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STORYTELLING – THE TOOL OF DESTINATION MANAGEMENT COMPANIES FOR CREATING AN EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE IN FILM TOURISM

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Abstract

Experience-based industries, such as tourism, gain a competitive advantage when they create an extraordinary experience for their customers. Contemporary tourists prefer authentic experiences, acquisition of new knowledge and skills as well as participation in community activities. Therefore, they don't want to consume only the products and services in the destination, but they are really interested in the story behind the tourist products. In film tourism, the story has a special role since it is a type of product that arises from the individual experience of the location, which is displayed in some form of media presentation. Consequently, it is particularly important for the destination management companies to use tools and techniques that can influence the customer experience. In this context, the aim of this paper is to analyse possibility of destination management companies to use storytelling in creating film tourism products. Although storytelling is often used by destination management organization as a destination marketing tool, destination management companies can use it to create high value-added products. This paper analyzes an example of good practice how a destination management company can use storytelling in creating and developing its products. However, as the example of good practice emphasizes, the application of storytelling in creating extraordinary experience requires an interdisciplinary approach and great creativity of experts from different fields, where additional value can be achieved through the use of modern information and communication technology. Applying this approach, storytelling is a tool that destination management companies can use very successfully to transform the film tourism product into an extraordinary experience for their customers.

Keywords: *storytelling, destination management company, film tourism*

1. INTRODUCTION

Although experience has always been a part of our daily lives, Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 99) have developed a theoretical framework that recognizes experience as a business opportunity on which companies can build competitive advantage. The experience is very different from the service because it is personal, interactive and complex phenomenon that emphasizes the feelings and fantasies, and requires consumers to be immersed and actively involved (Mei et al., 2018, p. 4).

Tourism is distinctly an experience-based industry because tourism products and services are produced to contribute to the tourist experience. In this manner the tourist stays in the experience for a long time going through several phases from travel planning to staying in the destination and in each phase it is possible to add an element of experience as an added value of the tourist product.

Destination management companies play an important role in creating experiences for tourists. They are receptive travel agencies that use local resources to combine them with their extensive knowledge and experience into a unique high value-added product. Their recognizable feature is a specialization that can be focused on a specific destination or a specific form of tourism of special interest. In order for the tourist experience to be complete, the destination management company must have good business connections with local companies and work in cooperation with them to strengthen the image of the destination. Since there are no two destinations with equal resources and stakeholders involved in the experience creation process, differentiation based on the creation of a unique experience becomes an acceptable strategy to gain a competitive advantage (Lekić, 2017, p. 61).

In this context, the aim of this paper is to analyse the way in which a destination management company specializing in film tourism can use storytelling as a tool in creating an extraordinary experience for tourists. This paper is organized as follows. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature in the field of film tourism, explaining the concept and contribution of film tourism to a destination. Chapter 3 highlights the basic features of storytelling, while Chapter 4 analyses the possibilities that destination management companies can use storytelling in creating film tourism products. Concluding remarks are presented in Chapter 5.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Understanding the concept of film tourism

Sustainable tourism development is becoming a priority goal of destinations worldwide. To this purpose, it is desirable to support the development of special interest tourism that can contribute to sustainable development in two ways: first, by creating products that are not based on major tourist attractions and second, by enriching the tourist offer in the off-season.

One of the newer forms of special interest tourism is film tourism. Film-induced tourism is defined as a visit by a tourist to a destination or certain attraction that is a result of its appearance on television or in cinemas worldwide. A destination can become attractive to tourists if the destination served as a filming location or if it was part of a film story.

Film induced tourists are primarily attracted by the unique "first hand" experience of the location where the film was shot. That provides a new insight for tourists and takes them to the heart of the film world where they can perceive a new dimension of film production (Elmgaard and Christophersen, 2012, p. 5). In fact, compared to classic tourists, film induced tourist give less importance to the authenticity of the destination because they replace the authenticity with something personal, which they experienced in the film through the story, plot and characters watching that destination. Therefore, the most important factor that motivates a film tourist is his view of the film. It is actually his longing for scenery, people, experiences and fantasies that is

shown throughout the film. The attractions shown in the film are not only related to the allure of the scenery in the film, but also to the reasons for taking the trip, escape and homesickness. People travel because they are motivated by their own motives but also attracted by external characteristics of the destination (Gjorgievski and Trpkova, 2011, p. 104).

Exploring the motives of film induced tourists Macionis (2007, p. 140), as the most significant factors that motivate them to go to film tourism destinations, recognizes: see the landscape from the film live, have fun and feel entertained, add something special to the holiday, experience something new and experience a unique experience. Although it could be concluded from the above motives that film tourism attracts a very wide range of different tourists, it should be emphasized that most film productions function in a way that attracts only a certain demographic group. Accordingly, taking into account each individual film, the wide range of tourists is reduced only to certain demographic groups that are attracted by a particular film. For example, the Star Wars film, primarily attracts male, solo tourists between the ages of 31 and 40. Research shows that the attractive factors of films are based on the landscape itself, ie its uniqueness and curiosity, society and cultural features that tourists find attractive, and which later become a key reason for visiting the destination (Connell, 2012, p. 1017).

