

Introduction

Worlds of Imagination

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Jede Tür, egal ob Stall-, Küchen-oder auch Schranktür, kann in einem bestimmten Augenblick zur Eingangspforte in den Tausend-Türen-Tempel werden.

Die unendliche Geschichte (1979)

[Every door [...] even the most ordinary stable, kitchen, or cupboard door, can become the entrance to the Temple of a Thousand Doors at the right moment.]

(Quote taken from Michael Ende, *The Never Ending Story* (1983), translated by Ralph Manheim)

This book focuses on media tourism: the phenomenon of people travelling to a place because of its association with a book, film, television series, video game, or other form of popular media culture. Often the site concerned is an ordinary, everyday place. For example, several cafés, mansions, and streets in Istanbul attract tourists from around the world because of their association with popular soap operas such as *Binbir Gece* (2006–2009), *Ezel* (2009–2011) and *Elif* (2014–2019) (Anaz & Ozcan 2016).

At first sight, these locations might come across as ordinary, but they contain the power to open up worlds of imagination. For fans, these “places of the imagination” can form a magical portal to an imaginary world (Zimmerman & Reijnders 2024). For example, there is a door on the South Bank of the Thames leading up to Westminster bridge. For most people, this is a simple door that provides access to a cleaning shed. For James Bond fans, however, the door means something completely different: by opening this door, secret agent 007 in *Die Another Day* (2002) gained access to an underground meeting place of MI6, where a new assignment to save the world awaited him (Reijnders 2010: 371). Likewise, the Mexico Tourism Board together with Disney Pixar has developed an eight-day ‘Coco Tour’. By visiting the real-life locations that inspired the producers of *Coco* (2017), tourists are offered a glimpse into the colourful and enchanted *Land of the Dead* featured in this computer-animated fantasy film.

A more recent example concerns the HBO series *The White Lotus*. The global popularity of this series is said to have boosted tourism to both Hawaii (season

1) and Sicily (season 2).¹ *The White Lotus* is not only interesting as a contemporary example of media tourism but also as a reflection on it. The series offers a satirical look at the more luxurious strands of tourism, including the phenomenon of media tourism. For example, in the episode ‘Bull Elephants’ a son, father and grandfather together go in search of the shooting locations of the film trilogy *The Godfather*. They visit, among other places, the farm in Sicily where Apollonia (Michael Corleone’s wife) is killed in the film by a car bomb. The three characters marvel at the paraphernalia in an adjacent *The Godfather* gift shop and the replication of the car from the movie, complete with an Apollonia dummy. When a local company from Sicily recently decided to organize a The White Locus Tour, this farm was of course also included.² By joining The White Locus Tour, tourists can now follow in the footsteps of fictional characters who in turn follow in the footsteps of other fictional characters. The fact that this fiction-in-fiction is ultimately based on a long history of very real mafia-related intimidation and violence provides the palace of mirrors in The White Lotus Tour with a macabre undercurrent. However, looking at the high visitor numbers, this does not seem to detract from its tourist appeal.

The aim of this book is to delve deeper into this palace of mirrors, this ‘Temple of a Thousand Doors’ that famously offers to bring you everywhere as long as it based on a genuine wish. By using media tourism as a starting point, we aim to reflect on how the connections between people’s worlds of imagination and the real worlds they inhabit are made tangible through place.

In recent years, the number of studies about media tourism has significantly increased, and the range of disciplines interested in it has widened. Yet, and despite the global attention media tourism has sparked, prior empirical studies have been mostly focused on isolated examples from the Global North, in particular the United Kingdom and North America. As we will argue below, this Western focus tends to overlook the fact that the face of the media industry as well as the tourism industry has been changing rapidly on a global scale. For example, Bollywood overtook Hollywood in terms of film production and viewership in the past decade and has been leading since. At the same time, the global tourist flows can no longer be only characterized as a neo-colonial phenomenon in which the white, Western tourist consumes the ‘exotic Other’ in the non-West. Instead, people from the Global South are increasingly present in the global tourist flows, partly driven by images from their own media industries. These developments call for a broader, more global approach to media tourism, considering possible commonalities and differences in the development and experience of media tourism in different cultural settings, while at the same time being attentive to related themes such as migration and diaspora.

