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Tourist transformation: Towards a conceptual model

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ABSTRACT

Despite growing interest in transformative tourism and its benefits, there is not yet a precise understanding of tourist transformation. This study contributes to fill this research gap by reviewing the contexts where transformative tourism research has emerged, and the main theories employed. Through a multi-disciplinary approach, the paper discusses key dimensions of transformative tourism experiences. The discussion suggests that liminality, cultural shock and challenges faced at the destination initiate transformation by provoking peak episodes, dilemmas and new performances. Contextual stimuli can lead tourists to reflectively interpret the experience and acquire skills, values and knowledge, with consequences on attitude, habits, and behaviour. A tourist transformation model is created, which provides a conceptual foundation for future research, and is relevant for designing and marketing transformative tourism experiences.

Introduction

The nature of tourist wellbeing has recently become the object of debate in tourism research (see Smith & Diekmann, 2017). As tourism experiences may involve meaning and engagement besides pleasure, Filep and Laing (2019) have encouraged the investigation of eudaimonic experiences, frequently characterised as opportunities for tourists to learn and grow. Such growth has also been termed 'transformative tourism', which Christie and Mason (2003) describe as leading to "a positive change in attitudes and values among those who participate in the tourist experience" (p. 9). Transformative tourism occurs through activities that foster tolerance and cross-cultural understanding (Caton, 2012), or a shift towards responsible travel (UNWTO, 2016). It can therefore lead to changes in lifestyle, towards sustainability and global citizenship, and positively impact destinations (UNWTO, 2016). Since Robledo and Batle (2017) argue that transformative tourism is provided by a combination of different factors, rather than by a type of tourism, it would be helpful to provide a conceptual understanding of tourist transformation and its formative factors. This would further assist both researchers and operators to understand how these positive, eudaimonic impacts can be generated and enhanced.

As it stands, however, the literature on transformative tourism experiences remains limited, with most studies focused on describing transformative benefits provided by specific types of tourism (e.g. volunteer tourism, study abroad, etc.) (e.g. Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Reisinger, 2013), and only few studies discussing transformative tourism experiences regardless of the type of travel involved (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017b, 2017c). While Kirillova et al. (2017b, 2017c) conceptualised an existential type of transformation using philosophical underpinnings, no study has yet described or defined tourist transformation comprehensively. We therefore address this significant gap in our understanding of how tourist transformation is characterised across different experiences,

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to promote a general consensus on the definition of tourist transformation that has yet to be reached.

To address these research gaps, and achieve a conceptual framework and definition that supports further theory building, this study focuses on answering the following questions:

- In what contexts has the notion of transformative tourism research emerged?
- Which theories have been utilised in transformative tourism research?
- Which theories have not yet been used but may further explain the tourist transformation process?
- Which are the key dimensions of tourist transformation, regardless of the type of tourism tourists engage in?

To answer these questions, the study adopts a hermeneutic approach and reviews existing transformative tourism studies to investigate the contexts in which tourists' self-change has been analysed. We then present and critically discuss the main theories employed by transformative tourism studies to consolidate our theoretical understanding of tourist transformation.

Particular attention is given to how tourists may experience transformative change, based on interactions between their consciousness and external environments. Following the review of literature on transformative tourism, we consider approaches to tourism experiences (e.g. psychological, geographical and pragmatic perspectives) to suggest and discuss a more comprehensive conceptual framework of tourist transformation, and we finally illustrate a conceptual model of tourist transformation that includes the main constructs and key dimensions underpinning transformation.

As a result of our conceptual model, we propose that '*tourist transformation is facilitated by contextual stimuli which strike the tourists and lead to reflecting and integrating new knowledge, skills and beliefs, which ultimately enhance the tourists' existential authenticity and increase the tourists' cross-cultural understanding and pro-environmental awareness, with potential consequences on long-term behaviour*'.

Methodology

In order to understand how tourist transformation is characterised, this study employed hermeneutics and analysed experience accounts to interpret the meaning and understanding of the phenomenon. An empirical description of tourist transformation based on observation relates to an analysis of visible action (see Parsons & Shils, 1951). A transformed tourist would demonstrate changed behaviour after returning home, for example, by returning to work refreshed and more alert, or showing new skills or interests adopted while on holidays. Yet, before the tourist reaches that stage in which transformation would materialise as habit or routine, there must occur a change that is individual and subjective (Swindler, 2001). The question is: how does such a change occur? It clearly happens through the interaction with destination attributes and activities, but given that tourists engage in myriads of different activities, what sorts of transformations do occur and what are their patterns and commonalities?

In order to pursue these questions, the current study employs hermeneutics (Schleiermacher, 1999) and treats tourists' experiences as accounts that are analysed and interpreted. Hermeneutic interpretation seeks 'understanding' rather than description, using a spiralling method, that moves from text to theory, and back to the text. It is spiralling because each move involves the authors' dialectic dialogue, self-critical questioning and *phronesis* ('practical wisdom'), including a priori ontological understanding of what we are dealing with when talking about transformation. Interpretation is thus 'laying bare', or 'revealing' what is hidden in a tourist experience account but also what remains concealed. Questioning dialectically thus increases our understanding with every turn (Heidegger, 2008).

Consequently, our interpretation of transformation through tourism is based on the authors' readings of the most recent usage of the term in the tourism literature, and subsequent questioning of existing and underlying theory. This then led to readings both outside and within the tourism literature to further investigate how tourists change as a result of their interaction with the destination, and to define the common stages that may characterise this transformation. Rather than seeking to be comprehensive in covering every use of the term 'transformation' in the tourism literature, the conceptual paper sought a sound and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of transformation including its expressions (Kim, 2001).

