How Film Tourists Experience Destinations

Yuri Kork

Abstract Within the tourism industry, the specific type of tourism-Film Tourism-has recently been recognized and approached in several research projects and case-studies. The researchers agree that, in certain conditions, a film may influence the decision of the viewer to travel to the destination that such film portrays. However, there is an evident lack of understanding about the underlying reasons why films may have such a stimulating effect on tourist decisions. It is vital to research different elements of the film and their possible effects on tourism-related decisions of the viewer. Accordingly, an extensive survey was conducted, followed by a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews. The results suggest that films may affect the viewers through the processes of association construction and evaluation. The major contribution of this study is the reconfirmation that films affect tourists via a number of elements, such as visual beauty, plot, actors, credibility and the atmosphere. Furthermore, it would appear that, for most tourists, film is an additional and not a primary factor which creates a wish to travel, and the visual portrayal of the destination may be the key element which determines whether the film will affect the decision of the viewer to travel.

Keywords Film tourism • Tourist experiences • Destination image

JEL Classification L83 sports • Gambling • Restaurants • Recreation • Tourism

1 Introduction

In recent years, Film Tourism has become the focus of research within the tourism industry since it was recognized that films can stimulate tourism development. Many examples demonstrate the positive effects of film exposure. Most famous examples include, perhaps, Harry Potter films attracting tourists to Gloucester Cathedral, UK (Grihault, 2003; Lee, 2012), "The Sound of Music" film stimulating tourists to visit Salzburg (Hyunjung & Kaye, 2008), "Pride and Prejudice"

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increasing the number of visitor of the Netherfield Park, UK (Parry, 2008) and "The Lord of the Rings" positively affecting the tourism industry in New Zealand (Buchmann, 2010; Jones & Smith, 2005; Singh & Best, 2004). These examples demonstrate how films can increase the number of tourists at a destination they portrayed. Such destinations receive unique marketing opportunities and can provide the type of tourism that is not available at other destinations: Film Tourism.

Visiting the film-exposed destinations is a relatively recent type of tourism experience, and as destinations are constantly capitalizing on their unique elements that are not available at other destinations (such as film-exposed locations), it has become important to understand the relationship between films and tourist experiences, and how films may affect such experiences. However, the complexity of the phenomenon of Film Tourism, which is a highly personalized experience and depends on a variety of personal characteristics of the viewer, makes it a challenging area to approach. An additional challenge in understanding this type of tourism lies in the fact that, to date, most of the research in this area are case-study based and are exclusive for a particular area or film, or descriptive in nature. For example, the focus of research has been the definition of Film Tourism (Busby & Klug, 2001), its advantages and disadvantages for the local tourism industry and community (Hyunjung & Kaye, 2008), the relationship between the film and the destination image (Urry & Larsen, 2011) and, more recently, the effects films on the emotions of tourists (Kim, 2012).

Despite the advances mentioned above, there is still a lack of deeper theoretical understanding of this type of tourism (Beeton, 2005; Busby & Klug, 2001; Couldry, 1998; Olsberg/SPI, 2007; Riley & Van Doren, 1992). This paper contributes to the existing base of knowledge by attempting to examine how film tourists and make decisions to travel to the film-exposed destinations and how they experience such destinations. Results suggest that the main driving force for tourists to travel to the film-exposed locations may be the complex process of association construction that is caused by watching the film. Understanding the processes of association construction and evaluation contributes to the general understanding of Film Tourism and may help to predict and account for the effects film exposure will cause for the destination.

2 Literature Review

The study of Film Tourism is relatively new in tourism research. Hudson and Ritchie (2006) suggest that Film Tourism is a growing phenomenon worldwide, driven by both the growth of the entertainment industry and the increase in international travel. Consequently, as stated by Frost (2004), in recent years, there has been increasing interest in how films may shape destination images and resultant tourist expectations, behaviour and numbers.

2.1 Film Tourism Definition

The first definition of Film tourism was proposed by Evans in 1977, but a number of subsequent studies in this area developed and expanded the original definition. Macionis (2004) reports that such studies provided a range of useful terms to refer to Film Tourism: Film Tourism: Film-induced Tourism; Movie Induced Tourism; Media Induced Tourism; Cinematographic Tourism and Media Pilgrimage. This diversity in definitions, according to Connell (2012), was criticized by Olsberg/SPI (2007) Fernandez-Young and Young (2008) and Connell and Meyer (2009). These researchers attempted to reduce potential misinterpretation of this type of tourism and proposed adopt an umbrella term "Screen Tourism" to cover all forms of this type of tourism.

