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# Do Managerial Practices Need Philosophy?

## Alternative Philosophical Models of Experience and Authenticity and their Relevance to Marketing Practices

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**Abstract**
This article answers the question raised by the special issue of this journal in a positive way: managerial practices do need philosophy. In particular, it argues for a more concrete claim: managerial practices have needed philosophy in the past to develop some important intellectual tools, and today they still need to be open to the continuous conceptual and methodological innovations introduced by competing philosophical research programmes, because loyalty to just one favourite philosophical paradigm can hinder the ability of managerial practices to express their full potential, whereas openness to philosophical innovation can help managers keep their conceptual tools up to their tasks. The authors argue for this thesis *in concreto*: they discuss a specific branch of managerial practice—marketing—and illustrate that a preeminent form thereof, i.e. Experiential Marketing, has needed philosophy, and still needs it nowadays, in order to achieve its goals and overcome certain problems. They also point out that Experiential Marketing needs to renew and integrate some of its philosophical assumptions and conceptual tools in the light of innovations brought about by a recent philosophical turn. In particular, the authors argue that philosophy has provided essential conceptual tools for the articulation of the notions of experience and authenticity used in Experiential Marketing; they claim that the excessive reliance of Experiential Marketing upon a problematic and somewhat outdated ontology produces paradoxes with important repercussions upon managerial practice; and they show that those problems can be overcome by integrating and partially renewing its assumptions and conceptual tools, in the light of a fresher philosophical framework. Shortcomings and solutions are discussed with reference to a specific case study: Venice as an experientially rewarding and authentic tourist destination during the Covid19 crisis, but also as a World Heritage property whose management entails difficult choices. The fruitfulness of the paradigm revision is shown also by integrating the conceptual toolkit of Experiential Marketing with three relatively new notions, deriving from a new realist framework: independence, attrition and perception.

**Keywords** Experiential Marketing · Authenticity · Tourism · Venice · Realism · Independence · Attrition · Perception

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## Introduction

Do managerial practices need philosophy? We intend to ask this question against the background of the ongoing debate on the status of management, its goals, assumptions and methods (Klikauer 2010, 2013; Rappin 2017a, b; Erkal and Vandekerckhove 2021; Mir and Greenwood 2021).

In what follows, we shall argue that managerial practices have needed philosophy, because philosophy has contributed to the introduction and refinement of crucial methodological approaches and conceptual tools used in managerial practices. More specifically, we shall argue that philosophical methods and concepts developed by phenomenology, existential philosophy, and philosophical hermeneutics have significantly contributed to the flourishing of one of the most prominent forms of contemporary marketing, i.e. Experiential Marketing (or EM). We also intend to argue that contemporary marketing practices have significant problems, caused by their excessive reliance upon partially outdated ontological assumptions, and that they would overcome those obstacles if they were ready to renew and intensify their dialogue with philosophy, by updating and integrating their philosophical methods and concepts in the light of a recent but significant philosophical turn.

A methodological clarification may help define our approach at this point.

Firstly, the usefulness of philosophy to various practices can be assessed in different ways: most typically, by reference to truth or knowledge. Truth and knowledge are paramount reference points for any philosophical inquiry—and perhaps for research *tout court*. And that should not be underestimated when it comes to managerial practices either. However, we feel that the question whether managerial *practices* (as opposed to, say, general management theory) need philosophy legitimately stresses the relevance of *pragmatic* issues. Fruitfulness is a paramount example of pragmatic relevance, therefore, in what follows, we shall highlight the contribution of philosophy to managerial practices especially in terms of fruitfulness, and leave other aspects more in the background. It may be useful to declare that highlighting the fruitfulness of philosophy for managerial practices does not necessarily presuppose or imply a pragmatist conception of truth, knowledge or indeed philosophy, to the effect that their significance resides exclusively in their fruitfulness or consequences for possible or actual practices. In fact, the perspective from which our comments derive is rather realist than pragmatist, as will emerge from the following paragraphs.

Secondly, in what follows, we shall argue for our thesis *in concreto*. Arguing *in concreto* means undertaking to show that existing and influential marketing practices have made use of, and still need, philosophical tools in order to achieve their goals. We chose to discuss a particular branch of management, i.e. marketing, but we expect that similar analyses apply to other branches[1].

Our argument will formally run as follows:

– prominent managerial practices have relied upon philosophical methods, claims, and concepts, to develop certain intellectual tools, which are essential for them to achieve their goals;

[1] Arguing *in concreto* is not overgeneralising, but rather proving the correctness of a thesis by showing that it makes sense of certain well-known phenomena, and suggesting that similar results could be obtained in other fields. It is like arguing that politics needs science by pointing out that crucial political decisions (say, during a pandemic) are scientifically informed.

– those same managerial practices would not have been able to develop such tools without the contribution of philosophical methods, claims, and concepts;
– such managerial practices cannot overcome certain problems without updating and integrating their philosophical tools;
– hence, prominent managerial practices need to have a continuous dialogue with philosophy in order to achieve their goals.

Less formally:

– marketing, a fundamental branch of management, has relied upon methods, claims, and concepts, developed by existential philosophy, phenomenology, and philosophical hermeneutics to develop EM, which is a preeminent form of marketing;
– marketing has resorted also to philosophical tools to overcome its previously (Neo)-Positivistic and Utilitarian framework, and develop EM;
– EM cannot tackle certain problems without revising and integrating its philosophical toolkit;
– hence, marketing has needed and still needs philosophy, in order to develop its programmes, overcome important obstacles and update its conceptual tools.

We shall argue for our theses by making reference to concrete marketing practices related to tourism marketing, tourism management, and cultural management, and in particular to the case of tourism in Venice during the Covid19 pandemic and the status of Venice and Its Lagoon as a World Heritage property.

Our discussion of the philosophical assumptions of EM and our proposal of revising and integrating them will draw from recent debates generated by the new wave of philosophical realism. By 'realism', we understand the double thesis that there is a reality independent of any particular perspective (experience, language, discourse, interpretation) and that the existence of such an independent reality is fundamental for the emergence and understanding of behaviour, meaning, and value; by 'anti-realism' we understand the negation of that thesis, i.e. the claim that there is no reality, that whatever might count as real is relative to some linguistic, conceptual, or interpretive framework of reference, and that behaviour, meaning, and value constitute or construct realities rather than emerging from reality or referring to it (Searle 1995; DeLanda 2006; Meillassoux 2006; Benoist 2011, 2017; Ferraris 2012, 2016; Gabriel 2015; Giannasi and Casarin 2022).

Although realism has been a minoritarian position especially in the second half of the twentieth century, the last two decades have witnessed a flourishing of realist research programmes and theses (cf. Searle 2010; Garcia 2010; Bogost 2012; Ferraris 2018; Harman 2018), which have produced a new and interesting breakthrough, and called into question many received assumptions about the purported irrelevance of reality or reference to it. The issue of the philosophical credentials of realism and antirealism, respectively, is of course of great interest, but will remain in the background.

The article will unfold as follows:

– we shall first reconstruct how the rise of EM was fuelled by insights deriving also from phenomenology, existential philosophy and philosophical hermeneutics, in an intellectual battle against the outdated Neo-Positivist framework (paragraph 1), and in an attempt to develop two innovative and crucial conceptual tools: the notions of experience (paragraph 2) and authenticity (paragraph 3);

– we shall point out that EM's current use of the notion of authenticity needs integration and revision, because its (antirealist) philosophical assumptions lead to paradoxes and are managerially ineffective, when it comes to certain well-known problems pertaining to cultural management (paragraph 4);
– we shall point out further problems deriving from antirealism for managerial practices, by making reference to the case of tourism marketing (paragraph 5);
– we shall show that recent philosophical innovations, deriving from a return of realism, can help EM overcome its problems and we shall introduce complementary philosophical notions deriving from a realist framework, and use them to discuss a concrete case of tourism management: Venice during the 2020-21 pandemic years (paragraph 6).