Transformative experiences in tourism contexts

Tourism researchers have treated transformative travel mainly as leading to "positive change in attitudes and values" (Christie & Mason, 2003, p. 9). While one might say that all tourist activity, even mass tourism, could change individuals, Reisinger (2013) argues that "mass tourism or business tourism does not offer transformational learning experiences", but rather, "alternative tourism, such as nature-based, adventure, rural or agri, cultural and heritage, religious, wellness and spa, educational or volunteer tourism" are able to trigger self-growth (p. 29). This argument is supported by the fact that previous studies describe transformative experiences as bound to the characteristics that specific types of tourism afford. Transformative discourses and outcomes have emerged especially in relation to experiences of study abroad, independent travel, ecotourism, wellness and spiritual tourism, and volunteer tourism. This next section therefore analyses each context, briefly discussing how and why previous studies have chosen and linked such specific tourism types to tourist transformation.

Study abroad

Brown (2009) discusses the transformative power of students' international sojourns, and shows how the prolonged absence from home, exposure to other cultures and challenges faced while attending lectures and studying in a different setting have consequences

for life perspectives of international students, who become more independent and better cope with stress (Brown, 2009). Study abroad promotes opportunities for tourists' self-growth, to adjust to new environments, culture, values and practices (e.g. McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017), and is attributed multiple transformative benefits: changes in attitude towards the destination hosts (Nyaupane, Teye, & Paris, 2008), and developing cultural cosmopolitanism and international political concern (Grabowski, Wearing, Lyons, Tarrant, & Landon, 2017; McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). Improved knowledge and cultural competence acquired through study abroad may also have repercussions for traveller's professional career and interpersonal relationships (Brown, 2009).

Independent travel

A number of studies discuss the growing popularity of long-term independent travel, especially among young travellers (e.g. Tsaur, Yen, & Chen, 2010), and associate it with a desire to explore their potential and to face challenges and cross-cultural encounters (Hirschorn & Hefferon, 2013). Gap year travellers and backpackers develop social relations, and greater respect for cultures, communities and nature, which all contribute to self-enhancement (Joseph & Wearing, 2014). Matthews (2014) describes the rite of passage experienced when backpacking, which involves being separated from family and friends, and creating *communitas* with other backpackers. Backpackers' narrations of their experiences highlight reflexive self-change, made up by 'real' or authentic encounters (Noy, 2004; O'Reilly, 2006). Through backpacking, tourists may also develop and refine abilities, such as acquiring new general knowledge, self-confidence and independence (Pearce & Foster, 2007).

Ecotourism

In ecotourism research, Weaver (2005) stresses the importance of reinforcing motivations and deep understanding, to influence pro-environmental behaviour. As such, ecotourism particularly focuses on designing programmes and activities that involve interpretation to convert tourists' behaviour and become more responsible in the long term (Moscardo, 2017). Through a systematic review, Wolf, Ainsworth, and Crowley (2017) conceptualise a model of transformative travel market niches for protected areas. They illustrate experience-outcome linkages, according to participants' sociodemographic characteristics and motivations, with the objective of ensuring satisfaction and destination loyalty (Wolf et al., 2017). Beyond increasing restoration, transformative travel in natural environments and protected areas may involve challenging activities encouraging personal development, to less challenging activities promoting socialising and cultural learning (e.g. Wolf et al., 2017).

Wellness and spiritual tourism

Wellness tourism has been defined as journeys motivated by tourists' willingness to increase their health and wellbeing, and is characterised by stays at facilities designed to enhance physical and psychological wellbeing (Voigt, Brown, & Howat, 2011). Fu, Tanyatanaboon, and Lehto (2015) analyse guests' accounts of transformative experiences at retreat centres, and find that they experience bodily change (feeling healthier), emotional change (balanced feelings), attitudinal change (increased confidence) and change in skills. Voigt et al. (2011) focus on wellness tourists' motivations, and similarly find that the participants benefitted from their experiences on physical, psychological and spiritual levels. Smith and Kelly (2006) discuss how holistic tourism, which involves a range of activities and treatments aimed at developing the body, mind and spirit, also represents a 'journey of the self' which lets tourists escape and enhance their life at the same time. Rather than using the word 'transformation', studies focusing on spiritual tourism experiences, characterised by an intentional search for spiritual benefits through religious practices (Parsons, Houge Mackenzie, & Filep, 2019), discuss tourists' quests for meaning (Willson, McIntosh, & Zahra, 2013), which motivate them to engage in sacred journeys leading to spiritual fulfilment (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011) and self-actualisation (Moufakkir & Selmi, 2018).

Volunteer tourism

The main objective of volunteer tourism is to help local residents and vulnerable groups in their territory. Several studies discuss the transformative impacts of such experiences on tourists' lives. During their activities, volunteer tourists engage in self-exploration and reflection (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018), develop intercultural sensitivity (e.g. Curtin & Brown, 2019), new skills, greater confidence and an improved perspective on life (e.g. Crossley, 2012). However, it has also been noted that volunteer tourism may result in soft global citizenship, the unproblematised adaptation to a new context (Bone & Bone, 2017), and may even reinforce negative stereotypes (Sin, 2009). While Kontogeorgopoulos (2017) argues that volunteer tourists seek existential authenticity, it has been suggested that such trips, made up by privilege and sensitive encounters, have to be consciously examined and de-constructed by tourists in order to be 'truly' transformative (e.g. Knollenberg, McGehee, Bynum Boley, & Clemmons, 2014).

The studies hereby discussed describe transformations framed within diverse niche tourism contexts, and are either conceptual or use various research instruments such as interviews, surveys, and quasi-experiments, ranging from deeply investigating the lived experience of transformed tourists in relation to their activities, to measuring changes in personal skills or attitudes towards the destination. These observations of transformative processes are based on descriptions of how the tourist's mind makes sense of its own travel experience and activities (Gnoth & Matteucci, 2014). They mostly reveal how exposure to other cultures and challenges lead to the development of a broader frame of reference and sense of identity. Having reviewed the different contexts where the notion of transformative tourism research has been developed, we now turn to discuss how the literature explains such changes in detail, which theories have been utilised, and which key dimensions of tourist transformation can be identified from such conceptualisations.

