CONCEPTUALISING AUTHENTICATION OF RURALNESS

Authenticity, a key asset to rural tourism, is a problematic concept. The debate on authenticity has so far proven unable to deliver a conceptual route for analysing the workings of such notions in rural tourism. Here a Halfacreean-approach to rural space as a threefold emergence, in which ideas, locality and practices interacts, is put forth, from which a framework to analyse rural tourism's authentication of ruralness is suggested. This is then deployed on empirical data from four Norwegian rural tourism cases. The article demonstrates the analytical abilities of the framework, uncovering, among other aspects, the political nature of authentication and the role of rural tourism consumption in authenticating the 'rural idyll' as the 'authentic' ruralness.

Keywords: authenticity; rural idyll; rural tourism; social production of rural space; social representations; structural coherence

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1. INTRODUCTION

Perceived authenticity is a key asset for any rural tourism venture (Blekesaune, Brandth & Haugen, 2010; Daugstad, 2008; Hall, Roberts & Mitchell, 2003; Midtgard, 2003; Skavhaug & Brandth, 2012). Indeed, notions of the countryside's authenticity seem inherent to the very cultural notions commodified and consumed within rural tourism (Bell, 2006). However, despite the importance of the concept there is no widely accepted paradigmatic framework under which claims of 'authenticity' can be justified, analysed and interpreted (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006), a fact which contributes to authenticity being fiercely debated in the literature (Brown, 2013; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999; Xie, 2003). This

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is problematic. As perceived authenticity is pivotal to rural tourism, the lack of a conceptual framework through which to view and assess claims for authenticity raises the danger that we are simply reproducing popular myths about authenticity in the countryside; rather than developing a theoretically grounded understanding of the fusion between the rural, notions of its authenticity, and rural tourism's commercialisation and consumption of the countryside.

Tourist sites are contested, negotiated and consumed spaces. In rural tourism it is rural space and notions of its rurality/ruralness which are commercialised and consumed (Frisvoll, 2012; Lacy & Douglass, 2002). The contestation, negotiation and consumption of space involve the interaction of *ideas* (i.e. representations, or notions of rurality and authenticity), *locality* (i.e. the countryside as emerged via human endeavour/practice and nature) and *human practice* (i.e. lived life, traditions, social action and interaction, such as e.g. tourism's commercialisation and consumption) (Frisvoll, 2012; Halfacree 2007). Moreover, rural tourism products involve deliberate and conscious design or staging (Bell, 2006; Daugstad & Kirchengast, 2013). Without the support of a critical analysis of the threefold fusion between the countryside and notions of its authenticity, and such notions workings in rural tourism's commercialisation and consumption of the countryside, any research concerning authenticity's critical importance to rural tourism risks evoking premature reproductions of cultural myths of the countryside as a stronghold of authenticity. It will also be blind to authenticity's social sides, such as power (c.f. Bruner, 1994), and the moral organisation of what is put on display and what is included by the consuming tourists (c.f. Abram, 2003). This is decidedly problematic as the key concepts: authenticity (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Cole, 2007; Xie, 2011), rurality (Cloke, 2006; Halfacree, 2007), cultural consumption (Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos, 2004) and tourism (Britton, 1991) are all highly political.

The purpose of this article is to develop and demonstrate a framework from which notions of the countryside's authenticity can be investigated. Based on tourism research's debates on authenticity (c.f. Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999),

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conceptual works within the field of rural studies (i.e. Frisvoll, 2012; Halfacree, 2006; 2007), and empirical research on the production and consumption of ruralness in four Norwegian rural tourism cases, I address recent calls to conceptualise the social processes in which notions of authenticity are created, sustained and reinforced (c.f. Cohen & Cohen, 2012). Furthermore, the analytical capability of the proposed framework is demonstrated. Two connected research questions are addressed: '*How can an analytical deconstruction of authentication in rural tourism be conceptually framed?*' and '*What can an application of the proposed framework tell us about 'authentication' in cases of rural tourism?*' The key finding is that 'authentication' is social processes involving a complex range of elements (material, ideas, practises and performances) which are linked to discourses outside the consumed tourism product.

2. AUTHENTICITY AND TOURISM RESEARCH

Considerable debates have been devoted to 'authenticity' (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Taylor 2001), generating not only "as many definitions of authenticity as there are those who write about it" (Taylor, 2001, p.8), but also calls to reject the concept (e.g. Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). To present a comprehensive review of the contributions of such a complex and lasting debate is both beyond the scope of this article and unnecessary as the issue has been thoroughly reviewed (see Buchmann, Moore & Fisher, 2009; Olsen, 2002; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Robinson & Clifford, 2012; Wang 1999, Xie 2011).

A common analytical approach after Wang (1999) is to separate between three profoundly different categories or discourses, differing not only in terms of ontology and epistemological anchorage, but also in terms of research's subject and scope (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999). The first category, *object authenticity*, refers to approaches building on the existence of a measurable (objective) authenticity of toured objects (i.e. whether they are the originals or not), operating with fixed categories of

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authentic/inauthentic and an ontology of realism. *Constructed/symbolic authenticity*, the second category is complex as it involves a wide range of contributions with the commonality of seeing authenticity as constructed. The ontology of such approaches is constructivism, in which the social construction of symbol authenticity is the research subject. The third category, *existential authenticity*, consists of works referring to authenticity as a potential state of being, i.e. the tourists' feelings in term of their touristic activity/experience. It is conceptualised as a postmodern negation of the first category's ontology and the second category's research subject (symbol authenticity) (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999).

Regardless of the enduring and complex conceptual debate, emerging conceptual consensus towards the socio-constructive subjective understandings of authenticity can be observed (Robinson & Clifford, 2012). There is, however, not much consensus in analytical approaches (Robinson & Clifford, 2012) and the processes 'by which authenticity is constructed remain analytically under-developed' (Cohen & Cohen, 2012, p. 1296). This is a problem as "the **social process** by which the authenticity of an attraction is confirmed, remains almost unexplored." (Cohen & Cohen, 2012, p. 1296 [original emphasis]). Recent approaches have focused on the commodification of the tourism product and how authenticity becomes politicised, an agent of power, seeking to understand the intersection of place, individuals, tourist behaviours and beliefs (Bruner, 1994; Robinson & Clifford, 2012). Some have kept a focus on authenticity, building conceptual bridges between the conceptual fissures of 'authenticity' into their approaches; such as Belhassen, Caton & Stewart (2008) conceptualisation of 'theoplacity', and Rickly-Boyd's (2011) return to 'aura', in order to capture a perceived affinity between artefacts, practice, experience and meaning. Others have turned to the process of authentication (Bruner, 1994; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Wall & Xie, 2005; Xie, 2011), building their approach on the recognition that the tourism phenomena's authenticity is something negotiated and involving institutionalisation, power and a multitude of actors, their actions/practises, knowledge and traditions (Wall & Xie, 2005; Xie, 2011).

