore, grounded theory is a proper design to use when a theory is not available to explain a process (Creswell, 2007), like understanding various stakeholder's perceptions of authenticity in a tourism destination that has not been researched before. Grounded theory does not test a hypothesis but rather influences the researcher to discover the theory as it emerges from the data (Glaser, 1992). It also facilitates "the generation of theories of process, sequence, and change pertaining to organisations, positions, and social interaction" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 114).

The researcher chose the grounded theory approach because it was the most appropriate method to assess various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity in an emergent tourism destination. On the practical side, a theory is needed to explain how people are experiencing a phenomenon, and the grounded theory developed by the researcher will provide such a general framework (Creswell, 2007). Jennings and Junek (2007) observed that grounded theory offers tourism studies the potential to generate holistic theories, and an understanding of human behaviour that is not quantifiable. Using grounded theory, the researcher elaborated around a central phenomenon which included the concept of authenticity in tourism studies, causal conditions, strategies for eco-tourism development, the Kazakhstani socio-cultural context and consequences for the local tourism industry. The purpose of this study is not only to describe what was experienced by various stakeholders but also to discover how their perception of authenticity can be understood as a factor influencing the adoption of eco-cultural tours in the country. Grounded theory research can be based on single or

multiple sources of data that include secondary data, life histories, interviews, surveys, introspection, observations and memos (Glaser, 1992, p. 56). The researcher decided to undertake interviews in this study as they have the potential to bring about rich and detailed accounts of experience.

Constructivist grounded theory approach

Constructivism assumes contemporaneous multiple social realities rather than there being the one and only 'real reality'. In a constructivist grounded theory, it is stressed that data is constructed through an ongoing interaction between researcher and participant (Hallberg, 2006). Charmaz (2004) asserts that in qualitative research the researcher has to enter the world under study and the need to learn from the inside. The analysis of the interviews is related to time, culture and context, and reflects both the participants' and the researcher's ways of thinking. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 59) explicitly argue that reality cannot be fully known but can always be interpreted and that "doing analysis is, in fact, making interpretations." The research process is enriched by subjectivity because the generated theory is constructed through a transactional process involving the researcher and the data (Hallberg, 2006).

Undertaking research in a reflexive way, whereby ethical, political and epistemological dimensions of research are explored, constitutes an integral part of producing knowledge (Marcus, 1999). Glaser and Strauss's (1967) classic model of grounded theory assumes that data represents facts about the social reality, that meaning is inherent to data, and that the researcher's aim is to discover this meaning. However, Glaser also emphasises the importance of the investigator approaching the research field with openness and theoretical sensitivity and without preconceptions, and warns the researcher against exploring the literature before entering the field. It would be unrealistic to imply that a doctoral candidate had no preconceived opinions formed in relation to likely answers to the research questions (Deuchar, 2012). Because the researcher lived and worked in Kazakhstan between 2003 and 2012 and managed to observe the gradual development of tourism in various geographical areas in the country, the result of the analysis in this study is thus the researcher's interpretative understanding, rather than the researcher's explanation, of how the participants create their own understanding of reality (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher's multicultural background and his proficiency in Russian language enabled to enrich the

analysis and understanding of the nomadic culture and the value of tourism in Kazakhstan. In order to maintain a high level of reflexivity, the researcher kept focused on the purpose of this research, which is assessing various stakeholders' perception of authenticity in eco-cultural tourism practices.

Jamal and Hollinshead (2001, p. 67) argue that "social agents are central to the construction of knowledge and that the researcher's voice is one among many that influence the research process." As Phillimore and Goodson note:

The researcher's standpoint, values and biases – that is, their cultural background, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, and so on – play a role in shaping the researcher's historical trajectory, and the way in which they interpret phenomena and construct texts.

Phillimore and Goodson (2004, p. 17)

It is argued that Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 1998) approach is more open and reflexive than Glaser and Strauss's (1967) and is therefore more appropriate for use in this study. Theory is created or constructed "in an interactional process between researcher and data, indicating epistemological subjectivism and the inclusion of existing theories into the analysis" (Hallberg, 2006, p. 147). The researcher's argument is similar to that of other researchers such as Hallberg (2006, p. 148) that "the assumptions about what reality is and how it can be known are embedded in the different modes of grounded theory and need reflected standpoints." Analysis of empirical material in this study followed Charmaz's (2005) constructivist approach rather than the Glaser and Strauss's (1967) approach of grounded theory. As Charmaz details:

A constructivist grounded theory recognises that the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interactions with the viewed. Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the 'discovered' reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural and structural contexts.

Charmaz (2003, p. 269)

Accordingly, the researcher adopted a constructivist grounded theory approach which assumes that people create and maintain meaningful worlds through dialectical processes of conferring meaning on their realities and acting within them (Bury, 1986; Mischler, 1981).

3.1.2 Research design

Rickly-Boyd (2012, p. 274) argues that “while there are clearly multiple ontological and epistemological perspectives of authenticity, few researchers use only one paradigm.” As an example, Rickly-Boyd discusses that when analysing the authenticity of a tourism experience, one has to consider the strong interaction between object, site and experience, which are not mutually exclusive:

The authenticity of an artefact can be judged objectively, but that may have no merit in the preconceptions and touristic perception of that artefact. Likewise the authenticity of experience may be separate from the authenticity of the site and objects toured, as it is action- and emotion-based.

Rickly-Boyd (2012, p. 274)

Relativist ontology assumes that realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). For Cohen (1988, p. 379), “since authenticity is not a primitive given, but negotiable, one has to allow for the possibility of its gradual emergence in the eyes of visitors to the host culture.” In accordance with the constructivist position applied in various tourism studies (Chhabra et al., 2003; Cohen, 1988), Kolar and Zabkar further postulate two guiding principles for evaluating authenticity:

First authenticity is a socially, individually constructed and evaluated perception or experience. It is a matter of extent (rather than an either/or issue); hence its extent could be evaluated. Second, managers can influence authenticity (claimed, presented, assured, authorised and promoted).

Kolar and Zabkar (2010, p. 654)

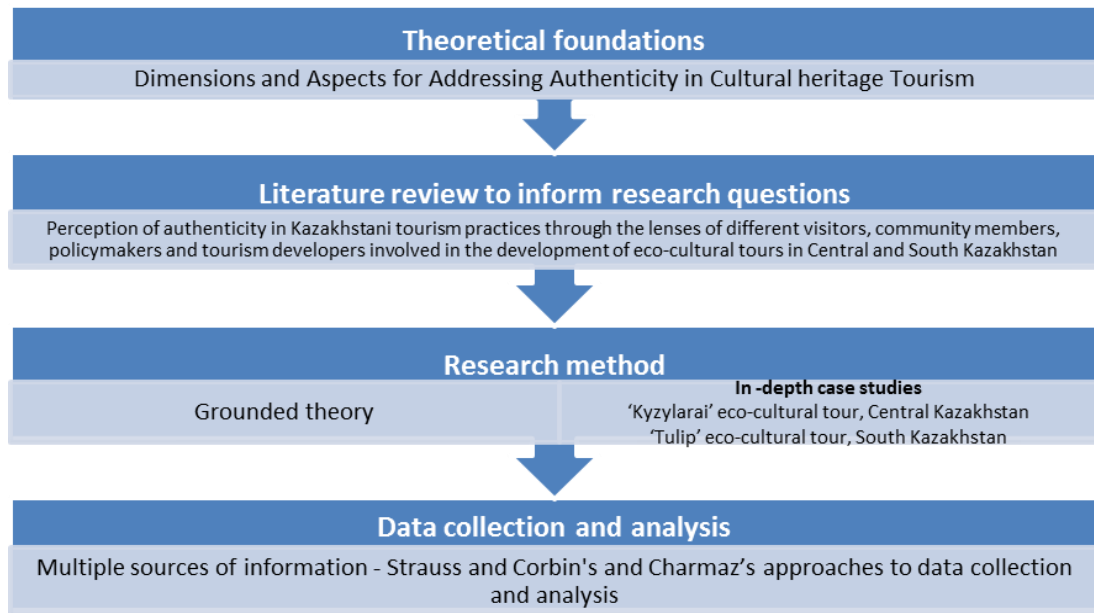
For Jamal and Hill (2004, p. 22), the authenticity in the heritage domain is situated in a constructivist perspective particularly “with respect to the role of public and private sector actions in historic preservation, heritage (re)construction and destination management.” In regards to the different epistemological and philosophical positions that have a stake in the conceptualisation of authenticity, the study adopted a constructivist paradigm as a managerially more adequate position. In particular, the constructivist paradigm was appropriate for uncovering the managerial implications of the process of commodification of Kazakhstani cultural heritage.

Because the study also includes “tourists and residents who engage in sense-making, narrative and interpretive meaning-making encounters with situated place and contextual space” (Jamal & Hill, 2004, p. 21), this research is predominantly situated in a “constructivist/interpretivist thought and practice” (Hollinshead, 2006, p. 43) that is grounded in an “essentially relativist” ontology (D. Chambers, 2007, p. 109) and a subjectivist epistemology (the research views reality as subjective and constructed by the individuals involved in the research process) (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The thesis utilises two stages of research: a *first qualitative exploratory stage*, when the main issues in the concept of authenticity as applied to the Kazakhstani tourism market are identified; and a *second qualitative stage* which looks at visitors’ perception of authenticity while participating in eco-cultural tours in the country. At the first qualitative exploratory stage, the study used in-depth semi-structured interviews with different tourism stakeholders involved in the development of eco-cultural tours in Kazakhstan. At the second qualitative stage, qualitative semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires were undertaken with visitors during the ‘Kyzylarai’ tour in Central Kazakhstan and the ‘Tulip’ tour in South Kazakhstan and with free independent travellers (FITs).

Figure 3.1 renders an overview of the research design and specifies the main body of knowledge that constitutes the theoretical foundations of the study. A literature review allowed a background understanding of the different issues and themes around perception of authenticity in eco-cultural tourism development and helped to inform the development of research questions.

Figure 3.1: Research design



The next section details the two cases used in the research, followed by an explanation of how the grounded theory methodology was applied in this study.

3.2 Case studies: 'Kyzylarai' and 'Tulip' tours, Central and South Kazakhstan

Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995). Because the case study approach comprises an all-encompassing method, covering the logic of the design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis, it is a comprehensive research strategy or framework of design (Dufour & Fortin, 1992; Platt, 1992). A case study is recommended when “how or why questions are being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control” (Yin, 2003, p. 9). Yin suggests that a case study should be defined as a research strategy, an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context:

The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interests than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulation fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

Yin (2009, p. 18)

Case studies can provide valuable understandings of people, events, experiences and organisations in their social and historical context (Veal, 2006), which is essential for the current study. Xiao and Smith (2006) suggest that case study methodology is most often seen in research projects related to tourism development and often addresses themes or topics such as alternative forms of tourist experience as well as cultural-heritage tourism. Yin (2003) argues the importance of using unique case studies involving extreme, rare, critical and/or revelatory cases. A case study approach may adopt several collection methods such as a combination of secondary data with surveys and/or interviews.

Multiple embedded case studies

The evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling than using a single case, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust (Herriot & Firestone, 1983; Yin, 2009). More importantly, the analytic benefits from having two cases may be substantial (Yin, 2009, p. 61). Because the cases chosen are not sampling units but chosen for their ability to enrich the results about the variation of the perception of authenticity in eco-cultural tours, an analytical mode of generalisation was chosen. As Yin points out:

If two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication may be claimed [...]. The empirical results may be considered yet more potent if two or more cases support the same theory but do not support an equally plausible, rival theory.

Yin (2009, p. 38)

This thesis is primarily concerned with eco-cultural tourism development in Kazakhstan and case studies provided the major source of empirical evidence for the analysis of the question of authenticity in Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism practices. After the researcher met with various stakeholders (policymakers, tourism developers) involved in eco-cultural tourism in the country during the first international ecotourism conference held in Karaganda city in August 2010, the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours were chosen as sources of empirical evidence for the study.

The Tulip tour was organised by a member of the national Kazakhstan Tourism Association (KTA) whom the researcher had met at the eco-tourism conference in Karaganda city in August 2010; this KTA contact is also the author of the first

comprehensive cultural guide book of Kazakhstan (Schreiber, 2008). The case studies were located in the central and southern parts of the country. Both tours included archaeological sites from the Bronze Age and encompassed various aspects of the remains of the nomadic culture heritage. Both case studies represent key eco-cultural tourism practices in the country in terms of tourism approaches and activities proposed to visitors yet involved different tourism stakeholders, who were selected through purposive and theoretical sampling. The two case studies offered contrasting situations (research setting, number of stakeholders involved, structure and organisation of the tours) compared with those of a single case alone (Eilbert & Lafronza, 2005; Hanna, 2005).

After a phase of data collection in Central Kazakhstan with the Kyzylarai tour in August 2011, the researcher embarked on another tour (the Tulip tour) in South Kazakhstan in May 2012; collecting data from a second tour expanded the sample of visitors and tourism providers. Figure 3.2 shows the location of the two villages where the tourists stayed and undertook eco-cultural activities during their visits: Shabanbai Bi for the Kyzylarai tour and Kanshengel for the Tulip tour, respectively.

Figure 3.2: Shabanbai Bi and Kanshengel villages



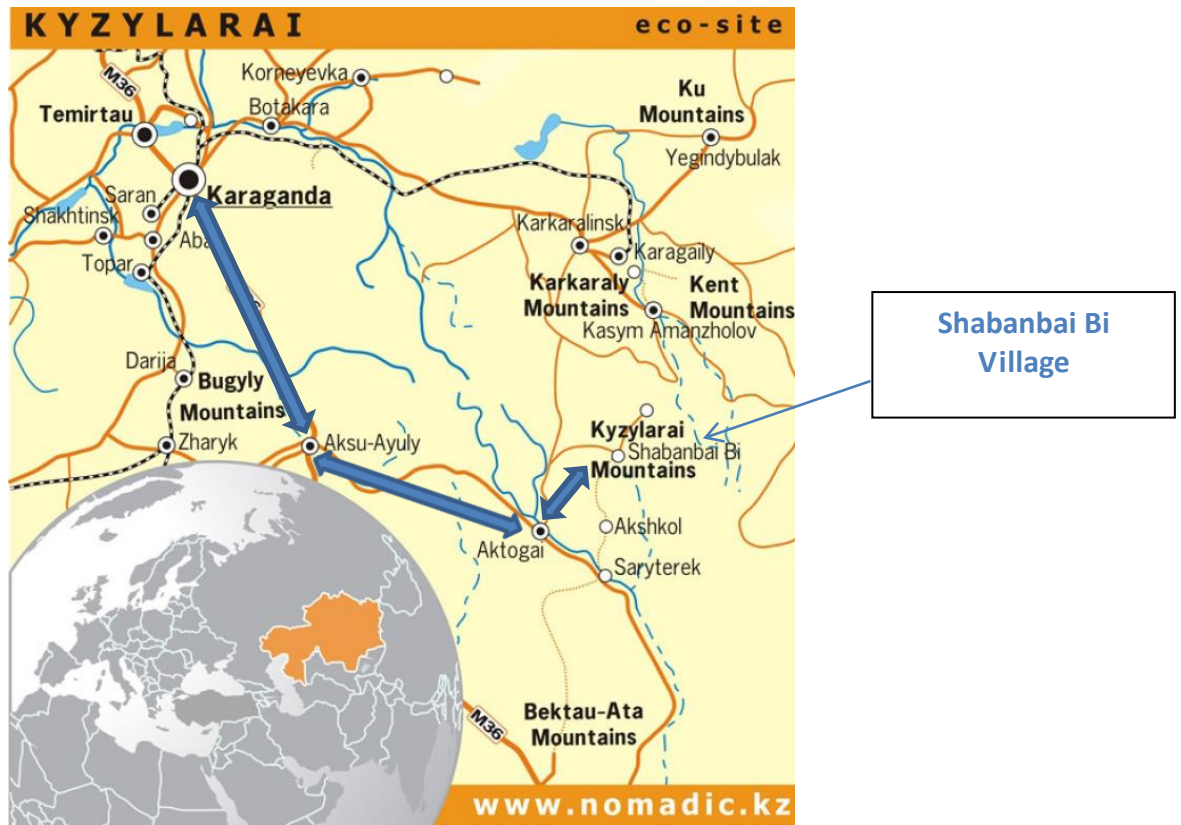
Source: Google Maps (2013).

3.2.1 Kyzylarai tour, Central Kazakhstan

Central Kazakhstan (Karaganda region) is also known as ‘The Heart of Kazakhstan’, and has an area of 398,800 square kilometres. Central Kazakhstan is a land of ancient nomadic civilizations, boundless steppe expanses and natural diversity. Since ancient times, these lands have been known by their poetic name, Sary-Arka. The mountains of Central Kazakhstan (Karkaraly, Ulytau, Kyzylarai, Bugyly and others) are noticeable because of their “clean lakes, fresh pine air and unique wildlife and have always played an important role as signposts for travellers along the Silk Road as an oasis for rest and recuperation” (ETPACK, 2010a).

The Kyzylarai tour (Figure 3.3) was developed by the members of the Ecological Tourism and Public Awareness in Central Kazakhstan (ETPACK) project and was one of the first community-based eco-tours in Central Kazakhstan promoted by national and international organisations. The two-year project started in September 2008 and was financed up to 160,000 Euros (80% of the total budget) by the Institution Building Partnership Program (IBPP) of the European Union. The German Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU) and the Kazakh NGO ‘Eco-museum Karaganda’ have been cooperating in the past two years to implement the project (e.g. development of certification and eco-label procedures) and have provided the needed co-financing. During the project implementation, three eco-sites with a network of home-stays, and one souvenir producer of traditional handicrafts, were built up in Karaganda region and a small eco-tourism operator, ‘Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan’, is now marketing the tourism products of the eco-sites, tours and souvenir products.

Figure 3.3: Map of the Kyzylarai eco-cultural tour, Karaganda region, Central Kazakhstan



Source: www.nomadic.kz.

The three-day Kyzylarai tour combines different eco-cultural elements: pine forests which grow on the granite rocks and which are of particular interest to scientists because they are the most southern place of the pine habitat in the Central Kazakhstan ecosystem, the granite sepulchres of Begazy and rock paintings dating from the Bronze Age, stone statues of the Turkic period, and mausoleums of the period of the Kazakh-Jungar wars dating from the eighteenth century. The local population has managed to preserve skills of producing handmade fur products and numerous national fermented-milk products, such as *kymiz* (horse milk), *shubat* (camel milk) and local dairy products, which are made available to the visitors. As the tour brochure details:

Such combination of pristine nature, ancient historical monuments and well-preserved way of life of the local population makes the Kyzylarai tour a great place to visit for those who like to explore something new and interesting for themselves.

ETPACK (2010d)

All the travels were done in a four-wheel-drive minibus. The tour started from the city of Karaganda and headed to Aktogai (250 kilometres, 3.5 hours) where an excursion to the local archaeological and ethnographical museum was organised. The tour then continued for 40 kilometres (1 hour) from Aktogai to Shabanbai Bi village (Figure 3.4) where visitors were welcomed in the guest houses.

Figure 3.4: Shabanbai Bi village, Central Kazakhstan, August 2011



Source: Author.

A visit of the granite sepulchres of Begazy (Figure 3.5) was organised during the second day of the tour.

Figure 3.5: Begazy sepulchres, Kyzylarai tour



Source: www.nomadic.kz

The third day of the tour comprised the visit of Shabanbai Bi village and going back to Karaganda city. The price (approximately NZ\$320 for one person) included the services of a driver and an English-speaking guide-interpreter, accommodation in the guest houses of the village, and three meals per day in guest houses and in the field when needed. Horses, bikes and camping gear rentals were organised on demand for visitors.

3.2.2 Tulip tour, South Kazakhstan

The three-day Tulip tour (Figure 3.6) was organised by a member of KTA who is also a professional guide and author of a cultural guide book about Kazakhstan. The tour started from Almaty and travelled 80 kilometres south to see the petroglyphs from the middle and late Bronze Age at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Tamgaly.

Figure 3.6: Map of the Tulip tour, Almaty region, South Kazakhstan



Source: http://valentina-gh.narod.ru/vgh_accesstamgaly.jpg.

After 80 kilometres in the steppes, the bus reached the Kanshengel village, where several yurts were installed and equipped with beds specifically for visitors (Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7: Tulip tour yurt-camp, May 2012



Source: Author.

The second day of the tour started with an exploration in the steppes landscapes where fauna and flora (particularly special flowers and plants species) were identified by the organiser of the tour. The second day comprised a visit to a camel farm where visitors were offered the opportunity to taste *shubat* (camel milk) and derived camel milk products (*kurt*) from the traditional nomadic culture. The third day consisted of having breakfast in the yurt allocated for guests and going back to Almaty.

The tour was designed for visitors who wanted their first experience in a yurt. In order to keep a certain level of comfort, home-stay providers offered visitors the choice of sleeping in beds (Figure 3.8) or on *körpes* (traditional mattresses on the floor), as well as proper sanitary conditions and toilets.

Figure 3.8: Beds set in yurts for visitors, Tulip tour



Source: Madina Duysebayeva.

This level of comfort implies that some ‘traditional’ cultural elements of the nomadic lifestyle have been omitted; for example, the food was served in a yurt (Figure 3.9) designated specifically for visitors, and it was Western-style cuisine with beer and wine being served, even though alcohol is normally absent from the traditional nomadic culture.

Figure 3.9: Dinner in the yurt with international visitors, Tulip tour



Source: Madina Duysebayeva.

The culinary codes and rules inherent to the traditional nomadic lifestyle – for example, how the guests are positioned in designated areas in the yurt according to their age and prestige criteria – were neither applied nor explained. All travel between the different geographical locations of the tour was covered in a four-wheel-drive minibus. The price (approximately NZ\$340 for one person) included the services of a driver and an English-speaking guide-interpreter, the accommodation in yurts (six beds per yurt), three meals per day in the yurt or in the field, and the visit to the camel farm.

3.3 Collecting the data

The interpretative paradigm supports the belief that reality is constructed by subjective perception and predictions cannot be made (Littlejohn, 2000). As the proposed research focused on the social construction of meaning, the researcher adopted a constructivist/interpretive research position to interview various stakeholders. In this way, the researcher emphasised the significance of context in understanding various stakeholders' positions in the study. The multiple-stakeholder approach means that different research tools were needed in order to understand the complexities and challenges of the development of eco-cultural tours in Kazakhstan. It was thus important for the study to understand all stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity of the Kazakhstani tourist space and cultural heritage.

3.3.1 Theoretical sampling and validity construction across case studies

Due to the recent development of the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours (launched in July 2010 and May 2012, respectively), the researcher had limited available information about the population from which the sample would be taken. Therefore, non-probability sampling was applied for both stages of the research. Purposive or judgmental sampling method was used in order to select unique cases that were especially informative about the development of eco-cultural tourism projects in Kazakhstan; this sampling method is preferred in situations when an expert uses judgment in selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind (Neuman, 2009). After the researcher met with various stakeholders (policymaker and tourism developers) involved in eco-cultural tourism in the country during the first international ecotourism conference held in Karaganda city in August 2010, a multiple-stakeholder approach was chosen to

understand the development of Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism. The multi-stakeholder approach allowed the researcher to first interview all the different groups of populations involved in the development of the Kyzylarai and Tulip eco-cultural tours. In order to understand the complexity of ecotourism development and nomadic culture in the country, a panel of international and Kazakhstani academic experts selected from their publications, knowledge and expertise about nomadic culture and tourism development in Central Asia were contacted and additionally interviewed. Some of the experts in nomadic culture were met at the first international ecotourism conference held in Karaganda in August 2010. During the first qualitative stage, semi-structured interviews were undertaken and transcribed with local government officials, tourism operators, home-stay providers, NGO coordinators and experts in nomadic culture. During the second qualitative stage, local and international visitors were interviewed.

Theoretical sampling

Theoretical sampling involves refining categories and developing them as academic constructs, finding gaps in the data and holes in theories. The researcher then goes back to the field and collects delimited data to fill the conceptual gaps and holes. Theoretical sampling represents a defining property of grounded theory and relies on the comparative methods within grounded theory. As Charmaz argues:

The researcher would seek comparative data in substantive areas through theoretical sampling to help us tease out less visible properties of our concepts and the conditions and limits of their applicability.

Charmaz (2003, p. 266)

After it was decided which categories best explained what was happening in the study, the researcher defined gaps between the categories. Charmaz (2003) recommends conducting theoretical sampling later so that relevant data and analytical directions emerge without being forced, otherwise early theoretical sampling may bring premature closure to the analysis.

McCracken (1988) states that most studies achieve saturation at between eight and twenty-four interviews, depending on the topic focus. If the study or phenomenon is conceptually small, the sample size may be minimal; if the phenomenon is expansive,

however, many informants may need to be interviewed before saturation is achieved. To assist in the process of acceptance and trust, informants were recruited through mutual acquaintance intermediaries. These intermediaries provided common bonds by which trust could be established. When the ongoing process of analysis of each interview revealed that findings were conceptually similar and repetitive, sampling was suspended in keeping with McCracken's (1988) views.

Looking at two different case studies involving different stakeholders in various geographical locations allowed theoretical saturation to be maximised, with informants chosen deliberately for contrast (age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, education, lifestyle and geographical location). The data collection involved one case study located in Central Kazakhstan and another in South Kazakhstan; local communities, NGO coordinators, tourism providers and visitors were interviewed for both case studies. Government officials and experts in nomadic culture were interviewed in Almaty and the capital city, Astana. Free independent travellers (FITs) comprised expatriates living and working in Kazakhstan, international travellers, and local and international students, and were all interviewed in Almaty.

Validity construction

Qualitative approaches are often criticised by positivists because of the lack of objectivity and generalisability associated with them. To ensure the rigour of the study's findings, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were applied to the study. According to Henderson (1991), credibility in qualitative studies is mostly a question of the researcher having the personal and interpersonal skills to limit biases due to their presence; the researcher limits bias by developing trust with informants and avoiding reactive effects or selective perception. The researcher managed to gain trust with the informants by a prolonged engagement in Kazakhstan, living and working in the country from August 2003 to August 2012. By participating in the first Kazakhstani eco-tourism conference held in Karaganda in August 2010, the researcher managed to meet several tourism officials, local tourism providers, and local and international NGOs involved in the development of eco-tourism in the country. Initial contacts with key organisers of the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours were established during the conference, and a preparatory

visit to the village of Shabanbai Bi (Kyzylarai tour) was organised for the participants of the conference.

Research is credible when the suggested meanings are relevant to the informants and when the theoretical propositions conform to the interview and observation data. In order to conform to the credibility criteria, the researcher gave each participant an information sheet containing detailed aspects of the research. Such an information sheet is also a requirement of AUT University's Ethics Committee (AUTEC). Furthermore, analyses and interpretations were contextualised by describing the various stakeholders being interviewed, by explaining the Kazakhstani context, and by highlighting the infancy stage of eco-cultural tourism development in the country. Finally, data, categories and concepts were continuously compared and checked against the empirical material in order to make the findings and conclusions credible.

Data triangulation involves the use of a variety of data sources in the study. By combining primary data (interviews and questionnaire surveys with different tourism stakeholders and different types of visitors (e.g. Tulip tour clients and FITs) and secondary data (textbooks and promotional materials of the tourism agencies advertising the eco-cultural tours), the researcher managed to render different points of views regarding perceptions of authenticity in Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism practices. Informant triangulation involved both typical (Tulip and Kyzylarai tours' clients) and atypical (FITs) informants who were worth investigating and assisted in the transferability of the sampling.

Transferability and confirmability were enabled by consciously adding new cases to be studied according to their potential for developing new insights or for expanding and emerging grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As Yin details:

A theory must be tested by replicating the findings in a second case study, where the theory has specified that the same results should occur. Once such direct replications have been made, the results might be accepted as providing strong support for the theory, even though further replications had not been performed.

Yin (2009, p. 44)

Following Yin's approach and in order to maximise theoretical saturation, the researcher decided to add the Tulip tour in South Kazakhstan as a second case study.

The Tulip tour involved an international tourism organiser, local communities in the village of Kanshengel, and a group of 18 visitors.

Dependability refers to design stability. The informants were interviewed following the research protocol defined in the study and the coding processes of the grounded theory were applied to the interview transcripts. Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that a researcher can never be totally objective. However, the data analysis process was made as objective as possible with the researcher looking at a variety of perceptual approaches about the concept of authenticity (objective, subjective and experiential). The researcher then reported theoretically how the different perceptions of authenticity could enhance visitors' experiences while travelling in Kazakhstan.

3.3.2 Ethical and practical aspects of researching the question of authenticity in Kazakhstan

The author spent one month (August 2011) in Central Kazakhstan collecting data from the Kyzylarai tour. The researcher first interviewed different stakeholders involved in the organisation of the tour and then visitors while they undertook the tour. The researcher made use of source documents such as field notes, interview transcripts, and the concurrent integration of secondary interdisciplinary literature as new concepts were developed and refined. The author then spent three days in South Kazakhstan (May 2012) collecting data from the Tulip tour. First the researcher interviewed stakeholders involved in the organisation of the tour and then visitors while they undertook the tour. Figure 3.10 summarises the different activities of the data collection.

Figure 3.10: Summary of data collection

Activity	Details	Description and timeline
1) Literature review and secondary data sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of the main theoretical aspects of the dimensions and aspects for addressing authenticity in cultural-heritage tourism • Identification of various statistical data about the number of outbound and inbound visitors in the country 	Evolutionary process completed throughout the thesis
2) Preparatory visit to eco-site Shabanbai Bi, Kyzylarai tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of key stakeholders to be interviewed for the research • Initial visit and direct observations of the eco-site Shabanbai Bi 	First international eco-tourism research conference held in Karaganda city in August 2010
3) Formal semi-structured interviews with tourism providers and visitors of 'Kyzylarai' and 'Tulip' tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted: focuses directly on case study topics • Insightful: provides perceived causal inferences and explanations 	August 2011–September 2012
4) Questionnaire surveys with FITs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted: focuses directly on case study topics 	August 2011–September 2012

1) Review of literature and secondary data sources provided information about the background context of the study and further informed the research questions. In particular, the researcher reviewed academic literature on authenticity and sustainable tourism development, tour operators' newsletters and brochures, and public documents. Industry publications and information coming from local and international conferences about the development of eco-cultural tourism in Central Kazakhstan were accessed through the online deliverables of the ETPACK project database after the implementation of the Kyzylarai tour in July 2010.

The researcher made use of statistical information from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of the Republic of Kazakhstan available in English language before the interviews commenced. The researcher faced the challenge of overcoming discrepancies in Kazakhstani tourism statistics between the Ministry of Tourism and Sport and international organisations who took part in the development of eco-tourism projects

in the country. In particular, the number of international and domestic visitors varies significantly between the official Kazakhstani government statistics site and the Ministry of Tourism and Sport (Table 3.1). The figures below illustrate the number of inbound and outbound visitors in Kazakhstan based on two different sources from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport.

Table 3.1: Number of inbound and outbound visitors in Kazakhstan between January 2008 and December 2012.

	KZ statistics site		Ministry of Tourism and Sport	
	International visitors	Domestic visitors	International visitors	Domestic visitors
2008	38,000	175,000	4,689,390	4,028,000
2009	31,246	122,000	4,330,000	4,241,484
2010	39,640	157,988	No figures available	No figures available
2011	36,096	189,502	No figures available	No figures available
2012	30,240	186,341	No figures available	No figures available

Source: Kazakhstani statistics site (The Agency of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2012) and the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of Kazakhstan Republic (Nikitinsky, 2010).

As the number of inbound visitors greatly varies between various sources of information, the researcher, being familiar with the local socio-political context, interpreted the local statistics with caution before contrasting them with the results in the thesis.

2) In order to investigate the practicality and viability of the proposed doctoral study, an initial visit was undertaken at the end of August 2010 to the first international eco-tourism conference held in Karaganda, Kazakhstan. During this visit, key stakeholders involved in the development of the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours were identified and potential methodological and logistical issues inherent to post-Soviet Kazakhstan were explored. The researcher met with different stakeholders from the ETPACK project in Sary-Arka region (Central Kazakhstan) involved in the development of community-based eco-tourism: the Delegation of European Union in Kazakhstan, the German Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU), the Kazakh NGO 'Eco-museum

Karaganda', the Kazakhstan Tourist Association (KTA), and the manager of the tour operator 'Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan'.

The researcher also participated in a prospective two-day field trip with different stakeholders to the eco-site of Shabanbai Bi village for two days. The researcher managed to contact the local community as well as experience some of the tourism activities prepared for prospective local and international visitors. It enabled the researcher to directly observe and take pictures of the case study sites and the cultural landscapes surrounding them. Methodologically, the preparatory visit provided considerable insight into the issues being studied and this information was used in parallel with an ongoing review of relevant literature so that the research design was informed both by prevailing theories and by a fresh set of empirical observations. This process helped to ensure that the study reflected significant theoretical issues as well as questions relevant to the two case studies.

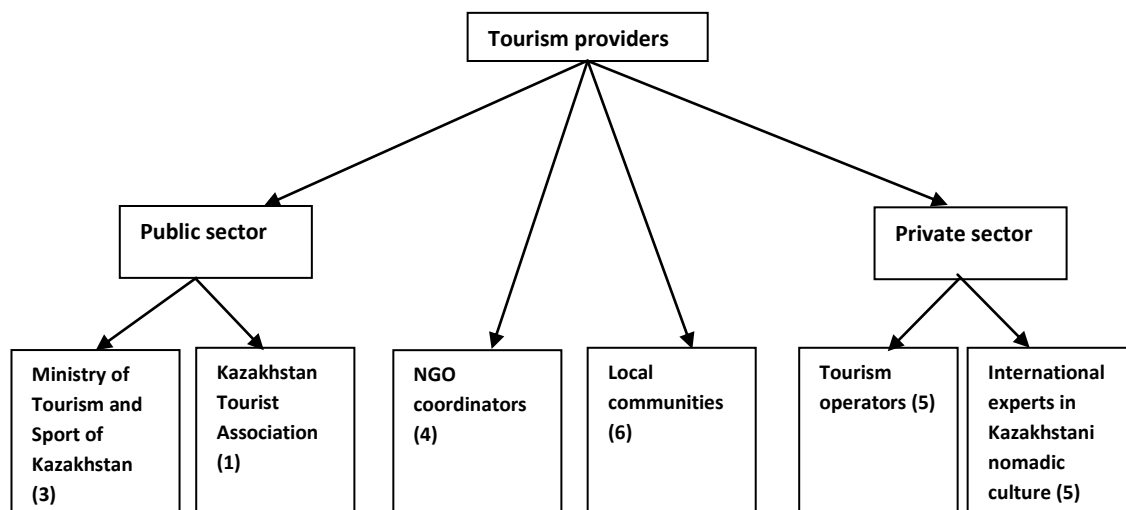
3) The researcher needed the assistance of a professional translator in order to switch from English to Russian and English to Kazakh when necessary. The translator was selected by the researcher from a professional Kazakhstani translation company (www.translated.kz) and was trained for accuracy and reliability prior to fieldwork commencing. The researcher interviewed in English international visitors and some tourism stakeholders like international NGOs involved in the development of the eco-tours. The researcher was accompanied by an official translator in Kazakh and Russian for the interviews with local officials and home-stay providers. Only one participant (an official in Astana from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport involved in the development of eco-cultural tourism in the country) was anxious about issues of privacy and confidentiality. Due to confidentiality issues, this interview was conducted in an international hotel in Astana with the help of a professional Kazakh translator.

The consent forms for the in-depth interviews and questionnaire surveys were designed to take the Kazakhstani cultural context into account. When needed, and in case Kazakhstani local communities were suspicious of signing the form, the researcher passed the forms through a facilitator (for example, an employee of Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan) to explain the research and consent forms. Interview questions, consent forms and participant information sheets were translated into Russian and Kazakh languages by a professional translator who signed a translator

confidentiality agreement before the interviews commenced. All questionnaires for the interviews were supplied with a covering letter which explained the main purposes of the survey and the participants' rights. The cover letters included contact addresses of the researcher and the researcher's primary supervisor.