Tourist transformation: current theoretical perspectives

Transformative learning theory

After reviewing the contexts where the notion of transformative tourism research has emerged, the present section addresses the study's aim of identifying and critically discussing the different theories that have been utilised in transformative tourism research so far. Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory has been widely employed to conceptualise transformative tourism (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Lean, 2012; Reisinger, 2013; Robledo & Batle, 2017; Walter, 2016; Wolf et al., 2017). Sociologist and educationalist Jack Mezirow suggests a 'disorienting dilemma' in life as the trigger and the first of a ten-step transformation process consisting of: self-reflection, analysing one's own assumptions, acknowledging the shared dilemma with others, exploring new roles and relationships, acquiring new knowledge, developing skills in the new role and finally integrating the new perspective into one's life (Mezirow, 1991, pp. 168–169). As a result, an old experience is renegotiated from a different perspective and provided with new meanings, so that transformative learning leads "toward a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable, and integrated perspective" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 155).

Mezirow's transformative learning theory relies on conscious processes of which the learner is fully aware, and has been applied to processes by which tourists acquire new knowledge, face challenges and develop new skills (Pearce & Foster, 2007; Wolf et al., 2017). These may all be considered potential dimensions that facilitate transformation. Coghlan and Gooch (2011) define disorienting dilemmas in tourism contexts as personal crises or circumstances which encourage individuals to search for something missing from their lives and to travel. They also associate Mezirow's transformative learning steps with volunteer tourism experiences, such as: facing a new environment, reflecting on strong emotions, acquiring skills as volunteer and, finally, building new networks (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011). Beyond volunteer tourism, in outdoor adventures and nature-based experiences, visitors experience awe in the wilderness while witnessing damages to natural environments and wildlife (Walter, 2016). By purposefully delivering activities going beyond visitors' comfort levels, these types of 'nature shock' and 'adventure shock' have been proposed as opportunities of transformative learning, especially fostering reflection and action in relation to sustainability goals (Walter, 2016).

As Hirschorn and Hefferon (2013) note, challenges faced during the trip may be represented by "culture shock, fear of personal attack, involvement in road accidents, daily uncertainty, prejudice, shyness, and extreme sports" (p. 294). Mezirow's theory also helps explain tourists' experiences of culture shock at destinations: the cultural imbalance between the host/tourist backgrounds leads tourists to question subjective meanings and values (Walter, 2016), which encourages them to develop cross-cultural awareness: as travellers realise that they have adapted their cultural constructs to different international realities, they transform by expanding their worldview and by integrating elements of their experiences when returning to a "blurred home" of new and old meanings (Mkono, 2016; Pocock & McIntosh, 2013).

Beyond cross-cultural awareness, tourists may also develop other skills as a result from learning through travel, such as planning to achieve a goal, learning a new language, dealing with change and stress, using information technologies, managing financial resources, becoming more willing to take risks, and better self-understanding (Pearce & Foster, 2007; Tsaur & Huang, 2016). In conclusion, transformative learning theory is used by many tourism studies to describe culture shock and disorienting dilemmas faced at the destination, which make tourists reflect on their surroundings and integrate new skills and values such as cross-cultural and pro-environmental awareness. These key dimensions emerge from a review of tourism studies that discuss transformative learning, which rests on a theory of conscious gradual adaptation and adjustment, but does not discern how the self is involved.

Existential transformation

Instead of employing transformative learning theory as conceptual foundation to describe transformative tourism, Kirillova et al. (2017b) focus on existential authentic experiences, identified as profound and self-fulfilling tourist experiences (Brown, 2013; Gnoth & Matteucci, 2014), and explore such experiences under an existential philosophy paradigm. Portraying existential transformation as a re-consideration of one's personal value system (e.g. Heidegger, 1927/1962), the human being's existence is shown to be subject to change, and affected by the balance between authenticity and anxiety. Anxiety is the fear of living a meaningless life and not expressing the best version of self (e.g. Kierkegaard, 1986). It pushes individuals to question their life's direction and values, thus initiating a path towards transformation and achieving existential authenticity (Kirillova et al., 2017b; Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017a).

According to these authors, a peak episode leads to a sudden revelation and triggers the existential transformation. It describes a serendipitous moment that occurs towards the end of the trip (e.g. connecting with other people, reaching the top of a mountain, witnessing a striking local performance, etc.). Specifically, the peak experience increases the tourists' self-awareness and intensifies their existential anxiety, leading to questioning values and re-evaluating priorities (Kirillova et al., 2017a). Existential transformation results in tourists achieving or enhancing their existential authenticity (Kirillova et al., 2017b). When describing this process, Kirillova et al. (2017b) refer to travellers taking important decisions, analysing the significance of values such as freedom and giving them priority in their life after the trip, or becoming more conscious about the meaningfulness of their relationships.

Tourism research also dwells on the concept of authenticity, as studies debate what tourists seek and what they can actually obtain at the destination (e.g. Brown, 2013; Pearce & Moscardo, 1986). Existential authenticity, described as "potential existential state of Being which is to be activated by tourism activities" (Wang, 1999, p. 352), is thought to be difficult to obtain in daily life, due to ordinary routine and social pressures, which are suspended in the liminoid and self-explorative dimension of tourism settings (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Turner, 1969). Liminality relates to the extra-ordinary dimension of the destination, where tourists feel

free to unconsciously express a different persona (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017), and is a fundamental component for a spiritual journey of evaluating and reorganising one's life purpose and existential priorities (e.g. Kirillova et al., 2017c; Willson et al., 2013).

After conceptualising existential transformation, Kirillova et al. (2017c) turn to deconstruct peak episodes during trips, and find that they evoke intense mixed emotions and heightened cognition, and engender the tourists' sense of transiency, and connection to something grand (Kirillova et al., 2017c). Therefore, peak episodes seem to characterise any tourism experience eliciting strong emotions and meaningful moments, which are 'serendipitously' interpreted in relation to the tourists' existence. In comparison, disorienting dilemmas refer to results of experiencing cultural shock in studying abroad and volunteer tourism (Brown, 2009; Coghlan & Gooch, 2011), of going beyond comfort levels in adventure tourism (Buckley, 2012), or of witnessing damages to the environment in nature-based tourism (Walter, 2016), and have been discussed as learning and conscious processes.