Despite the variety of terms to address this type of tourism, it is possible to synthesize the definitions developed by Evans (1997), Busby and Klug (2001), Grihault (2003) and Macionis (2004). These researchers suggest that Film Tourism refers to post-modern experience of a destination or attraction that has been depicted in some form of media representation, such as, video, television or on the cinema screen. Macionis (2004) adds that this definition is an example of most straightforward and logical approach.

2.2 Forms of Film Tourism

Busby and Klug (2001) referred to the concept of Film Tourism as "movie tourism" and attempted to summarise the forms of Film Tourism present in the research literature at that time and formulate the characteristics of the identified forms of Film Tourism. Busby and Klug (2001) suggested that the forms of Film Tourism depend on specific push and pull factors of the film-exposed destination, and identified several behavioural aspects of the film-induced tourist. Specifically, it would appear that different forms of Film Tourism appeal to different types of Film Tourists, influenced by complex combinations of different factors. Therefore, it can be concluded that films create a range of different Film Tourists. This theory has been further developed by Connell (2012). By summarising previous studies, Connell (2012) concluded that Film Tourists can be classified depending on which form of Film Tourism they include in their visit to the destinations. Moreover, in the context of this paper, the form of Film Tourism where the viewer performs a "visit to portrayed location (real/substitute)" (Connell, 2012, p. 1010) is approached and examined.

Furthermore, many researchers agree that Film Tourism is a form of cultural tourism (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; Iwashita, 2006). Films may create a wish to visit heritage sites (Frost, 2004) and can communicate cultural meanings (Busby & Klug, 2001). Macionis (2004) further developed the role of Film Tourism as a

Increasing interest in film →		→
Serendipitous Film Tourist	General Film Tourist	Specific Film Tourist
• those who just happen to be in a destination portrayed in a film	• those who are not specifically drawn to a film location but who participate in film tourism activities while at a destination	• those who actively seek out places that they have seen in film
Motivations include: • social interaction • novelty	Motivations include: • escape • novelty • education • nostalgia	Motivations include: • ego-enhancement • self-actualisation • pilgrimage • self-identity • vicarious experience • fantasy • status/prestige • romance • nostalgia
Increasing self-actualisation motivations →		→
Decreasing importance of authenticity →		→

Fig. 1 Continuum of film-induced motivation. Macionis (2004, p. 94)

form of culture tourism, and adapted the cultural tourist classification model by McKercher (2002) to the specific Film Tourism context (see Fig. 1).

Macionis (2004) developed three types of Film Tourists: the Specific Film Tourist (this tourist actively seeks out places that they have been exposed to by the film); the General Film Tourist (this tourist is not specifically drawn to a film location but participates in Film Tourism activities while visiting the destination); and the Serendipitous Film Tourist (this tourist just happens to be visiting a destination portrayed in a film, and the presence of this tourist is not related to film or media portrayal; this tourist may or may not participate in Film Tourism activities). However, it must be noted that such an approach to Film Tourist classification was criticized by Fernandez-Young and Young (2008) who perceived is as simplified and not comprising the degree the film influence on Film Tourists, which may be more diverse than presented in this classification. This demonstrates that classification of Film Tourism is a complex evolving process and no universally accepted system to classify Film Tourism exists.

2.3 *Film Tourist Profile*

It may be suggested that Film Tourist can be differentiated from other tourist types by a number of specific characteristics. From the demographical perspective, Busby

and Klug (2001) suggest that cultural tourists tend to be affluent older professionals and senior managers from the ABC1 socio-economic groups, and present evidence from Prentice (1996) and Kerstetter, Confer, and Bricker (1998). This argument is supported by Kim, Agrusa, Chon, and Cho (2008), who stated that Film Tourists tend to be middle-aged, have high income and high education level. However, Busby and Klug (2001) additionally mention that

Richards (1996) suggests that the majority of Film Tourists are younger, highly educated and from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

It must be added that Connell (2012) argues that, in a majority of current studies, the research focused on a specific film, which may attract tourists of specific demographic characteristics while being less influential for other film-induced tourists. Singh and Best (2004) and Hyunjung and Kaye (2008) support this argument in their case studies that focus on "The Lord of the Rings" and "The Sound of Music" films. Moreover, the case study of Korea by Kim (2012) contributes to discussion about the profile of Film Tourists by suggesting that the nationality of the Film Tourist has an effect on Film Tourist behaviour and interactions with the destination.

