The impact of travel blogging on the tourist experience:

An e-ethnographic investigation

Marie-Christine Thurm

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Max Spotti

Department of Communication and Information Science

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Abstract

The globalized age of modernity is characterized by fluid and complex movements, as stated by Bauman (2010). The changes of this era might influence the way people travel and write about their experiences. Since the appearance of travel blogs is increasing, it is necessary to analyse the effects this dynamic genre has on the tourism experience. The present research aims to find out how the tourist experience process, introduced by Aho (2001), is influenced through blogging. The data is collected from interviews with professional information providers as well as leisure bloggers and their blog discourses which refer to the Netherlands as a destination. It was found that blogging makes the tourist experience more intense. First, during the pre-trip, the preparation stage, tourists had access to more personalized information and gained independence; yet, trust in the provided information is crucial for a successful preparation in this context. Secondly, the reporting process during the trip is quicker, influenced by reader and community, destinations were perceived more attentively and evaluations seem to become more explicit. The blogosphere was found to be a motivating factor; however, in some cases the informants felt stressed. Finally, within the post-trip experiencing authenticity was analysed. Mostly, a constructive and existential authenticity perception, concentrating on the authentic self could be observed. The fluidity of these different stages of the trip supports that blogging is an embodiment of rapid social change. Since the findings suggest an impact on the tourist experience and behaviour, the topic requires further research.

Keywords: travel blogs, tourist experience, travel preparation, reporting process, constructivist authenticity, existential authenticity, the Netherlands

1. Introduction

People have always been on the move; however their motivations differ over time. Conquering, fighting, finding salvation, being a pilgrim or enlarging worldviews were the main goals of travelling during the last centuries. Not only travelling, but also the tradition of writing about travel trips has a long tradition (Shackley, 2006).When conquering the new world, colonial travel literature had a great impact because it let the reader create a certain image of the unknown territories. Imperial ideologies were spread and were the only accounts of life in the conquered countries (Pratt, 1992). A biased report of the experiences started early in history, excluding the perspective of non-western societies and the lower classes (Towner, 1995).

In the 17th century travelling was a part of the education for young men of higher classes. Reports of these "Grand Tours" were published and started to form cultural practices of tourism (Inglis, 2000). The tours were very time-consuming and expensive. The common practice of writing down one's travel experience helped to justify the expense of the trip by providing an informative account to those who stayed at home, and these memoirs formed an intrinsic part of the experience. Tourism pioneers felt the urge to express, compare and to evaluate their different experiences (Steward, 2005).

With the first signs of industrialization an important change in lifestyle began. Rapid economic growth and new technologies increased opportunities and made travelling easier. Relaxation became a motivation for travelling too, - first as a luxury for the higher class and subsequently also for the middle class. In the post war period after 1945 there was a 'take off' of tourism activity in the Western world; more industrial development and a technological revolution changed peoples' way of travelling at a high pace (Lickorish & Jenkins, 1997). The press was an important feature of tourism, promoting travel as a common and natural activity of the middle class. Writers started to specialize on travel literature, helping the reader to make decisions about their destination. Travel journalists provided different travel choices by

writing about their preferences and thus expressing their ideal individual identity. Through the provision of this role model for tourism, these travel journalists also contributed to the identity formation of their reader (Steward, 2005).

With the advent of the internet, computer mediated communication quickly became very popular, changing tourism practices again. "The internet empowered the 'new' type of tourist to become more knowledgeable and to seek exceptional value for money and time" (Buhalis, 2001, p.75). As the internet facilitated the process of globalization, tourism became increasingly more flexible by providing individualized and up-to-date information (Buhalis, 2001).

For Bauman (2010), travelling is distinctive for the age of modernity. He defines the modern world as liquid because it is continuously moving and changing. People are constantly on the move. They are prepared to be flexible and strive to collect information about what is going to happen next. In this regard, the internet is salient; it provides information that is always available. The perception of a fluid modernity is also recognized by Appadurai (1996). For him, modernity means a radical transformation: "The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models (…)."(Appadurai, 1996, p. 32). He claims that the modern world is too complex to use simple models; instead he uses dimensions of cultural flow with the suffix 'scape'. These scapes underline the flowing and irregular character of modern landscapes; they can be constantly reconfigured. One of the five scapes are 'technoscapes', which describe a new global configuration caused by the movement technologies bring. Through technologies people are able to cross previously closed boundaries and move at a faster pace.

The availability of relevant information that can be found online is striking, especially in the tourism industry (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). However, the data overload that emerged when new technologies became popular, possibly makes it challenging to decide if

information is valuable and authentic (Bauman, 2010). Bauman (2010) claims that in the current society the quantity of connections is more important than their quality. In his book *Wasted Lives* (2004) he underlines this perception by claiming that everything, both material and immaterial goods, are replaceable in the fluidity of modernity and only used for a short period of time.

Identities of modern people strive to be disposable at any time and the internet fulfils this need (Bauman, 2010). A key role of the internet is recording and updating peoples' memories immediately. In this regard, the question comes up how to decide if reality in all these reports is represented correctly. The huge amount of information makes authentic experience descriptions very valuable (Oxman, 2011). Poster (2001) states that culture is currently highly influenced by technology, which creates a virtual reality. This new way of existing is a combination of the imaginary with reality, which results in the creation of new forms of experiences and identities. The fact that online people are often anonymous can change the way one communicates. It became more important to represent the online personality as real and the written text as true and trustworthy. Identities online are not fixed, they depend among other things on the audience to whom they are writing. For example, people who write blogs perceive themselves as publishers, depending on the community who reads and builds the blog (Rak, 2005).

Apart from the perceived difficulty to decide between imaginary and reality, recording memories online is also seen in a positive light. Treanor (2009) explains that before archives were digitalized, collective memories were controlled more by the government. Today, internet users have the power to record their contents as well: they create their own archive, for example an online diary. It is an accessible conduit for sharing opinions and experiences with the rest of the world and a way that everyone can read about each other's perception of reality (Treanor, 2009).

In postmodern[1] times the internet responses to changing human needs. According to Davenport and Beck (2001), for postmodern societies, individualism and the freedom of choices play a significant role. In this generation people feel a strong need to interact through online communication media. This generation is described by Davenport and Beck with the book "The Attention Economy". Simultaneously with the trend of individualization, a need to be seen and recognized by others got stronger. In addition, people's perspectives tend to be short term and they desire to consume immediately. These needs can be fulfilled easily through new communication media, for example blogs. Online communities that give users a sense of belonging became popular and personalized websites are common, for example when informing about travel recommendations (Davenport & Beck, 2001). Online travel communities like Tripadvisor.com give tourists the possibility to interact with each other through writing and reviewing recommendations. Beyond the mere consumption of information, they have the ability to actively produce it themselves, and in doing so they provide independent information from commercial providers. Word-of-mouth information is powerful as it is regarded as very trustworthy. Recorded electronic-word-of-mouth, such as tripadvisor.com, is even more powerful compared to the ephemeral character of traditional word-of-mouth, which only reaches friends and family. Electronic-word-of-mouth presents new unpredictable dynamics on the tourism market since online recommendations or discussions spread instantly and have the ability to rapidly impact the tourism industry (Pan, Goldsmith & Litvin, 2008). In addition to the need to belong to an online community, the need to have memorable experiences got stronger. By taking a look back in history, we can see that economic values continuously changed. First beginning with an agrarian economy which concentrated on commodities, then the economy got industrialized and valued on goods or services. In postmodern times, one's experience is the main economic value. Pine and

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[1] Post-modernity is the era this thesis focuses on. It is understood here as a period beginning in the late 1970s. It is difficult to define this term in a consistent and clear way due to the unstable nature of this period of time. It is understood here not as a clear movement, but more as intellectual perspective, which draws on different movements such as post-structuralism Yilmaz (2010).

Gilmore (1999) define this new economy as 'Experience Economy'. The needs of consumers have changed, and they now strive to experience memorable events that are personally engaging. In short, experiences are considered to be more important than material objects. This is especially relevant in more developed countries where people have already reached their basic needs and therefore can begin to devote more of their time to focusing on self-actualization (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Thus, both experiencing tourism and sharing these experiences are valuable activities in postmodern societies.

This is supported by the fact that the appearance of blogs continues to increase, according to BlogPulse and Technorati the number of blogs in 2004 was 3 million and increased to 164 million in 2011. Out of all the various blogging subjects, travel blogs have an important position. In 2008, the topic of travel was reported to be the ninth most important subject, representing 28% of all blogs (Bosangit, Dulnuan, & Mena, 2012).

The e-revolution has affected tourism. As will be shown in the following chapters, the influence of this relatively new and highly dynamic blog genre which tells the experience of the tourist has not been researched enough to date. The fluid, unpredictable dynamics that came up in the age of postmodernity make an in-depth, qualitative study of blogs appropriate. Hence, the aim of this study is to find out how travel blogs influence the blog users, both writers and readers in the process of how they experience travel. Because of the physical location of the researcher and in order to compare results more easily, the Netherlands were chosen as the travel destination. A main research focus and three sub questions are formulated:

How does the tourist experience in the Netherlands change through blogs and the blogging activities that tourists do?

Q1: How does the process of travel preparation change through blogging in comparison with other information services?

Q2: How does the reporting process of the tourist experience change through blogging in comparison with offline procedures?

Q3: How does the process of the tourist experiencing authenticity change through blogging in comparison with offline procedures?

Through these questions the study aims for achieving a better understanding of how travellers perceive their experiences in the Netherlands. The point of view from professional tourism information services will help to answer the first research question. By finding out how these agents experience the boom of blogs, additional insights into the processes of how tourists build knowledge and prepare are expected. Furthermore, the perspectives of the community of bloggers, pertaining to all three sub-questions will help to give a better understanding of how travellers' behaviours and experiences are changed

2. The semantics of travel and blogging

The word blog has its origins in the word weblog (Myers, 2010). Four forms of this term are part of this research. The word **blog** is used to describe the website on which the blogging discourse takes place, comparable to the pages of a book. The **blogger** is the author, the person who writes the blog and therefore creates the main content. **Blogging** will be referred to as the activity of writing a blog, or interacting on blogs, and it will be regarded as a means through which communication takes place, for example among community members. In the context of the already described phenomenon of globalization, blogging is regarded as an embodiment of rapid social change. In addition, the term **blogosphere,** the community of bloggers, will appear in this research. What follows now is an explanation of the semantics that are part of this thesis.

2.1 Travellers and tourists

The distinction between travellers and tourists has a long tradition in tourism literature. Cohen (1979) for example describes different modes of travelling, which range from the tourists' search for pleasure to the travellers' search for meaningful experiences.

Furthermore, Galani-Moutafi (2000) explains that both tourists and travellers move beyond their geographic boundaries, although their journey practices differ. Travellers from the Victorian era were driven by the motivation to reach self-realization and to learn about new places and cultures. Distinguishing the familiar and the foreign, they discovered more about themselves. With the rise of mass tourism the motivations for travel have changed.

As Rojek (1993) says, tourists are presented as unadventurous persons without own initiative who aim to confirm their world view instead of using the opportunity to transform it. The goal often is to witness something and get a record of it, a proof of actually having lived a certain experience, for example by taking photos (Rojek, 1993).

Boorstin (1963) clarifies that the focus of the tourists does not lie on exploring something new anymore; "we look into a mirror instead of out a window, and we see only ourselves" (Boorstin, 1963, p. 125). Tourists are supposed to look increasingly more for what they expect to encounter and will often buy into premade attractions and experiences (Boorstin, 1963). Commodification of culture in this context means that through mass tourism human culture is turned into a commodity (Cole, 2007).

Feifer (1985) explains another type of tourist, called the post-tourist. Different to the previous tourist definition, post-tourists are aware of the lack of authenticity the experiences have, e.g. when staying at a tropical beach post-tourists are aware that they are not considered locals and remain as outsiders. Post-tourists however find pleasure in the inauthenticity and appreciate living differently for a period of time, away from the routine of everyday life. This kind of tourist not necessarily has to leave the house in order to see the world. Through the Internet the traveller is able to gaze at tourist sites at any time and from anywhere. In line with

Feifer (1985), Urry and Larsen (2011) refer to the postmodern traveller, claiming that the authentic gaze has lost its importance. According to Urry (1994) tourists do not see travelling as social practice separated from daily life anymore. He argues that there is no clear definition of tourist practices: "Tourism is no longer a differentiated set of social practices with its own and distinct rules, times and spaces" (Urry, 1994, p.234).

Moreover, according to Azariah (2012b), there is a distinction made between tourism and travel in terms of writing. These discourses are often seen as conflicting. Travel writing is described as very personal and picaresque; for example, the author presents himself as a hero who survives dangerous travel adventures. Whereas tourism discourse tends to provide an impersonal, factual or even commercial language, for example the verbiage found in tourism advertisements. Azariah (2012b) argues that through giving a website the title 'blog' the audience expects to receive travel discourse. The travel discourse therefore is perceived to be an intrinsic quality of blogs (Azariah, 2012b).

2.2 The blog genre

As said by Myers (2010), people have been used to reading narrations with clear structures and definitions. Blogs do not have these restrictions of most traditional texts. They include a high degree of intertextuality; in addition, time and space are given new meanings, making the analysis very complex. Nevertheless, blogs can be defined as a genre of writing. This genre was found in 1995; however, a revolutionary use started only six years later in 2001. According to Myers (2010) Pitas and Pyra blogging software was invented in 1999, giving all web users access to create blogs. People wrote blogs, usually in a reverse chronological order, for all sorts of uses, for example as a personal diary, or as a review or for posting photos or recipes. Thus, blogs are less defined by their content and more by the way they are used (Myers, 2010). Through the comment function users get the possibility to interact actively with each other. This means that the way people construct their social identities and communities defines what belongs to the blog genre. The members of these communities do

not only read each other's texts, but they also engage through comments and linking with each other. The community therefore builds and partly owns the blog genre. Different to a newspaper article the blog normally does not address a broad public audience; it is more often written for people who share the same interests (Myers, 2010).

Blogs without people are void; they are only an empty space. That is why the blogger, who provides the main content, plays a vital role.

2.3 The travel blogger

Most blogs are written by private authors as a hobby, but commercial or political purposes also can be a reason to blog. When the power of blogs became obvious, some blogs emerged that seemed to be written by a private, authentic person, but actually were produced by groups or organizations (Gunter, 2009).

When writing a blog with the theme 'travel', it typically begins with the experience of visiting another place, which is important for creating the contents of the blog. According to Aho (2001), travelling gives the possibility to fulfil a lot of different human needs: improving health through relaxation, socializing, learning new things, getting aesthetic impressions as well as prestige and self-realization. Aho (2001) summarizes these reasons. The tourist experience is based on four core motivations: the emotional experience, meaning to gather emotional impressions; the informative experience, getting new intellectual impressions; the practice experience, e.g. improving skills; and the transformation experience, changing the travellers' mindset. These four phenomena are supposed to appear in every tourist experience, although to varying degrees (Aho, 2001).

Some travellers read blogs, interact through comments with each other or even decide to write down their experiences. A study of Chung and Buhalis (2008) reveals the three main reasons why people engage in online travel communities. Information acquisition as well as socio-psychological and hedonistic reasons make people interact in a travel community. Information acquisition and the sharing of experiences were found to be the main elements in

their study and are determining factors in the participation and the attitudes of users. Chung and Buhalis (2008) add that information research especially in tourism is important, because travel related products are intangible and therefore difficult to assess by the traveller before the visit. Consequently, a more detailed information search has to be done in advance (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). Here, blogs play an essential role, since the blogging community benefits from sharing information and opinions, perceiving blogs to be more credible than the traditionally impersonal tourist information. In addition, for a lot of people a reason to write a blog is to stay in contact with friends and family during the trip and thereby inviting them to be part of the traveller's own experience (Banyai & Havitz, 2013).

Bosangit et al. (2012) analyze the post consumption behaviour of travel bloggers. They clarify the benefits tourists have after an experience has taken place. The blog is a platform to reflect on experiences and by remembering and evaluating the experience, it becomes enriched. The analysis of blog texts, which were dealing with stories of risks and challenges, revealed that self-presentation and identity construction are important purposes of travel blogging (Bosangit et al., 2012). In this regard, the community concept is an essential element of motivation for the bloggers.

2.3 Online communities and the blogosphere

Green and Haddon (2009) researched mobile communication. They explain that people decide on the kind of communication technology they wish to use, among other things, this depends upon the relationship they have with the interlocutor. Accordingly, different technologies are used to mediate different types of social relationships. When computer mediated communication became popular, scientists wanted to explore how the nature of relationships would change. Before, a community was often described as a relatively small group of people defined by close ties, transparent reasons, and trust (Green & Haddon, 2009). Yet, there is the opinion that communities are only imagined, since for example in a community of a nation, most members have never seen each other (Anderson, 2006). Green and Haddon (2009) show

that for online communities, new definitions are needed. New communication technologies were claimed to be based on individualism. Time and distance lost importance and made it more difficult to define a community. On the other hand, the loss of social capital is questioned, seeing online communities in a more positive light. Internet activities are embedded many peoples' normal day-to-day life and are able to strengthen social ties more easily though textual communication. Social communication processes became very flexible and better coordinated (Green & Haddon, 2009). The flexibility of communities online can be described with the term 'groupness', defined by Brubaker (2004) as a basic concept of post-modernity. Instead of understanding groups as whole, stable entities, often bounded to ethnicity, groupness has a fluent character. Groupness is not something given, but rather an event that is just happening. Given this, it is possible to account for moments of intense group interactions and high degrees of groupness; therefore social dynamics and mobilization are increasing in times of globalization (Brubaker, 2004).

Online and offline interactions show similarities, yet the main difference is that online there is a lack of physical presence and members do not necessarily know each other face-to-face. An online community is defined to consist of four main features as follows: there are people striving to satisfy their social needs; there is a shared purpose, for instance a common interest; there are policies, like certain rules to guide the interactions; and there are computer systems, mediating and facilitating the interaction (Preece, 2000).

One of these online communication systems is formed by blogs, which create a community called a blogosphere. In the blogosphere, linking and comment functions support the creation of dense and dynamic networks where information and personal matters are exchanged. However, it is difficult to define the blogosphere as a public sphere. It is perhaps better thought of as a set of multiple publics that have their own discussions about common topics of interest (Myers, 2010). Indeed, in the blogosphere, the distinction between private and public spheres is difficult to define. During the last years the number of readers and

writers has increased rapidly. Therefore, one could think that blogs are developing in direction to a mass-medium, read by a huge amount of people. On the other hand, a lot of blogs have been abandoned and the majority of blogs have a relatively small amount of readers, consisting often only of their private circle of acquaintances (Perseus, 2003). Although the blogosphere has to be taken seriously, it was found that sometimes the expected effects are not reached. It is important to rethink old definitions of 'public' and 'private' in this context. Blogs, which are meant to be private, can become public and public blogs can contain more personalized information (Gunter, 2009).

As said by Nardi, Schiano, and Gumbrecht (2004), in the blogosphere, people do not only create text, they create a social world. Unlike private diaries, blogs are made of social activity; the blog influences the reader and the reader influences the blog. Nardi et al. (2004) explore the motivations that bloggers have, in relation to the community. They found that bloggers usually want to update their readers on a topic and express opinions in order to influence them. At the same time they are seeking others' influence and feedback. Moreover, blogging for many people means a new way to express feelings. Hence, social and emotional needs are important reasons to participate actively in the blogosphere. In the case of the travel blogosphere, bloggers have the advantage to keep in contact with family and friends who stayed at home in an easy way (Nardi, Schiano & Gumbrecht, 2004).

Chung and Buhalis (2008) add that, besides staying in touch with others, the travellers' goal is to interact with people who have similar interests and lifestyles. Additionally, the aim in this case of a travel community is to reduce the uncertainty and risk a travel trip might bring. If the need of information acquisition is fulfilled, members tend to have a more positive attitude towards the blog and participate more. In turn, the high participation leads users to write more valuable content, making the blog more attractive (Chung & Buhalis, 2008).

3. Conceptual framework

In order to explain the transformations of the tourist experience process, I will explain two models of Aho (2001) about the tourist experience. Further literature dealing with the different stages of the experience process will be presented, embedding the models into an online context.

3.1 The tourist experience

Aho (2001) mentions personal resources a tourist should have in order to receive touristic experiences in an intense way. Often the factors time and money are mentioned as crucial in this context. Still, there are other personal resources a person can make use of in order to achieve a rich touristic experience. For example, according to Aho (2001) one resource is the knowledge background of a tourist which helps him or her to find relevant information and therefore available experiences before travelling. After an experience has taken place the knowledge background influences the evaluation. Another resource is formed by the social networks a person possesses and which support anticipation and sharing of experienced events. In addition, a personal resource he mentions is the skill to approach and contribute to a touristic experience, for example when a traveller who dares to do something new is supposed to have a more intense experience. Certain attitudes of a traveller, like being open-minded, help to experience new and unexpected things. These mentioned personal resources have a dynamic structure, thus partly influence each other. The intensity of the different resources has the potential to influence the intensity of the travel experience (Aho, 2001).

Besides this model of personal resources, the strength of a touristic experience is explained by a seven-staged model of the tourist experience. The experience process of a journey is defined by Aho (2001) with seven different stages, taking place before, during and after a journey:

The pre-trip phase includes the stages orientation and attachment, meaning that interest leads to a go-decision. In this phase expectations are created which influence later evaluations

of the trip. After that, the trip itself follows, thus the actual visit that builds the source of the tourist experience. The post-trip includes the evaluation of the trip, like a conclusion of the visit or comparisons to earlier experiences. This stage is followed by the storing of experience, which results for example in diaries or messages or souvenirs. Storing provides the basis for the last two stages. Increasing the strength of an experience the stage reflection is important. This can happen in a private space or in wider social arenas. Larger audiences can benefit from the reflections of a traveller, using them as an inspiration for own travelling, for example interfering at the stage of orientation. The last stage is called enrichment. It means on the one hand the internal and on the other hand the external enrichment, e.g. by giving presentation of films, establishing networks or continuing with new practices learned during the visit. Not every tourist experience passes through each of the seven stages and the degree of intensity can vary. However, reaching further stages of the model can indicate the strength of an experience. For example, tourists' desire to repeat the experience is predicted by what they remember, thus by the post-trip (Aho, 2001).

In this study, I will explore in which way travel blogs impact travel experiences. Blogs can have influence at each stage of this model. Therefore, the three research questions will be structured around the experience process stages of Aho's model. However, the stages are not regarded as fixed categories. According to Ek, Larsen, Hornskov and Mansfeldt (2008), it is more adequate to have a dynamic view on the tourist experience. They suggest that it is necessary to research pre-trip, trip and post-trip, including a dynamic perception of time and space. Thus, the stages will give a structure to the thesis, but should not be regarded as fixed. Tourists can move back and forth during the experience process. Therefore, I find it more appropriate to understand the trip as an experience that is made of several 'pre-experiences', 'experiences' and 'post-experiences'. The following model caters for the fact that the preparation can occur during the trip, and also remembering and reflection of experiences for instance can happen already during the trip, directly after an experience and not only after

coming home from the trip. Therefore, the pre-experience can be understood as a pre-trip, extending into the trip and the post-experience as a post-trip, starting already during the trip.
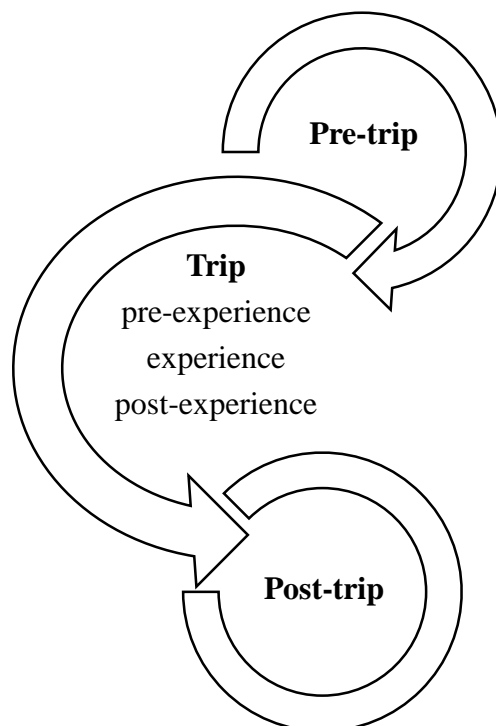

Figure 1 *The structure of the tourist experience*

The model should be understood as a flexible timeline, but does not show mutual influences of the different phases.

3.2 The process of building knowledge during the pre-trip

Research question one, exploring how the process of knowledge building has changed through travel blogging, corresponds to the pre-trip of Aho (2001). First, the concept of the 'tourist gaze' by Urry and Larsen (2011) is presented in order to explain what happens in the tourists' mind during the pre-trip. Secondly, the tourist gaze is put into the context of blogs and the relevance of blogs in terms of knowledge building is highlighted.

As 'tourist gaze' Urry and Larsen (2011) describe how people perceive their tourist experience and how important the time before the trip is. When going to a new place, people tend to look with interest and curiosity at what they encounter. Instead of only looking at the

world that surrounds them, they gaze at it. This way of gazing at new things during the holidays is socially constructed. For example, the way tourists perceive a sight is not only determined by the intrinsic properties of the sight, but also by a lot of other factors, like the experiences someone had before or by the expert literature they read about it beforehand.

Hence, there is no objective way of seeing. Instead, it is always impacted by what an individual knew and believed before (Berger, 1972). In the current age, expectations are constructed by mobile images and new technologies for instance (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Through the use of technology the tourist experience can be repeated anytime by gazing at it from the screen. Urry (1994) claims that since the tourist gaze became part of our culture, the distinctiveness of this gaze gets lost. People are always tourists, even though they only experience simulated mobility (Urry, 1994). Urry and Larsen (2011) state that through the different perspectives or different knowledge sources, offered over the Internet, the tourist gaze gets extended and therefore 'democratized'.

Blogs seem to play an important role in this democratization of knowledge. There are several studies which underline that blogs support the tourists' knowledge gathering and therefore build the tourist gaze. Brady (2005) found that blogs tend to rank particularly high when looking at the results of search engines, since websites that are linked to and updated frequently are usually shown favourably. Furthermore, blogs are important in terms of knowledge building because they are used to filter information. Collections of information about a certain topic are shown with links to related relevant information, excluding irrelevant data (Brady, 2005).

Indeed, web 2.0 has an important influence on the tourist gaze. A study of Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts (2007) shows that travel communities are powerful, exchanging manifestations of experiences. They can influence how people perceive a certain place by writing in a positive or negative way on a travel blog.