In this context of peak episodes, Gnoth and Matteucci (2014) also identify flow as an existential experience albeit entirely self-directed. Flow is a mental state caused by focusing on a rewarding, skilful activity. It involves a temporary loss of self-consciousness and a perceived distortion of time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), leading to recreation and self-rediscovery. Flow could therefore be categorised as transformational, at least when occurring for the very first time. For example, the tourists may employ their abilities in fully engaging tasks at the destination, practising skills such as dancing, rafting, mountaineering, etc. (Feder Mayer, dos Santos Machado, Marques, & Gonçalves Nunes, 2019). These practices, which tourists could copy, or adopt mindlessly at the destination should also be considered as transformational change, beyond the reviewed theories on transformative learning and existential transformation.

As discussed in this section, most tourism studies on transformation have employed Mezirow's transformative learning theory as theoretical foundation, and their analysis allows to identify cultural shock, disorienting dilemmas and reflection as common key dimensions characterising transformative learning through tourism. Kirillova et al. (2017a, 2017b) then turned to define an existential type of transformation through philosophy, again stressing tourists' conscious engagement. Here, liminality and peak episodes lead to an enhanced sense of authenticity, and emerge as key dimensions of existential transformation. However, tourist transformation as a comprehensive process that incorporates and makes sense of these two separate conceptualisations has not yet been understood.

To build a comprehensive conceptual model of tourist transformation, the hermeneutic approach of this paper further considers 'embodied' aspects of tourist transformation, namely how tourists might experience transformation in their interaction with a physical place where performance takes place, as well as which stages in time lead a transformative event to change the tourists' long-term behaviour. These aspects have not yet been explicitly considered by existing tourism literature on transformative experiences. This conceptual paper therefore expands the discussion on tourist transformation by involving theories and studies that have adopted a psychological, sociological or non-representational geography approach, to discuss the way tourists behave at the destination. Moreover, since the theories so far used by transformative tourism research are either existential (Kirillova et al.) or educational (Mezirow), the study also considers a pragmatist perspective to understand how practices at the destination may transform into habits, and what stages this process requires.

Understanding the tourist transformation process

The tourist encounter

While tourist transformation has been conceptualised from an existential perspective, little attention has been paid to transformation in relation to tourists' interaction with destinations as places. As Crouch, Aronsson, and Wahlström (2001) note, tourism experiences are constructed by multi-sensory and bodily trajectories of tourists in space. Tourists not only reflect on ideas and their daily life, but are also practically involved. Through embodiment, they interpret artefacts and landscapes, so that fragments of the experience are not only used to understand others' realities, but to also negotiate their own identities (Crouch et al., 2001).

Urry and Larsen (2011) discuss how tourism discourse has moved from the concept of 'gaze' for describing tourists as passive consumers, to employ the concept of 'performance'. Tourists engage in ritualised practices that have been set according to expectations, cultural contexts and power dynamics (Crouch & Desforges, 2003). This is exemplified by Edensor (2001) describing backpackers: "They like to wander off the 'beaten track', and may seek apparently unorthodox mystical, drug-enhanced and other counter-cultural experiences […] Clothing is often 'rough and ready' and apparently signifies scorn for fashion, or is local apparel to signify 'going native'. Books are used among backpackers to signify a shared disposition towards exploration" (p. 74).

Performativity refers to visitors' interaction with the destination environment, local residents and other tourists (Crouch & Desforges, 2003). Site-specific and unique situations influence visitors' expressivity, who engage with embodied practice, and reconfigure themselves in relation to the experience (Crouch & Desforges, 2003). Tourists also imitate others' practices, so that they appear natural to others (Urry & Larsen, 2011). The repetition of ritualised behaviours may detour and initiate new creative practices and personal stories, meaning that tourists (and their bodies) are not passive subjects to sensorial experiences, but agents who negotiate place and increase awareness of their reality (Urry & Larsen, 2011). For example, Desforges (2000) notes that tourists engaging in backpacking through the Andes use the activity as means to assert their identity. Robledo and Batle (2017) argue that meditation provided their study participants not only with respite opportunities, but also to acknowledge the experience as meaningful and to reflect. In fact, performances may become potentially unsettling, revealing something new about their self and their position in the world (Crouch & Desforges, 2003; Urry & Larsen, 2011), thus playing an important role in initiating tourist transformation. Compared to disorienting dilemmas and peak episodes, tourists' physical performances involve embodied activities they juxtapose to their everyday habits. This evokes memory as an important faculty, as it continuously re-configures and re-invigorates

performativity (Crouch & Desforges, 2003).

Memory stores experiences as actual and virtual existence, and past lived moments are recollected with the lens of the present (Parr, 2005). Thus, memory not only provides an impression of a unified self, but also plays a pivotal part in detecting tourist transformation, as remembering corresponds with juxtaposing the 'before' and 'after' situations, so that the past experience is interpreted in terms of current circumstances. This may be exemplified by contemporary tourist photography (Crouch & Desforges, 2003), or by travellers' urge to talk and write about their experience in journals, social media and travel blogs (Robledo & Batle, 2017). Memory and interpretation are hereby considered key dimensions of tourists' transformative process. Adding a psychological perspective, Pearce and Packer (2013) note that the role of memory in framing travel experiences has been underplayed by tourism research that seeks to understand the multisensory encoding of experiences, and the memory mechanisms that allow for long-term behavioural outcomes.

Using both studies on performativity and philosophical interpretation, new nuances for our understanding can be conceived so that transformative processes through tourists' embodiment of practice can be explained further. By performing previous practice or emulating that of others, new embodied memory can form. At times the tourists may become disoriented but begin to form new preferences and behaviour, as other contextual cues help promote such preferences for a new logic to emerge. Alternatively, the new logic may change the appreciation of a place and also tourists are received, but may not actually cause long-term changes in tourists' values, attitudes or behaviour. They may participate, but only change outwardly and as far as it can be observed. To gain further insights into how practices experienced at the destination may transform tourists' behaviour, we now turn to Peirce's theory of experience.