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Cohen & Cohen (2012) criticises the authentication-approaches for not having theoretically developed a conceptualisation of 'authentication'. Some attempts have been made. Xie (2011) turns among others to Saïd's 'orientalism' and Bhabha's 'thirdspace' to inform his approach to the authentication of ethnic tourism's. Xie's approach may very well be fit for understanding ethnic tourism, but rural tourism in a western context is of a different sort. Cohen & Cohen (2012), on the other side, propose two overarching concepts: 'cool authentication' and 'hot authentication'. The first refers to the formal, fact based certification issued by an institution with authority to examine, document and judge an artefact, a site or an attraction's authenticity, while the latter "is an immanent, reiterative, informal performative process of creating, preserving and reinforcing an object's, site's or event's authenticity." (p. 1300).

While distinguishing between different processes of authentication, I argue that the notion of hot and cool fails to address what shapes the very notions of authenticity involved – beyond pointing to experts' certification (i.e. cool) or to confirmation through performative practices on basis of beliefs and assumptions (i.e. hot). 'Hot authentication' is thus, as I see it short of any real impetus to investigate the origins of what spurs the performative practices and its embeddedness with the complex and messy mesh of cultural notions, social representations, materiality, political discourse and practices. Consequently, Cohen & Cohen's (2012) conceptualisation, although undoubtedly applicable to some tourism contexts, leaves research on rural tourism unable to investigate and interpret how tourism, notions of rurality and notions of authenticity interact, not only with each other, but also with other aspects of the countryside (e.g. locals, agriculture, industry, landscape etc.). Key issues for rural tourism research, such as how notions of a tourism product's *real ruralness* comes about, what influences such notions, what destabilises such notions, what sustains them and how they are reproduced, eludes I fear analytical attention with 'hot authentication'.

So, how can an analytical deconstruction of authentication conceptually be framed in order to overcome analytical shortcomings? I propose to further develop the conceptualisation of authentication by turning to the role of social representations of space and spatiality as it is attuned to precisely the intersection of *social representations* (e.g. notions of authenticity), *materiality* (e.g. the visual appearance of a village) and *practice* (e.g. mass-tourism, individual small-scale tourism, agricultural practice).

3. A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF AUTHENTICATING RURALITY

The conceptual point of departure is rural space as socially produced (c.f. Halfacree, 2006, 2007). Tourist sites are spaces "within which multiple interpretations of a single ostensible culture can be negotiated, contested and consumed" (Lacy & Douglass, 2002, p.7). A Halfacreean-approach constitutes sensitivity to precisely such aspects (Frisvoll 2012) as it, influenced by Lefebvre's (1991) writings on space, recognises space and spatial notions as emerging and contested.

3.1 A trialectic approach to rural space and associated 'ruralness'

The social production of rurality and rural space is a conceptualisation adopting a socially-based spatiality (Halfacree, 2006, 2007). It is particular its recognition of the complex and embedded interaction of *ideas* (i.e. representations, or notions of rurality), *locality* (i.e. the countryside as emerged via human endeavour/practice and nature) and *human practice* (i.e. lived life, traditions, social action and interaction) that constitutes the ability to conceptually contribute to the understanding of authentication. Two elements are of relevance here: *rural space's three dimensions* and *the structural coherence of rural space.*

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The conceptualisation addresses attention towards three dimensions: *representations of the rural, rural localities*, and *lives of the rural.* Together, these elements both constitute and reciprocally influence each other, thus creating rural space and associated notions of rurality/ruralness. The first dimension, representations of the rural, refers to how the rural is portrayed in formal contexts, such as authorities' policies, planning documents, industrial interests and cultural arbiters (Halfacree, 2006, 2007). In terms of tourism this also translates to the tourism entrepreneurs'/host's schemes, their design of their product and notions of rurality that have guided these (Frisvoll, 2012). In their approach to authentication Cohen & Cohen (2012) distinguish between formal and informal routes through which authentication takes place. The first dimension in Halfacree's conceptualisation is addressing many of the issues captured by 'cool authentication': formal institutionalisation involving professional actors and professions that may gain hegemony. However, here this formal dimension is seen to interact with the other dimensions.

The second dimension, rural localities and their characteristics (e.g. natural landscape, cultural landscape, aesthetics, etc.) relates to localities as "inscribed through relatively distinctive spatial practices, linked to production and/or consumption activities" (Halfacree, 2007: p. 127). In this corner are placed spatial practices exuding a society's distinct space with its material expression – elements associated with what is perceived as 'real' space (Halfacree, 2006, 2007). This refers to the material dimension of rural space, and translates in touristic terms to the 'toured objects' (or activities) and their material context (e.g. elements in the surrounding landscape or present at the tourist site) (Frisvoll, 2012). This dimension conveys in other terms analytical awareness to cultural tourism's material side (e.g. artefacts). It is important to note that this refers both to elements introduced deliberately to the tourism product and to elements beyond the control of the tourist entrepreneur/host.

The third dimension, lives of the rural, refers to people's reproduction of rural through practices in everyday life (space as lived) (Halfacree, 2007). The lives of the rural are inevitably

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subjective and diverse, reflecting varying levels of coherence and in-coherence (Halfacree, 2006, 2007). In terms of tourism this also relates to tourists' and tourism entrepreneurs'/hosts' touristic practices, to "the execution of the strategies that stakeholders employed to champion their envisioned rurality" (Frisvoll, 2012, p. 454), to tourists' and tourist hosts' performance of their roles, their bodily interactions with the tourism product (c.f. Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Edensor 2001; Knudsen & Waade, 2010; Olsen, 2002). This dimension represents the potential to include tourists' and tourist hosts'/entrepreneurs' feelings and assessments of a tourism product/experience. Due to the threefold nature of the conceptualisation, I argue that such an approach to authentication has the potential to analytically recognise how such sentiments feed into the tourism product and the rurality they are perceived to represent.

The second element of relevance here is structural coherence, which refers to the degree to which the different elements present in a rural tourism product and its rural space are perceived to fit together (Frisvoll, 2012; Halfacree 2006, 2007). 'Structural coherence' indicates whether 'harmony' is present within rural localities, and thus the extent 'to which rural residents, policy makers, business interests, pressure groups, etc. "are singing from the same hymn sheet" (Halfacree, 2007, p. 128). There are three categories of spatial coherence: (1) congruent and united, (2) contradictory and disjointed, and (3) chaotic and incoherent. In the first, the elements come together in a consistent manner, yielding a single narrative of uniform ruralness; the conceived, the perceived and the lived internalise each other. However, in the other two categories the spatial character is open for debate as there is either contradiction within and between the different elements present (second category) or fundamental contradictions between them (third category). Here fundamental conflicting ruralities co-exist and the elements of rural space fail to internalise each other (Halfacree, 2007).