## The Rise of Experiential Marketing and its Philosophical Underpinnings

Conceived as "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (AMA, 2017), marketing is a crucial branch of management, which focuses upon the structural ties between businesses on one side and markets, both industrial and final, on the other. Marketing plays a pivotal role in the life and growth of businesses, thereby contributing to shape and orient managerial practices.

'Experiential Marketing' (or 'EM') is an expression used in marketing to cover a now very widespread set of approaches and strategies unified by their interest in subjective aspects of consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Schmitt 2009; Carù and Cova 2012). EM emerged in the early 1980s, in opposition to modernist approaches, by rejecting received methodological assumptions and elaborating an alternative and complex model of consumer behaviour, pivoting upon the notion of experience.

The major theoretical innovations introduced by EM hinge upon its rejection of methodological and ontological assumptions associated to the neopositivist movement. The most relevant assumptions *rejected* by EM are:

– behaviourism (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, 132);
– rationalism (*ibid*);
– utilitarianism (134);
– reductionism (136)
– objectualism (134)[2].

Behaviourism is a methodological, epistemological, and ontological position associated with the neopositivist refusal to posit the dependence of human behaviour upon unobservable inner states. It exerted a tremendous influence upon linguistics, psychology, economics, and the social sciences generally especially from the 1940s onwards. Behaviourism excluded reference to first-person reports about personal psychological states or the positing of unobservable inner causes of overt human behaviour. Rationalism and utilitarianism

[2] By 'objectualism' we mean an approach that mainly focuses upon the features of objects (Giannasi and Casarin 2022, 45, 47). EM criticises previous forms of marketing as focusing mainly upon "the tangible benefits of conventional goods and services" (134).

were both associated with the positivistic model of human agency via the old assumption of a felicific calculus regulating human behaviour. Reductionism and objectualism both tend to exclude the relevance of subjective states of consumers.

EM enriched the scope and strategy of contemporary marketing by highlighting the importance of subjective experiences correlated with purchase and consumption, thereby paving the way to a radical rethinking of managerial practices regarding markets at large: "The focus on customer experience has led a shift away from an analytical and largely cognitive view of branding that views customers as information-processors towards a more holistic view of customer value that encompasses rational and emotional benefits" (Schmitt and Rogers 2009, *Preface*). EM has questioned "the hegemony of the information processing perspective on the grounds that it may neglect important consumption phenomena", and has included "various playful leisure activities, sensory pleasures, daydreams, esthetic enjoyment, and emotional responses" (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, 132). Besides rejecting the utilitarian framework of reference for consumer behaviour, EM also disputed the behaviourist principle of the exclusive relevance of observable phenomena. It paid "increased attention to the mental events surrounding the act of consumption" and especially to "purely subjective aspects of consciousness", and "introspective reports" (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, 138).

EM clearly proclaimed its allegiance to phenomenological insights, considered as gateways to non-verbal and not publicly observable but nevertheless relevant dimensions of experience (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982, 134–137; see also reference to MacLeod 1964).

It is important to appreciate the philosophical novelty of the theoretical tools introduced by early EM with respect to previous forms of marketing, which tended to rely upon Neo-Positivist and behaviourist theoretical frameworks: reference to inner mental states and non-verbal or unexpressed subjective experiences was expelled from both philosophy and the social sciences as a consequence of the widespread adoption of Neo-Positivism in North-American academia. Rationalist and utilitarian models of human agency and behaviour were largely dominant and so was the neglecting of subjective, symbolic, and hedonic or even existential aspects of life.

By abandoning Neo-Positivism and adopting a phenomenological approach, EM elaborated a concept of experience which enabled the attention of marketing practitioners to be drawn to the very inner and subjective dimension discredited or neglected by logical positivists.

EM highlighted the relevance of emotions, fantasies, daydreaming, free associations, but also uncovered a whole dimension of rewarding multisensory mental episodes and states: "the consequences of consumption appear in the fun that a consumer derives from a product—the enjoyment that it offers and the resulting feeling of pleasure that it evokes" (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, 138). Indeed, "the criteria for successful consumption are essentially esthetic in nature and hinge on an appreciation of the product for its own sake, apart from any utilitarian function that it may or may not perform" (*ibid.*); the "seeking of emotional arousal" is "a major motivation for the consumption of certain product classes" (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982, 93).

The adoption of an alternative philosophical perspective contributed to the renewal of marketing theory and practice and to the emergence of a whole new field of phenomena (subjective experiences correlated to consumption patterns); it provided the early formulations of EM with conceptual tools to describe it (categories to analyse experiences), and it contributed to its reformulation of the fundamental features of consumer behaviour (the seeking of rewarding experiences as opposed to utilitarian means/ends calculations), by

promoting a shift from mainly epistemological themes to existential and aesthetic ones. In tourism management, the shift boosted attention to exciting, challenging, immersive, and memorable aspects of tourist experience, as opposed to traditional, utilitarian cost/benefit ones. Hence, EM's attention to alternative philosophical perspectives contributed in a fundamental way to its elaboration of an original and effective set of conceptual tools.

Contemporary tourism management privileges the intrinsically rewarding aspects of excitement, adventure, immersion, and memory in tourist experience, as opposed to the strictly utilitarian ones of relief, relaxation, status, or cost/benefit ratio: the phenomenological/experiential shift has paved the way to a whole new series of approaches to tourism management, which have boosted the development of 'experience providers', or ExPro's (Schmitt 1999)—such as festivals, traditional markets, theme-parks, community-based experiences, etc.—at tourism destinations. The "experiential turn" also fostered attention to subjectively rewarding aspects in travel planning, choice, preparation, and remembering, thus significantly restructuring all phases of tourist experience, including preparatory and *post festum* phases.

## The Concept of Experience in EM and its Philosophical Background

One of the pivotal notions of Experiential Marketing is of course experience. EM's notion of experience involves personal, emotional, biographical, aesthetic, and existential factors. That aspect constituted an important innovation with respect to previous managerial conceptions and practices. EM's experience does not exactly overlap with classical philosophical conceptions thereof: for instance, it is not akin to the ancient Aristotelian '*ἐμπειρία*', the Scholastic '*experientia*', the Galilean 'esperienza' the modern empiricist 'experience' or the Kantian '*Erfahrung'*, all of which have strongly epistemological connotations: they highlight the cognitive relevance of certain modes or forms of knowledge acquisition—and leave emotional or existential aspects very much to the side.

Unlike such classical concepts, EM's "experience" does not evoke scientific experiment or observation, but rather exciting, rewarding, unforgettable, or defining episodes in a subject's life: moments that make a subject what it is and what it appears to itself to be (Gadamer 1960; Schmitt 2011). EM's category of experience derives not from epistemology, but rather from (auto)biography: from a perspective that goes all the way back to Rousseau, but is most typically associated with existential philosophy and philosophical hermeneutics (Schmitt 2011). Both philosophical programmes highlighted the significance of different subjective ways of becoming aware of something (Gadamer 1960).

Existential philosophy and philosophical hermeneutics elaborated a distinction between the knowledge that a subject may acquire from academic or otherwise institutionalised (but impersonal) forms of scientific production and dissemination, and what a subject may become aware of through a difficult but personal path of world- and self-discovery, particularly by direct exposure to the riddles of life (Gadamer 1960). Earlier philosophy had insisted mainly upon the truth and reliability of experiences for knowledge, whereas existential philosophy highlights the relevance of experiences in contributing to sculpt the development of one's personality.

Schmitt (2011, 60−1) explicitly acknowledges the philosophical background of EM's conceptual tools. In particular, he highlights the importance of existential philosophy (especially Kierkegaard) and phenomenology (the Brentano-Husserl legacy) to a correct understanding of EM's conception of experience. He also reconstructs the philosophical

ancestry of Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) early introduction of an experiential approach to marketing issues (Schmitt 2011, 62).