Peirce's theory of experience

The American pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce linked his philosophical theories to experience (Misak, 2004). Following Kant, Peirce defines three universal categories of experience, and applies this classification to the psychic system. The '1st category' is a state of pure consciousness, which is startled by a new stimulus existing in a single instant (Houser & Kloesel, 1992). In tourism, a transformative stimulus may be being struck by different cultural practices at the destination, or facing an unexpected challenge during the trip, all of which may then constitute a peak episode or dilemma. In response to the 1st immediate feeling, a 'dual consciousness' comes into play in a 2nd moment of cause/effect, action/reaction. In this '2nd category', the individual realises that something has changed between the 'before' and 'after' the dividing stimulus, and starts relating the self to the outside world. At this stage, the transforming travellers start reflecting on the transformative stimulus and seek to make sense of their predicament.

Such reaction is followed by a '3rd' stage of a person's 'synthetic consciousness', connecting and interpreting the experience as a whole. After reflecting on their predicament, tourists reminisce about the experience and assign it meaning and an interpretation. The 3rd category of synthetic consciousness and interpretation has also been defined as obtaining a sense of learning, of similarity and real connection. This 3rd state is the psychological basis for physically acquiring habits (Houser & Kloesel, 1992). The durability of acquired habits depends on the intensity and permanence of the stimulus, and on its repetition. For example, Warren, Becken, and Coghlan's (2017) study investigating the effectiveness of environmental education programmes in tourist accommodation, found that a structured programme, the host capability, infrastructure, feedback and satisfaction foster the acquisition of habits such as saving resources, removing litter and becoming more involved in environmental issues. Former backpackers may refine their minimalistic lifestyle choices after the trip, by using public transportation and biking to work, and by adopting backpacking as travel lifestyle (Reisinger, 2013).

The three steps (1st, 2nd, and 3rd categories) can be regarded as independent of each other, hence explaining the variability of experiential processes across people. The 2nd category of dual consciousness, a dividing instant, setting the object (e.g. the exposure to the 'Other', sensing difference at the destination, etc.) against the subject (the tourist), corresponds with the unsettling imbalance between anxiety and authenticity characterising existential transformation. Such disruption may cause the tourist to consciously experience a sense of difference and fragmentation (e.g. during Peirce's dual consciousness). This fragmentation can be represented by what Kirillova et al. (2017b) described as travellers reinterpreting their everyday cultural environment, making sense of incongruities between internalised values and their true inclinations, and dealing with existential concerns such as a meaning in life, alienation, and freedom.

In this regard, the transcendentalist Deleuze considers fragmentation a necessary step in which individuals consider all virtual and implicit possibilities underlying the experience (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). This process allows individuals to 'return to difference', to be aware of their internal differences and move beyond unity and multiplicity, towards 'becoming' (Deleuze, 1997; Williams, 2005).

Considering Peirce's theory of experience therefore allows us to understand how an immediate stimulus occurring during a journey, especially when intense (e.g. peak episodes in existential transformation; disorienting dilemma in transformative learning), may disrupt the tourists' inner equilibrium and lead to the formation of new values. Subsequently, behaving according to the newly adopted values may eventually lead to lasting change in behaviour in the form of habits, once the tourist returns home. Alternatively, a striking event may not be strong enough to startle tourists into changing their value system; or tourists may experiment with new values at the destination, but abandon such behaviour once they leave the tourism environment for lack of reinforcement. For example, tourists WWOOFing in Australia report their willingness to live in a more sustainable manner, to do more farming and to eat organic food (Reisinger, 2013). However, these intentions may not materialise, and little is known about the longevity of such practices after the experience.

While this model confirms that not every tourism experience including a striking event leads to personal transformation, it also provides a stimulus-response perspective to a tripartite process of tourist transformation. However, behavioural change through

tourism may not always occur in the form of developing habits. Tourist transformation does not necessarily entail adopting new practices, but may correspond to a once-in-a-life-time and life-changing decision that affects the individual's way of life. This could be a career change, committing to intrinsically fulfilling hobbies, or terminating a disingenuous personal relationship as result of a transformative tourism experience (Hirschorn & Hefferon, 2013). Therefore, while Peirce's experiential theory explains how transformative experiences through tourism can result in the formation of new and visible habits, more perspectives are needed to understand the full array of behavioural consequences of transformative tourism.

Value and attitude change

Christie and Mason (2003) define the act of transformation as 'positive change in attitudes and values' (p. 9). This definition has not yet been critically analysed by transformative tourism studies, nor used to explore the process of transformative change experienced by tourists. Attitudes are evaluative responses to an object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). They help individuals organise stimuli and responses and are aroused by a need or environmental stimuli (Li, Cai, & Qiu, 2016). Tourists' attitudes towards tourism have been considered at a macro level (i.e. towards a destination) and at a micro level (i.e. towards an organisation) (e.g. Breitsohl & Garrod, 2016; Li et al., 2016), yet not for the analysis of transformative changes.

Beliefs or values are inner representations and subjective norms that individuals reflect upon and test, and are antecedents of intentions and behaviours (Gnoth, 1997). The awareness of difference, if felt with sufficient intensity, disrupts the tourists' system of beliefs, which is responsible for forming attitudes, attitude change, or new behaviour (Ajzen & Dasgupta, 2015). In fact, the affective strength of the attitude depends on the importance of the newly-reconfigured and underlying value that drives the attitude. Steinmetz, Knappstein, Ajzen, Schmidt, and Kabst (2016) note that interventions aiming at changing behavioural, normative and control beliefs, lead to an intention to engage in the planned behaviour. Therefore, transformative tourism processes, whether they be learning experiences or existential re-evaluations, consist of a combination of stimuli experienced throughout the holiday, which disrupt the tourists' value system and change the tourists' attitude towards the new meaning. Both discourses on transformative learning theory and existential transformation focus on a change in meaning that the individual makes sense of or internalises (Kirillova et al., 2017b; Mezirow, 1978). When sufficiently strong and reinforced, these processes can also involve meaningful behavioural changes, where behaviour is directed to fit with the newly-acquired perspective and/or the new sense of self (e.g. Kirillova et al., 2017b; Mezirow, 1991). Taking these theoretical perspectives into consideration, this study will now propose a tourist transformation framework and discuss its key dimensions.