Zehrer, Crotts, and Magnini (2011) as well demonstrate that travel blogs have a strong influence on the reader when it comes to the creation of anticipation. The findings of their study suggest that multiple perspectives on the tourist experience are very useful for the user. Positive as well as negative comments were regarded as helpful since they gave the user an image of the destination that appeared to be more trustworthy.

Wang (2012) analysed in which ways blogs influence travellers and how the process of knowledge building in the pre-stage of a trip influences the trip itself. The results suggest that three factors have a strong impact on how a destination is perceived, and therefore on the likelihood of going to a certain place. Blogs often build affective images, creating emotional identification that motivates users to visit the destination. They create cognitive images, e.g. providing guidelines and knowledge for other travellers. Finally, the fact that blogs facilitate social interactions was found to be significant as well. Through the interpersonal contact, members of the blogosphere influence each other.

During the process of knowledge building decisions regarding the destination and activities are made. According to Arsal, Woosnam, Baldwin, and Backman (2010) the blogosphere clearly has an influence on these decisions. Especially experienced travellers are very influential when it comes to information gathering, about accommodation or transportation for instance.

The pre-trip stage determines how the trip will be experienced and evaluated. According to the Expectancy Disconfirmation Paradigm, travellers are satisfied if the expectations they created beforehand are met (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2001). So, the knowledge that is gathered on blogs has an influence on the contents that are reported during the trip.

3.3 The reporting process during the trip

Research question two, dealing with the change of the reporting process through blogs, refers in this study to the tourist trip, thus the actual trip. Since bloggers usually write and start to evaluate the experience during the trip, also the stage the evaluation will be part of the second

research question. In order to analyse the reporting process, it is necessary to explore the context in which blogging takes place and the possibilities this medium has to offer. Moreover, concepts regarding content and style of blogs will be presented.

When analysing the reporting process, one should be aware that smart-phones with integrated cameras as well as computers with wireless connection in hotels offer a lot of possibilities to update a travel blog. Hence, the reporting process can take place easily during the trip (Ek et al., 2008).

As said by Karlsson (2006), a blog normally contains two interactive dimensions. The crossblog interactivity makes communication across blogs possible, e.g. through linking, whereas the in-site interactivity directly takes place on the blog, e.g. through comments. He explains that these conversational spaces make personal online diaries immediately accessible for an audience. Looking at the publishing process of diaries in the offline world, there is a huge time lag between production and consumption of the contents, which makes it difficult to get inspired by contemporary texts. In contrast, on blogs, where posts are published instantaneous, "the acts of reading and writing feed into each other in a spiraling way" (Karlsson, 2006, p.302). Thus, the acts of production and consumption are very close to each other. Bloggers can have direct access to the contents of other bloggers and inspire each other. The act of writing is not an individual process anymore. Karlsson (2006) argues that the construction of a community is salient; bloggers have the reader in mind and write for specific audiences.

Moreover, the readers' influence on the reporting process is studied by Miura and Yamashita (2007). Exploring the psychological and social influences on blog writing, they found that positive feedback was crucial for the blogger as a motivation to keep on writing.

During a travel trip, people make sense of what they experience. This sense making happens implicitly or explicitly, when questioning the own interpretations (Woodside, 2011). Colt (2011) researched on blogs of city travellers about sense-making in the tourism context.

As explained in the previous chapter, the interpretation of an experience is influenced by the tourist gaze created before the trip. According to Colt (2011), certain myths are associated with a destination; a city might be known to be exciting and luxurious for instance. The traveller has to decide how to deal with the myth in relation to the own experience. Colt (2011) found that the travellers were interacting with the iconic myth and their interpretation of the experience in their own way. They can publish their experiences with the myth in the blog, condensing the experiences through deciding what actually is memorable and worth to write down.

In order to find out differences in content and style of traditional travel reports and blogs, Koivunen (2011) is comparing a travelogue from 1832 and a blog report from 2002 about the same destination, analysing how these tourists make meaning out of their experiences. The content of the two travel stories differs, mainly due to the changes in the tourism practices over time. Furthermore, the writing styles differ: the older travel story is full of detailed information about nature and history whereas the blogger concentrated on writing about the life of the local communities. There are also similarities between the texts, for instance they both construct the image of an adventurous traveller and show their identity through the travel report. This analysis concentrated on the content and style (Koivunen, 2011).

As said by Azariah (2012a), when tourists are writing down their experiences in a blog, they use different writing techniques and voices. In travel blogs a variety of different narratives styles can be found, also the negotiation between the travel and tourism discourse is different among blogs. Therefore, she proposes a flexible definition of the blog discourse (Azariah, 2012a). In order to cater for this flexibility Azariah (2012a) uses an approach which is introduced by Lomborg (2009), defining the reporting style with a set of parameters on a continuous scale. She proposes a framework which includes communicative qualities and social uses of blogs. Blogs are classified according to three dimensions: content (internal –

topical), directionality (monological – dialogical) and style (intimate – objective). During the writing process bloggers seem to negotiate between internal content, like personal thoughts and feelings and on the other hand topical content, describing the world around the blogger. Referring to directionality, the blog is used monological, as a means through which self-expression is transferred or dialogical, highly networked and written in a conversational style. The third dimension, style, refers to the tone the blog is written in, moving between an intimate style, including confessions and personal information and on the other hand an objective tone with factual descriptions or expert statements (Lomborg, 2009).

3.4 Construction of authenticity during the post-trip

Research question number three, exploring the change of authenticity construction through travel blogs, refers to the post-trip, which includes the stages storing, reflection and enrichment. Understanding the post-trip as a post-experience, the researcher underlines that this stage can also happen during the trip itself. In this chapter, concepts that explain the meaning of authenticity in tourism will be shown. Since the focus of the thesis lies in the perspective of the tourists, their subjective perceptions will help to explain the meaning of authenticity. Furthermore, several concepts that deal with the construction of authenticity on the blog will be presented below.

Blommaert and Varis (2011) explain that authenticity is related to 'enoughness'. After having 'enough' features which are regarded as typical and pivotal for a certain type of identity or place, authenticity is reached. Accordingly, to be identified as 'real' or 'authentic', reaching a certain benchmark is required. A set of essential characteristics, the 'active substances', have to be present in the right dose in order to categorize something as authentic. Hence, subjective judgments of enoughness determine authenticity (Blommaert & Varis, 2011). Here, enoughness is regarded as an umbrella concept for the following thoughts about authenticity.

Despite the perception that the modern tourist has inauthentic experiences, as discussed before in chapter 2.1, tourists are still searching for authenticity according to MacCannell (1973). Authenticity is believed to be found especially in other historical times and cultures, when lifestyles were simpler. Therefore, sightseeing of historical attractions is very popular among tourists. Although the tourist experience is motivated by authenticity, it is very difficult to examine if an experience has been authentic or not. MacCannell (1973) speaks of 'staged authenticity', referring to special places that are designed to fulfil tourists' needs of an authentic experience. Such 'fake' authenticity means that hosts adapt the region to the expectations tourists have of that specific region and as a result provide an inauthentic experience (MacCannell, 1973). This interpretation of authenticity refers to objects and their inherent authenticity. Yet, in this research, the peoples' perspective will be analysed. Therefore, MacCannell (2008) article is more to the point: in this clarification of his older work he states that, no matter if objects are authentic or not, authenticity depends on how people perceive these objects psychologically.

In order to understand the perspective of the tourists better, other concepts have to be added. Cohen (1988) explains another concept, which is a constructivist understanding of authenticity. He suggests that authenticity has to be perceived rather as a fluid concept, which is socially constructed and depends on personal perceptions. Therefore, it cannot be measured objectively. The individual tourist keeps deciding if something is authentic or not. Fluid in this regard means that tourists negotiate what they experience as authentic, for example what is classified as inauthentic first, can become authentic over time.

Klitgaard Povlsen (2010) makes a connection between constructivist authenticity and the tourist gaze. An authentic experience is supposed to depend on expectations, own beliefs, preferences and gathered knowledge of a person. The image a person creates of a place before visiting it impacts the perception of authenticity. In turn, experiencing a destination as

authentic constructs the authenticity of the next object the tourist gazes at (Klitgaard Povlsen, 2010).

Mkono (2012) researched on constructive authenticity in relation to the way tourists evaluate their experiences. The study showed that tourists have a fluid perception of authenticity, changing their opinions easily. It was established that there is not a fixed reality but a reality existent in the subjects mind, influenced by the social processes surrounding the individual tourist. This changeability confirms the concept of constructive authenticity and the impressions of a commodified culture.

According to Rak (2005), the anonymity of cyberspace can make it difficult to verify identities and therefore many bloggers find it especially important to present themselves as real and emphasize the trustworthiness of their stories. To be part of an online community they have to overcome anonymity and strive for authenticity (Rak, 2005). Although it seems to be difficult to verify the authenticity of a blog, the credibility of blogs was rated higher than the information of traditional media because on blogs people are more likely to disclose opinions in a true and unbiased manner (Johnson & Kaye, 2004).

Thus, authenticity is not only an important aspect of the experience of the tourists, but also appears to be crucial in their travel blog posts. McNeill (2003) researched on the online diary. Compared to an offline report a blog has other possibilities to create authenticity. Texts can be enriched by multimedia through posting photos or videos for example. Through hypertexts bloggers can show the whole context they are talking about and are able to underline that their blog is based on truth. In this way, reading blogs can be transformed into a three dimensional experience. In addition, McNeill (2003) stresses that immediate entries are often perceived as authentic because the blogger writes what first came to his or her mind and has no time to alter or improve the experienced event. Entries that are edited afterwards or published late seem to be less authentic. However, there is a contradiction: on the one hand,

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there is the reader, demanding an authentic text and on the other hand the blogger who strives to present an idealized version of the text and therefore the own identity (McNeill, 2003).

Blogging takes place in a disembodied environment, lacking in non-verbal cues which makes it difficult to evaluate the authenticity of the blogger. Thompson (2003) explains that the dialogue between blogger and audience is the basis for authenticity construction. Through textual communication authenticity is created over time.

Another measure to cater for authenticity on a blog Mkono (2012) found in the language. In the travel blogosphere often a typical tourism language is used, e.g. a picturesque, detailed language, attempting to visualize experiences. It was found that this tourism jargon was used to construct authenticity.

4. Methodology

According to Banyai and Glover (2011), it is essential to include more ethnographic research instead of concentrating on just one research method. A variety of methods should be used to understand the full potential of blogs. Mixed methods are essential to explore the true meanings tourists assign to their individual travel experiences.

In this regard, e-ethnography is a good method to explore culture online. Analysing blogs, researchers have the advantage of exploring their interactive nature, being able to lurk into dialogues which would not be possible offline. The natural occurring data of the blog discourse is considered to be a reliable source which gives a holistic picture. Culture and tourism can be examined in new ways. Nevertheless, researchers should not forget the relationship between online and offline environments. The digital experience and the offline experience should be both taken into account (Bosangit et al., 2012). Because of these findings mixed methods were applied. Interview analysis, observations as well as an analysis of blog discourse were done, including online and offline data collection.

First, around 50 people, including bloggers, journalists and agencies that were related to the Netherlands, were contacted via email or a comment on their blogs. In an individualized message the researcher presented herself and the aim of the study. Some of the informants wanted to conduct the interview via email. In these cases the researcher first started little personal conversations in the emails to establish a good atmosphere. About three questions were usually asked in one email. In this way, the interview could go on like a conversation and the researcher had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions. In other cases, the informants preferred to conduct a Skype interview. These semi-structured interviews were done with sound and videos on both sides. In addition, it was possible to conduct two face-to-face interviews. For the first one, the researcher went directly to the tourism office. The second face-to-face interview was collected on a fieldtrip to Amsterdam, where the researcher observed the main tourism information office and talked to several tourists in the city. During these conversations one blogger was found in a typical tourism area who agreed to be interviewed. Besides these interviews and field notes that were taken in Amsterdam, the blog posts about the Netherlands could give additional insights into the matter, especially for the third and second research question. This aspect of the methodology caters for additional reliability as the results can be drawn from different perspectives.

Most of the interviews have been conducted in English, with the exception of two interviews in Spanish and one in German in order to give the informants the possibility to express themselves in the language they feel most comfortable with.

To define the object of this study, the broad field of travel blogs was specified in order to collect comparable data. First, only interviewees and blogs dealing with the Netherlands as a destination were chosen due to the physical location of the researcher. Secondly, only blogs of people who stayed or were going to stay in the Netherlands for a short period of time were included, thus tourists who made vacation for some days or at most some weeks. Travellers who stayed longer, for reasons like working or studying have been collected for the study as

well, but were not included in the analysis. In this way the researcher could make sure that experiences they were writing about were based on a similar background, perceiving the country from a tourist perspective. However, the data of these excluded informants was observed in order to gain knowledge about underlying concepts of travel blogging. In addition, preferably blogs which have entries about the Netherlands which were posted during the current and previous year were chosen in order to concentrate on relatively current data. This is especially important in a fast changing environment as the blogosphere.

It became clear that the informants can be divided into three groups: professional information services existing online and offline, leisure bloggers who also have professional intentions and leisure blogger for whom blogging is only a hobby. The distinction between the two blogger groups was made during the data collection process, since there was observed a difference in blogging motivation, intention and writing skills. Another reason to differentiate the professional leisure blogger and leisure blogger is that the first group probably assigns more importance and reflection to their blogging activities than in the second group does. Therefore, it could be that there is a difference when it comes to the impact of blogging on the tourist experience. Despite having these groups it is not possible to assign their data clearly to the three research questions and consequently to the travel stages defined in the conceptual framework.

The data of the first group, the professional information services, was collected in order to gain insights into the preparation stage from an offline-based perspective. In order to analyse how the preparation stage changes through blogging, besides the tourist perspective, it is important to analyse the perspective of information services that have been existed already before blogging became popular. This data can show what the work of these agents looks like nowadays and the needs of tourists during the preparation can be explained better.

Table 1

First group

Informant	Label	Description	Data collection
Professional information service 1	P1	Tourist Office in Tilburg	Face-to-face interview
Professional information service 2	P2	Tourist Office in Amsterdam	E-mail interview + observations

The second group, consisting of bloggers who combine leisure blogging with professional intentions, stands out because they have other intentions than the leisure bloggers. They have good writing skills where they can make with. Informant LP1 and LP2 are journalists. However, their blogging activities have a different background: LP1 started with blogging and was so successful that she started to work as a free journalist. LP2 on the other hand started being a journalist for a travel magazine and then made the blog as an extension of his work and because of private interest. LP3 had a travel blog and liked blogging so much that he quit his job and now works as a negotiator between tourism agencies and tourists. Additionally, he started a second blog in order to have more room for different kinds of contents.

Table 2

Second group

Informant	Label	Description	Data collection
Leisure+professional blogger 1	LP1	Indian blogger who became free journalist	Skype interview + blog discourse
Leisure+professional blogger 2	LP2	German Journalist who started a blog	Skype interview + blog discourse

| Leisure+professional blogger 3 | LP3 | Spanish blogger who turned his blog into a business | E-mail interview + blog discourse |

The third group are the leisure bloggers, who blog as a hobby. Different to the previous group there is no connection between their blogging activities and earning money. This means that their engagement in the blogosphere is less intense and the fun of writing and interacting is salient.

Table 3

Third group

Informant	Label	Description	Data collection
Leisure blogger 1	L1	Spanish blogger living in Belgium	Skype interview + blog discourse
Leisure blogger 2	L2	Blogger from New Zealand	Skype interview + blog discourse
Leisure blogger 3	L3	Blogger from Singapore	E-mail interview + blog discourse
Leisure blogger 4	L4	Blogger from Canada met in Amsterdam during his Europe trip	Face-to-face interview
Leisure blogger 5	L5	Spanish blogger living in Africa	Skype interview + Blog discourse
		Spanish blogger living in Belgium	Skype interview + blog discourse

On the basis of grounded theory interviews, blogs discourse and field notes were analysed. Substantial statements were highlighted, summarized in comments and categorized. Through marking the statements in different colours they could be assigned to the three different research questions. Statements and screenshots from the blog post and the respective interview were combined in one document in order to make meaning out of the utterances people said and the blogging activities they were doing on their blogs. As a result, connections and differences between all informants could be detected.

5.   Results

5.1 The impact of blogging on the process of travel preparation

"Y desde luego pienso que los blogs de viaje si dan información que encuentras en la web y son las nuevas agencias de viaje" (L1, 60).

"And of course I think that travel blogs give the information that you find on the web and are the new travel agents" (translation by author).

According to the opinion of informant L1, travel blogs dominate the travel preparation in the present age. However, to answer the question how the pre-trip changed through blogging, more perspectives are needed. First, the data of the professional side of tourism is presented and explains what the branch looks like nowadays. Then, the group of professional leisure bloggers will give insights into their work and what they do to help tourists before they experience a trip. The perspective of the leisure bloggers will explain in which way they actually prefer to prepare.

5.1.1 The work of professional information offices

Information offering. For information acquisition, tourists in the Netherlands can go to the information office of the respective city. In the Dutch city Tilburg, the customers are mostly 40 years and older. According to the interviewed employee of the office, the concept

of 'hostmanship' is applied, which means that customers are asked what they want to know and accordingly get a specific, individual answer. Information about the nature, the sights and current events in the city is demanded, thus through the office they can get quickly changing insider tips on a daily basis. Next to the face-to-face contact, practical information is given via telephone, e-mail contact and the website (P1).

In Amsterdam, information is given through the local tourist office as well. In addition, there is a 'Welcome Team' in front of the central station, consisting of volunteers, for example local retired people, who help tourists to orientate through short, practical conversations. In the office next to the station personalized information plays an important role, too. They provide computers on which tourists can search on the company's website for relevant information. According to the interviewee, tourists get a lot of information which helps them to achieve the full experience in Amsterdam (P2, field notes).

Influence of blogs. The interviewee in Tilburg explained the influence of the internet and consequently of blogs on her work. The number of people coming to the office is decreasing year by year. The internet is a competitor in terms of information search and as a result the office has to create an additional value to attract customers. That is why they concentrate increasingly more on selling experiences. Through activities that include seeing, tasting and feeling they can create memorable events for the tourists. The preparation of these activities is essential because they are responsible to create a perfect experience in Tilburg (P1). The journalist informant LP2 agrees that specialization is important for tourism offices. Travel blogs and the influence of the internet in general do not mean a danger for tourism offices. If they adapt their business in the right way, their expertise and service can never be outclassed by the knowledge blogs can offer.

As well the work of the tourism office in Amsterdam has changed. Social media gives them the opportunity to answer to the opinions and questions of visitors. In addition, they monitor travel blogs about Amsterdam and in case something negative appears they get in

contact with the blogger and ask for the reasons. Sometimes bloggers are even invited to trips around the city in order to give them a good experience to write about (P2).

In short, adapting to the customers' needs, the work of the professional services got specialized and diversified. For the tourist this could means, that there might be more options to prepare.

5.1.2 The work of professional+leisure blogger

Journalist. The work of the interviewee LP2, a journalist of a German travel magazine has changed as well. Before going on an investigation trip, he analyses travel blogs systematically. One goal is to find contact persons at the destination who can support him with insider information. This improves quality and efficiency of his work. Before, he had to organize things on the travel itself, which he can prepare nowadays precisely online during the pre-trip stage. Blogs help him not only in the preparation but also as additional sources, which give the journalistic articles more depth. Even if a journalist investigates very carefully and intensely he can never see the reality from all perspectives. For example, when he and his colleagues wrote an article about the Netherlands, they searched for locals from Amsterdam through blogs and visited them. The experience with them, exploring the city with the help of their personal tips and stories was the material for an article they wrote. In doing so, they are generating new, individual content, which cannot be found in other sources on the Internet. In the introduction it was explained, according to Treanor (2009) that people today have the power to create their own archives which they share with others. The huge amount of information online makes it reasonable that the informant has to present new contents and find his personal niche.

Professional blogger. Besides agencies and journalists, there are bloggers who extend their activities to a professional level. Informant LP3 started as a leisure blogger and made a business of it, supporting tourism organizations and selling guided tours. He noticed that it could be useful for travellers to compress the time they spend on the information search

online. On his blog this is shown by a post about Amsterdam, in which he explains what to do there on a two-day trip in a structured and helpful way with many maps and photos. Like the information offices and the journalist LP2, this blogger knows that he has to specialize, by creating new, up-to-date content. He is doing so by designing guided routes through hidden places. The blog is a good way to offer and market his services because easy communication through the comment section or e-mails help him to support his clients in a personal way.

During the process of travel preparation there are a lot more platforms than blogs that tourists use, so the blog cannot be analysed in isolation. Informant LP3 posts almost every day a link or photos on Facebook in order to remember his followers of his service. Facebook is an important complement of his blog, because it shows new customers the value of his company through the positive ratings:

Figure 2 *Screenshot Facebook page LP3*

(LP3, Facebook page reviews, retrieved: 17.06.2014)

He noticed differences between the social media platforms he uses:

"El mantener una comunidad en mi blog es complicado, ya que el lugar idóneo para ello es Facebook o Google+, sin embargo en mi blog el lector se siente más agusto que en esas plataformas sociales" (LP3, 6).

"Maintaining a community in my blog is tricky as the ideal place for this is Facebook or Google+, nevertheless on my blog the reader feels more comfortable than on these social platforms" (translation by author).

The data suggests that tourists like to inform themselves through different communication channels which offer different kinds of information and communication features. Through the blog however, he gets into deeper contact with the readers than on Facebook. Especially the interactions via e-mail offer him the possibility to establish trust and to get faithful followers. Furthermore, his attitude can be seen under his posts about Amsterdam, where in total 14 comments are written. It is noticeable that the readers perceive him as an expert and ask all kinds of questions. Not for every question he knows a perfect answer, but he always tries to help on the same day or one day after in an honest, encouraging way. In other cases they do not ask him anything and just give him feedback. The blogger always answers these comments and encourages the people to share their experiences:

„Mucha suerteeeee...!! Que lo pases genial. Ya nos contarás a la vuelta :-)" (LP3, Post: Ruta por Amsterdam en dos dias, Comment section)

"Good luuuuuuck…!! Have a lot of fun. For sure you will tell us when you are back :-)" (translation by author).

The informant states that it takes time to create good relationships with the readers. As explained in the conceptual framework, Thompson (2003) underlines that in a disembodied environment communication is key to believe in the presented information. Here, the data suggests that trust is the basis to make texts appear authentic and therefore worth to use as a preparation source. For tourists this means that, although the preparation is easy and quick

online, because information is always available, they need time in order to believe in the presented advice.

This discrepancy between the fast and slow pace online is also indicated by an utterance of the informant. He seems to be aware of the fluent age of modernity and has a strategy how to deal with the quickly changing environment of the Internet:

> "En Internet las previsiones deben hacerse a mucho menos tiempo. La experiencia me ha enseñado a que tienes que tener una meta a la largo plazo, un objetivo a medio plazo y una estrategia a corto plazo" (LP3, 16).
>
> "On the Internet forecasts must be made in much less time. Experience has taught me that you have to have a long-term objective, a medium-term objective and a short-term strategy" (translation by author).

His opinion reflects the fluidity of modernity explained by Bauman (2010) only partly. It is true that in the current age everything is changing quickly and therefore the informants' short-time strategies are sensible. However, although his strategies need to be short-term, the interviewee stresses that the objectives need to be coherent in a long-term perspectives. Probably, if he would change his objectives every day his business would not be successful as the tourist could not establish trust.

By establishing trust and friendships, the informant can make use of the benefits of the blogosphere. As indicated before by the journalist LP2, it is possible that the quality of information improves through blogs. This is true for LP1 as well. Through the input of others he does not only learn about his readers' needs, but can also improve the quality of the blog. This means that the content of his blog is created through collective intelligence:

> „Ha habido lectores que tras hacer la ruta, han visto que un lugar ha cambiado de lugar (mercado de flores, mercado concreto, etc), y gracias a su comunicación lo he podido rectificar del blog" (LP3, 18).
>
> "There have been readers who after making the route, have seen that a site has changed the location (flower market, specific market, etc.), and thanks to their communication I could adjust the blog" (translation by author).

5.1.3 The impact of blogging on knowledge building

Independence and flexibility through blogs. Informant L1 thinks that travel blogs have more power than agencies because people became more independent and now search for their travel information themselves:

> "De la misma manera, las reservas de alojamiento las hago yo misma a través de la web. Los vuelos igual. La comparación de los precios lo hago yo. Lo hago personalmente. Lo hago absolutamente todo a través de la web" (L1, 60).
>
> "Similarly, accommodation bookings I do them myself via the web. Flights the same. Comparing prices, I do that. I do that personally. I do absolutely everything through the web" (translation by the author).

Her self-depended attitude is underlined in her blog. She gives the readers independence from professional agencies, providing them with helpful information and including practical information with a lot of links to other websites and blogs. She enjoys the freedom and the independence she has during the preparation. Without being able to prepare online she would feel lost:

> "Sería como irte a ciegas, a mí me gusta de alguna manera preparar los viajes, y me gusta tener el control de mi experiencia" (L1, 68).
>
> "It would be like walking around blind, somehow I like to prepare my travels and having the control over my experience" (translation by author).

Thus, the internet is offering her control and flexibility which also means more responsibility to decide on trustworthy information sources. The answers of informant L4 as well support that tourists got more independent from professional services. His readers are asking him questions that before probably a professional would have answered.

For most interviewed bloggers reading blogs is very important. Some of them state that they read travel blogs preferably because they are supposed to be unbiased information sources. L3 for example thinks that this independence makes blogs successful and that they cannot be compared to any other social media website. However, he thinks that some businesses who

combine blogs and commercial purposes abuse blogging. They are not building valuable information, which would be unethical and destroy the blogosphere.

Informant LP1 perceives a change in the preparation stage of travelling through blogging since her answers support the ideas of Ek et al. (2008), that the stages of the tourist experience are very flexible and dynamic. Her preparation is not bound to time and space as she reads other peoples blogs e.g. when she wants to find out about vegetarian restaurants.

Inspiration through blogs. Informant LP1 reads blogs not in order to have a guide or planning support. She wants to read about real experiences. Trust is an essential feature she finds exceptionally in blogs, even if she does not know the other users face-to-face. This seems to be valid as well from the point of view of other community members who are reading her blog and who in turn ask her for advice. In the case of informant LP1 the influence of blogs in the pre-trip has been very significant. Since she is reading blogs she started to consider destinations she would not have thought of before. In addition, she changed her travel behaviour through reading blogs. Travel blogs gave her the courage to travel on her own:

> Without reading travel blogs of solo bloggers, I don't think I would ever have been a solo traveller myself. It's not a very common thing in India, travelling alone. It never occurred to me in the past to do that. So, it's just when I read other people doing that, oh it's possible and there are people doing that and it's safe and it's entirely doable (LP1, 42).