Structural coherence translates as I see it to tourism in that it refers to a particular rural space or tourism products' *ability* to come off as 'authentic' rurality. Such an endpoint is of course a subjective assessment of the individual tourist/tourist host involved (c.f. Reisinger &

Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999). This does not make an understanding of the processes through which such notions emerge any less important and it is this that structural coherence brings with it, without deploying a binary understanding as either/or. A stage one coherence is what Halfacree (2007) labels a 'cultish space' (p.128), a space where what is perceived and lived meets the expectation of not only what type of rurality is to be encountered, but also the expectations of how such an experience ought to be, ought to feel. At the other two stages the experience of a uniform rurality would be challenged by the presence of elements suggesting of alternative versions of the countryside, of other kinds of ruralness.

Structural coherence is thus about power (Frisvoll, 2012), as is authentication (Bruner, 1994). Whose rural vision is the 'right' vision and why, is thus key questions in understanding authenticity and rural tourism, as staging, designing and grooming is part of rural tourism's commodification of the countryside (c.f. Bell, 2006; Daugstad & Kirchengast, 2013). Abram {, 2003 #3282} introduces 'rural gaze' in order to conceptualise this, and the concept refers to power and to the collective social norms guiding the active organization, or the weeding of the countryside as it were. In this sense 'rural gaze' lies at the heart of 'authentication' of ruralness.

3.2 The analytical framework

However, before the Halfacreean approach can be deployed to analyse authentication, it needs to be operationalised. I propose a framework consisting of six conceptual boxes, which refer to interwoven and interconnected phenomena in line with a social production of space-approach to rural tourism (see figure 1). Its purpose is to create impetus to explore the connections between production, consumption, artefacts and notions of rurality, and thus provide a scaffold for the empirical exploration of authentication of ruralness; each of the boxes represents an analytical dimension. For each box applied, the analysis digs deeper into the social processes through which 'authentic ruralness' is authenticated. It is important to note that the framework is conceptualised so that each of the conceptual boxes carries with it the

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analytical discoveries of the preceding boxes. The 'rural gaze' is at work in each of the dimensions the boxes refer to.

Figure 1. Framework for deconstructing the authentication of 'authentic ruralness'

[figure 1 about here, please]

The framework's first box, '*production*', indicates that the production of the tourism product needs to be investigated. Thus it urges (for each rural tourism enterprise under investigation) analytical questions such as: What is the tourism product? To what extent do the hosts believe that their rural tourism product embodies a real ruralness? To what extent do the producers see authenticity as the product? And where in the product is its authenticity thought to reside (i.e. artefacts, practice, traditions, etc.)? The second box, '*consumption*', refers to the touristic moment of experiencing the product and what that moment reveals: what is really consumed? Is it a tourism product's higher order functions (i.e. cultural symbols, such as ruralness) or is it its most basic function (e.g. a meal as means to still ones hunger)? To analytically cover this, the second box commends that the analysis asks: How central to the purpose of consuming a particular tourism product is its ruralness and how central is consumption of the 'authentic' (i.e. real)? The third box is '*hardware*', referring to the elements utilised to convey ruralness in the tourism product. This may be material elements such as farm buildings, animals, and landscapes, but also non-material elements such as rural practices. 'Hardware' refers to the visual, to the hands-on artefacts and actors constituting the tourism product and its surrounding countryside. This box urges an exploration of 'what is mobilised and employed by tourist hosts in producing the tourist product on offer?' and 'what is included in the consumption by the consuming tourists?'

The fourth box '*software*', refers to the cultural lens (i.e. notions of rural representations) and personal input (i.e. previous experiences, assessments, beliefs, etc.) layered onto the hardware in acts of production and consumption by tourist hosts and tourists alike. In

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other words, software is all those things involved in moving beyond the physical character of the 'hardware'. This box aims to capture the yardstick by which tourism products are assessed. It is important to note that 'software' not only applies to the tourists consuming a rural tourism product, but also to tourism hosts that are constructing/grooming ruralness into a tourism product, as it is conceptually referring to the 'template' by means of which the product is produced/groomed. This conceptual box provides impetus to explore the popular myths of the rural (i.e. rural representations) and their integration with a tourist product's production and consumption. The last two boxes reflect authentication's political sides. '*Intra-coherency*' warrants an investigation of the relationship between the rural tourism product and its rural space, which could be quite simply defined as what is seen, heard and otherwise sensed (i.e. experienced) while consuming a rural tourism enterprise's product and the significance attributed to these aspects (i.e. their meaning). 'Intra-coherency' parallels Halfacree's (2007) notion of structural coherence, and the key question to address here is to what extent do the different elements of a given rural tourism product and its surrounding space tell the same story: 'Is the rural narrative of the tourism product internalised in the elements present, or is it undermined'? An important aspect of rural as socially produced is the idea that representations are formed, sustained and changed in a discourse with other representations, practices, material realities and their representational meanings (Frisvoll, 2012; Halfacree 2007). The last box '*inter-coherency*', encourages an inquiry into this, urging that the linkages between the rural tourism product and overarching notions of rurality are explored. This conceptual box sets out to ask: how does the tourism product investigated relate to the larger discourses involving countryside and regional issues and to what extent is this reflected in the tourist's consumption of the products?

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4. EMPIRICAL DEPLOYMENT OF THE FRAMEWORK

Before addressing the issue of what an empirical application of the proposed framework can tell us about 'authentication' in rural tourism, the study's method and empirical data needs to be accounted for.

4.1 Methodology

The empirical analysis is based on research in a Norwegian mountain region. The study region, a developing mountain community located in a peripheral region, is rapidly changing from being dominated by agriculture into a tourism driven economy. Four rural tourism enterprises were chosen as cases using a strategic sampling logic (Mason, 2002). The chief criterion was to cover a spectrum of the rural tourism products on offer in the study area.

The data was collected in 2008 and 2009 and contains interviews, document sources and observations. In addition a research journal was kept in which contextual information from the interviews and fieldwork were recorded. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 51 strategic sampled informants on site and covering a wide range of stakeholders (see table 1). All of the informants except the tourists were contacted by a letter describing the research project with a subsequent phone call to negotiate participation. Tourist informants were recruited on site. Furthermore, data also includes information from public records, documents from the region's agency for development and rural tourism marketing material. Formal, overt observation of the moments of consumption/production was undertaken in one of the cases (see below). The interviews were transcribed and imported into qualitative analysis software (NVivo) along with the document data and research notes from the formal observation. The data was then coded with a focus on categorisation of meaning in relation to authenticity and social production of rural space.

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Table 1. Oversight of the study's interview data

[table 1, about here, please]

4.2 The cases

Each of the four cases are commercialising rural space and ruralness, presenting tourists with the opportunity to consume countryside experiences associated with summer dairy farming in mountain grazing landscapes, inland small holding's farm heritage, food traditions and folk culture. The *Folk Museum* is the study area's public museum, employing curators, historians and guides. The museum's collection of buildings, among them summer farm houses and farm buildings, and display of artefacts offers a certified narration of the region's rural culture and traditional way of life to tourists.