Conceptualising tourist transformation

Based on this study's approach of integrating different theoretical perspectives, the framework presented in Fig. 1 is proposed to guide the conceptualisation of tourist transformation and to understand its common processes. The conceptual model was initially built drawing upon the study's literature review conducted with a hermeneutic approach, where a number of transformative dimensions were identified. Specifically, the review of literature on the transformative benefits provided by specific tourism types uncovered challenges encountered by tourists at the destination as facilitating transformation. In the discussion of the main theories employed by existing transformative tourism research, cultural shock, disorienting dilemmas and peak episodes emerged as having an important role in initiating the process of tourist transformation, followed by meaning making of the experience, and resulting in the enhancement of existential authenticity, or acquisition of new values such as pro-environmental awareness and cross-cultural understanding. Once these dimensions were identified, the present paper proceeded to expand the conceptualisation of tourist transformation by discussing how tourists might experience transformation in their interaction with the destination as a physical place, and identified physical performances as additional key element of the transformative experience. After employing Peirce's theory of experience to understand which stages the tourist transformation process may comprise, the discussion highlighted that a transformative experience is initiated by a stimulus, which tourists react to and interpret. The interpretation and integration of new knowledge and values may lead to attitude change and temporary habits: if these are enforced, long-term behavioural changes may be adopted.

In the present section, the identified key dimensions of tourist transformation are illustrated in the form of a conceptual model (Fig. 1). As specified above, each of the model's processes, similarly to Peirce's independent categories, may lead to the next one, but may also not be sufficiently intense, or provide all necessary circumstances, to constitute a continuous process and follow the whole sequence of tourist transformation. In other words, tourists may be presented with transformative stimuli provided by liminality, cultural shock and challenges, and not react to them, so that such stimuli may not amount to a subjectively perceived peak episode or dilemma. Alternatively, tourists may be aware of a specific striking episode during the trip, but may not reflect on it, hence the reflection stage may also be optional and separate, and the same can be said for the following dimensions. Hence, the dimensions in Fig. 1 are interrelated by dashed lines to signify both their independence and potential sequence. The study now discusses these dimensions below in four propositions.

1. Tourist transformation is facilitated by the destination's liminality, as well as cultural shock and challenges that arise from the perception of difference. It is initiated by stimuli in the form of peak episodes, and disorienting dilemmas including performance dilemmas.

The tourism setting is a liminoid dimension, where daily routines are suspended temporarily. This allows for tourists' self-

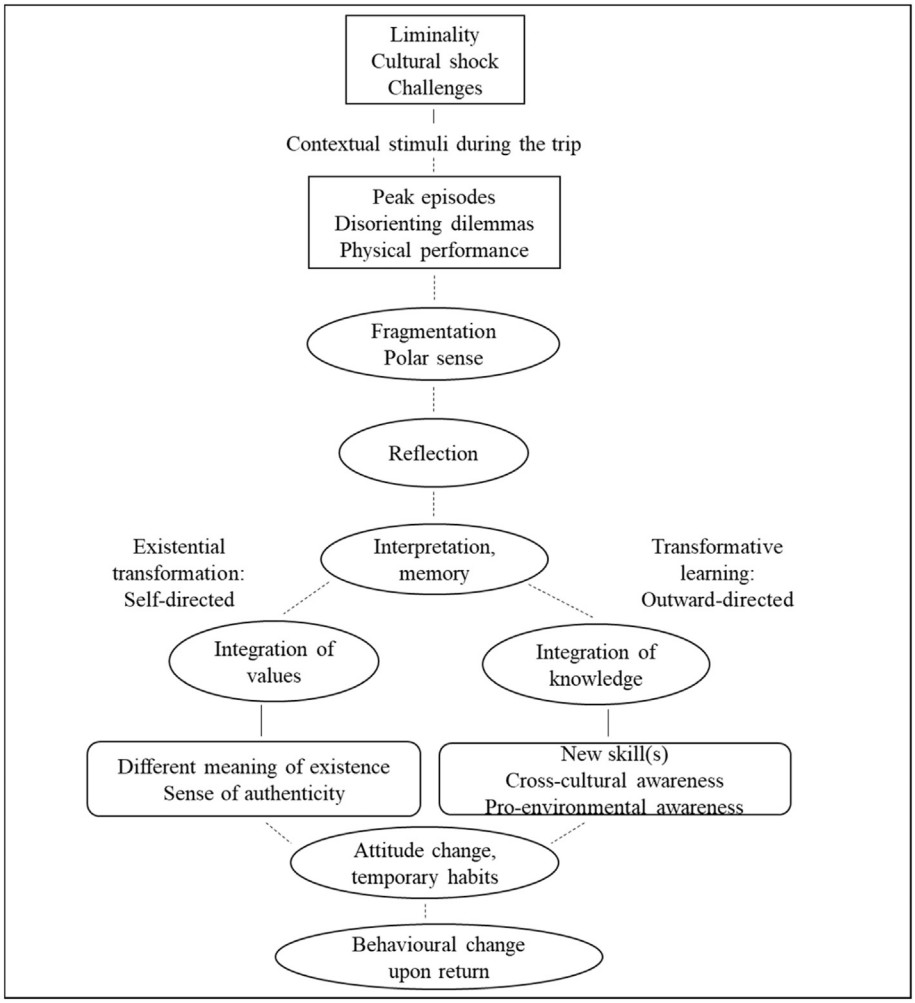

Fig. 1. Key dimensions of tourist transformation, based on the study conceptualisation.

exploration, through embodying different roles and personas (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017). Being in a new environment also provides opportunities for interacting with local residents and other travellers, thus experiencing a different culture, made up of unfamiliar values and practices (Brown, 2009; Walter, 2016). Adapting to the novel setting can be challenging, together with other unpredicted situations and events that the tourists may have to face during their stay. The liminoid dimension, the culture shock experienced and the challenges encountered at the destination, all contribute to generate multiple stimuli, occurring across the experience with different degrees of intensity. This may lead up to Kirillova et al.'s (2017b, 2017c) peak episode, a culminating stimulus that suddenly strikes the tourist in the form of a moment of transcendence and connectedness, and awakes the tourist's existential anxiety.