Moreover, the preparation is different for her now. She learned from others that it is possible to travel in a spontaneous way and not to plan everything beforehand.

Different to the finding of Chung and Buhalis (2008), who stress the importance of information research in tourism, her preparation is determined by the positive feelings the community provides her with. Although there are plenty of practical information sources online, she tends not to use them and rely on the experiences of the blogosphere members. Comparing her motivations with chapter 2.1, where the distinction between tourist and

traveller is presented, probably, not preparing too much gives her a sense of adventure and the feeling of being a traveller instead of a tourist.

L4 as well perceives a mutual influence in the blogosphere. According to him, blogs inspire people to travel more. They see how others experience great destinations and adventures and want to do the same. In contrast, informant LP3 thinks less positive about reading blogs in the travel preparation, criticizing the quality of travel blog contents. He does not want to read simple reports about people's vacations:

> Normalmente no leo demasiado a otros bloggers, pero si a aquellos que son más originales y realmente aportan conocimiento y experiencias únicas, ya que hoy día hay mucha gente que se denomina blogger de viajes y lo que hace simplemente colgar sus vacaciones (LP3, 6).

> Normally I do not read a lot of other bloggers, but those who are more original and really bring knowledge and unique experiences, because today there are many people who call themselves travel blogger, and what they do is simply put down their holidays (translation by author).

Reading original and authentic blogs helps him to improve his own writings. He sees them as a benchmark he can compare his own texts with. Reading and writing happen instantaneous and influence each other. This demonstrates the approach of Karlsson (2006) as outlined in 3.3, who explains the spiral development of blogs, where production and consumption of texts feed into each other and influence each other constantly. The production of blogs, thus the writing process will be explained in the following in chapter 5.2.

Similarly, L5 has high standards in terms of travel blogs and demands authentic information of locals. He is only interested in their insider perspectives and not in the recommendations of other tourists.

Individualized information. A positive perception of reading blogs is shared by informant L1. She likes to read personal blogs full of experiences. Reading information of people who are travelling like her helps her most because they have the same economic resources as her. Hence, she can find information about her own style of travelling, reading

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the reports of like-minded travellers. She perceives the high amount of data that can be found online as a great opportunity for tourists:

> Entonces la web creo que ofrece todos los tipos de posibilidades y de ideas de viaje. Pues un viaje de mochilero o un viaje de cinco estrellas. Y en función de estas necesidades pues encuentras la información que es específicamente lo que tu quieras (L1, 10).
>
> So I think the web offers all kinds of possibilities and travel ideas. For a backpacking trip or a five star trip. And based on these needs you find information that is specifically what you want (translation by author).

For every individual tourist there seems to be suitable information. She is aware of the fact that also professional tourism agencies can specialize on the different types of the customer needs. Yet, she thinks that they can never compete with the diversity of options online.

Likewise, the advantage of blogs as a source of individualized information was perceived by informant L4. He engaged in a travel blog about backpacking in Europe and could build knowledge about this way of travelling. In his opinion, because of more available information expectations increase.

The answers of the informants L1 and L4 reflect Urry and Larsen (2011) who claim that the tourist gaze gets extended and therefore 'democratized' through the internet. Every person can find a group of like-minded people, even if this group is very specialized and small. In these groups very specific or unusual information can be discussed, and as Chung and Buhalis (2008) explain, uncertainty gets reduced when similar people can interchange their thoughts about travelling.

5.2 The impact of blogging on the reporting process

Informant LP2 remembers the days without internet and blogs and explains how a travel report of friends looked like back then:

> [...] dann hat man so manchmal die berüchtigten Diaabende gemacht. Dann wurde man eingeladen und es wurde per Diashow von einer Reise berichtet. Berüchtigt deswegen weil das halt toll ist, sagen wir 10

Fotos von einer Reise anzugucken, aber sehr anstrengend sein kann 150 Fotos von einer Reise

anzugucken [...] (LP2, 18).

[…] you sometimes had those infamous slide shows. You were invited and it was reported about a trip via

slideshow. Infamous, because it is just great to look let's say at 10 photos from a trip, but it can be very

exhausting to look at 150 photos of a trip […] (translation by author).

He experienced these old ways of telling a travel story as boring. A blog, on the other hand

has new options to design a report in an easy way. The following part explains how exactly

the reporting process has changed through blogging for the informants and which

consequences blogging has for them personally. First, information about what the reporting

process looks like during travelling is provided. Secondly, the data explains which impact the

blogosphere has on the bloggers' writing process.

5.2.1 The way of reporting

   The importance of updating. Updating the blog was an issue they talked about when

being asked about the reporting process. Informant LP1 for example is not always able to

update as much as she wants to. She tries to post something at least once or twice when she is

on a trip. According to her, updating on a regular basis is a key characteristic of travel blogs.

Being authentically part of the travel blogosphere therefore means to communicate and

interact actively with others. Her posts about the Netherlands show as well that she is keen on

creating new contents, for example she posts teaser to call attention to older posts, by

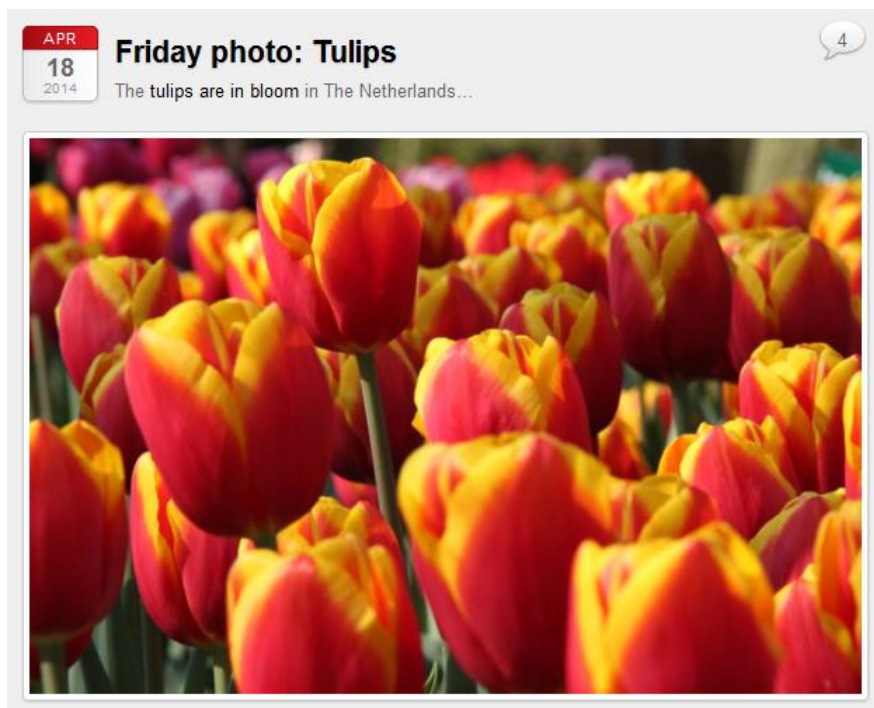rearranging contents. Every Friday she chooses a different photo:

Figure 3 *Screenshot Blog LP1*

(LP1, Post: Friday photo: Tulips, 18.04.2014, retrieved: 16.06.2014)

Understandably, the leisure bloggers are updating their blogs less frequently because they have less time to concentrate on the blog. However, from the point of view of L2, reporting and posting directly after an experience occurs is essential for a blogger and makes the contents more reliable: "I think it's a way of recording what you have done because you are recording it in the moment rather than one or two days later when you get like, oh what did we do again guys- kind of thing" (L2, 26). She uses the verb 'recording' to show that the contents of the blog are true and not changed by remembering the experiences later. This feature of the reporting process will be explained more detailed with the results of the third research question. In order to remember more precisely, or because they had problems with the Wi-Fi connection, some informants even decided to make notes on paper or the mobile phone before posting. L3 instead felt too tired to write or blog during travelling. He recorded the trip with the help of photos as a memory aid and was posting his experiences later when he got back to his home country. On the contrary, as observed on L5's blog posts about the Netherlands, he updated his blog more regularly, almost every day. Updating the blog is very important for him, because he can

show himself to others through the blog: "It's what I said, it's the obsession of keeping it up-dated. The blog is still alive, and I am still alive" (L5, 52).

From the perspective of LP2 updating is very important, because there are some topics which have a non-durable actuality; hence they are only interesting to the current time. Since the magazine he is writing for is only published monthly some topics cannot be included. Therefore, the informant decided to write a blog about travelling. It seems that the reporting process has changed through blogs in a positive way, because they adapt to quickly changing developments and trends. Yet, there is another perspective, according to which the fast movement of cyberspace is perceived as unstable and unreliable: "All the memories are there. So, if I can recapture it again, if I go and share it with other people. But if I just leave it in cyberspace it's got nothing, it's a lot of effort for nothing" (L2, 96).

The informant thinks that only in a short-time perspective she can have access to her blog and share it with others, yet, she does not trust cyberspace in the long-term. For informant L2, blogging seems to have another meaning than writing something down on paper. Her utterance reflects the thoughts of Bauman (2004): In his book *Wasted Lives* he underlines that everything is replaceable in the fluidity of modernity and only used for a short period of time. The awareness of an unstable cyberspace and therefore and unstable blog might cause that blogger concentrate even more on updating, knowing that it is used in the present time and perhaps not later on. Thus, their perception of cyberspace could make them update more. As the majority of informants strives to update as quickly as possible, they have less time to think about their content carefully.

Stress as a consequence of travel blogging. The answers of the so far discussed informants indicate that they perceive regular updating as positive. Yet, there are some negative consequences it can have on the tourists. Informant L4 perceived blogging during a travel trip as a hassle, feeling compelled to give the reader a whole picture of his experience: "Sometimes, it's difficult to juggle between recording the details and finding my way, exchanging money,

communicating with the locals, and many other things" (L3, 9). Since he is from Singapore, probably the difference between his country and the Netherlands are quite big and therefore his distraction increases. Still he wants to fulfil the expectations of the readers. Despite his opinion that blogging is a hassle, he still enjoys the activity a lot.

When talking to informant L4 during his stay in Amsterdam, he still had the plan to write regularly about his Europe trip. Nevertheless, two weeks after meeting him, he posted that he does not want to write his travel report in form of a frequently updated blog anymore and write a book instead after coming home. Two reasons motivated him to stop. One was that blogging made him enjoy his trip less: „I am having too much fun analysing less and less, and I am in the moment more and more. I am finding that worrying about recording and putting my travels into a written form is taking me away from the fun"(L4, Post: No more travel journal). The second reason was that he feared because of writing half-hearted, the quality of his reports could suffer. Nevertheless, it could be observed that almost every day a short Facebook entry with some photos was posted. The meeting with the researcher for example he aimed to report on his blog, he posted on Facebook. This social network seems to be a compensation for blogging, since it offers him the possibility to share experiences. At the same time it does not require as much effort as a blog post:

Noam Lightstone
23 May

Inside sick for most of time in Amsterdam. Walk out and get lost. Ask random person to take a picture of me. Ends up being someone who's been searching all day to interview a travel blogger.

Awesome.

Like · Comment · Share

10 people like this.

View 6 more comments

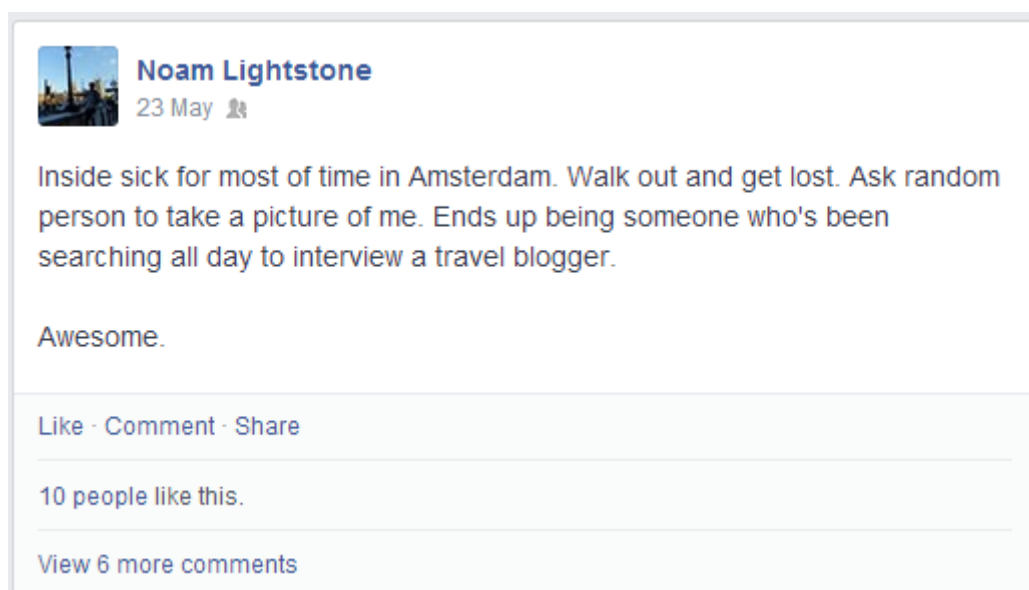THE IMPACT OF TRAVEL BLOGGING ON THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

Figure 4 *Screenshot Facebook page L4*

(L4, Facebook timeline, retrieved: 17.06.2014)

Blogging for this informant means a responsibility towards the reader. On Facebook whereas, the general expectation is to read something short, which he still can provide easily without losing the fun of travelling.

Similarly, for L5 a negative consequence of the blog was that his commitment to it got very strong and writing the blog was sometimes stressful for him: "At the beginning it was very simple. I was just taking pictures. The menu, buildings, I used basically a cell phone […] And suddenly it became like an obsession. Taking pictures of as many things as possible" (L5, 16).

Writing the blog became an obsession for him. Always, he was busy with posting and collecting as much information as possible. He does not know how to describe this feeling of commitment and finds it strange. His obsession means an important consequence on the tourist experience: he enjoyed the trip less and felt an addiction to blogging. It seems to awaken his ambition and strengthens his sense of competition. The purpose of the trip is not relaxing anymore; instead, it is to prove his experiences and travel success to others. Thus, a travel trip that before perhaps was a timeout from the busy working life is now connected to the stress of proving oneself and finding self-affirmation. Now he fears to disappoint his readers: "You don't want to fail the people; you are following also the statistics of the people coming in. But when you don't do it for a week, I don't know, it's like an obsession. You want people to read your blog" (L5, 24).

At the moment, L5 is not blogging because he lives in Africa and his internet connection is not good enough. Still, he would like to continue in the future, even though blogging is very time consuming and he knows that he is focusing too much on it.

As Davenport and Beck explained with the book "The Attention Economy", in postmodern societies, people feel a strong need to interact through online communication

media and the need to be seen and recognized by others got stronger. This need, by some of the informants got so strong that it ended up in stress and made the experience less enjoyable.

Content of the blogs. Sometimes, there are differences between the way a blogger speaks about the experience and the way he or she writes about it. Bike riding and short distances stayed in the memory of interviewee LP1 when being asked about the experience in the Netherlands. However, in the report this opinion is not portrayed. Instead, the focus lies on the typical tourist sites of Amsterdam, Keukenhof, Haarlem and the fishing villages of the North (LP1, blog posts). Often she gives advice and tips in the blog, writing from an experts' perspective: „If you are in Amsterdam for only a couple of days, here is how to get the best of it"(LP1, Post: 48 hours in Amsterdam).

Moreover, the oral explanations in the interview of L5 differ a bit from what is important in his blog posts about the Netherlands. When he was asked about his experience in the Netherlands, he explained his personal motivations to go there. He was young and went with his friends in order to have fun and discover. In the blog little personal information appears. He focuses on food, bicycles, the boats on the canals and the smallest house of Amsterdam. Drugs and alcohol are mentioned too, presenting himself and his friends as young, adventurous people who like to party. The blog contains a lot of practical information, which could be interesting for tourists. Even though the information is not very personal, he includes his own perspective and thoughts, creating a vivid picture of Amsterdam:

> "Hay dos cosas que se te quedan en la cabeza cuando se va dormir después de pasar un día entero en Amsterdam; el olor de los Coffie Shop's y el sonido de los timbres de las bicis: cling cling….cling cling" (L5, Post: ¡Alquila tu bicicleta! y serás el dueño de Amsterdam).

> "There are two things that stick in your head when you go to sleep after spending a day in Amsterdam; the smell of Coffeeshops and the sound of the bells of the bikes: cling cling....cling cling" (translation by author).

Blogger L1 told in the interview that food and a special atmosphere are important topics to focus on in the blog. This is underlined very well in her blog post about the Netherlands. Like blogger LP1 she wants to capture her real experiences and not only give dry information. It is important for her to differentiate her contents from the information that can be found on Wikipedia. Not to repeat information might seem difficult when looking at the amount of data that the internet offers nowadays. Through improvisation, like when she improvised a new route by car, she might be able to experience something new and consequently write about something different. She wants to give her writings a personal touch and show a destination in an individual way that she and nobody else perceives. In line with this writing attitude, as well informant L4 wants to provide unique content. When the researcher talked to him in Amsterdam, his plan was to write about what happened to him in this city and what he personally was thinking. Meeting someone who was researching about travel blogs he describes as a very random experience which is worth putting into the blog.

For the interviewed bloggers' tourist experience this need to make a special and different content probably means the challenge to be very attentive and creative, in order to write something that is interesting for the reader.

Writing styles. As already indicated there are different voices in which the bloggers write: on the one hand they are giving practical information, descriptions and advice, speaking from the perspective of a travel expert or tour guide. On the other hand they are taking the perspective of a traveller, writing about their personal experiences and feelings.

This is illustrated very well by the blog of informant L5. In his writings, there are often passages in parenthesis and italics, which give additional information. It seems like he is speaking to the reader in two voices:

> Dicen que Amsterdam es la venecia del norte *(por lo de los canales)*, en Amsterdam también puedes disfrutar de viajes en barco por los canales. Esto es para los románticos, se recomienda llevar chica, creo que en el red light district se puede alquilar alguna chica para un par de horas y llevarla a dar un paseo en

barco *(es lo que hace la mayoría, no?).* […] No me he subido en ningún barco así que no tengo ni idea de cuanto cuesta el paseo en barco *(no encontré ninguna chica de mi gusto en el red light district)* (L5, Post: Paseo en barco).

They say that Amsterdam is the Venice of the north *(because of the canals),* in Amsterdam you can also enjoy boat trips on the canals. This is for the romantics, it is recommended to take a girl, I think in the red-light district you can rent a girl for a couple of hours and take her for a boat trip *(that's what most people do, right?).* […] I have not gone on any boat so I have no idea how much the boat trip is *(I did not find any girl I liked in the red-light district)* (translation by author).

In this excerpt, the distinction between internal and topical content can be observed very well. Besides the topical voice of the tour guide, explaining what people can do in Amsterdam, there are parts in parenthesis and italics which seem to be explanatory, with more personal or ironic information, which is directed directly to the reader. These parts are written by his internal voice, experiencing the city from his own perspective. Other informants whereas exclude the voice of the tour guide almost completely. Informant L2 writes in an experience-based way, speaking to an audience, in this case directly to her grandmother: "Got to be honest though Oma, yours still tasted better" (L2, Post: At home in Amsterdam). She just speaks about how she personally perceived the food in the new environment, without including for example the name of the restaurant.

The writing styles found on the blogs show that the approach of Lomborg (2009), introduced in chapter 3.3 can be applied. His set of parameters on a continuous scale caters for the diversity of styles found on the blogs.

Analysing the content and writing styles the bloggers use, it becomes clear that the audience and therefore the blogosphere has an important influence on the writing process.

5.2.2 The impact of the blogosphere on the writing process

Relevance of the reader. According to the informants travel blogging can have several consequences on their experience and behaviour. The awareness of a potential reader changed

the bloggers behaviour and writings in some ways. Having in mind that they want to blog their experiences, almost all informants indicated that they concentrate more on details and look at their environment more carefully and attentive. Informant L2 for example states that the whole family was more aware of what they were doing through being accompanied by the blog. This awareness of the environment was influenced by the readers' presence and seems to intensify their tourist experience. The direct feedback of the readers gave LP1 an understanding of their needs and made her change the way of writing: "So, they want me to write very simple, idiot prove, friendly kind of guides, rather than long rambling narratives. I find that one way in which readers have influenced me is that I started writing more and more guides and tips to travel and things like that" (LP1, 32). Through the reader this informant started to post rather in a trip advisor format than writing a travel story. Her content moves from internal to topical based information. Analysing her blog posts about the Netherlands, a distinction can be made between the posts influenced by the reader and the posts that she prefers. The Post '48 hours in Amsterdam' is the tourist guide her readers want her to write. Similarly, her post 'It's tulips time in Amsterdam' is about a Dutch stereotype that readers might want to read about. Yet, this post is more experienced based, with personal information and feelings. In contrast, the influence of the reader seems to be less important for informant L1. She admits that she looks at how popular a certain post is in order to know more about the opinions of her readers. Nevertheless, she states to feel completely free in her way of writing. Probably she chooses the destinations without thinking much of the reader; however, the way she writes seems to be directed to an audience. She includes a lot of helpful links for other people who might have similar travel plans and describes her feelings like speaking directly to the reader:

> "Me desperté, por primera vez en varios días, rodeada de calma y tranquilidad. ¿Os había comentado que están de obras en mi edificio?" (L1, Post: Haarlem y alrededores).

> "I woke up for the first time in days, surrounded by peace and quietness. Did I tell you that there are construction works in my building?" (translation by author).

In a similar way L2 wrote directly to her audience in her post 'Biggest and BEST day in Amsterdam': "Means heaps to me that you are all reading it and having a good laugh so keep the comments rolling on in :) xx" (L2, Post: Biggest and best day in Amsterdam). The reader obviously is a motivation for her to keep on writing and entertain others. In addition, knowing that other people were reading it, she posted more details about the destinations and less personal information and feelings. For L3 the presence of potential readers is a motivation to keep on writing. Family and friends follow him, but he is not sure if strangers are reading it. Interestingly, the influence of the reader does not seem crucial for this blogger. Being a real travel blogger for him means that he has to go on blogging, even if nobody is reading it. On the contrary, for L5 the audience plays an important role. Being aware of the reader, informant L5 experienced a strong motivation to keep on writing that turned out to be an obsession. The importance of the reader is shown on the main page of his blog. The first part "Lo Más Visto Hoy" shows which posts the reader liked most on that day:

Figure 5 *Screenshot Blog L5*

(L5, blog domain site, retrieved: 16.06.2014)

So, every day the reader can influence the posts shown on the main page and the blogger gets feedback, inciting him to write more. In addition, the "Blog Stats" reflect the readers' opinion.

Interaction in the travel blogosphere. As said by Nardi et al. (2004), blogs are made of social activity and there is a mutual influence of readers and writers. Accordingly, besides the described awareness of the reader, the communication and interaction in the blogosphere change the travel experience for some of the informants. A very good consequence of blogging, as explained before in 5.1, is that the members of the blogosphere encourage each other. LP1 for example experienced that they inspire each other to travel with less preparation and concerns. Less preparation for her means more freedom during the trip:

> I have more room for spontaneity now. Even though I read a lot of research I still think that my travel behaviour has changed, based on that I leave a lot of room to unexpected things, you know, how my travel is planned and how my travel is just to explore on my own (LP1, 42).

She understands herself as a traveller who explores and interacts spontaneously with the new environment. For her the blogosphere became an essential part of her life and is a big motivation for her to keep on writing: "Otherwise it's just like talking to the air, to an empty space. I think the blogging community is very very very important because like I said, it's a community that I trust" (LP1, 28). Looking at her blog posts about the Netherlands, her strong engagement with the community is supported: there are comments under every post with her answers to the people (LP1, all posts). Her commitment to the travel blogosphere is so intense that she even met some of her community friends offline and felt like she already knew them very well. Therefore, the blog has a significant influence on her social life. The connection to other bloggers is e.g. shown in her post „Friday photo: Tulips", which includes a song title in Hindi, called „dekha ek khwab toh yeh silsile huey". In the music video of this Bollywood love song, tulip fields appear. In the comment section above is shown that another blogger reblogs this post on the own blog and answers with the title of another love song. In the respective music

video as well some flower fields appear. This shows two important insights into the travel blogosphere: First, through the insider knowledge they are creating their community. The travel blogosphere in this case is English and Hindi speaking, which reduces the amount of people who are able to understand the conversation. Even if a reader understands English, he or she is not able to fully participate in this perhaps private conversation. Secondly, they are constructing their identity as Indian, independent travellers who are most likely both well-educated women. These insights show that, even if the information is available for a public audience, not everybody will understand it. On the other hand, it might be difficult to define the blogosphere as a closed group, since even if the information is written for a certain group it is not sure who actually reads or participates. The concept of 'groupness' by Brubaker (2004), that groups have a fluent character, therefore is to the point.

Furthermore, from the perspective of L1, the interaction of the travel blogosphere seems to be a motivation to blog. When she gets comments or emails she feels proud and enjoys writing back. In line with her interview answers, on the blog it can be observed that the readers are writing her in a motivating way, showing her that they like the blog and that they keep on reading it. On the other hand, she is reading blogs of other travellers getting inspiration to improve her own blog.

For L2, the interaction with friends and family through the blog was a key motivation to write. It was important for her that they would read and comment, like she did with her friends who are travel blogging as well. It seems that the comments partly consist in phatic communication, giving encouragement and conveying relational meaning more than practical information: "I have noticed a recurring theme…food…alcohol…shopping. Will any of this change when Ross arrives?" (L2, Post: At home in Amsterdam, Comment section).

In the case of this blogger, a lot of information is directed to a specific audience, which indicate a private sphere. This content would not be meaningful for other people.

An important feature of the blogosphere for informant L4 seem to be relationships which are based on trust. Being an honest blogger who writes in a personal style, others are more likely to develop confidence and relationships can get more intense. Similarly, he found other bloggers, who were helping him to start his blog about self-improvement, which includes travelling as an important part. One of them became a real role model for him: "Mark means a lot to me. I have kind of a man crush on him cause a lot of his articles helped me a lot in life" (L4, 40). Although he has contact to other bloggers and they help him to create his personal traveller mind-set, L4 says that he is not part of a travel blogger community. The leisure bloggers all agreed that they do not feel part of a community, even if they are aware of the readers' influence and their interaction with other travellers. This could be in line with the finding that a lot of blogs have a relatively small amount of readers, consisting often only in their private circle of acquaintances (Perseus, 2003). The data suggests that the impact of travel blogs on writing process is dependent on the composition of readers or on the reader that the blogger imagines.