The in-depth semi-structured interviews with tourism providers and visitors consisted of open-ended questions so the views of the participants emerged naturally and were not predetermined by the researcher (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). The design of the interviews facilitated genuine unguarded responses to the questions asked (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Permission to conduct these interviews was approved formally by the director of Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan for the Kyzylarai tour in August 2011 and the tourism organiser of the Tulip tour in May 2012. An interview guide developed from a series of topics for discussion was administered to the participants. The interviews were about one hour long and notes were taken during the interviews, which were reviewed soon after by the researcher to draw out key themes. Interviews were conducted by the researcher at convenient times for the visitors (on the bus, in the evenings, and at the end of the tour). The researcher did not face any gender issues when interviewing local communities in the villages of Shabanbai Bi and Kanshengel. Figure 3.11 summarises the tourism providers interviewed for the study.

Figure 3.11: Summary of the tourism providers interviewed for the study



In August 2011 the researcher started the process of conducting semi-structured interviews with groups of experts in the nomadic culture and representatives of different Kazakhstani officials responsible for developing eco-tourism projects in the

country. The Minister of Tourism and Sport of the Republic of Kazakhstan is involved in the development of eco-tourism in the country and was interviewed in Russian in the capital city, Astana, with the help of a professional translator. Two additional representatives from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport were interviewed in the Karaganda region regarding the implementation of eco-cultural tourism projects in the region (including the ETPACK project). One member of the KTA created by the president of Kazakhstan in 1999 and responsible for the promotion of ecotourism in the country, was interviewed in English in Almaty.

The researcher joined the Kyzylarai tour in Central Kazakhstan in August 2011 to interview tourism professionals (tourism providers). The director and marketing and logistics specialists of Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan, who organise and promote eco-cultural tours in the country, were interviewed in Russian with the help of a professional translator. The researcher then joined the Tulip tour in South Kazakhstan in May 2012 and interviewed the organiser of the tour in English.

The researcher interviewed, in August 2011, local and international NGO coordinators directly involved in the development of the Kyzylarai tour. These coordinators have a deep knowledge of the nomadic culture and its renaissance in the country as well as environmental issues in Kazakhstan. The director of the representative office of NABU and the directors of the Kazakh NGOs 'Eco-museum Karaganda' and 'Avalon Historic-geographical Society' were interviewed in English and in Russian, with the help of the professional translator when it was necessary.

The researcher interviewed local communities in the villages of Shabanbai Bi, for the Kyzylarai tour, in August 2011 and Kanshengel, for the Tulip tour, in May 2012. The interviewees consisted of local home-stay providers selling local souvenirs and running local guest houses. All local home-stay providers formally agreed to participate in the research by signing the consent form. They were interviewed in Kazakh or Russian and the interviews were then transcribed into English with the help of the professional translator. The international and Kazakhstani experts in nomadic culture were interviewed between August 2011 and September 2012. All were interviewed in English in Kazakhstan, except for two who were interviewed in French over the Internet, using Skype software. Table 3.2 provides a breakdown of various stakeholders' participants for both Kyzylarai and Tulip tours.

Table 3.2: Breakdown of semi-structured interviews with tourism providers

Categories	Number of semi-structured interviews Kyzylarai tour	Number of semi-structured interviews Tulip tour
Government officials	4	
Tourism operators	4	1
Tourism home-stay providers	4	2
NGOs	4	
Experts in nomadic culture	5	
TOTAL	21	3

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with international visitors on the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours during the peak of the tourism season, in August 2011 and May 2012, respectively. The interviews focused on the visitors' perceptions regarding different dimensions of authenticity when experiencing eco-cultural tours in Central and South Kazakhstan. Table 3.3 provides a breakdown of visitors' participants for both Kyzylarai and Tulip tours.

Table 3.3: Breakdown of semi-structured interviews with visitors on the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours

Categories of visitors	Number of semi-structured interviews
Kyzylarai tour visitors	7
Tulip tour visitors	18
TOTAL	25

4) As part of the informant triangulation and theoretical sampling strategy, several categories of FITs were interviewed between August 2011 and September 2012. These FITs were either randomly met by the researcher during their travels in Kazakhstan or identified by the researcher during various discussions around tourism development in the country while he was living in the country. When the researcher could not physically reach the participants to be interviewed, questionnaire surveys with consent forms were administered or sent via email by the researcher to some of the categories of FITs. The first category of FITs comprised eighteen Kazakhstani and international students from KIMEP University located in Almaty and who had travelled in the country; the researcher met with them in Almaty and they completed the

questionnaire in English with a consent form at the end of the spring semester 2012. Another category of FITs comprised six expatriates who were living and working in Kazakhstan for international companies and international organisations, and who had an extensive experience of travelling in the country. Questionnaire surveys in English were sent by email and received with answers by the researcher between September 2011 and February 2012. The last category of FITs comprised a group of five international visitors 'passing through' Kazakhstan during their world travel, and who were interviewed by the researcher in Almaty. For this last group, the itineraries of their travels included journeys in remote areas in the country, travelling through the steppes, sometimes by their own means (cycling), and stopping often in local villages for accommodation. Table 3.4 provides a breakdown of FITs' participants who did not participate in either of the Kyzylarai or Tulip tours.

Table 3.4: Breakdown of free independent travellers

Categories of visitors		Number of questionnaire surveys
Students	International	3
	Kazakhstani	15
Expatriates living and working in Kazakhstan		6
International travellers		5
TOTAL		29

The multiple-stakeholder approach means that different research tools were needed in order to begin understanding the complexities and challenges of the development of eco-cultural tours in Kazakhstan.

3.4 Analysing the data

Hallberg (2006) argues that the result of a constructivist grounded theory study is more often presented as a story or a narrative, including categories, told by the researcher, rather than as a theory. As Charmaz (2006) details, the researcher composes the story and does not simply unfold it before the eyes of an objective viewer. Accordingly, the story reflects the viewer as well as the viewed (Hallberg, 2006).

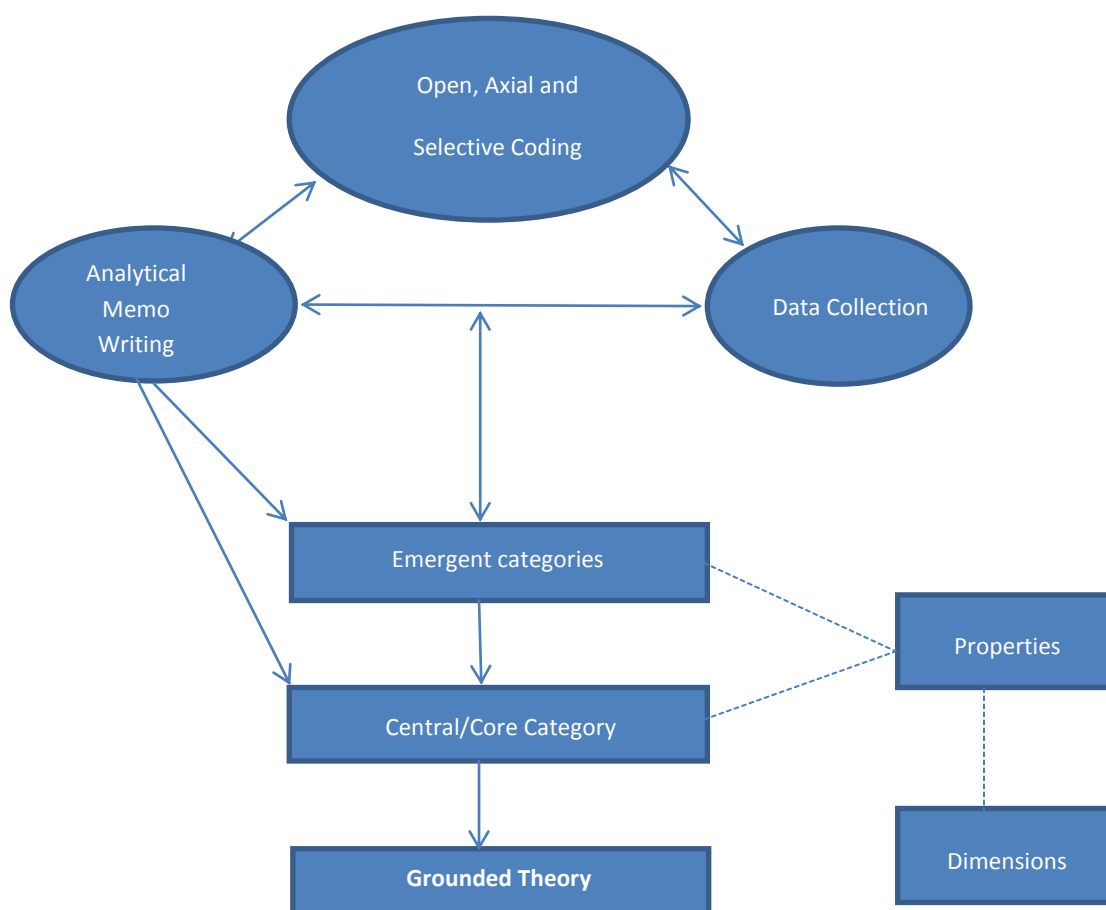
The researcher engaged in three major stages of data analysis that are involved in grounded theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In line with Marshall and Rossman's (2006) process of organising data and identifying any emergent patterns, categories and themes, the researcher firstly analysed any recurrent events or comments and attached a label to them (open coding, see Appendix 5). The researcher then identified causal relationships between coding in order to understand the observable facts which they create (axial coding), and then followed this analysis by validating relationships and refining these categories in the third stage (selective coding). This enabled the development of theory and completion of the research process through the review and evaluation of the proposed model of transnomic authenticity, which is developed in Chapter 6.

Unlike quantitative research that requires data to fit into preconceived standardised codes, the researcher's interpretations of data shape his or her emergent codes in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003). The researcher proceeded through an examination of each line of data and then defined the action within it as well as what meaning should be given to it. This process allowed the researcher to pinpoint gaps and hence focus subsequent data collection; in particular, after the set of interviews from the Tulip tour. Specifically, the constant comparative method of grounded theory enabled the researcher to: (a) compare different people (such as their views, situations, actions, accounts and experiences), (b) contrast data from the same individual with different points in time, (c) compare incident with incident, (d) compare data with category, and (e) juxtapose a category with other categories (Charmaz, 1983, 1995; Glaser, 1978, 1992).

The processes of open and axial coding are intended to make the researcher's emerging theories denser, more complex and more precise (Charmaz, 2003). The concept of dimensionality, developed by Shatzman (1991), helps in the development of a 'dimensional profile' of the properties of a category. Axial coding, proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), is aimed at making connections within a category and its subcategories, which include conditions that give rise to the category, its context, the social interactions through which it is handled, and its consequences. Categories have 'properties' and 'dimensions', variable qualities that display the range or distribution within similarly coded data (Saldana, 2009). Making explicit decisions about selecting codes allows a check on the fit between the emerging theoretical framework and the empirical reality it explains (Charmaz, 2003).

(Glaser, 1978, p. 84) specifies that "through writing memos on codes, the analyst draws and fills out analytic properties of the descriptive data." Through memo writing, the researcher managed to explore codes and expand upon the processes they managed to identify and suggest. After defining the properties of the emergent categories (e.g. the 'performative' aspects of the tourism experience) the researcher connected themes (e.g. 'characteristics of the tourism experience') and defined how they fit into larger processes; in particular, with the transnomadic authenticity model introduced in this study. Saldana (2009, p. 42) insists on "the ongoing interrelationship with analytic memo writing, and the memo's reorganisation and integration into the final report of the study." Raw data from different sources enabled the researcher to make precise comparisons, identify new ideas, and analyse properties, categories and word choice patterns. Figure 3.12 below illustrates Saldana's model for the developing 'classic' grounded theory.

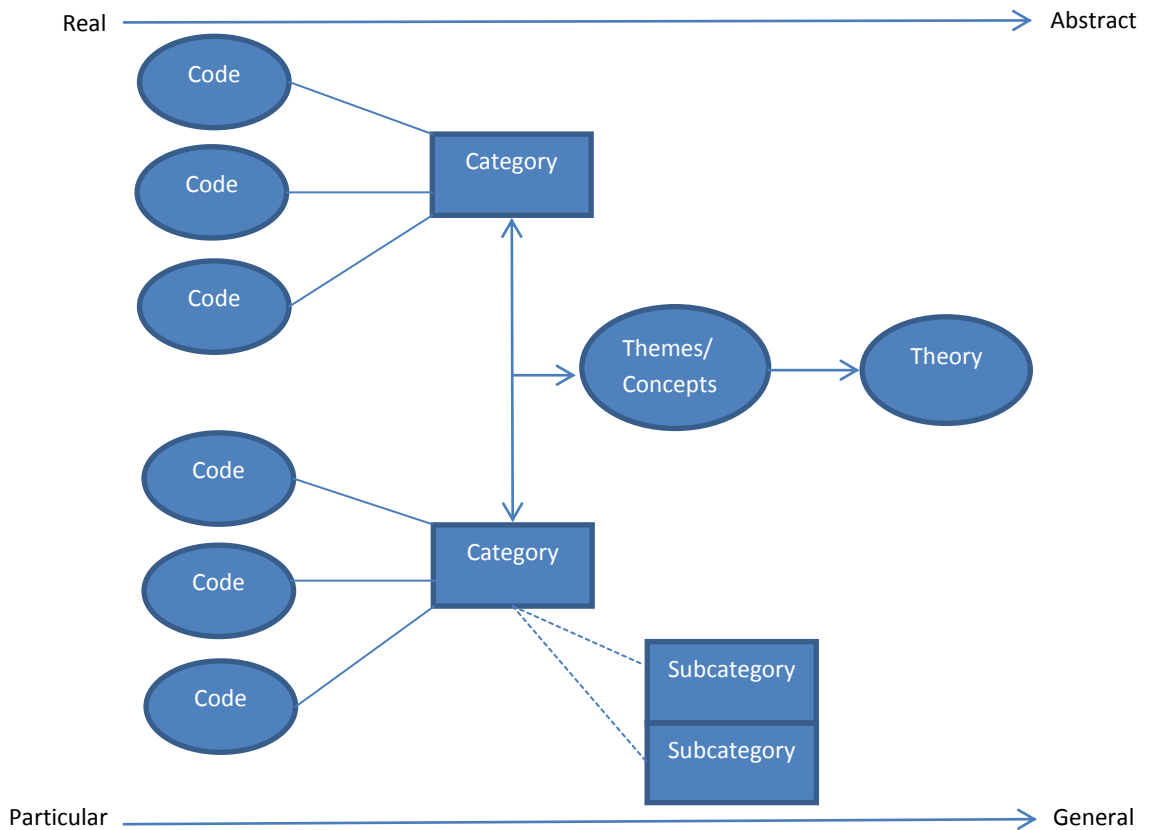
Figure 3.12: An elemental model for developing 'classic' grounded theory



Source: Adapted from Saldana (2009, p. 43).

Coding is a method that enables organising and grouping similarly coded data into categories or 'families' that share some characteristic – the beginning of a pattern. The researcher used classification reasoning plus a tacit and intuitive sense to determine which data 'looked alike' and 'felt alike' when grouping them together, in the manner of Lincoln and Guba (1985). Content within each category were refined from the data before the researcher started comparing the content or the categories, similar to the approach taken by Rubin and Rubin (2005). Some emergent categories had conceptual processes rather than descriptive topics such as 'existential' or 'performative' aspects of the tourism experience. Themes or concepts lead to "more general, higher level, and more abstract constructs" (L. Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 157). The ability to show "how these themes or concepts systematically interrelate lead towards the development of theory" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 55). Figure 3.13 illustrates Saldana's streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry.

Figure 3.13: Streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry



Source: Saldana (2009, p. 12).

Saldana (2009) advises the final number of major themes or concepts should be held to a minimum to keep the analysis coherent. Unlike Lichtman's (2013) five to seven central themes and Creswell's (2007) five to six major themes, Harry F. Wolcott (1994, p. 10) generally advises throughout his writings that "three of anything major seems enough for reporting qualitative work." The researcher heeded Saldana's and Wolcott's views and kept the number of themes to three – 'destination context', 'characteristics of the tourism experience' and 'visitor profiles'. The three themes were put in perspective with a fourth one taken from existing literature – 'global travelling trends and mobilities' – before generating the proposed model of transnomadic authenticity.

Saldana recommends that for first-time or small-scale case studies, coding should be first done from hard-copy printouts, not via a computer monitor, because "there is something about manipulating qualitative data on paper and writing codes in pencil that give you more control and ownership of the work" (Saldana, 2009, p. 22). Handling the data manually gets "additional data out of memory and into the record. It

turns abstract information into concrete data” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 145). Basit (2003, p. 143) compared personal experiences between manual and electronic coding and concluded “the choice will be dependent on the size of the project, the funds and time available, and the inclination and expertise of the researcher.” The researcher decided to transcribe the codes manually in pencil for all stages of the research to favour the inductive aspect of grounded theory and generate the basis of the transnomadic authenticity model.

Yin (2009) argues that the examination of word tables from cross-case patterns strongly relies on argumentative interpretation. The researcher coded the transcripts line by line, looking for recurrent themes in the interviews. Some lists of word tables broken down by specific questions were then created and reported in Excel sheets. Multiple iterations of coding were used to confirm the validity of the data analysis. To ensure the validity and consistency of interpretations of questions, the researcher coded iteratively the same transcript on separate days and had academic tourism experts in the field validate them.

Following this approach, the researcher managed with complementary word tables to draw cross-case patterns about different stakeholders’ perception of authenticity regarding eco-cultural tourism in Kazakhstan. The researcher then became familiar with each case as a standalone entity. This process allowed the unique patterns of each case to emerge before the researcher started to generalise patterns. The researcher then listed the similarities and differences between the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours. As Eisenhardt highlights:

This tactic enabled the researcher to look for the subtle similarities and differences between the cases. The juxtaposition of seemingly similar cases by a researcher looking for differences can break simplistic frames. In the same way, the search for similarity in a seemingly different pair can also lead to more sophisticated understanding. The result of these forced comparisons can be new categories and concepts which the investigators did not anticipate.

Eisenhardt (1989, p. 541)

From the within-site and cross-site analyses, concepts started to emerge. The researcher made sure to compare systematically the emergent categories (like ‘performative’ aspects of the tourism experience) with the evidence from each case in order to assess how the emergent category fitted with the data. Theory was generated

through the interpretation of the empirical materials by constantly comparing the codes identified from the semi-structured interviews.

The theoretical categories were generated through the inductive generation of themes supplemented with deductive reasoning. All tourism stakeholders interviewed provided the background context under which sets of categories occurred. The researcher used replication logic from the Kyzylarai to the Tulip tour to enhance confidence in the validity of the themes which, in turn, provided an opportunity to refine and extend the transnomadic authenticity model. Some questions used in semi-structured interviews (“What is your definition of an authentic tourism experience?”, “How would you characterise nomadic culture in Kazakhstan?”) involved rich and complex answers from the participants. Following Glaser’s (1992, 1998) approach who claims that doing grounded theory implies drawing upon all information to generate theory, the researcher used the terms ‘several’, ‘some’ or the ‘majority’ where appropriate in the subsequent chapters to “indicate a sense of consensus when no definite statistic to reflect a finding can be given” (Deuchar, 2012, p. 100).

Chapter 4: Tourism Providers' Perceptions of Authenticity

This chapter presents the findings that focus on the perceptions of authenticity of community members (home-stay providers), policymakers (officials from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of the Republic of Kazakhstan), tourism developers (Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan and 'Tulip' tour operators, and local and international NGOs) and specialists in nomadic culture involved in the development of eco-cultural tours in Kazakhstan.

Using the cases of 'Kyzylarai' and Tulip tours in Central and South Kazakhstan, the chapter is divided into three sections: a detailed overview from the tourism providers of the rebirth and characterisation of nomadic culture in the country, tourism providers' authentication positions on various topic areas and indicators of authenticity for Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism, and the attributes of the performative aspects of the tourism experiences made available to visitors. Key findings of the chapter are illustrated by authenticity concepts taken from the academic literature to clarify the depth and complexity of various tourism providers' perceptions of authenticity, and are summarised at the end of the chapter.

4.1 Authentication and rebirth of nomadic culture

Of particular relevance to this study is the question of how tourism providers can shape the reality for tourists and provide a depiction of the true social and economic situation in the destination (Britton, 1979; Silver, 1993). More specifically, the research examines how suppliers of tourism experiences redefine the social meanings of places, through creating an image of the country which would be exposed to the international arena. This chapter looks at how tourism intersects with post-Soviet heritage and socio-economic development to create, as MacCarthy (2012, p. 2) highlights for the Trobriand Islands, "a cultural heritage which looks to the past for authentication and validation" and which can combine the concept of authenticity in eco-cultural tourism experiences.

The chapter relates the complicated conditions and tensions that emanate from the negotiated views of what is traditional and authentic through the lenses of different stakeholders involved in the development of eco-cultural tourism. The discussion examines the various aspects of the commodification of Kazakhstani nomadic culture

in a post-Soviet heritage. In particular, this chapter looks at how the tourism experience is conceptualised and shaped by different tourism providers around the development of eco-cultural tourism in the country. The focus of this chapter includes identification of stakeholders according to their relationships with eco-cultural tourism development in Kazakhstan. The tourism management strategies and practices related to their position on authenticity are then considered. The remainder of this chapter discusses the measurement of these stakeholders' perspectives regarding their authentication positions on various topics areas related to neo-nomadic culture.

4.1.1 The rebirth of nomadic culture and its characterisation

For a majority of local home-stay providers, the question of authenticity in the tourism experience is a concept that is *brought* by Western-minded visitors “who introduce it to a place where it had never previously existed” (Neich, 2001, p. 236). When being interviewed about her perception of an authentic tourism experience, one home-stay provider from the Kyzylarai tour immediately pointed out “the need to be more familiar with the notion of authenticity in the everyday practice of tourism”. Two home-stay providers from the Tulip tour did not answer the question immediately, needing an explanation of the term ‘authentic’ before they could respond. When asked more specifically about what would constitute an authentic tourism experience for a visitor in their villages, a majority of the home-stay providers mention the home environment, using expressions such as “be with my family” and “be in my house” to depict an authentic tourism encounter.

Interestingly, most experts in nomadic culture mentioned that the transformation of traditional nomadic lifestyles in contemporary Kazakhstan makes it difficult to find “a definite authentic image of the country”. One highlighted that the traditional nomadic culture that was prevailing before 1928 gradually disappeared during Soviet times as the nomadic populations became more sedentary and their lifestyle transformed into a semi-nomadic one:

“Semi-nomads make their living out of livestock breeding in the summer pastures and live in the rural villages (*auls*) of Kazakhstan during the winter seasons. Due to the rapid Westernisation and urbanisation processes following the independence of the country in 1991, traditional nomadic peoples’ shelters in the form of yurts have progressively been replaced by houses in villages.”

A majority of the tourism providers interviewed acknowledged that some aspects of the traditional nomadic culture have been preserved. As one expert in nomadic culture explained, “The figure of the nomad is perceived by foreigners as being tolerant, peaceful, law-abiding and living in harmony with nature.” As Kunanbaeva (2008, p. 92) details, “Nomad civilization has its own laws governing the organisation of time and space, and nomads follow very sensitively the cycles of nature.” Some other experts in Kazakhstani cultural heritage associate the ancestral nomadic culture with “strong family values” and “a sense of the community”, but also emphasise its connectedness to “fauna, flora” and “culinary traditions that were influenced by the ‘horse culture’”.

Xie (2011, p. 44) refers to a *primordial state* “when tourism is in a primitive stage with few external influences”. Therefore, the concept of authenticity at this stage can be summarised as “a set of symbols that are interpreted as concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, identities and religions, and can be perceived as a generic and incontestable attribute of primary ethnic manifestation” (Xie, 2011, p. 46). In Kazakhstan, the cultural evolution which has characterised the nation since its independence is shaping the distinctive tourism of the country. According to the Tulip tour organiser, the revival of nomadic culture is taking place “mostly in the Southern part of the country and in mountainous landscapes”. The director of Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan explained:

“Traditional nomadic culture is distinctive, fast integrating with other cultures and the *sense of hospitality* is still one of the main distinctive aspects of the traditional nomadic lifestyle.”

More than half of the home-stay providers mentioned that nomadic traditions, including culinary ones, are evolving. These home-stay providers explained that the fast assimilation of Western lifestyle standards by younger generations in the villages tend to make them forget the traditional knowledge of their ancestors, in particular, knowledge about products made from fur. As one of them highlighted, “People do not follow a traditional nomadic lifestyle, but get inspired by its foundations.” As an example of the reinvention of local traditions, particularly in craft-making, some home-stay providers mention that traditional Kazakhstani embroidery patterns are now being used on tourists’ fur souvenirs. One tourism operator, from the Kyzylarai tour, explained that the ‘real’ traditional nomadic culture is still preserved in some remote

areas, but in terms of craft-making, there are fewer and fewer masters who can make carpets the way they were made during the previous century:

“The *kilims* (traditional carpets) were made out of camel wool while local people are now using cotton to make them. Instead, younger generations have created hybrid crafts for the tourism market using fur, and created new products like mobile phones sets and sleepers visitors can use in everyday life back home.”

Politically, nomadic culture is perceived by government officials as a key theme in the country’s ongoing process of identity-making. One of the specialists in Kazakhstani nomadic culture explained, “The nomadic identity and the pride of being a nomad remain intact as a marker of the country’s identity.” From a tourism marketing point of view, another specialist in nomadic culture believes a rebirth in traditions is necessary as it serves to validate the visitors’ romantic views of the nomadic culture and the Silk Road:

“The renaissance is necessary even though the real understanding of the nomadic culture has to be found during Soviet times. Though, there is an intense revival of our traditions for the sake of eco-tourism and ethnic tourism development in the country. This revival is mostly carried out by returning ethnic Kazakhs from China, Mongolia and Turkey.”

The development of tourism is also motivated by a declining socio-economic situation in the villages due to a rapid urbanisation process since the beginning of the 1990s. The project manager of the national Kazakhstan Tourism Association (KTA) recognises that the rebirth of nomadic culture is mostly due to “a need to preserve a declining cultural heritage, but also motivated by the perspective of additional sources of income in the most remote areas of the country.” For one government official, “Everything revives when linked to commercial goals.” Tourism development in Kazakhstan is seen as an opportunity to attract new investments for local development, but also as a tool to revitalise traditional nomadic culture in the villages.

4.1.2 Authenticity, eco-cultural tourism and sustainability

With the advent of globalisation and since the independence of Kazakhstan in 1991, “the contemporary collective imagery has largely restored the figure of the Nomad that became a ‘fetish’ theme in marketing” (Laruelle, 2008, p. 14). The demand for cultural heritage experiences is increasingly leading to a number of new nature and cultural-tourism products providing local communities’ perspectives (Carr, 2008) as

eco-cultural tourism experiences. More than half of the tourism providers interviewed (community members, policymakers, tourism providers and specialists in nomadic culture in Kazakhstan), indicated that eco-cultural tourism, ethnic tourism and community-based tourism (CBT) are the most appropriate models for tourism development in the rural areas. The three models ideally combine visits to archaeological sites from the Bronze Age with remains of the post-Soviet heritage, and contribute to the preservation of rural villages by empowering local populations with eco-tourism practices.

While nineteen tourism providers out of twenty one emphasise the importance of ecological (fauna and flora) and cultural (traditional games, craft-making and cooking traditions) aspects in visitors' experiences, three government officials, and two tourism operators, believe eco-cultural tourism to be the most appropriate model for tourism development. Two experts in nomadic culture and two tourism operators acknowledge ethnic tourism based on nomadic way of life as the most suitable way for visitors to have an authentic tourism experience in the country. CBT is advocated mostly by the NGO coordinators, half of whom believe that living an authentic tourism experience is only possible if visitors live with the local communities in the villages because, by doing so, the visitors can experience their hosts' cultural traditions. Business tourism, extreme tourism and beach tourism are mentioned as well by two-thirds of the officials interviewed as representing a potential additional source of income for the local populations in rural areas.

While a majority of the home-stay providers emphasise the importance of nature and culture preservation, two NGO coordinators underline the notion of authenticity as being a unique and important feature associated with eco-cultural tourism practices and tours offered in the country. The sustainable nature of the former nomadic culture and lifestyle is recognised as being an important component for the development of Kazakhstani eco-tourism. Key experts in the country's nomadic culture indicate former nomads used to live closely with nature in a sustainable way, using and consuming natural resources (fauna and flora) before moving to another dwelling setting. In this context, eco-cultural landscapes (steppes) and the different meanings and symbolic aspects of the Kazakhstani fauna (eagles, wolves) and flora (plants) are seen to be

essential elements to portraying a fair and impartial image of an authentic tourism experience.

Archaeological sites encountered during the tours (ancient stone carvings, or petroglyphs) are perceived by operators from both tours to have a “true authentic meaning” and should be underlined as a cultural component in the eco-tours. One of the NGO coordinators and the main guide of the Kyzylarai tour emphasised the need to “combine natural sights with ethnical, historical and cultural features”. This perspective is reinforced by an official from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport, who explained:

“We do not need to create myths in Kazakhstan; the richness of our cultural heritage comes from our people and our land. That’s why eco-tourism would be impossible to implement without cultural tourism. Visitors can visit more than twelve national parks, and we are currently developing a tourism strategy around the revival of Silk Road archaeological sites in the country.”

The growth of eco-cultural tourism development in Kazakhstan is also considered important by one NGO coordinator for whom there is a need to connect visitors to the people who keep breeding their cattle in the rural areas. For him, it is “critical to have an authentic tourism experience with semi-nomads who have been living this way for centuries”.

Ethnocentric government policies assume that distinctive ethnic culture, traditions and local variations can be diffused and reconstructed through the process of acculturation and assimilation (Xie, 2011, p. 110). The Shabanbai Bi and Kanshengel villages, visited on the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours, respectively, are not considered by NGO coordinators and tourism operators as ‘folk’ villages, although their degree of authenticity is perceived differently by the home-stay providers in them. While the tourism operators see Shabanbai Bi village as objectively authentic, Kanshengel village is perceived as being staged for the sake of tourism. As Robinson (1999, p. 383) details, “There is a need to view living culture as tradable, substitutable and separate from the natural environment.”

4.2 Topic areas and indicators of authenticity for Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism experience

Using Jamal and Hill's (2004) framework for addressing authenticity in cultural-heritage tourism, some dimensions and topic areas of analysis have been identified (Table 4.1 below). The examples presented in the table assist in the task of constructing multi-dimensional indicators of authenticity for heritage and cultural tourism management in Kazakhstan.

Table 4.1: Indicators of authenticity: topics and considerations for Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism

Dimensions of authenticity			
Topic area	Objective (real)	Constructed (socio-political)	Postmodern (experiential)
The "geographical imagination" (Ryden, 1993) Nomadic cultural landscapes Nomadic architecture	Markers as repositories of geographical meaning <i>Steppes and meadows</i> <i>Nomadic architecture (archaeological sites and yurts)</i>	The construction of destination image in relation to sense of place <i>The role of the steppes in cultural heritage</i> <i>Perceived cultural differentiation. Importance of symbols in nomadic architecture</i>	Perceived mystery, dimension, and depth to stimulate geographic imagination <i>Experiencing eco-cultural landscapes</i> <i>Experiencing re-enacted tourists' yurts.</i> <i>Experiencing a local home-stay in rural villages</i>
Crafts purchased by tourists (Littrell et al., 1993) Ethnic art (Cohen, 1988) Nomadic ethnic art	Production technique; clearly identifiable origin; material, technique (Littrell et al., 1993) <i>Yurts and fur-manufacturing processes</i>	Constructing self and the other's identity through 'substantive staging' and emergent authenticity (Cohen, 1988) <i>Giving a 'nomadic sense' to fur products while making them</i>	Appealing or useful at home for visitors (Littrell et al., 1993) <i>Wearing ethnic fur products at home</i>
Performative spaces and the politics of cultural sites Nomadic home-stays Nomadic food	Buildings, machinery, demonstrations, cooking in heritage theme park (Moscardo & Pearce, 1986) <i>Nomadic lifestyle</i> <i>Traditional food</i>	Interpretation of indigenous culture and history (Edensor, 1998) <i>Socio-constructed nomadic lifestyle</i> <i>Traditional food as a socio-constructed mean between generations</i>	Performative and lived experience of identity, heritage and multiculturalism (Bruner, 1994; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998) <i>Experiencing nomadic lifestyle</i> <i>Experiencing nomadic food in local home-stays</i>

Source: adapted from Jamal and Hill (2004, p. 360).

As Jamal and Hill (2004, p. 361) state:

The framework of dimensions and aspects for addressing authenticity in cultural-heritage tourism draws upon studies that either sought to assess authenticity directly through measurable indicators or less directly by emphasizing actions and activities that aimed to provide a meaningful cultural or heritage-based experience, or place-based identity.

Several topic areas including the geographical imagination (nomadic cultural landscapes and nomadic architecture), crafts purchased by tourists (nomadic ethnic art), and performative spaces (nomadic home-stays and nomadic food) are highlighted by tourism providers as sources of authentic tourism experiences. For each topic area, various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity are now presented.

4.2.1 Nomadic cultural landscapes as living heritage

According to Carr (2008, p. 36), "Cultural landscapes are regarded as being human constructions resulting from peoples' relationships to the natural areas within which they live or move." In their study about cultural landscapes in Mongolian tourism, Buckley, Ollenburg and Zhong define the term cultural landscape as being intricately entwined with the populations who inhabit them:

A cultural landscape is an area where the landforms have been created by human culture as well as by nature; human culture has been created by the landscapes as well as the people; and each now depends upon and continues to exist because of the other.

Buckley, Ollenburg and Zhong (2008, p. 48)

From a geographical perspective, it is useful to argue for greater attention to the situated place and space in which the object is experienced (Crouch, 2000). From a tourism perspective, Buckley et al. further argue that culture and scenery are closely combined in the expectations and the perceptions of locals and tourists alike:

As an attraction, a cultural landscape is a place where the setting would not look the same without the culture, and the latter would not look the same without the landscape.

Buckley et al. (2008, p. 48)

Figure 4.1 shows the steppes landscapes encountered during the second day of the Tulip tour. Steppes landscapes constitute an integral part of the nomadic lifestyles of the home-stay providers who set up yurts for tourists on the Tulip tour.

Figure 4.1: Steppes landscapes, Tulip tour, May 2012



Source: Author.

Simon Schama (1996, p. 7), in his seminal work *Landscape and Memory*, emphasises how the perception of a landscape is constructed by the mind:

Before it can be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.

Buckley et al. (2008, p. 52) note that Mongolian cultural landscapes consist of four main elements – steppes, herds, horses and yurts – and the local population are characterised by “nomadic pastoralists who rely on their horses to move their flocks and herds across the great grassland steppes and carry their mobile yurts dwellings”. The perceptions of four home-stay providers, however, were slightly different: when interviewed about their authentication positions regarding the scenery encountered during the eco-tours, they associated Kazakhstani cultural landscapes with “wild nature”, “unspoilt and unique landscapes”, “natural sightseeing” and “diversity of deserts, mountains and pine forests”.

Similarly, according to three employees of the operator Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan, the fauna and flora of the steppes landscapes can be considered as key elements in portraying an authentic image of the nomadic culture. This view is shared particularly by a majority of local home-stay providers, for whom steppes landscapes are

recognised to be one of the most authentic parts of the visitors' tourism experience. The archaeological site of Begazy, which is included in the Kyzylarai tour, offers a unique opportunity for visitors to witness an ancient 'authentic' historical site from the Bronze Age (Figure 4.2). As the tourism brochure details on the Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan website:

Historical heritage is presented in a quite interesting way: monumental granite sepulchres of Begazy and rock paintings, dating from the Bronze Age, stone statues of the Turkic period and mausoleums of the period of the Kazakh-Jungar wars. Such an amazing combination of pristine nature, ancient historical monuments and rather well-preserved way of life of the local population makes the Kyzylarai eco-site a great place to visit for those who like to explore something new and interesting for themselves.

Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan (2012)

Figure 4.2: Site of Begazy, Kyzylarai tour



Source: Vitaliy Shuptar.