Heritage Farm is a restored farmstead with old buildings, some of which are considered to be of significant heritage value; the farm is mentioned in several books on cultural heritage presenting Norwegian buildings with heritage value. The farm is own by a married couple, the husband, a master builder, has restored the run down farm using historic techniques. The tourism business is run by the wife with some hired staff. Tourism is the farm's chief activity and its tourism product is lodgings and a café serving traditional food in the old farm buildings. On request, the host provides guided tours of the farm's oldest building.

Goat Farm is a summer farm devoted to the local tradition of dairy farming with free-ranging herds grazing on highland grasslands in the summer months. The farm is run by a husband and wife. The wife lives at the summer farm during the grazing season and entertains the tourists. Dairy farming is the couple's main business. In addition they manufacture traditional food from their farm's goats, and lastly, they invite paying tourists onto their summer farm. The scale of the tourism is moderate, accepting only small, prescheduled groups on certain days of the week. The tourism product is a farm visit, with the farmer's narration of a typical day at Goat Farm. Coffee and biscuits are provided in the cottage, before milking the

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goats (tourists are encouraged to try) and sending them off for night grazing. One session was overtly observed by the researcher.

The last case, *Display Farm* is a summer farm own by a tourist company and is managed by a trained tourism industry professional, employed by one of the company's hotels. Display Farm is located in the company's resort town, but is situated on a site that has a long history as a summer farm. Current buildings, which are on their original location, are more than 200 years old. Its tourism product is petting zoo in a summer farm setting.

4.3 Deconstructing authentication of ruralness

Box 1: Production

The Folk Museum's product is a collection of artefacts and buildings from different parts of the region and from different time periods, representing a variety of uses. Inside the historic buildings artefacts corresponding with the buildings' purpose and time periods are on display and historical scenes acted out. At Heritage Farm the product is homemade traditional food, served in an historic rural atmosphere, as well as lodgings in historic buildings. Display Farm is located in a booming resort town, and its tourism product is chiefly contact and interaction with animals in a summer farm setting. The product at Goat Farm is a package containing social gathering with the farmer in her summer farm cottage, a narration of the day at the farm and why the summer farm is important, before watching the farmer milking her goats and sending them out to pasture (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Goat Farm

[Figure 2 to be placed about here, please]

Important here is whether authentic ruralness is perceived to be part of the product, and to what extent authenticity was important for perceived product quality. In this study this varied between the cases. At Goat Farm, the hosts believe that displaying and communicating an

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authentic ruralness *is* the product. At Heritage Farm and the Folk Museum to display 'authentic' rural buildings was important (see Figures 3 & 4). However, at Display Farm and Heritage Farm ruralness seem to serve merely as a backdrop to its main elements on offer (petting-zoo and traditional food and lodgings, respectively). However, all of the interviewed hosts seem to share an understanding that their own product was reflecting a real ruralness (this will be further addressed in box 3). Most of the hosts were wary of limits to what their product could be composed of and still pass as authentic ruralness. In the study's data, this concern is most clearly articulated in Goat Farm and the Folk Museum. The following quote from one of the interviewed professionals at the Folk Museum illustrates this: "The original plan was to put such an exhibition [of a 1970s home] inside one of the houses from the 19'th century. (...) But such a display would be too provoking." From a professional curators' point of view, this would be an accurate representation of how modern appliances was introduced in post-WWII Norway in this rural region. However, the informant was, as illustrated by the quote, wary of not meeting the visitors' expectations of how a folk museum should represent rural heritage. This attention to the tourists' judgment in the designing and staging of rural tourism products was not exclusive to the informants from the Folk Museum (further addressed in Boxes 3-6).

Figure 3. Heritage Farm

[Figure 3 to be placed about here, please]

Further, the location varied as to where 'real' was perceived to reside. At Heritage Farm, 'real' was seen to reside in the buildings, their original location and the traditional food served, while at the Folk Museum 'real' was seen to dwell in the certified buildings and artefacts as well as the professional staging of the displays, rather than the location and milieu. At Goat Farm and to some extent at Display Farm also, realness was seen to reside in the activities taking place there; Goat Farm's authentic ruralness was seen by its hosts to reside in their agricultural practices and in the integration of the host's own life as a farmer with the tourism product.

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Consequently, they tried to keep the agricultural practice shown to tourists the same as if they had no tourism product:

> I'm a goat-farmer. I don't want to be a tourist host. I could've built a fire and made brown cheese for them [in the traditional manner], but I don't. It wouldn't be true. (...) What I want to do is to show tourists how it is in real life. (Olga, tourist host Goat Farm)

Figure 4. The Folk Museum

[Figure 4 to be placed about here, please]

Box 2: Consumption

When it comes to ruralness' centrality to consumption, tourists do not seem to be that dissimilar across the four cases. However, what kind of rural and which part of it was sought varied among the tourists. International tourists reported that the ultimate motivation for going to Norway was its natural landscape. These informants were encountered at the Folk Museum and not in any of the other cases which perhaps catered to a more niche market. Domestic tourists also ranked nature high, but typically linked their motivations to the countryside's (perceived) safety and child-friendly-ness – particularly with reference to the presence of animals for their children to interact with. Such motivations were particularly clear cut at 'Display Farm' where ruralness' child-pleasing qualities were mentioned by all of its informants.

Another aspect addressed by the interviewed domestic tourists was the perception that a rural way of life was a lifestyle in harmony with nature. The practices of moving the livestock upland to take advantage of summer grazing still typical in this region were seen as examples of such a relationship. A common reoccurring motive among the interviewed tourists at Heritage Farm, the Folk Museum and Goat Farm was nostalgia: either for the old ways or for the perceived qualities of a 'simple rural life'. Another important motivation for consuming the cases' products was cultural education. Rural tourism products were used, by international

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tourists, to refine and hone their understandings of Norway. This was even more pronounced for the domestic tourists, who were outspoken on their desire to experience a different side to Norway than that of their own everyday lives. This motivation was most clearly articulated and expressed by the domestic tourists travelling with children.

