Creating (Extra)ordinary Heritage through Film-Induced Tourism: The Case of Dubrovnik and the Game of Thrones

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Introduction

Central to tourist consumption is the tourist gaze: the fact that 'we look at, or gaze upon, particular objects, such as piers, towers, old buildings, artistic objects, food, countryside and so on' (Urry 1995: 131). These objects boast certain material and imagination-stimulating qualities that evoke a nostalgic sense of history and tradition and are, thus, able to attract tourists (Bærenholdt *et al* 2004). Heritage sites create an anticipation of pleasurable experience that is very often constructed and sustained through non-tourism practices, such as popular culture in general and film-induced tourism in particular (Urry 1995, Beeton 2005, Urry and Larsen 2011). Film-induced tourism is considered a unique form of tourism that motivates visitors to experience on- and off-location sites used in films and/or TV series (Beeton 2005, Hudson and Ritchie 2006). Due to being featured in a film or TV series, a place or object otherwise considered an 'ordinary' object of tourist consumption very often gains the status of an icon (Riley *et al* 1998). The use of film imagery to emphasise the extraordinariness of a place is the subject of a long-lasting debate among academics and business people (Riley and Van Doren 1992, Riley *et al* 1998, Beeton 2005, Beeton 2010, Connell 2012). It is certainly a practice widely employed by tourism professionals.

Enriching heritage with fantasies and day-dreams from films and TV series may not directly 'harm' the unique attractiveness of a place. By intertwining the heritage of the place with film imagery, tourists are attracted to certain places, gazing at particular objects 'in the level of what is *ordinary* and hence what people view as *extraordinary*' (Urry and Larsen 2011: 115, emphasis in original). Tour guides have the ability to transform and facilitate the identity of the place as interpreters and educators of its heritage (Imon *et al* 2007), acting as a direct link between the identity of the heritage site and the visitor experience. On the one hand, they provide necessary and accurate interpretations of the site, whilst on the other, they have the ability to enhance the quality of the visitor experience by complementing the 'ordinary' heritage sightseeing tours with unique stories and sites relating to the film or TV series. Hence, heritage becomes the subject of transformation and reformation influenced by popular culture; its identity is 'a *discursive formation* which consists of what the destination is and represents at the time and the historical and present practices involved in transforming it' (Saarinen 2001, 51, emphasis in original).

Limited attention has so far been paid to the practices of (re)producing heritage through film imagery in sites of (so-called) outstanding value to humanity. This chapter addresses this research gap by discussing the recurrent practices of tour guides in reshaping and recreating the heritage of the city of Dubrovnik, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979, through film imagery related to the popular TV series, *Game of Thrones*. The chapter will start with a review of relevant literature concerning the influences of film imagery and tour guides on the tourist gaze. It will then describe the city of Dubrovnik and its heritage and present an analysis of the role of tour guides in transforming the heritage of that city in connection with the popular series, *Game of Thrones*. The chapter will conclude by discussing the implications of film-induced tourism for the heritage management of a destination.

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On the creation and delivery of the mediated gaze

Tourism sets the stage for a very profound consumption of places because destinations represent 'a unique environment and stimulation apart from those ordinary shopping settings' (Oh *et al* 2004, 309). The physical space itself becomes not only the location of tourist consumption, but the object of consumption *per se* (Jančič 1999, Urry 2002, Bærenholdt *et al* 2004, Oh *et al* 2004, Urry and Larsen 2011). Tourists visit places and gaze upon the objects, landscapes and traditions (as part of the physical spaces), in search of authentic and memorable experiences. What is 'sold' to the tourist is highly context-dependent, inseparable from the social and physical setting within which it occurs (Urry 1995). Ramkissoon and Uysal (2014: 114), suggest that an authentic experience, at least in part, arises from 'the nature of the interaction within the setting in which tourist experience is produced and consumed'. However, there have to be certain mechanisms in place to ignite a tourist's desire for authentic experiences, while the latter have to be carefully delivered at the visit site in order to be memorable.

Creating the tourist gaze for places of 'outstanding value'
Mechanisms that inspire a desire to travel are highly diverse, with destination branding as a common factor. Destination branding involves the selection of a consistent mix of brand elements, in order to identify and differentiate a tourism destination through positive image building (Cai 2002, Novčić Korać and Šegota 2017). The brand elements are embodied in pictures and videos in order to link *in situ* experiences and emotions with a destination (Šegota 2018). As such, they have the ultimate power to present the evidence of a destination's unique characteristics to target audiences (through destination marketing) or from one person to another (by word-of-mouth). Urry and Larson (2011: 115) recognise that the availability of visual media results in the propensity of people to 'keep demanding new out-of-the-ordinary experiences'.