Similarly, the Tulip tour encompasses the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Tamgaly, where petroglyphs from the Bronze Age can be found (Figure 4.3). Tamgaly is situated 180 kilometres from Almaty in South Kazakhstan, and was authenticated by UNESCO in 2004 as being 'genuinely authentic' for visitors:

The archaeological landscape of Tamgaly features a remarkable concentration of some 5,000 petroglyphs, associated settlements and burial grounds, which together provide testimony to the husbandry, social organisation and rituals of pastoral peoples from the Bronze Age right through to the early 20th century.

The large size of the early petroglyphs, their unique images and the quality of their iconography sets them apart from the wealth of rock art in Central Asia. The petroglyphs still keeps its pristine character and essential natural and cultural features intact.

UNESCO (2004)

Figure 4.3: Petroglyphs of Tamgaly, Tulip tour, May 2012



Source: Author.

N. Wang (2000) discusses 'existential authenticity' as the experience of the visitor where the personal dimension plays a major role in authenticating a site. This transcendence of time associated with the gaze of the steppes is referring to what N. Wang (1999, p. 355) calls "the authenticity of the origins felt by the visitors and correspondingly to the authenticity projected onto toured objects by tourists and tourism producers in terms of their imagery, expectations, preferences and beliefs." Among Kazakhstani landscapes, the *feeling* of being a nomad is perceived as an authentic element of the visitor's tourism experience by most home-stay providers. One of the home-stay providers from the village of Shabanbai Bi emphasised the mystery of the inhabited steppes for some international visitors.

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

NGO coordinators confirmed that the Kazakhstani cultural landscapes often constitute the main authentic aspect of a visitor experience. From a more pragmatic perspective, NGO coordinators insist on the need to (re)connect Kazakhstani semi-nomadic people and visitors with traditional nomadic lifestyles by using cultural landscapes as an “additional component in the tourism adventure”. They highlight that, in particular, this connection gives visitors the possibility to travel in cultural landscapes on horseback and experience, upon availability, a yurt nomadic shelter with the local population, and therefore “meet visitors’ expectations about traditional nomadic culture”. Figure 4.4 shows camels in steppes landscapes encountered at the end of the Tulip tour, a sight which enhances visitors’ romantic views of the nomadic culture and the Silk Road.

Figure 4.4: Camels in the steppes, Tulip tour, May 2012



Source: Author.

4.2.2 ‘Old’ and ‘new’ nomadic architecture

As yurts are part of both the nomadic lifestyle and visitors’ perceptions of traditional nomadic culture before arriving in the country, some home-stay providers mention the need to reconstruct traditional yurts as a means to *augment* the perceived authenticity of the visitors’ experience. In the Kyzylarai tour, visitors are welcome to spend their

time with their hosts in the guest houses, but some home-stay providers emphasised the possibility of building reconstructed yurts, depending on the tourists' demands:

“We can build yurts for visitors next to our houses during special events like *Nauryz* (Kazakh New Year), or even do it on demand depending on what the tourists are aiming for and to what extent they want to learn about our nomadic traditions.”

The yurts, which used to be the symbolic traditional shelter of former nomadic populations, are now used for traditional ceremonies and special events like weddings, or specifically for tourism purposes. The main organiser of the Tulip tour is willing to reconstruct yurts in the steppes:

“The yurts in this tour are not original ones because the real yurts are more expensive and we cannot afford them. Moreover, we only stay here for a month and if we were here for three months or more we could have organised them but right now we can't.”

Figure 4.5 shows a yurt-camp set up by the Tulip tour home-stay providers in May 2012. These yurts incorporate some traditional Kazakhstani ornaments but their structures, traditionally in wood, have been replaced by aluminium. Despite the lack of genuine materials in their construction, these yurts were perceived as authentic by a majority of the Tulip tourists.

Figure 4.5: 'Reconstructed' yurts for visitors, Tulip tour, May 2012



Source: Author.

Edward Said, in *Orientalism* (1978), argues that by cannibalising cultures, capitalism has abandoned its authenticity in the quest for modernity and technology. Thus, the visitor's quest of authenticity can never be fulfilled. A majority of home-stay providers acknowledged that modern technologies (such as satellite televisions) and a change of habitat do not negatively influence the visitors' perception of authenticity:

"Modernity is not a problem for visitors and the global perception of authenticity of their tourism experience is not being necessarily changed by modern technologies that are to be found in the villages."

Instead, the Kyzylarai tour operator believes modernity is a "normal process" which reflects the social and economic changes encountered in the Kazakhstani rural areas:

"It would be totally inauthentic to have villages 'frozen' in time; people have to live with their times. Kazakhstan is a fast-developing country and we cannot refuse modernity. New technologies help us to live better, and to some extent prepare our villages to better cater the visitors' expectations."

Authenticity is negotiated and socially constructed between the visitors and the tourism operators who offer a tourism experience that reflects the contemporary socio-cultural Kazakhstani reality, with the culture presented in the villages constantly being reinvented.

Some NGO coordinators indicated that an historical reconstruction using yurt forms and traditional Kazakh ornaments can be observed in Astana city, where contemporary architectural buildings are mixed with traditional elements of the nomadic culture. The new capital city, with its many new buildings and as a new landmark of the country, is perceived by NGO coordinators as a way to understand contemporary Kazakhstani architecture (Figure 4.6).

The neo-nomadic culture is thus seen as a process of assimilation of Western architectural standards into traditional buildings. For the majority of specialists in nomadic culture interviewed, this renaissance cannot be seen in the rural villages because Kazakhstani people stopped migrating (except for going to summer pastures with their cattle) and are now settled in the villages and in the main cities.

Figure 4.6: Contemporary Kazakhstani architecture in the capital city, Astana, August 2011



Source: Author.

4.2.3 Nomadic ethnic art: objective and constructive authenticity

In the village of Shabanbai Bi, most of the home-stay providers are ready to offer handmade fur crafts in the forms of *kilims* and *körpes* (carpets) and *tapochkis* (slippers), depending on tourists' demand. The workshop on fur production organised by tourism operators and NGO coordinators in the village of Shabanbai Bi (Figure 4.7) highlights the importance of genuine fur craft-making for the local population:

Fur craft-making represents the heritage of the material and spiritual culture of the tribes who inhabited the Great Kazakh steppes in ancient times. Its development is closely connected to the nomadic characteristics of the traditional social and economic aspects of the Kazakh society, about their consciousness and various historical processes. The Kazakhs' lifestyle was mostly determined by folk craft and trade.

ETPACK (2010b)

Figure 4.7: Fur craft-making production in the village of Shabanbai Bi, Central Kazakhstan



Source: ETPACK (2010b).

The souvenir articles are individually produced by local villagers who sell a choice of hand-crafted souvenirs that are sometimes exclusively designed for the needs of the visitors. In their descriptions of craft authenticity from mid-western American tourists, Littrell et al. (1993) developed some indicators of authenticity regarding craft-making. Both external criteria (aesthetics, production techniques or time/place of manufacture) and internal criteria (whether crafts are appealing or useful when they arrive home) are found to be important markers of authenticity by the home-stay providers of the Kyzylarai tour who are selling the crafts to the visitors. They argue some carpets made in the village of Shabanbai Bi are still objectively authentic, following the embroideries and ornaments from ancient times, even if they are now mostly made out of cotton rather than camel wool.

Interestingly, the handmade craft-making production in the villages is part of the *revival* of the traditional Kazakh culture despite the fact that the fabrication is made on machines dating from Soviet times. New crafts in fur materials (carpets), jewellery (rings, earrings) or even toys for children are continuously reinvented for tourism purposes. The way collective identities in Kazakhstan are negotiated through the material and symbolic cultures of local place and space is illustrated by this comment from one home-stay provider:

“Since the independence of the country in the beginning of the 1990s, there is a re-appropriation of traditional elements of nomadic culture by populations

from the villages who want to preserve and revive the traditions that disappeared during Soviet times as a way to counter the rapid Westernisation processes that are happening in the cities; we are getting local visitors who are interested to (re)learn ancient traditions.”

Figure 4.8 shows the main home-stay provider of the Kyzylarai tour in front of a traditional carpet which decorates the wall of her living room where tourists have their meals. Depending on the tourists’ demand, home-stay providers in the Shabanbai Bi village can offer to make either traditional or new crafts out of fur materials.

Figure 4.8: Home-stay provider and Kazakh carpet, Kyzylarai tour, August 2011



Source: Author.

Half of the home-stay providers who participated in the study are aware that reproductions of some ancient crafts, including traditional Kazakhstani ornaments, can be perceived as authentic by tourists when the crafts are carried out and worn in the visitors’ homes. Here, the authenticity of the crafts is being evaluated by touristic perceptions: “an aspect of meaning-making and identity-building are of paramount importance rather than scientific study and objective dimensions of authenticity” (Jamal & Hill, 2004, p. 362).

4.2.4 Nomadic home-stays, intimacy and experiential authenticity

According to three-quarters of the tourism operators and NGO coordinators involved in the development of the Tulip and Kyzylarai tours, the notions of both eco-cultural

tourism and authenticity have a real meaning for the tours because most of the villages in Kazakhstan are largely physically unchanged since the 1930s. Contrary to the open-air museums developed by the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of Kazakhstan at the sites of Balkash Lake and Burabai in Central Kazakhstan, the village of Shabanbai Bi is not specifically organised to welcome visitors. From the points of view of the home-stay providers and the Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan operator, there are no special activities such as traditional cultural performances organised for visitors for the purpose of portraying Shabanbai Bi as a 'typical' Kazakhstani village.

The brochure of the Kyzylarai tour specifies that the "local population has managed to preserve skills of producing articles out of felt and numerous national fermented milk products (*kymiz*, *shubat* and *kyrt*)" (Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan, 2012). Home-stay providers emphasise that the visitors' stay in the guest houses, where they share a 'nomadic lifestyle' and interact with the local population, enhances the authenticity of their tourism experiences. By letting visitors access the 'backstage' of their homes, home-stay providers favour a direct contact with their guests.

As Xie (2011, p. 38) points out, in the context of cultural performances undertaken in folk villages in China, "the more structured the event and the shorter the visit, the less opportunity tourists have to make genuine contact with local communities". In the case of Shabanbai Bi village, contacts are developed between the local population and visitors when the visitors are invited to share a meal and a couch in the villagers' houses. Cross-cultural understandings between tourists and home-stay providers are favoured during evening meals at the guest houses in a form a *family feeling*, where the level of intimacy between visitors and the host community members is high. The way Kazakhstani home-stay providers have organised the daily sites visits and the guest houses chosen to welcome visitors tends to favour intimacy (Figure 4.9) between hosts and guests and access to the 'backstage' of their homes, and such a degree of intimacy is required if visitors are to fully appreciate the complexities of the Kazakhstani eco-cultural heritage.

Figure 4.9: Hosts and guests (including the author), Kyzylarai tour, August 2011



Source: Author.

The concept of ‘pseudo-events’ or superficial and manufactured tourism experiences, as described by Boortsin (1964), finds some relevance in the Shabanbai Bi village when some Kyzylarai home-stay providers suggest the possibility of accommodating tourists in reconstructed yurts, a form of accommodation that has normally disappeared from rural villages. The perception of authenticity in the contemporary Kazakhstani context is relative because, in the views of Bruner, “a single real authentic culture does not exist” (Bruner, 2005, p. 146). Following the researcher’s explanation of the difference between the ‘backstage’ and the ‘front stage’ in tourism encounters, one NGO coordinator pointed out that authenticity can be experienced in the guest houses because in the context of Kazakhstani tourism development, “visitors can meet authentic people that are not necessarily related to the ‘front stage’ or the ‘backstage’.”

The type of comfort expected in the Tulip tour clearly highlights antithetic aspects associated with the authenticity of the tourism experience: How to experience a traditional nomadic lifestyle without changing its meaning (for example, by augmenting the level of comfort)? As one Kyzylarai tour home-stay provider highlighted, “Yurts with solar panels, TV and fridges are part of local people everyday life, but it also allows us to cater [for] the needs of our visitors, especially more comfort for older tourists.” However, tourism providers do not see a certain level of

customising the experience to meet tourists' demands for comfort as something that would lower their guests' perceptions of authenticity.

4.2.5 Participatory activities around nomadic food

The researcher looked at different dimensions of authenticity (ingredients, links to the past, as well as new food traditions) relating to the traditional Kazakhstani nomadic food made available to local and international visitors during the eco-tours. All local tourism providers said that culinary traditions remain “intact” in rural areas and the traditional table filled with dishes (*dastarkhan*) (Figure 4.10) is perceived as objectively authentic. In Shabanbai Bi village, food traditions and recipes using horse meat (*bes barmak*, *kuyrdak*) and horse milk (*kymiz*) are acknowledged by home-stay providers to have been handed down through the generations. The national dishes *bes barmak* and *kymiz* are served for visitors without any changes to the recipes during the Kyzylarai tour. One of the home-stay providers in the village of Shabanbai Bi observed:

“Our cuisine is very rich and national traditional food is the best expression of our culture; especially the way we are preparing horse meat and dairy products derivated from horse milk. Everything is handmade and fresh, and the preparation and recipes of traditional meals are transmitted from one generation to another, like *bes barmak*. Moreover, the food we are serving for the visitors is the same as what we are eating ourselves.”

Figure 4.10: A traditional table filled with dishes (*dastarkhan*) in the village of Shabanbai Bi, Central Kazakhstan, Kyzylarai tour



Source: www.visitkazakhstan.kz (2013).

The yurt-camp organised in the steppes landscapes in South Kazakhstan for the Tulip tour is adjusted (food, levels of comfort in the yurts and proper toilets) especially for the needs of the visitors. Home-stay providers display a Kazakhstani culture 'on stage', allowing visitors to see only the 'front stage' of the tourism encounters. The operators realise, however, that these adjustments may not entirely satisfy visitors:

"For this tour at first we have tried to meet the needs of Western tourists, by offering them popular Western dishes. But this year we slightly changed the direction and moved towards more traditional cuisine. And this is the first time we are cooking food outdoors."

In both cases, and despite a Westernisation of local food prepared by the organisers of the Tulip tour, the tourism operators clarified that the authentic part of the tourist experience can be found in *sharing* traditional meals prepared by the host populations in the villages.

By stating "understand you can find happiness from simple things", the brochure developed by KTA welcomes visitors to experientially participate and share in the life of the host community members. The traditional *dastarkhan* prepared by the home-stay providers allows visitors to discover the conventional ways of cooking within the village and experience an 'authentic meal' with the local population. Thus, the impression of a genuine tourism experience is given by home-stay providers through culinary aspects of their cultural heritage, in particular when the visitors are given the possibility to *participate* in the preparation of the meals and have the recipes and experiences explained by the tourism operator or guides of the tours. The opportunity to be part of the cooking experience is provided spontaneously by home-stay providers as part of their daily lives in the villages, and the 'backstage' of their lives: "We showed and explained in detail to German visitors the processes of making *kymiz*."

As tourists involved in active participation rather than observation are more likely to experience a sense of existential authenticity (Kim & Jamal, 2007), the intimate experience of sharing local culinary knowledge in villages or in yurts is perceived as an 'authentic encounter' by the majority of the home-stay providers, who explained that they do not need to stage the cooking of the meals specifically for visitors.

4.3 Characteristics of the tourism experience

According to Edensor (1998), the experience of the visitor is related to performance-based touristic space that shapes individual and collective as well as place-based identities. Home-stay providers suggested a number of ways that local people could enhance visitor understanding of culture. Some of them thought members of the local communities should organise “theatre performances and wear traditional clothes” so that tourists can develop a comprehensive understanding of the traditional nomadic lifestyle. As one of the home-stay providers stated:

“It would be good to show tourists traditional games and cultural performances inspired by the nomadic culture in the villages as the summer season is more appropriate for tourists to ‘experience’ cultural landscapes (steppes). Their tourism experience is therefore more oriented towards nature, mountains and forests rather than cultural events.”

This perception is shared by most government officials, who emphasise the need to stage some of the nomadic culture traditions that disappeared during Soviet times; for example, cultural performances with traditional clothes or national games organised around the horse culture could be held in “revived yurt-camps” in the middle of the steppes. A similar point of view was articulated by the main organiser of the Tulip tour, who said yurts are “better than living in a tent”, showcasing the ‘front stage’ of Kazakhstani lifestyle. In contrast, a majority of the NGO coordinators do not see the need to stage something especially for the visitors – they believe that an authentic tourism experience can be found in the villages where some events are still happening naturally and offer visitors the possibility to witness cultural artefacts.

National days and feasts periods like the Kazakh New Year, *Nauryz*, provide great opportunities for tourists to witness traditional games like horse and hunting festivals. Some local home-stay providers are ready to stage cultural events like *kokpar* (a traditional horse game, Figure 4.11) as an additional attraction for visitors: “Some of our games are organised in official competitions nowadays, and we are trying to get it back to the villages for the visitors.”

Figure 4.11: Kokpar game, Shabanbai Bi village, Central Kazakhstan



Source: www.visitkazakhstan.kz (2013).

In the village of Shabanbai Bi, village festivals (*mereke*) represent one way visitors can witness traditional events in the villages. A home-stay provider revealed that “in the village of Shabanbai Bi there are still a club and two theatres playing satirical games regularly with one called the theatre of the people”. Whether performed in a village setting or in the Kazakhstani cultural landscapes, visitors’ perception of authenticity is enhanced when they watch these traditional cultural performances.

4.3.1 Intimacy and the nomadic sense of hospitality

According to more than three-quarters of the NGO coordinators who participated in the research, the structure of eco-cultural tourism in Kazakhstan is conducive to creating opportunities for ‘backstage’ experiences and intimate encounters. The main guide of the Kyzylarai tour acknowledged the importance of intimate tourism experiences where the host community members are presenting their daily lives and the nomadic *sense of hospitality* without artificially creating a contrived tourism encounter for their guests:

“Most of our visitors are asking to live and witness the traditions of local people. We are trying to share with the visitors the sense of hospitality that was and is still prevailing in the nomadic culture so that their tourism experience becomes as close as possible to the daily life of the local populations.”

In contrast to Palmer (1994), who views ethnic tourism as 'enclavic' in which "cross-cultural understanding is discouraged in favour of voyeurism by clearly distinguishing the tourists and the locals" (Xie, 2011, p. 38), no special adjustments are made by tourism providers to present something culturally authentic in Kazakhstani villages. The division between the 'front' and 'back' region defined by Goffman (1959) is not prevalent in the village of Shabanbai Bi. NGO coordinators and the tourism operators of the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours are encouraging a direct contact with visitors so the local communities continue their traditions in front of them. This is similar to what MacCarthy noted in her research regarding cultural performances in the Trobriand Islands:

Some dances are almost never performed at commissioned performances for tourists. Cultural performances continue to have meaning for locals and further reinforce identity and cultural proficiency with the added benefit of being a means of generating cash income.

MacCarthy (2012, p. 11)

One of the main home-stay providers in Shabanbai Bi village highlighted the contradictions between continuing to offer the same tourism experience while also increasing the number of tourists:

"I would like to continue offering the same tourism experience, and expand the number of sells for carpets and fur products. There is a need to expand the production of clothes for tourists in traditional nomadic lifestyle but also organise more staged cultural performances and commercial cultural artefacts to expand the number of visitors in our village."

It has been suggested that in tourism, "authenticity is a feeling one can experience in relation to place" (Knudsen & Waade, 2010, p. 5). Müller and Pettersson (2001, p. 8) explain for example that "the depiction in tourists brochures of the Sami's nomadic lifestyle in northern Sweden is closely connected to the promotion of the area as Europe's last wilderness.". Knudsen & Waade further argue that "a real experience of a place touches upon the tourist and its ability to affect, touch and transform him/her" (2010, p. 7). In Kazakhstan, a specialist in nomadic culture stated that "in order to experience the highest level of authenticity, it would be ideal to 'give birth to a relationship' between hosts and guests". This idea entails the creation of a family feeling for the tourist, whose visit to Kazakhstan is sometimes perceived as the 'last frontier of the exotic'.

One of the NGO coordinators recognises the importance of creating a host–guest relationship through a stronger commitment by the visitors to experience some aspects of the lives of the home-stay providers. As this NGO coordinator explained, being able to experience something authentic in Kazakhstan implies “helping people at work as the traditional nomadic lifestyle is also about a hard way of life”. This perception is reinforced by two specialists in nomadic culture in Kazakhstan who highlighted “what is objectively authentic is the hard way of life of people living in the steppes, far from the idyllic vision of the past or romantic views of the visitors.” Therefore, the ontological aspects of developing a relationship between hosts and guests in the villages presuppose an enduring process of visitors’ commitment and a shared ‘slice of life’ with the local populations and the ‘backstage’ of their lives. This idea entails that visitors’ perception of the authenticity of their tourism experience is rather subjective or experiential. As one of the specialists in nomadic cultures revealed:

“Daily lives of local people in the villages are pretty much about breeding their cattle to survive, but the visitors’ initiation to the type of lifestyle is quite authentic. Human interactions make the experience authentic. In the end, it’s all about the nature of the interactions between hosts and guests and the degree of satisfaction of the visitor’s tourism experiences.”

N. Wang (2000) explains that existential authenticity can be examined at intra-personal and inter-personal levels and that authenticity can be experienced when people meet ‘authentic’ people in certain contexts that are not necessarily related to a ‘front stage’ or ‘backstage’ setting. Xie, by outlining Wang’s views, emphasises the importance of the visitors’ motivations and expectations when arriving at tourism sites:

Authenticity can be viewed as a factor in tourism motivations composed of two elements: behavioural and situational. Authenticity implies a combination of an appropriate setting, representing a backstage environment and a set of appropriate actions by the visitor, such as eating local cuisine and meeting local residents. At the same time, inauthenticity is not inherent in the touristic experience, but a variable that depends on the expectations and the goals of the tourists.

Xie (2011, p. 41)

The sense of hospitality that can be found in the villages encountered during the tours implies that the tour operators have to make decisions about how many visitors can

actually benefit from an experience in the guest houses with the local populations while still keeping a high level of intimacy between hosts and guests. For one NGO coordinator and one specialist in Kazakhstani nomadic culture, the chance of having an authentic tourism experience is increased by limiting the number of visitors on sites per visit and by 'rotating' the families who are hosting the visitors. One of the specialists in nomadic culture also highlighted the importance of "maintaining a certain degree of equality" by favouring intimate encounters between hosts and guests:

"In this way you can enhance the hosts–guests relationship in a quite reciprocal way. This approach is also contributing to minimising ecological impacts on sites and cultural misunderstandings with local populations."

4.3.2 Reciprocity between hosts and guests

The main local home-stay operator and guide for the Kyzylarai tour acknowledge the importance of reciprocal relationships between host community members and their guests. This idea entails that the host community members are as equally interested in the visitors' stories as the visitors are about their hosts'. This position is shared by a majority of the home-stay providers, who noted the necessity to share their culture with their guests. One home-stay provider described the importance of having a reciprocal relationship with her guests "as a mean to ask them about their own culture". By engaging visitors in participatory activities (for example, cooking and craft-making activities), local operators are aiming to change the nature of the exchange between hosts and guests. As one of the operator explained:

"Tourists are participating in the activities, witnessing how people live, how people prepare food, or watch the process of weaving a carpet. We do have a know-how that we can share with visitors."

The home-stay providers seem particularly keen to organise a tourism experience for international visitors that focuses on the *processes* of preparing local meals and traditional craft-making (*kilims* and *körpes*). In this way, principles of reciprocity between hosts and guests occur in a 'natural' context, with the home-stay tourism encounters facilitating such exchanges. NGO coordinators emphasised the need to 'un-stage' the local population's lives as a way of augmenting visitors' perception of authenticity while on sites:

"Visitors should be invited to witness how local people are practising their traditions for themselves, and not the other way around."

As with volunteer tourism (Conran, 2011), NGO coordinators place a high priority on the quality of the interactions between tourists and the host communities, recognising that these interactions must move beyond superficiality.

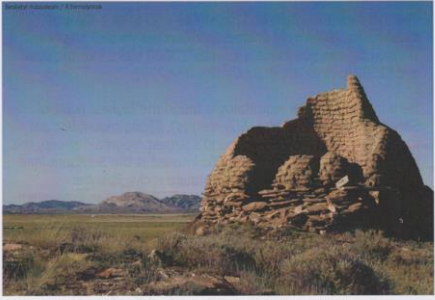
4.3.3 Avoiding visitors' disappointment

Eco-tourism can be seen as a form of nostalgia, in the sense that eco-tourism means non mass tourism that uses natural aspects of the landscape as its main selling point (Graburn, 1995, p. 162). For Xie (2011, p. 38), "in the context of ethnic tourism, the pursuit of authenticity is to reify the past in terms of a nostalgic yearning for the Other and to deny the present in order to establish a distinctive Self." This point of view was advocated by one of the main guides of the Kyzylarai tour:

"The visitors' representation of traditional nomadic lifestyle before coming to the country is also linked to nostalgic feelings. That's why we have a tour called 'Back to the USSR' that essentially tries to capture the historical artefacts and stereotypes associated with the Soviet Union as well as to recreate some emotions within specific tourism encounters."

Nostalgia is seen as a re-enactment of the past to augment the visitors' perception of authenticity. In the brochure about the Kyzylarai tour, the operator Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan mentions that the tour encompasses a well-preserved cultural heritage in symbolic historical places. Figure 4.12 is an extract from the Kyzylarai tour brochure, detailing what tourists will encounter during their visits.

Figure 4.12: Extracts from the Kyzylarai tour brochure



The Kyzylarai mountain and forest oasis, located in Central Kazakhstan, gives truly unique opportunities for the traveler. Where else can you make a journey "3000 years into the past" and "1500 metres up" in just a few days?

Here in the Kyzylarai mountains is found the highest point of Sary Arka, Aksoran peak (1565 metres). These mountains are the only large habitat of the world's largest mountain sheep, the regal Argali. Of particular scientific interest is the Southern Pine Forrest, which grows among the granite rocks. It is the southernmost pine habitat in the Central Kazakhstan ecosystem, bordering upon the desert areas. The region is also rich in history: monumental granite sepulchers of Begazy, rock paintings which date back to the Bronze age, ancient stone statues of the Turkic period, and mausoleums from the time of the Kazakh-Jungar wars. The local population has passed from generation to generation the craftsman's skills of producing articles out of felt, and numerous national fermented milk products like koumiss, shubat, kurt, etc.

This unique combination of pristine nature, ancient historical monuments, and a well-preserved traditional way of life makes the Kyzylarai a great place to visit. Join us for a unique and fascinating experience.

- The crisp, fresh air of the pine forest and the wormwood steppe.
- Comfortable guest houses with regional and national cuisine.
- Ancient mausoleums and tombs.
- Spectacular vistas of the Kazakh uplands.
- Felt handicrafts - souvenirs and household items.

www.nomadic.kz

Source: www.nomadic.kz (2012)

The Kyzylarai tour is marketed in the tourist brochure to embrace the idea of it being a unique tourism experience for travellers from both an historical and cultural point of view. As Preston (1996) specifies, authenticity does not equate to historical accuracy and tradition does not always equal the truth. This idea is important as both the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours are presenting several aspects of Kazakhstani cultural heritage from the Bronze Age that are perceived to be objectively authentic by a majority of tourism providers. Meanwhile, one of the Kyzylarai tour operators emphasised that visitors' perception of authenticity can vary according to their expectations before undertaking eco-tours and, more importantly, by what they can feel while on site:

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

Here, the authenticity felt is personal and based on visitors' experience while undertaking the tours. As Yeoman, Brass and McMahon-Beattie (2007, p. 1137) point out, "The tourism industry shouldn't promise something which can't be delivered or produce something tainted by falseness that will spoil the authentic proposition." The visitors' expectations of the nomadic culture are essential to understand their appreciation of their tourism experience, but at the same time their expectations can render their experience of the place inauthentic. One of the Tulip visitor details:

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

One of the Kyzylarai tour guides mentioned the importance of organising the tour in a 'natural' way because there is a gap between "what tourists like to see and what they have learnt". In order to avoid disappointment upon arrival on sites, visitors need to be informed in advance that "traditional nomadic lifestyle does not exist anymore, that people are not living in yurts". Even so, this guide acknowledges the possibility of setting up yurts specifically to meet some of the visitors' expectations:

“We had three or four letters from potential visitors who would like to live in yurts, but actually Kazakhstan is not as authentic as foreigners expect, it’s a modern country. They can live in yurts, but they will be set up near houses. People do not live this way now, but it can be organised for tourists.”

The organiser of the Tulip tour favours a contrived tourism setting where visitors are sleeping in yurts set up specifically for them (on the left side of the picture), illustrating the ‘front stage’ of Kazakhstani tourism encounters (Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.13: Yurts set up in the steppes for the Tulip tour, South Kazakhstan, May 2012



Source: Author.

Dovey (1985, p. 39) explains that “tourists can accept all kinds of faked things and perhaps even learn to love them so long as they are not deceived by those things.” As Hall (2007, p. 1140) states, “more problematic with respect to the notion of authenticity is when there is a deliberate attempt to deceive, as people do not like to be deceived.”

4.3.4 Favouring visitors’ disorientation

Disorientation is defined as “the condition of having lost your bearings” (The Collins English Dictionary, 2013). Several of the home-stay providers and experts in nomadic culture suggested that a tourist might be motivated into undertaking an eco-cultural tour in Kazakhstan by a desire to experience a feeling of disorientation. One of the specialists in nomadic culture who met and interacted with several international visitors travelling in the country defines the ‘typical’ foreign visitor travelling in

Kazakhstan as “looking for absolute things in life and trying to find himself again”. Similarly, Xie, when referring to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998), explains that in the context of theme parks or special events, the access to authenticity lies in a moment of aesthetic reception, rather than in the object presented:

The only time tourists experience the authentic is when they encounter things they do not understand, thus requiring them to make up their own minds about what they see.

Xie (2011, p. 36)

For one specialist in nomadic culture, “international visitors have a deep intellectual curiosity about foreign cultures and can bear to live in a different environment and endure the gap in this difference.” The views of specialists in the nomadic culture in Kazakhstan diverge somewhat on what can be considered as the best way to access higher levels of understanding about cultural heritage in the country. Some consider that reconstituted yurt villages are not objectively authentic and look like “cheap nostalgia”, whereas others look at them as “a good opportunity to (re)learn traditional aspects of the nomadic culture”. The dichotomy between letting things happen naturally and the commodification of culture in Kazakhstani tourism encounters presupposes that visitors who are looking for ‘disorientation’ do not have high expectations upon arrival in the villages.

4.4 Summary

This chapter shows that almost all the stakeholders (home-stay providers, policymakers, Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan and Tulip tour operators, local and international NGOs and specialists in nomadic culture) involved in the development of Kazakhstani ecotourism emphasise the importance of ecological (fauna and flora) and cultural aspects (traditional games, craft-making and cooking traditions) in visitors’ experiences. In particular, they acknowledge eco-cultural tourism as the most appropriate model for tourism development in rural areas. Tourism providers emphasise especially that the structure of eco-cultural tourism in Kazakhstan is conducive to creating opportunities for accessing the ‘backstage’ of tourism encounters in the villages. Politically, nomadic culture is perceived by government officials as a key theme in the country’s ongoing process of identity-making. For specialists in nomadic culture, a rebirth of nomadic traditions is necessary for tourism

development purposes as it contributes to validate the visitors' romantic views of the nomadic culture and the Silk Road.

For tourism providers, Kazakhstani cultural landscapes and culinary traditions often constitute the main aspect of authenticity of the tourism experience being offered to visitors. Suppliers of tourism experiences in the Tulip tour conceptualise and shape the tourism experiences made available to visitors by supporting the commodification of some aspects of the Kazakhstani nomadic culture. In the Kyzylarai tour, some home-stay providers mentioned the need to reconstruct traditional elements of the nomadic culture shelters as a way to augment the perceived authenticity of the visitors' experiences.

Despite a Westernisation of local food prepared by the organisers of the Tulip tour, the tourism operators clarified that the authentic part of the tourist experience can be found in the sharing of traditional meals prepared by the host populations in the villages. Authenticity is thus negotiated and socially constructed between the tourism operators and home-stay providers who offer a tourism experience that reflects the contemporary socio-cultural Kazakhstani reality. While a majority of home-stay providers perceive cultural landscapes and culinary traditions as being objectively authentic, they perceive contemporary nomadic architecture and local craft-making as a way of reviving the traditional Kazakh culture when the crafts are bought by the tourists to wear once they return home.

Tourism providers emphasised the performative aspects of the tourism experiences made available to visitors when authenticating various facets of Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism. In particular, tourism encounters that favour intimate and reciprocal relationships based on participatory activities with the local populations were regularly highlighted by a majority of tourism providers as factors that contribute to enhancing the existential authenticity of the tourists' experiences. Home-stay providers and NGO coordinators emphasised that spontaneous and reciprocal exchanges between hosts and guests in the guest houses can encourage a feeling of disorientation for tourists and avoid visitors' disappointments upon arrival in the villages.

Chapter 5: Visitors' Perceptions of Authenticity

This chapter presents the findings related to visitors' perceptions of authenticity when undertaking eco-cultural tours in Kazakhstan. The visitors surveyed for the research were Kyzylarai and Tulip tour clients, and Free Independent Travellers (FITs) comprised of expatriates, international travellers, Kazakhstani and international students. In line with Jackson's (1999) work on the commodification of cultural artefacts, this chapter will focus on the visitors' authentication positions regarding the various study themes identified in Chapter 4, namely nomadic cultural landscapes, nomadic architecture, nomadic ethnic art, nomadic home-stays and nomadic food.

The chapter starts with the visitors' evaluations of an authentic tourism experience in regards to Kazakhstani nomadic culture. The second section of the chapter presents a detailed overview of the visitors' perceptions of authenticity of the identified study themes. The third section of the chapter presents findings about the visitors' quests for experiences during their travels in Kazakhstan; in particular, it examines attributes of the performative aspects of their travels in that country. The structure of the chapter follows the structure of chapter 4 to inform various themes and categories of the transnomadic authenticity model developed in chapter 6. Key findings of the chapter are illustrated by authenticity concepts taken from the academic literature to clarify the depth and complexity of various visitors' perceptions of authenticity, and are summarised at the end of the chapter.

5.1 Evaluation of an authentic tourism experience

The question of authenticity in visitors' tourism experiences reinforces the debate about what can be presented to tourists during their visits to the country. According to Xie, visitors' pursuit of authenticity can lead to illusion as local communities respond to tourists' preconceived images of ethnic cultures:

Presentation of the everyday culture of ethnic peoples is catered to tourists' preferences for viewing a contrived collage of ethnic images and therefore tourists' visits are so bounded and spatiotemporally fixed that the pursuit of authentic culture is replaced by illusion.

Xie (2011, p. 183)

As a consequence, it is argued that authenticity can also be viewed as a 'social construct' (Hughes, 1995). Likewise, Cohen (1989, p. 195) proposes that authenticity is a socially constructed concept and its social connotation is, therefore, not given but negotiable:

To give meaning and to attach values to objects and memories is a personal construction and tourists are in these respect active creators of meaning rather than passive consumers.

This chapter therefore examines "the processes whereby visitors make claims for authenticity regarding their tourism experience and the interests that those claims serve" (Sims, 2009, p. 324) when undertaking eco-cultural tours in the country.

5.1.1 To live in accordance with local traditions and the environment

Participants in the survey were asked: "What is your definition of an authentic tourism experience?" Some of the visitors' first answers were about living in accordance with local traditions and the environment. For a German Tulip tourist, Kazakhstan is one of the last tourism destinations where it is appropriate to examine the concept of authenticity in the visitors' tourism experiences:

"There is still the chance to be the only one in the area, not having to eat European food, not having a special treatment. Just being there as part of the family. And that's the relaxing part [...]. No European beer in the evening, but Russian vodka and brandy. No pizzas, but *lagman* and *bes barmak*. No marketed tour, but just going here and there. No bus waiting, but going by foot, lunchbox and backpack. Not having a house for resting at lunchtime, but eating under a tree [...], not being the annoying tourist, but just a person who wants to discover what is there. This is possible in Kazakhstan, and in many places it's not."