EM's concept of "experience" was developed in dialogue with a late-modern notion: *Erlebnis* (Schmitt 2011, 60). '*Erlebnis*' is a German expression usually translated as 'experience'. However, it has a totally different meaning and etymology from the standard German counterpart of the English word 'experience', i.e. '*Erfahrung*'. As Schmitt (2011) notes, '*Erfahrung*' evokes objective or scientific knowledge and observation, whereas '*Erlebnis*' (which is sometimes also translated as 'adventure'), denotes a significant episode in a person's life, something which has personally occurred to someone or which someone has directly witnessed. The expression *Erlebnis* was introduced into modern academic jargon by German historicist philosophers (Dilthey, *in primis*) in the last third of the nineteenth century in an attempt to contrast the dominance of rationalist and positivist approaches to meaning, value, and art (Gadamer 1960, 2, b: β) and was deepened at the beginning of the twentieth century by phenomenologists (in particular Husserl, who had an intensive intellectual dialogue with Dilthey, and considered him a man of genius), who were fighting against objectualist and positivist philosophy (Gadamer 1960, 2, b: γ)[3]. '*Erlebnis*' is etymologically related to 'leben' (to live) and is very close to being a philosophical term of art (Husserl 1900-1, vol. 2/1, V: §§ 1–3; Gadamer 1960, ch. 2, b: β-γ): '*Erlebnis*' denotes what it feels like, for a particular individual, to be personally involved in a certain situation or to partake in a certain event and be exposed to it. How being personally involved in it alters the subject's inner life. It suggests "the immediacy with which something real is grasped—unlike something which one presumes to know… What is *erlebt* is always what one has *erlebt* oneself" (Gadamer 1960, Eng. tr. 56). It is not surprising that EM's attempt to emancipate marketing from Neo-Positivist approaches to value made use of an *Erlebnis*-related, philosophically alternative, anti-positivistic, and phenomenological, notion of experience.

Gilmore and Pine (2007) is certainly one of the most influential contributions to EM. The authors note that "what consumers want today are experiences—memorable events that engage them in an inherently personal way" (23) and claim that contemporary economies are fundamentally experience economies (Gilmore and Pine 1999). It should be stressed that the experiential turn in part of recent marketing has heavily influenced managerial practices in general and not only marketing practices.

EM's notion of experience was enriched by the idea of events that are unforgettable and shape one's life: they are memorable and change the person who witnesses them. If we delve for a moment into the philosophical notion of *Erlebnis*, we find that it has still more than a lesson to teach to managerial practices and in particular to tourism destination management: *Erlebnis* evokes "the permanent content of what is experienced… a yield or result that achieves permanence, weight, and significance from out of the transience of experiencing" (Gadamer 1960, Eng. tr. 56). Relatedness to individual feelings and enduring value yield a "productive union: something becomes an *Erlebnis* not only insofar as it is experienced, but insofar as its being experienced makes a special impression that gives it lasting importance" (Gadamer 1960, Eng. tr. 56). "Every experience is taken out of the continuity of life and at the same time related to the whole of one's life" (Gadamer 1960, Eng. tr. 63). In the words of EM: "Experiences involve the entire living being" (Schmitt 1999); "every experience has something of an adventure about it" (Gadamer 1960, Eng. tr. 63). And, indeed, since the rise of EM, managerial practices have insisted more and more

[3] Notice that Gadamer revives the notion of *Erlebnis* as part of an attempt to emancipate the philosophy of his time from scientistic and positivistic conceptions of truth and meaning (Gadamer 1960, ch. 1).

upon the adventurous, immersive, unforgettable aspects of value proposals, in tourism marketing and beyond.

The booming of EM contributed to shape late twentieth century and early twenty-first century management: the stressing of unforgettable experiences led to the proliferation of theme-parks and immersive malls and districts, to the radical revision of retail and advertising and to the festivalisation of cultural initiatives. It had an important impact upon tourism destination management, with the explosion of immersive, multi-sensory, or experiential value proposals designed to intensify the richness of consumer experiences, as unique and unforgettable episodes in consumers' lives. These transformations are still taking place as we write, and are still orienting much of what is done in tourism destination management and customer experience management.

It is a revealing paradox that the very booming of EM was progressively accompanied by a perceived depletion of consumer experiences, which spread to many different areas, but is particularly remarkable in tourism management (Carù and Cova 2007). In particular, EM's explicit proposal of designing and accurately structuring theme-based contexts of experience, in order to boost their value to customers (Schmitt 2000, 2011), sometimes led tourism managers to excessively refine and polish such contexts, thereby removing every element of attrition and uniqueness. The need for controlled, enjoyable, and manageable contexts of experience often led to a reduction of spontaneousness and historical genuineness of tourism destinations, including places, traditions, and habits. For instance, it led to the partial superimposition or substitution of stereotypical and easily understandable features of places and traditions for the original ones, thereby generating the phenomenon of Disneyfication. The issue of authenticity (or lack thereof) became, therefore, a crucial theme for EM research and practice, especially in the last two decades[4]. It is no wonder that EM devoted growing attention to the relevance of authenticity to customer experiences.

## Authenticity: Its Philosophical Underpinnings and the Limits of the Antirealist Framework

The concept of authenticity plays an important role not only in almost every context of contemporary marketing practice (and especially in EM), but also in contemporary management more generally. Authenticity, we are told by experiential marketing practitioners and consultants, is "what consumers really want" (Gilmore and Pine 2007): "In any industry where experiences come to the fore, issues of authenticity follow closely behind" (1). "Even if two things appear exactly alike, the authentic object is the one that is believed to have particularly valued or important physical encounters with the world. Similarly, even if two social actors behave in similar ways, the authentic set of behaviors are those that are believed to reflect the actor's true self, not simulated to achieve a particular effect." (Grayson and Martinec 2004, 298). Indeed: "Authenticity is in high demand. Trilling's (1972) seemingly prophetic treatise on the topic nearly a half century ago anticipated the rise of authenticity in response to modernization." (Lehman et al. 2019).

The relevance of authenticity has significantly grown in recent years, partly because of the paradoxical effects of EM itself and of its standardisation of experience (Carù and Cova

[4] Cf. Liedtka (2008); Zare (2016); Basile and Cavallo (2020). For an overview of the literature and of its philosophical underpinnings cf. Lehman et al. (2019). See Tasci and Knutson (2004) for a discussion of authenticity and tourism destination management.

2007), but even more because of deep structural features of modern and contemporary life, as highlighted long ago by Adorno (1964).

The notion of authenticity plays a crucial role in tourism destination management, for intuitive reasons. The words 'authentic', 'authentically', as well as their synonyms and antonyms ('real', 'really', 'true', 'genuine', 'inauthentic', 'contrived', 'phony', 'fake', etc.) are often used in advertising and customer reviews to connote tourism destinations, restaurants, hotels, museums, boroughs, districts, villages, bars, recipes, products, styles, festivals, dances, songs, and more. However, they are also used in official operational guidelines, handbooks, monitoring reports, and even conventions pertaining to the management of cultural and natural properties, including official UNESCO documents (Lemaire and Stovel 1994; UNESCO 2013, 2015, [1977] 2021)[5]. Authenticity, therefore, plays a fundamental role not in tourism destination management but also in the management of cultural properties.