While a peak episode mainly involves a re-evaluation of the tourists' life direction, the observation and adaptation of different lifestyles also generate learning opportunities in the form of Mezirow's (1991) disorienting dilemmas. Together with serendipitous peak episodes (as antecedents of existential transformation) and disorienting dilemmas (as antecedents of transformative learning), the embodiment of tourist performances can also lead them to detect a sense of difference (Crouch & Desforges, 2003), compared to their ordinary practices, and to question the nature of their newly-acquired behaviours.

2. Intense stimuli at the destination cause sudden awareness and fragmentation, leading tourists to reflect on their sense of self in relation to the world.

As seen in Peirce's theory of experience (Houser & Kloesel, 1992), the present study discussion posits that transformative tourism experiences are caused by stimuli that disrupt tourists' sense of self and value systems. Once the stimuli are perceived, the individual becomes conscious of the intensity of their reaction to them (double consciousness). Peirce's polar sense and Deleuze's fragmentation illustrate the state in which tourists are suddenly aware and upset by feeling an incongruence between their way of being and behaving at the destination and at home, in relation to the physical, psychological and sociological difference in their surroundings. This awareness leads tourists to start reflecting and questioning their position in the world. Alternatively, tourists may escape into

stereotyping (Gnoth & Matteucci, 2014), or assume a gaze (Urry & Larsen, 2011), thus ending their transformative process.

Research on transformative learning has established that reflection during the trip is a necessary step to make sense of the challenges provided by the tourism experience (Mezirow, 1978). It is an important process to timely react by consciously integrating knowledge to respond to the different environment (e.g. Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Robledo & Batle, 2017). However, Kirillova et al. (2017c) specify that existential transformation is perfected through meaning-making only after the tourists return home, because individuals who experience existential transformation do not necessarily self-reflect at the destination. Research has not yet examined at which phase tourists reflect on their transformative experience (i.e. on-stage or post-trip), nor confirmed whether existential transformation and transformative learning are made sense of at different stages. This is important, however, as it would direct what kinds of assistance could be given to the disoriented tourist, and when, to form episodic memories and place attachment to be further interpreted.

3. The transformative experience is interpreted and reminisced, and tourists restructure their value system and/or develop new knowledge about the world and the environment.

As a common step in both transformative learning and existential transformation, tourists' reflection can turn into an interpretation of the occurrence that is relevant to their own reality. As final category in Peirce's theory of experience (Houser & Kloesel, 1992), the individual interprets the transformative experience, and learns something new, either about themselves or the external environment. Such interpretation involves memory, through which individuals compare virtual and actual recollections (Parr, 2005), relate their present situation to their past tourism experience, and associate new meanings to their position in the world. The interpretation may be directed outwards, and involve integrating new knowledge about the world (the outside environment). Through practice, facing challenges, or just by cultivating an interest at the destination, the tourists may detect the development of a new skill, such as independence, mastering a new language, self-confidence, etc. When learning and interpreting the lifestyle of other cultures, tourists develop cross-cultural awareness, expanding their worldview and global citizenship (Grabowski et al., 2017; Mkono, 2016). As seen in the literature review, interpretation proved to be an essential tool for visitor management, to facilitate their understanding of sustainability issues and development of pro-environmental awareness (Moscardo, 2017).

Through introspective interpretation, tourists may adopt a new value, or attach a different meaning to their life, thus experiencing existential transformation (Kirillova et al., 2017b). Therefore, the interpretation of the experience may be directed inwardly and to the self, or outwardly by reframing how they perceive the environment. Existential transformation is primarily self-directed, and consists of changing one's meaning of existence or having an enhanced sense of existential authenticity. In contrast, transformative learning is primarily outward-directed, and takes place, for example, through developing cross-cultural awareness (i.e. changing one's view on others), pro-environmental awareness, and new skills (i.e. learning practical abilities). As such, these transformative learning outcomes could be more visible than existential and introspective changes. A particular transformative tourism experience may include both processes, occurring at similar or at different times. We propose that this understanding was not clearly evident in earlier conceptualisations of transformative tourism processes and outcomes, making this one of the intended theoretical contributions of this paper. Such differentiation suggests that tourists' initiation to practices and their local interpretation may trigger transformative learning episodes via various potential routes rather than just through inward reflection as in existential transformation.

4. Newly-acquired knowledge and values change tourists' attitudes and influence their behaviour.

Transformative tourism experiences are not only characterised by increased consciousness, but are also influenced by the practices tourists engage in at the destination (Urry & Larsen, 2011). In Peirce's theory of experience, the 3rd category of interpretation and synthetic consciousness also involves the formation of habits (Houser & Kloesel, 1992). Accordingly, tourists assume habits in order to remove any insecurity or irritation around a new stimulus. In the case of existential transformation, tourists may even change their life direction to mitigate their heightened existential anxiety (Kirillova et al., 2017b). Similarly, in the case of transformative learning, tourists may respond to culture shock by attempting to adapt to the different cultural and social environment (Brown, 2009). These actions and repeated practices, while now consciously applied and existing with a purpose, are often found to be dropped and to stop after leaving the learning environment (Moscardo, 2009). When travellers return to their home setting, the habitual forces acquired in the familiar environment ‘kick in’, so that the transformation is only temporary and limited to the trip.