This vision is shared by half of the FITs, especially by two who had endured a long trip in the Kazakh steppes:

"Daily life and cuisine were the most authentic experiences we had while cycling in Kazakhstan. We never had any apparent staged events during our trip, nothing was planned ahead, and in this sense the whole country is objectively authentic (from getting our train ticket, the fire in the steppes, the police who caught us up)."

For three visitors on the Tulip tour, an authentic tourism experience is about living in accordance with local traditions and the environment. A domestic student interviewed

in Almaty pointed out the idea that a cultural setting would be 'fixed' by the time of the interaction:

"An authentic tourism experience is the initial and raw interaction of a person with a real, unchanged and unaltered local culture. It is not staged or changed to please the eye of a tourist."

A Kyzylarai client defined an authentic tourism experience as an experience that occurs "organically and naturally" with the host populations, but also "interacts with them and their natural environment":

"I could go to a show and watch folk dances; it would give me only a basic idea of what their real life is like. But for me it would be more interesting to go somewhere and see them during a celebration like a wedding so I would know they are dancing for themselves and not for me."

This underlying sentiment is shared by half of the expatriates, who witness nomadic traditions when visiting for special celebrations or family events. One of them pointed out that "the nomadic traditions are remembered at every holiday or family gathering by performing certain rituals".

For expatriates, the most authentic tourism experiences are to be found by living with families or visiting local festivals. The survey participants who had been living in the country for several years frequently used Kazakh words like *Nauryz*, *kymiz* and *kykpar* in their narratives when they mentioned traditional nomadic culture. These perceptions complement the ones of the Kazakhstani students, for whom the authenticity of the tourism experience is linked to the ideas of "philosophy of life" and "sense of freedom".

Nysanbayev (2004, p. 76) argues that former nomads had "a specific perception of time and space". He points out in particular that ancient nomads greeted travellers with a blessing ("Have a good way", "Faith" and "Good luck") before their departure for a journey in the steppes. For three Kazakhstani students, the notions of genuineness and spirit associated with the Kazakhstani landscapes are linked to the concept of authenticity as the students connect their tourism experiences to an existential meaning of life. One of them highlights:

"Authentic tourism – is something linked to origin, true, where you can feel the true spirit of the country and experience it as it was originally, when you're mingling with local population and trying to live their lifestyle."

The idea of experiencing something authentic is deeply linked with the nomadic way of life, a 'nomadic philosophy of life'. Another local student believes authenticity can be experienced "when you can feel the spirit of the local heritage and the place, when you get inspired by local people and feel mutual respect". This perception is entwined with the feeling of independence expressed by two FITs for whom *the sense of freedom* was the main aspect characterising their experience while cycling in the steppes:

"Interaction with 'nomadic people' occurred naturally as we were travelling in the steppes. We felt a great sense of freedom while there and people are respecting this."

For these two FITs, the cultural landscapes that bring visitors to the country are as much the steppes as the inhabitants living there. The rich cultural landscapes and the natural interactions with visitors are providing, as Wallace and Russell (2004, p. 241) argue, "marginal local communities opportunities for financial betterment and the simultaneous preservation and promotion of their natural and cultural heritage."

5.1.2 Nomadic and neo-nomadic culture

For the majority of the Tulip tour clients, traditional nomadic culture in Kazakhstan is associated with mobility of housing (yurts) and an autonomous way of life. A third of the tourists interviewed perceive nomadic people as being quite adaptive to resources and climate. Two visitors specifically mentioned that nomadic people have a "special connection", a "freedom spirit" attached to the cultural landscapes:

"Real nomads don't have a house or a definite place to live. They have to move every couple of weeks or months depending on the season. In winter they may go to the steppes or to more diversified forests areas, and in the summertime to the mountains where the climate is a bit cooler. They are always in search for food and cattle."

Two other visitors on the Tulip tour mentioned the strong family bonds and the transmission of values and knowledge from one generation to another; for example, children are educated at a very early age to breed and take care of the cattle which characterise the traditional nomadic culture in Kazakhstan. Visitors perceive the lives of traditional nomadic families as being organised around 'the horse culture' as these animals were used as a means of transportation as well as a main source of meat for traditional meals like *bes barmak*.

In contrast, a third of the visitors on both the Tulip and Kyzylarai tours feel that traditional Kazakh culture has disappeared. They see how local communities have profoundly changed their lifestyles, often living in towns and villages and no longer moving from one dwelling to another. As one visitor on the Tulip tour highlighted:

“Traditional nomadic culture no longer exists since the colonisation by the Soviet people in the beginning of the 1930s, and this culture only remains in the *memories* of old Kazakhstani people. So we don’t believe in neo-nomadism. Any tourism activities will influence and change the people and their traditions with the Westernisation and transformation of their cultural habits.”

This statement is supported by three Kazakhstani students, for whom “traditional nomadic culture tends to vanish as more people reside in the cities”. They also hold the huge impact of modernity, with the Westernisation of people’s lifestyles, as being responsible for the changes in their cultural habits. One student considers the word ‘renaissance’ as not appropriate to qualify the modernisation of the Kazakhstani society and nomadic culture, as for him, “Kazakhstani people do not forget their traditions but rather reinvent them with the modernisation of their country.”

Some of the former nomadic people still practise a pastoralist system of moving around the pastures with the cattle in the summer but staying in the villages in the winter. This practice was mentioned mostly by FITs who managed to witness local populations moving with their cattle in the summer. More than three-quarters of the FITs consider traditional nomadic culture as being deeply linked to the landscapes as well as the practice of the people living with their livestock. One such traveller used the words “pastoralist traditions” and “horse culture” to depict the way former nomads used to live in the country. Another FIT expressed his impression of contemporary Kazakhstani lifestyles, after having travelled several months in the Kazakh steppes:

“Kazakh people are living with their environment, traditionally yurts and livestock breeding. Kazakhstan is located among the Silk Road countries and therefore the transportation of merchandises. There are no proper nomads as such, but life organised around different oases. The pastoralist system around different villages in rural areas is the way nomadic people are living right now.”

The new pastoralist system that characterises the neo-nomadic culture is thus perceived as a revival of a former traditional lifestyle but also, as one Tulip tourist highlighted, as a political tool for the development of eco-tourism in the country:

“The neo-nomadic culture is more about a reinvention of the traditional nomadic culture organised by the Kazakhstani Government for the development of tourism.”

Another Tulip client believes that most of the commodification of cultural artefacts, such as traditional games performed specifically for visitors, is a staged spectacle intended to depict what was past local culture. A small majority of visitors from both tours conceded this commodification process is organised mainly for tourism business purposes, which is “a condition for the survival of the tourism industry in the country”. This statement is supported by three Kazakhstani students, for whom “traditional nomadic culture tends to vanish as more people reside in the cities”. Although, as one visitor on the Tulip tour noted, authenticity can be found in the local parks and bazaars of the cultural capital Almaty, as the old capital city still reflects “how Kazakhstani people live today”. Even so, the three Kazakhstani students hold the huge impact of modernity, with the Westernisation of people’s lifestyles, as being responsible for the changes in their cultural habits. Two local students also believe that the recent development of tourism in the country emphasises the need to preserve and develop nomadic culture, in particular highlighting “the strong sense of hospitality that characterises former nomads”. Two FITs gave some evidence of Kazakhstani cultural hybridity when travelling in the southern part of the country:

“We witnessed in the area of Almaty some organised yurt-camps for tourists, mixing the original traditions with new technologies, big cars, etc. ...They are wearing traditional clothes and they are coming there to ‘get back to their roots’.”

Five visitors on the Tulip tour mentioned several occasions when they noticed a renaissance of nomadic culture. The revival of traditions was witnessed particularly during special occasions and allowed visitors to experience and learn about traditional nomadic culture:

“Cultural performances during special events (like weddings or national days) are portraying traditional cultural artefacts: traditional dances and games during the *Nauryz* celebrations. Traditional games like *buzkashi* no longer exist as well, and you can see them only in special festivals in the countryside or during special city events (Almaty city day) as a way of portraying local culture.”

The Kazakh language became the state language in 1989. Along with cultural performances and traditional games played during special events and national days, the language is perceived by some respondents as being another element in the

renaissance of the traditional nomadic culture. Three visitors on the Tulip tour acknowledged the importance of the Kazakh language:

“Kazakh language is the main part of the renaissance in the country, but is essentially a political tool to re-establish Kazakh traditions in the villages (what can be called as well a Kazakhisation of the nation).”

But for another Tulip tour client, who had previously experienced some official events, the Russian language is more authentic because that is the language used by Kazakhstanis in their everyday lives:

“I do think Kazakh language plays a role in the renaissance of the Kazakhstani culture and its identity, especially as a medium to convey some special meaning. Kazakh language is always practised for the official events (with Kazakh officials) but I feel Russian language is better used for the everyday conversations and looks easier to use.”

According to a majority of local students, Kazakh people are very proud of their traditions without being nationalistic and they favour close connections with their families in the villages. As one visitor on the Tulip tour highlighted, “Yurts seem to be in use mostly for tourists as a way to describe the former Kazakhstani traditions associated with the landscapes.” Similarly, one Kazakhstani student acknowledged visitors can feel “a great sense of pride of the country mostly in the rural areas where they try to reconstruct yurts”. These reconstructions are part of the revival of the Kazakh people’s former lifestyles, but also can be used as additional shelters to welcome visitors.

5.1.3 Staging traditional nomadic culture for visitors

King et al. (2009, p. 49) advocate that instead of abandoning the concept of authenticity, there is a need to “personalize it, address its socially constructed nature, and recognise that tourists can perceive authenticity to their satisfaction even when it is staged”. In contrast, a visitor on the Tulip tour believes the idea of experiencing something authentic within a tourism encounter is not possible:

“I don’t think it’s possible to have an authentic experience as a tourist. The words ‘authentic’ and ‘tourist’ don’t go well together because as a tourist you only go somewhere for a short period of time. And to gain an authentic experience you have to blend and be part of the society. And it takes time. As a tourist you are only a customer and your social role is defined. You can get an

idea of what is authentic but to truly have an authentic experience you need to be a member of the community.”

Interestingly, two FITs who had the opportunity to travel a long time in the landscapes and witness local lifestyles pointed out the need to avoid any staged activities for the visitors:

“It shouldn’t be an open-air museum, with an actor playing a role. Authenticity is lost.”

Some visitors on the Tulip tour were much more critical about the staged parts of their tourism experience which they consider to be ‘not authentic’:

“It can’t be really authentic because it is staged. But it gives you an idea of what it is like to live here, more in the environmental sense. Sleeping in a yurt, what it feels like to live in the steppes. It’s as much authentic as it can be. You get an idea of how life in the steppes was before. But you don’t learn anything about the social and cultural aspects.”

While half of the Tulip tour visitors conceded the need to focus on a kind of tourism that preserves the natural environment and doesn’t change the way of life of local populations, one of them holds a different opinion:

“This kind of tourism in the steppes can be uncomfortable for people of a certain age. Generally eco-tourism is not comfortable enough for me. There is a need to balance the traditional aspects of the tourism experience with more comfort.”

A certain level of comfort is important for this German tourist, who emphasises that some aspects of the nomadic culture may need to be adapted and commodified in order to meet visitors’ requirements.

5.2 Perceptions of authenticity of Kazakhstani cultural heritage

One of the issues for visitors when they visit culturally and environmentally remote regions is the authenticity of what they see (Cohen, 1984, 2002). Therefore, it is important to understand visitors’ perceptions and experience of cultural artefacts in the construction of eco-cultural tourism experiences. Xie (2004) argues that tourists’ perception of authenticity is highly personal but it can still be influenced, segmented and analysed. What tourists will consider as being ‘genuine’ is usually “the holiday experience, the judgments about the authenticity of the toured objects and the felt reality of the tourist experiences” (M. Smith & Duffy, 2003, p. 132).

For Yang and Wall (2009), tourists' responses to authenticity in folk villages are either directed towards local settings (situational authenticity) or towards fulfilling personal needs (behavioural authenticity). For Xie (2011, p. 184), "tourists expect to see frozen aspects of ethnic cultures and do not generally realise ethnic culture evolves with time." To some extent, the authenticity is contrived and mediated by local hosts, who direct the guests to the 'most traditional villages', organise cultural performances and control the visitor's access to cultural information (Xie, 2001).

5.2.1 Nomadic cultural landscapes

Newsome, Moore and Dowling (2012) argue that in many tourism destinations, tourists are attracted by natural landscapes, including scenery, environment and wildlife. For the visitor, then, the natural environment is providing a landscape of pleasure experienced in a brief sojourn. This view is in contrast to those of the local communities for whom "at a very basic level, the landscape may be one associated primarily with work and everyday living" (Wall & Ringer, 1998, p. 51). Several topics (nomadic cultural landscapes, nomadic architecture, nomadic ethnic art, nomadic home-stays and nomadic food) were considered for analysis in the framework of authenticity developed by Jamal and Hill (2004); these topics are detailed in Table 4.1.

Nomadic cultural landscapes are perceived by half of the visitors interviewed as *objectively* authentic. Diversity of fauna and flora encountered during the tours, the gaze of the steppes and its wildlife are perceived as constituting a major 'objective part' of their tourism experience in Kazakhstan. Two FITs consider cultural landscapes and also Soviet architecture to be objectively authentic:

"From the information we have read before coming to the country, we found objectively authentic the steppes landscapes, the Soviet architecture and the mountains."

For a majority of the Kyzylarai clients, the steppes are primarily associated with nomadic culture. The perception of genuineness given by the idea of the landscape being 'untouched' by human activities reinforced the perception of authenticity for one Kyzylarai tourist: "The steppes are objectively authentic because it obviously hasn't been touched or altered." Figure 5.1 shows two Kyzylarai tourists gazing at the landscapes after several hours walking in the steppes.

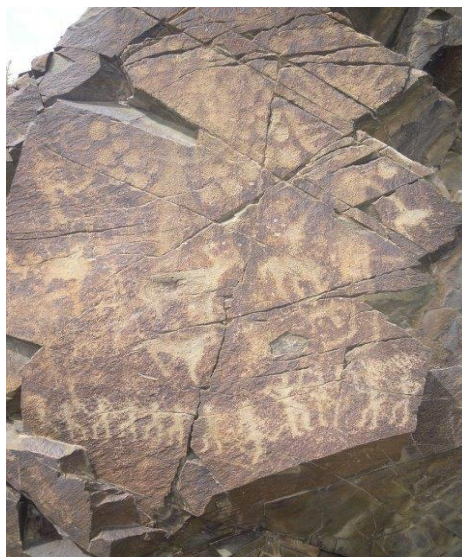
Figure 5.1: Visitors and cultural landscapes, Kyzylarai tour, August 2011



Source: Vitaliy Shuptar.

The visitors' perceptions of Kazakh steppes are intricately imbued with the nomadic culture and lifestyle of the local people living in the steppes with their cattle. Six visitors on the Tulip tour specifically mentioned that the steppes and the fauna and flora as well as the village landscapes constituted the most authentic part of their tour. Another Tulip tourist pointed out, "The environmental aspects are objectively authentic: from the plants, the wind, the sun and so on." A visitor on the Tulip tour found "the places, the lakes in the desert and all the ancient paintings on the rocks" unexpectedly authentic. Figure 5.2 shows the petroglyphs at the site of Tamgaly, encountered during the second day of the Tulip tour. These rock paintings are perceived as objectively authentic by a majority of the tour participants.

Figure 5.2: Petroglyphs at the Tamgaly site, Tulip tour, May 2012



Source: Author.

Half of the Kazakhstani students emphasised that the steppes landscapes are objectively authentic and one-third of the students separately perceive cultural performances in the form of traditional games as objectively authentic. As one Kazakhstani student noted, the steppes are imbued with “freedom, spirit and wilderness”, especially in the countryside. Authenticity is thus found in the villages, and in the everyday lives of the people who are rooted in the steppes landscapes. One local student explained why the steppes’ scenery in Central Kazakhstan is so important in shaping his perception of the authenticity of his travel in the country:

“The nature in the region is fascinating and recalls in our souls’ patriotic feelings. And you feel in these steppes we’re building the history of Kazakhstan.”

Pointedly, a visitor from the Tulip tour mentioned that witnessing the steppes from the bus does not give an authentic perspective, and highlighted the need to be physically in the environment to ‘sense’ the authenticity of the landscapes:

“Being in a bus and discovering the landscapes from that perspective does not give an authentic vision of what Kazakhstan really is.”

Buckley et al. (2008, p. 48) define cultural landscapes as being “an area where the landforms have been created by humans; human culture has been created by the landscape as well as the people; and each now depends and continues to exist because of the other.” An important aspect of this definition is also to be found in the traditional nomadic architecture and its renaissance in the new capital city, Astana.

5.2.2 Nomadic architecture

According to Yeoman and al. (2007, p. 1131), “the search for authenticity is based upon feelings of nostalgia and a search for historic roots and heritage.” One domestic student was very impressed by the architectural design of the sites in Turkistan, South Kazakhstan, including the mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, saying, “it is very authentic because this mausoleum was built by our ancestors and still exists.” In this case, the perception of an unchanged, ‘genuine’ architectural building was part of an authentic tourism experience.

Four Tulip tour clients acknowledged the authenticity of their tourism experience despite the commodified aspects of the tour, namely separate yurts especially set up

for visitors beside the ones of the home-stay providers, beds in the yurts for sleeping instead of traditional mattresses (*körpes*) on the floor, and Europeanised food served during the tour. One of them detailed her impressions when she arrived at Kanshengel yurt-camp:

“The little oven, the organisation of the camp, the people, the separate kitchen in the yurt, it met my expectations. That’s how I imagined it.”

Three visitors noticed the yurts are not traditionally made (a plastic structure instead of a wooden structure) but nevertheless accept it as a modern authentic tourism experience. One of them noted:

“The yurts are more modern and therefore I have the feeling of a modern authentic experience. But it’s still staged; it’s not made of traditional materials and it’s Chinese.”

Another visitor perceives the reconstruction of the yurts specifically for visitors as subjectively authentic; especially in the ways yurts are built:

“We are part of a foreign group of tourists who are served European food and live in Chinese-made yurts. The setting was chosen and the yurts set up for us, but I still got the feeling of authenticity.”

Two Kyzylarai clients feel the architecture of the houses in the villages visited during the tour is objectively authentic as they perceive the houses as being made in a traditional style. The perceived *simplicity* of the traditional Kazakhstani lifestyle in the villages is considered objectively more authentic than the ‘contemporary’ lifestyles in the new capital city, Astana:

“Kazakhstani lifestyle is linked to simple lifestyle from local people following their rituals, and I consider the life in the *auls* (rural villages) more authentic than in Astana. But I understand the country is changing and is now divided into new and old parts. The new part can also be called authentic, as it shows the new identity of the country.”

Yeoman et al. (2007, p. 1131) add that “destinations rich in history and heritage are perceived to be authentic because history is an illustration of the truth rather than something that is falsely manufactured”. Correspondingly, two FITs were much more critical in their assessment of yurt-camps that have been recreated in the steppes for the sake of tourism:

“Yurts, in contrast to Mongolia, are definitely not associated with Kazakhstan for us, and we haven’t seen any of them during our trip. A yurt town is like

Disneyland – it is interesting, but people know that it is artificial. There are few of people still living a traditional nomadic lifestyle, and they now live in the villages. Most of the yurts found in the countryside are now set for tourists, but people do not live there anymore.”

According to Cohen (2002), contemporary tourists seek both objective and existential authenticity in their holidays. Sims (2009, p. 325) has a similar argument:

While some tourists are spending more, travelling further and experiencing more discomfort in order to experience encounters with ‘untouched’ environments and cultures, others are happy to simply relax, have a good time and experience the existential authenticity that comes from ‘being themselves’.

Visitors on the Tulip tour had contrasting perceptions about the ‘degree of authenticity’ experienced in the yurts. Two of them have reservations about the authenticity of the yurts, focusing instead on the importance of mingling with the local population:

“Sleeping in yurts was not authentic to me, but sleeping in the same yurts with the local community would be more authentic.”

Here, visitors aim at discovering the ‘backstage’ of the local home-stay providers’ lives but are ready to accept contrived tourism attractions (‘Chinese’ yurts) for more comfort. The commodity-driven Tulip tour is attracting visitors who are conscious that their tourism experience is contrived but nonetheless still perceive it as experientially authentic. One visitor highlighted the necessity to adapt the travel conditions to the type of visitor and the visitors’ requirements:

“The ideal thing would be to mix with the people, and not living apart. In particular, living in a yurt with local people is the ultimate experience you can have. But there should be some levels of customisation depending on the visitors’ requirements as well.”

A FIT who had been cycling in the steppes and stopping by local families’ houses underlined the benefits of what can be referred to ‘slow tourism’. This tourist’s cycling mode of transport was a factor that influenced his experience and interactions with the local populations:

“You can witness how they make arts, and also be able to eat with them. It is better to live within a local family, but not in a place specifically designed for tourists.”

In contrast, a visitor on the Tulip tour thinks it is better to organise the visitors' activities separately from the traditional shelters, even if there is a potential cost of this arrangement being perceived by tourists as inauthentic:

"The touristic activities should be organised near places where Kazakhstani families are living and working, and a separate yurt for visitors should be installed nearby as it was done during the tour. Of course the more visitors go on sites, the more accustomed to a high level of services tourism providers get, and to a lesser level of authenticity they are 'producing'. The local families should explain what a traditional yurt is, what is a traditional meal to the visitors as well."

Another Tulip tour visitor sees her experience in the organised yurt-camp in the steppes as a compromise between traditional and modern nomadic lifestyles:

"It's somehow in between. It's a kind of authentic experience that I was expecting. But on the other hand we had some comfort that wouldn't happen in ideal community-based tourism."

Similar to the tourist "fun gaze" mentioned by Ooi (2002, p. 87), yurt attractions in this tourism setting are understood to be constructed architectural shelters in which tourists are in a playful search for enjoyment and experience some disorientation. From this perspective, the main concern is "the illusion of authenticity rather than a definitive reality" (Yang & Wall, 2009, p. 236). It implies, for example, as some visitors from both tours mentioned, that it is valid for eco-tour operators to construct yurts specifically for visitors on the condition the yurts are still perceived as being authentic. From an 'objective' authenticity perspective, this involves the materials used to build the yurts, and from an 'existential' authenticity perspective, it implies sharing a traditional meal with the local populations.

Milne, Grekin, and Woodley (1998) highlight that sometimes the construction of tourist landscapes involves the creation of "fantasy":

Cultural landscapes are viewed and shaped as commodities that can be consumed by potentially malleable consumers. The construction of tourist landscapes in peripheral regions and areas where indigenous peoples live has focused on the fact that this commodification process involves the elaborate creation of 'fantasy'.

Milne et al. (1998, pp. 102, 103)

Correspondingly, contemporary architecture incorporating traditional cultural artefacts is considered to be a new way of depicting traditional Kazakhstani culture.

Three visitors on the Tulip tour mentioned that this renaissance of nomadic culture can be seen in the design of the architectural buildings of the new capital city, Astana, like the *Khan Shatyr* (Figure 5.3, below), a commercial centre designed by Norman Foster in 2006 with a roof top similar to a nomadic tent. One Tulip tourist who had previously visited the new capital city described Astana “as a good representation of architectural fantasy”.

Figure 5.3: Khan Shatyr commercial centre, Astana, August 2011



Source: Author.

Another Tulip client, when referring to her visit of Astana, said that designers and architects of the new capital city have staged some traditional elements of the nomadic culture in its architecture:

“In Astana there is a strong element of show, a staged show, but I guess this is part of building a new city. Some traditional elements in the modern architecture can be witnessed, like *Ak Orda*, the presidential palace, which is embedded with yurt elements on the roof. Different Kazakh ornaments are also decorating the streets.”

While Astana is perceived by some of the visitors on the Tulip tour as a marker of the new authentic architecture, the capital city does not represent authentic nomadic lifestyle:

“Contemporary architecture in Astana is beautiful, but it does not represent nomadic lifestyle, nothing that was important for nomads.”

Therefore the city of Astana is not perceived by visitors to be genuinely authentic from an architectural point of view but rather as being part of a *constructive* authenticity. This perception is based on the symbolic attributes of the city, namely the traditional ornaments found in the buildings and in the shapes of some building. Such a diversity of opinions illustrates how the concept of authenticity is socially constructed according to the visitor's understandings of Kazakhstani cultural heritage. Consequently, as Boyle (2004) highlights in his appraisal of authenticity, tourists are searching for a connection with something that is real, pristine and rooted within the destination.

5.2.3 Nomadic handicrafts

Cohen (1989, p. 195) emphasises the importance of “tourists seeking regular authentication of their souvenir purchases” to appreciate ethnic products acquired during their travels. Chambers (2000) argues that *confirmation* of authenticity is widely regarded as the most important criterion for a satisfying tourist experience. Schouten details the complexities about visitors' expectations of souvenirs:

Many souvenirs reflect the ‘spirit of the place’ visited whether or not their design is based upon tradition or just reflects the state of mind of the visitor. In particular, arts and crafts souvenirs, which are considered to be an integral part of the tangible heritage that the destination has to offer, are important icons to sustain the image of the destination. In order to fulfil that role handicrafts for sale as souvenirs have to meet certain expectations of the buyers. Generally these expectations are expressed in concepts of ‘authenticity’, ‘genuine’, ‘original’ and ‘traditional’.

Schouten (2006, p. 200)

Three local students and one FIT visitor indicated that some remnants of traditional nomadic culture can be found in the crafts sold in the local bazaars – for example, *tapochkis* which visitors can wear back home and small yurts made in fur and incorporating Kazakh ornaments – although they challenged its authenticity:

“The crafts sold here and there, all of these are done for the tourists, and it is not nomadic. For example, small yurts that are sold in the bazaars – it is a fake version of the traditional nomadic culture.”

Small yurt souvenirs are offered to Tulip tourists at the end of their two days' experience in the Kazakhstani steppes (Figure 5.4). These yurts are made in fur and incorporate traditional Kazakh ornaments yet, despite this, they are perceived by some

Tulip tourists as not representing traditional nomadic culture, instead being made only for tourism purposes.

Figure 5.4: Small yurts made in fur offered to tourists during the Tulip tour



Source: Madina Dyussebayeva.

Half of the tourists on the Kyzylarai tour who had the opportunity to witness some craft-making by the local community in their houses mentioned that traditional craft-making had little influence on their perception of the revival of traditional nomadic culture. Only one of the tourists sees traditional craft-making as part of the renaissance of the nomadic culture. He indicated that some ornaments and symbolic figures could be found recurrently in the crafts as well as the fur materials that were used to make them. Two local students and one expatriate regard jewels and traditional musical instruments like the two-stringed guitar, or *dombra*, as being 'culturally representative' of the nomadic culture but note that they also could be used as commodified products for tourism.

Figure 5.5 shows some fur products for sale to visitors in Shabanbai Bi village. The stall also emphasises the financial contribution of the European Union during the implementation of the ETPACK project in Central Kazakhstan when production of traditional handicrafts souvenirs was launched in the village.

Figure 5.5: Fur products on sales in the village of Shabanbai Bi, Central Kazakhstan



Source: ETPACK (2010a).

5.2.4 Nomadic home-stays

One of the primary goals of ethnic tourism is “to help tourists experience the everyday life of ethnic communities” (Xie, 2011, p. 183). The perception of the nomadic lifestyle by visitors on both tours is imbued with nostalgic feelings created by a ‘cultural shock’ when travelling in the country that is bringing them back to their Self, and to existential authenticity. A Tulip tour client, while visiting the camel farm during the second day of the tour, mentioned:

“Local populations’ lifestyles in rural areas inspired me a lot. People struggle with the environment every day; however they won’t change their ways of living.”

For two FITs who travelled in the steppes by bicycle, the notion of *nomadic hospitality* best defines the culture in the countryside. One feels nomadic lifestyle is synonymous with simplicity, especially in rural areas as “people are more simple and happy in the countryside and share much more of their lifestyle”. A visitor on the Kyzylarai tour considers the time he spent with the Kazakhstani family in the Shabanbai Bi village was authentic:

“What was authentic were the ‘little moments’ during the visit such as living together with other families in a small village as a community where everyone knows each other, where a car is a luxury, where in the summer people dine outside and drink *kymiz* milk from their own cows and camels. When people sleep outdoors during spring and summer, and sing songs with a *dombra* to entertain the family and guests.”

While visiting the camel farm during the second day of the Tulip tour, two visitors specifically indicated that their perception of the place is objectively more authentic than the yurts set up specifically for them; in particular, they emphasised the genuine aspects of the local inhabitants’ lives:

“The camels and the people who take care of them were also objectively authentic because these people live here and they breed camels. People are living their everyday lives even if tourism activities are organised beside their houses.”

In contrast to the ‘hardship’ of the local people’s lifestyles witnessed while visiting the camel farm, several visitors on the Tulip tour perceive the hosting experience in yurts “not enough authentic”; for example, letting the tourists sleep in beds in the yurts instead of on traditional *körpes* like the local population. From a different perspective but with a similar sentiment, the tourists on the Kyzylarai tour perceive the traditional mattresses and natural products made out of fur that are sold in the village of Shabanbai Bi to be part of a revival of nomadic traditions.

5.2.5 Nomadic food

Tourist demand for food perceived to be ‘traditional’ and ‘local’ can also be viewed as being linked to a quest for authenticity (Sims, 2009, p. 324). It can be argued that local food aims at reconnecting consumers with the people and places that produce their food (Holloway et al., 2006) and that this connection is a powerful part of an integrated tourism experience (Clark & Chabrel, 2007). As Sims further mentions:

Unlike other popular souvenirs, such as a decorative key-ring or craft item, foods and drinks engage all the senses and have stronger connections with place because visitors have personal, sensory memories of consuming them in that setting.

Sims (2009, p. 328)

For a majority of visitors, their quest for authentic tourism experiences varies according to their profile and attitude towards authenticity. One-third of the local

students think nomadic food is still objectively authentic; in particular, they insisted on the importance of the hosts teaching their guests how to cook national food (*bes barmak*, and *Kymiz*). Two out of three international students corroborate this feeling. As one of them pointed out:

“I was invited to one Kazakh family and they cooked *bes barmak*. It was made of goat and horse meat, and I had the feeling it was the national food.”

The meals served during the Kyzylarai tour were interpreted in various ways by the visitors. Two of them acknowledged the meals are prepared according to the Kazakh traditions, “as they would do it for themselves”. However, the rest of the tour participants mentioned that their perceptions of the meals made of horse meat are subject to their interpretation of traditional nomadic culture, and therefore are subjectively authentic. One of the Kyzylarai tourists explained:

“Meals and hospitality can also be perceived as authentic - because this perception corresponds to what I have personally constructed myself before coming as well as my expectations. I found the *dastarkhan* subjectively authentic because we were served the way they always did for themselves, but it was my interpretation.”

The sharing of a traditional meal, or *dastarkhan* (Figure 5.6), with the local people helps tourists on the Kyzylarai tour to understand traditional nomadic culture.

Figure 5.6: A traditional dastarkhan organised for visitors during the Kyzylarai tour



Source: Genadiy Yakushev.

Conversely, the Europeanised food that was served during the Tulip tour is perceived as staged and artificial by more than half of the visitors. One of them interpreted the

food served during the tour as a simplified and stereotyped version of their cultural heritage:

“Food served on sites should not be too Europeanised as it gives a lesser impression of what was their traditional lifestyles. No special cultural events should be organised especially for visitors, but if a wedding occurs during the tour, visitors should be able to witness it. Otherwise these events are perceived as a ‘folklorisation’ of their traditional lifestyles.”

While having a Western-style dinner in the yurts in the evening, one visitor on the Tulip tour identified the traditional way of boiling water in a samovar (Figure 5.7) as an experientially authentic part of the tour:

“The experience of seeing people boiling the water in samovars for our dinner is authentic.”

Here, visitors’ perception of authenticity is linked to the possibility of witnessing the ‘backstage’ of the tourist settings.

Figure 5.7: Samovars being used to boil water for the tea, Tulip tour, May 2012



Source: Author.

Sims (2009, p. 329) argues that local food and drinks are an asset to sustainable tourism because “they enable host communities to capitalise on visitors’ desire for

some form of ‘authentic’ experience that will enable them to connect with the place and culture of their destination.” Two Tulip clients mentioned the importance of being served traditional food as a way to enhance the home-stay providers’ culture while satisfying visitors at the same time:

“Traditional horse meat culture would be more authentic to me than the Western meals we had during the tour. They do this because they try to please tourists and they are afraid that their food wouldn’t fit them. But I would like to be offered an option to eat their local food because it is a big part of their culture. If I’d like to eat Western food I would stay at home.”

For seven other Tulip tourists, a revival of the nomadic culture can be seen in the way the rural people cook and live; namely, they still live from cattle and have no gardens around their houses. One visitor on the tour also perceives cooking instruments as part of the revival of nomadic culture:

“Changes in nomadic traditions can also occur by a modernisation of cooking accessories and by a modernisation of the meals themselves.”

The ways in which food and place were constructed by visitors on both tours underline how traditional nomadic food is perceived differently by different visitors. In particular, if the food eaten corresponds to the visitors’ preconceptions about what a traditional nomadic meal is, the food will be considered as more authentic. For Yeoman et al. (2007), tourism attractions should not appear too contemporary as the perception of something ‘authentic’ is rooted in the past. The concept of food heritage makes sense in the village of Shabanbai Bi as the visitors valued home-made nomadic food which they perceived as being traditional because of its long history of production in that location.

5.3 Quests for authentic experiences

Hall (2007, p. 1139) argues “authenticity has become a focus of many tourism marketing organisations intent as they are attracting visitors who are high yielding, better educated, better travelled, and earn more.” It can also be argued that the personal investment and emotions of the tourist in the quest for authenticity are becoming more important than the object-related authenticity, and so the existential personal quests of the tourist is becoming the centre of interest (Knudsen & Waade, 2010). The potential existential state activated by the tourist’s activities, both from the intra-personal and inter-personal levels (as defined by N. Wang, (2000), becomes

particularly relevant in the Kazakhstani villages encountered during the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours.

5.3.1 Perception of authenticity and visitors' previous travelling experiences

According to Schouten (2006, p. 192), "authenticity is a modern Western concept, closely related to the impact of modernity." Westerners conceive their own cultural environment as inauthentic and they increasingly look for an 'authentic' culture elsewhere. They may seek it in 'unspoilt' exotic destinations, in the past (the heritage experience), in nature (looking for paradise) or in the 'simple' life (as in rural tourism), and their perception of the authenticity of a place is influenced by their cultural backgrounds and travelling experiences. One expatriate emphasised the importance of his cultural background when evaluating the perception of his tourism experience in Kazakhstan, noting that his prior knowledge is based on a 'Western mindset':

"Prior knowledge influence[s] perception. I have always viewed things in Kazakhstan with a Western mindset."

Hall (2007, p. 1139) argues "there is a growing preponderance of the fake or the inauthentic that does not necessarily detract people from visiting a place." According to Xie (2011), the fact that most tourists came to the villages with a very limited prior knowledge means that entertainment is probably more important to them than expansion of their cultural knowledge; therefore, these visitors could be viewed as 'incidental tourists' rather than true 'cultural tourists'. The perception of authenticity is thus dependent on tourists' preconceived images (Waller & Lea, 1999) as well as visitors' limited knowledge and previous experiences (McIntosh & Prentice, 1999). A visitor on the Kyzylarai tour insisted on the importance of having her tourism experience not biased by any previous knowledge or expectations about the nomadic culture before arriving in the country. Answering the question whether her tourism experience would have been more authentic if she had learned about nomadic culture in Kazakhstan beforehand, she explained:

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

Conversely, for a visitor on the Kyzylarai tour, an authentic tourism experience is the one that matches her preconceived expectations:

“I want to see what I imagined, what kind of associations with the nomadic culture and post-Soviet heritage I had before coming to Kazakhstan.”

A Tulip tour client argued her perception of authenticity of Kazakhstani nomadic culture changed when she considered it in terms of what she also knew about the country:

“I studied in Moscow before I came to Kazakhstan and I knew already there was no longer traditional nomadic culture existing in the country. But you can feel people in Kazakhstan have a certain ‘level of patriotism’ that keeps their traditions alive. People have remained also quite preserved from a certain ‘degree of Westernisation’ as most of the country still lives under the poverty line.”