Those roles do not seem to coincide: whereas tourism destination management and marketing tend to highlight authenticity as a feature of possible consumer experiences, and to expand it or guard it, cultural management protects authenticity as a feature of cultural properties themselves, a feature which may be only partly compatible with certain forms of tourism. Official UNESCO cultural management guidelines formally define authenticity as credibility and truthfulness (UNESCO [1977] 2021, § 80). Truthfulness and credibility are analysed as relations between the ascriptions of certain values to particular properties and the information used as justification for those ascriptions (UNESCO [1977] 2021, §§ 79–86 *et passim*). The assessment and preservation of authenticity are spelled out in detail as attributes of cultural properties themselves, including their "form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions, techniques and management systems, location and setting, language, other forms of intangible heritage, spirit and feeling" (UNESCO [1977] 2021, § 82). The preservation of authenticity is one of the objectives of World Heritage management systems: "Protection and management of World Heritage properties should ensure that their Outstanding Universal Value, including the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity at the time of inscription, are sustained or enhanced over time" (§ 96, cf. also §§ 98 – 9; § 116) and cultural managers are committed to the pursuit of those very goals.

Authenticity is another important case in point for our discussion of the contribution of philosophy to managerial practices, because the very notions of authenticity used in marketing, tourism destination management and cultural management have important philosophical underpinnings (again, mostly from existential philosophy and phenomenology), but also because certain problems and paradoxes related to its use could be overcome by updating or reformulating certain features of philosophical frameworks of reference in the light of available alternatives in current debates.

Some authors (Trilling 1972; Golomb 1995) consider authenticity one of the most relevant values in late-modern society, especially as an antidote to formalistic or objectivistic (e.g. rule-centred, norm-centred) conceptions of value (Ferrara 1989; Taylor 1992, 25–30; Williams 2002, 172–205). As with the concept of experience, the apparent correspondence between EM's notion of authenticity and the ordinary meaning of the word conceals its derivation from a philosophical debate (Lehman et al. 2019). Etymologically speaking,

[5] The words 'authentic' and 'authenticity' have 104 occurrences in UNESCO's Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO [1977] 2021 and 53 in UNESCO's resource manual on Managing Cultural World Heritage (UNESCO 2013).

the current use of the expression 'authentic', in EM and beyond, derives indeed more or less directly from Heidegger's (1927) German neologism '*Eigentlichkeit*', whose closest English approximation would be something like 'owned-ness' or 'being one's own'. '*Eigentlichkeit*', in Heidegger's phenomenological analysis, denotes someone's possible decision to be their own person, instead of conforming to impersonal modes of conduct, of doing what "they do" and thinking what "they think" (Heidegger 1927, Eng. tr. 314-ff.; cf. McManus 2019). Heidegger's '*Eigentlichkeit*' and '*eigentlich*' were translated into English, French, and other languages as 'authenticity'/'authentic', '*authenticité*'/'*authentique*' etc., although the English word 'authentic' has a different etymology, and the German equivalent of 'authentic' would rather be 'authentisch' or 'echt' than 'eigentlich'[6]. The concept of authenticity became philosophically and culturally influential especially through the phenomenological/existentialist writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, although the values it embodies hail from Rousseau and Kierkegaard's refusal to evaluate human conduct mainly in terms of compliance with existing social codes and rules.

Authenticity evokes a sense of being one's own self but also of genuine reality, perhaps via the idea that, loosely speaking, some things may be correctly or incorrectly identified as produced by a certain agent, who has the power of validating them or bestowing a certain value upon them. For instance, a certain painting may be authentic because it was painted by the very artist to whom it is attributed. A certain document is authentic because it was drawn up by the authority in charge of issuing it. A certain signature is authentic because it was made by the very person identified by it. A certain pair of sunglasses is authentic because it was produced by the company represented by the logo on it.

The notion of authenticity used in EM and beyond is underpinned by a specific philosophical notion, deriving from existential philosophy, phenomenology, and existentialism. However, the contribution of philosophy to the concept of authenticity used in marketing was enriched by further conceptual tools, deriving from philosophical semiotics. For instance, Grayson and Martinec's (2004) analysis of consumer attitudes towards authenticity used a (*nota bene*) Peircean conceptual toolbox pivoting on the technical concepts of index and icon, to analyse consumer attitudes towards the authenticity of offerings: "we draw from the philosophy of Peirce… His ideas… provide a useful foundation for exploring and understanding how consumers evaluate indicators of authenticity." (Grayson and Martinec 2004, 297). The contribution of philosophy to the development and articulation of the managerial concept of authenticity has, therefore, gone beyond casual reference.

## The Authenticity Paradox and the Need for Philosophical Revision

Managerial practices have resorted to philosophy in order to develop certain conceptual tools and evolve pre-eminent forms of marketing, e.g. EM. However, marketing research and practice have also encountered specifically philosophical problems in elaborating the notion of authenticity, problems which have been explicitly recognised as philosophical paradoxes by some of the most prominent EM authors (Gilmore and Pine 2007):

[6] Etymologically, 'authentic' derives via French and Latin from the ancient Greek word 'αὐθέντης', stressing someone's doing something with their own hands, someone's being directly and materially responsible for an event or state of affairs; 'αὐθεντικός' was used to stress the converse idea of an object, event or state of affairs being the effect or product of the actions of a particular person. The German word '*eigen-t-lich*', instead, expresses the belonging of something to someone.

"consumers choose to buy or not buy based on how real they perceive an offering to be. Business today, therefore, is all about being real. Original. Genuine. Sincere. *Authentic*" (1, emphasis in the original). However, "reality isn't what it used to be" (89) and "beliefs are not objective truths about an objective world but rather socially constructed realities" (*ibid.*). The conjunction of these two claims leads to "the authenticity paradox": all consumers want is authenticity, and authenticity is reality. However, there is no such thing as reality. Since being authentic is being real and nothing is real, nothing is authentic: authenticity is ontologically impossible. That authenticity is ontologically impossible does not simply mean that it is not easy to find: it cannot possibly exist. Hence, it is ontologically impossible to offer consumers what they really want: "*Nothing offered by any business is authentic; it's all artificial and utterly fake*" (88, emphasis in the original).

The interesting point is that the authenticity paradox emerges from an explicit philosophical background: it is considered as "the logical conclusion that follows from centuries of philosophical thought on authenticity" (89). But, if that paradox is the last word of EM on authenticity, then, we believe, managerial practices have a problem. That problem is not only philosophical, but also practical. If nothing is or can be authentic, tourism destination managers do not have reliable conceptual tools to articulate the difference between, say, offering tourists the possibility of experiencing Venice proper and offering them the experience of a Venice-hotel-simulacrum; or between offering the experience of a meal in a traditional Venetian trattoria, located in an area of town inhabited by Venetians, in a historical building, in which Venetian cooks prepare meals following traditional recipes with local products, and expecting them to grab a sandwich in a fast-food restaurant in an overcrowded lane, where no Venetian person lives any more, and in which the staff prepares the same meals as anywhere else in the world. If nothing is authentic, then managers cannot draw a line somewhere between a chandelier produced in a Murano furnace by a master glass-blower with a thirty-year experience, and a product created elsewhere with standardised industrial procedures: "It is all artificial and utterly fake". The same counts for cultural managers, who cannot use that concept of authenticity to draw a line somewhere between allowing reasonable numbers of tourists to experience a city whose population represents an outstanding testimony of a living civilisation and accepting that uncontrolled mass tourism will drive all remaining inhabitants of Venice out of its historical centre.

In our opinion, Gilmore and Pine (2007) correctly identify the underlying philosophical terms of the paradox: it is impossible to formulate a substantive notion of authenticity if a) being authentic is defined as being real, and b) it is claimed that nothing is real. Rejecting or qualifying (b) would certainly contribute to solve the dilemma. However, they rather adopt a more difficult solution: a radical form of perspectival relativism, to the effect that the "sole determinant of the authenticity of any economic offering is the individual perceiving the offering. Call it a corollary to the Authenticity Paradox" (92). The solution consists in claiming that inauthentic products (i.e. *notabene* all possible products) can be rendered authentic, i.e. can be made to appear authentic to customers, although they are in fact not. This solution seems no less paradoxical.