However, tourists' attitude change may also be strong enough, and able to transform their long-term behaviour beyond the tourism experience, into everyday life. Behavioural change through tourism involves the adoption of permanent practices, e.g. developing environmentally-friendly behaviour (Wolf et al., 2017) or behaving with solidarity and thinking more critically about social issues (Grabowski et al., 2017). It may also take the shape of life-changing decisions, such as reorganising one's own social sphere and interpersonal relationships (e.g. Lean, 2012) and changes in career plans (e.g. Brown, 2009). Managerially, the consequences are profound. Tourists must not just be confronted with ‘otherness’ but also helped to fully appreciate it; not by ‘watering down’ differences but by providing means to understanding through practice and explanation. These changes are different and very specific for each individual. Small or large, they have potential impacts not only on the individual, but also on the world and community wellbeing.

Conclusions

This study set out to examine the tourism literature on transformative tourism experiences. Existing research has mainly focused

on discussing the transformative benefits of specific types of tourism. However, no study has explored theories from different disciplines to identify what may define and characterise tourist transformation, regardless of the type of tourism. By integrating different disciplines on experiences and tourist encounters with a hermeneutic approach, this paper has discussed and illustrated the key dimensions of the process of tourist transformation, contributing to our knowledge on transformative tourism.

Mezirow's transformative learning theory, used by a tourism studies to frame self-growth processes, and Kirillova et al.'s (2017b, 2017c) conceptualisation of existential transformation, were found to be the main prominent tourist transformation theories. Theories on tourist performativity and attitude change, as well as Peirce's theory of experience, enriched our knowledge on tourist transformation, as they highlight the socially induced, observable experience as studied by social empiricists (Gnoth & Matteucci, 2014). The contribution of this study also lies in proposing a definition of tourist transformation and illustrating key dimensions of transformative tourism experiences in four propositions. The study reveals contextual stimuli (liminality, cultural shock and challenges, followed by a disorienting dilemma, peak episode and physical performances) and transformative processes (reflection; interpretation and remembering; integration of values and/or knowledge; attitude change and acquisition of habits; behavioural change upon return), which have been illustrated as dimensions of a proposed conceptual model that can help structure future analyses of transformative tourism experiences. As such, this study also contradicts the idea of a specific peak episode to be the sole antecedent of tourist transformation. Instead, it supports the occurrence of complex, contextual stimuli (caused by the liminality, cultural shock and challenges of the destination context) across a journey and stay, which may have different subjective intensities and may or may not achieve lasting attitudinal and/or behavioural change.

The analysis has thrown light on how these stimuli create a sense of fragmentation and heightened consciousness in tourists, who reflect, recollect and interpret the experience in relation to their self (self-directed interpretation) and/or the world (outward interpretation). From the discussion, an issue emerged regarding the lack of consensus on whether reflection, an essential phase for meaning making and tourist transformation, takes place mostly during or after the tourism experience, and whether different reflective processes affect the nature of transformation. The integration of beliefs and knowledge changes the tourists' attitude towards these new perspectives which, however, may remain latent and vanish unless reinforced. If reinforced, temporary habits and attitude change towards destination attributes can become long-term behavioural transformation at home, such as changing to new practices, e.g. pro-environmental behaviour, or life-changing actions, e.g. career re-evaluations or interpersonal changes. While habits assumed during holidays have been explored previously by literature on tourist embodiment and performance, they had not been analysed in terms of changing long-term behaviour. The same can be argued for attitude change. Both constructs of habits and attitudes help us further understand how the integration of practices, values and knowledge can lead to permanent behavioural transformation.

The present study also provides tourism operators and destination marketers with useful insights on how to better position tourism experiences as opportunities to generate uplifting change for greater well-being. Our conceptual model suggests that practitioners should highlight the transformative values tourists can gain through travelling, when devising a strategy for positioning their destination or company brand. Destination management is encouraged to curate its uniqueness, enhancing the awareness of the liminoid dimension of the destination setting, by promoting experiences of extra-ordinary natural sites and outstanding elements of local lifestyle (e.g. traditions, food, etc.); to increase the chance of encounters with local residents, which could be effected through peer-to-peer tour guiding or home stays; and to elicit tourists' consciousness towards their embodied experiences through flow activities. To encourage such change of values and to reinforce it, the role and function of mementos and souvenirs, or even ongoing communication between hosts and guests via social media might need to be reconsidered.

Tourism practitioners should help tourists reinforce their learning and participation in local activities, and provide visitors with opportunities for reflection and interpretation of their experience, both in relation to their self and the world. To do so, peak episodes and disorienting dilemmas could be encouraged, and followed up by slow-paced activities in natural settings, spiritual retreats, etc. This would also help position tourism and travelling as a tool to promote happiness and wellbeing both at an individual and societal level.

The limitations of this study relate to the study hermeneutic methodology which may not cover all contingencies of transformation. The interpretation of the existing literature and the expansion of the conceptualisation to other specific theories was based on the shared knowledge and interpretations of the three authors and therefore remains subjective. However, the study provides a discussion of higher order theories in addition to exemplary experiential research on transformative tourism to illustrate the transformative process, as well as mid-level theory that could support hypothesis testing based on the four propositions on transformation.

Future research needs to consider sociodemographic factors (e.g. gender, age, length of travel, travel companions, etc.) and different types of destinations (e.g. nature settings, city, rural destination; domestic or long haul holiday destinations) to help tourism operators and marketers understand which services can promote and achieve transformative tourist experiences. As existing literature on transformative tourism is theoretical or based on interviews, further research is particularly recommended to also engage in multi- or post-disciplinarity (Hollinshead, 2016), and to use empirical approaches and critical methodologies that engage in reflexivity, such as ethnographic longitudinal studies and memory-work, in order to deeply identify the specific components of tourist transformation processes and contribute to the ongoing conceptualisation of transformative tourism.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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