Another visitor on the Tulip tour pointed out that his previous knowledge about cattle breeding in his home country gives him a critical perspective on the local practices of breeding farm animals:

“Nothing in the camel farm is objectively authentic to me. I was more impressed by the countryside, the horse-riding culture. Because I used to live in a village in Germany, I know a lot about the animals and the conditions to breed them. So I can have a critical understanding about the camel farm itself.”

In this particular tourism setting, losing the ‘points of references’ and disconnecting from what visitors know before arriving in the country is paramount to increasing the level of authenticity of the tourism experience. For half of the FITs, the idea of travelling for a long time in the Kazakh steppes is perceived as a way to disconnect from their usual comfort zones, and therefore *augments* the perception of authenticity while in the villages. One of the FITs highlighted:

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

Interestingly, the idea of “longue durée” within the tourism experience (Xie & Lane, 2006) is advocated by a Kazakhstani student who commented that “tourists would change the whole perception of their tourism experience if they had a chance to live in the country for at least a month and learn the local language”. In this perspective, the

visitors' enduring involvement in the villages greatly influences the perception of the authenticity of the visitor experience.

5.3.2 Levels of involvement with the local populations and spontaneity

While being interviewed about their perception of the authenticity of their tourism experience, different visitors pointed out various levels of involvement with the local populations depending on the nature of their tourism experience and the previous knowledge they had about the tourism destination. For a participant on the Kyzylarai tour, it is possible to have a feeling of authenticity for the place on the condition that the local populations do not change their behaviour for the tourist:

“The ideal authentic tourism experience could be encountered as if the family was living the same way independently from me, as if I was not there. What they organise for visitors should remain a piece of their lives, not something they are not doing anymore.”

Similarly, a visitor on the Tulip tour believes that it is important that the way the tourists discover a country, a culture or local people, has minimum impact on the daily lives of the locals:

“Tourists should not interfere or interfere a minimum with the local populations, and should be going on sites where local people live rather than having indigenous population coming to stage cultural performances.”

One Kyzylarai client highlighted why her tourism experience was associated with spontaneous moments:

“They invited us for a lunch, and the whole family was sitting and eating with us as they usually do, then he was playing *dombra* and they were asking us about our country. It was not organised in advance, and that is why it was special.”

Two FITs cycling in the Kazakh steppes also pointed out the strong connection between an authentic tourism experience and spontaneous interactions with local populations:

“An authentic tourism experience is a rare and unique experience that favours spontaneity. It's about living in the present time. It's also an entire shared experience with the local populations.”

The richness of the tourism experience in remote Kazakhstani villages is linked to the understanding visitors are getting from the place. This implies that some knowledge of the tourists' languages is important so that the local people can engage in meaningful exchanges with the visitors. One of the home-stay providers explained:

“Kazakh language is rich and represents our culture and history, so when visitors come they can see we are living like before. But we also need to be able to speak foreign languages to be able to share a conversation with them.”

Two visitors on the Tulip tour underlined the fact that Kazakhstani people are communicative and engage in conversations easily. They pointed out the local people’s “willingness to make contact”, that “they like to communicate” and that “they are exceptionally friendly people”. One visitor on the tour mentioned:

“Authentic means genuine to me, which means if things make sense for the local population and for the tourists at the same time. It means finding an ideal compromise in discussions.”

Another visitor on the tour pointed out the need to *communicate closely* with the host populations rather than really sharing their lives:

“It is not necessarily sharing the lives of the local population, but being surrounded by locals and communicate ‘eye-to-eye’ with them, so that you meet them not only as waiters or people serving you.”

A Kyzylarai visitor explained, “Authenticity is about seeing how people live and have the possibility to take part in their life and exchange points of views with them.” An international student highlighted the same need to share some common values with the local community as a way to *feel accepted* by them:

“If I can share their values in life, and be accepted as a member of their society like a friend, and I can act or do freely, that could be called an authentic tourism experience.”

Sharing feelings with the local population intensifies the tourism experience between hosts and guests, and it also increases the chances of adding to the visitors’ knowledge about the tourism destination.

5.3.3 Acquisition of knowledge and host–guest reciprocal exchanges

When considering authenticity, Hall (2007, p. 1139) claims “it is important to consider the role of experience for its capacity to provide shared meanings through shared experiences.” Value depends also on “the amount of energy invested and the qualitative ‘depth’ of investment, in other words how intense was the experience” (Knudsen & Waade, 2010, p. 5). A visitor from the Kyzylarai tour feels it is important that tour organisers realise that visitors want to experience the ‘voices of the locals’ when in the villages:

“Organisers are not aware that we are really interested to discover more about the home-stay providers’ lives. It will be more interesting for me to know their feelings, their points of views; The tour operator should make them aware that they are not only serving us but they can interact with us, that visitors feel glad when they can exchange their views, talk to local people about their lives and cultures.”

Another visitor believes the local people are as interested in them as they are with the home-stay providers:

“The reason why I loved Kazakhstan after my first visit was the communication with people: they liked to invite us, they were curious about us.”

The reciprocal relationship depends on the involvement of both hosts and guests. As one FIT mentioned, “The result is depending on the implication of both parts, and the experience is the result of these implications.” However, another visitor on the Kyzylarai tour put the onus of responsibility solely on the visitor: “The lack of exchange of information with the host communities is not authentic. But again it all depends on us.” Two FITs emphasised the importance of travelling in the country and interacting with local people without ‘forcing’ the relationship:

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

Three members of the Tulip tour saw the exchange of information with the local populations as being an essential part of the authenticity of their experiences, despite the perceived ‘cost of energy’ it incurs:

“Living with a family is a perfect way of learning about the culture and the people, to learn their habits, their family structure. We talked about life in the villages, about politics. I like to learn this kind of information from the people themselves directly. The families who are welcoming visitors are interested in you and they like to talk and communicate.”

Another participant of the Tulip tour said:

“I would love to have the experience of living with the local population once, to get in contact with the local people, to get accustomed with them, to build a relationship. It would be interesting to know what they feel, think [...]. Basically all the social aspects. But it wouldn’t be a relaxing holiday for me. It would be difficult and would cost a lot of energy.”

Jamal and Hill (2004, p. 364) argue when referring to Crouch (2000, p. 65) that “Cultural and heritage places and spaces are always ‘in the making’ through the construction of meaning and the participatory activities that occur within them, generating a variety of personal, heritage and identity relationships including sense of ownership or emotional attachment, empowerment, value, and feeling.” One FIT suggested that visitors can *gain trust* and access higher levels of cultural heritage understanding while visiting the country by participating in the activities of the village:

“The more efforts the tourists are doing, the more host people are inclined to share the ‘backstage’ of their authentic life. It is attractive to witness craft-making processes or the cooking of national dishes.”

As Dovey (1985) states, “Authenticity is experiential, in that it is derived from the property of connectedness of the individual to the perceived, everyday world and environment, and the processes that created one’s engagement with it.” The authenticity of the tourism experience is thus synonymous with the idea of connection and self-transformation as a way to build visitors’ identity through their travels.

5.3.4 Perception of authenticity and self-transformation

Willson, McInstosh and Zahra (2013, p. 151) explain how the tourism experience “through the subjective way in which individuals derive meaning from the things they do can lead to change, self-transformation, and discovering dimensions of one’s identity”. One specialist in nomadic culture in Kazakhstan defined his perception of the typical foreign visitor travelling in Kazakhstan:

“The typical visitor coming to Kazakhstan looks for ‘absolute things in life’ and tries to find himself again. He is in search of disorientation and looks for a certain ‘degree’ of loneliness. He has a deep intellectual curiosity about foreign cultures, can bear to live in a different environment and endure the gap in this difference.”

A local Kazakhstani student pointed out the link between an authentic tourism experience and the pleasure derived from the experience itself. For her, an authentic tourism experience is synonymous to a “joyful experience for your body, for your mind”. For one FIT, an authentic tourism experience is one that gives pleasure at the time and after you have returned home:

“An authentic tourism experience is when I feel relaxed; if I learn something or meet new people. It is also about coming back home and saying that the

travelling experience was great or when you have some positive impressions in mind.”

Csikszentmihalyi (1975) described optimal human experiences as ‘flow’, whereby people are challenged and experience a loss of self-consciousness and time. Similarly, the tourism journey in Kazakhstani rural areas can be seen as a way to transcend oneself and construct meaning in one’s life. Accordingly, the Kazakhstani cultural landscapes are described by some visitors on the Kyzylarai tour as being linked with the idea of self-transformation through their travel journeys in the steppes, thus reaching the feeling of existential authenticity:

“I have the feeling that the link to the Self can be reached by walking hours in the steppes, and the notion of time is essential to have this feeling.”

Figure 5.8 portrays two clients of the Kyzylarai tour starting their journey in the Kazakhstani cultural landscapes. After several hours walking in the steppes, these Kyzylarai tourists mention a strong feeling of “being with themselves”.

Figure 5.8: Visitors starting the Kyzylarai tour near the Shabanbai Bi village, August 2011



Source: Author.

This idea is corroborated by a Kazakhstani student for whom an authentic tourism experience is one “when tourists get a chance to live the life of an average citizen of the hosting country and experience all traditions”. The idea of self-discovery was also pointed out by another local student, for whom an authentic tourism experience is to “see who you are in another culture with native people, like something full of truth”.

The journey is seen as way to test oneself in unfamiliar environments and discover a part of the 'self' within the host–guest tourism encounter. A Tulip tour member explained that the most important parts of her travel experience in the steppes were *the moments* when she was taking full responsibility for herself:

“The most authentic experience depends on the tourists themselves. For me, for example, it’s going somewhere where I cannot speak the language and communicate with local people, it’s about the little moments in the shops or at the local hairdresser. It is something *I explore myself*.”

A local student claims a tourism experience is authentic when “the visitor discovers something new for himself by going to different unknown places but the *process* of discovering is thus interesting”. While in her study on the consumption of local food in England, Sims (2009, p. 334) states that visitors engage with ‘local’ food and drinks products on holiday as a way of “restoring a more meaningful sense of connection between themselves, as consumers, and the people and places that produce their food”.

Hall (2007, p. 1140) argues that “authenticity is born from everyday experiences and connections which are often serendipitous not from things out here”. According to Cary:

Serendipity is best understood as an unexpected discovery of something valuable that is perceived to be true at the time [...]. Given the temporary illusion of truth associated with serendipity, it in turns becomes a mechanism for inventing authenticity.

Cary (2004, p. 66)

Two visitors on the Tulip tour highlighted the need to be ‘disoriented’ as a way to *augment* their perceptions of authenticity.

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

A visitor on the Kyzylarai tour believes the surprise moments of his tourism experience in the country were the most authentic part of his adventure:

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

Likewise, an international student highlighted the need to be surprised throughout her journey, to experience something she couldn't anticipate while travelling in the country. Two FITs proposed the idea of a "semi-controlled" tourism experience that would necessarily take into account the uncertainty or unexpected events of the Kazakhstani tourism context:

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

Cary (2004, pp. 66, 67) adds "As both unexpected and extraordinary, there is a spontaneous instance of self-discovery as well as a feeling of communal belonging elicited by serendipity and represented in narrative." Feelings of pleasure, spontaneity and control are experienced by visitors on the Kyzylarai tour who are looking for serendipity, while the sense of togetherness in families and among friends is experienced in the village of Shabanbai Bi when visitors share a traditional meal with the local communities.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has presented the findings of a survey of visitors undertaking eco-cultural tours in Kazakhstan. Various groups of these visitors attached different meanings to their perceptions of authenticity of the various aspects of Kazakhstani cultural heritage experienced during their visit – the geographical imagination (nomadic cultural landscapes and nomadic architecture), crafts purchased and the performative spaces (nomadic home-stays and nomadic food). A majority of the visitors associate an authentic tourism experience in Kazakhstan with local traditions and the cultural landscapes. The diversity of fauna and flora, the gaze of the steppes and its wildlife encountered during the Tulip and Kyzylarai tours are all perceived as objectively authentic.

The commodity-driven Tulip tour is attracting visitors who are aware that their tourism experience is contrived but nonetheless they perceive it as experientially authentic. Despite noticing the yurts are not traditionally made, some Tulip tourists accept them as a modern authentic tourism experience. Local and international visitors mentioned

that the renaissance of nomadic culture can be seen in the design of the architectural buildings of the new capital city, Astana, which they perceive as a marker of the new authentic architecture.

Few visitors indicated local craft-making as objectively authentic. However, when local crafts bought in the villages are brought back to the tourists' homes, their authenticity is confirmed. The organisers of the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours hold different views on whether traditional nomadic food should be served to the tourists. Visitors on the Kyzylarai tour share a traditional meal, or *dastarkhan*, with their hosts. The visitors perceive this as an authentic experience and their interaction with the local people helps them in their understanding of traditional nomadic culture. In contrast, the Europeanised food served during the Tulip tour is perceived as staged and artificial by more than half of the tour's clients.

Both the local and international visitors frequently highlighted the performative aspects of the hosts–guests relationships when talking about their understanding of Kazakhstani cultural heritage. For a majority of the FITs and the Kyzylarai and Tulip tourists, the most authentic tourism experiences are to be found by living with families or visiting local festivals. The serendipitous moments and the sense of togetherness in families experienced in the villages when visitors are sharing a traditional meal with the home-stay providers were underlined by Kyzylarai tourists and FITs as self-transformative experiences. In contrast, Tulip clients acknowledge the lack of authenticity of their tour because of the way visitors are accommodated in special tourists' yurts, separate from their hosts. From their comments, it can be seen that the visitors' involvement and reciprocal relationships with the local people greatly influence their perception of the authenticity of their tourism experiences.

Chapter 6: Transnomadic Authenticity Formation in Kazakhstani Tourism Encounters

This chapter examines the conditions for the development of a theoretical model of transnomadic authenticity. The chapter draws on cross-cutting themes identified from the findings of the main three study questions:

1. How can the perception of authenticity lead to better cultural-heritage penetration in a new tourism destination context?
2. What is the role that the perception of authenticity plays in the host–guest relationship?
3. How can various stakeholders’ authentication positions contribute to a better sustainable tourism industry?

The chapter starts with an introduction and a presentation of the model of transnomadic authenticity in Kazakhstani tourism encounters using the grounded theory methodology. The second part of the chapter details four factors that influence the qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity. In this section, various stakeholders’ authentication positions, identified in Chapter 4, are contrasted directly through measurable indicators of authenticity and less directly by emphasising activities that aim to provide a meaningful cultural heritage experience for visitors (Jamal & Hill, 2004). The qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity are then summarised and discussed in the third part of the chapter. The discussion weaves in case-study findings to present an original approach to understanding the processes that ground various stakeholders’ authentication positions in the understanding of a destination’s cultural heritage.

6.1 Grounded theory and the transnomadic authenticity model

The development of the transnomadic authenticity model outlined below (Figure 6.1) was enabled by three major stages of data analysis (open coding, axial coding and selective coding) which follow grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After defining the properties of the emergent categories (e.g. ‘performative’) the researcher connected themes (e.g. ‘characteristics of the tourism experience’) and defined how they fit into larger processes to create the model of transnomadic authenticity. The researcher made sure to compare systematically the emergent

categories (the performative and existential aspects of the tourism experience) with the evidence from each case in order to assess how each category fitted with the data.

The interpretation of empirical materials through constant comparison of codes identified in semi-structured interviews generated the model of transnomadic authenticity in Kazakhstani tourism encounters. The theoretical categories emerged through the inductive generation of themes supplemented with deductive reasoning. The tourism stakeholders interviewed provided the background context under which sets of categories occurred.

The use of grounded theory enabled the researcher to describe the underlying factors that determine a social phenomenon and what happens within the study of its dynamic process. This methodology enabled the researcher to look for both the subtle similarities and differences between the Tulip and Kyzylarai cases. The result of these forced comparisons can be new categories and themes which the researcher did not anticipate (Eisenhardt, 1989). The research adopted replication logic from the Kyzylarai to the Tulip tour to enhance confidence in the validity of the themes which, in turn, enabled the model to be refined and extended.

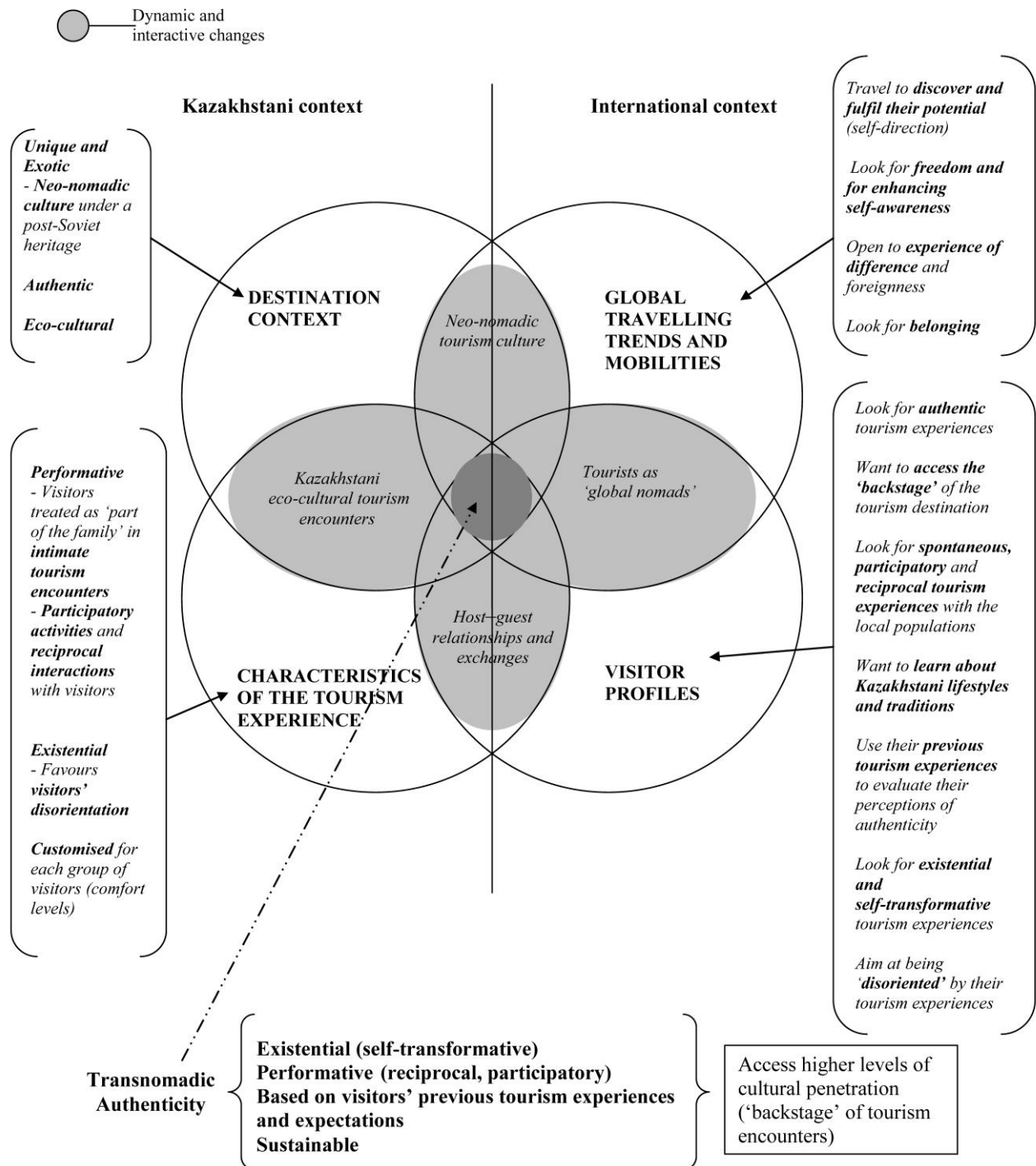
The model of transnomadic authenticity in Kazakhstani tourism encounters emerged from the three grounded theory stages. The model is based on the relationship between four themes: 'destination context', 'characteristics of the tourism experience', 'visitor profiles' and 'global travelling trends and mobilities'. Each theme is broken down further into categories; for example, the 'characteristics of the tourism experience' theme has three main categories: 'performative', 'existential' and 'customised'. Each theme and its categories are described in detail later in the chapter.

The 'characteristics of the tourism experience' and 'the destination context' themes were informed by the authentication positions given by community members, policymakers, tourism developers and specialists of nomadic culture involved in the development of eco-cultural tours in Kazakhstan. The behavioural aspects of 'visitor profiles' were generated by the analysis of the visitors' perceptions of authenticity while undertaking an eco-cultural tour. The concept of 'global travelling trends and mobilities' was informed by existing literature on tourism and mobilities studies (e.g. the concept of global nomadism).

Figure 6.1 presents the transnomadic authenticity model and the themes that ground it. Four elements undergoing dynamic and interactive changes are highlighted as factors that influence the qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity; these factors can be seen in the model as the intersections of the themes' circles, and are shaded light grey. The four influential factors are 'neo-nomadic tourism culture', 'tourists as global nomads', 'Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism encounters' and 'host–guest relationships and exchanges'. The intersection of the four factors (the dark grey circle at the heart of the model) informs the transnomadic authenticity qualifying dimensions, highlighted by a pointed line at the bottom of the model.

The chapter ends with an explanation of how each qualifying dimension of transnomadic authenticity contributes to the understanding of the 'backstage' of Kazakhstani cultural heritage.

Figure 6.1: Transnomadic authenticity model (grounded theory method)



6.2 Factors influencing transnomadic authenticity

The section starts with a discussion of two factors, 'neo-nomadic tourism culture' and 'tourists as global nomads', that influence the qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity; these are shaded light grey in the model. The factor 'neo-nomadic tourism culture' results from the intersection of the 'global travelling trends and mobilities' and 'destination context' circles. The factor 'tourists as global nomads' is found at the intersection of the 'global travelling trends and mobilities' and 'visitor profiles' circles.

The intersection of the 'destination context' and 'characteristics of the tourism experience' circles (shaded light grey and on the left-hand side of the model) is then examined. Here, tourism providers' and visitors' perceptions of authenticity of various topic areas identified in Chapter 4 are contrasted to inform the characteristics of the 'Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism encounters'.

The attributes of the performative aspects of the tourism experiences authenticated by tourism suppliers and made available to visitors are then discussed within the host–guest relationship. These attributes are used to inform the understanding of the characteristics of the 'host–guest relationships and exchanges' resulting from the intersection of the two circles 'characteristics of the tourism experience' and 'visitor profiles', seen at the bottom of the transnomadic authenticity model.

6.2.1 Neo-nomadic tourism culture

The first factor influencing the qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity relates to the fact that with the increasing number of tourists visiting Kazakhstan, the renaissance of nomadic culture exists within the realm of tourism development – as a 'neo-nomadic tourism culture'.

Nomadic culture is often seen by Western visitors as an idyllic vision of cultural mobility and lifestyle. According to D'Andrea (2006, p. 106), "as a culturally diffused reference, nomads have long fascinated the West, either as a contemptuous case of pre-civilizational barbarism or as a romanticized icon of holistic freedom." It is argued (Selwyn, 1996; N. Wang, 1999) that the politics of authenticity, and representation of culture for the viewing public, influence the creation of tourism products. In

Kazakhstan, the dichotomy between nomadic and neo-nomadic cultures finds its relevance in the views of the politics of authenticity between various stakeholders involved in the development of Kazakhstani tourism. On a broader level, Odgaard and Simonsen argue that historically the reconstruction of Kazakhstani traditions and culture in 1991 is correlated to the need to create an independent republic:

Although there had been a rise in national sentiment throughout the 1980s, there was no existing independence movement in Kazakhstan. The revival of interest in nomadic life among the Kazakhs had little to do with any desire for independence. It was more a wish to see Kazakh culture included within official Soviet accounts of their history [...]. The building of an independent republic therefore became a matter of constructing a Kazakh national state which was founded on a reconstruction of Kazakh tradition and culture.

Odgaard and Simonsen (2001, p. 17)

The renaissance of nomadism in contemporary Kazakhstan was argued by two of the interviewed experts in nomadic culture as being “a rebirth for the nation’s identity-making” because people are no longer living a nomadic lifestyle *per se*, except in some remote areas. They further argued that the Government is “selling nomadic aspects of the Kazakhstani culture by reconstructing an *imaginaire* of the nomad”. Neo-nomadic culture is thus seen as a way to validate new and unique cultural traditions of Kazakhstani populations whose ancestors were former nomads and who are now subject to globalisation processes.

For the Ministry of Tourism and Sport, eco-cultural tourism in Kazakhstan is built around the renaissance of cultural traditions for the sake of tourism development. A government official argued that this process leads to newly defined nomadic lifestyles:

“We are organising tourism activities in the countryside: yurt-camps (*zhaylau*) with local communities who are living with their times. It means they still eat traditional food (*bes barmak*, *kymiz*), but their yurts are equipped with TV, fridges and they have electricity. We have such kind of *zhaylau* now.”

For one NGO coordinator responsible for eco-tourism development in Central Kazakhstan, local populations do not identify themselves anymore as having a traditional nomadic lifestyle. Instead, the coordinator feels foreign visitors, and free independent travellers (FITs) in particular, are looking for traditions and habits that have almost disappeared from the lifestyles of the local communities:

“The knowledge and transmission of hospitality traditions associated with former nomadic lifestyle have almost disappeared in the country, and Kazakhstani populations are not sad about it. It is the nostalgia visitors bring upon arrival in the country, the fact that they would like to see something that does not exist anymore that creates a gap between their expectations and the ‘reality’ of their visits in the country.”

A great number of the local home-stay providers also feel that the concept of authenticity is brought by Western-minded visitors. They argue that people in the villages do not follow a traditional nomadic lifestyle but “get inspired by its foundations”. For them, the notion of authenticity is simply associated with work and everyday life in the villages. Interestingly, for a large majority of those on the Tulip tour, traditional nomadic culture in Kazakhstan is associated with the mobility of yurt habitats and an autonomous way of life. Meanwhile, a third of the visitors from both the Tulip and Kyzylarai tours feel that traditional Kazakh culture has disappeared. A few visitors from both tours pointed out that this commodification process is organised mainly for the purpose of creating tourism business and is a condition for the ‘survival’ of the tourism industry in the country. The renaissance of nomadic culture is thus perceived as commodified and existing within the realm of tourism development in the country as a neo-nomadic tourism culture.

6.2.2 Tourists as global nomads

The second factor influencing the qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity is the fact that tourists as ‘global nomads’ cherish values of autonomy, self-expression and experimentation. For D’Andrea (2006, pp. 105, 106), “mobility is a component of global nomads’ economic strategies, self-identities and modes of subjectivity.” The process of travelling like a nomad represents not only the ‘Other’ to be visited, but also an idealised form of travel as liberation from the constraints of modern society (Kaplan, 1996; G. Richards & Wilson, 2004). It is argued (D’Andrea, 2006; Madison, 2006; G. Richards & Wilson, 2004) that travellers and global nomads, in particular, aim to find a unique, exotic authentic tourism encounter when travelling, one that corresponds to their search for experience of difference and foreignness. In particular, they are seeking greater possibilities for self-actualising, exploring foreign cultures in order to assess their own identity, and ultimately grappling with issues of home and belonging in the world generally. For Smith and Duffy (2003), the idea of the tourist finding the ‘genuine Otherness’ in other cultures is motivated by existential reasons in

narrating one's self-identity. The neo-nomadic culture operating under a post-Soviet heritage meets some of the global nomads' criteria for selecting Kazakhstan as a tourism destination. By exploring Kazakhstani cultural landscapes and staying in local home-stays, global nomads' visits to the country serve one of their reasons for travelling: to discover and fulfil their potential as a way to reinforce their inner selves through existential meanings.

When defining the concept of 'existential migration', Madison (2006, p. 9) details that it concerns individuals who are interested in "sustaining enhanced possibilities for self-awareness, independence and freedom, authenticity and 'homecoming' arising from confrontation with the non-ordinary". Smith and Duffy (2003) assert the search for oneself in travels can be linked to the search for authentic tourism experiences as a way to counterbalance something missing in the traveller's own society. In this study, a majority of both the FITS and the package tour visitors highlighted their need to find authentic tourism experiences on the steppes landscapes and in the local guest houses in rural villages. As sources of both objectively and existentially authentic tourism experiences, cultural landscapes and local home-stays augment visitors' perception of authenticity.

6.2.3 Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism encounters

The third factor that influences the qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity is the specific content and nature of 'the Kazakhstani eco-cultural encounters'. While operators and visitors seek to develop/consume authentic experiences, the Kyzylarai and the Tulip tours exhibit significant differences in the ways in visitors are hosted. While the former tour welcomes guests in local community guest houses (see Figure 6.2), the latter is organised in the middle of the steppes, specifically for tourists. Despite these major differences, most Tulip tourists, who had no previous knowledge of nomadic culture before arriving in the country, described their experiences as authentic. As one of them mentioned, "Walking in the steppes landscapes, living in a yurt and meet local shepherds is objectively authentic." The environmental surroundings, including the fauna and flora, of the yurt-camp stayed in for three days during the Tulip tour, strongly influence the tourists' perceptions of authenticity. This finding also corroborates the views of a majority of the Kyzylarai tour participants for

whom the cultural landscapes are one of the most important markers of authenticity of their tourism experiences.

Figure 6.2: Shabanbai Bi village, Kyzylarai tour



Source: Vitaliy Shuptar (www.guide.kz)

For Kunanbaeva, nomadic time is cyclical and follows the rhythm of nature:

Nomad civilization has its own laws governing the organisation of time and space, and nomads follow very sensitively the cycles of nature [...]. The primacy of movement serves as the basis of the nomads' entire worldview. For them, everything that is alive is in movement, and everything that moves is alive: the sun and moon, water and wind, birds, and animals.

Kunanbaeva (2008, p. 92)

This conception of a nomadic lifestyle corroborates Kazakhstani students' perceptions of the nomadic way of life. For them, the authenticity of the tourism experience is linked to a 'philosophy of life' and a 'sense of freedom' they find in the steppes landscapes. Likewise, several visitors from both tours acknowledged that the vastness of the country is strongly associated with the feeling of freedom. This is an important factor also for global nomads, who are looking to enhance their self-awareness when they travel. Travelling for global nomads can be the expression of a spiritual quest and a way to find one's values in foreign cultures (Madison, 2006). As mentioned by a visitor on the Kyzylarai tour:

"Kazakhstan is a country of freedom; it is so huge with steppes everywhere. I found travelling in this country adventurous and different from my expectations."

As described earlier, the steppes landscapes and the former nomadic populations living in the area are integrally part of the visitors' tourism experiences. In Kazakhstan, nature and steppes landscapes have a special role to play as sources of authentic tourism experiences, a vision shared by the majority of home-stay providers for whom 'the feeling of being a nomad' is perceived as an existentially authentic element of the visitor's experience. As an integral part of the tourism destination, Kazakhstani cultural landscapes are associated with local pride in the nomadic lifestyle, a topic similarly addressed by Buckley, Ollenburg and Zhong in their discussion of Mongolian cultural landscapes:

As indigenous people and traditional cultures become increasingly proud of their heritage and alert to preserve and profit from it, they are increasingly eager to present cultural landscapes as destinations.

Buckley et al. (2008, p. 57)

For both tourism providers and visitors, culinary traditions also play a vital role in contributing to an authentic experience when visiting Kazakhstani rural villages. In the Kyzylarai tour, all of the local tourism providers who were interviewed mentioned that culinary traditions remain 'intact' in rural areas and are perceived by visitors as objectively authentic. In the Shabanbai Bi village, food traditions and recipes made out of horse meat (*bes barmak*) and horse milk (*kymiz*), characterising the nomadic culture, are handed down from generation to generation. Preparation of the traditional *dastarkhan* by home-stay providers allows visitors to discover conventional ways of cooking within the village and experience an authentic meal with the local communities.

Despite the 'Europeanisation' of local food served during the Tulip tour, tourism operators clarified that the experiential part of the tourists' visit is to be found in the sharing of the meals prepared by the host populations. This point of view is corroborated by half of the local Kazakhstani students and FITs who shared a traditional meal with the local populations in rural villages. Visitors from both the Tulip and Kyzylarai tours highlighted that their perception of the authenticity of the meals served is influenced by their knowledge of nomadic culture. While half of the Kyzylarai participants mentioned that sharing the meals with the local populations "as they would do it for themselves" is authentic, a majority of the Tulip tourists characterised the Europeanised food as somewhat artificial and inauthentic. Visitors on both the

Tulip and Kyzylarai tours suggested that the relationship between hosts and guests emphasised by participatory activities in the guest houses is a practice of subjectivity formation and authentication of their tourism experiences.

The uniqueness and exoticism which characterise Kazakhstan as an eco-cultural tourism destination are two other elements mentioned by both tourism providers and visitors. For one NGO coordinator and main guide of the Kyzylarai tour, “The cultural landscapes of Kazakhstan are always different and unique, like the steppes skies.” Two government officials said that the Kazakhstani cultural landscapes are synonymous with an “initial state of authenticity” and “untouched nature”, statements that corroborate most of the visitors’ perceptions of objective authenticity. Both uniqueness and exoticism are elements that are looked for by global nomads, who are open to experiences of difference and foreignness when travelling.

The majority of the Kyzylarai clients felt that the most authentic encounter on their tour was staying in the local guest houses in the Shabanbai Bi village. While the reconstruction of yurts for tourism purposes in the Kanshengel village was acknowledged as being subjectively authentic by half of the Tulip tourists, the simplicity of the village people’s lifestyle in the village of Shabanbai Bi was perceived as objectively authentic by most of the Kyzylarai tour participants. Despite the Kyzylarai tour clients preferring to stay in the guest houses with the local populations, it was interesting to hear some of the home-stay providers in Shabanbai Bi village say that they need to reconstruct traditional yurts to augment the perceived authenticity of the visitors’ experiences. For these villagers, yurt shelters are part of the nomadic lifestyle and so they believe providing yurt accommodation will help to meet visitors’ romantic views of the nomadic culture.

In contemporary Kazakhstan, Astana is perceived as the modern part of the country, and the city was acknowledged by several visitors from both tours as being constructively authentic. This difference between old and modern Kazakhstan was commented on by a visitor on the Kyzylarai tour for whom higher levels of authenticity are found in the rural areas:

“I understand that the country is changing and is now divided into the ‘old’ part and the ‘new’ part, and the new part can also be called authentic, as it shows the new identity of the country”.

Some visitors on the Tulip tour mentioned that this 'neo-nomadic identity' is reinforced by the pride Kazakhstani people share in their culture and traditions. Similarly, when interviewed about whether they thought a renaissance of the nomadic culture is occurring in the country, a quarter of local Kazakhstani students specified the revival can be found in the decoration and architecture of modern buildings in Astana, which incorporate traditional ornaments and yurt shapes. These findings corroborate the idea of a 'neo-nomadic cultural impregnation' characterising the capital city.

Architecturally, Astana is not perceived as genuinely authentic but, rather, participates in the visitors' subjective views of neo-nomadic culture based on the city's symbolic attributes. Figure 6.3 below shows the tourist attraction Baiterek (tall polar tree), erected in 1997, which represents the new landmark of Kazakhstan's capital city. The Baiterek tower was conceptualised and designed to celebrate the country's nomadic past and the independence of Kazakhstan as a nation. Inspired by nomadic cosmogony, this 'tree of life' became the central symbol of the new capital city (Thorez, 2013).

Figure 6.3: The tourist attraction Baiterek in Astana



Source: Author

Cohen (1988) notes that the emergence of a tourism market can facilitate the preservation of local cultures that would otherwise die out. The conservation of a meaningful local identity, particularly in the sphere of ethnic art, is important for the

local populations in the remote Kazakhstani villages of Shabanbai Bi and Kanshengel. As Cohen (1984, p. 388) highlights, “with tourism development a variety of ‘transitional arts’ created specifically for the tourist market can be perceived as genuinely new artistic creations.” According to the home-stay providers of the Kyzylarai tour, both external and internal criteria are found to be important markers of authenticity when evaluating crafts offered to tourists on the Kyzylarai tour. Home-made souvenirs made of fur are proposed in Shabanbai Bi village as new emerging tourism arts and are specifically sold to visitors.