While specific locations have received some attention in the research literature, for example, New Zealand in the research by Singh and Best (2004) and Carl, Kindon, and Smith (2007)) or Korea in the research by Kim, Agrusa, Lee, and Chon (2007) and Kim (2012), Connell and Meyer (2009) report that there is a limited understanding about the perception of the destination by Film Tourists and their interaction with the destination. To develop such understanding, it is important to explore how film tourists make decisions about their film-induced travels.

3 Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate the processes of films affecting tourist experiences. The methodological component of this paper is divided into two phases. The first quantitative phase involves a questionnaire survey to examine how films affect tourist decisions and experiences. The survey utilized both closed and open questions to allow for deeper investigation. This phase was followed by a series of qualitative interviews with a purposive sample of the respondents who completed the questionnaire.

The quantitative survey is based on the literature review and survey utilized 21 "closed" questions, 7 Likert scale questions and 10 "open" questions that, in most cases, provided respondents with an opportunity to explain in more detail why they chose a certain option in the closed question. The questionnaire was designed to examine both how the tourists make tourism-related decisions and to evaluate the influence that film has on such decisions. The final reviewed survey utilized the non-probabilistic convenience sampling (Wheeler, Shaw, & Barr, 2004) and targeted randomly selected individuals from the general population. The socio-demographic variables of the survey were developed to be similar to that of

previous research. The analysis of the questionnaires was performed by using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) system. Field (2009) reports that the SPSS is an appropriate package to explore the possible connections between the variables; in the case of this research, the relationship between the films and the tourist experiences.

The qualitative stage of the study adopted face-to-face interviews. The reason for this method lies in the highly personal nature of the film influence, and Veal (2011) suggests that face-to-face interviews may be most convenient method to access such complex data. The interviews, while semi-structured to allow a level of flexibility, majorly focused on four aspects of Film Tourist experience: motivation to travel, changes in destination image and destination interest, emotional responses and experiences of the respondents and desired and/or previously experienced Film Tourism visits. To address these dominant themes, the key questions of the questionnaires were identical, but allowed for additional individually-designed questions to address the specific respondent and specifics of his/her questionnaire replies.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The results suggest a connection between the films and the experiences of tourist. It would appear that films may affect tourists by creating the associations with the destination, which consequently are evaluated by the tourists. The results of such evaluation establish the degree of film influence in tourist experiences. The results of this study may be summarised in Fig. 2.

As can be seen in Fig. 2, results suggest that films begin to influence the experiences of potential film tourists when they confront the information about the film, possibly in the form of commercial description and/or word-of-mouth, and may be both purposively researched or incidentally acquired. This information, informing potential viewer about the theme, genre, director and/or actors of the film is then used in the decision of the potential viewer whether or not to watch the film. If the decision to watch the film is positive, the information about the film may be used by the viewer to construct the expectation from the film, particularly, an emotional experience the film may cause. When such expectations have been made and were found desirable by the potential viewer, he/she may watch the film.

This study established that, during the process of watching the film, several associations with the destination are constructed. Specifically, "Visual Association", which connects specific visual images with the destination portrayed; "Atmosphere Association", which connects specific "feeling" and atmosphere with the destination portrayed; and "Emotion Association", which connects specific emotions with the destination portrayed, and is connected with the motivators to travel.

The main factor that affects the "Visual Association" is the visual quality of the destination in the film, such as landscape, memorable heritage sites or scenic beauty, indeed, as stated by Lefebvre (2006, p. 28), cinema "offers a visual