5.3 The impact of blogging on experiencing authenticity

"Not really authentic. For me, when I travel. Yes, you are right, we can say authentic, original, local. Something local" (L5, 38). It seems that authenticity for the informants is difficult to define or is something they are not aware of. In order to answer the last research question, first, it will be explained which kind of authenticity matters to the informants and in which way the blog reflects and influences the respective understanding of authenticity. Secondly, the data will explain which measures are used to transport authenticity to the reader, showing that the report is based on truth and has actually been experienced by the writer.

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5.3.1 How the bloggers understand authenticity

Enoughness. As explained in the conceptual framework in chapter 3.4, authenticity is linked to the concept of enoughness. The concept means that, after having reached a certain benchmark of 'enough' features which are regarded as typical and pivotal for a certain identity or place, authenticity is reached. For example, in order to be identified as a 'real' or 'authentic' tourist in Amsterdam, some essential characteristics have to be present in the right dose, thus certain things have to be experienced. Informant LP1 gives an example of enoughness, explaining in her blog that visiting Keukenhof is essential: „No visit to Amsterdam in spring is complete without a trip to Keukenhof gardens just outside the city" (LP1, Post: 48 hours in Amsterdam). L2 states that she likes to portrait things that everybody knows, so that her readers can recognize what she is talking about:

> You know, like from Paris it's the Eiffel Tower, so it was a big focus writing about that when we got there or in Amsterdam we have been through the red-light district and that was kind of a cultural thing (L2, 38).

The red-light district seems to be an essential feature that has to appear in a blog about Amsterdam. Being able to show the crucial elements of the Netherlands makes the informants feel that they have authentically experienced the country and presents them as an authentic tourists to the readers. The notion of enoughness is a basic concept when looking at the following understandings of authenticity.

Commodified culture. In the blog posts of L2 various historical details appear and are a means through which authenticity is expressed. In line with the beliefs of MacCannell (1973), who claims that authenticity is found in other historical times and cultures, visiting places of historical importance is perceived as a sign for authenticity as well by the professional tourist agent P1.

Although for these informants objects seems to transport authenticity, not the objects themselves but the personal perception of these objects matters (MacCannell, 2008).

Staged authenticity, which means according to MacCannell (1973), that authenticity is only constructed for tourists, is shown through the commodified culture in the Netherlands. However, the Cheese factory in Volendam is something informant LP1 would not perceive as authentic, but still it is a place she visits and enjoys. Actually, in contrast, authenticity means for her to experience something local, like markets or food. She wants to experience a destination through the eyes of a local and not a tourist. Staged authenticity is something she does not regard as authentic: "These are experiences made for tourists and they are already obviously touristy experiences [...]" (LP1, 64). As an example she names a little village in the north of the Netherlands, which she liked, but did not perceive as authentic because it was made for tourists and for commercial purposes. Yet, in her posts she includes experiences which she does not consider as authentic:

> It is a fine spring day and the entire tour is like being inside a 'Visit The Netherlands' poster. First stop, the Zaanse Schans village. I could swear there was a Hollywood set designer at work there: windmills, gabled houses, pretty wooden bridges over narrow canals, more tulips (LP1, Post: It's tulips time in Amsterdam).

Through writing about these tourist sites she can fulfil the concept of enoughness and be an authentic traveller. She is open to experience the commodified culture, but at the same time observes what she sees critically. Since she is aware of the inauthenticity, she can be defined as a post-tourist (Feifer, 1985).

In the case of L2, an incoherent perception of authenticity was analysed. It is important for her to experience a place from the point of view of the locals and not to feel and look like a tourist. She is aware of the fact that she is a tourist, but wants to see a destination from an insiders' perspective, in order to experience it as authentic. However, in her blog she writes about the attractions that visitors normally want to see in the Netherlands:

"Si seguís por la calle mayor en dirección hacia la iglesia de la ciudad, os encontráis de lleno con la Cheese Factory de Volendam, una de las principales atracciones turísticas de la ciudad. Se trata de una especie de tienda-museo [...]" (L1, Post: Haarlem y alrededores).

"If you follow the main street towards the church of the city, you find the Volendam Cheese Factory, one of the main tourist attractions of the city. It is a kind of shop-museum [...]" (translation by author).

Whether or not these two informants perceive an object as authentic, they write about it in the blog. Mentioning essential features of a tourist destination could be a strategy to convince the reader of the authenticity of the bloggers' experiences.

When comparing this data to the distinction between tourists and travellers made in chapter 2.1, it seems that they want to be travellers but actually engage in tourist activities. They look at what they expect to encounter instead of discovering something new. This corresponds to Rojek (1993) who explains that the tourist aims to confirm the own world view. Often, the goal of tourists is to witness something and to get a record of it. Through writing about Dutch tourist sights, she can proof that she actually has experienced the country, which again is in line with the concept of enoughness.

Although MacCannell (2008) gives insights into the tourists' perception of authenticity, the data suggests that a constructivist understanding, as presented in the conceptual framework in chapter 3.4 describes the field better. Constructive authenticity means a fluid perception of authenticity, which can change through new impressions and the re-evaluation of experiences. Cohen (1988) explains that this authenticity is socially constructed and depends on the personal experiences, beliefs and expectations of an individual. The answers of LP1 show this constructive understanding of authenticity because for her authenticity is connected to the things which are different to what she is used to. Coming from India, the good organization in the Netherlands in contrast to the chaos of India is striking. Thus, her understanding of authenticity is built through her personal background. Consequently, the clear structure of Amsterdam is something she considers as authentic. Although this is

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something she remembers well during the interview, it is not mentioned exceptionally in her blog. Hence, this part of her authenticity construction is not the most important topic to write about on the blog.

Similarly, constructive authenticity in case of L2 is shown by the fact that she preferred countries which were different to what she is used to. In line with Urry and Larsen (2011), her authenticity is formed through former experiences and that is why she liked the Netherlands more than other countries: "I think countries that were just more the same compared to New Zealand in terms of culture wise, they didn't appear as authentic" (L2, 68). In the blog this kind of authenticity is reflected because she is mentioning her experiences several times in relation to New Zealand. However, this aspect can be the same in traditional travel literature, as showed by Koivunen (2011).

Different to the informants L1 and LP1, there are some bloggers who emphasize the tourist attractions explicitly in the interview. L3 mentions very typical tourist highlights of the Netherlands, like wooden clogs, windmills or the red-light district. Experiencing authenticity for him is to see the things a country is famous for, thus it depends on his tourist gaze. Moreover, in the blog these attractions are displayed with the help of a lot of photos, which show tourist sites in Amsterdam and some Dutch villages. He is not searching for the offbeat locations like LP1, but wants to see the must-go places other people recommend:

Figure 6 *Screenshot Blog L3*

(L3, Post: Europe Trip Day 11 – The Netherlands, 15.09.2013, retrieved: 17.06.2014)

As well, informant L4 seems to have a fluent understanding of authenticity. When meeting him on his trip in Amsterdam, he finds it difficult to define what exactly is authentic in the Netherlands. Through spending more time in the country and through reporting in his blog, he will be able to explain the authentic Amsterdam better: "It's hard actually to put it down because I don't really have full thought in my mind. What I do is when I write, I write and then I add it over a few days and then it becomes more clear" (L4, 26).

Existential authenticity. During the process of data collection it was discovered that besides constructive authenticity, another understanding of authenticity is important for the participants. Constructivist authenticity is delinking authenticity from objects and the concept of 'existential authenticity' follows the same notion (Wang, 1999). The data that is assigned to existential authenticity in this chapter however cannot be separated clearly from the already discussed notion of authenticity and therefore should be seen as an additional understanding which matters a lot to the informants.

Wang (1999) explains that authenticity depends on personal feelings. On holidays tourists experience non-ordinary activities and escape the constraints of daily routine. In the new environment they feel free, can explore themselves and have the possibility to be their authentic selves. The subject is having an authentic and emotional experience of the own self. This existential state of being is shown during tourist activities. Wang (1999) divides existential authenticity into intra-personal and inter-personal authenticity. Intra-personal refers to bodily feelings. During vacations people often give in their bodily desires, they feel sensual experiences, relaxation or excitement. Furthermore, intra-personal authenticity means to explore the own identity. A motivation to travel is to find self-realization for example by having adventurous experiences or by overcoming challenges away from the routine at work. Inter-personal authenticity whereas refers to 'social authenticity'. During a holiday trip people have room and time to experience communities and enhance family relationships and

friendships. Thus, tourists are also searching for more authenticity between themselves by strengthening the 'we-feeling' and team spirit. This inter-personal authenticity likewise can be found with fellow travellers met on the journey. In a new environment social pressures and hierarchies are taken away and relationships can be established in an authentic way.

In line with this understanding of authenticity, Wilce (2011) stresses the importance of authenticity in the current age. According to him, by being faithful to the inner self, it is possible to experience authenticity. He adopts the notion of the 'Age of authenticity' of Taylor (2008) who sees authenticity as something people increasingly believe in.

A person, who is able to express and share the authentic self, shows courage. Expressing authentic feelings in an honest and spontaneous way became very important in the age of modernity. Talking openly and reflexively about personal thoughts therefore turned into an essential trend of the current age. Consequently, authenticity got a convention that is expected by society (Wilce, 2009).

Intra-personal authenticity. Corresponding to the intra-personal meaning of existential authenticity, the data suggests that self-realization is important. Self-realization for L1 is reached through learning about other cultures and consequently getting a more open-minded attitude. In addition, she is interested in languages and likes the challenge and effort to communicate in a different country. Her affinity to languages and using them during travelling is supported in her post about Haarlem and surroundings, where she includes some Dutch sayings in the Spanish text (L1, Post: Haarlem y alrededores). These short parts will probably not be understood by her readers and therefore transmit the challenge of speaking a foreign language. Dutch language is strategically used to transmit authenticity. A differentiation between existential and constructivist authenticity in cases like this one is complicated. Constructive authenticity is socially constructed and depends on own beliefs; speaking a foreign language is socially approved and therefore the informant believes that through writing in another language she can present herself in a positive light.

Although she says that she is interested most in the way locals live, according to her blog, the things she likes most are related to tourist attractions in the Netherlands. Probably authenticity for her is not connected primarily to the places themselves but more to the way she is exploring them. In her self-description on the blog she characterizes herself in the following way: "Viajera de la vida y soñadora de su propio camino" (L1, Post: About the author). "Traveller of life and dreamer of her own way" (translation by author).

Travelling and exploring things in her own way brings her closer to her individual self. In the blog she can show the individuality she is experiencing during the trip through writing down her preferences and giving her writings a personal touch. In doing so, most likely she finds approval of her own personality. For her it is important to show the reader a place through her eyes:

> […] a través de que lo que me pasa, de lo que como, de donde voy, de lo que observo. Entonces creo que es una manera de aportar autenticidad al relato. Al final creo que son estos pequeños relatos de los sitios a los que he ido (L1, 32).
>
> […] through what is happening to me, what I eat, where I go, what I observe. So, I think it is a way of mediating authenticity to my story. In the end I think it's about these little stories from the places I have been (translation by author).

Finding the authentic self is not only related to mental abilities but also to the bodily well-being. Travelling for her is a way to relax and to get new energy. Having authentically a good time, enjoying the Dutch village Volendam for instance, is what matters to her.

In a similar way, informant L2 connects authenticity to her own person. First, her bodily feelings get satisfied through tasting new food. During the interview and on the blog, she mentions several times, that tasting new food and flavours is very important for her. It gives her a good feeling and underlines the pleasure of experiencing the other culture authentically. Secondly, for her authenticity is related to self-realization. Learning about other cultures she considers as an important purpose of travelling, as well as improving personal attitudes, like

broaden her horizon. Not being familiar with the language and forcing herself to understand gave her a good feeling. Overcoming challenges on the trip is one important feature of experiencing authenticity for her. In her blog post "Amsterdam to London" she admits that usually going into museums does not fit with her own identity perception as a young girl, however, she managed to enjoy and learn: "Not often we'd get a kick out of studying fine china, paintings or royal sculptures that didn't have hearts, glitter or some young ho ha about it! It was incredible the stories behind some of the images – good and bad" (L2, Post: Amsterdam to London).

The blog can help to show her preferably identity. Furthermore, her intra-personal authenticity got intensified by improving the stage of reflecting and remembering:

> And if I hadn't had the blog I think my memory of the whole trip and understanding of what we have been through over the period of time when we were travelling would definitely be reduced. I wouldn't have the same connection or learning experience (L2, 76).

With the help of the blog she does not only improve her memory. The self-realization she has reached during the trip got stronger consequences on the post-trip as she is able to read her blog after an experience has taken place. She admits, that the blog gives her a feeling of accomplishment and better feeling about the whole trip. This positive perception about herself lasts longer because she is able to reread her success in the blog and to share it with others. In addition, she got a deeper learning experience. The blog made her post-trip and therefore her tourist experience more intense, strengthening the stages of storing, reflecting and enrichment.

From the perspective of L3 intra-personal authenticity seems to be important as well. Through reading his blog he can see what he has achieved. Nevertheless, different from the other informants, having authentically fun, and reporting this joy in this blog is essential. He states that after an experience he wants to remember the crazy, unusual things he has done. The same impression emerges on his blog. It is written in an easy-going, unconcerned way, including more photos than text and 'haha" as a way of conveying humour, e.g. when exploring the red-light district: "But too bad no photograph allowed, scare that the mafia will beat us up.

Sorry, just use your imagination haha…" (L3, Post: Europe Trio Day 11 – The Netherlands). The blog helps him to strengthen the identity of a relaxed, easy-going traveller. In addition, he can show that he is open-minded, experiencing a new, foreign culture:

Figure 7 *Screenshot Blog L3*

(L3, Post: Europe Trip Day 12 – The Netherlands, 16.09.2013, retrieved: 17.06.2014)

For L4, his blog is important to strengthen his intra-personal authenticity, as it forces him to reflect about his actions and feelings. Having the power over the blog gives him a good feeling about himself. He can realize his creativity and independence, because the blog is his own personal project. It deals with self-improvement: He puts his feelings and challenges into the blog in order to improve. Travelling for him means to find his personal boundaries. Finding himself and exploring every part of his personality is salient for him:

> But from having a good amount of my childhood taken from me, the most carefree years of my life with little responsibility… I choose to play more, NOW. I chose to give a sense of adventure and wonder to my inner child (L4, Post: An Introduction To The Travel Journal And The Eurotrip).

Self-realization can be connected to the professional life of bloggers as well. The success of the blog helped LP1 to get further in her career: Based on a link to her blog, her

first story in a newspaper was published. Thus, the blog for her means a way of improving personal writing skills and creativity, as she can show her talent and turn it into a profession.

Inter-personal authenticity. In addition to the authenticity concept that refers to the inner self, existential authenticity can arise through the creation or improvement of inter-personal relationships. For informant L2 this seems to be the most important motivation to travel: she wants to live the relationships to other family members authentically and enjoy the time they spend together in an intense way. Besides the relationship to her Dutch relatives, especially important is the contact to her direct family: her mother, father and sister. During their three month Europe trip, the blog emphasized their feeling of togetherness and group spirit: "I think it kind of put us all together a little bit. Because people knew that, because my family knew that I was recording a blog. Then during the day, we kind of came up with the quote of the day" (L2, 48). She was reporting especially the fun they had together. Although the informant was the official writer of the blog, the whole family contributed. Through the group work the report got even closer to their actual experiences. The blog posts support that the family experience was a salient motivation to travel and to write the experience down. Instead of facts the focus is on relational information: "Strangely Amsterdam feels like home, especially when the link to here seems to just be that of the Family Tree until now" (L2, Post: At home in Amsterdam). Moreover, the group feeling could be underlined through certain activities that became part of this specific journey: "Getting over that we headed for a coffee and our only traditional Apple Pie of the whole trip!" (L2, Post: Amsterdam to London). Here again, the concept of enoughness is striking, because this tradition makes them authentic members of their own little travel community. They were remembering their experiences very close to the point of time they happened. This intensified the fun they had together and made the experience richer: "And it gave them a chance to remember because one or two days later when we had internet, so, we were like, oh I will read a bit kind of thing. Or, wasn't that funny? And we talk about it again and laugh" (L2, 48). On the photos she puts the family experience plays an

important role too as it increases the feeling of togetherness. The inter-personal family relationship could be strengthened through the blog.

Looking at the blog of informant L4, intra-personal relationships seem to matter as well. He is not referring to people he already knows, but to relationships build on the trip. These new relationships to other backpackers are so important for him, that he dedicated a whole post to them. He describes in which way he appreciates the short time friendships made with other travellers: "There's a sense of openness and ease I just don't feel back in "society"." (L4, Post: The Tragedy Of The Backpacker Relationship). It is important for him to remember the good feelings and be thankful, instead of being sad that an experience is over.

Inter-personal relations are not only shown through the blog posts. The blog is as well a means through which relationship can be strengthened or established. Several interviewees explained that they like writing a blog because it is an easy way to communicate. Instead of writing emails to friends and family members with the same information, they publish it once on the blog. For example L1, says that in an easy way she can help more people than only her acquaintances. Consequently, the stage of storing, including writing messages to other people, gets easier. However, this does not say anything about the quality of relationships, regarding the fact that she writes less personal e-mail since she has a blog.

5.3.2 How the bloggers construct authenticity for the reader

LP2 admits an important disadvantage that travel reports online have:

"Schauen Sie, was das Thema Reise angeht wird man heute im Internet förmlich überflutet von Information. Das Problem ist nicht, dass man die Information nicht findet, als Laie, sondern, dass man die Information schwer einschätzen kann" (LP2, 34).

"Look, when it comes to the topic travelling, you get almost drowned with information. The problem is not that you don't find the information as a layman, but that it's difficult to assess the information" (translation by author).

In contrast, the work of journalists consists in reliable and serious investigations, showing the authentic parts of each destination. LP3 adds that blogs which are not authentic, made by fake profiles, are detected easily by the user. In the following part it will be illustrated which elements create authenticity and thus make the reader believe that the report is real.

Multimedia. Photos were often named by the interviewees when they were asked about authenticity construction on their blog. Interestingly, the photo scenes which are supposed to produce authenticity differ among them. For instance, informant LP1 does not want to take photographs of the big tourist attractions: "The offbeat kind of locations that you go to. I think it's important to portrait that on your blog. That's a way of bringing about the flavour of the place" (LP1, 72). Nevertheless, typical tourist attractions from Amsterdam and the northern villages do appear on her blog. Yet again, enoughness is to the point, because by providing the essential elements of a vacation in the Netherlands she can prove to her reader that she really has experienced the country. Probably a way to produce authenticity is to include the own person from time to time on the photos to convey the message that the experience is real (LP1, Post: Why Amsterdam rocks). Comparing this data to chapter 2.1, the blogger LP1 shows characteristics of a tourist instead of a traveller since, as Rojek (1993) explains, the goal of a tourist is to witness something and to get a proof of actually having lived a certain experience.

L4 states directly that self-portrays in front of famous places are a good way of proving that you have actually been there: "One reason is to upload it and say, oh look where I am. And also a bit like, we are tourists, what the hell" (L4, 54). He can show his identity as a real tourist through those pictures. Photos are considered to be an important company of the text and as an essential part of travel blogs also by L1:

"Creo que un post sin fotos, cuando hablamos de viajes, sería como un post descalcinado" (L1, 36).

"I think that a post without photos, if we are speaking of travel, would be like a post being barefoot" (translation by the author).

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Informant L1 needs photos of what she has seen and lived in her blog, because a text alone is not capable of transmitting everything she wants. Pictures instead speak a bit for themselves and make the reports more lively and interesting. Moreover, in her post about Keukenhof she includes a link to her Flickr account, giving people access to additional pictures on another platform.

L2 has a similar strategy, combining text and pictures. She states that only pictures are not enough and adds explanations with some facts and details in order to make the reader understand what is portrayed on the photos. So, she included historical details from a travel guide she was reading on the trip.

Furthermore, putting non-professional photos can show that they were made by an ordinary person, like in the case of L5:

La calidad de las fotos deja mucho que desear, ya se estaba haciendo de noche y mi super cámara-móvil perdía eficacia.

Figure 8 *Screenshot Blog L5*

(L5, Post: Smallest house of Amsterdam, 22.06.2008, retrieved: 16.06.2014)

In the utterance beneath the photo the blogger explains that the quality is bad because of his mobile camera and the light conditions. He evaluates his own content and in doing so he can

underline that the picture is authentic, made by the blogger himself and not copied from another source.

Next to the photos, videos are popular on blogs and improve authenticity. Informant L1 adds a YouTube video to the blog which gives the reader an additional perspective. With the video she can support her own perception of Haarlem as a beautiful place that is worth visiting.

Communication. Communication was found to be very important when it comes to authenticity construction. Under every post of informant LP1, interaction with the reader can be observed. Often it is only phatic communication and does not convey practical information. It is more used to show that the writer is actually there and to maintain social relationships, for example by repeating that she really likes Amsterdam.

Informant LP3 as well states that communication with the reader produces authenticity because like this they know that there is actually a real person who responds them:

> "Este detalle pienso que humaniza lo digital y hace que realmente tenga éxito el blog y esté bien valorado" (LP3, 6).

> "This detail, I think makes the digital more human and makes that blogs are really successful and well appreciated" (translation by author).

As well informant L2 is conveying authenticity to the readers with the help of comments:

"[…] being able to comment, like, 'was it really how you felt?' gave us a way to answer a bit to them rather than just being on our own trip reputation of what we were saying" (L2, 72).

They have the possibility to sympathize with the travellers and are more likely to believe their stories.

Using a blog as a means through which communication takes place, offers new ways of reporting. Informant LP1 sees an essential feature in the possibility to link to others, creating a richer presentation:

> The thing about blogging, the thing about writing on the internet is that it's not your own experience alone, I think what makes it interesting is also when you link to other peoples perspectives. […] I feel compelled to link at least to a couple of other peoples' experiences (LP1, 22).

Therefore, the community is creating the report together. Through different perspectives the blog gets more reliable and trustworthy. As explained in chapter 5.2, during the reporting process linking is essential, describing a destination from several angles and adding helpful information. The polyphony reached through linking caters for more authenticity and can make the blog less subjective.

Subjectivity. When analysing different blogs it was found that often a register of tourism genre is used. Informant L1 for example describes the scenes she is seeing and the special atmosphere Amsterdam has to offer in detail:

> La casa era tremendamente acogedora y tranquila, pero lo que más nos gustó, y con diferencia, fue la terraza trasera, con vistas a la pradera y al canal. Un buen libro, una copa de vino blanco y unas fresas bien fresquitas para aprovechar las últimas horas de sol. *What else?* (L1, Post: Haarlem y alrededores).
>
> The house was extremely cosy and quiet, but what we liked best, and above all, was the back terrace with a view over the meadow and the canal. A good book, a glass of white wine and some strawberries well cooled to enjoy the last hours of sunshine. *What else?* (translation by author).

She is evaluating her trip in a very positive way and attempts to visualize the atmosphere through a detailed, picturesque language. It appears a change in language as she adds in English 'What else?' to the Spanish text. This is probably meant as a reference to the famous commercial of the brand 'Nespresso'. The commercial is about enjoying Nespresso coffee no-holds-barred; this feeling of complete pleasure she can transport to the reader through the reference. About negative experiences she writes very few. As well her photos always show very nice, enjoyable sceneries:
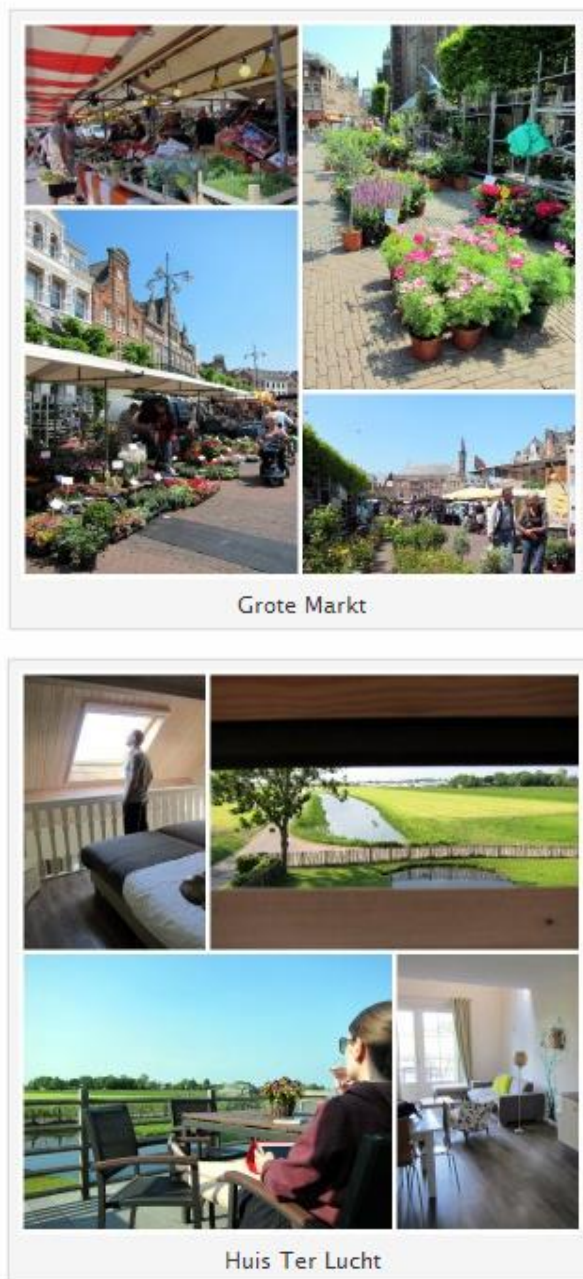
Grote Markt

Huis Ter Lucht

Figure 9 *Screenshot Blog L1*

(L1, Post: Haarlem, 14.06.2013, retrieved: 17.06.2014).

She admits in the interview that not all the photos are made by herself, instead she chooses those which best capture the beautiful atmosphere.

From the point of view of the journalist LP2, travel blogger should write in a more critical way:

> Den Tipp, den ich an viele Reiseblogs habe ist, dass ich es viel zu unkritisch finde. Die Leute machen eine Reise und finden sofort alles paradiesisch und wunderbar und toll und hier bin ich glücklich und das

hätte ich nie gedacht, dass es so wahnsinnig toll ist. Da werd ich dann immer sehr schnell misstrauisch (LP2, 36).

The tip I have for many travel blogs is that I find it way too uncritical. People make a trip and instantly find everything like in paradise and wonderful and amazing and it's like I'm happy here and I never thought that it would be so insanely great. I feel very easily suspicious then (translation by author).

