

Authenticity

The term 'authenticity' can be used to describe a thing, including heritage objects, an experience, or a person. In all instances the term conjures up notions of originality, truth and sincerity, or a quality of being real as opposed to being fake. For example, we can speak about 'an authentic tourist experience' or about 'the authentic self' or 'an authentic painting'. The notion of 'authenticity' has had a long history within the social sciences and humanities and is still commonly used in everyday life. Earlier definitions of authenticity eschewed ideas of commodification, placing greater emphasis on ideas of tradition. An object, for example an artefact in a museum, was deemed authentic if it was made by a traditional artist to serve a traditional function. Objects made for the consumer or tourist were deemed inauthentic. Such definitions have however come under significant criticism in recent years with some critics pointing out the socially-constructed nature of authenticity. Authenticity, in this sense, is negotiable. Such criticisms have led to the development of new ways of thinking about what is authentic, giving rise to terms such as 'staged authenticity', used, for example, to describe touristic experiences of particular cultural practices.