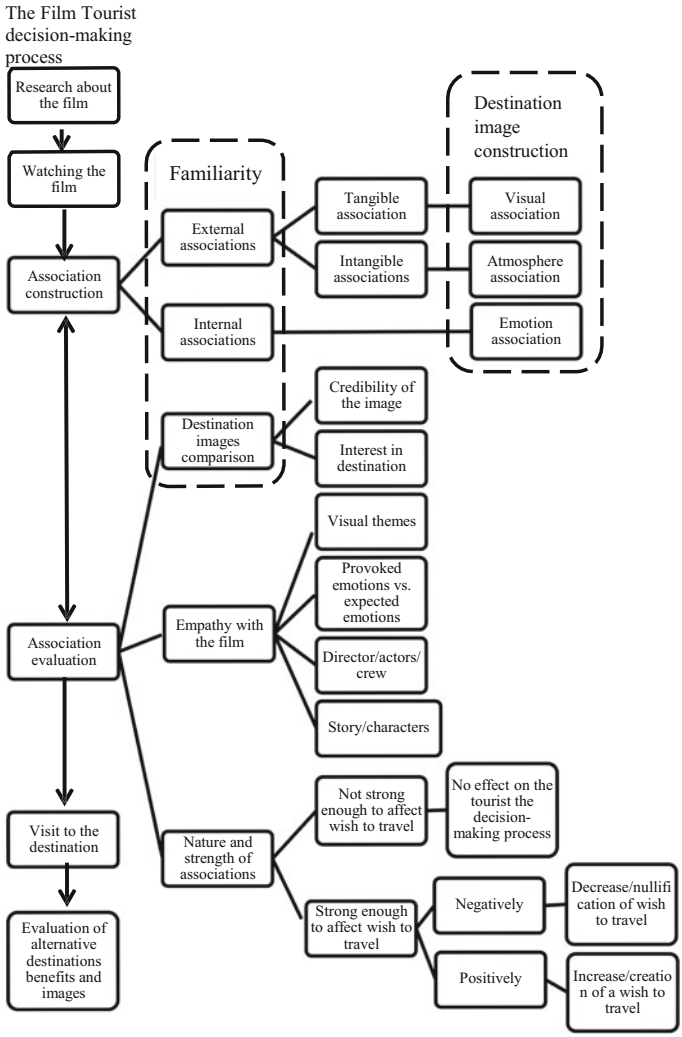

Fig. 2 Film Tourist decision-making process. Developed from Faye and Crompton (1991), Macionis (2004) and Hudson, Wang, and Gil (2011)

spectacle". The "Atmosphere Association" is different because it belongs to the "Intangible Associations" group (see Fig. 2) and operates with the intangible phenomena of feeling, culture and sensual characteristics of the destination. These two associations are inter-connected because cultural and social elements are constantly interconnected with visual images (Debord, 1983). Specifically, Bordwell and Thompson (1993) argue that the filming process can be used to fill

the filmed destination with symbolism and meaning and, that through this process, develop the landscape into the "cultural property" (Weir, 2002).

The "Emotion Association" may be the most developed association, as films are designed to provoke emotions, as Connell (2012) suggests the central facet in film is the experience of emotion. Simultaneously, films associate locations with emotions and, in some cases, with actual motivators to travel, because emotional attachment can fuel the motivational needs of the tourists (Gnoth, Zins, Lengmueller, & Boshoff, 2000), which may result in an actual visit. Tooke and Baker (1996) add that film is more likely to affect the tourist experiences if it creates strong associations between emotions and places. It can be suggested, furthermore, that different association types are formed simultaneously in the interconnected processes, a phenomenon Brégent-Heald (2007, p. 67) refers to as the "interconnected web".

"Visual Association" is the main element of the process of association formation, necessary for other associations to be formed. In certain conditions such as, for example, extraordinarily visual qualities of the destination, the influence of "Visual Association" may be strong enough to affect a wish to travel. However, "Visual Association" may be formed simultaneously with "Atmosphere Association", which conveys the mood and atmospheric aspects of destination. The "Emotion Association" may also be formed simultaneously with "Visual Association". Morgan (2006) suggests that films can transform locations into the "emotional territory" by connecting emotions to visual themes of a location.

Moreover, after being constructed by the film, the associations are evaluated by the viewer. During the evaluation process, several conditions need to be met by the film and associations in created in order for it to impact tourist experience. Specifically, a film needs to be liked by the viewer, it needs to be trusted by the viewer and needs to affect the viewer strongly enough to influence him/her to travel.

The qualities of a likeable film are very difficult to define and evaluate, because such qualities are highly personal and depend greatly on the profiles of the viewers: different people like different films. Additionally, from the perspective of the film production industry, it would appear that there is no definite understanding about the features that make the viewers like the film. This study suggests that the empathy with the film originates from four aspects: emotional evaluation, visual qualities, director/crew and story/characters.

Visual qualities of the film depend on filmed locations: if the viewers perceive them a beautiful, they may empathise with it more; this element of the film influence depends on the viewer's sense of beauty. Emotional evaluation is established when the viewer compare the emotions they were expecting from the film (based on prior-watching information) and the emotions caused by the film. If the film failed to provide desired emotional experience, the empathy with it lowers. Similarly, if the viewer enjoys directors/actors of the film and story/characters portrayed, he/she may like the film more, in certain cases despite the possible lack of beautiful scenes or satisfaction of desired emotional needs.