However, even if writing about positive and negative experiences in an honest way, travel blogger usually write from their personal experience. Blogger L3 is aware of the subjectivity blogs are based on: "Blogs like mine are just casual travelogues, not news articles and bloggers are not journalist. It might not be 100% real. It's just something that bloggers experienced and wished to share with others" (L3, 13). P1 who is a professional in tourism is reading blogs and sees a problem in their subjectivity. Depending on the personality of the blogger, an experience is evaluated in a subjective way. These evaluations and impressions are no guarantee to experience it the same way.

L1 caters for authenticity in her self-description. She elaborates 25 aspects of herself, for example by explaining her good memory capacities. According to herself, she has the ability to remember precisely:

„De hecho recuerdo con precisión y claridad hechos, cifras, fechas, olores, ropa, colores y sensaciones como si de fotografías se tratara" (L1, Post: Sobre mí).

„In fact I remember precisely and clearly facts, numbers, dates, smells, clothes, colours and sensations as if they were photographs" (translation by author).

This positive self-description is used to build trust and probably, by putting the blogger into an expert's position, the report shall appear more trustworthy and authentic.

Updating. As argued in chapter 5.2 frequent updates matter during the writing process of the interviewed bloggers. This characteristic of travel blogs transmits authenticity. According to interviewee LP3, authenticity is reached through writing spontaneously, improving the connection to the reader:

"El mejor proceso es de manera espontánea… Si escribes según te sale, es cuando mejor conectas con el lector. Lógicamente sabiendo previamente qué quieres contarles, pero de una manera sincera y de tú a tú" (LP3, 8).

"The best process is spontaneous ... If you just write like it comes to your mind, is when you connect best with the reader. Logically, previously you need to know what you want to tell, but in a sincere way and from you to you" (translation by author).

Wilce (2009) states that the spontaneous and honest expression of feelings transports authenticity and is an essential trend of the current age. This behaviour is socially expected. Therefore the utterance of informant LP3 can be connected to the notion of constructive authenticity. If a tourist is aware that spontaneous writings are considered to be authentic, he or she will construct authenticity on the blog according to this expectation.

L2 shows a very spontaneous and honest updating behaviour. She posts every evening, no matter if she is tired and evaluates her own writings: "As you can read, yesterday's write up was crap as I was doing it whilst falling asleep.. Learning from that and seeing the tired state I am now in" (L2, Post: Biggest and best day in Amsterdam).

Through this post she makes it very clear that the text is authentic since contents with bad quality are not excluded.

This construction of authenticity on the blog, which happens during the writing process and in the post-trip, is very important for the stage of preparation, since, in order to prepare successfully the reader needs to believe in the blog discourse. The data proves that the three stages of the journey mutually influence each other.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The main research question of this thesis is about the impact of blogs and blogging activities on the tourist experience in the Netherlands. The e-ethnographic investigation with the data of

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professional information offices, professional/leisure bloggers and leisure bloggers gives helpful insights into this matter in order to answer the three questions.

The research was divided into three parts, the pre-trip, the trip and the post-trip. However, it was predicted that, according to Ek et al. (2008), a dynamic and flexible view on the different stages of the tourist experience is to the point. The fluent perception of time and space is shown in the research, e.g. by informants who move their pre-trip preparation as well as the evaluation partly into the trip stage of the journey. Blogs seem to reflect the rapid and complex movements of modern societies.

The complexity of modernity was also underlined by the finding that the blog discourse cannot be regarded on the blog alone as there are a lot of links, which extend the discourse to other sites, like other blogs or the own Facebook page. The intertextuality and quick movements in the blogosphere make the approach of Appadurai (1996) reasonable, who sees modern societies as fluent scapes. In the following, the results for each research question will be discussed, drawing conclusions that explain how the tourist experience changed through blogging.

The impact of blogging on the process of travel preparation. In chapter 3.1 the concepts of Aho (2001) were explained. According to him, there are several personal resources, which determine the intensity of the tourist experience. The first resource, knowledge background, according to the interviewees became much more extensive. Collective intelligence in blogs, with comments, feedback and links caters for information quality and an easy preparation. Professional services adapt to the changes the internet brought and offer specialized services and memorable experiences. However, almost all informants emphasized that they prefer the unbiased reviews and trust found in blogs. Blogs make them independent of professional agencies. According to Zehrer et al. (2011) the different perspectives which include positive as well as negative information were crucial for the success of blogs. The tourists of this research seem to have high standards when it comes

to the travel preparation because they have more independence and freedom to choose. At the same time, having more control and flexibility during the preparation means that tourists have more responsibility to decide which kind of information they will believe and use. Although there is more information available, the question is whether this improves the experience.

A mentioned advantage of blogs is that they offer a huge amount of information that responds to all kinds of needs. Informant L1 for example explains that professional services can never reach the amount of individualized information offered in blogs. Urry and Larsen (2011) speak of a democratization of the 'tourist gaze', which could be partly proved in the result chapter 5.1. Through blogs people have more options to prepare that influence the way they perceive a destination. In addition, everyone has the possibility to publish their experiences and therefore create the tourist gaze of others. However, this democratization can only appear if people trust in the presented discourse. People can find groups of like-minded others who are interested in the same specialized topics. As Chung and Buhalis (2008) explain, uncertainty gets reduced when similar people can interchange their thoughts about travelling.

Some interviewees explained that they actually do not want to prepare too extensively to be able to experience something spontaneously. So, what they search in blogs often is the trust and encouragement of the community. Pan et al. (2007) and Wang (2012) write about the high influence of travel blog communities on other tourists' decisions. This is supported especially through the answers of LP1 who took the decision to be an independent female traveller due to reading blogs.

The studies of Pan et al. (2007) and Zehrer et al. (2011) presented in the conceptual framework, speak of a very strong impact of travel blogs. This seems true for some informants, although the impact varies across the informants. Some of them, especially the group of leisure bloggers do not feel like members of a community and read them very little.

Indeed, there has been recognized an overestimation of blogs, which cannot be called a mass-medium since the majority of blogs have a relatively small amount of readers and are only read by their private circle of acquaintances (Perseus, 2003).

Some interviewees, mostly the professional leisure bloggers, saw the drawbacks of blogging and advised to use them carefully. They claimed that a lot of blogs are written in an unprofessional way and are too subjective. Thus, although there is more information available, it does not necessarily mean that the experience improves.

In this regard, the democratization of the 'tourist gaze' that Urry and Larsen (2011) discovered, for some informants is less to the point because they trust in the available information to a lesser degree. The freedom to choose of different information sources for them is limited. In order to actually have an extension of the tourist gaze, trust is essential. The establishment of trust in turn takes time, which indicates that some informants object the concept of the fluidity of modernity explained by Bauman (2010), where everything moves and changes quickly.

To sum up, the process of travel preparation does improve, as long as honest information is provided, in which tourist can trust.

The impact of blogging on the reporting process. When analysing the way the informants blog, updating was found to be a key characteristic. Karlsson (2006) states that through the frequent updating of blogs it is possible that writers are inspired more by other present-day writers since consumption and production feed into each other and therefore influence each other. The question is which consequences this higher speed of information exchange has. According to the journalist LP2, the closeness of reading and writing is very positive, since some topics have a non-durable actuality. Through his blog he is able to adapt to quickly changing trends and reading up-to-date information of other bloggers' perspectives gives his journalistic articles more depth. Here, blogging is a means through which he can adapt to the fluid movements of modernity, introduced by Bauman (2010). Yet, there is the

opinion of L2 who does not trust in cyberspace in the long-term and assigns more meaning to a printed report. This corresponds to Bauman (2004) who claims that everything is replaceable in the fluidity of modernity and only used for a short period of time. The awareness of an unstable cyberspace might cause that blogger concentrate even more on updating, knowing that the blog perhaps is not used after a period of time. In addition, as the majority of informants strives to update as quickly as possible, they feel pressured and take less time to think about the content carefully.

Miura and Yamashita (2007) found that a positive consequence of blogging is that the reader motivates the blogger. For the interviewed informants the reader means a big motivation too and the awareness of the blog and a potential readers caused that almost all informants looked at their environment more carefully and attentive when they are writing a blog.

In addition, the data suggests that sense making, due to blogging and active interaction with the blogosphere is a more conscious and explicit process. Accordingly, a result of the study is that the tourist experience is more conscious and explicit through blogging, because by evaluating typical Dutch tourist sites from their own point of view, the bloggers rebuild the myth according to own experiences. Reflecting together with other like-minded bloggers about it strengthens this process. This is in line with Colt (2011) who explains that sense making during a trip is associated to the iconic myth a person created before.

Miura and Yamashita (2007) and Colt (2011) however did not expand on the following aspect of blogging. The necessity to update frequently in the cases of some informants is so strong that blogging got stressful for them. It was also found that blogging can be an obsession or addiction which awakens the ambition and is used to prove oneself and find self-affirmation. By sharing the travel success frequently, they search for the approval of others. It seems that the informants feel challenged to provide creative and individualized content instead of repeating facts that can be found in other sources, in order to attract readers. As

Davenport and Beck (2001) explained, in postmodern societies, the need to be seen and recognized by others got stronger. This need, by some of the informants got so strong that it made the experience less enjoyable. According to Davenport and Beck (2001) people have a short time perspective and desire to consume immediately. This is also shown by the fact that several informants have a Facebook page as a complement to the blog to attract readers. Another possible explanation is that there is a trend in direction to shorter and even more often updated posts than blogs provide.

Despite the wish of several informants to write about local people and their culture, the focus in the blogs is on iconic images of the Netherlands, e.g. by creating a vivid picture of biking in Amsterdam, the red-light district or the Northern villages. A reason might be that they use known tourist sites as a strategy to convince the reader of the authenticity of the information, which is discussed within research question number three.

As explained in 3.3, in order to analyse the complex blog discourse, Lomborg (2009) introduces a continuous scale with thee parameters: content, directionality, and style. In this research his scale fits very well because in every text different kinds of voices were found. Especially the aspect of directionality changes because the reader is closer to the writing process. The discourse of the comment section is entirely dialogical and also the blog texts include directionality. The parameter content as well corresponds to the readers' wants; LP1 for instance responds to the readers' opinions and writes more topical, in a trip advisor format despite her own desire to write in the internal style of a travel story.

Through this analysis of content and writing styles of the blogs, it becomes clear that the reader and thus the members of the blogosphere have an important influence on the writing process. The interaction in the travel blogosphere has positive consequences on the blogger as it reduces fears and encourages them to experience new or unusual things. In terms of the blogosphere, there is a distinction between private and public content. In some of the comments insider knowledge is written, e.g. when LP1 communicates in Hindi. This specific

information indicates a private sphere, because it reduces the amount of people who are able to follow the conversation (Gunter, 2009). However, it also shows that the definition of the blogosphere as a closed group is complicated, since there is always the possibility that other people read it and might join the group. In the communication of the blogosphere also phatic communication was identified. Again, this information indicates a private sphere because it has no real meaning or practical benefit for outsiders. Here, the concept of 'groupness' by Brubaker (2004) gives insights into the distinction between 'private' and 'public'. According to him, groups have a fluent character and therefore groupness accounts for the degree of social interaction rather than defining fixed groups or audiences. Accordingly, also the distinction between private and public sphere is fluent.

The data suggests that Aho's (2001) resource of social networks which intensifies a tourist experience, could be enriched through blogging since some interviewees had great advantages because of their new contacts. LP2 for example could experience a destination better due to the locals he met on blogs. Some informants also mentioned that the blog made it easier to maintain their social ties and intensify relationships. The third resource, the ability to approach a tourist experience, probably as well got intensified. Reading other like-minded peoples blogs encouraged most of the interviewed bloggers. Finding like-minded other travellers encouraged them to approach new tourist experiences in their individual way. On the other hand the writing process gave some of them confidence and the feeling of achievement. On the first glance, there is no difference to the writers of classic travel literature. Yet, the degree of self-affirmation is probably higher because there is more feedback of the reader. Similar-minded people find each other easier and can approve each other's worldview.

The impact of blogging on experiencing authenticity. Staged authenticity, as explained by MacCannell (1973) was found by the informants in the Netherlands. Yet, not the authenticity of the objects themselves is crucial, but how the tourists perceive these objects

(MacCannell, 2008). Commodified culture, like the Cheese factory in Volendam, informant LP1 would not perceive as authentic, however, it is a place she visits and writes about in a positive way. In contrast, actually authenticity means for her to experience something local, like markets or food. This contrast can be analysed on the subject of the distinction between tourists and travellers made in chapter 2.1. Although some of the informants claim to be travellers, they actually engage in tourist activities and look at what they expect to encounter. This corresponds to Rojek (1993) who explains that the tourist aims to confirm the own world view. Photos of tourist sites are also common among the interviewees. Thus, the goal is to witness something and to get a record of it. Through presenting Dutch tourist sites, a proof of actually being a tourist in the Netherlands can be given to the reader, which is in line with the concept of enoughness. The presentation of sites that seem to be authentic is used strategically to convince the reader. This power to convince others most likely gives the informants a good feeling. The data indicates that, as Bruner (1994) explains, that authenticity is linked to authority. People who write about tourism have the authority and power to decide what is authentic and tell it to others.

Mkono (2012) found that tourists have a fluid perception of authenticity, changing their opinions easily. Some informants did not present a consistent perception of authenticity or adapt reflexively to the commodified culture. Thus, the perception of staged authenticity by tourists should only be analysed, having constructive authenticity in mind. Therefore, in this research, staged authenticity is not rejected, instead the focus does not lie on it, but on the tourist and his personal perceptions that depend on the tourist gaze. In line with the constructivist understanding of authenticity, the tourist gaze is built constantly. For informant L3 authenticity is connected to his previously constructed tourist gaze, as for him things a country is famous for are authentic. Again here, enoughness plays a role, because the essential features that need to be acquired, for example in order to be an authentic tourist in the Netherlands, are socially constructed.

Urry and Larsen (2011) makes clear that for the postmodern traveller the authentic gaze got less important. The results indicate that this might be true in terms of gazing at commodified culture. Authenticity for the informants is more linked to an authentic perception of the self and the own relationships than to having an authentic gaze at the environment.

Therefore, different to what expected in the beginning of the research, existential authenticity, as explained by Wang (1999), was found to be the most important understanding of authenticity for the informants and was also found within the blogging activities the informants do. Through blogging the informants could express existential authenticity and intensify their experience. Expressing the authentic self and the personal thoughts, according to Wilce (2009) are salient aspects for authenticity in the modern age. Since a big part of the data is about intra-personal authenticity, the ideas of Wilce (2009) can be supported. The informants speak a lot about the self-realization they reach on a travel trip. They intensify this feeling through blogging about the experience, reflecting about it and getting approval of readers. This reinforces a feeling of accomplishment and supports a positive identity construction of the travellers. Constructing identity hence is a salient aspect of blogs, reinforcing the intra-personal understanding of authenticity. As Davenport and Beck (2001) claim, there is a trend of individualism and hence it makes sense that the authenticity of the inner self was found to be important. For some informants blogging means to improve personal writing skills and creativity, so that they could even turn their talent into a profession. This shows that every informant has the possibility to publish and the chance to have professional success with it. The publishing process therefore gets democratized through blogging. Despite this trend of individualism, also inter-personal authenticity matters to some of the informants. With the help of a blog some informants were able to emphasize and intensify their feeling of togetherness and group spirit. Informant L1 and her family remembered their experiences through the blog very close to the actual happening. This increased their fun and catered for a richer group experience.

Authenticity is constructed mainly during the post-trip or post-experience. According to Aho (2001) stage enrichment of the tourist experience means to spread experiences to a wider audience, which is definitely reached in blogs. However, enrichment only is fulfilled, if there really is an audience, reading the texts. Since the informants, mostly the leisure bloggers do not feel part of the travel blogosphere they might have small audiences. This means that their power or authority to convince others of their authenticity perception is reduced. The impact of blogs on the tourist experience seems to depend on the degree of engagement or authority someone has within the blogosphere. The data suggests that the more someone engages actively and increases the number of readers, the more successful the stage of enrichment is fulfilled, which means that the tourist experience improves. This is however only true, if blogging does not mean stress for the tourist.

When analysing how the bloggers construct authenticity for the reader, it was found that the explanations of McNeill (2003) is supported. Three dimensional experiences through photos, videos and linking cater for authenticity. This opinion however is not sufficient. Rak (2005) states another very important point: in the disembodied online environment, it is crucial to overcome anonymity in order to create authenticity. The data suggests that communication helped the informants to counteract anonymity and verify identities. Because of the data overload brought by new technologies, authentic information got very valuable. According to Bauman (2010), in the current society the quantity of connections is more important than their quality. This is supported in this study, for instance by LP2 who alerts to question the quality of blogs, as information is often too positive and subjective. L1 for example presents her experience very positive, without including any negative aspects of her travel. The popularity of blogs is due to unbiased reports of tourists, yet the problem is that this informant strives to present herself as positive as possible. As a result, information is too subjectively and not balanced. This finding supports McNeill (2003) who mentions the contradiction between the requirement of authenticity on the one hand and striving to present

an idealized self on the other hand. As well the analysis of Bosangit et al. (2012) showed that blog texts with risks and challenges are used to present and construct identity. Performativity, thus the construction of identity through behaviour, plays an important role in this study. Identities should not be seen as pre-given categories, but as formed by the language use (Pennycook, 2004). The contents of the travel blogs can be regarded as performative actions, for example in the case of L3 who emphasizes his identity as an easy-going, open minded tourist through the language he uses and the photos he includes. Yet, these hints do not allow a strict categorization of his identity. Poster (2001) states that the virtual reality is a combination of imaginary and reality, creating new forms of experiences and identities. The difficulty to decide between authentic and imagined information was also explored in the study; informant L3 for instance is aware of the fact that memories of bloggers cannot always be completely true.

According to McNeill (2003), immediate entries are authentic, because time cannot change the memory. Also in this study the opinion was common that spontaneous, up-to-date posts cater for authenticity. The urge to update is in line with Wilce (2009). Expressing authentic feelings in an honest and spontaneous way got very important in the age of modernity. A person, who is able to express and share the authentic self, shows courage. If a tourist is aware that spontaneous writings are considered to be authentic, he or she will construct authenticity on the blog according to this expectation.

7. Limitations and further research

Most of the interviewees were found through an Internet research and consequently their blog posts about the Netherlands were written some time ago. For further research, it would be interesting to do more in depth field work in Amsterdam, like shown with informant L4. Tourists like him, who are travelling through the Netherlands at the point of time of the research, are able to memorize their actual tourist experience more precisely. The researcher

could spend some time with the bloggers in Amsterdam and observe them during their experience and writing process. It would be possible to compare the plans they have about their Netherlands posts with the posts they actually write. The researcher could observe their reports and see the developments on the blog over time, being close to the interactions. After writing the conclusions it would be interesting to do follow-up interviews in order to ask the informants on the one hand if the interpretations of the researcher have been correct, and on the other hand to find out how their answers would change after they have come back from the trip. Furthermore, group interviews with several travel bloggers could help to understand how opinions are built and how they negotiate their understanding of authenticity.

Ten informants built the data of this thesis; this catered for in-depth analysis of these individuals and can explain important developments of the tourist experience. However, it is not possible to generalize the results for the whole population. In order to do so, the conclusions could be tested with more informants and additional follow-up interviews.

A similar research could be done with expats or exchange students who are living for a longer period of time in the Netherlands and who are coming because of different motivations and goals. Like this their perspective could be compared with the tourist experiences to find out in which way blogs influence their stay in the Netherlands. In addition, it would be interesting to conduct the research in a less developed country than the Netherlands, which is relatively quiet and secure. Analysing places with more possible dangers and insecurities, one could find out in which way blogs influence the experiences of tourists there as trust might have a more important value.

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Appendices

Appendix I URL travel blogs

LP1 http://traveholic.wordpress.com/category/europe/the-netherlands/

LP2 http://tourististan.de/

LP3 http://que-ver-en-mi-viaje-a.blogspot.nl/2013/03/ruta-por-amsterdan-en-2-dias.html

L1 http://blog.bernabeumolina.com/category/europa/paises-bajos/

L2 http://petrasparks.wordpress.com/?s=Amsterdam

L3 http://alanliow.wordpress.com/2013/09/

L4 http://lightwayofthinking.com/category/travel/

L5 http://granevasion.wordpress.com/category/amsterdam/

Appendix II Interview P1

30.04.2014, Tilburg face-to-face

IM = Interviewer Marie

RE = Respondent employee

(…) = recording unclear

Colours assigned to the three research questions:

RQ1: Change of travel preparation through blogging

RQ2: Change of reporting process through blogging

RQ3: Construction of authenticity through blogging

IM1:   Can you tell me something about the people who come to this agency? The tourists?

RE2:   Yes, just the type of person? There are different kinds. Most of the time there are the people who love to walk or going cycling in the surrounding. Just for the fun. And then you will see the people are mostly 40, 50 years or older. And we also have sometimes families. But the families are mostly there during the holidays. Like this week and also during June, July, August. Then there are more families because they are all on vacation somewhere here in the surroundings and are visiting our city and come for some information. Then we also are also giving information for the people who are coming to live in Tilburg. So, new people. And the type of public is from young to old. Everybody almost. And in the location we are now

situated we also see in the weekends, especially Friday, Saturday, that there are also the people who are living here. Not only the tourists, but also the people from here. There are coming here because it is very close to the centre.

IM3: And the shop is also nice.

RE4: Yes, that's a little bit the kind of people. But the biggest category is the walking and cycling.

IM5: The nature tourists?

RE6: Yes.

IM7: How do you help tourists with the travel orientation when they come here?

RE8: When they come here inside and they go to the shop, they are just going to look for what they want. We go to the customer and ask them if they can help them. We are doing the hostmanship, so we ask if we can help the customer and we want to, through asking we want to know what he wants. What it is his desire? Where does he comes for? Especially on his questions we will give the answer. So, we are not going to give a customer who comes for walking, information about cycling, museum and so on. No, if he comes for walking we will especially give him information about the walking areas here in the surrounding. Through asking, we know what the customer wants.

IM9: Mainly they are interested in maps? Or what do they exactly want?

RE10: Especially the tourist people, they are coming for information about the sights here in the centre, like museum, a city walk, tourist centre, the shops. They all want to know where the centre is.

IM11: That is pretty near!

RE12: Yes! On the other side we also have the visitor who especially comes for the city centre part. But also tourists who want to go to the surrounding. Because the surrounding of Tilburg is a lot of nature. In the North, South, East, West, everywhere you look, there is nature. So, a part of the group is coming especially for questions about that area. But there is also a part who just comes for a weekend and they want to visit the culture here in Tilburg, like museums, theatre, music. There are a lot of things to do here. You see in the summer period, when also the events are starting, because it's Kings Day and we start here with 'Tilburg singt'. So, the whole city is singing. From that event on, it's the first event in the New Year. After that, there is every time a big new event. But Tilburg is also a city where every evening, every day, there is something to do in the city centre. We also get a lot of questions about what is here to do today or tomorrow. So, they want to know.

IM13: They want on the day information?

RE14: Yes, because when they come today, they want to know what they can do today. Or tomorrow when they stay a day longer. But things like shopping. It's ok, they also want to do that. But they want to do something special next to shopping.

IM15: Yes, and it's good to come here for that.

RE16: Yes, the questions is so big, it's so different. Every day there is another questions. So, this is the most information we give.

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IM17:   That's very nice. I should do a bike tour as well. So, what questions do they often have, we already answered that. How does the contact with the tourists look like? You told me you speak with them, but is it also over the internet?

RE18:   Yes, next we have the shop of course where they come to us and we see them and give them especially for that day the information. But before they come to Tilburg we also are in contact with the tourist by phone or by email. And also the tourists can look at our website. There they also have a lot of information. And if they have further questions, they can contact us also by email or telephone. So, we also give a lot of information through those two channels. Like, email you have to see it more, they are asking, they want to know something about Tilburg and we will send them a package with all kind of information, what they can do in the weekend when they are arriving. So, they already have the information before they are coming. And telephone, it's different, it's one person asks when the fun fare is again in Tilburg. And the other wants to know if Sunday the shops are open or at what time, at Kings Day, are the shops open? Yes, no? But also, just activities. What can we do here in Tilburg with a group of persons? Can we do a city tour? Can we do a game? Or something like that. They also call for that kind of things. Family day, Bachelor party.

IM19:   Wow! It's interesting. And how do you attract the tourists? Online and here?

RE20:   For now, we don't have any campaign. It's now just very quiet. It's not that we are. Well, website and shop of course, but there are no special things we are doing now to get the tourists people here to Tilburg. Because there is also a part of the city hall and there is also a new city marketing.

IM21:   They do that?

RE22:   Yes, how do I say? It's just the beginning. But, we don't know the goals. We are just doing our job, that' all. We are going further. But (...)

IM23:   I know what you mean. Het begint nu.

RE24:   Yes, so there are no marketing activities at this moment for tourists here to Tilburg. In the future we will do it.

IM25:   Ok. What do you think how important is the travel preparation?

RE26:   Sorry?

IM27:   The travel planning, how important is it when you go on a travel?

RE28:   Ah ok, before they come here or just in general?

IM29:   Both, let's say both.

RE30:   Ok. I think if they are just going for one day, there is no preparation or something. People are just going there. They know a day before or a week before that they are coming to the city. But, they will see here what they want to do. But people who come for a weekend or a week, I think yes, they are going to search before what they can do and what they can see. I think also that to choose for a place, to go for a weekend or something, that's more important. Do you go to Tilburg, Breda or Den Bosch. I think people are going to look which place is the most interesting place and then they are going. This kind of thing is important. But when they already chose, I think they see it in the location. Most people still want to go to tourist

information office to ask what they can see. Some people are just looking at their own iPad or mobile phone what they can do.

IM31:   Maybe they search before on the Internet and then they come to you? Something like that?

RE32:   Yes, most tourist people who come here for a weekend or for a week they already search on the Internet. Visitors on the website, we see that every month, it is more than in the shop. So, the last two year in the shop there were less people. And, I have to say that from January to now, we see the visitors in the shop, we see that there are going to be more. But our website, the last three years, there are every time more and more people. So, you will see that people are going from the shop to the Internet. But, we still have a lot of visitors.

IM33:   So, in which way is the Internet influencing your daily work then?

RE34:   I think most important is the information because we are an information office and we give information about our city and you will see that the Internet gives all kinds of information, also about the city. So, you have to show your value as a tourist information office. Only for giving information, you can also search on the Internet. We have to do more to get the customer here. So like the hostmanship we are doing here. We want to give a little bit more than only the information.