Paradox is the price for radical allegiance to antirealism. The loyalty of contemporary marketing to an antirealist framework is a widespread phenomenon. Indeed, in a similar vein, but from a different perspective, Grayson and Martinec (2004) claim that "[t]he word 'authentic' is associated with "genuineness,' 'reality,' and 'truth'", but add that "the words 'genuine' and 'true' can mean different things to different consumers in different contexts.": "To one consumer, a Native American necklace is genuine only if it is made by a Native American craftsperson"; "to another consumer, the necklace must have particular colors and designs, regardless of who made it". Or: "To one consumer, a meal is

truly Mexican only if it is made in Mexico and consumed by Mexicans, while, to another consumer, the meal must reflect certain recipes, regardless of who eats or makes the food" (296-7). And indeed: "most scholars who study authenticity agree that authenticity is not an attribute inherent in an object and is better understood as an assessment made by a particular evaluator in a particular context..." (298). "Despite our belief that we perceive iconic or indexical signs 'out there' in the 'real world,' our perceptions of these signs are highly influenced by our personal predilections and perceptual imperfections" (*ibid.*). "Thus, there are no purely objective criteria for deciding whether a market offering is indexically or iconically authentic" (*ibid.*).

As can be clearly seen from the foregoing passages, the authenticity paradox derives from the difficulty of harmonising the definition of authenticity as reality with a strongly antirealist position, i.e. with the claim that there is no reality, that whatever counts as real is such only relative to some perspective. Some readers might be tempted to believe that the antirealism we highlighted above depends upon the influence exerted by philosophy *tout court* upon marketing research and practice, because—we are told—antirealism is nothing but the logical consequence of millennia of philosophical thought. If antirealism is counterproductive and is the logical consequence of philosophical reflections, then philosophy is counterproductive. However, EM's allegiance to strongly antirealistic positions does not depend upon its indebtedness to philosophy *per se*, but rather upon its subscribing to a specific philosophical framework. In fact, radical antirealism may be for EM's concept of authenticity what Logical Positivism was for the modelling of consumer behaviour in the 1980s: an ageing paradigm, which might preclude certain forms of theoretical innovation.

We can appreciate how loyalty to one philosophical framework has reduced the options available to managerial theory and practices, whereas openness to other philosophical possibilities, which have been made available by recent debates and research programmes, may contribute to the solution of those problems, by providing alternative philosophical tools. Indeed, the recent return of philosophical interest in the role of reality, not only as independently existing, but also as an inescapable element of value, meaning and understanding, has provided fresh conceptual tools to address the paradox of authenticity and move beyond its stalemate.

The introduction of a full-blown alternative philosophical concept of authenticity is beyond the scope of this article. However, the idea of authenticity seems to us to evoke the condition that an object $O$ truly instantiates a property $P$ (that it is *prima facie* taken to instantiate), only if a validating subject $S$ bears the appropriate relation to $O$ (where $S$ can be an individual or a community). For instance, a painting is an authentic Picasso only if Picasso painted it; a pair of sunglasses is an authentic pair of Ray-Ban only if it was produced by Ray-Ban or by a licenced company[7]. Along similar lines, perhaps, a village, a square, a borough, but also a region, a restaurant, a bar, or a hotel, may be (and correctly be experienced as) authentic, because the right type of (collective) subjects validate them. If this intuition is on the right path, the question arises, What kind of individual or collective subject is appropriate to the validation of a village, square, borough, region, and so forth. Intuitively, the validating subject is the community that *inhabits* it: a village or a certain borough of a city are authentic if they are mainly inhabited by their resident population (and not only by tourists), a square is authentic if it is used as a gathering place by the local community, a bar or a restaurant are authentic if the owners are local, the food,

[7] The relevant validating subject depends upon the type of object we are considering, but it is important to note that authenticity is not the same as an abstract standard of quality.

the furniture and the tableware are traditional etc., but even more if they are frequented by locals and not only by tourists. Conversely, a village, borough, or square may be experienced as (an be) losing authenticity if you only find tourists there; a restaurant or a bar may be inauthentic if they were established and are managed for tourists and not for locals etc. If our suggestion is correct, it follows that certain areas of Venice, certain bars, restaurants, squares etc., are more authentic than others, and are experienced and reviewed by tourists as such, because they are used and inhabited by Venetians according to their own habits and traditions. They are not phony, contrived, fake, simulacra etc. Notice that being inhabited by the local population is a real feature of certain towns, not something relative to a certain perspective. In what follows, we shall attempt to address the main question of this special issue by showing *in concreto* how an even more substantial dialogue with philosophy can provide useful conceptual tools for managerial practice. In particular, we shall discuss the case of tourist destination management of a world-famous tourist destination.

## Consequences of Antirealist Assumptions for Tourism Management

Venice is not simply one of the most famous brands worldwide; it is also a subject of controversies due to its demographic decay and radical touristification. This has had various consequences, not only for Venetian citizens, who are abandoning it as unliveable and unaffordable, but for tourists as well, who have started considering Venice as an excessively touristified destination: all these phenomena are related to the loss of authenticity of Venice and have significant consequences in terms of its tourism destination management and of its management as a world heritage property: both of which concern also its authenticity (or lack thereof).

The phenomenon of overtourism has been mainly investigated from the point of view of its sustainability and of its impact upon the life of resident populations (UNWTO 2017). We agree with Grayson and Martinec (2004) and with Gilmore and Pine (2007), as well as with a whole host of EM managers and researchers, that authenticity is not simply an accessory aspect of value proposals: in some relevant cases, like tourism destination management, it is clearly at least part of "what consumers really want". Hence, if certain processes lead to a loss of authenticity of a tourist destination (for instance, if that destination is reviewed or considered as inauthentic, less authentic, or losing its authenticity on online rating platforms, travel magazines, social media or simply word of mouth), there may be repercussions of that process upon the attractiveness of that destination for certain kinds of potential tourists.

An overtouristified destination may have a bad or worsening quality/price rate; it may be overcrowded; it may take away the feeling of adventure and of personal discovery associated with travelling and holiday; it may make it more difficult to find shops, restaurants, hotels, districts, and even human gestures that feel authentic and therefore prompt a rewarding experience. And it may be at odds with someone's self-image as a person with original and individual taste who does not do what "they" do: as a person who lives authentically.

Hypothesising that overtouristified destinations keep tourists at a distance is only apparently paradoxical: what is at stake is whether overtourism has an impact upon the attractiveness of tourism destinations for certain precious types of potential or actual tourists—whose presence may be particularly beneficial in terms of revenues, sustainability, seasonality, reputation—while retaining it for others, who may be numerous but nevertheless less valuable or even damaging for them in terms of pollution, overcrowding, etc.

The antirealist idea that authenticity is ontologically impossible poses an important problem to a correct understanding of cultural heritage management and tourism destination management for at least two reasons:

– firstly, that idea is too generic to be put to work for the making of concrete managerial decisions;
– secondly, it is incompatible with the attested use of the term by important institutions in operational documents pertaining to the management of cultural properties.

The first point is methodological but has palpable consequences: allegiance to antirealism leads EM to the paradoxical conclusion that all offerings are utterly inauthentic; and that something's being or not being authentic radically depends upon its being subjectively so-considered. Both claims are confusing, not only intrinsically, but also because concepts are supposed to provide some guidance to those who use them. For instance, in tourism destination management, the concept of authenticity is supposed to help destination managers understand why certain groups of tourists tend to avoid certain destinations, certain urban areas, certain kinds of accommodation, certain restaurants; why they tend to prefer certain districts over others, why they appreciate certain hotels more than others, why they tend to review certain attractions in loosely systematic ways, and so forth. It also helps articulate managerial policies related to the preservation of authenticity or to its conditions. However, if everything is inauthentic, then every restaurant, town, or district, is inauthentic; but if every restaurant, town, or district, is inauthentic, then they are all as authentic as they could ever be: there is literally nothing left for managers to do to maintain, protect, or foster their authenticity. But a concept that can provide no guidance to a practice is fruitless: "a wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it is not part of the mechanism" (Wittgenstein 1953, § 271).