Half of those interviewed from the Kyzylarai tour who had had the opportunity to witness some craft-making in the guest houses noted that crafts had little influence on their perception of a revival of traditional nomadic culture. In fact, from a visitor’s point of view, the authenticity of the products came from their uniqueness when brought back home whereas back in the villages where they bought them, the tourists perceived the crafts as a ‘tourism product’. The fact that these products are specifically designed for tourists and are not used or worn by the local populations in the villages gives visitors the impression that these are exotic products.

It is the uniqueness and exoticism of the crafts once visitors are wearing them back home that actually imbues them with authentic dimensions. The fact that the crafts are appealing when tourists arrive home corroborates Littrell, Anderson and Brown’s (1993) internal criteria of crafts authenticity. Here, visitors are looking for what Chambers (2000) calls a *confirmation* of authenticity as an important contributing factor to the satisfaction of their tourism experience. The joyful experience of wearing authentic felt slippers (Figure 6.4 below) back home is seen by visitors as one indicator testifying that their tourism experience in Kazakhstan was authentic.

Figure 6.4: Felt slippers made in fur as souvenirs for visitors



Source: www.discovery-bookshop.com

For one government official, crafts sold during eco-cultural tours not only shape the visitors' representation of the neo-nomadic tourism culture but their making by rural villagers also contributes to the renaissance of cultural traditions in Kazakhstan. This opinion is shared by a home-stay provider for whom the idea of "selling more carpets and traditional clothes for tourists" is synonymous with the revival of the nomadic traditions in her village that is driven by tourism. For this particular home-stay provider, who welcomes visitors every year in her guest house and produces customised crafts on demand, the development of traditional fur products on a larger scale is seen as a way to increase her income. She mentioned, in particular, that "additional products like carpets can also be sold to tourists", emphasising the idea that cultural products can be customised if tourist demand exists. In Shabanbai Bi village, the traditional and modern ways of making crafts are both seen by tourism providers as a way to satisfy visitors' desires for souvenirs.

Two important characteristics of tourism encounters that both tourism providers and visitors acknowledge as contributing to authenticity are participatory and reciprocal relationships between hosts and guests. When asked about how visitors would like to see their tourism experiences organised with the local populations, a large majority of the visitors from both tours supported the idea of sharing the local communities' homes. For them, the home-stay is the best place for sharing knowledge between hosts and guests. While separate yurts are built specifically for visitors on the Tulip

tour, the Kyzylarai tour acquaints its clients with the local populations through local home-stays in the villages. Figure 6.5 shows a room from the main local home-stay in Shabanbai Bi village. Usually occupied by a member of the family, the room is turned into a guest room for visitors when needed. A physical shift from usual beds to traditional mattresses (*körpes*) also enables closer human interaction – thus adding to the visitors’ sense of authenticity.

Figure 6.5: Traditional Kazakhstani mattresses or *körpes*, Kyzylarai tour, August 2011



Source: Vladimir Garkavenko

The proximity to their hosts directly augments visitors’ perception of authenticity. In the Tulip tour, one-third of the informants mentioned they would prefer to live within a Kazakhstani family rather than have the staged parts of the tour (Chinese yurts and Western food) they experienced:

“I personally would love to be involved in community-based tourism for a couple of days. I would be glad to live with a family in a yurt, including experiencing local traditions, being part of it. I’ll be happy also to help them preparing food and other duties.”

For visitors, community-based tourism is described as the “the ideal way to discover the local people’s lifestyles”, suggesting that both notions of intimacy (Conran, 2006) and spontaneity (Cary, 2004) are of paramount importance in experiencing authentic moments with the local populations and are a prerequisite of genuine tourism experiences and exchanges.

When mentioning the sense of hospitality that characterises former nomads, Kunanbaeva highlights the importance of information exchange between hosts and travellers who stop by the yurt during their travels in the Kazakhstani steppes:

Nomadic hospitality rituals are strongly regulated and provide an opportunity to exchange news and for guests – at the behest of their host – to talk about themselves, their travels, and events in the place where they live.

Kunanbaeva (2008, p. 95)

For the director of Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan, an essential dimension to his clients' perceptions of authenticity is the sense of hospitality of the former nomadic populations who are now living in the villages and who welcome visitors on the Kyzylarai tour:

"An authentic tourism experience to me lies in the idea of hospitality: Kazakhstani people are always glad to see guests, to invite them, to share a meal and to communicate with them."

One visitor on the Kyzylarai tour considers that the authenticity of her travel is represented by the simplicity of the hosts' lifestyles and the fact that they try to "follow their rituals and traditions". The Kazakhstani village (*aul*) is considered appropriate as a tourism encounter on the Kyzylarai tour because the visitors see the village and local populations' houses as "the most natural place to stay". For one participant on the tour, the authenticity of her experience came primarily from how the local community treated her *like any other ordinary people*, despite being aware that the location of the yurt-camp has been chosen deliberately by the organisers of the tour to portray a 'typical' nomadic tourism encounter.

In contrast to the views of home-stay providers of the Tulip tour, who value the commodification aspects as a means to enhance visitor enjoyment, a tourist of the Tulip tour who visited the Kanshengel village said that the absence of tourism activities and the 'spontaneity of the occasion' increased her perception of authenticity:

"Authentic means having more traditional meals and a tourism experience that is not staged. It's about letting things happen in a natural way; for example, going at a particular time to a village where traditional feasts and celebrations are organised."

Here, the perception of authenticity is seen as avoiding "the Western influence" and fostering Kazakhstani culture and traditions. Two participants specified that in order to

organise such a tourism encounter, the tour should be established at a basic level (transportation and housing) and avoid any unnecessary luxuries. As one participant on the Tulip tour specified, “The sightseeing is already there, so there is no need to provide accommodation with real toilets, hot shower and a cold beer in the evening.” Two tourists on the Kyzylarai tour mentioned the importance of ‘unstaged’ tour events to maintaining a high level of authenticity:

“The tour operator has to be very careful regarding the organisation itself, like organising a yurt with some explanation of the ornaments that decorate it in order not to fall into some cliché.”

When asked whether modern technologies are influencing their perception of authenticity while being at the guest houses, all respondents from the Kyzylarai tour noted that their tourism experiences were not staged as new technologies are also part of the local populations’ lifestyles:

“The Western modern style changes the country definitely. The influence of TV is great. Young people are leaving the villages for the cities. It’s important to recognise these influences are also part of the authenticity of their lives. The village is not a museum.”

All NGO coordinators interviewed believe that a unique authentic tourism experience can still be presented to visitors in contemporary Kazakhstan. For them, Kazakhstani people are not living anymore as “a Third World country” but with modern equipment and new technologies which do not lower visitors’ perceptions of authenticity of their tourism experiences.

The organisers of both the Tulip and Kyzylarai tours said that tourists will not get an authentic picture of the country if the local people’s lifestyles are portrayed as living in the past. Even in the most remote areas, a home-stay provider of the Kyzylarai tour highlighted that local communities in her village are “living with their times” and remain authentic despite high levels of commodification of their lifestyles and habits. All of the home-stay providers of both tours pointed out that modern technologies are not hindering the visitors’ perception of authenticity while in the villages, but instead “help them to live better” and “keep in touch with the world”. They acknowledged that modern equipment plays a role in the visitors’ global impressions of how former nomadic populations are living in contemporary Kazakhstan. Despite the fact that government officials are advocating the need to strengthen cultural heritage around

nomadic culture traditions, they also feel that new technologies and modern equipment can improve local communities' lifestyles and portray the new reality of the country.

6.2.4 Host–guest relationships and exchanges

The fourth factor influencing the qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity includes 'the host–guest relationships and exchanges'. A strong theme that emerges from this study is the need for visitors to be disconnected from their usual home environments in order to increase their perceptions of authenticity when touring in the country. For visitors from both tours, a feeling of disorientation is one of the conditions necessary to encourage information exchange with the local populations. By losing their usual points of reference, visitors find 'home' somewhere else, a feeling that contributes to augmenting their perception of authenticity. Two experts in Kazakhstani nomadic culture expressed the idea that this feeling of disorientation increases the level of emotions encountered with the local populations, and makes the visitors' experiences more authentic:

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

Most visitors from both tours acknowledged the challenges they faced during their journeys in the country by describing what was presented to them, as well as natural events during the tours, as "unexpected" and "going beyond their own boundaries". In heterogeneous spaces like the steppe landscapes and Kazakhstani rural villages "where tourism has often emerged in an unplanned and contingent process and tourists and local mingle" (Edensor, 2000, p. 331), visitors reach a state of existential authenticity. Despite having the perception that the tour is crafted and staged, one visitor on the Tulip tour felt the unexpected natural events constituted the most authentic part of his tourism experience: "the wind in the steppe during the first night, the camel farm and the steppes landscapes were authentic to me." Similarly, another participant on the Kyzylarai tour highlighted that the steppes landscapes contributed greatly to her perception of authenticity while touring in Central Kazakhstan: "The diversity of the

landscape, the fauna and flora were unexpected, and I was surprised that we met few pastoral people too.”

Some authors suggest that tourists are looking for familiarity in their travels, and the feeling of ‘being at home’ is seen as being of particular importance to creating this perception. Y. Wang (2007, p. 796) argues that “as an omnipresent referent to distinguish the familiar from the strange, home is unavoidably a constituent of tourists’ experiences.” In his study about visitors’ perception of authenticity encountered in Lijiang’s guest houses in China, Y. Wang talks about the importance of the home feeling in the visitors’ ‘hot’ authentication of their tourism experiences:

A particular focus on tourists’ subconscious search for ‘home’ can eventually lead to the production of customized authenticity in tourism contacts [...]. ‘Home’ is not just an underplayed element in understanding authenticity, but rather an alternative dimension that transcends the existing twofold perspective of object-based versus self-based authenticity in tourism studies.

Y. Wang (2007, p. 790)

Sometimes visitors experience a cultural shock when travelling to foreign and unfamiliar environments like remote villages in Central and South Kazakhstan. As Sack (1992) details, this cultural shock can evoke a powerful feeling of being at home even though they have never previously been in the country. In Y. Wang’s (2007) study, customised authenticity is produced in home-oriented environments, which visitors found satisfactory despite its staged nature. In the Kyzylarai tour, most visitors had a feeling of existential authenticity with their hosts. Home-stay providers in Shabanbai Bi village emphasised that the visitors’ stay in the guest houses involves sharing a nomadic lifestyle and interacting with the local population, inducing a host–guest cultural exchange. Conversely, the absence of intimate tourism encounters with the host populations is recurrently referred to by Tulip tour visitors as being a contributing factor for their perceiving a lack of authenticity of their tourism experience.

The customisation levels of the tourism experience proposed by both tour operators is another important theme influencing the host–guest relationship. When comparing the various visitors’ perceptions of authenticity of the Tulip and Kyzylarai tours, a more comfortable tourism experience is perceived by tourists as less authentic than a tourism experience that is not adjusted especially for them. As one Kazakhstani

student summarised, a customised tourism experience with additional comfort in the guest houses for visitors can diminish the overall perception of authenticity of the tourism experience:

“I think it is a dilemma between being more comfortable and keeping the experience authentic. For example, living in a yurt with all Western equipment (hot water, for example) is much better than living in a yurt like it was before. But the perception of authenticity is changed with Western-style services and the experience becomes less authentic.”

In the Kyzylarai tour, the houses and the hosts' everyday lives are only slightly modified to satisfy visitors' demand for authentic tourism experiences. Interestingly, none of the visitors interviewed in the Shabanbai Bi village expressed the need to have the guest houses customised for them. Conversely, visitors on the Tulip tour pointed out that the adjustments in the yurt structure (plastic instead of wooden framing), the sleeping conditions (beds instead of traditional mattresses (*körpes*) on the floor), and the meals altered to please Western tastes, all contributed to a perception of staged authenticity. It can be argued here that higher levels of comfort add to what Graburn (1983) calls “ritual inversion”. He suggests that when travelling, some visitors enjoy new experiences that are lacking in their Western homes yet they still also enjoy drinking wine, speaking English and having a coffee in the morning. One visitor on the Tulip tour explained that the level of customisation of the tour can directly influence the perception of authenticity and the access to the ‘backstage’ of the home-stay providers' guest houses:

“The more customised the tour experience is, the less you can witness the real life of the local populations. Obviously there is a strong need for a compromise (depending on the age of the customers, for example) between a certain level of customisation and delivering tourism experiences based on traditional nomadic culture.”

On the Kyzylarai tour, the ‘cool’ authentication aspects are provided by the tourism organisers and the home-stay providers who provide a shelter for visitors with minimum disturbances to local inhabitants' lives. The emotions that visitors experience when interacting with the local populations in the guest houses participate in the ‘hot’ authentication described by Cohen and Cohen (2012). Because three-quarters of the Tulip tourists interviewed deplored the Westernised aspects of their tour, they looked for the authenticity of their tourism experience in the steppes landscapes and their relationships with the home-stay providers in the villages.

For some older visitors, however, the 'hot' authentication is provided by the enjoyment of a more comfortable tourism experience. Interestingly, two visitors on the Tulip tour mentioned that the level of comfort expected on a tour should depend on the visitors' physical conditions:

"The roughness of the home-stay providers' life has to be adapted for visitors who cannot bear the same kind of living conditions. Tourists should not be treated the same as the local population in order to experience the highest 'level of authenticity' as to me it would be staged anyway."

Y. Wang argues that the objects, self and home are all interrelated and influence each other within the tourism experience:

In customized authenticity, there is an overlap between the object, self and home and that the three can constitute and transform into each other. Given the potential for transformation, one's search for authenticity in the context of cultural tourism is actually a parallel search for all three.

Y. Wang (2007, p. 797)

The levels of customisation of the tourism experience decided by both tour operators affect the scope of the transnomadic authenticity model. Authenticity can be customised and include the modifications of the toured objects, like shelters or meals. In the case of the Kyzylarai tour, visitors' desired authenticity is met with minor compromises from the hosts' sides. This desired authenticity can be found within the host-guest reciprocal relationship in the guest houses. In the case of the Tulip tour, customised authenticity is accepted by hosts and guests as a compromise and is found in the modified architecture of the yurts, adapted beds and Western meals that sometimes suit some visitors' desires for more comfort.

Chhabra, Healy and Sills (2003) argue that a tourist's prior knowledge of the destination's cultural traditions affects their perceived authenticity of the place. By comparing their knowledge of the place with the reality of their tourism experiences while in the country, the visitor is better able to distinguish the authentic aspects of their visit. Bruner (1991) argues that the only way to explore the real is through one's symbolic system. The information about nomadic culture that the visitors brought with them was often tainted with their imageries of exotic nomadic people based on their projections of Western views about the nomadic civilisation. Both tourism providers and visitors interviewed during the research acknowledged that previous tourism

experiences influence tourists' perceptions of authenticity. Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 1298) argue that "acts of 'cool' authentication may be based on expertise, on personal knowledge claims or on divine inspiration". When responding to the question as to whether previous knowledge of the nomadic culture and the Soviet or post-Soviet era can influence the perception of authenticity while touring in the country, one visitor on the Tulip tour highlighted that the perception of authenticity depends on the tourist:

"It heavily depends on the person. Some people are emotional and some are analytical. I am personally more analytical and for me it is extremely important to know something about the culture I visit beforehand. Because otherwise it wouldn't make sense to me and I wouldn't be able to interpret and analyse what I experience, so for me having previous knowledge about Kazakhstani cultural heritage is necessary."

Another visitor on the Tulip tour said that having had previous knowledge of the nomadic culture before visiting the country increased his level of understanding of various aspects of nomadic culture encountered during the tour. Consequently the 'level of authenticity' of his tourism experience was transformed as he was more likely to understand the meanings behind what was being portrayed or shown to him. Similarly, two visitors on the Kyzylarai tour expressed the need to characterise what they experienced during the tour as a way to "guide their behaviour" and have "deeper conversations with the local populations". Here, visitors' perceptions of authenticity depended on the prior knowledge they had about nomadic culture in Kazakhstan. As one Kyzylarai visitor explained, "If you have some knowledge it will be better to identify whether it is authentic or not, but it depends on your understanding of authenticity." Another visitor on the Kyzylarai tour mentioned how his previous experience in the neighbouring country of Kyrgyzstan influenced his perception of his travels in Kazakhstan:

"I've been to Kyrgyzstan before, where some people live a real semi-nomadic lifestyle. So I can compare and I can say that there were few people having a nomadic lifestyle in what I saw in Kazakhstan".

Here, the knowledge visitors have about the cultural heritage of the destination they are visiting affects the scope of the transnomadic authenticity model. Home-stay providers in Shabanbai Bi village strongly emphasised that knowledge of nomadic culture and post-Soviet Union history increases visitors' perceptions of authenticity. Tourism providers argued that if visitors have some prior knowledge of the history and

culture of the country, they are more likely to ask questions and engage with their hosts. Three-quarters of the home-stay providers for the Kyzylarai tour and half of those for the Tulip tour favour the visitors having some prior knowledge of nomadic culture before their arrival in the country because they say such knowledge enables them, the hosts, to have more in-depth conversations with their guests. The Kyzylarai tour organisers, however, have a more moderate view, saying that while having prior knowledge of Soviet times and nomadic culture is preferable to avoid cultural misunderstandings, it is not essential to enjoying the tour.

Organisers involved in the development of the Kyzylarai tour believe it is important to deliver tourism experiences that do not 'over promise and under deliver'. As the director of Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan pointed out, "Visitors who have too much knowledge about nomadic culture can increase their expectations to a level that may not be met while tourists are travelling in the country." Two of the three officials working in eco-tourism development at the national and regional levels claim visitors' perceptions of authenticity can be strengthened if they prepare for their travels in advance. An NGO coordinator made a similar comment, pointing out that the type of visitors travelling to Kazakhstan are "culturally aware of what they can do". However, his opinion differs from those of other NGO coordinators who said that tourists still need to prepare in advance if they are to be able to describe their views on the authenticity of their tourism experiences.

For one international student, "having previous knowledge about Kazakhstan upon arrival can lead to more enjoyment". Controlling some of the uncertainties linked to a tourism experience in Kazakhstan is seen by the visitors as a way of ensuring a better tourism experience and so enhancing their appreciation of the country. For three-quarters of the local Kazakhstani students, their prior knowledge about the nomadic culture had a direct impact on their perceptions of authenticity. Two of them explained that the difference between a visitor's knowledge about the nomadic culture before visiting Kazakhstan and their tourism experiences in the country can lead to disillusion:

"I think it can lead to disillusion if you do not prepare your travel well before coming to Kazakhstan. The level of authenticity a tourist would expect will be based on the visitors' previous knowledge of nomadic culture, Soviet and post-Soviet times. For example a person who knew the history of nomadism in

Kazakhstan beforehand would expect something similar when visiting rural villages.”

“Having previous knowledge about the nomadic culture creates certain stereotypes and expectations in the visitors’ minds that might not be true in some cases. For example, lifestyles in major cities like Astana and Almaty and in small villages are very different. The former fits the stereotype of Westernised cities that have developed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, while the latter does not.”

In addition to the level of preparation, the ability to speak Kazakh and Russian languages was mentioned by some visitors as a factor that can contribute to an authentic experience. The ability to exchange information is one of the cornerstones of cultural understanding and key to building a meaningful host–guest relationship. Along with cultural performances and traditional games played during special events and national days, the Kazakh language is perceived by several visitors from both tours as being vital to the renaissance of traditional nomadic culture. Whether staged or not, the understanding of Kazakhstani nomadic culture can be better understood with a good knowledge of local languages.

Some visitors felt that the short period of time spent in the villages and their lack of proficiency in Kazakh and Russian languages meant they had fewer opportunities for sustained interaction with the local people. The visitors also felt that the lack of trained guides and interpreters who could facilitate the discussions guests had with their hosts meant that the visitors’ interactions with the local people were limited. One Tulip tourist specified that her perception of authenticity would have been enhanced if the home-stay providers had used their own languages when talking with the visitors:

“I had the feeling that my experience could be more authentic and exotic if the local home-stay providers would have spoken in their native language and if some translation would have occurred simultaneously.”

Likewise, the main home-stay provider for the Tulip tour acknowledged the importance of Kazakh language as a direct influence on the authenticity of the visitors’ experiences and their feeling of the ‘exotic’. Visitors’ perception of authenticity is increased when the home-stay providers use the Kazakh language in their presence. For this home-stay provider, the Kazakh language is representative of the Kazakhstani culture and history as visitors can see how local people lived during nomadic times. The Kazakh language, an official national language since 1989, is perceived as a

profound marker of authenticity for the host populations. Three officials out of four insisted on the importance of using the Kazakh language to strengthen both the national culture and traditions, and also as a means to portray the 'real' Kazakhstan in the rural areas. The idea of 'longue durée' within the tourism experience (Xie & Lane, 2006) was advocated particularly by the Kazakhstani students and local home-stay providers as a chance for visitors to stay longer in the country and learn local languages. Being able to converse in the local language would then, in turn, deepen the quality of visitors' conversations with the local populations, and thus the perception of authenticity of their tourism experiences.

Another factor of influence identified in the transnomadic authenticity model (see Figure 6.1) is the fact that the absence of visitors' prior knowledge of Kazakhstani cultural traditions can heighten their perceptions of the authenticity of the places they visit. A quarter of visitors from both tours felt they had a higher perception of authenticity with little or no previous information about nomadic culture and post-Soviet heritage than they would have had if they had known about nomadic culture prior to their tour. A Tulip tour client said the information about nomadic culture and post-Soviet heritage gathered before her travel increased the stereotypes about the destination and therefore influenced her perception of authenticity:

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

Here, having some knowledge of nomadic culture is seen as a way to contextualise the visitor's impressions in order to better understand the nature of their experiences.

Some scholars have argued that the best way to learn about a place is through emotionally based relationships with local communities. Kolar and Zabkar (2010, p. 661) argue that "in order to facilitate tourists' existential quest, managers should focus on how tourists establish and perceive their connectedness with history, religion, spiritual experiences, humankind and civilization." Kolar and Zabkar are emphasising the idea that tourism organisers, when managing the sites, should devote more attention to new approaches like storytelling in order to improve tourists' perceptions of existential authenticity.

A tourism encounter with the local community is thus perceived as a way to get 'genuine' information that augments tourists' perceptions of authenticity about the place they are visiting. As a tourism encounter that favours reciprocal exchanges between hosts and guests, local home-stays allow that "object-based and existential authenticity can be validly measured as latent psychological constructs and that perceived authenticity can be conceived and measured as an evaluative judgment which is dependent on tourists experiences" (Kolar and Zabkar, (2010, p. 660). The tourists' authentication positions can thus be found in the host–guest relationship, a type of authenticity referenced by Cohen and Cohen (2012) as 'hot' authentication.

An essential theme from the transnomadic authenticity model that conditions the visitors' perception of authenticity is the reciprocal mode of exchange they have with their hosts. Barfield (1993) and Abu-Lughod (1999) argue that behaviour of former nomads was conditioned by codes of reciprocity and belonging imperative for their survival. In the field of tourism, reciprocity includes cooperation at the inter-personal level (host–guest). According to Pi-Sunyer (1977, pp. 150,151), "insofar as they are accepted as guests, visitors are at first treated as individuals in a personalized relationship." Cohen (1984, p. 381) specifies that "With the advent of widespread tourism, however, locals become incapable of relating to each visitor individually and tend to create an 'ethnic typology'." Xie (2011) argues that during the *primordial state* of tourism development, it is more likely that performances that are the product of spontaneous improvisations will occur and intimate cultural experiences happen between visitors and the local communities. He then postulates that during the stage of *increasing involvement*, tourism can be used to reinforce the native culture's uniqueness and the host–guest relationship in a mutual beneficial creative reciprocity.

Because of the 'nomadic sense of hospitality', the nature of the host–guest relationship on the Kyzylarai tour is based on principles of reciprocity despite the commercial exchange induced by tourism activities. However, all bar one of those interviewed from the Tulip tour thought that the commodified aspects of their tour do affect the hosts-guest principles of reciprocity. Many of the hosts and guests from both the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours, as well as various stakeholders (NGO coordinators, experts in nomadic culture) involved in the tours, thought that participatory activities should be encouraged.

The interviewees also noted that principles of reciprocity between hosts and guests would be enhanced by minimising the number of visitors at any one time. For example, one Tulip tour client said that living alongside the home-stay providers and maximising the host–guest relationship is only possible with a small number of visitors on site: “I do not think living by the home-stay providers during the stay in the villages is manageable for a big number of people”. Another Tulip tourist highlighted that crowding on sites is a parameter that transforms the nature of the interaction between hosts and guests from an exclusive to a commodified relationship:

“As more visitors go on sites, more tourism providers should provide a high level of services that can potentially lead to a lesser level of authenticity. Local families should explain [to] visitors what a traditional yurt is, what a traditional meal is.”

This desire to reduce or limit visitor numbers was shared not only by those on the formal tours but also by some the independent travellers: more than half of the FITs think the uniqueness of the tourism experience is correlated with the relatively low number of visitors visiting the villages. One FIT explained that, “If the number is too high, there is no possibility to meet the local populations, and the only relationship visitors have with their hosts is a ‘transactional’ one.” The reciprocal relationship between hosts and guests is transformed as the number of visitors increases because home-stay providers become less interested and caring about the guests they are welcoming into their homes. Another FIT argued that a smaller number of visitors on sites allows the visitors to spend more time with the local populations:

“It gets completely depersonalised if visitors come in huge numbers. It is a question related to the quality of the experience, only possible if the tours are kept to a small number of visitors.”

For one NGO coordinator, having a small number of visitors is a necessary condition to ensure the communication between hosts and guests is functioning well. For two experts in nomadic culture, the host–guest communication is improved by having translators accompanying the tourists. Translators ensure the cultural heritage information offered by the home-stay providers is passed on to the visitors. Thus, having translators accompany the visitors improves the quality of the host–guest reciprocal exchanges and enhances mutual cultural understandings. These specialists of nomadic culture also support the idea of ‘rotating’ the families who host a limited number of visitors in order to “keep a high level of authenticity”. By limiting the

crowding of tourists in the guest houses, tourism organisers can improve the number and quality of interactions between visitors and home-stay providers.

The reciprocal mode of exchange between hosts and guests in the Kazakhstani villages of Shabanbai Bi and Kanshengel raises the question: How can local communities respond positively and interact with tourists so that both hosts and guests have valuable tourism experiences? In the Tulip tour, creative reciprocity is not favoured by the organiser, with the roles of the home-stay providers being limited to providing food and accommodation for visitors. The decision by the Tulip tour organiser to provide a higher level of commodification for their clients and restrict the role of the home-stay providers to just catering and providing accommodation means that home-stay providers and visitors on the Tulip tour rarely exchange information and so are unable to develop a meaningful host–guest relationship. Conversely, some visitors on the Kyzylarai tour mentioned that their relationships and experiences while on sites with the local communities transformed their understandings of the traditional nomadic culture. Similarly, in Shabanbai Bi village, the hosts who engage in a deeper relationship with their guests (by explaining various meanings of the traditional nomadic culture to them) pointed out that both parties grew in their cultural knowledge from the exchange. One of the home-stay providers said:

“As hosts, we should be able to explain some aspects of our traditional nomadic culture so we can have a conversation with our guests and ask them about their cultures as well. We should show the petroglyphs in the landscapes and explain their meanings; our guests should be able to sleep in yurts in the middle of the steppes too.”

Additionally, by welcoming visitors in the traditional nomadic way, home-stay providers contribute to perpetuating the ‘nomadic sense of hospitality’ in rural villages.

The ‘disorientation factor’ as well as a higher level of cross-cultural interactions between hosts and guests encountered during the Kyzylarai tour favour creative reciprocity between visitors and the host populations. As a result, each guest house on the Kyzylarai tour becomes what Y. Wang (2007, p. 800) refers to as “an inexhaustible social space” in which hosts and guests define their homes and authentic selves. This type of authenticity elevates the host–guest relationships into a better mutual understanding, and ultimately helps visitors to refine their perception of authenticity

of the local cultural heritage. Figure 6.6 below portrays a home-stay provider serving tea to her guests in the Shabanbai Bi village. This moment is usually a time when hosts and guests exchange cultural information.

Figure 6.6: Home-stay provider serving tea, Shabanbai Bi village, Kyzylarai tour



Source: Alexandr Yermolyonok.

The need to create a relationship between hosts and guests is based on the idea of ‘giving and receiving’, a notion specific to the nomadic sense of hospitality in the various ways they welcome visitors. As one specialist of nomadic culture explained, “There is a strong need to maintain a certain degree of equality between visitors and the host population”, and this need can open a real dialogue between the two parties. This cultural exchange is based on the idea that both hosts and guests can build a relationship by sharing their backgrounds and personal stories in intimate tourism encounters (Conran, 2006; N. Wang, 1999).

6.3 Qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity

The interpretation of empirical materials through constant comparison of codes and cross-cutting themes of the four factors undergoing dynamic and interactive changes (‘neo-nomadic tourism culture’, ‘tourists as global nomads’, ‘Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism encounters’ and ‘hosts-guests relationships and exchanges’) enabled the determination of the qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity. The Kyzylarai and Tulip tours served as case studies to both inform and illustrate how the transnomadic authenticity model is used in visitors’ behavioural codes of conduct to access the ‘backstage’ of Kazakhstani cultural heritage. The pointed line in the model

(see Figure 6.1) highlights the qualifying dimensions of the transnomadic authenticity model.

The first important transnomadic authenticity qualifying dimension is the *existential* aspect associated with the tourism experience, which allows self-transformative experiences for visitors. Hall (2007, p. 1140) states that authenticity is experiential, “in that it is derived from the property of connectedness of the individual to the perceived, everyday world and environment, and the processes that created one’s engagement with it.” If one’s ‘Self’ is created in interaction with one’s surroundings and environment, visitors who undertake eco-cultural tours in Kazakhstan are more likely to experience existential authenticity, in particular in environments where there is a ‘real’ interaction with the local communities. For these visitors, existential authenticity and the sense of connection to the steppes are mentioned as joyful experiences that augment their perceptions of authenticity during their travels in the country.

Y. Wang (2007) argues that the idea of self-transformation while travelling is strongly correlated to the visitors’ search of authenticity. Several visitors expressed their belief that in Kazakhstan, the idea of experiencing something authentic is deeply linked with a ‘nomadic philosophy of life’. The search for uniqueness, exoticism and authentic tourism experiences that brings visitors to Kazakhstan is found both in the cultural landscapes and in sharing knowledge with the inhabitants living in this environment. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) described the concept of ‘flow’ as optimal human experiences whereby people are challenged and experience a loss of self-consciousness and time. Likewise, the journey in Kazakhstani rural areas can be seen as a way to test oneself in unfamiliar environments. Walking among steppes landscapes is described by some participants as a self-transformative moment which they link to existential authenticity. As one Tulip tourist explained, the most important parts of her travel experience in the steppes were the moments when she was taking full responsibility for finding her own way.

According to Cohen (2002), contemporary tourists seek both objective and existential authenticity in their holidays. In Y. Wang’s study (2007) about the Lijiang’s guest houses, customised authenticity is produced by the relationship between hosts and guests. In the context of Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism, existential authenticity can

be found in the Kyzylarai guest houses, where both material (object-related) and personal (self-related) authenticity coexist. International visitors perceive object-related authenticity in the food served (*bes barmak* meals) and self-related authenticity in their contacts and discussions with the local communities. Experiencing Kazakh culture provides, as Carr (2008, p. 42) details for tourists visiting Māori cultural sites in New Zealand, “an opportunity for personal enrichment and self-reflection about their own lives”. Whether on the steppes or with Kazakhstani families, these moments of self-discovery transcend visitors’ inner selves and help them to construct personal meanings to their travels.

The visitors’ experiences of difference and foreignness, as advocated by global nomads when travelling, are experienced on both the Tulip and Kyzylarai tours. Some visitors mentioned ‘disorientation’ and ‘unexpected events’ as being serendipitous moments that contributed to their perception of authenticity of the places they visited. Several visitors on the Kyzylarai tour mentioned a ‘feeling of belonging’ in the guest houses, a feeling similar to the concept of ‘customised authenticity’ developed by Y. Wang (2007) and De Botton (2002) where visitors find themselves as ‘part of the family’ in intimate tourism encounters. As Cary (2004, pp. 66, 67) highlights, “As both unexpected and extraordinary, there is a spontaneous instance of self-discovery as well as a feeling of communal belonging elicited by serendipity and represented in narrative.” The nomadic ‘philosophy of life’ and serendipitous moments encountered by visitors among steppes landscapes engender existential moments of self-awareness, a feeling that is looked for by global nomads.

Several tourism providers aimed to create a different tourism experience in remote rural villages as they see the ‘disorientation factor’ as a way to augment visitors’ perceptions of authenticity in the places they visit. The perception of nomadic lifestyle by some visitors from both tours is imbued with nostalgic feelings created by a ‘cultural shock’ while travelling in the country, linking them back to their inner ‘self’, and therefore to existential authenticity. In Kazakhstani landscapes, the feeling of being a nomad is seen as an authentic element of the visitor’s tourism experience and is promoted by some of the tourism providers. For some home-stay providers, the perception of experiencing something authentic entails that visitors should be “disoriented by the unexpected”, and “find home somewhere else”. For some of those

on the tours, this 'home feeling' or experiential authenticity can be perceived if they believe the tourists are having a minimal impact on the local communities, while for others it was the spontaneity of the local populations with whom they mingled that made their tourism experiences authentic.

The second important transnomadic authenticity qualifying dimension is that the perception of authenticity changes in *performative tourism encounters* that involve reciprocal exchanges between hosts and guests. Tourists as global nomads are continuously exposed to new cultures and their perceptions of the authenticity of the places they visit depend on how satisfied they are with their tourism experiences. The high level of cross-cultural interactions between hosts and guests during the Kyzylarai tour favours the idea of creative reciprocity between hosts and guests. The various forms of exchanges including participatory activities between visitors and the local populations are transforming visitors' knowledge about the nomadic culture and simultaneously enhancing their emotions so they are perceiving existential authenticity.

The creative reciprocity between hosts and guests in the guest houses is the result of several enabling elements: a small number of visitors on site at any one time, home-stay providers sharing their houses with their guests, a lack of staged activities during the tour, and the responsiveness of the local populations in the various ways they engage with tourists. On the Tulip tour, the higher number of visitors and the fact that they are accommodated in yurts separate from the host population meant that there was limited reciprocal exchange between the visitors and their hosts.

Wearing, Lyons and Snead (2010) argue that reciprocal relationships between host communities and tourists develop out of productive exchanges that enhance local communities' understanding of tourists' expectations. One of the NGO coordinators recognises the importance of creating a host-guest relationship that supports the visitors' commitment to the lifestyles of the home-stay providers. More in-depth conversations also enable the visitors to increase their knowledge about the tourism destination. Several visitors from both tours talked about the importance of sharing feelings with the local populations as a way of intensifying the tourism experience between hosts and guests. As one of the tour organiser explained:

“We have a lot of contacts with local populations while on tour and a lot of the tourists we have come back, sometimes twice. These people are not just tourists, they become friends. They give us feedback after the tours, even when we did not ask them to do so.”

The feeling of authenticity experienced during the Kyzylarai tour, and the strong perception of staged authenticity among participants in the Tulip tour, highlight the fact that positive interactions and exchanges between visitors and home-stay providers can lead to a better understanding of both the hosts’ and guests’ cultural backgrounds. This level of understanding is one of the primary conditions for increasing visitors’ perception of authenticity of their tourism experiences.

The dynamic process of creative reciprocity between hosts and guests, mentioned by both tourism providers and visitors, ends up transforming both the knowledge and understanding they have about one another. As Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 1305) highlight when referring to Bell (2008), “Individual performances therefore not only mirror and sustain normative boundaries, but have the capacity to transgress and subvert them.” The various meanings given by visitors in each guest house of the Kyzylarai tour reflect what Y. Wang (2007, p. 800) calls “an inexhaustible social space against which both guests and hosts are defining their homes and authentic selves”. Through interactive information exchange, consideration of their differences, and mutual understandings, this type of authenticity transcends the host–guest relationships. Both hosts and guests are playing an active and creative role in their relationship and redefine each other through respective perceptions of their authentic differences.