IM35:   What is the hostman?

RE36:   Hostmanship. We call it in Dutch hostmanship. The customer is the king. And we will help the customer like he wants. So, you give him the information he wants. If we don't have the information then ok. But you can explain it in a good way that we can't give the information. But most of the time we can give the information. So, next to the information you have to put a new item, new activity, that they cannot find anywhere else. Like the activities we also book for customers, the activities we also book for groups. Like a city walk through the centre and visiting a museum, for a nice price. Then they are coming. They have the information about the centre but they also get explanations. They are seeing, they are tasting, they are feeling also the centre when they are going out. So, it's more than the information we give. We want to give them a day they don't forget and they are coming back to Tilburg. So, we send them out of the door and they are going to all the other companies here and if they are spending there their money we are also happy. Because they are in Tilburg.

IM37:   Is it also important for them that you are from here? You know the city in a way that maybe people online don't know.

RE38:   It's important, but not everyone who is working here is coming from here. Most people are living in Tilburg, but not everyone. But I think as an employee you can learn it. Because there are two boys now in the front, they are doing a traineeship and they are both not coming from Tilburg. One comes from, well, from the region. And they are also learning, they have to visit the museums, they have to visit the centre tour, they have to look all the maps from the cycling tours and the walking tours. The first week, they are only taking information. That's how they learn about Tilburg. So, I don't think it's the most important thing that people who are working here also come from this place.

IM39:   Do you also have international tourists?

RE40:   Yes, a little bit, but very small.

IM41:   Most are from the Netherlands?

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RE42: Most are from the Netherlands. A very small group international. And then you will see Germany, Belgium, but Belgium is also almost Dutch, the language is the same. French we also have, some Spanish people also. But especially in the summer period. Sometimes also Canada or the USA, it's very big. Maybe 5-10 % from the whole visitors in a year. I think Amsterdam has more.

IM43: Yeah, that's full of tourists. What do you think how does the travel preparation influence the experience you have? That's a bit difficult. How does the travel preparation, the way you plan, the way you prepare, influence the experience of the journey?

RE44: That's a very good questions. I translate your question into Dutch, then maybe I can. (...)

IM45: The experience of the journey, how does it change through the things you do before?

RE46: Yes, when they are here, what they. I have no idea. The preparation before, if that has influence on what they are doing here. Maybe we don't know it from the persons who are coming here for just one day, but when I am going to look to the people who are coming here with groups and are going to Tilburg city tour with a guide or visiting a museum or they are going to a city game in the centre with the group, then there is a big influence. They are coming here, they are asking to do something here in the centre for the whole day. They want to start a cup of coffee in one of Tilburg's cafés and afterwards they want to do a city tour with a guide, so that they know everything about the centre, they want to have lunch and afterwards they want to do some activity. Just different than the city tour. And they want to have dinner. And that's what we also do, we are making a whole day. That kind of things we all do before. So, the day that the people are coming, that has to be perfect. Otherwise we get complaints. Then the preparation is very important. You will see that there is an influence on the day they are coming. Because when the partners, the partnerships that we have, when there is something not good, they will see it as us because we are the booking office and not the partner where they have done the activity. So, it's our name and the name of the partnership. That's very important. But, just the daily visitors, no.

IM47: That makes sense. What do you think is an authentic experience here in Tilburg, what is very original, what you cannot get somewhere else?

RE48: I think, I don't know how to say it in English. But I think that the special thing here is the palace. I don't know if you know it?

IM49: The palace?

RE50: Palace Rathuis? Yes, I think that's the one, because that's a very old one from the history. King Wilhelm two he built the palace, he built the first stone, but before he could live in it, he died. So, the history is very nice to know.

IM51: Sad story.

RE52: Only the thing is that tourists cannot go into the palace. Because the palace is part of the government. And it's used now for weddings and it's always closed. Only there are special Sundays, that there are guides that are giving a tour through the palace. Most of the time they are very soon full booked.

IM53: It's worth to do that tour?

RE54: Yes, it's something with the history, because Tilburg is not so very from the history. It's more a very modern city. I don't know if you know Eindhoven? Tilburg is kind of like this. They have

a little bit of history and more modern buildings. Breda and Den Bosch have a lot of history. I think Tilburg is also famous for the textile, the textile museum is a very nice museum. Very modern, but also the old aspects you will see in the museum. It's also still a company where there are working. Also De Pont is a very nice museum, modern but in the past it was a textile fabric.

IM55: But you said that they are still working there?

RE56: In the textile museum. Yeah, they have a textile lab, that's the modern part and there are still people working. So, people in mode branche [English: fashion branch], it's kind of a start for that to show what they can do. And there are also part of their exhibitions. And there is a part also with the old instruments. So, you will the old and the new ones. But they are still working there.

IM57: That's nice.

RE58: Like towels and so on, everything in the museum shop is made in the museum.

IM59: I will go there actually, it's on my list!

RE60: It's very interesting.

IM61: And which role does authenticity play for tourists who come here? That they have an authentic experience, that they see the real things here? Do they often ask you about that?

RE62: Sorry?

IM63: Which importance has authenticity, or let's say that something is real or original, is that important for tourists who come here? Do they ask you?

RE64: Yes, they want to know what is typical in Tilburg. I think that's more typical. Yes. That person is called Kruikezeiker, I don't know if you have heard of it, Kruikezeiker?

IM65: Ah, I think I saw a statue here?

RE66: Yes, it's a statue, just when you go out the door.

IM67: In front of Happy Italy?

RE68: Yes, there is the statue and that's, we also have candy of it, it's a very important one because it's also from the history from Tilburg. So, people who are living here are coming to Kruikezeiker in the carnival period. I don't know if you know that one?

IM69: Carneval? Yes!

RE70: Because then the city during that period is Kruikstad and it is also from the history from the textile industry the working people, who are working in the textile, they are bringing their urine in a bottle in a kruik.

IM71: Their own?

RE72: Yes, their own from the morning, they were taking it to the fabric and they use it for (...) I have it in English, so I will give you a paper with what it means. They were using it, because there was something in the urine that was good for the textile.

IM73: Wow!

RE74: But I give you the explanation because I think that's one of the most typical, authentic things here in Tilburg. Especially the Kruikenzeiker and the textile industry because that's what Tilburg is famous of. When you are going to look to the modern part also (...) is one of the famous things.

IM75: How was it called?

RE76: Null dertig, it's the pop centre.

IM77: Ah, I heard about it.

RE78: And the theatre. Also the rock academia. I think I forgot some. And the churches, there are two in the centre. People are also visiting that ones. So, there are here in this area a lot of typical buildings and things people can see. Most of the time they don't know it. (...)

IM79: Yes, I didn't know that and I am here.

RE80: And also this area, this street and there are a couple of other streets here in Tilburg, we are promoting also the street because it's different than the shopping street. In the shopping street there are a lot of shops, big shops with big names and in this area there are also just little shops, from owners who just started with their own company.

IM81: Yes, I saw it!

RE82: And it makes more, how do I say, it makes it a little bit different than the high street. So, we also, when tourists are coming here, we also advice to go that area, because then they also see Tilburg from a different way.

IM83: More typical little shops.

RE84: Yes, so that's very nice.

IM85: And have you experience with travel blogs?

RE86: Travel blogs?

IM87: Yes, travel blogs, where you have online these, where a person has an own websites and writes about a whole trip and puts every day a new comment about what he just.

RE88: Ah, that, no. We don't have it. Not from Tilburg. No, we are not using blogs no.

IM89: But do you think blogs influence your business here?

RE90: Yes, I think there can be an influence. Only when you have blogs and they are writing something about Tilburg, our city the name Tilburg, most people don't, hm most, maybe 50% like Tilburg and 50 % don't like Tilburg. So, blogs, it can be very good for the city to have it, when the blog is positive. But it can also be negative. Then I think don't it's very good for Tilburg. And most, hm most, yes there is a difference because the Tilburgers, so the people who live here in Tilburg, and there are also a lot of people who don't like the city. And some people like the city, but it's not like Den Bosch, everyone likes Den Bosch, everyone likes it. But Tilburg, the name Tilburg is not so famous. But, still we are the 6th city of the whole Netherlands.

IM91:   The 6th biggest?

RE92:   Yes, the 6th biggest. So, Amsterdam is one, but Tilburg is the 6th. And Breda and Den Bosch are smaller. But the name, so when you are going to a travel blog, it has to be more positive than negative. Because when it's all negative, it will not give you traffic to the centre. Most people think, we don't go there. So, nobody is coming anymore to us. Yes, it's different. There are two ways I think. If people are happy and enthusiast about the city it can be very good thing to use, to promote your city.

IM93:   What do you think is the main difference between the text on the blog and the information you are offering here. What does it make different?

RE94:   I think when I am looking at travel blogs, the people are putting it on it. And we are using our website and also social media, like Facebook and Twitter, but we are putting the information on it. And there are also people who can react of course on Facebook if they like it or not. But then you will see someone who doesn't like it and the others persons like it. So, they are reacting on the other persons. So, the difference is, that we are putting information on it, just the information that is necessary and what they can do and what they can get and blogs are more experiences from people who have been here.

IM95:   More feelings maybe.

RE96:   Yes, and what's different is also who is putting the text on the blog because if it's just someone from Tilburg and he likes everything in Tilburg, that's ok, but it's someone who hasn't experienced Tilburg as partly what he likes and partly not. And it's different I think. But I think TripAdvisor, I think it can be a positive way to show you what other people think of Tilburg because most people are asking other people if they have been there, if they liked it and so you can give a lot of information as a tourist office but most people listening to the experiences of the others. So, in that way a blog is positive, because you will see the switch now. People are not going to think, oh nice websites! Because then the mother and the father are coming, no it's not a nice city, then the child will say, no, we don't go there. They will go safer if they don't go than if they go because of the website. I think the experience for people is very important, to get more people. Right?

IM97:   It's good! Why do you think people write and read travel blog?

RE98:   I think because they want to know what the other person has experienced. When I look to myself and I am going to a place somewhere in Europe I also want to know how other people like that kind of hotel or city, what they didn't like and what they liked. Of course, it also depends on the character of a person. Because what he doesn't like, maybe I like it. That's a little bit.

IM99:   Subjective?

RE100: Cause maybe he didn't like the food because he always wants more. And maybe you don't, I don't know how to explain.

IM101: I know what you mean.

RE102: But on the other side you are looking on blogs because you want to know how the experience from others is but for yourself you can also see if it's ok or not. But I think in that kind of way it's very important for people. I think in the whole travelling world you will see, like (…) or TripAdvisor, people are putting their experience on it and people are also looking at it. And I also heard that on (…) companies can also put their own information. So in that way it's also,

hm. It can also be not true. You don't know. So, yeah I don't know if it's always true or not true. You don't know it. Eventually you have to experience it yourself to know it. But I think for a big groups of people travel blogs are very important. But still we do nothing about it.

IM103: I think I already asked you most of the questions. Maybe, are there any stereotypes that you hear about the Netherlands and that are important for tourists?

RE104: Stereotypes of Holland? Here in Tilburg no. Amsterdam, that region yes. The Delft blue, the kissing couple, yes that are typical Dutch things. We also have here a bus tour, people can go to Keukenhof where there are a lot of tulips, yeah, that's typical. But, the international tourists who are coming here, they also want the clomps, something like that. They don't want something typical Tilburg, no, they want the wooden shoes and the Vermeer, just a little (...) they like it.

IM105: Do you like it?

RE106: Some things. It's not that my house is full of it. It's just a part of the Netherlands. In real life I like it. I like Keukenhof, it's really a beautiful park. Also the dikes. You have also the openlucht [English: open-air] museum, and there you will see the history of how the Netherlands was in the past. With the little houses. That's what I like. But getting a typical Dutch souvenir, no, that's not my thing. But history yes.

IM107: Yes, you are not a tourist here.

RE108: Yes, but I can see why they like it, because if I am going to another country I also want the culture of that country. I want to taste it, I want to see it. So, I also do it. Everywhere I come I take a magnet.

IM109: You collect it?

RE110: Yes, so when they are coming here, I understand it. I don't like it from here, but yes.

IM111: One questions more, how long have you been working here?

RE112: I am working here for eight years. I started here as a traineeship and now after the traineeship I started working here. And now I also do a study. And yes I still like it.

IM113: Yes, I think it's nice!

RE114: But with the study I am doing now I can also go in other directions. Manager and that kind of things.

IM115: So it's like a part time, you work and you study?

RE116: No, no I am working full time 36 hours and next to the job, I work Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday and Thursday it's my day when I go to school. And now I am sitting in my last year. So, I am making my, how do you say? My end.

IM117: Thesis, kind of.

RE118: Yes, kind of. I don't study at the university, one step lower. I am doing my bachelor. In three weeks I think I have to be ready and after that there is an oral exam and then I am finish.

IM119: Wow that is quite busy.

RE120: Yes, it's very busy, but it's also very nice. Because the study I do (...) the link between work and school is the same. So, everything I have to do for school, all the scripts I have to write and these kind of things, they are related to my work. So, I have to overlook the whole organization. Employee management, also financial management. A very big part of it. Like a whole business plan. Also business plan and marketing, communication, social media. Everything I had in the last three year I now just put together. I am doing a research, a special research, I am looking now for the tourist information office and if we, how do I say, it's in Dutch already hard. If the tourist information still has value for the city, for the tourist.

IM121: Ah ok, also kind of Internet comparing.

RE122: Yes, and to look if there are new (...) ways of commercial to get, hm. Like the souvenirs we are selling, it's not enough to open this whole building. And to pay also the salaries of the persons. So, the money which comes in, is not enough to cover everything. So, I am searching for new ways to do that, to cover it. The only thing is that we as a tourist information office, we are not sponsored by the government, but we are part of the government. So, most tourist information get money from the government every year and they have to run their own business next to it. But we get all the money from the government because we are working for the government. So, that's a very unique thing here in the Netherlands. There are two tourist information offices which are part of the government.

IM123: Only two? VVV?

RE124: Only VVV, but only two VVV in Bergen op de Zoom and Tilburg. All the other VVV they get a subsidy from the government and they have to run their own business to get it all fixed. And we don't have it. It's very difficult to do a research about it because you still have the part that you are not making any wins. Because the government is also from the people, how can I say? The money which comes in the government it's from the taxes, from the persons who live here. So, from his money they are doing everything. We don't have money. So, we have to be very open. So, you cannot say, oh we ask that person or that partnership for money because you can do it as a part of the government. But if you are not part of the government it can't.

IM125: Is it going to change?

RE126: No, no for the future it is not going to change. We are going to move from here. We are going to the nature museum. But when I don't know. This is a very big location and we are going a little bit smaller because also from the government they give less money. So we have to do something different. That's why I also chose this research. It's very difficult.

IM127: But also interesting.

RE128: So, yes, some questions you had, I also had.

IM129: Yes, it's all changing a lot.

RE130: Especially with the Internet there are a lot of things. You will also see that more work is coming in the back office and not anymore in the front office. It's just now we have three persons there and in the future we will have two persons. But I think you still have to have the front office. You still have to have the shop because some people, especially the generation 50, 60, 70 they still want to go to a person for information. So, that's the biggest part now. There are a lot of people now who are going to do something in their free time and especially the part of the 50, 60, 70. The next 10 to 15 years I think you will still need a shop where you can come in. I think not as big as what we now have but.

IM131: I find it also helpful, when I go somewhere I always want to have a map, so I can use it.

RE132: Yes, that's one of the things we give every day, every day we give maps. Everyone wants.

IM133: Thank you very much. That was very helpful!

Appendix III Interview and blog posts LP1

30.04.2014, Skype call with cameras

IM = Interviewer Marie

RC = Respondent Charu

(…) = recording unclear

Colours assigned to the three research questions:

RQ1: Change of travel preparation through blogging

RQ2: Change of reporting process through blogging

RQ3: Construction of authenticity through blogging

IM1:   Okay, so why do you travel? What are your motivations to travel?

RC2:   When I started travelling I find it very addictive. It's just meeting new people, seeing how others live. That's a very big motivation for me. To see how others live. I used to do market research, that's my background. I used to do a lot of qualitative research. You know, so seeing how people live. The way they make things, the way they use things, the way they eat, the way they shop. Everything, that's what I used to do for living. I don't do that very often, I am now a travel writer. But I guess that's somehow still on to the way I travel, because I was always curious about how other people live, how other people shop and eat and whatever. If we are talking about blogging, about my blog, I am always talking, I am always interested in the local experiences. Like I always say, go and stay in an apartment, stay in a B&B, don't stay in hotels, go and explore local markets and those kind of things. So, seeing how other people live is a very big motivation for me. So, I start getting ready and see where I stay in my own home town for a very long time. That's a big motivation. And the other thing is definitely seeing new places, seeing natural wonders is another motivation. But that's not the big thing. The big thing is the people. I think so.

IM3:   Yes, I understand that. And how do you prepare for a trip? Or how do you decide on a new destination?

RC4:   I actually now have a long bucket list of places that I want to go to. So, it depends on the kind of time that I have in hand, it depends on the time and it depends on the season. So sometimes its just time to go a place. It could be that something is happening at that time there, like for instance in Amsterdam. I always knew that the first time I went to Amsterdam, I wanted to go in the tulip season. You know, I might go several times again in the future. But I knew that the first time I ever went to Amsterdam I want to go in April. I knew that. Around a particular

season, that's one way of deciding. Or sometimes it could just be that there is a good flight sale. A few years ago I was just looking around on the Internet, I was just browsing around and I found this incredible sale to Cairo, in Egypt. So, nobody was travelling to Egypt at that time because the first revolution had just gone over, so this was in 2012. Nobody was travelling to Egypt then. But because I found a good sale, extremely cheap sales. It was just that my husband and I travelled, the two of us travelled for the price of one ticket. So, I just booked it and we went. And our friends thought we were crazy to go. But things were beautiful, things were very peaceful, things were very cheap at that time because nobody was travelling. No crowds and people were so friendly because they wanted to just sell that spot. Sometimes it's just that you get a good deal and you go. So, I have chosen destinations based on that. Sometimes I actually just read a book and I've said that you know, I have to go to that place. I've read in a book or seen photographs of places I wanted to go to that place. For instance, New Zealand has been big on my list, simply because I've seen so many photographs of New Zealand and I wanted to go there.

IM5:   And do you also read travel blogs yourself?

RC6:   Quite a lot.

IM7:   Which kind of travel blogs?

RC8:   I don't read blogs which are. You know that there are blogs which give you tips and guides. I don't need those blogs. I need blogs that are more experience based. Which are more narrative based (...) I don't look necessary for planning. I look for peoples' experience.

IM9:   And how did you decide on writing a travel blog?

RC10:   I knew for quite a long period a bit of law (...) my sampling experience and all that. And in that I used to write a few travel notes every now and then. I found that they were very popular among people who came to my blog. A lot more people used to come searching for travel tales and people used to comment more. And a lot of my readers used to say, why don't you write more about travel. So I decided to take my travel notes and start a travel blog. And I also started travelling a lot more. I decided to travel and write together. And I switched to being a journalist, to being a travel writer. I didn't had any published, I didn't had anything to show. So the first time I actually switched to an editor with a story idea, I send my travel blog, a link to my travel blog and said I haven't written anything that is the only thing that I have. And that was an actual newspaper and she gave me my first story based on my travel blog.

IM11:   Cool! That's really nice.
        And what does blogging mean for you when you travel?

RC12:   (silence) Somehow I, you mean my own blog?

IM13:   Yes, the activity of writing a blog? What does it mean for you during the trip?

RC14:   I think when I travel I am not always able to blog as much as I would like to. Because I know I've seen a lot of people who make it a point to actually update their blog on a real time basis or almost like an everyday blog. I make quick notes every day. Especially when you are on the road for a very long time. (...) I find it when I travel I try to publish at least one or two times when I am on the road. I know that when I travel, I kind of keep making notes in my hand about what kind of things that I like. But if possible I make drafts in my blog. I save it as a draft in my blog. I also realized that when I am actually travelling and if I make specific suggestions or recommendations I have been looking for travel blogs more than any other website. Suppose that I am in a new city and I want to look for a place to go and eat. For instance I am vegetarian, I look for a place to eat good vegetarian food, or somewhere I look

for a popular pub that evening, I would rather go to a blog to look for recommendations than travel website. So even when I am on the move, even when I am travelling I've been looking at bloggers recommendations and not travel websites. It's just in blogs it's much more, even people that I have never met, that I will never meet I trust their recommendations, I trust their judgements more than a travel website.

IM15: And what are the topics you write most about? Your favourite topics?

RC16: I write a lot about the kinds of experiences I have. (...) Experiences about going to a certain place and if there is one specific thing that I am doing, I write about that. I write about local food places a lot. I write about local markets. Not in a big shopping way, not in terms of what you can shop for, but more about the experience of local markets. I write about those, for instance Istanbul has the grand bazar.

IM17: Yes, that's beautiful.

RC18: There are teas, and carpet vendors, they like to bargain there. You know, that experience. Or Vietnam has this (...) vegetable market. The experience of just being there and trying other and fresh food. So, I write a lot about markets and local shopping. Street markets and bargains and those kind of things. What else.
About interesting places to stay, you know about small B&Bs and guesthouses and those kind of interesting places because I am always looking for smaller friendly places to stay in. I almost never stay in hotels. I write about those. When I stay in interesting, warm, nice places then I write about those.

IM19: That sounds good. And, you already told that a little, but how does your reporting process look like?

RC20: What do you mean?

IM21: The reporting process? So, you said you make your notes in your head and then you write it down.

RC22: Yes, sometimes I make notes in my head, I always carry a note pen around so I can actually write down notes. Or sometimes I just use my photos as a memory aid. When I look at the photos I think back at the story. You know the story just comes back to you, when I look at the photos the story comes back. Sometimes it happens that I just make bullet points inside a draft. You know I open a new post on my blog with bullet points and it just stays there for many many days. I keep going back, revising it and it just stays there. And for some reason I never finish it. Then one day I just finish it all. The thing about blogging, the thing about writing on the internet is that it's not your own experience alone, I think what makes it interesting is also when you link to other peoples perspectives. I think there is a lot more work to it, at least I feel that whatever post that I write I feel compelled to link at least to a couple of other peoples' experiences. Because I think it gives a better perspective to whoever it's reading it.

IM23: Yeah, that's a good idea.

RC24: I think a little more effort to that process, so it's not just writing down what happened you know, blabla I went the other night and this and this happened. But see what else people are interested in. It gives a different perspective to it. I think that is very important.

IM25: So, would you say that there is a community of bloggers? If you say you link to other blogs?

RC26: Yes, definitely.

IM27: And, this community how does that influence you, being part of a community of bloggers?

RC28: I think that being part of a community is what keeps you going as a blogger. Otherwise, what are you doing? It's important to be writing for something, for somebody. Otherwise it's just like you talking to the air, to an empty space. I think the blogging community is very very very important because like I said, it's a community that I trust. If I want suggestions, if I want recommendations, if I want to know if I should go to a place or if I should do something, then I will go to a blog. Those are the people I might trust first. Not even a travel magazine. I would rather trust a travel blog for recommendations. I think that's sense of trust and that sense of kinship is very well within the travel community. Sometimes you actually, if you go to another city or even another country I end up meeting that blogger, somebody whose blog you might be reading for a very long time, and you end up meeting that blogger. It's a very nice feeling because you end up feeling that you actually know that person for a very long time. You know, not because of meeting that person but because you have been reading their blog. You feel that you actually know that person.

IM29: You did that several times? You met people, you met other bloggers?

RC30: Yes, it's a very nice feeling.

IM31: Cool. So, in which way do the readers then influence you? Can you for example tell an anecdote about the contact to a reader?

RC32: Sometimes readers ask questions, for instance, I get a lot of questions about their travel plans. Where they want to go, you know, can you help me plan things and can you help me, suggest what I should do and so on. Readers also ask for specific things that they want me to write about. Which I not always do, but in one way I see my subjects changing. In the beginning I told you I like to write about experiences, I don't like lists and guides and that kind of thing. But I find that for a lot of my readers, list and guides are very popular. Readers want very full prove. Seven things to do in Amsterdam. If I go to Amsterdam what are the seven things I should do. What if I spend the weekend in Paris, what should I do? How to spend one weekend in Paris. So, they want me to write very simple, idiot prove, friendly kind of guides, rather than long rambling narratives. I find that one way in which readers have influenced me is that I started writing more and more guides and tips to travel and things like that. I wasn't used to that in the past. In the past most of my writing was more experience based. You know, based on how I felt about things and how a place affected me. My blog was not meant to be like a guide, a destination guide kind of a blog, but I found that a lot of readers like that and want that and were asking for that. I find myself writing more and more of that.

IM33: And when we think of the community of bloggers, what would you think are the key elements of a travel blog? What do you have to have to be part of a travel community?

RC34: Can you repeat that questions?

IM35: What is necessary, what are the key elements of being part of a travel community, a travel blog community?

RC36: I think communication. You need to be, you cannot blog in isolation, you can't just blog and then say, ok let people come and read my blog I have done my part just by writing. You need to interact. You need to interact with other bloggers. You need to go and leave comments and if possible also interact with bloggers outside their blog, if possible. What other ways? Maybe make friends with them on Facebook or if they live in the same city, then meet up with them for a coffee or if you are going to that city catch up with them. I think interaction and communication is very very important to be part of a travel community. You can't just have a blog and say I'm done. Write a blog, and now I am a blogger and I'm done. It doesn't work that

way. And it's also important to be regular in updating your blog. You really have to, if you write once a month, once in two month, that kind of thing doesn't work. (...)

IM37: What do you talk about with other bloggers? For example if you meet them, what are the topics?

RC38: Travelling. That kind of things, that's inevitable. But once you end up making friends with a lot of travel bloggers you end of travelling with them actually. You end up travelling with them and making friends with them. So, you start just talking about travel and you end up making friends with them.

IM39: Wow!

RC40: I mean you actually move on with travel topics and just become friends.

IM41: Wow, the blog has real big influence on your life. Nice. And how did the blog influence you in your travel behaviour? What has changed if you think of the time when you were not blogging?

RC42: I think now I would consider a lot of destinations that I would not have thought of before. Like if I see a new destination in a blog then I would actually consider that, I would think of that and I would say ok. You know, maybe ten years ago I wouldn't have thought of that. So, that is maybe one way in which. It's just the way in which my travel has changed. I don't know how to explain this. Just, you know, it's kind of, I have more room for spontaneity now. Even though I read a lot of research I still think that my travel behaviour has changed based on that I leave a lot of room to unexpected things, you know how my travel is planned and how my travel is just to explore on my own. And strangely enough, I think I have started travelling on my own because of being a travel blogger. Because of reading other travel blogs. I would never have been a solo traveller otherwise.
Without reading travel blogs of solo bloggers. I don't think I would ever have been a solo traveller myself. It's not a very common thing in India, travelling alone. It never occurred to me in the past to do that. So, it's just when I read other people doing that, oh it's possible and there are people doing that and it's safe and it's entirely doable. So, I think that's one thing that has happened to me. One very significant thing that happened to me.