As to the second point, EM's loyalty to antirealism makes its use of the concept of authenticity incommensurable with influential and institutionally binding uses of the very same concept in documents regarding the management of cultural heritage properties that are also parts of tourism destinations. Most notably, relativist and subjectivist conceptions of authenticity are at odds with the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the 1972 Convention for the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage* (UNESCO [1977] 2021): the Operational Guidelines explicitly state that management plans for World Heritage Properties—like "Venice and its Lagoon"—must preserve and enhance the authenticity of those properties[8]. Assessments of the state of authenticity of Venice and its Lagoon and all sorts of provisions adopted by the institutions in charge of its management plan in order to preserve it and enhance it must feature in the periodic reports about the state of conservation of the property "Venice and its Lagoon" as well as of all other Cultural and Mixed World Heritage properties. In fact, UNESCO has issued formal recommendations regarding the loss of authenticity of Venice and its Lagoon, urging institutions in charge of its management plan to do more to preserve it. The very expressions 'authentic' and 'authenticity' occur twenty-one times in the most recent and dramatic recommendations (e.g. UNESCO 2015). Those documents have

[8] "IIF § 96. Protection and management of World Heritage properties should ensure that their Outstanding Universal Value, including the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity at the time of inscription, are sustained or enhanced over time. A regular review of the general state of conservation of properties, and thus also their Outstanding Universal Value, shall be done within a framework of monitoring processes for World Heritage properties, as specified within the Operational Guidelines".

pointed to serious and specific threats: "the dramatic increase of the number of tourists, followed by a consequently proportional reconversion of buildings into spaces for persons coming from outside on one hand, the enormous decrease of the population on the islands on the other hand are alerting indicators for the irreversible loss of this essential value of authenticity" (UNESCO 2015). Increase of tourists and decrease of resident population are considered as objective measures of loss of authenticity and cultural managers are urged to take measures against them. It is hard to look away from such evidence and insist that 'authenticity' in this context is nothing but a term of art for conservation experts only, with no relation to the ordinary concept of authenticity or to cultural management practices; or to claim that UNESCO and ICOMOS simply got it all wrong, and that nothing can change the authenticity of Venice, because nothing really is ontologically authentic; or even that, perhaps, all we need to do to preserve the authenticity of Venice and its Lagoon is to attempt to experience it differently.

Whereas antirealism leads EM into a conceptual *cul-de-sac*, a realist approach would offer an alternative framework, which enables one to understand the difference between authentic and inauthentic tourist destinations and between the authenticity or inauthenticity of cultural properties to be managed. The issue of authenticity with respect to Venice is multifaceted: it has robustly objective features intertwined with subjective counterparts. Excessive touristification is at the same time a real pattern in town, with which cultural managers and local administrations are confronted, and the typical feature mentioned in negative reviews of Venice as a tourist destination. Authenticity and its loss are experienced by tourists and residents, and have a lot to do with the progressive, painful transition of Venice from real city to theme-park. From a realist perspective, the loss of authenticity of Venice could be described as its transformation from real town, with a real population, real houses, real shops, real habits, real traditions, into a show, i.e. into something existing only for the sake of its being consumed by tourists. The validating subject for the property of being an authentic town (or borough, area, bar, restaurant, square etc.), i.e. the resident population, is vanishing and so is the authenticity of the candidate object for instantiating that property. Indeed, according to the proposal sketched above, the authenticity of a square, borough, town, restaurant or bar, is related to its being part of the life of a local population.

An authentic town could be a town in which buildings, by and large, are used by its inhabitants to perform the activities correlated to their living there. Correlatively, an authentic area of town is an area in which what goes on in shops, restaurants, residential buildings, parks, and lanes, is related to the typical functions associated with that area of town being inhabited by its residents. An authentic town square—also in tourist reviews—is not simply a square that has not been reconstructed without respect for restoration principles; rather, it is a town square which is used by residents for the typical functions associated with its being a town square, a town square which has not been spoilt by mass tourism or gentrification. For instance, one could say that Piazza San Marco is not an authentic town square any more, because Venetians do not meet up there. Hence, a person who visits piazza San Marco may have a subjective experience of the Piazza as not being authentic. And that experience may in fact be correct.

## The Covid19 Pandemic and Authentic Venice

Venice was struck by an exceptional high-water on 12 November 2019, which compromised the 2019 Winter tourism season, and was left without tourism by lockdowns and travel restrictions in early 2020 (Rosin and Gombault 2021). World media convened in Venice, in

2020, to portray it in a completely unusual state, disseminating images of its iconic squares, lanes, and views relieved from the pressure of mass tourism.

The image of an almost deserted Venice, initially exaggerated as the claim that Venice without tourism would be nothing but a ghost town (Anna Momigliano, "The Ghost Town of Venice", *The New York Times*, 27 February 2020) soon made way for a more nuanced representation. In fact, the absence of mass tourism renovated and improved its international reputation, displaying a somewhat unpredictable side which had remained concealed for decades: its being a real town still inhabited by Venetians, with their own habits, activities and traditions, stubbornly resisting over-tourism (Andrea Kasiske, "Venice in Times of Coronavirus: Relaxed and Unique", *Deutsche Welle*, 1 September 2020; Robert Landon, "The Private Language of Venice", BBC, 14 October 2020).

Relieving Venice from the pressure of overtourism made the "Venice of Venetians" reappear, as if from a remote past. This phenomenon led to a renewed interest in Venice also as a tourist destination for consumers who had been kept at a distance by its reputation as a tourism blockbuster. It also led many tourist operators, such as city-guides, travel agencies, and portals, to promote a visit to Venice in 2020 and 2021 as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the authentic Venice, the Venice of Venetians, the Venice without tourists, with a sense of witnessing the real life of the city. Indeed, city guides, websites, and social media pages, portals, and agencies used and abused the very word 'authentic' to connote the Venice of 2020/2021 and its merits with respect to previous years. The unexpected resurfacing of a real, authentic Venice led tourism operators to design and propose experiences of its rediscovered authenticity, and to position them in the market by contrasting them with pre-pandemic experiences.

The Covid19 pandemic drastically reduced the Venetian cultural offering, which depends upon tourism for its financial sustainability. However, Venice was rediscovered by many as a—temporarily and unexpectedly—*authentic* tourist destination. How can tourism managers make sense of that phenomenon? During and after the peak of the Covid19 pandemic, cultural organisations focused more than ever upon new information technology. Customer journeys and the process of choosing a tourism product shifted even more than before towards digital platforms. Potential customers tended more than ever to gather information through online platforms, instead of repeatedly visiting habitual providers or relying upon traditional agencies. That counted also for such businesses as hotels, restaurants, museums, and tourist attractions. The repetitive, habitual and almost mechanical reproduction of purchase patterns vanished almost completely. Customer brand loyalty diminished radically. In summary, customer journey transformations were accelerated by Covid19 pandemics (Jacobides and Reeves 2020).

What followed was the managerial need to enhance the presence of offerings on online platforms and apps and to take care of customers via digital tools. Media planning strategies were deeply affected by that shift, as well as the media habits of potential tourists. For instance, communication planning had to tune in with audience migrations towards new media as well as towards television and radio, due to changing lifestyles and working patterns.