The third transnomic authenticity qualifying dimension is linked to *visitors’ previous tourism experiences and expectations*. Here, it is implied that tourists’ feelings of authenticity vary according to their previous travelling experiences and exposures to other cultures. According to Hall (2007), the perception of authenticity within a place is influenced by the visitor’s cultural background and travelling experiences. Kolar and Zabkar also argue, when detailing the theoretical implications of their consumer-based model of authenticity, that the evaluation of authenticity is dependent on tourist experiences:

Object-based and existential authenticity can be validly measured as latent psychological constructs, and perceived authenticity can thus be validly

conceived and measured as an evaluative judgment which is dependent on tourist experiences.

Kolar and Zabkar (2010, p. 654)

Additionally, according to Hughes (1995), the perception of authenticity is judged by reference to previous expectations. Cohen (1988) argues that the depth of perception of authenticity of cultural products or experiences depends on each visitor, and in particular on their cultural background and expectations. Within both the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours, visitors' knowledge of traditional nomadic culture gave them a critical perspective on what are considered as traditional local cultural practices.

Some visitors from both tours thought their tourism experience was more authentic because it was not biased by any previous knowledge and expectations about the nomadic culture and it did not have to correspond to any preconceived expectations about the country. Others on the Tulip tour, however, had a different viewpoint, saying that their knowledge of nomadic culture gave them a critical perspective of the traditional local practices. For half of the FITs, losing their 'usual points of references' and 'disconnecting' from what they knew before arriving in the country is of paramount importance to increasing the level of authenticity of their tourism experiences. The gradual and cumulative aspect of visitors' experiences adds to the transformation of the cultural knowledge they had about the destination they visit. Thus, tourists' knowledge and understanding of the places they visit is refined and augmented.

The fourth transnomadic authenticity qualifying dimension is correlated to *principles of tourism sustainability*. The nomadic cyclic way of life described by Kunanbaeva (2008) means the Kazakhstani home-stay providers are inclined to offer tourism experiences that favour the preservation of local cultural heritage. In addition, sustainability attributes of the former nomadic culture and lifestyle are recognised by various tourism stakeholders to be important elements for the development of eco-tourism in the country. The 'simplicity' of the home-stay providers' nomadic lifestyle and the 'nomadic sense of hospitality' explained earlier in the chapter both favour direct contact with their guests. By continuing to prepare meals based upon their nomadic traditions and by favouring the hosting of visitors as 'part of their families', home-stay providers are offering tourism experiences that favour the usage of local resources.

Xie (2011) argues that during the *revitalisation process*, original meanings of traditional cultures are revived so that they can be perceived as objectively authentic by visitors. Moreover, cross-cultural interactions between hosts and guests are favoured in a way that reduces stereotypes and increase mutual understandings between both hosts and guests. The existential moments created by tourist activities at both intra- and inter-personal levels, as defined by N. Wang (1999), are particularly relevant in the Kazakhstani villages encountered during the Kyzylarai tour. The model of eco-cultural tourism developed throughout the Kyzylarai tour provided visitors with a high perception of authenticity of their tourism experiences in rural areas.

For global nomads, travelling involves discovery and fulfilment and provides possibilities to enhance self-awareness. The authenticity of their tourism experience is thus synonymous with the idea of connection and self-transformation as a way to build and reinforce identity during travel. According to Madison (2006), voluntary migrants experience a similar self-transformation when travelling, which suggests that the relationship between the dichotomous themes of 'freedom' and 'belonging' transforms during relocations:

Visitors undergo geographic mobility by travelling from one country to another, where the second country is experienced as significantly different from the first and for a sufficient duration that the person engages in daily activities and is challenged to sustain some adjustments to the new place.

Madison (2006, p. 5)

The transnomadic authenticity model can be used to understand how visitors can reach high levels of cultural-heritage penetration of a new tourism destination and also why some visitors make return visits to the destination. The existential moments that tourists experience with their hosts during performative tourism encounters increase their understanding of the place they are visiting. The visitors' perceptions of authenticity depend on their previous tourism experiences and their expectations upon arrival in the country. The tourists' knowledge of the places they visit as well as their abilities to communicate with the local populations increase their chances to reciprocate with home-stay providers. The more that visitors are able to 'make connections' with their hosts, the better they are able to exchange information and understand the specificities of their hosts' cultural backgrounds. As the levels of exchange deepen throughout participatory activities, visitors gradually gain the trust of

their hosts who reciprocate in return by sharing and explaining to them other aspects of their cultural heritage and nomadic way of life, i.e. the visitors experience the 'backstage' of a tourism encounter.

The joy visitors experience as they engage in creative reciprocal exchanges with their hosts gradually changes the nature of their relationship from formal to informal guests. When visitors develop a higher level of connection with their guests then they are more likely to return to the villages for a second visit. They are also more likely to talk positively to other tourists and encourage them to visit, too. An increase in the number of new visitors, as well as visitors returning, helps to develop financial stability for the local populations in Kazakhstani rural areas.

As one of the main organisers of the Tulip tour explained, her clients are motivated to revisit Kazakhstan largely because of the positive relationships they had with their hosts:

"The percentage of my clients revisiting Kazakhstan is 30%, and some have become friends of the locals and come back to see the people with whom they had an interesting tourism experience. Most of the visitors who are visiting Kazakhstan are interested in the remains of the Soviet Union and the nomadic culture and [have] heard about the Silk Way. It's better if visitors have some notions of the Kazakh and Russian languages before coming to the country. It favours a better level of understanding, but it also works as a cycle as the more they understand, the higher levels of connections with the local populations they develop. Everything is interrelated: the fact they can witness the preparation of the food, visit cultural landscapes and learn about principles of tourism sustainability in the rural areas."

The creative reciprocity developed between the hosts and their guests becomes a major factor for tourists *yearning for reconnections* with their hosts. As an iterative process, the concept of transnomic authenticity allows higher levels of understandings of cultural heritage as for each new tourism experience in the country, visitors increase their knowledge of the place and the people who live in the cultural landscapes. As Pesämaa and Hair Jr (2008) advocate, successful interactions between hosts and guests can generate positive feelings for the individuals involved, increase visitors' trust, and increase the likelihood they will return to visit their hosts again.

Experiential reciprocity considers how a tourist's experience of a site influences their desire to contribute to the conservation and environment protection of that tourism

setting (Russell & Russell, 2010). The positive interactions between tourists and home-stay providers in the guest houses of Shabanbai Bi village generate a desire for visitors to come back and contribute to sustainable livelihoods of the local populations in rural areas. Potentially, tourists' return visits can also increase the number of first-time visitors through positive word of mouth.

Integrating 'backstage' development into future tourism products and experiences can be seen as a way to diversify the opportunities offered to tourists, alongside the other types of tourism development supported by the Kazakhstani government. Within the host–guest creative reciprocal relationships, the model of transnomadic authenticity is used as a prerequisite for accessing higher levels of cultural penetration. The final chapter synthesises the findings and discussion from the thesis and suggests how the model of transnomadic authenticity can be used to enhance visitors' perceptions of travelling destinations. An emphasis is placed on the various ways that the host–guest relationship affects the scope of the transnomadic authenticity model.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Future Research Agenda

The four objectives that have directed this research are: to critically discuss models and dimensions of authenticity in the Kazakhstani tourism context; to record and review various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity in Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism practices; to examine in what ways a deeper understanding of authenticity can be used to inform the planning and future development of tourism; and to evaluate the contribution of grounded theory methodology when exploring various stakeholders' authentication positions in relation to eco-cultural tourism practices.

This chapter starts by presenting conclusions drawn from the analysis of various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity from two case studies in Central and South Kazakhstan using grounded theory methodology. A proposition to integrate the transnomic authenticity model into cultural heritage tourism is examined. The chapter then provides a summary of the research's practical and theoretical contributions in the fields of authenticity and eco-cultural tourism development, which are used to provide new insights to inform the further development of theory associated with access to the 'backstage' of cultural heritage in tourism destinations. The chapter concludes with a set of recommendations for future research.

7.1 Research summary

Visitors make travel decisions at least in part based on their own perceptions of authenticity, or how real they perceive the destinations to be. When referring to MacCannell (1976), Jamal and Hill (2004, pp. 18-19) state that, "the dialectic of authenticity reflects an ontological anxiety of existence about what we are and what is genuine and objectively true about the human condition." While being motivated by existential reasons in narrating one's self-identity, visitors' search for authentic tourism destinations and 'genuine Otherness' have become synonymous with discovering the destinations' 'real' aspects before they disappear.

The thesis has made distinct theoretical, practical and methodological contributions to research. The thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge in that it advances knowledge and theory in the area of tourist experiences and other stakeholder constructions of authenticity. The study reveals various perceptions and

conceptualisations of authenticity in Kazakhstani tourism practices through the lenses of different visitors (Kyzylarai and Tulip tour clients, FITs comprised of expatriates living and working in Kazakhstan, Kazakhstani and international students, and international travellers), community members, policymakers and tourism developers involved in the planning and development of eco-cultural tours in Kazakhstan. The researcher managed in particular to explore the complexity of various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity in a destination context that has not been researched before.

The study provides a comprehensive review of authenticity in the context of tourism studies. The present research applies several conceptual frameworks including Xie and Lane's (2006) 'cycle of authenticity' model to trace an evolutionary commodification process of Kazakhstani culture, heritage and tradition. More specifically, the thesis introduces the term *neo-nomadic tourism culture* to qualify and build "the new state of authenticity" of Kazakhstani cultural heritage.

The study details that three themes authenticated by tourism providers can contribute to an authentic eco-cultural tourism experience for visitors: the geographical imagination (nomadic cultural landscapes), crafts purchased by tourists, and performative spaces (nomadic home-stays and nomadic food). In particular, participatory activities with local home-stay providers and the feeling of being 'part of the family' are emphasised by several home-stay providers as a way to foster the host-guest relationship and visitors' perception of authenticity of their tourism experiences.

Participatory activities that occur between tourists and local populations generate for home-stay providers what Crouch (2000, p. 65) refers to as "a variety of personal, heritage and identity relationships including sense of ownership or emotional attachment, empowerment, value, and feeling with their guests". Likewise, the researcher found that visitors' subjective evaluations of an authentic tourism experience in Kazakhstan encompass various performative aspects of their travels in the country – specifically, aspects that induce creative reciprocal relationships between hosts and guests.

Taking into account the exploratory nature of this doctoral study and the limited amount of existing academic literature surrounding the question of authenticity in eco-cultural tourism practices, the thesis contributes to expanding the body of knowledge

in a new tourism destination. By reflecting on the multiple stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity of various topic areas in Kazakhstani cultural heritage, the study provides a depth of understanding of various stakeholders in the process of authenticating neo-nomadic culture and their perceptions of authenticity; and focus on identifying indicators of the authentic/inauthentic heritage experiences.

The study contributes to methodologies in tourism research by using a qualitative approach that draws on two eco-cultural tours as units of analysis to explore various stakeholders' authentication positions in eco-cultural tourism practices. The thesis explicitly records and reviews various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity in Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism practices and examines ways a deeper understanding of authenticity can be used to inform the planning and future development of Kazakhstani tourism, local community's participation and empowerment.

The grounded theory methodology allowed the inductive production of a conceptual theory of transnomadic authenticity by constructing relationships between four major concepts: 'the characteristics of the tourism experience', 'the destination context', 'global travelling trends and mobilities' and 'visitor profiles'. In this way, the model of transnomadic authenticity emerged from the socially constructed knowledge of the participants. The use of a constructivist version of the grounded theory methodology enabled the researcher to interpret holistically the various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity from a range of multiple realities to create a meaningful understanding of how visitors access higher levels of cultural-heritage penetration when travelling in Kazakhstan.

By advancing theoretical understandings of the role authenticity plays in visitors' access to cultural heritage, the thesis provides a rich and broad context through which to understand how the model of transnomadic authenticity can be used to enhance visitors' perception of destinations. The identification of visitors' experiential patterns in Kazakhstani tourism encounters contributed to understanding the role authenticity plays in the host-guest relationship and in the access to the 'backstage' of tourism destinations. By creating the conditions for reciprocal exchanges between hosts and guests, the guest house tourism encounter allows both hosts and guests to share information with each other. The existential moments and creative reciprocal

relationships visitors experience with their hosts incrementally enhance their perceptions of authenticity of the places they are visiting.

By exploring new directions in which to apply the concept of authenticity in emerging tourism destinations, the study brings about important contributions to current literature about authenticity in tourism. It adds to the available literature on various stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity in cultural-heritage tourism, but more particularly goes some way to addressing the lack of empirical research in the area of eco-cultural tourism destinations. By detailing various stakeholders' authentication positions about topics identified as being important sources of authentic tourism experiences for visitors, this study explores the complexities inherent in the analysis of the question of authenticity in the development of tourism in Kazakhstan. In particular, this study makes a practical contribution to literature associated with the incorporation of the notion of authenticity as a unique and important feature in future Kazakhstani tourism products and experiences. The study contributes more specifically to helping to differentiate Kazakhstan as a tourism destination, both globally and within Central Asia.

7.1.1 Perception of authenticity and levels of cultural-heritage penetration

The study discusses in Chapter 6 how both tourism providers and visitors construct and define notions of wilderness and primitiveness through a Western lens. From one perspective, it is argued that commodification and commercialisation tend to give a partial image of the tourist destination (Cloe & Perkins, 2002; Cole, 2007). The various ways the Kazakhstani Government wishes to frame the renaissance of nomadic culture for tourism development purposes raises an important question for the local communities: What aspects of the remnants of the former nomadic culture do local populations wish to represent as consumable tourism products for visitors? The images of authenticity portrayed to tourists have important ethical implications for the locals themselves. Smith and Duffy (2003, p. 120) note that, "this emphasis on local exoticism can lead to inventions of traditions to satisfy external definitions of what is genuine."

By reviving certain aspects of the nomadic culture for tourism purposes, the Kazakhstani Government wishes to portray an idealised version of the country's

cultural heritage. This “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) is used to match visitors’ expectations of traditional nomadic culture upon arrival in the country. In turn, the host populations may feel forced to adapt their lifestyles to ensure that tourists are not disappointed. As Smith and Duffy mention:

Clearly, there are limits to the degree to which ‘reality’ can be negotiated, but these limits will vary for different social groups with different agendas. Authenticity becomes an issue for tourists only when their expectations are unmet or their desires unfulfilled.

Smith and Duffy (2003, p. 133)

The previous chapter has shown that two important qualifying dimensions of transnomadic authenticity were the existential and performative aspects of the visitors’ tourism experiences with the local populations. On the Kyzylarai tour, all home-stay providers in the Shabanbai Bi village treat visitors as ‘part of the family’ in the guest houses, whereas on the Tulip tour, visitors are welcomed in yurts in order to match tourists’ ‘romantic’ vision of the nomadic culture. When responding to the question of whether yurts are associated with the nomadic lifestyle, some visitors highlighted the limits of the commodification of traditional nomadic culture artefacts, qualifying tourism products as “interesting” but also as “artificial”. Visitors acknowledged one of the main aims of their visit to Kazakhstan is the possibility of accessing the ‘backstage’ of the tourism encounter. A high degree of commodification of the tourism setting and experiences is seen by visitors as a process hampering the development of host–guest intimate encounters and reciprocal relationships. The relative lack of exchanges between hosts and guests consequently does not foster existential authentic aspects of the tourism experience, potentially reducing the scope of the transnomadic authenticity model.

According to Prideaux and Timothy (2008, p. 12), “Access to heritage can be discussed from the ability of tourists to physically travel to the site and their ability to gain admittance once they have arrived at the site.” The point at which authenticity is lost because living cultures and heritage sites do undergo change is an important point that affects the scope of the transnomadic authenticity model. The research discussed in Chapter 6 shows that despite the commodification of some aspects of their tourism experiences, visitors still find their experience authentic. Visitors on the Kyzylarai tour find an ‘authentic’ nomadic culture in culinary traditions in the guest houses, whereas

visitors' conception of authenticity on the Tulip tour is mostly existential because most of what is presented to them comes from a contrived tourism setting. Despite the staged aspect of the host–guest tourism encounter, though, the yurt-camp in the middle of the steppes on the Tulip tour generates what N. Wang (1999, p. 359) calls “a sense of existential authenticity due to its creative and cathartic nature”.

Tourism home-stay providers in Kazakhstani rural villages should thus continue their traditions while customising the tourism experience for visitors when needed. Cohen argues that the principal motive behind tourism suppliers' commodification of cultural heritage is to preserve and enhance the area's reputation and thereby ensure the long-term benefits of a continuous and growing flow of tourists:

Though economically motivated, a professionalized local-tourist relationship does not take on the character of a wholly depersonalized, neutral economic exchange. Rather, it becomes professionally 'staged' in MacCannell's sense, with the locals 'playing the natives' and the tourist establishment's personnel correctly providing a 'competently personalized' service.

Cohen (1984, p. 380)

When adapting some aspects of the tourism experience by catering to the Tulip tourists' desires for more comfort, the local owners are transforming their yurts into a packaged commodity (Y. Wang, 2007) or a 'front stage' (Goffman, 1967; MacCannell, 1976). The hosts are thus producing a kind of authenticity that meets some specific visitors' requirements. The previous chapter detailed that creative reciprocity resulting from the host–guest relationship is created through the process of customised authenticity, as described by Y. Wang (2007). On the one hand, Kazakhstani home-stay providers create an environment that fits visitors' expectations of authenticity, while on the other, tourists perceive it as staged with customised tourism products and settings.

N. Wang (1999, p. 358) highlights that, “with the accelerating globalisation under postmodern conditions, it is increasingly difficult for the authenticity of the original such as the marginal ethnic culture to remain immutable.” As tourism grows in Kazakhstan, the commodification of cultural artefacts implies switching from the *primordial state* to *increasing involvement* and *situational adaptations* of tourism development (Xie & Lane, 2006).

In Shabanbai Bi village, where tourism is at its raw stage of development (the primordial state) and visitors are experiencing spontaneous and intimate cultural experiences with local populations, the host–guest relationship is formed out of creative reciprocal exchanges. The commercial aspect of the tourism experience remains minimal as the number of tourists on sites remains relatively small (less than ten per visit). Local communities are not performing cultural performances especially for tourists, and visitors are invited to share the everyday lives of local communities in the villages. The structure of the Kyzylarai tour, with the guests living with their hosts in their houses, increases the number of interactions between hosts and guests and generates positive feelings for those involved, thus increasing the potential for creative reciprocity between one another. The high number of exchanges between hosts and guests induced by creative reciprocity is an important factor that grounds the transnomic authenticity model.

Following the maturation of the tourism market in the country, the Kanshengel yurt-camp of the Tulip tour is showing signs of both the increasing involvement and situational adaptations stages of the cycle of authenticity model developed by Xie and Lane (2006). The fact that the Tulip tour attracts a higher number of visitors (between fifteen and twenty per visit) than the Kyzylarai tour induces an increasing commodification of performances. The choice of the tourism setting (a reconstructed yurt-camp in the middle of the steppes) is specifically chosen for visitors as a way to satisfy their ‘nostalgic views’ of nomadic culture. The revival of nomadic culture in the Tulip tour is negotiated between the tour operator and the home-stay providers as a compromise to satisfy some of the visitors’ needs for more comfort and Europeanised meals. The commodification of local cultures is changing the meaning of cultural products and practices in a way that is similar to some aspects of the situational adaptations development stage detailed in Chapter 2. Recognisable features and signs of traditional nomadic culture are commercialised and adapted to match the ‘ideal’ visitors’ perception of traditional nomadic culture.

Unlike the increasing involvement stage when tourism can be used to reinforce the native culture’s uniqueness, the host–guest relationship on the Tulip tour tends to be minimal. Visitors are treated like formal guests rather than being part of the family and the relationship with their hosts remains mostly transactional. The transitory, short-

term and asymmetrical relationship between hosts and guests during the Tulip tour does not encourage mutual understandings and cooperation between one another. Some Tulip tourists particularly mentioned that as visitors their “social roles are defined” and it takes time to be perceived “as a member of the local community” Tulip tour clients acknowledged that sleeping in the same yurts as the local populations would be more authentic than sleeping in a yurt specifically organised for them. While for a large majority of the Kyzylarai tour participants, sharing a *bes barmak* with the local populations was authentic, half of the Tulip tour visitors considered the food that was especially made for them as too Europeanised to be authentic.

In Kazakhstan, the traditional nomadic sense of hospitality requires deference to the travellers who are treated as guests. The increasing commodification of home-stays in the rural villages has implications for local communities and tourism providers, and it can be expected that in the future they will offer a professionalised tourism product that will see traditional nomadic hospitality evolve into a more commercial hospitality. Through these transformations, the level of authenticity between hosts and guests in the guest houses of the Kyzylarai tour could diminish as the number of visitors increases and the level of interactions with the host populations decreases accordingly. Similar to the situational adaptations stage detailed in the authenticity life cycle model developed by Xie and Lane (2006) for ethnic tourism, the larger number of visitors on the Tulip tour implies that recognisable features and signs of traditional culture like yurts are thus commercialised to satisfy tourists’ perceptions of authenticity.

Mathieson and Wall (1982, p. 21) define carrying capacity as “the maximum number of people who can use a site without acceptable alteration in the physical environment and without an acceptable decline in the quality of experience gained by visitors”. For O’Reilly (1986, p. 254), “In tourism capacity, an even balance has to be maintained, both in the physical environment and the quality of the experience of the host country to the visitor.” Here, the carrying capacity of tourism sites influences the scope and applicability of the transnomadic authenticity model in the visitors’ access to higher levels of cultural-heritage penetration. By managing the number of visitors in the guest houses, tourism operators can favour the conditions for more information being

exchanged between hosts and guests and so induce creative reciprocal relationships between the two parties. The performative home-stay tourism encounter allows both visitors and home-stay providers to refine their understandings of their respective cultural differences and traditions.

7.1.2 Perception of authenticity and the host–guest relationship

Studies on reciprocity and how local cultures can respond positively to contact with visitors reveal that local cultures often prove to be highly resilient and capable of interacting with tourists so that both hosts and guests return with some valuable experiences (Brown, 1992; Cone, 1995). It is important to determine more specifically how the model of transnomic authenticity operates in the host–guest relationship and, in particular, as N. Wang (1999) details, the extent to which the notion of authenticity provides a basis for interaction and social exchange.

This thesis makes a contribution to the body of knowledge associated with the use of the notion of authenticity to support the development of a higher level of interactions between hosts and guests. In particular, the thesis describes the various parameters of the host–guest relationship that facilitate access to the ‘backstage’ of tourism destinations: existential and performative activities favouring reciprocal hosts-guest interactions, and visitors’ previous experiences and expectations of authenticity upon arrival in the country. Contrary to MacCannell’s (1976) notion of ‘staged authenticity’, the practices of eco-cultural tourism in Shabanbai Bi village, including how the traditional nomadic lifestyle and culture is presented to visitors, induce a close and intimate relationship between the visitors and the host populations.

According to Edensor (2000, p. 324), “performance is an interactive and contingent process, and that it succeeds according to the skill of the actors, the context within which it is performed, and the way in which it is interpreted by an audience.” The temporal and spatial distance between subject and object in the guest houses tends to be minimal, and the ‘front’ region (Goffman, 1959) presenting the contrived experience is minimised so that the ‘back’ region remains largely accessible for visitors. By sharing meals with their hosts in the guest houses of the Kyzylarai tour, visitors managed to witness various aspects of traditional Kazakhstani lifestyles and access the ‘backstage’ of their lives. The idea of participating in the activities of the village as a

way to gain trust and access higher levels of cultural heritage understanding while visiting the country exemplifies some of the performative aspects of the host–guest relationship that ground the transnomadic authenticity model. As visitors gradually gain the trust of their hosts, they may potentially get admittance to the ‘backstage’ of their hosts’ lives and so gain a different understanding of Kazakhstani cultural heritage.

According to Goffman (1967), performance is found everywhere in what he describes as *interactional ritual*. Transposed to the context of tourism and hospitality, “performance refers to the expected display of behaviour by host and guest: the perception, considerateness, deference, and demeanour that accompany the social interaction” (Heuman, 2005, p. 411). Knudsen and Waade emphasise the importance of understanding authentication processes in the performative aspects of the host–guest relationship:

Whether one is a performing body or city/region/country, it is possible to authenticate sites, sights, places and to enhance the tourists’/travellers’ understanding and their sense of intimacy, self-reflection and feelings toward their surroundings.

Knudsen and Waade (2010, p. 2)

Knudsen and Waade (2010, p. 7) also state that “a real experience of a place touches upon the tourist and its ability to affect, touch and transform him/her”. In Kazakhstan, some NGO coordinators place a high priority on the quality of interactions between tourists and host communities, both of whom acknowledge that these interactions must move beyond ‘superficiality’. Visitors from both tours highlighted the fact that performing the ‘exotic Otherness’ (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2005) in staged and artificial tourism encounters does not foster mutual understandings with their hosts. Despite more than three-quarters of the NGO coordinators who were interviewed specified that eco-cultural tourism in Kazakhstan is conducive to favouring intimate encounters, a level of intimacy between hosts and guests is rarely attained in a more contrived tourism setting like the one found on the Tulip tour. As Trauer and Ryan point out:

While tourism offers opportunities for consumption of commodities, intimacy requires something emotional and something that is ‘real’ rather than superficial, something requiring enduring involvement rather than purely situational involvement, and a commitment to wanting to identify with the other.

Trauer and Ryan (2005, p. 484)

This thesis emphasises the conditions that allow existential moments that strengthen the host–guest relationship. These existential moments constitute an important qualifying dimension of transnomadic authenticity. Ooi (2002) argues that tourists involved in active participation rather than observation are more likely to experience a sense of existential authenticity. Knudsen and Waad (2010, p. 5) note the dichotomy between objective authenticity found in objects and experiential or existence-based authenticity of performative tourism encounters, but insistent that higher levels of authenticity can still be achieved:

If authenticity is no longer to be seen as objective qualities in objects or places, but rather something experienced through the body, through performance, management and media, authenticity becomes a feeling you can *achieve*.

By engaging visitors in participatory activities during the Kyzylarai tour (cooking and craft-making activities while on site), local operators are aiming to change the nature of the exchange between hosts and guests. As Hall (2007, p. 1140) specifies, “The search for authenticity may lead people to travel but it may be found just as easily at home. Authenticity lies in the connections, not in separation and distance.” Home-stay providers are particularly keen to organise a tourism experience focused on the *processes* of how to prepare local meals and traditional craft-making specifically for international visitors. From a visitor’s point of view, being invited to participate in the hosts communities’ activities is seen as a self-transformative experience from both a cognitive (understanding of the nomadic culture) and emotional (the ‘feeling of being a nomad’) point of views. For Edensor (2000, p. 327), “the efficacy of the performance relies equally upon the ability of the audience to share the meaning the actor hopes to transmit.” By managing to exchange information with their hosts about Kazakhstani culture and traditions in the guest houses of the Kyzylarai tour, visitors have the opportunity to better comprehend the traditional nomadic culture in rural areas. The positive and reciprocal host–guest relationship is thus one of the main conditions grounding the transnomadic authenticity model in the accessing of various levels of Kazakhstani cultural heritage.

7.2 Stakeholders' perceptions of authenticity and the planning of Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism

Singh, Timothy and Dowling (2003) argue that as tourism develops in more distant areas, it becomes important for researchers, policymakers and the tourism industry to recognise the impacts of these changes on destination communities. In Kazakhstan, financial sustainability and the participation of different stakeholders are crucial for the long-term future of eco-cultural tourism. Some authors argue that the need to gain some financial benefits from tourism can change priorities in cultural tourism from education to entertainment (Graburn, 1995) as the desire for nostalgia translates to profit. Although the principles of sustainability are financially relevant, they may be perceived from a local perspective as imperialist and orientalist views of development (Errington & Gewertz, 1989; MacCannell, 1999; Munt, 1994; Tucker, 1997; G. Wallace & Russell, 2004). In particular, development of environmentally sustainable eco-cultural tours that result in a smaller number of visitors on sites are not always financially self-sustaining (G. Wallace & Russell, 2004).

Milne, Grekin and Woodley (1998, p. 104) argue that "Shifts in the structure and organisation of the tourism industry can change the relationship between the producers and consumers of tourism products and how the meanings of the tourist experience are negotiated by various agencies." Similarly, this study highlights the need to redefine the host–guest relationship from the hosts' point of view; in particular, how to portray some aspects of the local traditions that incorporate the local communities' views. The research addresses the question of how various Kazakhstani tourism suppliers' sources of revenue, necessary to support eco-cultural tourism in the villages, need to be balanced in regards to questions of authenticity and cultural carrying capacity (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; O'Reilly, 1986).

7.2.1 Local communities' empowerment for tourism development

Smith and Duffy (2003, p. 133) argue "the issue of authenticity is much more important for the host community". Carr (2008, p. 45) suggests that "Incorporating indigenous or local community perspectives offers visitors authentic insights into the cultural and natural heritage of the landscape." A strong theme emerging from this study is the need for the local communities to reinforce their cultural proficiency as a

way to strengthen the host–guest relationship. Visitors from both tours expressed their interest in knowing more about traditional nomadic culture. By sharing knowledge about traditional nomadic ways of life and by involving visitors in participatory activities, local home-stay providers can generate creative reciprocity with their guests who, in turn, become more open to share their views and talk about themselves. In return, this increases the likelihood of return visits and developing higher levels of understanding between hosts and guests. Schouten (2006, p. 195) highlights the importance of the local population having control over the process of cultural change to ensure local tourism development does not have negative outcomes:

Vital cultures are constantly interacting with each other. This interaction might lead to cultural change, which in the case of tourism is seen as a negative impact. However when the host population is in control of the process of change, cultural change does not necessarily have to be negative.

The Tulip and Kyzylarai tours offer different levels of commodification of cultural heritage and, more importantly, different tourism products – offerings that reflect the organisers' different views on eco-cultural tourism development. While home-stay providers on the Kyzylarai tour are given more freedom and empowerment by the tour organisers to interact with tourists in Shabanbai Bi village, the tourism experience in Kanshengel village is more controlled by the Tulip tour organiser who offers a commodified version of the nomadic culture that limits contacts and discussions between hosts and guests.

Local communities will share traditional aspects of nomadic culture, including the 'backstage' of their lives, with the visitors when the hosts see benefits coming from tourism development. However, as Prideaux and Timothy (2008, p. 11) underline, "The power of tourism operators to select which attractions are patronised has resulted in a power transfer from the local community to commercial interests." While the Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan operator allows the home-stay providers in Shabanbai Bi village to interact and organise the catering freely with their guests, Tulip home-stay providers are guided by the tour organiser, who frames the tourists' experience in the Kanshengel village. The structure of this second tour means that it is the tourism operator who is determining how the families present authentic aspects of their cultural heritage, rather than the decisions coming from the local communities

themselves. This has resulted in some of the 'authentic' aspects being staged to meet the desires of the visitors; for example, the re-building of yurts with higher levels of comfort next to the home-stays in Shabanbai Bi village. This power of the tourism operator is not purely commercially driven, though, because the director of Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan explained, "Our people are not ready to be observed and do not have an immediate understanding of what visitors perceive as natural beauty."

One specialist in nomadic culture notes "There is a need to maintain a certain degree of equality between hosts and guests within the tourism experience which would imply giving feedback to the local population about which aspects of the tours were considered to be authentic." By explaining to home-stay providers what the key contributing elements of a visitor's authentic experience are, tourism organisers, in collaboration with government officials and NGO coordinators, can frame the boundaries of the tourism products and experiences made available to the visitors in a way that favours a genuine Kazakhstani cultural heritage. The Kazakhstan Tourism Association (KTA) already holds seminars for local communities to acquaint them with visitors' expectations. Development of future tourism products could also take into account the visitors' romantic views of the Silk Road and former nomadic traditions. A higher involvement by the local communities as to how they engage with visitors and in the eco-cultural tourism development of their villages would meet visitors' demand for authentic tourism experiences even if, as one home-stay provider said, "It implies rebuilding yurts in the villages." The organisation of staged yurt villages in the steppes is paramount to creating the 'feeling of being a nomad', a romantic view and representation by the visitors of the traditional nomadic culture. As one of the government officials explained, "Tourists should be able to sleep in yurts habitats in the steppes as they are a landmark of our image and the way traditional nomadic culture is perceived by visitors."

The various levels at which the commodification of nomadic culture for tourism purposes is decided should vary according to the stakeholders involved in the process. The local authorities appear to have essentialist conceptions of Kazakhstani cultural heritage, stating that an authentic tourism experience implies reifying and staging architectural and traditional elements of nomadic culture traditions as it was before the arrival of the Soviet people in the early 1930s. However, as Xie notes:

Cultural evolution is not internal (i.e. based on historical or contextual authenticity), but external with governments and tourists determining how the 'genuineness' and the 'realness' of the performed culture presented in the folk villages is defined.

Xie (2011, p. 109)

Kazakhstani governmental policies for cultural evolution should focus on the revival of the nomadic culture's uniqueness and distinctiveness but without ignoring the impact of assimilation and acculturation policies inherent in the modernisation of traditional lifestyles and traditions. Negotiated identities and cultural hybridity involving the mix of modern and traditional aspects of the nomadic culture are also favoured by Kazakhstani officials and tourism providers, who recognise the opportunities that the revival of nomadic culture can create for the development of eco-cultural tourism in the country.

Kazakhstani steppes reflect a long history of people interacting with the environment, as acknowledged by several tourism providers and NGOs who advocate the development of eco-cultural tourism in the country. As Buckley et al. (2008) indicate, cultural landscapes in Mongolia allow local populations to reinforce their identity and cultural proficiency:

Constructing tourism products based on their cultural landscapes may become one way for these peoples to reaffirm their own territorial and cultural identities, either for internal or for external political reasons.

Buckley et al. (2008, p. 57)

Operators and visitors from both the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours see the cultural landscapes not only as a source of authentic tourism experiences, but also as an element of the eco-cultural tourism encounter that remains unchanged and objectively authentic. By reaffirming their ancestral links to the landscapes, home-stay providers can similarly construct and offer tourism experiences that emphasise the steppes and mountains as authentic tourism encounters.

7.2.2 Redefining the boundaries of the tourism experience

The challenge for tourism providers is to balance the visitors' romantic views of traditional nomadic culture with the cultural evolution that prevails in Kazakhstani rural areas. By refocusing the tourism experience on authentic aspects of the

traditional nomadic culture, home-stay providers of the Tulip tour can better meet visitors' demands for authentic nomadic tourism encounters. In Shabanbai Bi village, one of the local home-stay providers mentioned the possibility of organising cultural events (traditional games and cultural performances) specifically for the tourists even though the events can be perceived as staged. He argued that the level of customisation of the tourism experience is dependent on visitors' expectations and demands upon arrival in the country:

“We are ready to organise cultural events only if the visitors are asking us to do so. *Kokpar* (a traditional horse game) is organised in competitions nowadays, and we are trying to get it back to the villages for tourists.”

By commodifying traditional games in the villages, home-stay providers are hoping to create new tourism products for local and international visitors that incorporate authentic cultural and historical components of the traditional nomadic lifestyle. Home-stay providers should be given the opportunity to re-enact some traditional aspects of their cultural heritage to specifically satisfy visitors' perceptions of 'authentic' nomadic culture, even if such a re-enactment is at the expense of losing the serendipitous moments (Cary, 2004) visitors can experience with spontaneous cultural performances.

An interesting finding in the study is the fact that for some visitors, losing their 'usual points of references' and 'disconnecting' from their home environment and 'usual comfort zone' is of paramount importance in increasing the perceived level of authenticity of their tourism experiences. The unexpected events and feelings of disorientation that visitors experience during their visits are seen as factors that can contribute to reaching existential authentic moments and thus contribute to enhancing their perceptions of the authenticity of the places they visit. These self-transformative tourism experiences reach visitors' inner selves and reinforce the authenticity of their souvenirs after they return home.