In order to take the next step and move this field of research to a higher level, a more comparative and cross-cultural approach is essential. This book aims to do so, to go beyond the limited scope of high-profile examples from the Global North and to explore more generic processes and relationships of power involved in the development and experience of media tourism worldwide. Before going into further detail about this explicit focus of our book and how each chapter contributes to

this mission, it is first important to provide a broader context: what exactly is media tourism, how has it developed over time and how is it studied in academic circles?

Media tourism: Past and present

In its essence, media tourism is nothing new. For centuries, people have been interested in visiting locations associated with the lives and works of famous writers. An early example of this is the fourteenth-century diplomat and poet Francesco Petrarca. His poems were read and acclaimed throughout Europe, already during his own lifetime. As a humanist, he not only wrote about religious matters, but also about more earthly subjects such as love and the beauty of nature. Because of his predilection for nature walks, he is even called the “first tourist” (Hendrix 2007). A few decades after his death, Petrarca’s house in the north of Italy (a region later rechristened as ‘Arqua Pertrarca’) became a secular place of pilgrimage for lovers of his poems. The locations from his poems also gained some fame, in particular those poems in which he recounted the walks he took with his muse Laura. In this sense, Petrarca was not only the “first tourist”, but also one of the first literati in European history whose work led to media tourism. Learning more about similar forerunners of media tourism in other cultural traditions outside the West would contribute to deepening our understanding of the historical evolution of the nexus between media and tourism. But at present this terrain is – at least within the confines of our research field – less well documented and thus largely a *terra incognita*.

In the context of European history, media tourism gained momentum in the nineteenth century. This had partly to do with the emergence of a widely supported reading culture. Reading novels became an increasingly popular form of leisure among broad layers of the population, a trend that was to some degree facilitated by the industrialization of the printing process. These novels stimulated a desire to see the locations described, and literary authors like William Scott played a key role in the creation of an emerging tourism culture (Watson 2006). In these early decades of the fledgling tourism industry, even before the rise of mass media such as film and television, tourism and fiction were already inextricably intertwined (Beeton 2015). In this sense, from its inception, media tourism was more than just a specialized ‘niche’ within the emerging tourism sector. It was – and still is – close to the core of what drives the whole tourism phenomenon: the imagination of meaningful locations and the resulting desire to be there yourself (cf. Chen, Hall & Prayag 2021: 33–49; Lovell 2019:3). As Graburn, Gravari-Barbas and Staszak (2019: 1) state, it is not possible to understand tourism “without understanding how tourism simultaneously both results from *and* produces fictions”. According to Alexander (2017), fiction and tourism are both based on a fundamental desire for ritual transformation. In media tourism, this desire returns in a highly concentrated form; transformation is offered on a textual and material-spatial level at the same time.

Despite this rich past, it seems justified to say that media tourism has gained considerable popularity in the past decades. Media tourism is no longer a small-scale

phenomenon limited to a few hundred fans per location but is widely recognized as one of the fastest growing niches within the tourism sector. Numerical substantiation of this statement is difficult to make at a global level since such large-scale research is difficult to carry out and the boundary between media tourism and other forms of tourism is not always easy to draw. But studies at a national level do give a good indication. For example, research among tourists in the UK shows that approximately 10% of tourists have been inspired by films or TV series for their holiday destination (Connell 2012). A study by VisitBritain – the UK’s tourism authority – found that film tourists now make up a quarter of all tourists from overseas. Likewise, Turkish soap operas are identified as one of the main causes for the steep rise of Latin American tourists in Turkey in recent years³, while the Bollywood movie *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2010) – shot in collaboration with the Spanish ministry of tourism – is said to have singly caused a 32% hike of Indian tourists travelling to Spain in the year of the film’s release.⁴ At a local level, there is also much evidence for the considerable impact of film and television recordings on the tourist appeal of the locations concerned, a phenomenon that is captured both in the media and in academia with terms such as the *Braveheart* effect and the *Downton* effect. Nowadays, hardly any large-size city can do without a film commission and an active media tourism policy. Media tourism has become a well-known instrument of nation branding and city marketing.