IM43: And you said spontaneity, what do you mean? During the travel you are more spontaneous now?

RC44: Yes, I mean that I don't plan everything that I have to do. I keep a lot of things open. I don't have to know exactly what I'm doing, where I am going. That's also because of reading the way how other people travel. That has changed.

IM45: And when you travel you also think of your readers, during the experience itself?

RC46: Not particularly. But I am thinking of my blog definitely. Like I said I think of what kind of content I can get for my blog. To one extent I am thinking of my readers because the content is for the readers. So, yes, for instance, if I come across a new place, if I come across a new experience then I know that I will definitely want to share it on my blog. Then I want to share that to a larger set of people. I know that I am immediately taking photos of that place with the blog in mind.

IM47: Nice. Speaking of the Netherlands. How did you experience the Netherlands?

RC48: How did I?

IM49: How did you experience the Netherlands as a destination? You have been in Amsterdam, right?

RC50: What do you mean, how did I experience it?

IM51: How was your journey to the Netherlands? How did you like Amsterdam let's say.

RC52: I love Amsterdam. It's still one of my favourite cities. It's fantastic. It's just I stayed in Amsterdam, I didn't explore much, I didn't go anywhere else in the Netherlands. I just stayed in Amsterdam. And it's just this whole bike riding that I loved. Being able to walk everywhere. Just, it's just a nice way of being crowded. (...) It's a small enough place, you know. (...)

IM53: Yes, you can go walking. Sometimes the connection, can you repeat the last bit?

RC54: Yes, it was quite a small enough place to explore. I found it quite lovely.

IM55: And was unique there? What was typical or unique in Amsterdam?

RC56: The way the city is laid out. The canals, the bridges over the canals, that you can go walking everywhere. And what I loved about the city was also, you know there was all kinds of transport on the road. There were people walking, there were people biking, there were trams. I saw some police men on horses and cabs. Have you ever been to India?

IM57: No, I would like to, but I haven't.

RC58: You know in India, things are so chaotic, everything is so crowded and chaotic and noisy. But I saw that there everything was just walking, everything was just going on, you know. At the same time there were horses, there were trams, there were cabs and bikers. And everyone was just doing their own thing and I find it quite fascinating. Coming from India I find it really fascinating.
I really loved that. (...) I liked that.

IM59: So, when you are travelling, is an authentic experience important for you? What does authenticity mean to you?

RC60: Authentic means, doing something that definitely that's local, that's not necessary a thing of every touristy place. Maybe, like I said, maybe a local market, a place where only locals shop, where only locals eat. Or a small pub where just people playing with their families, not one of those large pubs where tourists, just people playing with their families. Or if possible visiting a local home, if you have friends there. That kind of thing. Food definitely. Local food. Again, not one of the large places, but the smaller places with lots of authentic local food. So, definitely an authentic local experience is important when you are travelling.

IM61: Yeah. What would be inauthentic? To have the contrast.

RC62: There are certain things which seem the same in every city that you go. You know certain kinds of restaurants for example, where the menu seems the same and the waiter is talking in English.

IM63: Mc Donald's.

RC64: (...) or even sometimes this happens in Asia. They would say, this is a real local dance or something like that (...) but it's actually not a real thing. It's just people made up to move for

you, you know. These are experiences made for tourists and they are already obviously touristy experiences which you can make them out to be.

IM65:   And when you think of Amsterdam, was there something authentic or inauthentic?

RC66:   I cannot think of anything that's inauthentic. Oh yes, I went on this North Holland tour, this half a day bus tour of northern Holland. So, we went to this place where there was this whole cheese factory, I don't remember what it's called, and there was this girl, dressed up as a milk maid, which is exactly was I was talking about, inauthentic. It's is obviously made up. I don't know what I am talking about. Do you know what I am talking about?

IM67:   Yes, I can picture this.

RC68:   (...) Normal people don't live that way any longer. Maybe in the villages. But that's something made for tourists. Something with a shop for tourists. Ultimately they just want to sell their cheese. That what they want to do. You know that for instance. It's a beautiful village, it's a beautiful location. But the village itself has been created for tourists. Very pretty, I have no complaints about it. It's very pretty.

IM69:   Yes I understand.

RC70:   But it's not authentic. Things are not authentic, they are made up for tourists. (...) I can't think of anything else.

IM71:   When you think of your blog, how do you show to your readers that what you write is real? That you really experienced it?

RC72:   Photographs mainly. Photographs are a good way of doing that. I don't just take photographs of the big attractions. You know, it's not like I went to Paris and you can see the Eiffel Tower. Not that way. Just the smaller places that you go to. The offbeat kind of locations that you go to. I think it's important to portrait that on your blog. That's a way of bringing about the flavour of the place. That's important.

IM73:   What is different in comparison to the time when you did not use a blog? Speaking of the whole travelling experience?

RC74:   I've been reading those for about ten years now. So, I can't thing back (...).

IM75:   How does the process of reflecting of your tourist or your travel experience, how does that change through a blog? The remembering and reflecting?

RC76:   Sorry, what does that mean?

IM77:   How does the remembering of a journey or the reflecting of a journey change through your blogging activities?

RC78:   I think sometimes when you remember a journey on your blog, you don't always think of the negative things. You know, the good journeys are not always only happy experiences, they are not always happy. But when you write on your blog you end up writing more about positive, happy things that happened. Unless you are writing particularly about a bad incident. Unless your blog is about a bad incident or an unhappy incident. You don't focus so much on the negative things on your blog. So, when you recollect and report on the blog, usually you overlook the small unhappy that you see. I think that's also something you need to be careful

about when you read a blog because things are not always so happy when you travel. Things go wrong.

IM79:   Of course.

RC80:   You need to keep that in mind when you are reading a blog and you are making up your mind about something.

IM81:   That's true. And what about the title of your blog. Can you tell me something about that? Why did you choose the title?

RC82:   (…). My blog is called Itchy feet. It's just means that I get restless when I am staying in the same place for a long time. It's a phrase in English, that when you stay in one place, then you get itchy feet, then you get restless and you want to move to another place. So, I feel that way. If I'm home I want to go to a new place. And I actually start getting itchy feet. I start planning, I go the internet and start looking at new things, looking for flights. I thought that was a kind of a name for my blog because I have itchy feet.

IM83:   It's a good title I think. What do you think of travel agencies which make use of blogs?

RC84:   Travel agencies make use of blogs? I don't have any knowledge about that.

IM85:   Ok, some include blogs in their website for example.

RC86:   Ok. Maybe they try to push the things that they want to sell. They might be very biased because their blog is selling something. I would be very careful about reading those.

IM87:   How do you think your blog will go on, if you imagine the next ten, fifteen years? What do you think, how do you imagine the future of your blog?

RC88:   I will probably go on. A lot of people ask for guest posts on my blog, I don't know, I never thought about it. I never had any guest posts because I wanted to keep a certain quality and a certain standard. But, I don't know, maybe I will keep going, maybe I will stop. I don't know, I never thought about it. Maybe I find something more interesting to do. One thing I want to do is definitely add more videos and multimedia content on my blog. That's an idea I want to focus on in the next few years. Otherwise I don't really have a plan.

IM89:   Yeah, that's a good idea. Your blog looks really nice, it's really interesting.

Blog posts about the Netherlands

http://traveholic.wordpress.com/category/europe/the-netherlands/

Apr 18 2014
Friday photo: Tulips

The tulips are in bloom in The Netherlands…

Must Reads:

~ Make the best of a weekend in Amsterdam… My guide to 48 hours in Amsterdam

~ In which I go *dekha ek khwab toh yeh silsile huey…* It's tulips time in Amsterdam

Also see: Friday photo series

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4

Post navigation

Lunch at Comics Cafe Brussels
First time to Europe? 10 travel questions answered

4 comments on "Friday photo: Tulips"

1. *The Girl Next Door*

April 18, 2014 @ 11:39 am

Wow! They look so beautiful!

Reply

o *charukesi*

April 19, 2014 @ 9:15 am

==yeah, the tulips came in all kinds of stunning colours. we spent almost the entire day at the tulip gardens…==

Reply

2. *Garam chai ki pyalli*

April 19, 2014 @ 12:29 am

I love the tulips in the haarlemmermeer

Reply

3. *Garam chai ki pyalli*

April 19, 2014 @ 12:29 am

Reblogged this on Garam chai ki pyali blog and commented:
==Aisa desh he mera==

Reply

May 9 2013

48 hours in Amsterdam

There is something special about Amsterdam in springtime. The Keukenhof gardens are open for a couple of months, as the tulips paint the landscape in brilliant colours. The city is on party mode all through April in anticipation of Holland's biggest holiday – Queen's Day, on the last day of the month.

If you are in Amsterdam for only a couple of days, here is how to get the best of it. First, buy the 48 hour IAmsterdam Card, which allows free public transport and entrance to key attractions, discounts at some restaurants and even on bike rentals. Pick it up at the main

THE IMPACT OF TRAVEL BLOGGING ON THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

tourist office opposite the Amsterdam Centraal railway station. Also pick up a guide to Keukenhof gardens. Or, since Amsterdam is cyclist heaven, hire a bicycle for the duration of your stay—choose from one of these options recommended by the authorities.

Once you're set, here's how you can make the most of your two days in the city.

DAY ONE

9am: Start your day with a leisurely breakfast at an open air café on the Leidseplein (translated, Leiden Square), watching the city slowly come to life.

10am: Head to one of the many fabulous museums in Amsterdam for a morning of high culture. Choose from the Van Gogh Museum or the newly renovated Rijksmuseum. The two are located close to each other, so you can quickly take in the highlights of both.

1pm: Have lunch at one of the Indonesian restaurants that the city is known for. Order the Rijsttafel (Dutch for 'rice table'), which is a meal of several, tiny side-dishes accompanied by rice.

3pm: Pose for photographs on the iconic IAmsterdam installation (some tourists try to climb on top of the letters for that quirky photo) and then make your way to the sprawling Vondelpark for a walk in the spring sunshine. If you are feeling particularly sporty, join in a raucous game of football that is sure to be on at several places in the park.

4pm: Walk or bike your way along the main canals of Amsterdam that form a ring in the inner city—the Prinsengracht, Keijzersgracht, Herengracht and Jordaan. The canal ring is on the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites and celebrates its 400th year in 2013. There are beautiful

old buildings lining both sides of these narrow streets and several canal-side cafés to nip into for a quick coffee.

6pm: Take an open boat ride on the canals, which comes with a guide and usually lasts for an hour. This is a great way to see the city and know a bit of its history.

7pm: Devote the evening to beer quaffing at a pub of your choice; you can never go wrong with beer in Amsterdam. Our recommendations are the 't Smalle, a distillery set up way back in 1780 near a picturesque canal (Egelantiersgracht 12), and In De Wildeman (Kolksteeg 3) famous for its Dutch and Belgian beers. And if you must, then take a stroll around Amsterdam's (in)famous red light area, De Wallen. It is in Amsterdam's old side, in the vicinity of the Oude Kerk (Old Church). Be sure not to point your camera at people or shops there since it is frowned upon.

DAY TWO

8am: Grab a quick croissant and coffee on the run and make an early start to the Keukenhof gardens. Devote the entire morning to tulips and all the other attractions of Keukenhof.

THE IMPACT OF TRAVEL BLOGGING ON THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

1pm: Try some local specialties like Bitterballen—minced beef fried with a coating of bread crumbs at a brown café, so called for its darkwood panelling (and not because of the 'substances' they deal in, as some people think).

2pm: Take a lazy saunter through the floating flower market on Singel canal and the Albert Cuyp street market.

4pm: This is a must-do for any visitor to Amsterdam, the Anne Frank House. It is a grim reminder of the city's Nazi history. Note that entry here is not included in the IAmsterdam card and that it may not be suited for small children. Buy your tickets online to avoid the long queues.

5pm: Pick up a helping of poffertjes (Dutch pancakes) and patat (fries) and sit at Dam Square watching buskers ply their trade. Or, walk around the shopping haven of Negen Straatjes or "nine streets" around the canal area, filled with pretty boutiques, art galleries and vintage stores

7 pm: Have a quiet dinner at Hap-Hmm for Dutch food "like grandma used to make" and at prices that make you hum with happiness. The restaurant is justly popular among both locals and tourists.

More on tulips

No visit to Amsterdam in spring is complete without a trip to Keukenhof gardens just outside the city. The garden is open from 8am to 7.30pm (till May 20 this year) and it is best to arrive early to beat the crowds and get the most of your morning. Buy tickets for a boat ride around the gardens as soon as you arrive, since these are very popular and tend to get booked fast. Apart from the thousands of tulips in myriad colours, Keukenhof has other attractions like rows of daffodils and hyacinths, greenhouses for orchids, play areas for children and cafés dotted throughout. There are buses to Keukenhof from Schipol airport (easily reached from the centre of the city by bus or train) and it is best to buy a combination ticket online before you go.

***

Originally published on the Conde Nast Traveller website on April 30, 2013

Also read: It's tulips time in Amsterdam

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Post navigation

Death by dessert

Friday photo: Provence

6 comments on "48 hours in Amsterdam"

1. *Susmita Chandra*

   May 10, 2013 @ 10:34 am

   amazing Amsterdam!like everything specially the Singel canal and tulips.nice read.

   Reply

   o *charukesi*

      May 19, 2013 @ 10:06 pm

      yeah, it's a lovely city! and best time to visit is during the tulips season

      Reply

2. *The Girl Next Door*

   May 11, 2013 @ 9:20 am

   Sounds like such a lovely place!

   Reply

   o *charukesi*

      May 19, 2013 @ 10:07 pm

      It's one of my all time favourite cities :)

      Reply

3. **Pingback:** There is such thing as a free lunch, in Amsterdam | luckytravelblog
4. **Pingback:** Friday photo: Tulips | Itchy Feet

Mar 18 2013

It's tulips time in Amsterdam

In writing about Amsterdam as one of the top 10 cities for 2013, Lonely Planet says "Golden Age charmer prepares to party." There are anniversaries and more anniversaries this year, including 400 years of the canal ring that marks Amsterdam out as one of the prettiest cities in the world and 40 years of the Van Gogh Museum. It's not as if Amsterdam needs any of these reasons to party; the high heels and the disco music are on all the time.

Picture Amitabh Bachchan in a white sweater and Rekha in a tight white churidhar kameez floating in a cloud of dazzling colours, the whisper of a windmill in the backdrop. Remember? "Dekha ek khwab toh yeh silsile hue." Yes, those tulips. A far prettier scene than heroines in yellow chiffons against lush fields of sarson, don't you agree? But I digress. I won't go so far as to claim that I always wanted my first visit to Amsterdam to coincide with the tulip season ever since I saw that song (especially since I must have been 8 or 9 then). But I do hum it under my breath as I walk out of the tourist office clutching a bunch of brochures about Keukenhof gardens, tulip shaped dreams in my eyes.

After what seems like a dozen transfers by bus and train, we finally reach Keukenhof the next morning. Thoroughly enchanting: no idea tulips came in such colours and shapes. I walk around in a daze, mouth slightly hanging open. Reverie is punctuated briefly and frequently at the sight of Japanese tourists posing for cameras in front of particularly bright tulips, fingers in the quintessential V sign. Husband is meanwhile entertained by the sight of me crouching under a tulip with my camera, trying to capture the play of light through the translucent petals (as I told him sheepishly). Just goes to show that thing about doing not unto others and so on.

Later that day, we head to Haarlem to catch the end of the flower parade (this year on April 20). Typically European pretty town by the river. Medieval churches, over a dozen museums, buzzing city center, pedestrian only lanes, al fresco cafés. We grab a pizza and coffee at one of the latter and settle down in the evening chill to wait for the parade. This annual parade begins in the morning and travels 40 km from Noordwijk, through Keukenhof, finally stopping at Haarlem at 9 in the night. The theme for the year is 'Musicals' and after a long wait, the floats begin to stream in; tableaux from Lion King, West Side Story, the Sound of Music and all the usual suspects, created entirely with flowers.

Another day, another trip. This time, a half day whirlwind tour of North Holland (really, the country is that small). It is a fine spring day and the entire tour is like being inside a 'Visit The Netherlands' poster. First stop, the Zaanse Schans village. I could swear there was a Hollywood set designer at work there: windmills, gabled houses, pretty wooden bridges over narrow canals, more tulips. Even a cheese factory specializing in the round cheese that nearby Edam is famous for. And inside, a milkmaid straight from central casting, explaining the cheese making process and handing out generous samples.

Then an hour at the fishing village of Volendam, with lots of activities suggested by the tour guide. But we spend it watching the sailboats bob up and down the slightly choppy water. And finally Marken, a short boat ride away, also scattered with picture postcard scenes (I have become blasé about Holland's breathtaking beauty by then) and a stop at a traditional clog-maker's shop to see how these wooden shoes are made.

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Meanwhile Amsterdam has been on a roll as usual, the streets crowded with locals and tourists. People are playing chess on giant chessboards painted on street corners, buskers are doing brisk business at Dam Square, the canal-side cafes are full of people chatting over a beer and happy couples are stretched out on the grass at the sprawling Vondelpark. On the main roads, trams, buses, cycles and horse mounted policemen all travel together in perfect harmony. One morning, we browse idly through the open-air Albert Cuyp market and then we take a late evening canal cruise. We walk aimlessly for hours by the canals and narrow side streets, giving Amsterdam's famous brown cafés and red light district a miss.

And we end it all on a sad note with a visit to Anne Frank's House. As I step out, I am so thankful for Amsterdam's sunny friendliness that manages to lift that cloak of gloom that has settled on me.

Tip: Keukenhof Gardens is open this year from March 21 to May 20.

***

A slightly edited version was published in The Hindu Sunday Magazine – Tulips from Amsterdam

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By charukesi • Posted in Published, The Netherlands • Tagged Amsterdam, Holland, Keukenhof, North Holland tour, The Netherlands, tulips, tulips season

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Post navigation

7 comments on "It's tulips time in Amsterdam"

1. *The Girl Next Door*

   March 20, 2013 @ 7:27 pm

   Lovely pics and enchanting description!

   I love tulips, and am in love with that song of Big B and Rekha, too. Have never had the chance to see them in real life, though.

   Amsterdam looks like the backdrop of many a Bollywood movie.Would love to visit sometime in life! :)

   Reply

   o *charukesi*

      March 28, 2013 @ 6:05 pm

      Amsterdam is one of my favourite European cities. And I think the best time to visit is definitely during the tulip season.

      Reply

2. *Anuradha Shankar*

   March 21, 2013 @ 10:34 am

wonderful pics…. and your narrative makes me yearn to go there soon!

[Reply](#)

o *charukesi*

March 28, 2013 @ 6:05 pm

Anu, thank you :)

[Reply](#)

3. *Keeley*

March 30, 2013 @ 5:09 pm

Such a beautiful pictures. These tulip pictures remind me of my Honeymoon in Kashmir. Amsterdam is very beautiful place in Europe . I love tulip season

[Reply](#)

4. **Pingback:** 48 hours in Amsterdam | Itchy Feet
5. **Pingback:** Friday photo: Tulips | Itchy Feet

Sep 2 2012

Why Amsterdam rocks

Because it embraces silliness… and positively encourages silliness.

THE IMPACT OF TRAVEL BLOGGING ON THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

There is something in the air there that makes people do such things…

(Yes, that's me)

(No, I don't even know her)

There is a reason Amsterdam is one of my all time favourite cities.

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[7](#)

Post navigation

[Mandu in the monsoon](#)
[Mylapore's Sri Karpagambal Mess](#)

7 comments on "Why Amsterdam rocks"

1. [Dan Hunt (UndiscoveredPlaces)](#)

   [September 3, 2012 @ 5:36 pm](#)

   Hey, I love this, its layout is so cool! Do you have any advice for a travel blog I've been trying to start, http://www.facebook.com/UndiscoveredPlaces , it would be really appreciated?

   [Reply](#)

   o [charukesi](#)

      [September 4, 2012 @ 10:41 pm](#)

      ==Look forward to reading about your experiences with undiscovered places – good luck, Dan!==

      [Reply](#)

2. [The Girl Next Door](#)

   [September 3, 2012 @ 6:13 pm](#)

   :) :) :)
   Looks like a fun place!

Reply

○   *charukesi*

September 4, 2012 @ 10:41 pm

Oh, totally! whacky doesn't begin to describe Amsterdam :)

Reply

3.   *NS*

September 4, 2012 @ 3:15 pm

OMG. What kind of magnets are those??!!

Reply

○   *charukesi*

September 4, 2012 @ 10:42 pm

those are Amsterdam specials :)

Reply

4.   **Pingback:** Friday photo: Amsterdam | Itchy Feet

May 20 2011

Tulips at Keukenhof

I always knew that the first time I would visit Amsterdam would be in April – to catch the tulips in bloom. And so it was. The tulip season in the Netherlands is for a short couple of months between late March and late May. In this time, all roads lead to Keukenhof. We bought tickets from the tourist office as soon as we reached Amsterdam and headed out to Keukenhof. Considering that it is such a big attraction, it is not easy to get there – it involves changing many trams and buses. So, anyway.The minute we stepped into Keukenhof, the pain of the getting there was forgotten.

The Keukenhof tulip gardens were every bit as beautiful as I had expected. Rows and rows of tulips of all colours, well laid out paths and several spots in between for rest and refreshment – overall a wonderful experience. I thoroughly embarrassed my husband by bending and squatting and even lying down on the ground once (or so he claims – I flatly deny that) to photograph the tulips from various angles, especially the play of sunlight on those translucent petals.

We walked the entire length of the garden, stopping for quick ice-cream and coffee breaks to keep the strength up (heh!). Towards the end, we found ourselves in front of a huge windmill – from the top, the view of rows and rows of tulip fields next to the garden. Perfectly manicured fields, they looked like multicolour carpets laid out on the ground. We wanted to take a boat trip around the garden but the lines were too long and we skipped it. I loved the fact that they had made the garden attractive for everyone, including children, by providing a playground area – swings and see-saws and pens of little animals for them to feed and play with.

It is possible to spend an entire day at Keukenhof – so go prepared to be there atleast for four to five hours. And don't make any grand plans for the evening back in Amsterdam – a trip to Keukenhof is tiring!

I finally leave you with my favourite photograph from Keukenhof…

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3

Post navigation

I cried in Europe…
Prague welcomes Easter

3 comments on "Tulips at Keukenhof"

1. *mayankpandey*

   May 23, 2011 @ 11:34 am

   Lovely photographs. A visit to Tulip gardens – made famous by our very own Bollywood is always high on an europe tour agenda. Your photographs show why so!

   I loved the 2nd last one most, for the beautiful layers of colors. Thanks for sharing.

Reply

2. *Jejunekid*

   May 28, 2011 @ 1:36 pm

   Lovely photos and write up. Did you see the white peacock?

   Reply

3. *charukesi*

   May 30, 2011 @ 9:17 am

   Mayank – thanks! I think the tulip season is the best time to visit the Netherlands…

   Jejunekid – thank you! no, I missed the white peacock…

Appendix IV Interview and blog posts L2

30.04.2014, Skype call with cameras

IM = Interviewer Marie

RP = Respondent Petra

(…) = recording unclear

Colours assigned to the three research questions:

RQ1: Change of travel preparation through blogging

RQ2: Change of reporting process through blogging

RQ3: Construction of authenticity through blogging

IM1:   So you did a Europe trip, I saw it on your blog?

RP2:   Yes, we started 6th of December last year.

IM3:   Nice!

RP4:   Yes, and we went straight to London. I don't know did you read all about it?

IM5:   Well, I read which destinations you had, like Rom, Berlin, a lot of European cities. Cool. I prepared some questions so I will just ask you something about it right? Why do you travel? What are your motivations to travel?

RP6:   Well, first it was about exploring other cultures, so that we could understand them. Like for me that's the most important purpose. I think it's good to know the different backgrounds of people and why they, you know (...) and for example for us going to Amsterdam, it was because our family is from that region, from my mum's side. So for us it was about going there to see arts and history and get to know about the ancestors and other relatives we have over there. That we don't really keep in contact with here, but we are Facebook friends. But it's not like having a cup of coffee.

IM7:   So, you have ancestors in the Netherlands right?

RP8:   Yes, yes in Amsterdam and somewhere else, but we don't really have contact with them. They are more like further (...).

IM9:   Wow, that's pretty exciting to get to know your family then.

RP10: Yeah, that's grateful. (...) We went there a few years ago and she explained like how she grew up in the war and things like that and then she grew up with some of the people and it's cool to just going back and having a different purpose and just experience the culture and the food, especially the food. (...)

IM11: Yes, I read that.

RP12: And I just was nice travelling with family. I mean we don't always are together, my sister and I are at the university and my mum and dad are at home. So, it's a chance to all really keep together. And catch up with each other in the hotel room and so on.

IM13: Oh, that's so nice. I am doing that with my family as well sometimes.

RP14: Oh, cool. That's good.

IM15: So, your motivations were meeting your family and exploring Europe more or less?

RP16: Yes.

IM17: And how would you perceive yourself, like an explorer, a tourist or a traveller?

RP18: Traveller. Yes. I think explorer makes me think of (...) and I didn't fit in there. I think just travelling, you know, a travel experience rather than having no direct purpose, you just see what the rest of the world is like. Does that makes sense? Yeah.

IM19: Cool. And how do you prepare for a trip and decide on a new destination?

RP20: Well, we did it as a pretty big group process. So, each of us in our family, we wrote down five places that we wanted to go to, five big activities that we wanted to do and we collected the information and we span a bit of a circle. So, around the places and things. And of course we paid attention to the season because some of the countries that we wanted to go to were quite hard to go in the winter. And so, we said we were going there and then budget wise, what you want to do in terms of the conversion for us like the New Zealand dollar to other countries, I think that was really really expensive (...). I think, my dad has done a lot of travelling so we went to places that he, maybe had prior meaning to us, because we had already been to some

places before when we were quite young. So, revisiting some places, now that we are older and have a bit more understanding of, like looking at the Eiffel tower.

IM21: And did you also read blogs in preparation for it?