The adoption of a different frame of reference, that takes into account also the contribution of debates generated by the new wave of philosophical realism, allows one to anchor the rediscovery of an authentic Venice in 2020-21 to three fruitful concepts: independence, attrition, and perception. All three notions pivot upon the centrality of reality for managerial practices. Twenty-first century realist research programmes (Meillassoux 2006; Harman 2011, 2016, 2018; Bogost 2012) have insisted that it is philosophically illegitimate to attempt to reduce objects, events, processes, as well as their properties and relations, to

perspectives about them, and have pointed at the relevance of reality. They also have integrated (sometimes reversed) a widespread philosophical thesis about the status of objects as pretended passive recipients of meanings arbitrarily bestowed upon them by individuals and groups via institutionalised practices, and have contended that the converse might well be the case: social institutions, meanings and habits may in fact emerge in symbiosis with certain types of objects (Ferraris 2016, 2018). In what follows, we shall not take for granted that realism is a preferable ontological stance with respect to antirealism, but we shall rather point out that putting reality back in the centre of the philosophical picture helps overcome theoretical obstacles posed by antirealism, and constitutes a fruitful opportunity for marketing theory and practice.

## Independence

The independence of things from perspectives is the feature that decades of marketing have either overlooked or tried to minimise, by highlighting, instead, the role of linguistic, cultural, or otherwise non-objectual aspects of consumption (Giannasi and Casarin 2022). Independence is a hallmark of reality. Reality is indeed characterised as independence of particular perspectives, and realism as the thesis that there is a reality which is independent of any particular perspective (Ferraris 2012).

The independence of reality could be characterised as reality's own authenticity. Authenticity is what consumers really want, and authenticity is all about reality—but reality is all about independence. If we look back at the very philosophical notion of authenticity, we find that it is mostly related to the idea of being in a certain way as a matter of personal experience, of refusing to conform or adjust to social conventions and abstract standards, to the value of following one's own path out of personal conviction. If we apply this concept of authenticity to tourism destination management situations, and in particular to the situation of Venice in 2020/2021, as a temporarily reinstated authentic destination, we find that independence can help articulate our understanding of the relevant phenomena. The diminution of mass tourism led to the resurfacing of the independent existence and life of Venetian inhabitants. It showed that there still is a life of Venetians and Venice as a real city: i.e. a city that, as a whole, is not a simulacrum, a spectacle, but rather has its own population, lifestyle, rhythm, traditions, which have continued to exist unobserved by tourists and are still relatively independent of tourism.

The idea of independence is correlated to the possibility of genuine encounter: independence is particularly valuable because it enables tourists to have genuine encounters with authentic people and places, i.e. with people and places that are what they are not as a result of the presence of tourists themselves, but autonomously and spontaneously. The pandemic has offered tourists the experience of a city which was not a theatrical representation animated by actors, but rather a unique independently existing reality.

The rediscovery of Venice as an authentic tourist destination shows that providing rewarding experiences to tourists must go hand-in-hand with guaranteeing that the experiences a tourist is having are not mere set-ups, shows, but genuine encounters with a partially untamed, undiscovered, and independent reality, which inevitably conceals part of itself and only reveals it to expert travellers, who know how and where to find it, thereby experiencing the excitement of discovery and of testing their abilities.

This entails a managerial corollary to tourism destination managers and local authorities interested in the quality of tourism flows: the issue of overtourism cannot be interpreted only as a tension between tourism and the needs of the local population: overtourism is a

problem also for the reputation of a tourist destination, because it can keep potentially profitable visitors at a distance and attract potentially less interesting ones. And it is partly the responsibility of a Destination Management Organisation (DMO) to determine what types of tourists to attract and what types to keep at a distance—for instance, what number of daily excursionists to consider desirable or acceptable. Overtourism raises questions about what type of tourism a destination wants to attract and what kind of investments it is willing to make in order to support its choices. Investing in Venice as an independently existing city, with its own typical activities and districts, its own economy, life, rituals, population, is not an alternative to choosing to transform it into a tourism destination, but is a precondition for its ability to retain a decent reputation as a tourist destination by means of appropriate management plans and communication campaigns. By way of example, the DMO or local authorities could help the local population rediscover social and economic independence from tourism, by reducing opportunities to convert housing units for residents into tourist accommodations. That would contrast the rise of real estate prices and house rentals, which are major accelerators of the demographic decay of the city of Venice. It would thereby contribute to preserve or even restore at least a part of the authenticity of Venice, also from a touristic point of view. It would also be possible to make a different and more selective use of the Venice brand: for instance, to grant its use only to non-touristic activities and initiatives. Finally, it would be possible to provide incentives for people who reside in Venice for longer periods, thereby helping to stabilise the city's population and to reduce or reverse the loss of authenticity of Venice also as a tourist destination, in terms of an independently existing city and community, instead of as a virtually un-inhabited theme park.

## Attrition

The idea of independence and autonomy, of something's being there or being what it is regardless of any particular perspective, highlights another aspect of authenticity related to destination management: attrition. Attrition is the resistance opposed by something to its being used to perform a function, meet an expectation, or satisfy a desire or a need. Attrition is subjectively experienced as the need to adjust to—or cope with—a situation or a state of affairs not designed to meet a certain expectation, or satisfy certain desires or needs. Attrition is the experience of reality's asperities.

EM has been criticised as having brought about a host of hyper-real, contrived, phony and fake simulacra, in order to provide what are sometimes considered shallow or disposable experiences for consumers (Carù and Cova 2007). Awareness of this problem is connected to the very rise of the relevance of authenticity in EM (Giannasi and Casarin 2022). Our contention is that only interest in reality and its asperities can remove the threat of the progressive impoverishment of consumer experiences at tourist destinations.

The concept of attrition helps us elaborate on this aspect: if authenticity is what consumers really want, then their ability to recognise the independence of an object, their accepting or even valuing the opportunity to get in contact with something new, can become part of value proposals. Attrition is the very experience of independence; it is the experience that the reality we are encountering is not a mere spectacle, but rather has its own character, its own features, its own ways, to which tourists must get accustomed. It is the experience of discovery and mutual adjustment, the feeling that spaces and rules have to be negotiated, that the consumer, and not only the host, has to participate in a process of exploration, of trial and error, and of exposure to something unexpected and exciting.

We can make sense of the enthusiasm of tourists who visited Venice in 2020/2021, despite its partially impoverished cultural offering, because of their ability to finally experience the city in a less tutored way; walking through its lanes without being automatically pointed the way by the flux of tourists streaming from Piazza San Marco to the Ponte di Rialto; having the pleasure of temporarily getting lost in the city only to find one's way back; experiencing a completely different kind of contact with Venetian inhabitants, for instance encountering them and listening to the disasters caused by the devastating November 2019 high-water, instead of moving through a smooth-and-polished space shaped and designed to provide standardised experiences without asperities to generic tourists.

More obviously, the drastic reduction of tourism has offered tourists, in 2020 and 2021, the experience of identifying themselves as a *minority* in town, with respect to the number of Venetian inhabitants, instead of the other way around. Indeed, the awareness of being a small minority of tourists in a tourist destination is one of the most significant signs of its authenticity. It is the awareness of being in contact with something identifiable and recognisable, something which has its own shape and tempo independent of tourism. Tourists have not experienced tourism-in-Venice, but rather Venice and Venetians themselves.

An important lesson taught by 2020 and 2021 is that lack of mass tourism has momentarily improved the touristic reputation of Venice, not simply because of the difference in prices, the less crowded restaurants and attractions, but it has reinstated the attrition between tourism and local life, with all the pros and cons of living in such a place. The reduction of hotel occupation rates has gone hand in hand with a growth of rentals of flats for tourists. These solutions enhance the ability tourists have to stay away from hotels and adopt the Venetian form of life with all its asperities, which partly depend upon the physical layout and make-up of the city, its unique urban fabric. For instance, having to do groceries in a car-less town may be uncomfortable for a certain kind of tourist, but adventurous to another one, thereby contributing to the enjoyment of an immersive and authentic Venice experience and to a sense of being a real inhabitant of it.