However, the motives for visiting film-initiated tourists to film destinations are much more complex and today are perhaps most strongly influenced by the "celebrity cult". This area needs to be further explored, as well as the potential of the myth that runs through the film story and which through storytelling can become one of the strongest motives for tourist demand (Beeton, 2006, p. 186).

2.2. The contribution of film to the tourism development in the destination

Although films are generally not produced with the intention of attracting tourists to a destination, they tend to influence viewers indirectly, through the messages they carry within themselves. This means that filmmakers, cultural associations, producers and other stakeholders can use films precisely to promote a particular destination, without the audience noticing that it is a promotion or any other form of destination advertising (Juškelyte, 2016, p. 54).

It is obvious that the basic contribution of film tourism is to stimulate tourist demand to visit the destination, but research has confirmed that film tourism contributes to the destination through: increasing cultural values in a location promoted by film tourism, improving the image of the destination and creating destination awareness and the impact on reducing the seasonal concentration of tourist demand (Gjorgievski and Trpkova, 2011, p. 99).

Film is a medium in which a wide range of cultural meanings and norms can be conveyed to film viewers, and influence their perception of specific locations in a destination. Many of the historical attractions used as film locations gained popularity after the film was shot and screened, and became marked by a specific meaning that appears throughout the film (Rewtrakunphaiboon, 2009, p. 5). The film can build up the destination image and increase awareness of the existence of the destination in the eyes of tourists. Because the key elements of the image are visual and emotional, the film industry is a powerful tool for shaping the destination image and the destination awareness. However, as Bolan et al. (2015, 2) argue, there is a danger that mass film and TV show production will distort the image of real destinations. According to the theory of displacement, it is not unusual for a film to be shot in a completely different country from the one being shown. This emphasizes the problem of authenticity but also the question of which country a tourist under the influence of such a film will decide to visit. Film locations are not conditioned by climatic conditions, so it is possible to shoot all year round. On the other hand, film tourists can also reduce seasonal pressure due to the fact that film locations are available all year round and most film tourists avoid visiting locations in peak season due to overcrowding. They can experience the atmosphere of the film and the spirit of the destination more authentically by visiting and exploring it in the off-season.

However, the impact of film tourism on a destination does not always have to be stimulating. Due to the increase in the number of tourist arrivals at the location shown in the film as untouched nature, the natural environment may be destroyed and the destination may even begin to decline. Furthermore, in a destination where the number of tourists is growing significantly as a result of the development of film tourism, problems such as vandalism and overcrowding can occur, affecting carrying capacity, traffic congestion, environmental pollution, price inflation during filming, overvalued souvenirs, increased waste and feeling neglect among the local population (Gunesch, 2017, p. 6). Therefore, it is important to manage the sustainable development of film tourism in the destination, so that film tourists, film producers and destination management companies get the best out of film tourism, for the benefit of all stakeholders in the destination.

3. THE ROLE OF STORYTELLING IN TOURISM

Stories have always been an integral part of our lives, resulting in the ability to overlook their role in everyday communication, understanding the world and events around us, and creating and preserving our memories. There are different reasons why people tell stories: fun, knowledge transfers between generations, preservation of cultural heritage, warning of some danger. When people connect with each other through a story, they are more likely to remember the experience (Yavuz et al., 2016, p. 65).

Storytelling rests on emotions, and its most pronounced aspect is the reaction the story evokes in its audience. The engaged audience that communicates with the narrator perceives the story as an emotional experience (Lugmayr et al., 2017, p. 4). Storytelling can be recognized as a collective creative process that enables social interactions by generating an emotional experience in common (Pera, 2017, p. 337).

Due to the nature of tourism and the growing propensity of tourists to create experiences, learn and participate in various activities, the application of storytelling in tourism is more than welcome. So far storytelling has been mostly used in tourism as a destination marketing tool. Stories in destination marketing are primarily used to develop a destination brand (Korez-Vide, 2017; Yavuz et al., 2016), but also to develop new products and experiences in a tourist destination (Mei et al., 2018). However, its potential is huge in the process of conveying different messages to the target audience and creating unforgettable tourist experiences.