RP22: Yes, a couple of my friends had just done European tours, just before we went. So, I was reading their blogs and then I thought, oh that would be cool if I did a blog because then our friends and family, like mum and dads friends who don't have Facebook and things like that, could read about it and comment. So, yes I did read about three or four. And then it was kind of fun to decide blogging. People were pretty confused because I made probably about five accounts and then closed all because I found it weird.

IM23: So, that's how you decided to write the blog? You saw others?

RP24: Yes, just kind of. And I messaged my friends, I knew they had done some travelling and asked them if they had done a travel blog before and which website they had used. And then they recommended what they thought was easy or wasn't.

IM25: What does blogging mean to you when you travel?

RP26: I think it's a way of recording what you have done because you are recording it in the moment rather than one or two days later when you get like, oh what did we do again guys- kind of thing. And then also the pictures and the communication between each of you rather than just writing in bullet point style what you did, which can get a bit boring. I think the way that I wrote kind of portrayed what we were going through, like when we were cold, people could tell that we were really unhappy and feeling alone. And it was funny you know. People I think like being (...) instead of writing a journal that would be just for myself. Writing a blog means that I can share the experience with the rest of my family and people back home who were wondering what we were doing. And then people who hadn't or who were planning on going to this country. We had a few family friends who were going over there. I think that was a good way to share with them and maybe give them ideas what they could do when they were there. Which is why we put which is a good experience and which is a bad one. So they can say, we don't do that we will do this instead. So, it wasn't just for me.

IM27: You said that you like to write something after you experienced something? You directly wrote it down?

RP28: Yes, so as we were on a train for four hours (...) I have been doing it on the train. So, during the day I've been making notes or writing it in my phone what we were doing. And in the night, I posted it in the end of the day. But I was recording it. When we sat for a coffee to warm up I was writing all down. You know there were a lot of names that I would forget if I don't write it down. I am going to forget how to spell it. So, I thought if I just write it down. But some days I just fell asleep because I was just so tired, I kept it for the next day. But my mum and my sister they are really good at tracking on what we had done. So, they would just talk about it in the morning (...). So, it was all quite close to the actual being.

IM29: Cool. And so you wrote it kind of together with your family?

RP30: Yes, well I wrote it and then my mum and my sister would read it. My mum would reread to make sure, she started to say, oh your grammar is shocking! What are you doing? And my sister wanted to see what I was writing about. So, once we puzzled it!

IM31: So, you had an editor?

RP32: Yes, but some things I posted they don't read it before. And like we were all in the morning crying with laughter. You know it was so funny you know. It was my experience, what I thought, so it was cool. (...) But they all definitely read it and said, oh you forgot this, or something.

IM33: It's really nice to have that as a group project.

RP34: Yeah, yeah and my mum is in love with it now. I am managed to teach her how to blog using the same website she is doing another blog.

IM35: Ah, your mum is also blogging?

RP36: Yeah, my father and her at the moment.

IM37: And what are the topics you write about? When you write about your experience, which topics are most important for you?

RP38: Food. Like attractions of that country or city. You know, like from Paris it's the Eiffel Tower, so it was a big focus writing about that when we got there or in Amsterdam we have been through the Red light district and that was kind of a cultural thing. It is quite prominent and everybody knows what it is over there. So, you know, I think that you focus on things that you think are important wherever you are, like if my photo was insignificant maybe for my culture in New Zealand, maybe I thought it wasn't so necessary to write about it. So, when I did, I think lots of my friends and family were like, oh you talked about this food haha, surprise that you didn't come back fat. But, like to us in New Zealand food is like, it's a big (...). So, we always wrote about food.

IM39: How do you mean, in New Zealand food is?

RP40: You know, like for some cultures for example, London you know, people are all about working long hours, doing a lot of work. And so, for them it's more about trends and doing work. But in New Zealand, there are so many cafés and fish and chips shops and things like that that every kind of interaction we do is for food. So, when you catch up with friends you got, you have lunch. If you want to have a chat you go and have coffee. Or you hang out and eat fish and chips. Does that makes sense?

IM41: Yeah! I am also really into food!

RP42: That's good. It happens! So, I don't know (...) my mum had a Europe travel book, it was just, you know, a travel book that you read that has a lot of different countries and most attractions and this, you should do this, kind of thing. So, it said what was important and I'd write about it. And so like all the facts that we put, like if we went to a castle. Well, it could be any castle, so let's say it was castle so and so and it was from this period of time. So, that people could kind of understand what we were looking at. Cause photos can't tell the whole story.

IM43: A combination of photo and text?

RP44: Yes, photo and telling yeah. Because I think, you know, we could just stand in front of a brick (...) with umbrellas and people think, what's the brick for? And then you find out (...).

IM45: So, besides your experience you also put information, details, historical details?

RP46: Yeah. Just for other people that might want to go there or if they are deciding what they are going to do on their Europe trips.

IM47: Yeah. So, how did the blog influence you in your travel behaviour?

RP48: I think it kind of put us all together a little bit. Because people knew that, because my family knew that I was recording a blog, then during the day, we kind of came up with the quote of the day. So, we started with the quote of the day. Because we were all a bit blonde sometimes. We always made sure that in the end of the day, or at breakfast we discussed who had done something blonde or silly comments that one had done the day before. So, and I think recording that people had a good laugh. And also because my dad was at home during the start of our trip because he only joined us in January. I think, because he only joined us then, he could follow what we were doing. So, that when he arrived we were all just kind of starring at each other, like he could just slot in, in what we were doing. He had a bit of an understanding about how we did things during the day. You know, like waking up and having a big breakfast in the walking to town and have a coffee and then finally dinner later on. And I think when he arrived he had not the expectation, 7:30 coffee, lunch at 12:00 and, we were like, oh no that's not how we retain! (...) So, I think that was a bit helpful cause he could see how we were doing things and people at home could be watching what we were doing and then it's a family remote, we were kind of all a little bit conscious of what was going to be on the blog. So, if you see something funny it was like, well that's going to go there, thank you! So, I think that we had a bit more of awareness of what we were doing and where we were and things like that. And it gave them a chance to like remember because one or two days later when we had internet, so, we were like, oh I will read a bit kind of thing. Or, wasn't that funny? And we talk about it again and laugh.

IM49: You posted almost every day right?

RP50: Yeah, a post every day. It was quite (...)

IM51: Yeah, it's exciting. And how did you experience the Netherlands?

RP52: I think it was really good. It was one of the funniest city or countries to go to because from, as it turns out on my blog (...) we experienced a lot of like the national food, like poffertjes and olliebollen and sausage when we got there. I think it was more of a natural kind of country for us. We didn't feel (...) thinking, oh why are these people doing this? You know like when you are (...) you know that this is two or three kisses rather than just a hug or a handshake. (...) And I think we also, because mum was a bit more familiar with the area, having experienced a bit more than we had yet, I think it led us explore Amsterdam and the Netherlands a bit more in depth. Because we knew how to get around and things like that. We just had an idea about what we wanted to do and where we wanted to go, being familiar with the place. That we just (...) and we knew that mum could understand Dutch. She can't really speak it but she understands someone having a conversation. So that was quite helpful. And finding out information and doing like the night trip on a boat and things like that. We took out more opportunities being more familiar with the place.

IM53: That's nice. And your family that lives there also could help you then?

RP54: Yes, yes and we met up with them which was good. Cause we haven't seen them in about ten years and it felt like nothing had changed. We sit down and got on. So it was cool.

IM55: Cool. And what would you say it unique for the Netherlands?

RP56: The clogs. We all took home the clogs slippers (...) I don't know if I ever gonna wear them. But I think, it's when we all think about, what is the Netherlands, we all think about the clogs (...) and the way of old fashion (...). Yeah, if I have to decide I think clogs. And poffertjes (...). I like them.

IM57:   A lot of healthy food there.

RP58:   My father said, when I come back from the Netherlands I'd be fat.

IM59:   Yeah, I am trying my best here. Do you remember any anecdote that you would consider as very original for your time in the Netherlands?

RP60:   What's an anecdote?

IM61:   Like a little story.

RP62:   A little story about what was good about my time?

IM63:   Or what was very original or authentic for your time in the Netherlands.

RP64:   Is it like going to a pancake house?

IM65:   Yeah, maybe I should ask the question different. How would you say looks an authentic experience like? In the Netherlands.

RP66:   Like a cultural band. (Silence) What we thought was cool, was good about the culture was going to the Rijksmuseum and the Van Gogh museum which gave an understanding of the art in the Netherlands. Cause there is a lot of history and stories, you know, about how the Netherlands has become what it is today and I think it gives you about your ancestors. I think we definitely made a focus because I think it made us understand the culture and other things more than if we hadn't gone. It would be then more a holiday rather than understanding of where we were. And I think just like. I don't want to say this again but it was like the national food just because you get that food just in the Netherlands and you can't really get it anywhere else. Like if you get it back in New Zealand it's definitely not the same. We don't get the same flavour or like the same cultural experience as when you go. The special folks that you have and the way that it's (...) it's so culturally specific. We can't get that anywhere else. When you go to the Netherlands, let's say, go to the museum and go and have like poffertjes and things. I think that's really original to the Dutch culture. Does that answer your question?

IM67:   Yeah. That's good. If you think of your journey, was there something, when you thought, oh that is really not authentic? Do you understand my question?

RP68:   Yeah. (Silence) I think there were in other countries. But do you want me to. I think in the Netherlands that was very authentic. But I think in other countries, we had to go and search for what they were special for like. It was quite generic between a few of them. (Silence). Like, when we went to LA and London and things, they all were kind of the same to New Zealand, I mean the cars are driving on the same side of the road, there wasn't any other food and maybe also the language was all the same and it was hard when you see constantly what you know. Understand what they offer and what's different. And I think nothing really stood out for being, compared to when we were in Rome, you know in Italy and things. It was impressing the pizza and pasta and kind of atmosphere that Rome has, this is truly common. (...) Or having a hot chocolate, that is just melted chocolate and you are like, huuuuh how am I going to get through all of this, versus when we just had chocolate and lots of milk. I think countries that were just more the same compared to New Zealand in terms of culture wise, they didn't appear as authentic. And we wanted kind of move on and embrace countries that we liked to and I think language probably had quite a bit influence with it. I mean if we couldn't understand what people were saying it made us kind of explore the culture a bit better rather than just going through what we would do at home. Like shopping and having coffee and stuff. Just because we know how to do those things. Does that? I think if we couldn't

understand we'd explored a lot better. But if we could rely to the culture it didn't feel as different.

IM69:   You wanted something new? A new experience?

RP70:   Yes, something that we couldn't understand, so that we had to kind of deal with it. And it made us feel like we'd actually embrace their culture or learn something from them that we didn't already have.

IM71:   Yes, that makes sense. When you think of your blog. How did you show on your blog that what you did was real, that you really experienced it?

RP72:   I think having the photos, including multiple photos of what we did every day helped to get people an understanding of where we were and what we were doing. And if we hadn't had these photos people probably maybe not relied to it as much. Or they wouldn't have understood what we were going through. If I say, it's really cold, people here would say, oh haha it's only four degrees. But we were going overseas (...) and they see us freezing with bright pink noses and cheeks going hiiiiii so they are definitely cold you know. And I think other people being able to see through our photos and comment and things and being able to comment, like, 'was it really how you felt?' gave us a way to answer a bit to them rather than just being on our own trip reputation of what we were saying. Like I can see this is what they mean.

IM73:   So, comments also did give you the feeling that it was real?

RP74:   Yes, it gave an understanding of what we were doing. Cause they were sympathising rather than just going, ha you softies (...).

IM75:   Cool. And when you think of a journey when you didn't write a blog, what do you think is different?

RP76:   I think being able to just remember and being able to reflect. But having done the blog now I constantly think maybe (...) oh I remember when and I can go a bit to the blog and going a bit to the time and reread and think, oh that's what we did kind of thing. And if I hadn't had the blog I think my memory of the whole trip and understanding of what we have been through over the period of time when we were travelling would definitely be reduced. I wouldn't have the same connection or learning experience. I mean now that I can go back and see what we have done, I think wow that actually has changed my perspective from there to how I look at people now or how I approach something differently. I think before I'd say, if I went to somebody I didn't really know, I would be really stressed and I wouldn't know how to communicate with them. But now when I come across them, someone that I don't understand, I am more like speaking slowly or using more gestures and things. And I think having had this blog and experience of being able to review what you have gone over and done gives you more a feeling of accomplishment kind of thing. That you can say what you have achieved. So, it makes you feel better I think about the whole trip. You can just understand what you have got from it rather than just saying, right I am home, I am back, what is next- kind of thing.

IM77:   Yeah I read this quote you have on your blog, I liked it. Like all travellers I have seen more than I remember and I remember more than I have seen.

RP78:   It was really true though. The more we went through the trip the least you remembered, but the more memory you had in your head. But going back to your blog you could remember what you have done. It was a kind of memory. I think it was useful. And it was (...)

IM79:   It was what?

RP80:   It was on a wall of a building in Amsterdam. That was when we were walking to dinner one night. It was the first night we were there and we walked down the street and it was blowing up huge on the side of a building, I turned around and took a photo of it on my phone, but it didn't look so good because it was dark. So I thought I just look it up on the internet, but I knew what it was and my sister kept on reciting it: As we got further along I understand what this quote means!

IM81:   But do you think through the blog, well the quote says: I remember more than I have seen. So, the blog does help you to remember correctly?

RP82:   Yes, and I think remember what you have done we say because all the time you can forget the minor things or things that you forget that you have done. And then you look back and you say, I remember that. And then you know, it brings back a lot of memories from that time you know. You can't simply picture the day (...) but when you go a bit to the blog then, yeah I can remember that!

IM83:   Cool. And speaking of the readers of your blog. So, you said mainly family, friends? Or were there also other people?

RP84:   Just basically family and friends from home they were following what we were doing. Like before we went everyone that came over who we thought might be interested, oh I am writing a blog while we are away, here is the address (...) and so people like my 93 old Dutch grandma who is down and rests home or my aunt who took her laptop across since she was able to read what we were up to and for her it was taking (...) so she could rely to what we were doing and it was sharing that journey not just with our direct family like my mum my dad and us but that people back home who were just sitting there wondering day after day what we were up to and how we were going and things like that.

IM85:   Cool. Do you think that the readers have and influence on your blog and what you are writing? Your blogging activities?

RP86:   Yes, I think in terms of detail they probably do because I mean that's why I included the information because I knew that some people were gonna be going to the places that I was going to. And if I didn't know that we probably wouldn't have been so specific with approximate cost or the time from place to place. But, if I thought it was gonna be help for other people then I included it. It wasn't just about me, if it was about how I thought during the whole thing it would have been more feeling based I guess. But because I thought this is not just for me, it's for other people who might read it, so it would be helpful in a way. (...)

IM87:   And would you say that you belong to a travel community, a travel blog community?

RP88:   Well, at least in a way yes, because I am using a site that lots of other travel blogger people would use. But in another respect no, because I don't think apart from you, I don't think any other people probably have read it. I don't think. I'd say if other travel people were reading it then I'd say I would be part of a community, but because I think only my family and friends have read it I wouldn't say I was. Does that make sense? Just because I don't know if other people haven't read it. I mean you don't know, you don't have statistics saying, a 1000000 people have read you thing. So, maybe if you could use cyberspace I'd might be part of a community, but I don't feel like I am.

IM89:   Ok. And what are your elements in your blog that makes it a travel blog? What is distinctive?

RP90: I think just reporting every destination. And recording what you have learned from each place cause I think during my blog I recorded, you know, things that we found interesting or things that we learned over time from the people of that culture or from just amusing ourselves. (...)

IM91: Ok, I have just a few more questions about the travel industry. So, your opinion on that. What do you think of travel agencies which make use of blogs?

RP92: Which make use of them. I think it would be good if they ask people consent for using them. You know if they take snippets of peoples' comments that write about a place that they are trying to attract you to, then I think it's quite valuable because they are using someone's experience that has actually experienced that place or that culture and that would inspire me to go there more rather than just saying, oh it's got beautiful blue sky and beaches and things, then I would be like, oh that's just like from the picture. But if someone said, oh it was exactly liked they described, then I would say, oh yeah I will go there. So, I think it quite influences people.

IM93: Would you say that travel blogs are a threat for the tourism industry?

RP94: No, I don't think so. I think it would be more like a threat to businesses or (...). I think if somebody goes on a trip, if something was wrong, they are not going to complain to the travel agency or such, they would complain more about a hotel service or going out for a restaurant. So, I think in terms of travel I would say no. In terms of maybe culture. I don't know. Attractions, maybe this. Cause they might think, oh this person didn't like it or that's a sort of bad review, I will skip that one.

IM95: You think you would write another blog? Or keep on with your blog I mean?

RP96: Yeah. Of course I am not gonna keep on with it while I am in New Zealand. But if I would go again somewhere I think I would definitely record it because it's something very useful to look back on and I think this one that I have written I would probably go and get it printed, just so that I have got a copy. So, that if I am older and things like that. Just so that I don't lose it because I think a lot of time (...) and all the memories are there. So, if I can recapture it again, if I go and share it with other people. But if I just leave it in cyberspace it's got nothing, it's a lot of effort for nothing.

IM97: So, printing makes it more stable?

RP98: Yes, I think it's in your hand, you know, you have it vs. you are worried that if you type in that one day it's gonna be gone. And I guess, I know that it's easy to share if it's online, but I think having it in hand gives it a little bit more meaning as well cause it's like a document saying, I have done this, you know, rather than going and reading what I have done.

IM99: Yeah, I know what you mean, it's different to have it in the hand.

RP100: Yeah, and with the photos in it as well. It's a bit of handing in someone a written journal when they think I don't want to read 15 diary entries. But if they think there are pictures describing what has been done, it's gonna be a lot more interesting.

IM101: Cool.

RP102: I liked it.

IM103: It was really interesting!

RP104: Yeah, I like reading back, you know, and my mums one is really good to follow, I think it just connects to it a bit more (...)

Time for Amsterdam!   January 2, 2014

By petrasparks

Today was officially recovery day! Woke up early with some of us still to finish packing suitcases for travel. It was here that I parted with my black leather boots of 3 years and my deflated bra haha! Now I'm down to 3 pairs of shoes! 1 pair being sneakers which I have barely worn so effectively 2! Anyway off to train station we go!

Transferred through to the main station then reorganised to get some breakfast/snack for train! Well what a ruffle we got our feathers in!! The line for everything was sooo long to the point it took us over 30mins to buy 2 donuts, 4 Starbucks coffees and 3 wraps! Never going to stress myself out that close to train departure ever again, we were stealing through team terminal so fast! Onboard the train for our 7 hour trip through to Amsterdam enforced the fact that boy Europeans sure do like to stare!! Coming from respectful NZ my/our personal bubble has never felt quite so violated! Lucky the trip went fast!
I've now decided I like the places Berlin and Apeldoorn so bring on graduating! Although that may totally change when things get serious :P

Now in Amsterdam and checked into our hotel, with rooms all sorted. Ate out for dinner at an Indonesian restaurant down the road which we all enjoyed! Yay for authentic and traditional dining Edana learned!

Anyway back now and after a bit of socialising together we're off to sleep. It's 12am here but I have a cold so not sleeping well! Bring on tomorrow's sight-seeing Mum's circled on the map! Hoping to find some cute wee markets for food!

Ps quote I saw was on side of building as we bustled to dinner, starting to be true!!!

At home in Amsterdam..   January 3, 2014

By petrasparks

Whooo what a day!! Strangely Amsterdam feels like home, especially when the link to here seems to just be that of the Family Tree until now. Edana and I woke up pretty late but with having a cold I was appreciative, undeterred by Sarfia and Mum's room calls to wake us!

We leapt up and got ourselves sorted, heading towards central Amsterdam to begin our touring of the city. Yay for the cultural food, we're defs going to have food babies.. Found a pancake house which the girls were keen on so in we bowled despite my hesitancy.. On

reading pancake I was alert to the fact it may not be what I thought but nope it was the real deal! Ordered some water which caused a stir when the bill came clocking in at €6 – most expensive.. Would have preferred trying yo catch rain drops but we live and learn! And talk about learning.. Edana took one stab of her strawberry and whipped cream pancake only to have it the plate flop over onto her clean dress. Luckily for silk it got thrown back on the plate without lint attached, and with the help of mums wet wipes (yes turns out they stick with Mum from bums to dresses) it got cleaned up without anyone else noticing! However this then required/encouraged a prompt trip to H&M next door for a new dress! While Dad would boost back home or staunch it out we headed for the sale rack, did some Goc magic and were off! Well off meant walking 5 paces into the pharmacy to get me some clearing meds!

Tootled off out round towards Rembrandt Statue where we got a pic with the dudes around him. Following this we walked the Garden Market and Flea Market where we found Dad a wee gift :) we then hit a couple of real stores were I picked up a €10 poncho which I think is a very classy bargain! We then got stuck in some sudden heavy and windy rain which a) got us soaked, b) broke 2 umbrellas and c) nearly drowned our map!

We therefore hurtled down the street into the nicest looking cafe which was us indulge in coffee and poferages :) Nom Nom! Bursting back out into sun each 3 of us bought a pair of Dutch clog slippers for flatting :P Edana and Sarfia then made their first purchases each buying a pair of boots.. Some to our encouragement!

Crossed the road from here up the supermarket to get room party supplies then cut back to the hotel to dump our belongings before sussing a dinner place. Well it rained on us which wasn't desirable but we achieved getting a coffee, booking a place for dinner for tomorrow night and found one for tonight!

While the room party snacks were yum turned out they were unnecessary! Dinner was great tasting and Mum ordered he traditional Pea soup – her and I swapped half way – yay! Got to be honest though Oma, yours still tasted better!! There was a question posed halfway through eating whether or not we were siting in a gay bar but no body could conclude an answer so we're safe so far :P

Back at the hotel we have attempted using the washing machine in the basement to give some clothes like jeans a real wash! Right now I'm super tired and off to bed so if I've missed anything i will add tomorrow! Can't wait to meet some of the relatives tomorrow, we'll be visiting a cafe however not a coffee shop so don't get too worried :P toodles!

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« Time for Amsterdam!

Biggest and BEST day in Amsterdam »

2 responses to "At home in Amsterdam.."

- *Albie*
  January 4th, 2014 at 6:38 am

  <mark>I have noticed a recurring theme…food…alcohol…shopping. Will any of this change when Ross arrives?</mark>

  Reply

  - *petrasparks*
    January 4th, 2014 at 7:13 am

    Don't worry Albie we do maintain a hierarchy – all sights get ticked off before shopping and no food gets eaten till we have done a little walking. I think when dad arrives maybe more drinking and walking to compensate for that :P

    Reply

Biggest and BEST day in Amsterdam

January 4, 2014

By petrasparks

Here is a photo teaser from today folks! As you can read, yesterday's write up was crap as I was doing it whilst falling asleep.. Learning from that and seeing the tired state I am now in.

Yesterday was a long day but simple so I won't bore you with my descriptive writing!
At 10am we met the Zwetsloot's (except Patrick), so Paul, Emmie, Michelle & her boyfriend Thijs. It was an awesome catch up that was all talk, laughs and not much else. We did a bit of touristy things after that through their recommendation like visiting the market for fresh stroopwaffel's and pomme frites in a cone with majo. We peeked in a few shoe stores I must admit along the way – no purchases. At 4.30pm we took Paul's advice and did a canal cruise which was so pretty, gave us a different perspective of Amsterdam and we learnt about the hooks on houses (to crane furniture in cz stairs are too narrow in many).

After this we determinedly strode, ran, circled around some streets like bulls in a ring trying to find the place we booked for dinner. Now we weren't lost but when you need to pee, it's late, raining and touristy crowds you seem to lose all your patience!
Made it to Bazar – Mediterranean food – best meals of the trip!! Nom Nom for sure, and we all enjoyed a few drinks!

Back to hotel to pack and sleep for the journey tomorrow back to London!

Means heaps to me that you are all reading it and having a good laugh so keep the comments rolling on in :) xx

Amsterdam to London!

January 5, 2014

By petrasparks

Whooo another transition day!! We packed it out so all feeling like an early ish night (before 10pm). Woke up at 7am to pack bags and meet in Mum & Sarfia's room for our health kick breakfast :P Now don't worry we haven't split tacks due arguments, they just seem to put us in 2 rooms with king single beds – thank god because despite being family spooning does not need to occur! Ps breakfast was leftover cheese, bread and mango juice, so European yes, happening again..probably not.

At 8.30am we left the hotel headed on a direct path for the Rijks Museum – minus a few bends for bikes (yes Dad I would have died attempting to be a Dutch chicky babe on a bike). Gee whizz who would have thought that at 11.30am we'd still be here forcing ourselves to leave. I mean we lowered the general age in there by 20 years.. Not often we'd get a kick out of studying fine china, paintings or royal sculptures that didn't have hearts, glitter or some young ho ha about it! It was incredible the stories behind some of the images – good and bad. We only lost it at the 'Womb Tomb' described where lots of 'happenings' and 'performances' and sexual encounters usually occurred.. Yup fair to assume Hugh Hefner probably has multiple don't you think? Not going any further..

Anyway extracting ourselves from this historic environment we found ourselves living up our last food desires – fresh stroopwaffel's and poferjes! ==Mmmm I'm definitely coming back for the family and the food== – not for Dad and the streets glowing in red lights with real window displays!

We got picked up super early by the taxi man who laughed like Santa and thought he'd scored with 4 women! At the airport checking in we're all still eligible for more shopping as we sailed on out – Mums hairspray sailed into the bin due to being over 100ml and being lost in carry on luggage. ==Getting over that we headed for a coffee and our only traditional Apple Pie of the whole trip!== They didn't do good coffee (all of us skipped except Mum) so we were grinning proud as punch when we found a Starbucks next to our gate! Round 2!

The flight to London was short (45mins) making the puddle jumper plane bearable! We even got a bus ride out there.. Stretch that out a bit, pour us a drink and we nearly could've called it a private jet moment ==:P kidding (sadly).==

In London we navigated the underground to our hotel here in Paddington successfully! But that's slightly where we hit a bump in our tracks! The rooms are so small Edana and I can't lie our suitcases down, and the man above us better not have a women and get action tonight else we'll be in for a sleepless night, he's already creaking! Oh and our curtain on our door into the corridor seems like we finished our fish & chips or Xmas wrapping and thought oh what the heck tights, tights pants, paper, paper, blind!

Regardless we found a cute Indian place for dinner and enjoyed it despite the hang ups like have to order all at once, and no spice is their spice :P

Back now and can't wait for tomorrow, got plans already! Night!

Oh AND PS – YOU HAVE TO HAND YOUR KEY IN EVERY TIME YOU LEAVE THE HOTEL! Feels like we're on probation was Edana's comment!

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