Two much-debated mechanisms of positive destination image building are, firstly, inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage Sites list (for outstanding heritage) and, secondly, the presence of on-location filming sites. Very often, these two do not go hand in hand, but both are seen as key factors affecting the tourist gaze and communicating a destination's uniqueness to tourists. Being named a UNESCO World Heritage Site brings special attention to the natural or cultural endowments of a place (Cuccia *et al* 2017), emphasising its outstanding value and stressing the pure and original heritage that needs to be preserved for humanity (Frey and Steiner 2013). Such inscription builds expectations of a certain unique experience and influences the interpretation of authenticity. The sites play a significant role in creating the atmosphere of tourist experience because of their effective charge; tourists often report that their lives have been enriched by the opportunity to visit these special places, due to the characteristics they possess (Urry and Larsen 2011, Lisle 2016). According to Lowenthal (1985), localities with old buildings display solidity, continuity, authority, and craft; they have survived developers, town planners, wars, erosion and earthquakes, for years and years; they link past generations to the present; they demonstrate that tradition and age are worthy of preservation; they were built without the help of modern technologies. This claim to authenticity is what distinguishes World Heritage sites from other heritage sites. Frey and Steiner (2013) recognise that many tourism destinations which have the designation of 'World Heritage' become major attractions and icons of national identity and as such gain general popularity. The contemporary fascination with gazing upon such heritage contributes

to economic growth (Arezki *et al* 2009) and increases the attractiveness of wider regional areas (Mazanec *et al* 2007, Frey and Steiner 2013, Patuelli *et al* 2016). Destination management organisations (hereinafter, DMO) also use the World Heritage label for differentiating their specific tourism destinations from those of their competitors, presenting their own sites as must-see tourism products (Marcotte and Bourdeau 2012, de Fauconberg *et al* 2017).

Other important tourism products are those localities featured in popular culture. When such sites are visited, people gaze on the scene to relive the elements or certain aspects of the events conveyed through popular culture media. In recent years, there has been specific interest in understanding the benefits of literature and film tourism to destination marketing and management (Beeton 2010, Larson *et al* 2013, Šegota 2018). Bolan and Williams (2008) argue that film tourism benefits destination marketing in numerous ways, most importantly in reaching an audience (via film imagery) that would normally be unreachable through traditional marketing activities. In the first place, a destination's exposure through film generates awareness of a destination among viewers who may not be addressed by other tourism marketing tools. If a film is commercially successful, the market reach is even greater. Secondly, popular culture is considered an autonomous destination image formation agent, providing substantial information about a destination within a very limited time. Since popular culture is very often considered to be independent of the direct influence of DMOs, the information provided through film is likely to be evaluated as more objective and unbiased. Lastly, film imagery, which includes on-screen virtual characters, an appealing storyline, memorable music, and remarkable landscapes, generates out-of-the-ordinary experiences which are then materialised at the moment a tourist visits the destination and recreates similar experiences as those viewed in on-screen performances (Bolan and Williams 2008). Šegota (2018) asserts that the influence of film in emphasising the extraordinariness of 'ordinary' must-see tourism products (that is, landscapes, places, and sites) is undeniable.

Unquestionably, labelling an attraction as an important Heritage Site or a must-see filming location aids in destination marketing. Labels help DMOs to invent new destinations or to embellish ordinary destinations with imaginative geographies or novel stories and myths (Urry and Larsen 2011). In the case of film tourism, on-site filming destinations record a rapid increase in the number of visits and overnight stays due to the active tourism promotional work of DMOs. Prominent examples include the destination marketing practices of New Zealand in connection with the trilogies, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* (Croy 2010, Beaton 2015, Li *et al* 2016), of Forks, USA and the Italian towns of Volterra and Montepulciano in connection with *The Twilight Saga* (Larson *et al* 2013), and of Croatia in connection with *Game of Thrones* (Šegota 2018). These destinations display the pull factors for film site visits (Riley and Van Doren 1992) and have become (so-called) fantasylands for tourists who consider themselves true fans of the films. They magnify pilgrimage to the point that the consumption of *un*mediated reality is impossible (Urry and Larsen 2011).