The basic functions of storytelling as destination marketing tool can be systematise as follows. Facilitating market access, especially for smaller companies that, with the help of storytelling, can create competitive products but also run effective marketing campaigns for which they do not need to allocate large financial resources. Promoting special interest tourism through the creation of specific products using the storytelling principle. In this context, there are great opportunities that support the development of film tourism in the destination. Promoting the cultural heritage, history and tradition of the destination in the way that modern tourists want, by actively participating, connecting with the local community and getting to know the story behind the tourist product. Promoting the natural environment emphasizing the special qualities of space and organization of various activities in nature which highlights the focus on the sustainability of the destination. Reduction of seasonality, development of sustainable products in periods outside the main tourist season and products that do not include visits to overcrowded tourist locations. Increasing the average consumption of tourists per capita by enriching the offer of the tourist destination with various facilities and activities. Retaining profits in local communities through engaging the local population in the application of storytelling in product development (Korez-Vide, 2017, p. 381).

However, it is important to emphasize that although the role of storytelling in developing the destination brand is extremely significant, its potential in creating new products in the

destination is even more significant. Since tourists are looking for experiences, extraordinary experiences are often associated with tourist products that are focused on discovering some local legends or on the revival of the spirit of past times that were driven by excellent storyteller. Therefore, it can be expected that those destination management companies that will use all the advantages of storytelling in the process of designing tourism products create a competitive advantage without high fixed investments.

4. USING STORYTELLING IN CREATING FILM TOURISM PRODUCTS

Considering that tourism is an experience-based industry which aims to provide extraordinary experiences that will be unforgettable for tourists, it is analysed below how storytelling can contribute to such experiences in film tourism products. In film tourism, storytelling has a particularly important role because it is a form of tourism that is based on the personal experience of the location which illustrates the context of the film story or the place where the film was shot.

As an example of good practice is described operation of a destination management company *Vetus Itinera*, located in Split, Croatia, which specializes in film tourism. *Vetus Itinera* has developed specialized film tourism tours using the backdrop of the *Game of Thrones* series. In Croatia, the series was filmed at several locations in three counties of central and southern Dalmatia and *Vetus Itinera* offers several specialized film tourism tours in Croatia and one tour that connects the filming locations of the series in different countries around the world. The competitive advantage of their products is based on the successful combination of stories from Old Slavonic history and the history of the city of Split and Dubrovnik with the locations and scenes of the *Game of Thrones* series. In order to revive the locations where the series was filmed as interestingly as possible and to guide tourists as faithfully as possible into the authentic history of these locations, they hired an art historian.

However, their tours are not exclusively intended for *Game of Thrones* fans. Precisely because of the interpretation of cultural and historical heritage through the context of a popular series, their tours were also praised by tourists who did not watch the *Game of Thrones* series.

Also, the tours were further revived using various props that appear in the series, from cutlery and wrought iron cups, kites, and tour guides wearing clothes modelled on the clothes from the series. In this way, connecting stories from the past with the locations and plot of the planetary popular series, they try to enable tourists to get to know the cultural and historical heritage of cities like Split and Dubrovnik in a different way, touch and experience the locations of the series and participate in creating a new story. They have done all this in order to provide an extraordinary experience to their tourists, who they hope will spread the word about the quality of their services and become their loyal customers.

Although the above can be considered an example of good practice, it should be emphasized that in an effort to provide an extraordinary experience to tourists, products should be constantly developed and innovated. In this particular case, storytelling supported by new technologies can be used, since with the help of technology the audience can be more easily involved in the storytelling process, which has a positive effect on engagement and facilitates the creation of long-term connections. As *Korez-Vide* (2017, p. 380) points out, new digital technologies, especially visually oriented social media, contribute to facilitating new travel experiences based on storytelling and offered new ways to develop and share these experiences through different social networks.

5. CONCLUSIONS

To ensure a competitive advantage, tourism companies must offer products that will provide an extraordinary experience for tourists. Contemporary tourists, as an extraordinary experience, especially appreciate the opportunity to feel the authentic experience of the destination, learn the story that shapes the destination product, and actively participate in the interpretation of the destination.

One of the tools that can very successfully contribute to the development of a product that provides an extraordinary experience to tourists is storytelling. Its application is especially effective in the products of film tourism, which are based on the revival of stories and locations shown on film or other forms of media content.

Nevertheless, in order to leave a strong enough impression on tourists, storytelling needs to be used effectively not only in the promotion of the destination product but also in the design and creation of the product. This means that the message of the story must be conveyed in such a way as to enable the location and characteristics of the destination to be known by actively participating in the interpretation and creation of the destination experience.

This paper analysed an example of good practice of a destination management company that uses storytelling as a tool in creating its products. As it can be seen from the example, the use of storytelling in creating high value-added tourism products requires not only knowledge of the destination resource base and principles of successful storytelling, but also requires a high level of creativity and very often the cooperation of experts from different fields. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage interdisciplinary approach through cooperation of various stakeholders in the field of culture, education and tourism. An additional contribution can be made by applying modern information and communication technology as a platform for the application of storytelling. Therefore, it can be pointed out that the key activities are the improvement of creative and digital skills through various forms of education and training and as well as an interdisciplinary approach in the process of tourism product development.

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