The second element referred to in Box 2 is authenticity's centrality in consumption. As the tourists are heterogeneous, so is the centrality of 'authentic ruralness'. In all cases except Goat Farm centrality of authenticity was of peripheral importance to the informants arriving by chance. At the Folk Museum and Display Farm tourists sought purposely to consume a recognised 'authentic' ruralness. This applies for the interviewed tourists consuming Heritage Farm and Goat Farm as well. The desire to experience these cases' particular take on rural experiences is important. At Heritage Farm the mentioning of the farm in books on Norwegian heritage was addressed as a key lure, while at Goat Farm it was the farm's practice as a farm and the fact that it was the farmer herself that hosted:

> I experience this as a summer farm where we have come for a visit, where things are for real, where they live themselves and they tell us about their life. If it were a guide hired to do Olga's job, even though the guide was a good one, it wouldn't have been the same. It wouldn't have been for real in the same way. (Father, tourist visiting Goat Farm)

Box 3: Hardware

The data suggests that three overarching types of hardware were employed to convey authentic ruralness in the investigated products: material objects, their formal certification (i.e. 'cool authentication') and practices. It was particularly at the Folk Museum and Heritage Farm that 'cool authentication' was deployed to communicate authenticity. The Folk Museum is, for instance, employing its certified collection and traditional food such as sour cream porridge to convey its take on rurality. Additionally the museum used its staff, such as conservators, guides and staff in costumes performing, folk dancers and folk musicians, when staging and designing

displays and information material. The data suggests that what was consumed by the interviewed tourists mirrors the hardware employed by the Folk Museum.

At Heritage Farm it is the farm's buildings, dating back to the 17th and early 19th century, their interior and 'local food', which are employed by the host along with the farms' animals and its surrounding agricultural landscape: "We wish to create the atmosphere, telling [people] about the farm in the old days, how it was back then (...) Everything here is quite unique in many ways, thanks to the farm's old buildings." (Tourism host, Heritage Farm). Additionally, elements falling into Cohen & Cohen's (2012) 'cool authentication' are present, as educated endorsement of the farm is mobilised. Books on heritage discussing the farm are placed in a manner that invites people to read them, and a formally awarded brand from the organisation Norwegian Heritage is mounted at the entrance in addition to several other brands, including the symbol for Norwegian Rural Tourism (see Figure 5). However, performative (c.f. Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Knudsen & Waade, 2010) elements were also employed, as the hostess told about the restoration to tourists wanting a guided tour of the buildings. In addition, at Heritage Farm the data indicates a correspondence between what the tourist hosts include in their product and what is included by the consuming tourists (i.e. the local food, the hostess and the farm's old buildings).

Figure 5. Examples of the deployment of cool authentication at Heritage Farm

[Figure 5 to be placed about here, please]

The hosts of Goat Farm employ the summer farm's buildings, interior and farming infrastructure, in addition to their animals and the pastoral mountain landscape surrounding the farm. Moreover, the performative element was perhaps clearest at Goat Farm, as the hosts embedded their farming practices into their tourism product. As for Folk Museum and Heritage Farm, this is echoed by what the interviewed tourists included in their consumption. At Display Farm, the summer farm's 200 year old buildings are employed in making the

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tourism product, in addition to farming infrastructure such as pens, grazing enclosures, animals and traditional food. Contrary to the preceding cases there was no symmetry at Display Farm between what was employed in the intended product by the host and the elements included by the consuming tourists. This will be further discussed in box 5.

Box 4: Software

Two issues need to be addressed within this conceptual box: what representations constitute the foundation of the choice of hardware used to construct/design the rural tourism product and what rural representations comprises the tourists' judgments/sentiments of ruralness when consuming the same product? Berg & Lysgård (2004) identify two sets of representations that dominate lay discourses on urban/rural differences in Norway. The first, the 'rural idyll' is a collection of positive stereotypes on what rural is, while the second is a collection of negative. These myths are dichotomous to accompanying urban myths. If the rural is positively charged, then the urban elements are negatively charged. For instance the myth on rural as idyll sees the rural as characterised by peace and quiet, cleanliness, safety, social inclusiveness, picturesque locations, harmony with nature and wholesome ways of life (sustainable) whereas the mythical counterpart, urban disperse sees the urban as represented by noise, dirt, danger, social isolation, ugliness, and unhealthy ways of life (unsustainable).

The products in all of the cases, with their hardware of traditional small rustic farm buildings, countryside/agriculture's heritage, grazing farm animals and traditional food, provide elements central to the dominant myth of the 'rural idyll'. The study suggests thus that the 'rural idyll' and elements associated with these representations were central to the authentication of the investigated cases' ruralness. Another aspect of the 'rural idyll', supporting this was the Norwegian tourists' reference to the rural's harmonious relationship with nature, of which the region's summer farming practices were seen as exemplary. As seen in Box 1, hardware in the form of farming practices that constitute the backbone of the rural idyll myth was paramount at Goat Farm. It is these practices' cultural connotations of a sustainable embeddedness of

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human/nature which the experience is assessed by. The following quote illustrates this: "(...) by the look of it the children enjoyed that they could try it [milking] themselves, being allowed to actively engage with the animals." (Tourist Goat Farm, father). Moreover, as mentioned, a recurring motive among the interviewed tourists was nostalgia. Such nostalgia is part of the 'rural idyll', seeing the countryside as uncorrupted by modernity. However, at Display Farm tourists included elements beyond those intended by the hosts in their design. Here 'hardware' could be organised into two categories: that which supported the consumption of 'authentic ruralness' as intended by the hosts, and that which contradicted/undermined it. 'Supportive hardware' involved elements that fitted well with the myth of the rural idyll, such as free ranging grazing animals and old summer farm buildings. 'Undermining hardware' on the other hand involved elements associated with the rural idyll's dichotomous twin, urban despair, i.e. the developing resort town's urban sprawl onto nearby pastures.

Box 5: Intra-coherency

The cases' internal coherencies are reflective of stages one and two in Halfacree's (2007) structural coherence framework. At the Folk Museum, Heritage Farm and Goat Farm the data suggests symmetry between what was produced, what was consumed and the purpose intended by hosts and perceived by tourists, i.e. a stage one coherency. The study's data points to the myth of the 'rural idyll' as constituting a guideline or blueprint for what to expect from a rural tourism enterprise in terms of rurality. This set of representations thus constitute a template as to what 'naturally' belongs. In all of the cases except Display Farm, what was consumed seems to have largely corresponded to expectations prior to consumption. However, at Display Farm, some informants pointed to elements not belonging to the 'rural idyll' that disturbed their experience. This was related to the resort town's urbanisation of space which was clearly visible from the site of consumption, and represented urban development's commercialisation of the once pastoral land (see Figure 6). For example,

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It's sad that they are going to build as close as this. I can't grasp that they're allowed to do that. It ruins so much. But it's like this it tends to come to. The first time I visited this town was 30 years ago, and it was something completely different back then. Today it's so much more commercial here, unfortunately. (Tourist, Display Farm)

Figure 6. Display Farm's surroundings of urban sprawl

[Figure 6 to be placed about here, please]

Moreover, the study suggests that the set of representations belonging to the 'rural idyll' also constitute the blueprint of what would pass as authentic ruralness as the following quote from a tourist interviewed at Heritage Farm illustrates. When talking about why he came to Heritage Farm, he reveals that he interprets the food on offer in relation to the setting in which it is consumed: "When you have travelled to a farm such as this one I really savour the opportunity to taste local food. (...) If they had been serving hamburgers I wouldn't have bothered staying here. Definitively, I'll promise you that." (Tourist, Heritage Farm). One interpretation is that the tourist activates the discourse on rurality and its inherent dichotomous set of myths, the 'rural idyll' and 'urban despair'. An urban (i.e. modern) element, such as the hamburger with its cultural connotations of imported consumerism, is regarded by the informant as out of place in Heritage Farm; so much so that if it even were on the menu, it would shatter the establishment's 'authentic ruralness'. This illustrates the interlacing of materiality (i.e. the hamburger and the old farm buildings), social representations (i.e. the hamburger's cultural connotations) and practice (i.e. serving/offer the hamburger on the menu).