The role of tour guides in delivering the mediated gaze
People inspired to pursue the tourist gaze may do so individually or in groups, guided by tour guides, travel guides and tips, modern technology apps, or in random strolls around the destination. Eventually, those pursuing the tourist gaze come into contact with local residents,

other tourists, and workers in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Urry and Larsen (2011: 77) recognise that those in tourism and hospitality, with face-to-face contact with tourists, 'literally work under the tourist gaze.' Moreover, for Del Casino and Hanna (2000), they are so much a part of the performance that they themselves become part of the gaze; these authors are referring particularly to tour guides, who are perceived as 'of crucial importance in cultural tourism, as theirs is the task of selecting, glossing, and interpreting sights' (Dahles 2002: 784). Many writers see tour guides as essential to enhancing visitors' satisfaction and experience and their understanding of a destination and its culture (Holloway 1981, Moscardo 1998, Ap and Wong 2001). For Wang *et al* (2002), it is tour guides' communication and presentation skills that 'make or break' a tour, whilst Ap and Wong (2001) see these skills as crucial in transforming tourists' visits into experiences. Similarly, McIntosh and Prentice (1999) and Reisinger and Steiner (2006) say that tour guides play more roles than just providing information to tourists; they convey a sense of the place by interpreting attractions and sites, by explaining where to look, when to look, why to look, and how to behave. Cohen (1985) ascribes to guides the role of mentors, who select the experience and the narrative (which places to visit and which ones to omit), provide education through offering correct and precise information, and mediate the meaning between a tourist site and its visitors by fabricating or guarding the authenticity of the place. However, how the guides' roles are executed depends on historical and mediated narratives of the place. Here, historical and mediated narratives are seen as the content of tourism products that are commoditised to suit the perceived tourists' tastes and travel agendas (Urry 1995, Wong 2013). Some researchers suggest that tour guides do not manage to perform their roles in full, because post-modern tourists are not really seeking authenticity and in-depth understanding of heritage. Instead, guides have been placed in a difficult situation, where staging the narrative becomes superior to historical accounts of the site because the preference of tourists is for a visual experience and experiential enjoyment of the place (Nuryanti 1996, Desmond 1999, Blom 2000).

The above situation arises in the case of guided tours within film tourism. In order to attract visitors, tourism organisations and businesses promote guides, routes and maps with the content specifically highlighting filming location sites. Since the release of the *Lord of the Rings*, for example, the official New Zealand DMO has branded the country the 'Home of Middle-earth' (New Zealand Tourism 2017), one important focus of tours being the original Hobbiton Movie Set. Tourists may decide to visit this fictional and virtual environment on their own, or they can be guided through the mediated gaze (Urry and Larsen 2011, Beaton 2015). In the case of the latter, the authenticity of the place is being fabricated (Larson *et al* 2013) in order to meet expectations of the virtual experiences anticipated by fans of this popular culture phenomenon. However, tour guides in historic towns and heritage sites used as on-location filming sites are placed in an even more unenviable position in delivering the tourist gaze; one example concerns the TV series, *Game of Thrones*, a media phenomenon that has swept Europe since 2011. Tour guides have found that their encoding of a preferred narrative is contested by expectations over the mediated gaze. They have to decide how they will position themselves with respect to the particular accounts offered by heritage and fictional narratives: 'they may subscribe strongly to conveying a particular account, or may be less engaged, or perhaps even ironic' (Macdonald 2006). The research outlined in this chapter addresses the positioning of tour guides (with respect to heritage and fictional

narratives) in the Croatian city of Dubrovnik. The study uses a qualitative interpretative research style, based on interviews with representatives of tourist agencies offering walking tours in Dubrovnik.