Focusing on the credibility of the film, Butler (2011) reports that the image of the destination created by film is fictional in nature, and the appeal of an actual destination conveyed through the film may be greater than the actual location.

Because of this, film-created destination image may contradict with the image of the destination the viewer had before watching the film. In such a situation, particularly if the viewer had prior interest in the destination and accumulated reliable information for comparison, the viewer may evaluate the film as not credible information source about the destination, because the film does not provide the correct information about the destination. However, if the viewers detect no misrepresentation in the film, they may conclude that the film is a credible source of information about the destination, and the new film-created destination image may increase an interest in the destination.

Finally, focusing on the strength of associations, even if the film is trusted and liked by the viewer, the associations it created may not be strong enough to affect tourist decisions and influence them to seek Film Tourism experiences. In addition, strong associations may be both positive and negative in nature. Specifically, the results suggest that the association-created destination image can be strong or weak. A weak image does not appear to affect the wish to visit the destination the film portrays, and films that create weak destination images are less likely to affect tourist experiences. However, if the associations are strong, either positively or negatively, the implications for the tourist experience can be, subsequently, contributing or damaging. The strong negative associations may not affect the travel decisions of the viewer, or may have a damaging effect on the wish to travel to the destination and decrease it, for example, if the film evoked strong undesired negative emotions which became associated with the destination. If the association is strong and positive, it can create a desire to travel to the destination (if such a wish did not exist before watching the film), or it can contribute to the existing wish to travel to the destination.

It is important to note that not all of the themes mentioned are equally important and strong when affecting tourist experiences. It is important to recognise the difference in significance of these elements, presented in Fig. 3.

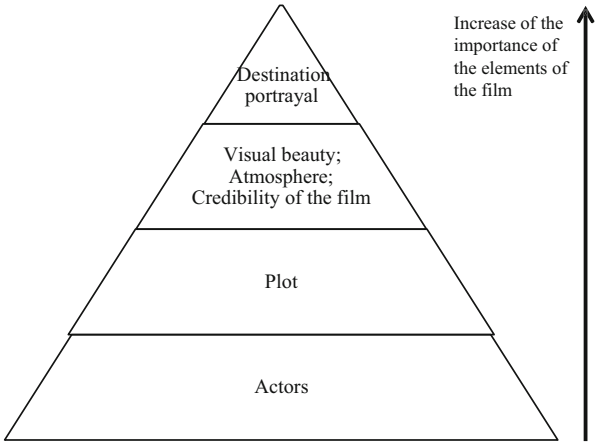

Fig. 3 The importance of the film elements. *Source*: author

It would appear that the core element of the film that affects whether the film will influence the viewers to travel is the portrayal of the destination. This element must be noted, despite being straightforward and expected, because a number of films are made with the usage of digital technologies or in specifically built sets and cannot be connected to any destination.

The less important elements are the visual beauty of the film, and the atmosphere portrayed in it. Indeed, the images of the film (from the viewer's perspective) need to be inspiring and beautiful and, similarly, the atmosphere must be engaging and desirable for the viewer. Moreover, the film needs to be credible so that the beauty of the images and the qualities of the atmosphere were trusted by the viewer. If these requirements are not met by the film, the probability of film affecting the viewer greatly decreases.

Less important elements of the film are the plot of the film, and the interest in the destination. However, even if the plot is not evaluated as enjoyable by the viewer, the beautiful visual themes in the film and the inspiring atmosphere may overpower the flaw in the plotlines of the film. Finally, the least important elements are the actors and the genres. Viewers confirm that acting is not as important as previous aspects, and actors rarely affect the decision to travel to the filmed locations despite their ability to affect the satisfaction from the film. However, fans of a specific actor, who may wish to travel to the location where his/her favourite actor has been filmed, may be the notable exception, but such form of specialised Film Tourism was not explored in this study.

In conclusion, this study reconfirms the complexity of Film Tourism, as it would appear that its high dependent on emotions and personal profiles of the viewers make it a challenging area of research to approach. The role and value of the emotional components in film-induced tourist experiences need additional research. This paper has identified the potential of films to affect tourist experiences. It was established that films affect tourists by constructing subsequently evaluated associations with the destinations. The associations include visual themes, atmospheric features and emotional engagement of the film. While not equally important, film elements in combination may affect the viewer's wish to travel to the film-portrayed location and partake in Film Tourism experiences.

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