Box 6: Inter-coherency

Within a Halfacreean understanding of socially produced rural space, the production and consumption of a tourism product is inextricable from the wider discourses on rurality as the rural space and its adherent notions of rurality is formed through a threefold mesh of representations, locality and practices/performances. Discourses and their interlinkages with policies, regulations, practices, materiality and representations become important analytical

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perspectives to explore. In relation to rural tourism in Norway, two discourses are central: discourses on regional issues, as tourism and rural tourism are part of regional policies (c.f. White Paper nr. 25 (2008-2009); Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2012), and discourses on agriculture, as rural tourism is identified in agricultural policies as a means to diversify and legitimise agricultural policy (c.f. White Paper nr. 9 (2011-2012)).The Norwegian discourse on regional policy is characterised by two hegemonic positions: *growth* and *intrinsic value* (Cruickshank, Lysgård & Magnussen, 2009). The growth-position approaches rural challenges from an economic and industrial perspective, seeing the countryside as underachieving, prescribing schemes to increase efficiency, and create economic and industrial development. The latter perceives rural life as having a value in itself, prescribing schemes aimed at preserving the 'rural idyll'.

Rural tourism in the study region is situated in the middle of this. These schisms are present and manifested in the region's agency promoting development, which all of the investigated cases interact with. Two of the cases, Display Farm and the Folk Museum, reflect both positions. As part of an industrial tourism complex rather than the agricultural sector, Display Farm incorporates both intrinsic and growth as part of a large resort complex containing a 'rural idyll' in the resort's portfolio of experiences. Similarly, at the Folk Museum both positions were observed by one of the curators as he conveyed that he would have liked the museum to display modern, industrialised agriculture, linking his desire precisely to the agency's perceived agenda of hiding the industrialised agriculture in order to amplify the region's brand as a 'rural idyll' (i.e. an intrinsic agenda).

The two other cases, Heritage Farm and Goat Farm seem moored within the intrinsic position. Heritage Farm has received grants conceived and designed within the intrinsic position and is consumed by tourists largely for its nostalgia of yesteryears' rurality. Similarly, Goat Farm is commercialising the traditional small holding's agricultural transhumance. However, Goat Farm could also be interpreted as an actor in the battle between growth and intrinsic value. Its

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hosts describe themselves as rural activists, linking their motivation for running a tourism enterprise to a desire to inform the public on agricultural issues. By commercialising their farm in the manner as they have, with their farming activities being the core of their tourism product, they perform the role of missionaries of farming practices they judge to be threatened by the growth-position:

> I want the tourist to see how the tradition of summer farming has evolved, how it lives on in a modern age (...) I tell them that this is essential to our small farm. We have to travel up here in the summer with our herd in order to have enough fodder for the winter. (Olga, tourism host Goat Farm)

In terms of the extent tourists relate to the discourses on regional and agricultural policies in the authentication of the tourism product, the data suggests two categories: interpreting the product in terms of these discourses and not. The data does, however, indicate that this is not necessarily due to the domestic tourists' ignorance of such discourses. It seems to be more about the centrality 'authentic ruralness' holds to the consumption. For instance tourists interviewed while consuming the generic qualities of the Folk Museum did not seem to relate their experiences to the overall discourses on rurality or regional policies. However, when these tourists were explaining the reason they were traveling to this particular rural area in the first place, the discourses on regional policy and agricultural policy are evident in their narrations – typically by making reference to the landscape.

At Goat Farm and Heritage Farm on the other hand, the tourism product's relation to the discourses on agriculture and regional policy seem central to many of the interviewed tourists' desires to experience it. These narrations were often indicative of the rural's political dimension. Tourist-informants traveling with children often made reference to their children's need to experience the countryside. The following passage, from one of the interviews at Heritage Farm illustrates this. The informant, a mother traveling with her son, relays that she distances herself and her son's vacation needs from activities that in her eyes do not reflect her template of a real ruralness: "To me, the activities for kids at the resort town are nonsense. (...)

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And this is important: the experiences needs to be something real." (Tourist, 'Heritage Farm'). In the quote she refers to the resort town's activities as unreal. With a social production to space approach, the root of such normative judgments is how the physical dimension and the performance/practises taking place there stack up with the notions of what a rural experience ought to be.

The consumption at Goat Farm (see Figure 7) further addressed this, suggesting that the consumption of rural tourism products and the inherent 'authentication' is employed by parents to socialise the social representations of the 'rural idyll' to their children:

> Interviewer: Why did you want to experience a summer farm such as this one?
>
> Tourist Goat Farm, father: It's so that the children, and us for that matter, get to experience a tradition. That they can experience something other than the city and witness that food is something that is made, and not only something that's eaten

In a Norwegian context the future of agriculture and rural areas is a hot political topic and 'growth' and 'intrinsic value' frequently clash in popular media. One interpretation of this quote in light of such a context is that the discourse on regional policy and agriculture has 'forced' this particular tourist to take a stand. Through his family's consumption of Goat Farm, he is socialising his children into embracing the kind of countryside that is advocated by the *intrinsic value*-position, thereby authenticating the 'rural idyll' as the authentic ruralness to his children.

Figure 7. Examples of performativity at Goat Farm

[Figure 7 to be placed about here, please]

5. Conclusion

Tourism research's debates on the concept of 'authenticity' are complex and enduring. Tourism is a multiplex phenomenon and, consequently, the idea that there is one particular

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take on authenticity that would fit all its endless variations is farfetched. Instead, calls have been made for conceptualising authentication (c.f. Cohen & Cohen, 2012), the social processes through which notions of authenticity emerge and are reaffirmed. Although providing an overarching recognition between different processes of authentication, Cohen & Cohen's (2012) conceptualisation leaves research on rural tourism unable to investigate and interpret how tourism, notions of rurality and notions of its authenticity interact with each other, and with other aspects of the countryside.

Such interplays are paramount to understand, as rural tourism's market niche is often thought to be the countryside's ability to deliver on authenticity (c.f. Hall et al., 2003). Without exposing these interplays, research are in danger of merely reproducing popular myths. In order to expose the how and why of the fusion between the countryside and notions of its authenticity, I suggested that Halfacree's (2006, 2007) conceptualisation of the threefold emergence of rural space is advantageous with its recognition of the interaction of ideas, locality and human practice. From within a Halfacreean-approach I operationalised an analytical framework to analyse authentication of ruralness that was deployed on data from four rural tourism enterprises.