Case Study of Dubrovnik and *Game of Thrones*

The City of Dubrovnik and its surrounding area cover the southernmost region of Croatia, stretching along the narrow Adriatic coastal belt under the Dinaric mountain peaks. The Old Town of Dubrovnik was formally established at the end of the 12th century, when two Slavic settlements were fortified and strengthened within the city walls (Visit Dubrovnik n.d.). From the 13th century onwards, Dubrovnik became an important Mediterranean Sea power, as evidenced by its many and diverse buildings, such as Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque churches, monasteries, palaces, and fountains (UNESCO n.d.). In 1667 the city was severely damaged by an earthquake; however, the majority of the Old Town has been preserved to the present day. In the 20th century the city became a well-known tourist destination and in 1979 it joined the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. In the 1990s, the city was yet again damaged during armed conflict; however, its restoration was co-ordinated by UNESCO in order to preserve the unique architecture of the Old Town. Nowadays, the city is one of the most famous tourist destinations in Croatia and in south-eastern Europe. The mountainous landscape, the crystal clear blue sea and the unique architecture have made Dubrovnik worthy of the nickname 'Pearl of the Adriatic'. What attracts tourists the most is the view of its preserved white stone defensive walls, endowed with numerous forts and towers, surrounding the medieval red-roof-top-houses and palaces (see Fig.1). Hence, the most famous tourist attractions are the Old Town, the City Walls and numerous fortresses, including Lovrijenac, Minceta, and Bokar.

Figure 1. Entrance to the City of Dubrovnik
(Insert Fig.1 here)
Source: Dubrovnik Tourist Board

Since the early 2000s, and especially since 2011, the city of Dubrovnik has boasted an increasing number of tourist visits. In 2015, for example, there were almost one and half million tourist arrivals, while almost one million admission tickets were sold for the City Walls. Tkalec *et al* (2017) attribute these record tourist numbers to HBO's 'megahit' TV series, *Game of Thrones*, suggesting that *Game of Thrones* film-induced tourism resulted in a 37.9 per cent increase in tourist arrivals, a 28.5 per cent increase in overnight stays and a 37.5 per cent increase in City Walls admission tickets, compared to a mere 7 per cent increase in tourist arrivals, a 8.2 per cent increase in overnight stays, and a 2.1 per cent increase in City Walls admission tickets in the pre-*Game-of-Thrones* period. The TV series became highly successful immediately after its first screening on April 17, 2011. The original series was based on George R.R. Martin's bestselling series of fantasy novels, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which portray chronicles of violent dynastic struggle among noble families for the Iron Throne whilst more threats emerge from the north of the continent and from distant eastern lands (Šegota 2018). With a production budget of up to US$ 100 million per season and a total of 38 Emmy awards, this record-setting TV series commands an average of 20 million viewers per episode, making it the most successful TV series in history (HBO, 2016). In 2011, during Season One of the series, HBO producers moved some of the filming locations

from Malta to Croatia, including those relating to the King's Landing, the most crucial place in the series, known for its Iron Throne. The majority of the filming took place in the Old Town of Dubrovnik and at nearby tourist attractions. Croatian DMO instantly recognised the economic benefits of a form of tourism driven by desire for an authentic experience of on-screen location sites in Dubrovnik and its surroundings. In both online and offline destination marketing activities, they strongly emphasised the City of Dubrovnik as a synonym for the King's Landing. As a result, Dubrovnik became the pilgrimage destination for fans of *Game of Thrones* (Šegota 2018).

Touring the heritage: of Dubrovnik or King's Landing?

One tourism product that has gained popularity among visitors to Dubrovnik is dedicated walking tours of the city and its famous city walls. These tours were initiated in the mid-1970s after the reconstruction of inaccessible walls. During the armed conflict in the 1990s the city and its walls reportedly suffered the most devastating destruction since the 13th century, but after the restoration the tours commenced again. Today, small tourism businesses provide most of the tours in the city, mainly focusing on local history and the popular TV series, *Game of Thrones*. Hence, the tours are largely organised according to scripts that meet tourist preferences for walking through the site and experiencing various gazes. The most important local heritage sites are sold under the meme, 'discovery tour', the history of politics and the challenges relating to the city's fortification are sold as the 'war tour', while the film-induced experience tours bear direct reference to the *Game of Thrones*. In the case of the last two, walks are being sold with an expectation that visitors are less attracted to the historical depth of the physical site than to its staged narrative.

In response to the discovery that some tourists are indecisive in their preferences over the mediated or historical gaze of the City of Dubrovnik, there are also tours which address both; the so-called 'two-in-one tours' combine experiences across heritage, history of wars and popular culture. These packages require well-trained professional guides with the ability to interpret, translate, and differentiate fact and fiction clearly. Representatives of Dubrovnik Walks™ and Dubrovnik Walking tours™ stated that guides for such tours are equipped with high-level professional knowledge about the history of the place, but also share the utmost enthusiasm for *Game of Thrones*. In order to draw a clear line between factual tours and fiction tours, the *Game of Thrones* themed tours are delivered by guides that are real fans of the series themselves, whilst some guides for 'discovery' and 'war' tours voluntarily exclude themselves from any relationship with the popular culture phenomenon. 'Discovery' guides tend to position themselves as strongly committed to the historical narrative of the place, thus contributing to high levels of consistency between tours. Other guides may be less engaged with the cultural heritage and, instead, embark on a path of recreating the city's heritage through war or *Game of Thrones* storytelling. In this case, the tours management personnel encourage guides to deliver a one-of-a-kind tourist gaze by telling of their personal involvement with the TV series or giving first-hand accounts of living in a besieged town. These personal guides' stories represent a social setting that is highly context dependent and inseparable from the physical setting within which it occurred. This kind of engagement increases the extraordinariness of place, with tourists having unique opportunities to meet those who contributed to the fictional or real heritage of the city.