Consequently, media tourism has also become a significant factor in adjacent sectors, such as the heritage sector (Tzanelli 2013; Ziakas et.al. 2024). A striking example of this is the fate of many medieval castles in Europe. Traditionally, these castles were built to keep people *out*. In 2024, many castles have become largely dependent on attracting tourists *inside* their walls, with ticket sale being the main source of income for their extremely costly maintenance. Starring in popular films or TV series works wonders: Alnwick Castle owes its popularity as a setting for Hogwarts from Harry Potter, while Highclere Castle managed to avoid bankruptcy by providing a location for the filming of *Downton Abbey* – the so-called *Downton* effect (Liu & Pratt 2019). The association with an exciting, fantastic or spooky story is not only an additional tourist attraction, but in the perception of many tourists it is also an essential part of what makes these historical locations authentic in the first place (Inglis & Holmes 2003; Lovell 2019). A modern policy plan for the management of castles and similar heritage sites is therefore not possible today without a section on media policy (Schiavone, Reijnders & Brandellero 2022).

Of course, the COVID-19 crisis from 2020 to 2021 caused a temporary dip in the rise of media tourism. While many sectors were hit by the pandemic, for the tourism industry the COVID years were simply disastrous. Tourism was restricted in almost all countries worldwide. Several countries completely closed their borders to foreign tourists, or required a quarantine period of one or more weeks, a measure that kept even the most travel-hungry globetrotters at home. At the same time, the film and television sector also suffered from the harsh measures that were taken to contain the virus. Outdoor shots were often not possible, causing productions to be delayed for months. Studio recordings were not always possible either, simply

because some scenes did not relate well to the 1.5-metre rule that applied in many countries. Recordings were moved or scripts were modified.

The combination of a paralysed tourism industry and a hindered media industry brought media tourism to a temporary halt. But the first signs – as in *The White Lotus* example mentioned earlier – point to a full resurgence in media tourism. This must of course also be seen against the backdrop of a more general revival of the tourism industry – a phenomenon also referred to as ‘revenge tourism’, with the total number of international tourist arrivals in 2024 expected to reach unparalleled heights. Notwithstanding the opinions of those who saw the COVID-19 crisis as a great opportunity to fundamentally change the tourism industry and, above all, to make it more sustainable, the ‘old’ tourism seems to be making a bold return. It is to be hoped that national governments and international associations such as the European Union and the World Tourism Organization will not completely ignore this opportunity to reflect on and innovate the highly polluting tourism sector (and within it media tourism).⁵

New developments

The resurgence of media tourism also raises the question of the extent to which contemporary forms of media tourism are the same as they were before the COVID-19 crisis, or further back in time, for example, their literary predecessors from the nineteenth century. Research into the motives, behaviour, and effects of media tourists is still too early to make a proper historical comparison. At first glance, media tourism seems to be a timeless phenomenon, but that does not mean that its appearance has always remained the same. For example, media tourism is currently undergoing a number of interesting developments, which seem to stem directly from technological developments and recent trends in contemporary (digital) media culture.