The suggested framework is not able to predict or rate what the end-product of an authentication-process is in terms of notions of the authenticity of a particular enterprises' take on ruralness – these would be mere subjective judgements of the tourists. However, the framework brings with it an impetus to deconstruct the processes in which such notions are formed, influenced, work and reproduced. My analytical deployment of the framework on qualitative data from cases of rural tourism commodification and consumption has demonstrated the framework's ability to: denominate a complex picture of authentication; which is exposing authentication as a multifaceted mesh of materiality, social representations, political discourses, practices and performativity; which could be analytically pursed.

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The application of the framework unearthed that certain material elements were employed in the authentication process to transfuse as it were ruralness into the rural tourism products. It highlighted that hosts and tourists alike approached the tourism products from within the reference point of the 'rural idyll', a set of positively charged social representations of the countryside. Moreover, the application of the framework indicated that what is consumed is 'tested' against this set of representations (c.f. 'rural gaze'); some elements support the narratives of a given tourism product's 'authentic ruralness' while others are seen as undermining. Rather than being compatible with the myth of the rural idyll, they are indicative of an alternative rurality brining disharmony into the cultish spaces of a tourism site. The deployment of the framework further demonstrated an ability to include the political side of 'authentication' as it highlighted its imbuedness with discourses on agriculture and regional policy. Moreover, the cases studied here, indicated that rural tourism plays a role in parent's rearing of their children, playing a role in authenticating spaces adhering to the 'rural idyll' as the 'authentic' countryside.

Finally, some implications of the study for future research can be drawn. If the framework is to be employed to analyse the authentication of ruralness, it is paramount that data is gathered on all of the dimensions emphasised, more generally by the three dimensions of space (representations, locality and lives – i.e. practices and performativity) of the rural, and more specifically on the issues raised within the six boxes (product, consumption, hardware, software, intra-coherency and inter-coherency). I believe there are significant contributions to the understanding of rural tourism to be made by further exploring performativity (c.f. Knudsen & Waade, 2010) and its role as 'hardware', its embeddedness in 'software', and, finally, its implications for tourism products' 'intra-coherency' and 'inter-coherency' by adopting a social production of space-approach.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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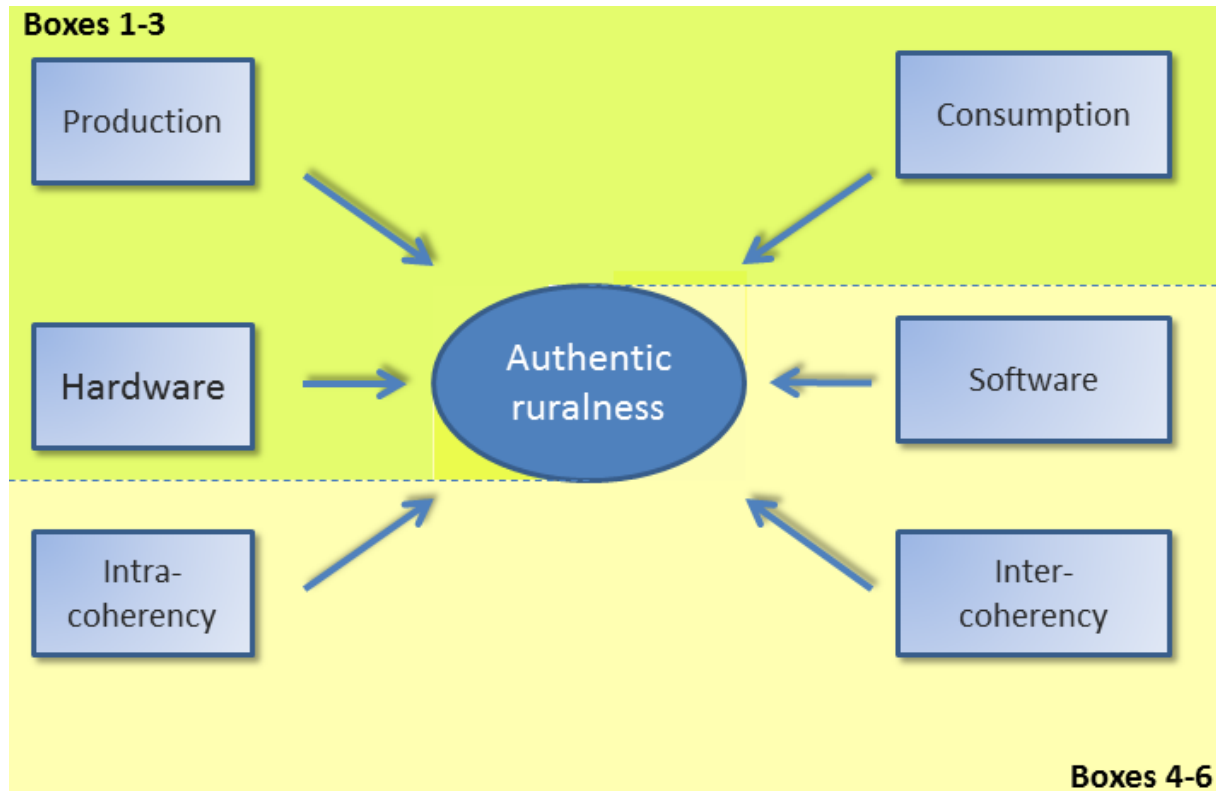This version is "author's accepted manuscript". Contact author directly for a citable version

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Figure 1. Framework for deconstructing the authentication of ruralness

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Table 1. Oversight of the study's interview data

Contextual data	Position	Number of informants	Key perspectives generated information on
Municipality	Mayor & Planning officer	2	Regional development, municipality's prioritisations, different industrial sectors' significance (especially tourism and agriculture)
Development agency	Manager & advisors on tourism, agriculture and culture	4	Regional development, large scale generic tourism (resort, hotels), small scale, niche tourism (i.e. rural tourism), and challenges on developing a viable rural tourism in the area
Tourism resort (Ltd.)	CEO & key owner	1	Region's tourism, the resort and resort town (strategic idea, purpose, etc.)
Destination agency	Manager	1	Region's tourism industry, its work on destination promotion and strategies and challenges in commercialisation of the region's attractions
Chamber of commerce	Director	1	Regional development, traditionalists vs. progressive voices, tourism vs. other industrial sectors' significance
Rural tourism enterprises	Hosts	3	Supplementing information, building a broader understanding of the rural tourism in the study area and the cases' contexts.
Case data			
The Folk museum	Curators & manager	5	Host's approach to tourism product (considerations, strategy, aims, motivation, etc.)
	Tourists	14	Tourist's approach to the consumed tourism product (considerations, motivation etc.)
Heritage Farm	Host	1	"
	Tourists	7	"
Goat Farm	Hosts	2	"
	Tourists	3	"
Display Farm	Host	1	"
	Tourists	6	"
	Total:	51	