Encouraging three different narratives of a place to exist, or even increasing the complexity by offering a mix of two (seemingly exclusive) narratives, entails complex visualisation work. Guides that deliver the 'discovery' tours build visualisation through their impeccable communication skills; they have to convey different layers of history through memorable stories and detailed descriptions of the sites. Other guides have to be skilled narrators as well; however, they show tourists the pictures and point to indicate where, for example, Daenerys Targaryen visited the House of Undying (Minčeta Tower) in Season Two searching for her stolen dragons, or, for example, which part of Stradun Street was bombed to rubble. In these cases, the work of linking the narrative of the war tour, or the *Game of Thrones* tour, to their original contexts has already been accomplished, in that tourists are familiar with images of the warfare or the TV series before they visit. The pictures used by the guides serve as visual triggers of the knowledge and the (un)pleasant memories they already possess, in order for them to grasp *in situ* the experiences that could not be delivered elsewhere.

Conclusion

> *For the Game of Thrones fans out there, it all comes live in Dubrovnik. You will walk the same paths, touch the same walls and soak up the views you see on the show.*
> Ed A. Jones (in Figueroa 2015)

The words of tour manager, Ed Jones, summarise the gaze that tourists anticipate when visiting King's Landing (the City of Dubrovnik, the 'Pearl of the Adriatic' and a UNESCO World Heritage Site). With the increasing popularity of the TV series, *Game of Thrones*, the City of Dubrovnik has gained the worldwide recognition for which it has longed for decades. However, this recognition has become tightly connected to the fictional heritage of film imagery. This has been greatly encouraged by the work of Croatian DMO in promoting the city as King's Landing on social media, which Šegota (2018) describes as unintentional practices gone 'great'. As a result, Dubrovnik's heritage has become a melting pot of three or more narratives: one about Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque architectural history and events, one about the political challenges, warfare, and fortification of the place, and one about the fictional chronicles of violent dynastic struggles of noble families for the throne. For small tourism businesses, intertwining the heritage of the place with film imagery has brought recognition and financial success. They instantly capitalised on the increasing tourist numbers by offering one-of-a-kind walking tours to *Game of Thrones* filming locations, enriched by personal stories of those contributing to its production. Moreover, tour management personnel recognised that tourists are indecisive in their perceptions of the place, so they now offer walking tours with mixed narratives. These require highly skilled professional guides who are able to provide necessary and accurate interpretation of the heritage as well as increasing visitor satisfaction, compared to 'ordinary' heritage sightseeing tours, by including unique stories and sites related to the TV series. Those delivering this mediated gaze are fans of the gaze themselves, because only 'true fans' know what people view as extraordinary.

Undeniably, Dubrovnik's heritage has become the subject of transformation influenced by popular culture. The label of UNESCO World Heritage Site from 1979 made its heritage outstanding; however, it was the popular culture label from 2011 onwards that made it extraordinary. Some tour guides remain strongly committed to an historical narrative of the city, while others increasingly succumb to post-modern tourists' preferences for instant

authentic experiences and a superficial understanding of heritage. However, the fruits of this (what Saarinen (2001) calls) 'discursive formation' will shortly be evident, since the TV series will be concluding soon and filming has already finished in Croatia. There are strong fears that Dubrovnik and its tour guides will have a difficult task in transforming the heritage back to its initial pre-*Game of Thrones* stage. This will involve down-grading the film narrative, making it only equal to, or less important than, the war and historical narratives. The real issue is whether Dubrovnik can continue to sustain itself as a significant heritage destination. Since 'new Dubrovnik' has been increasingly profiled and promoted as King's Landing, the city is now at risk of acquiring the image of a destination for film enthusiasts that only lasts a decade.

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