Moreover, the very direct experience of an atypical, although difficult situation, is remembered and spread better also through e-WOM. The condition for its effectiveness is that that experience be prepared with a correct information for tourists. What the Venice-in-the-pandemic lesson teaches managers is not that life can go on without tourism, but that the very reputation of a tourism destination partly depends upon its being experienced as an authentic reality, which can be discovered and encountered by tourists prepared to expose themselves to its attrition. From the perspective of tourist operators, it appears interesting, as well as ethically appropriate, to inform and orient tourists about accepting attrition. That would entail, for instance, using the intermediate phase of the customer journey, between the making of a reservation and the beginning of the voyage, to explain to tourists the significance of attrition in visiting a unique destination as Venice.

## Perception

A third notion which philosophy has progressively revived and refined over the past decades (Ferraris [1997] 2010; Burge 2009, 2010, Searle 2015), and which can play an important role in the appreciation of what has happened to Venice during the 2020/2021 Covid19 crisis, is perception. A caveat may be useful at this stage. The word 'perception' already plays an important role in marketing practices: we read and talk about 'perceived value', 'perceived quality' or even 'perceived authenticity'. However, in these contexts, the meaning of 'perceived' is rarely literal. Indeed, we may read that

markets 'perceive' a major business restructuring plan as a sign of pessimism, but that notion of 'perceiving' has nothing literal to it: it has nothing to do with seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, or tasting. In those contexts, 'perceiving' tends to mean the same as 'interpreting' or 'evaluating': the ascription of a certain meaning to a certain event, no matter whether any perception in the proper sense of seeing, touching etc. is involved: *lucus a non lucendo*. In what follows, instead, we shall insist upon the relevance of perception in its literal sense of sensory exposure to reality itself.

It is striking that perception proper has played a relatively modest role in EM (with the exception of Schmitt's early research and proposals, of studies on olfactive marketing and on musical ambience): in fact, the process of perceiving has very significant connections with the issues raised by EM. For instance, perceiving is something inescapably personal, something alternative to being told about a smell, reading about a melody, studying what something tastes like etc. Perception is direct and personal exposure to something. Perception is self-obtained information about the world.

Perception has a strong aesthetic side—indeed, the very word 'aesthetics' derives from the Greek word for perception. Some of the most significant aesthetic experiences are related to the actual perception of objects, processes, situations: listening to a song, observing a painting or a monument, tasting a good wine, smelling flowers or perfumes, touching a fabric or a sculpture. Perception offers a revealing exposure to things and situations, and an opportunity to find out for oneself what it feels like to entertain a relationship with them: to taste a certain ice-cream, to listen to a certain song, to see a certain monument, to swim in a certain sea.

Finally, perception reveals something to the perceiver about him- or herself: it brings about certain unpredictable sensations and feelings by exposing the perceiver to things and situations in certain ways. After listening to many stories about a certain food or a certain language, I find out whether I like them, by actually tasting the food or listening to that language in the streets. After listening to stories about the Bellini cocktail, I finally taste it and find out what it tastes like, but I also find out whether *I* like what it tastes like. What that exposure reveals to me is unique and deeply personal. It enriches my awareness of the world but also of who I am, of what I am made for and what I am not made for.

As opposed to modern theories of perception, which were mainly epistemological in nature, measuring the role of perception in cognition, more recent philosophical theories have emphasised the relevance of perception in mental life, its texture, its constancy and relative independence of belief systems, conceptual schemes or linguistic habits (Ferraris [1997] 2010, 2012). Antirealist philosophies downplayed the role of perception as a direct source of information about the world, claiming that all perception is theory-laden, that it depends upon conceptual schemes and linguistic habits, and that it cannot put subjects in touch with an independent reality (Ferraris 2012). In particular, the popular thesis that all experience is linguistically conditioned disqualified perception as a genuinely interesting field, putting language at centre stage instead.

If we turn to Venice in 2020 and 2021, the role of perception appears particularly relevant. To begin with, the radical decrease in the number of tourists made it not only easier to find appropriate accommodation or a place in a nice restaurant, or to catch a vaporetto. It also altered the urban landscape from a perceptual point of view. And Venice, it should be remembered, is the cradle of *Vedutismo*.

The decrease in the number of tourists reduced the number of boats circulating in the canals, but also the number of people streaming through the lanes and squares. That brought about a resurfacing of typical and unique Venetian sounds, such as the sound of

water which accompanies life in Venice, day and night—a world-famous aesthetic component of the Venetian experience which inspired poets and composers for centuries.

A less crowded Venice means a Venice in which it is possible to perceive the presence of water in the town as part of its life, of its ecosystem, thereby appreciating the uniqueness of its lifestyle and even of its architecture. It also permits the perception of the unmistakable sound of human steps on the Venetian urban pavement. Besides water, the lowering of the anonymous buzz of mass tourism allowed tourists themselves better to hear the city's unique environmental sounds, including the magical Venetian silence: a mixture of water lapping, distant seagull shrieks, and rubbing of wooden boats against each other.

The lowering of the tourist tide and balancing of the tourist/resident ratio allowed tourists to perceive the Venetian language, another aspect of Venetian life celebrated by world-famous theatre masterpieces: the chit-chat of Venetians, their unique language (which is different from Italian), their unmistakable intonation and forms of verbal interaction. The reduction of tourism removed the physical discomfort of encountering masses of other people in Venetian lanes, on the vaporetti, and near tourist attractions, thereby offering the opportunity to have better views of the monuments, of the water and of everyday Venetian life. The very bodily experience of being in Venice—a city in which one walks all day—was transformed, restoring the physical kinaesthetic pleasure of strolling and looking around without continuously feeling pushed and pulled by the mass of moving bodies.

Perception is a fundamental aspect of a person's experience of the authenticity of a tourism destination. The material, sensuous, physical and environmental traits of a destination contribute to its authenticity as much as its cultural, traditional or institutional ones. Overtourism is a threat to the very perceptual accessibility of Venice, as a unique sensory landscape. Tourism operators ought to be aware of all these elements in their value proposals as well as in their relationship with tourists. They ought to develop value proposals also focusing upon the uniqueness of perceptual opportunities provided by a certain destination, in terms of sight, hearing, smell, taste, feeling, and of course synaesthesia and kinaesthesia. In other words, they ought to be aware that the perception of reality, as well as the reality perceived, are part of the core of their value proposal: they are, therefore, bearers of the very identity of Venice as a tourism destination and are not mere accessory elements.

## Conclusion

This article has shown that marketing has relied upon philosophy for the development of crucial intellectual tools: tools which have passed into mainstream managerial practice, through Experiential Marketing. It has also shown that phenomenology, existential philosophy, and hermeneutics, have contributed to the elaboration of notions used in Experiential Marketing and beyond, such as the contemporary notions of experience and authenticity. It has highlighted that philosophical problems may arise from within managerial practices, for instance in marketing practice and research. It has suggested that philosophical problems may be caused not by philosophy itself but rather by an excessive loyalty to a specific framework (in this case, philosophical antirealism), which might have enjoyed widespread consensus in a certain period, but may have lost it in subsequent phases.

The article has argued that philosophy's contribution to managerial practices and management research is enhanced when it is not limited to an occasional conceptual loan, but rather when it is integrated in a continual exchange of conceptual innovation and a search for alternative theoretical frameworks. In particular, it has shown that reference to reality

can help overcome important theoretical problems and can contribute to the introduction of fruitful and innovative conceptual tools, such as the notions of independence, attrition, and perception. The final part of the article has delved into a case study: the case of tourist experience and its management in Venice during the pandemic years 2020/2021. The notions of independence, attrition and perception have contributed to show that the concepts of experience and authenticity can be renewed and integrated if managers remain open to contributions from more recent philosophical debates, which also profit by the contribution of new realist positions.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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