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Figure 2. Goat Farm

Figure 2. Goat Farm

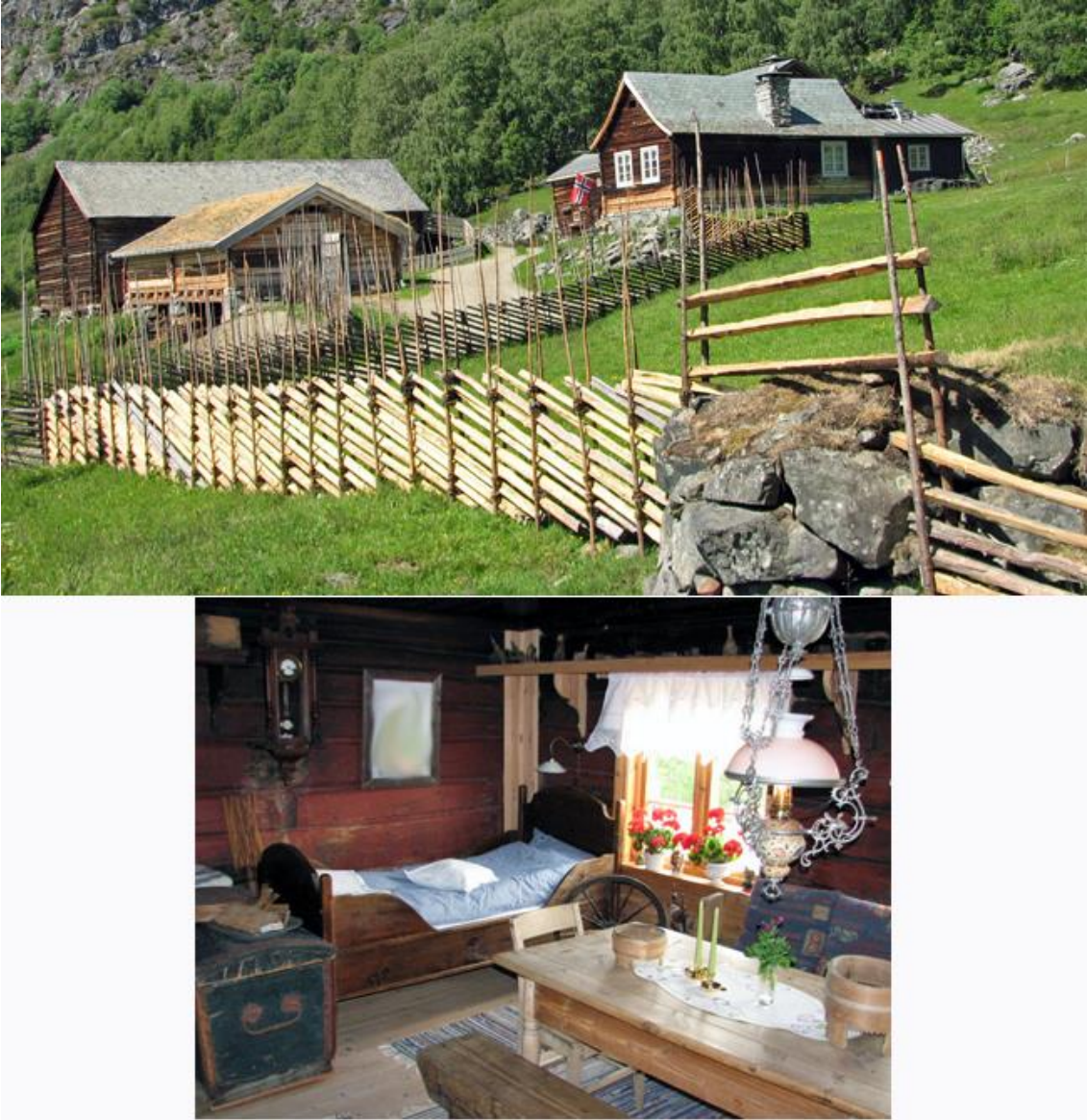This version is "author's accepted manuscript". Contact author directly for a citable version

Figure 3. Heritage Farm

Frisvoll, S. (2013). Conceptualising Authentication of Ruralness. *Annals of Tourism Research, 43*(0),
272-296. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2013.07.006

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Figure 4. The Folk Museum

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Figure 5. Examples of the deployment of cool authentication at Heritage Farm
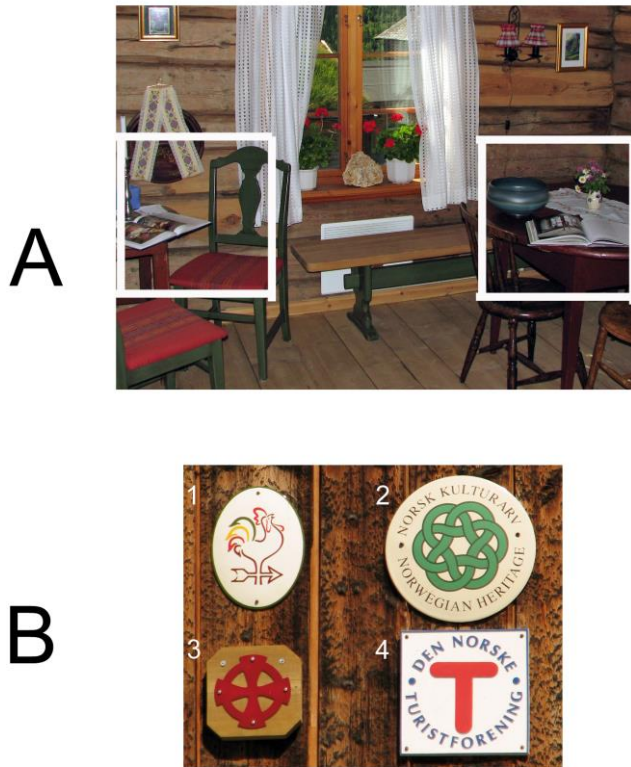
Symbol 1: The Cock (Nor: HANEN), a symbol of the Norwegian association for rural tourism, tells that Heritage Farm is a member offering rural products.

Symbol 2: St Olav's Rose is a brand awarded by Norwegian Heritage after evaluations. Those that are awarded have to undergo a yearly certification.

Symbol 3: Celtic Cross/Sun wheel: This tells that Heritage Farm is a recommended lodging for people walking the traditional pilgrim trails.

Symbol 4: This tells members of the Norwegian Trekking Association that they are entitled to a discount on lodging.

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Figure 6. Display Farm's surroundings of urban sprawl

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Figure 7. Examples of performativity at Goat Farm