Firstly, it is no longer just books, films, and TV series that attract media tourists but also increasingly new cultural products such as video games. The medium of video games has played an increasing role in popular culture since the 1990s; today the gaming industry is even bigger economically than the movie industry. Games are improving graphically and provide players with an advanced experience. The latest generation of games is praised for the level of ‘immersion’ and ‘presence’ they offer. Games like *Grand Theft Auto* create large-scale, fictional worlds in which players can move freely and shape the story themselves. Although many videogames still largely rely on imaginary game spaces that lack a real-life counterpart (Lamerichs 2019), more and more these stories are situated within recognizable geographical settings (Dubois et al. 2021). For example, the very popular game *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II* is partly set in Amsterdam and this game offers the player a hyper-realistic experience of several streets in the Amsterdam city centre. A game like *Assassins Creed: Revolution* is set in eighteenth-century Paris, with fabulous historical and architectural precision. In that sense, it was only a matter of time before examples of media tourism based on games appeared, in

which players compare images of their beloved games with the ‘real’ streets of Paris and Amsterdam.

Video games do not yet generate the same numbers of tourists as films and TV series, but research has shown that they might affect destination image and marketing (Dubois et al. 2021) and that, in the absence of official video game tours, fans have initiated excursions of their own based on their favourite games (Lamerichs 2019). While this medium has long been put away as a trivial pastime for teenagers – as a form of culture not worthy of celebrating outside the living room – gaming is slowly but surely rising in cultural status and asserting its grip on other dimensions of popular culture including tourism.

Secondly, digital media make it more easier to be a virtual media tourist. We are not referring so much to forms of ‘armchair travel’ (after all, that was already possible with the so-called old media), but to the online exploration of digital geographical representations with the aim of tracing “places of imagination” (Reijnders 2011). A good example of this is the Google Maps and Google Street View apps, which offer potential media tourists ideal opportunities to track the precise locations of movies or TV series and then share the corresponding global positioning system (GPS) locations online with other fans (Chow & Reijnders 2024). And when Google Street View is not sufficient, because it is limited to locations around motorways, online flight simulators can be used. For example, photographer, guide, and media tourist Ian Brodie describes how he used the Microsoft Flight Simulator to find out the shooting locations of the opening scene from *Paris, Texas* in a Texan desert (Brodie 2023: 23–24). It has been known for some time that many media tourists show a certain obsession with determining and pinning down the exact shooting locations of films and series, but this form of cartographic fetishism has reached new heights thanks to online tools. Of course, these aids are not only used in the living room, in preparation for a future holiday or otherwise, but also during the journey itself; smart mobiles and other portable media have fundamentally changed the travel experience of media tourists (as well as all other types of tourists) and made it more ‘mediatized’ (Champion et al. 2023).

Finally, media tourism is increasingly a ‘transmedia’ phenomenon, which is not linked to one medium but to a complex of media expressions (cf. Jansson, 2020). According to Henry Jenkins (2006), popular culture of the twenty-first century is characterized by a convergence culture: media no longer work alongside each other, but with each other, and old and new media have become increasingly intertwined, both in terms of content and organization. A characteristic part of this is the phenomenon of ‘transmedia storytelling’: popular stories unfolding in different media channels. Take, for example, Harry Potter. Originally published as a book series, the world of Potter was soon rolled out in films, but there are now also Harry Potter board games, Harry Potter video games, Harry Potter slot machines, Harry Potter theatrical performances, Harry Potter musicals, and Harry Potter theme parks in Los Angeles, Orlando, and Osaka. While the same storylines and characters return in these different channels, they in turn also make a unique contribution to the entire Harry Potter universe. In addition to these commercial expressions, it is important also to mention the non-commercial, fan-driven contributions, such as

Harry Potter fan fiction in online fan forums. This ‘spreading’ of popular stories across different media has resulted in media tourism becoming a lot more versatile. Media tourists no longer have one book or film that drives them but pursue an entire universe. Sometimes the seed of that universe lies in a book, but sometimes also in animations or a video game.⁶

