

51. FILM-INDUCED TOURISM - Contributions by Anna Irimiás

Stories have always been my passion. I have been an avid reader ever since I can remember, and I have always loved being transported into imaginary worlds and experiencing different lives and periods of history through stories. As a movie-aficionado, I chose a high school where I could learn about theories of mass communication, the history of cinema and practical skills such as video making and editing. For personal reasons, I went on to university in Sicily (Italy) a well-known film tourism destination, of course, where I continued to study literature and languages and completed my PhD in human geography. Not a linear career towards business management, you could say. To be honest, I had no intention of doing tourism research until I met my mentor (one of my best friends) Gábor Michalkó. He gave me several opportunities to explore the interconnections between art, place and tourism. Since then, my academic career has largely focused on the ways in which media productions influence tourist behaviour.

I strongly believe that the arts reveal the complexity of the human psyche. Novelists and film directors, in very different ways to marketing experts, can capture the psychological nuances of behaviour. This belief has been the engine of my work. My approach has been influenced by a commitment to bring new insights into the field of tourism building on my cross-disciplinary background. Over the last 15 years, I have published a range of studies exploring how tourism marketing research can benefit from arts-based approaches and how mass- and social media impacts tourists' behaviour and destination marketing (Irimiás, 2012; 2015a; 2015b; Irimiás and Mitev, 2021).

Film tourism is a tourist activity induced by the viewing of films, TV series and, more recently, digital media (Beeton, 2016). Its study is cross-disciplinary in both scope and subject matter. I employ surveys, interviews, participant observation, social media analysis, netnography and visual methods to investigate how to frame and conceptualise value creation for tourists. With my background in geography, one of the questions that most fascinated me has been how tourism destinations leverage on the interconnections between fictional stories, symbolic marking and film tourism. My most important contributions to the research field are, I believe, the following:

Tourists attribute diverse meanings to mediatized places and the fact that they have been immersed in a story influences their travel decision-taking

Our study, designed to explore the benefits of narrative transportation as a kind of travel-experience in a fantasy world, showed that watching TV series is a form of escapism (Irimiás, Mitev and Michalkó, 2021a). We operationalized narrative transportation theory to link this phenomenon to tourism. This helped us to define the different stages at which tourism marketers and planners can build a marketing or a demarketing strategy to manage tourist flows to filming sites. My co-authors and I were also curious to understand how tour guides can transform film tourism experiences (Irimiás, Mitev and Michalkó, 2021b). We used grounded theory to develop a model of the multidimensional realities of mediatized places, places where a story is set or filmed. This model illustrates how tour guides, aware of the different meanings that tourists attach to places, choreograph the shifts between a city's past, its present and its role in a particular fantasy world. We found that this switching between different realities results in greater tourist involvement. Tour guides detailed knowledge of both local history and the film/series set in the location are key to designing memorable tourism experiences.

Mediatized places need to be identified with the tourism destination in tourists' minds

I was born and raised in Budapest (Hungary), the city that stood in for Buenos Aires in *'Evita'*, and Paris in *'Bel Ami'*; it was the NASA headquarters in *'The Martian'*, and the scenes in *'Red Sparrow'*-s St. Petersburg's theatre were shot in the Opera House, just to mention a few of the blockbusters filmed in my hometown. Compared to other cities with a lively film industry (Irimiás, 2019), Budapest's potential as a film tourism destination has not yet been fully recognised. The spatial appropriation of place through runaway productions led to a dissonant relationship between places seen as a filming location and as a film tourism destination. The lack of a film tourism development strategy deprived the city of the capacity to create a narrative and visual imagery with global appeal (Irimiás, 2012). Indeed, marketing initiatives can be launched when a destination has been identified as a filming location.



Figure 1. Budapest (Hungary) a filming location but a not-yet film-tourism destination.

In order to provide evidence for the above insight, we adopted a long-term perspective and investigated a chosen destination's ability to strengthen tourism marketing through movie productions (Volo and Irimiás, 2016). In a holistic single case study to Cefalù (Sicily, Italy), we found that the town's strong film legacy had not been leveraged to promote the destination due to a lack of competences within the destination marketing organisation and the local entrepreneurial community. Such a pity if we consider that through the different and world-famous filming productions, *'Nuovo Cinema Paradiso'* by Giuseppe Tornatore and *'Il regista di matrimoni'* by Marco Bellocchio, Cefalù has built a unique film heritage.

Marketing to film makers is essential to attract productions but long-term strategies are also needed to enhance local creative industries and to undertake film-tourism initiatives

In many places, public bodies offer tax credits and support to foreign productions to attract blockbusters. Cities that are popular among film makers can be attractive to them for business reasons (cheaper production costs, easy access to heritage sites). However, few of these productions do justice to the cultural and historical richness of a place itself, and Budapest, for example, risks being used as a production “playground” (Irimiás, 2015b). I carried out structured interviews with production companies and hospitality service providers to understand their business strategies for attracting film makers. I found that when production companies only trust their personal contacts or word-of-mouth within the sector, their strategies are rather short-sighted. In other cases (Irimiás, 2017), like in South Tyrol (Italy), a public institution is -through the film commissions- responsible for attracting productions and nurturing local talents. Business relationships, while strengthened through personal contacts, are characterised by trust in institutions. A long-term perspective on building relations with film companies brings benefits to the local creative sector which makes the destination less dependent from foreign productions. A fruitful creative sector has an impact on tourism as well.

My future research

I am thrilled by the prospect of investigating the changes and challenges thrown up by the new media and content platforms such as Netflix. These technological innovations have radically changed our media consumption habits and, in this new context, elaborated intrusion theory can expand our knowledge on how visuals influence our desires (Irimiás and Mitev, 2021). One of my goals is to explore whether and how we immerse ourselves in media productions -and in stories generally- while travelling. This research path is connected to consumer behaviour in e-tourism (Volo and Irimiás, 2022). Hopefully, my critical approach to digital technologies in tourism will offer insights for destination management organizations, tourism enterprises and practitioners into how to connect arts, places and tourism.

In this short contribution, I have included my works published in Hungarian, in Italian and in English. As a researcher employed in both Hungary and Italy, I consider it important to publish original, high-quality contributions in the languages of these countries. I would also like to state my gratitude to my brilliant and creative co-authors Serena Volo, Ariel Mitev and Gábor Michalkó: throughout my career, collaboration with them has been of huge benefit to me and our discussions have been essential to my growth as a researcher. Last but not least, I am also grateful to Rachel Murphy for our precious collaboration.

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[Read Anna's letter to future generations of tourism researchers](#)

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