For some organisers and home-stay providers of the Kyzylarai tour, the frontier between letting things happen naturally and the commodification of human relationships is fickle and presupposes that visitors who are looking for 'disorientation' do not have high expectations for finding traditional aspects of nomadic culture upon arrival in the villages. Tourism operators should, therefore, encourage home-stay

providers to favour traditional nomadic culture activities with their guests as a means of enhancing visitors' perceptions of authenticity.

Tourism providers also pointed out that in order to avoid being disappointed, visitors need to be informed in advance that the traditional nomadic lifestyle does not exist anymore and that people are no longer actually living in yurts in rural areas. As a home-stay provider of the Kyzylarai tour mentioned, "The level of disappointment depends on visitors' expectations." Tourism providers interviewed in the study have confirmed that tourists' feelings of authenticity vary according to their previous travelling experiences and exposures to other cultures, which is one of the factors influencing the concept of transnomadic authenticity, as detailed in Chapter 6.

For some home-stay providers, the authentic 'Other' has to be found in the relationship between hosts and guests. While underlining that human interactions make the experience authentic, the home-stay providers emphasised that the nature of the interactions between hosts and guests also contributes to the degree of satisfaction of the visitors' tourism experiences. By informing visitors in advance that traditional nomadic culture no longer exists and by supporting a direct contact between hosts and guests in the guest houses, tourism providers and planners can minimise the risk of visitors being disappointed with their tourism experience in Kazakhstan.

Tourism operators can – and do – customise their tours, deciding how local populations present their Kazakhstani cultural heritage. Furthermore, the emergent nature of tourism development in Kazakhstan implies that tourism operators need to be able to ensure a certain 'degree of professionalisation' from the home-stay providers they are working with. However, a strong finding emerging from this study is the importance of a tour model that enables meaningful communication between home-stay providers and their guests.

At the national level, the Ministry of Tourism and Sport highly recommends the commodification of Kazakhstani cultural heritage around archaeological sites and craft-making workshops, while the Kazakhstani Government does not necessarily see the development of authentic tourism products and experiences as being the best way to increase the number of visitors to rural areas. This highlights an apparent contradiction

between the goals of those developing the tourism sector and the desires of some of the visitors coming to Kazakhstan. While the Kazakhstani Government wishes to increase significantly the number of visitors in eco-cultural projects that already exist, the types of tourism products and experiences local government officials aim to develop do not take into account the strong demand from visitors for authentic tourism experiences.

Likewise, the Government's point of view differs from that of most of the tourism operators involved in the development of the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours – these operators recommend that the number of visitors on site be limited in order to maximise the host–guest relationships. As one specialist of the nomadic culture explained, in order to experience the highest level of authenticity, it would be ideal to “give birth to a relationship between hosts and guests, the logistical parts of the tours being managed by the tourism operators and NGO coordinators”. Home-stay providers in the Kanshengel village should thus be encouraged to interact with their guests and develop the host–guest relationship on their terms. By refocusing the host–guest relationship on core aspects of the traditional nomadic culture, the organiser of the Tulip tour can induce a different kind of tourism experience based on ‘authentic’ cultural artefacts (traditional nomadic food and lifestyle), be it at the expense of less comfort or ‘Europeanisation’ of the meals served to tourists.

According to Kolar and Zabkar (2010, p. 661), “in order to facilitate tourists’ existential quest, managers should focus on how tourists establish and perceive their connectedness with history, religion, spiritual experiences, humankind and civilization.” Cultural and heritage tourism places have been described as destinations with a story, with cultural tourism described as a process of telling that story (Cass & Jahrig, 1998). The story may be told in many ways, so that the visitor can decide at which level they wish to engage with the place. As cultural assets have little meaning on their own unless their context or story can be described to the visitors, conveying a story can be especially useful for potential visitors who have little knowledge about the local history and culture of a destination. Weaving a story around tangible and intangible cultural and historical assets can alert visitors to what to do while on sites and provide meaningful activities around how visitors should interpret the given information (Cass & Jahrig, 1998; Fawcett & Cormack, 2001; Moscardo, 1998).

Pfister (2000) and Carr (2008) argue that the potential incorporation of storytelling by locals themselves into cultural tourism encounters can greatly influence the understanding of the 'sense of place'. On both the Kyzylarai and the Tulip tours, several visitors highlighted a lack of information, saying that more needs to be given to help them to really appreciate their tourism experiences. Tourism organisers can help to improve visitors' perception of existential authenticity in the rural villages of Shabanbai Bi and Kanshengel by encouraging the home-stay providers on the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours to tell stories about their local communities, especially stories that explain former nomadic traditions and lifestyles. Moreover, such storytelling will help the communities to keep the stories alive for their younger generations.

Pfister (2000) notes also that the "accuracy" and "authenticity" of information provided by local guides are important factors that affect visitors' learning about a place. Similarly, Carr (2008, p. 36) argues that "the presence of interpretation, either passive (for example signage) or active (with guides) can direct visitors' attention to cultural values" and provide a heritage experience that is specific to the location in which it occurs. By providing more information about the sense of place *while* tourists are visiting the cultural landscapes on the Kyzylarai and Tulip tours, tour organisers participate in increasing visitors' understanding of cultural heritage in the villages. As informed tourists become more aware of the cultural and heritage specificities of the places they visit, their perception of the authenticity of eco-cultural aspects of the tours increases incrementally as they are able to compare what they have learnt to what they experienced during their visits – a process described in the transnomadic authenticity model.

According to Xie (2011, p. 185), allowing local communities to present their own culture themselves, without intermediaries being involved, can lead to a better tourism experience:

Having minority persons serve as tour guides would not only result in a more rounded and balanced portrayal and appreciation of minority culture, it would also enhance the quality of tourist experiences (and could create additional employment opportunities for minority people).

As Kazakhstani cultural landscapes have a strong significance to local populations, one of the ways to raise awareness of the cultural values of such sites is by empowering the local populations to provide stories about the places while tourists are in their

guest houses. By also explaining the cultural meanings behind traditional dishes or traditional artefacts, home-stay providers can communicate local stories that are perceived as 'genuinely' authentic by visitors.

The fact that natural heritage and historical places have been preserved quite well in the Kyzylarai tour also adds to the 'nomadic sense of hospitality' described in Chapter 4. The traditional nomadic way of welcoming visitors is practised by home-stay providers as a means to keep the experience authentic for tourists, and this tradition should be carefully taken into account by local tourism organisers. However, local home-stay providers could be trained by KTA and local NGOs to commodify the tradition for visitors. By developing alternative types of tourism with a special focus on cultural and heritage tourism, Shabanbai bi village could become a year-round tourist destination and additional jobs and income for local communities. Additionally, income generated by the Kyzylarai tour through the host family programmes could be used for the protection of the environment and local culture and traditions in central Kazakhstan.

Several visitors highlighted that their understanding of the places they visit would be fostered by knowing the languages of the local populations. As some visitors pointed out, organisers should provide a Kazakh or Russian translator on the tours as the intimacy of the home-stay encounter encourages discussions. By having a translator who can facilitate discussions, visitors can experience a greater depth of interaction with their hosts; the translator can also ensure that the local stories are fully understood. Information about traditional nomadic culture could also be disseminated before the tours commence, with tour brochures and information provided on the Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan operator website as well as through social media.

Clear information about the three-day-tour's schedule could be given to tourists beforehand as a way of explaining to them what they might experience during their tour. In particular, some older visitors on the Tulip tour indicated they would like to know what to expect in terms of sanitation and levels of comfort provided on site. Some other Tulip tourists expressed a clear willingness to exchange information with the home-stay providers about their daily lives. By providing more information to the visitors before they arrive in the Kazakhstani rural areas and by managing the destination elements of information and interpretation of nomadic culture through

'authentic' local stories, tourism operators can encourage a better exchange of information between the hosts and their guests. Here it is argued that more culturally aware visitors can exchange information more easily with their hosts, who can, in return, reciprocate with stories about themselves and their cultural heritage.

An important finding in this study relates to the need for better linkages between the hosts who run the guest houses in the villages and their guests. As the development of eco-cultural tourism in Kazakhstan is at its early stage, the creation of this relationship between hosts and guests requires tourism intermediaries who can control the number of tourists to these culturally and environmentally sensitive eco-sites. Limiting numbers has the added benefit of favouring a positive host–guest relationship.

An important question raised in this study, and one that impacts on the transnomadic authenticity model, is how crowding influences visitors' perception of authenticity. This research shows that crowding does influence the visitors' perception of the authenticity of their tourism experiences in the villages. The study findings reveal that a high level of interactions can occur between hosts and guests when there is only a small number of visitors staying in the guest houses. The notion of crowding highlights questions related to the number of other tourists that guests encounter during their visits, the degree to which guests feel crowded during their visits, and the conditions (use levels) that guests feel are acceptable (Manning, 2001; McIntyre & Boag, 1995; Needham, Rollins, & Wood, 2004). Consequently, the quest for authenticity sought by tourists coming to Kazakhstan, and more specifically, access to the 'backstage' where local populations are maintaining a semi-nomadic lifestyle, remains possible with a small number of visitors who are culturally aware of some aspects of the traditional nomadic culture.

Cohen (1984, p. 379) highlights that, "Tourism encounters are essentially transitory, non-repetitive and asymmetrical; the participants are oriented toward achieving immediate gratification rather than toward maintaining a continuous relationship." The exclusivity and authenticity of the tourism experience on the Kyzylarai tour is possible because the number of tourists on each tour is restricted. Interestingly, the main organiser of the Tulip tour also noted that limiting the number of visitors can help to establish a better linkage between visitors, the guide of the tour and the host populations by allowing the guide to respond more appropriately to visitors' questions:

“My visitors usually come for two weeks, and I have a programme for each day which is quite flexible. Before they come I usually explore different options. We have very small groups, between six to twelve visitors maximum at the same time, which allows me to be responsive for each visitor’s demand and give an appropriate response adequately.”

A model of tourism development that incorporates incentives (participatory activities) for home-stay providers to develop reciprocal relationships with their guests with minimal involvement from the tour operator could be a high-yield option for those selling ‘authentic’ eco-cultural tourism experiences in the country. In this model, the local communities and the visitors are the main contributors to the construction of authenticity, through their engaged, mutual and exclusive relationship. By augmenting the level of common knowledge on both hosts’ and guests’ sides, tourists refine their perceptions of authenticity and understandings of Kazakhstani cultural heritage. Visitors’ initial perceptions of nomadic culture upon arrival evolve through the very nature of their experiences with their hosts. The performative aspects of the host–guest relationship favour the exchange of knowledge and, even more importantly, the sharing of feelings, or what Cohen and Cohen (2012) refer to as ‘hot’ authentication. The host–guest creative reciprocal relationship induces a transformation of visitors’ perceptions of authenticity, as described in the transnomadic authenticity model (see Figure 6.1).

7.2.3 Certifying and labelling eco-cultural heritage sites

From a governance perspective, there are two questions that deserve attention in this study: Who controls the power to authenticate tourism sites? and What levels of authenticity will various stakeholders strive to achieve in the construction of eco-cultural sites? (Prideaux & Timothy, 2008). Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 1308) observe, when referring to the official authentication of Zhongdian County in China as the real “Shangri La”, that “the politics of ‘cool’ authentication are often rife with controversy”. Likewise, Xie (2011) states that the power to authenticate ethnic cultures in China is characterised by tensions between various stakeholders involved in the development of ethnic tourism. The extent to which tradition is negotiable and subject to often politically motivated invention, is an issue that also affects the politics of authentication of eco-cultural sites in Kazakhstani rural areas.

The key question here is: Who has the responsibility to decide whose heritage is being presented and proposed to potential visitors? The construction of authentic tourism experiences is based on the perceptions of authenticity of multiple stakeholders, and should emphasise the important role that the local populations play in making the tourism experience authentic. In Kazakhstan, government officials from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport are framing the boundaries of what can be presented to visitors by proposing a staged renaissance of nomadic culture. By suggesting a revival of some aspects of traditional culture, these officials are promoting the commodification of eco-sites that portray a traditional Kazakhstani cultural heritage that no longer exists. From the political perspective, the maintenance of local customs is seen as a means to render an idealised version of a traditional nomadic culture ‘frozen in time’ (Oakes, 1997).

The findings of this study highlight that cultural landscapes are seen by government officials as one of the best sources of authentic tourism experiences for visitors. By intending to develop access and hospitality infrastructures to key cultural sites of the former traditional culture, like the site of Kyzylarai Mountains, the Kazakhstani Government aims to attract a larger number of tourists, be it at the expense of environmental and cultural sustainability around ancestral cultural heritage sites.

Rejuvenation of existing cultural heritage assets and the need to build sustainable tourism industries are other issues that have received attention in this study. For Werner (2003, p. 143), tourism is beneficial for local cultures, as “it is frequently associated with a revival of artistic traditions that were previously in decline, as well as the emergence of new forms of cultural expression”. Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 1299) argue that “In most non-Western countries, however, few efforts have been made to formally protect, authenticate or certify the craft and art products of tribal and other minority peoples.” Crafts that are produced in the Shabanbai Bi village represent contemporary traditional nomadic culture and are perceived by visitors as authentic when they see the crafts in the guest houses. The exoticism and exclusivity of the craft souvenirs, which the visitors buy to take home, add to the visitors’ perception of authenticity of their tourism experiences. By wishing to witness local craft-making in the villages, visitors are aiming for an authentic tourism experience produced in performative spaces like the guest houses. As Y. Wang explains:

These authenticities consist in a variety of hybrids that are produced at the interface of objective authenticity and existential authenticity – an interface linked by one's subconscious search for home, in both familiarity and unfamiliarity.

Y. Wang (2007, p. 802)

The emergence and increasing development of home-stay guest houses in the Shabanbai Bi village is one of the possible models of development for Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism that still preserves the authenticity of nomadic traditions. The commodification is seen as a way to diversify the economy from a self-sustained nomadic culture to a more professionally trained tourism culture, a development that is necessary as the country welcomes more culturally aware visitors. As Prideaux and Timothy (2008, p. 8) highlight:

Commodification is necessary and indeed may be one mechanism via which all communities can retain at least part of their traditional culture and heritage that otherwise might be lost in the march of modernization and its passengers of uniformity and conformity.

As Buckley et al. (2008, p. 55) outline about tourism development in Mongolia, “when local communities turn to tourism as a source of income, they do so as an alternative to subsistence pastoralism, not as a component of it.” Indeed, some local home-stay providers of the Kyzylarai tour mentioned the need to increase the number of visitors and, in particular, the possibility of selling more handmade products as an alternative source of income.

NGOs engaged in Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism development participate in shaping various types of tourism products that can be presented to visitors. By helping to identify which guest houses can meet visitors' expectations and what kind of tourism experiences can be offered in rural areas, NGOs play an important role in supporting alternative tourism projects that involve a high level of reciprocity with local communities. Local NGOs have a role to play in the development and management of eco-sites in the rural areas. For example, the ETPACK project launched with the help of the European Union in September 2008 explored the development of community-based tourism (CBT) in Central Kazakhstan. By helping to foster the network of home-stays in rural villages and identify the souvenir production of traditional handicrafts, local NGOs participate in the authentication and design of eco-cultural tours that can meet visitors' expectations of authenticity when travelling in the country.

For Kolar and Zabkar (2010, p. 654), “from the management and marketing standpoint the key concern is whether the authenticity claim will be acknowledged by the tourist.” A certification of authenticity, which is issued by authorised institutions and ‘received’ by tourists (Chhabra, 2005), is undertaken in the Shabanbai Bi village by KTA, which grants ‘eco-labels’ in rural areas. By making local home-stay providers familiar with notions of sustainability, environmental preservation and maintenance of ecological zones, KTA is aiming to ensure the self-sustainability of the eco-sites. One of the home-stay operators indicated the importance of label certification in the villages:

“The Shabanbai Bi village was one of the first villages to be certified by the agency responsible for the development of eco-tourism in the country. The certification procedures and labelling are ensuring that most basic hygiene and safety standards are met.”

Figure 7.1 below shows the owner and members of her family of the main guest house in Shabanbai Bi village receiving a certification label from the Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan operator and an employee of KTA. By rewarding home-stay providers for best eco-tourism practices, the main operator of the Kyzylarai tour and the official agency for the development of eco-tourism in Kazakhstan are jointly aiming to foster principles of tourism sustainability – principles that are looked for by international visitors. This professionalisation of tourism practices in Shabanbai Bi village is not perceived by home-stay providers as diminishing the level of authenticity of tourism practices in the village; rather, the local hosts perceive the certification as official proof of their ability to deliver quality authentic tourism experiences for visitors.

Figure 7.1: Certification of a guest house in the village of Shabanbai Bi



Source: ETPACK (2010c)

Here, the ‘cool’ authentication positions given by KTA are encouraging a sustainable tourism based on recognisable good practices and minimum standards of comfort, safety and hygiene for tourists. For home-stay providers, certification is seen as a way to promote their cultural heritage effectively while ensuring a level of environmental performance in the production of internationally tradable tourism products (Buckley, 1992).

7.2.4 Authenticity as a unique and important feature in tourism products and experiences

This study makes a practical contribution to literature associated with the incorporation of the notion of authenticity as a unique and important feature that adds value to future tourism products and experiences. Developing authentic eco-cultural tourism experiences in the country can differentiate Kazakhstan as a tourism destination, both globally and within Central Asia. The study underpins more specifically the managerial implications of the process of commodification of Kazakhstani cultural heritage, a process that requires reaching equilibrium between various stakeholders’ authentication positions in order for the destination to remain appealing for local and international visitors. Prideaux and Timothy (2008, p. 4) argue

that, “The retention of uniqueness requires participation in traditional experiences that no longer reflect contemporary society and thus commodification becomes a necessity and in the process authenticity is typically lost.”

Incorporating and emphasising the notion of authenticity in potential tourism products and experiences is a way to differentiate Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism practices from relatively similar tourism destinations. Authenticity contributes to the production of unique tourism experiences that are sought after by Western tourists and are not easily interchangeable with other tourism products and places. The revival of traditional nomadic culture for the sake of tourism development in the country is seen by the Kazakhstani Government and local communities as a way to adapt and transform some elements of their cultural heritage for their economic benefit. Whereas KTA, together with local tourism operators, is involved in the eco-labelling of guest houses in rural areas, there is a need for a bigger involvement of home-stay providers that allows them to also authenticate tourism products and experiences. In this way, the Kazakhstani tourism industry can differentiate itself from competing tourism destinations, not only in the global market but particularly within Central Asia.

In Kazakhstan, steppes landscapes have a strong significance for the former nomadic populations who inhabit them. Combining ecological and cultural aspects of the steppes landscapes with local populations’ lives is a model that fits well into the format of eco-cultural tourism described by Wallace and Russell (2004). The Kyzylarai tour offers a unique tourism experience as a mix of various aspects of former nomadic culture (culinary traditions, nomadic lifestyle) that are perceived as authentic for visitors. Just as Carr (2008, p. 38) mentions with the launch of nature walks around Rotorua in New Zealand, “there has been some acknowledgment that the cultural landscape may offer a truly authentic and unique selling point.” As sources of authentic tourism encounters, Kazakhstani steppes landscapes should systematically be portrayed in tourism brochures and on the operators’ websites and in social media.

For Knudsen and Waade (2010, p. 5) “the visitor is re-investing in authenticity as a way of intensifying experience, while the local tourist managers and authorities are re-investing in authenticity to brand their city or region.” Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 1304) argue ‘hot’ authentication is a more diffuse process which can contribute to reinforce the authenticity of existing sites and increase their attractiveness to tourists:

'Hot' authentication reinforces and augments an object's, site's or event's vitality, and might therefore contribute to its buoyancy, and boost its wider touristic attractiveness. Since 'hot' authentication is produced by the performative conduct of the attending public, the authenticity of a 'hotly' authenticated object, site or event emerges incrementally, from often inconspicuous beginnings, and is constantly reinforced with the growth of its popularity, reputation or fame.

The eco-cultural tourism experience offered by home-stay providers in rural villages allows visitors to emotionally share during their visits 'the feeling of being a nomad'. The reinvention of traditions, as advocated by government officials, can nonetheless serve a local tourism industry that could satisfy a wider audience of visitors who are less interested in the authenticity of their tourism experiences.

The gradual transformations of Kazakhstani culture for tourism can be done by an incremental social force led by different stakeholders and take place at a micro level with a traceable cycle. In Tibet, Kolas (2008) explains that the home-stay programs and families are carefully selected by tourism agencies and tour operators under the strict control of the government, providing an opportunity for tourists to take a close look of "backstage" and "authentic" Tibetan culture. The transformation of Tibetan culture has thus gone through a long process while authenticity and commodification construct a progressive relationship. As Kazakhstan keeps defining the dynamic nature of its cultural heritage and the possibilities for its eco-cultural tourism practices, it is important to keep in mind that access to the 'backstage' of local populations is linked to both visitors' and tourism providers' perceptions of authenticity. Overall, all of the stakeholders interviewed for the study acknowledge eco-cultural tourism as a potentially interesting niche in the development of the country's tourism industry. The model of eco-tourism development offered in the Kyzylarai tour encompasses all the elements necessary to satisfy visitors' demand for an authentic tourism experiences based on genuine reciprocal relationships with their hosts. Yet what visitors perceive as objectively authentic are the traditional elements of nomadic culture (culinary artefacts) rather than the new (architecture of the buildings in Astana), and the natural (fur products in craft-making) rather than the artificial ('Chinese' yurts on the Tulip tour). Tourism experiences offered in Kazakhstani rural villages emphasising ancient traditional nomadic traditions and 'natural' tourism encounters have a greater

potential to attract visitors for whom authenticity is a selective criterion when choosing a tourism destination.

This research demonstrates that visitors are looking for serendipitous and spontaneous encounters with local populations, even if this means they might experience less comfort in the guest houses or not understand fully the languages used between the guides, tourism providers and local populations. The research highlights that in the Kazakhstani context, visitors are looking for authentic tourism experiences that are deeply linked to reaching a 'sense of freedom' associated with the 'nomadic way of life'. The existential, serendipitous moments encountered in performative spaces with the local populations contribute to creating unique tourism products and experiences for visitors. The existential and performative aspects associated with the transnomic authenticity concept allow self-transformative experiences for visitors, experiences which vary according to each visitor's previous tourism experiences and expectations. By continuously transforming their knowledge of the place during performative tourism encounters, tourists gradually change their perceptions of authenticity of Kazakhstani cultural heritage.

7.3 Future research directions and limitation of the study

Pine and Gilmore (2007, p. 7) argue that "now more than ever, the authentic is what the consumers really want." For Kolar and Zabkar (2010, p. 661) "authenticity can be employed as complementary or even as alternative performance criteria next to customer (tourist) satisfaction." Because cooperation emerges from stable relationships that are developed over time, the transitory, short-term and asymmetrical relationship between hosts and guests does not foster mutual understandings and cooperation between one another. Essentially, there is a need for future research to explore, in greater depth, the concept of authenticity and reciprocity in tourism. Issues and tensions inherent in the notion of commercialised hospitality imply a redefinition of obligations and control of the social exchange in the host-guest relationship. This involves investigating the reciprocal mode of exchange between hosts and guests; in particular, the conditions leading to creative reciprocity between hosts and guests, so that both experience some valuable interactions with some valuable experiences.

On a broader level, further research should consider ways of fostering better cooperation between various tourism stakeholders involved in the authentication and tourism planning of cultural heritage sites. A joint cooperation between government officials, local NGOs and tour operators in the certification and tourism planning of various Kazakhstani historical and cultural sites would allow further development of eco-cultural tourism in other Kazakhstani rural areas.

A second priority for future research relates to the further development of the model of transnomadic authenticity. Some transnomadic authenticity qualifying dimensions should be examined in more detail to learn how they influence visitors' perception of authenticity when visiting 'off the beaten track' destinations. One of the dimensions that would warrant further research is the role previous tourism experiences play in tourists' perceptions of authenticity of cultural heritage; in particular, how visitors' previous travelling experiences, both in terms of the narratives and images they carry before their visit, can lead to a change in their perception of authenticity of their future travelling experiences. Another dimension of the transnomadic authenticity model that deserves more examination relates to the analysis of the characteristics of the tourists' journeys (uniqueness, novelty and contrast with previous journeys) that can influence visitors' perception of existential authenticity.

The characteristics of the tourism encounter constitute another dimension of the transnomadic authenticity model that deserves further research; in particular, the degree to which guests feel crowded during tourists' visits and the use levels that both hosts and guests feel are acceptable to maintain a high level of creative reciprocity between one another.

The proposed model of transnomadic authenticity, as an interactive and iterative process, is seen as a 'strategy' for the better understanding of cultural heritage when visitors travel from one destination to another. The model explains in particular how visitors can refine their perception of authenticity incrementally when visiting other tourism destinations. For Jamal and Hill (2002, p. 103), "Authenticity is neither a unified static construct nor an essential property of objects and events." By analysing the objective, constructed and experiential dimensions of the concept of authenticity in Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism encounters, the proposed model of transnomadic authenticity is hence context and cases specific and cannot be generalised to other

tourism destinations. The transposition and applicability of the transnomadic authenticity model to other tourism destinations' contexts thus needs to be done with caution. The political and experiential nature of authenticity points to the need to analyse in more detail the key factors that affect the scope of the transnomadic authenticity model. In particular, more research is needed to evaluate the global and local processes that influence the host–guest relationship in the tourists' perceptions of authenticity when travelling in 'off the beaten track' destinations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview discussion guide for tourism providers



Working Title: Authenticity and tourism in Kazakhstan: neo-nomadic culture in the post-Soviet era.

Researcher: Guillaume Tiberghien, PhD Candidate.

Indicative discussion guide for tourism providers' interviews
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Section 1: Background about the Individual

Basic demographics

- What is your country of origin?
- Male/Female
- Age group (20-30 / 30-40 / 40-50 / 50-60 / 60-70 / over 70)?

Brief professional history

- Are you working in the tourism industry?
- If yes, please specify under what professional qualification.

Section 2: Renaissance of nomadic culture in Kazakhstan

- How would you define traditional nomadic culture in Kazakhstan?
- Do you think there is a renaissance of nomadic culture (neo-nomadic culture) in the country?
- If yes, how would you characterise it (new commodified cultural habits and changes in nomadic traditions, food, architecture, games and cultural performances, craft-making, other?)
- Could you mention any specific examples?

Section 3: Tourism development with neo-nomadic populations in Kazakhstan

- What kind of tourism approach do you think is the most appropriate when travelling in Kazakhstan? (mass tourism, ecotourism, ethnic tourism, cultural tourism, eco-cultural tourism, sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, other...)?
- From your point of view, how should this type of tourism with neo-nomadic populations be organised (how to approach the local populations, how to value the environment...)?

Section 4: Perception of authenticity regarding the tourism experience in Kazakhstan

- What is your definition of an authentic tourism experience?
- Do you have the impression to travel in an authentic tourism destination when you are travelling in Kazakhstan?
- According to you, which aspects of your tourism experience confirmed your authenticity expectations while travelling in the country (nomadic lifestyle, nomadic food, nomadic architecture, nomadic cultural landscapes, traditional games and cultural performances, crafts bought during the tour, other...)?
- Do you feel your perception of authenticity has been altered by some Western acculturation processes (Western style of services for example) the country has been recently facing?
- Do you think having previous knowledge of the nomadic culture and Soviet or post-Soviet era can influence the perception of authenticity while touring in the country? Can you specify?

Thank you for your participation!

Working Title: Authenticity and tourism in Kazakhstan: neo-nomadic culture in the post-Soviet era.

Researcher: Guillaume Tiberghien, PhD Candidate.

Indicative discussion guide for visitors' interviews

Section 1: Background about the Individual

Basic demographics

- What is your country of origin?
- Male/Female
- Age group (20-30 / 30-40 / 40-50 / 50-60 / 60-70 / over 70)?

Brief personal travelling history

- Is it your first time visiting Kazakhstan? (Yes/No)
- Is it your first time embarking in an eco-cultural tour in the country? (Yes/No)
- Is it the first time you are travelling with 'Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan' or another Kazakhstani tour provider? (Yes/No)
- What is the length and name of your tour (if applicable)?

Brief professional history

- Are you working in the tourism industry?
- If yes, please specify under what professional qualification.

Section 2: Renaissance of nomadic culture in Kazakhstan

- How would you define traditional nomadic culture in Kazakhstan?
- Do you think there is a renaissance of nomadic culture (neo-nomadic culture) in the country?

- If yes, how would you characterise it (new commodified cultural habits and changes in nomadic traditions, food, architecture, games and cultural performances, craft-making, other?)
- Could you mention any specific examples?

Section 3: Tourism development with neo-nomadic populations in Kazakhstan

- What kind of tourism approach do you think is the most appropriate when travelling in Kazakhstan? (Mass Tourism, ecotourism, ethnic tourism, cultural tourism, eco-cultural tourism, sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, other...)?
- From your point of view, how should this type of tourism with neo-nomadic populations be organised (how to approach the local populations, how to value the environment...)?

Section 4: Perception of authenticity regarding the tourism experience in Kazakhstan

- What is your definition of an authentic tourism experience?
- Do you have the impression to travel in an authentic tourism destination when you are travelling in Kazakhstan?
- According to you, which aspects of your tourism experience confirmed your authenticity expectations while travelling in the country (nomadic lifestyle, nomadic food, nomadic architecture, nomadic cultural landscapes, traditional games and cultural performances, crafts bought during the tour, other...)?
- Do you feel your perception of authenticity has been altered by some Western acculturation processes (Western style of services for example) the country has been recently facing?
- Do you think having previous knowledge of the nomadic culture and Soviet or post-Soviet era can influence the perception of authenticity while touring in the country? Can you specify?

Thank you for your participation!



Participant Information sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

6th of August 2011

Project Title: Authenticity and tourism in Kazakhstan: neo-nomadic culture in the post-Soviet era.

An Invitation

My name is Guillaume Tiberghien and I am a tourism researcher from Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand, currently undertaking a doctoral study entitled “Authenticity and tourism in Kazakhstan: neo-nomadic culture in the post-Soviet era”.

As a client of ‘Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan’ or the ‘Tulip’ eco-cultural tours, you represent a very important part of the Kazakhstani eco-cultural tourism development. You are invited to participate in this research on authenticity and tourism in Kazakhstan through an interview.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research aims to explore the perception of authenticity in Kazakhstani tourism and make local tourism operators more conscious of the factors that influence sustainable tourism development in the country. Also, it will enhance local tourism product development of tourism operators through a better understanding of the visitor’s perception of authenticity when travelling in the country.

This research is being conducted as part of my Doctor of Philosophy at AUT University. Results of the interviews may appear in my PhD thesis and/or be used in journal and conference publications.

How was I chosen for this invitation?

You have been identified as a client of 'Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan' or 'Tulip' eco-cultural tours. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences.

What will happen in this research?

This research involves interviews with approximately 40 people altogether who are considered to be tourism industry 'experts' of eco-cultural tourism in Kazakhstan and with local and international visitors. In particular, members of local communities; nongovernmental organisations, respected academics in tourism; operators of small tourism businesses and clients of 'Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan' and 'Tulip' eco-cultural tours.

Additional interviews over the phone (or by any methods that best suits the respondents) will also be conducted at a later date with you and an invitation to participate in any additional interviews will be sent via email.

What are the discomforts and risks?

You are giving your valuable time and information to help with this research and I can assure you that I have considered your well-being and the one of your business or organisation. You may feel that you are not an expert in some of the areas discussed, or you may be concerned that I will 'leak' confidential or sensitive information to others. You may also be concerned about the use of your time - a valuable resource.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

All questions are optional, and you may choose not to answer some questions. However, the interview is designed to gain an understanding of the perception of authenticity in Kazakhstani tourism practices, so there are no right or wrong answers. Any information you provide will be interesting. I am strictly bound by my University's ethics procedures and processes and will not pass on any information to others. I will keep the interview time to approximately one hour.

What are the benefits?

This research is very important as it will contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the concept of authenticity in Kazakhstani tourism practices and will

aim at making local tourism operators more conscious of the factors that influence sustainable tourism development in the country. Also, it will enhance local tourism product development of tourism operators through a better understanding of the visitor's perception of authenticity when travelling in Kazakhstan.

How will my privacy be protected?

All answers are confidential and your answers can in no way be linked to your personal or organisation's details. The results will be presented in aggregate and no individual business or organisation will be identified in any of the publications relating to this research. I will also send you my notes from our interview so you can check what I've written before I write up anything in my thesis.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

This interview will take approximately one hour.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

As a client of 'Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan' eco-cultural tours, you had the opportunity to tick an option on the www.nomadic.kz website to be interviewed and then we will make the interview at a time which suits you during the eco-cultural tours. Additional interviews over the phone (or by any methods that best suits you) will also be conducted at a later date with you and an invitation to participate in any additional interviews will be sent via email.

As a client of the 'Tulip' eco-cultural tour, you had the opportunity to be asked by the tour operator before the tour commences whether you would like to participate in this research. Additional interviews over the phone (or by any methods that best suits you) will also be conducted at a later date with you and an invitation to participate in any additional interviews will be sent via email.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

To participate in this research, simply confirm on the website www.nomadic.kz that you would like to participate in the interview if you are a client of 'Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan'. In case you are a client of the 'Tulip' tour, I will ask you before the tour whether you would like to participate in this research. In both cases, I will also ask you

to sign a Consent form (copy attached) that gives me your written consent to participate in the interview.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

The results of this research will be included with my PhD work and will be available on www.nztri.org in summer 2014. I will inform you by email when results are published. Results may also be presented in your local media. To thank you for your participation, I offer to send you a brief summary of what I have found (a synopsis of my thesis).

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Simon Milne: email simon.milne@aut.ac.nz, phone 09 921 9245.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Dr Rosemary Gobold, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 8044.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details: Guillaume Tiberghien: email: gtibergh@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details: Simon Milne: email simon.milne@aut.ac.nz, phone 09 921 9245.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on **3rd of August 2011**.

AUTECH Reference number: **11/173**

Consent Form



Interviews

Project title: **Authenticity and tourism in Kazakhstan: neo-nomadic culture in the post-Soviet era.**

Project Supervisor: **Professor Simon Milne**

Researcher: **Guillaume Tiberghien**

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 3rd of August 2011.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio recorded.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including recordings, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive an electronic copy of the summary of the findings (please tick one):
Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I am aged twenty years and older

Participant's signature:

.....

Participant's name:

.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

.....

.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on **3rd of August 2011**

AUTEC Reference number: **11/173**

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix 5: Example of open coding

Category: Performative aspects of the tourism experience (first characteristic indicated within the brackets that qualifies the tourism experience on the left side of the transnomic authenticity model, see Figure 6.1).

Code	Operational definition	Examples of quotes
Participatory	Performing an act with the local populations	<p>HS1: "We showed some German visitors and explained in details the processes of making kyrts".</p> <p>HS3: "Tourists participate in the activities, witness how people live, how people prepare food, or watch the process of weaving a carpet. We do have a know-how that we can share with visitors".</p> <p>NGO1: 'Visitors should be invited to witness how local people are practicing their traditions for themselves, and not the other way around'.</p>
Reciprocity (exchange)	The practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit	<p>HS3: "It's necessary to share our culture so we can have a reciprocal relationship with our guests, so we can also ask them about their own culture".</p> <p>NT4: "Kazakhstan, even in its most remote areas, has changed tremendously so the authentic 'Other' has to be found in the relationship between hosts and guests, not necessarily in cultural artefacts".</p> <p>E1: "In this way you can enhance the host–guest relationship in a quite reciprocal way. This approach also contributes to minimizing ecological impacts on sites and cultural misunderstandings with local populations".</p>
Be part of the family	Intimate host–guest tourism encounter	<p>NT1: "Most of our visitors ask to experience and witness the traditions of local populations. We try to share with visitors the sense of hospitality that was and is still prevailing in the nomadic culture so that their tourism experience becomes as close as possible to the daily lives of the local populations".</p> <p>E4: "In order to experience the highest level of authenticity, it would be ideal to 'give birth to a relationship' between hosts and guests"</p>

HS: Home-stay provider

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

NT: Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan operator

E: Experts in nomadic culture