In line with the observation above, the term ‘media tourism’ is also deliberately chosen in this book, though sometimes in combination with closely aligned terms like film tourism, film-induced tourism, screen tourism or TV tourism. In our opinion, it is no longer tenable to reduce a complex phenomenon such as media tourism to a single medium. The visitor to the ‘Wizards World of Harry Potter’ in Osaka, Japan, is not a literary tourist, nor a film tourist, nor a television tourist, but a transtextual media tourist. In the year 2024, fictional worlds disseminate across different media, with the underlying technologies apparently setting no boundaries. With the same flexibility, the tourist goes in pursuit of them and contributes by sharing experiences on Instagram or via travel blogs. In theory, it could even be argued that place is nothing more than one of many ‘stepping stones’ within a transmedia convergence culture (Alexander, 2017; cf., Graburn et al. 2019: 10–12). But such a postmodern reading ignores the distinction between media representations and physical reality. This distinction can be challenged on a theoretical level, but on an ‘emic’ level – in the perception of the media tourist – the representation–reality dichotomy continues to play a key role. As Tom van Nuenen argues in his analysis of ‘hypermediated tourism’ (2021), digital media are ubiquitous, but today’s tourist is still driven by a ‘magical’ search for a direct, unmediated experience of authentic locations. Paradoxically, it is precisely new media technologies and platforms, such as Airbnb, that are seen as a means to achieving that ‘authentic’ experience (Nuenen 2021; cf. Lovell & Hitchmough 2020).

Understanding media tourism

The emergence of media tourism has – albeit with some delay – also had an impact on academia. The study of media tourism began in the 1990s with a few isolated studies, mostly focusing on the perceived effects of media tourism on the local community (Riley, Baker & Van Doren 1998; Riley & Van Doren 1992; Tooke & Baker 1996). But the research really took shape at the beginning of this century when Sue Beeton published the first version of her review *Film-Induced Tourism* (2005). Since then, Beeton has produced several publications over two decades, establishing media tourism as a serious subject of study (e.g. Beeton 2008, 2010, 2015, 2016). In the 2010s, research into media tourism gained momentum, when not only tourism researchers, but also geographers, literary scholars, historians, media scholars, and cultural scholars started to focus on this subject. Currently, it seems realistic to talk about a thriving, multidisciplinary field, with dozens of papers and several books on this subject being published every year.

What are the central research themes within this field? A literature study from 2012 identified, in seemingly random order, four central themes: “the film tourist” (particularly their characteristics and motivations), “the impacts of film tourism

activity”, “marketing, destination image and the business of film tourism”, and “the appropriation and commodification of place and culture” (Connell, 2012). Although these four themes reveal a fairly rich palette, they do make it clear how, in this first phase of the research field – in the 1990s and 2000s – the tone was set through the perspectives and topics from tourism studies, in particular issues of destination management and the perceived motivations and effects of tourism. With the broadening of the research field in the 2010s, new themes were also explored. In line with the perspective of the humanities, one of the most important themes in recent years has been the experience of the media tourist and how this experience should be situated within broader cultural, cultural-sociological, and historical contexts – with Roesch (2009) and Reijnders (2011) as two early forerunners.

Notwithstanding these important developments within the field, it must be recognized that our current knowledge in 2024 still has several important gaps. In this book, we identify two major shortcomings. Firstly, it is striking that the vast majority of existing studies are based on empirical research in the Global North. Almost all our knowledge and theories about media tourism are derived from examples from Western Europe, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia, with a few important exceptions focusing on countries such as South Korea, Japan, and Brazil (cf. Kim, Long & Robinson 2009; Kim 2012; Kim & Wang 2012; Dung & Reijnders 2013; Seaton et.al. 2017, Kim & Reijnders 2018, Mason & Rohe 2019; Nanjangud 2022, Póvoa 2023). To what extent can such a one-sided focus on the Global North, and in particular the Anglo-Saxon language area, be sustained? Can a research field that is limited to specific media cultures within the Global North ever come to meaningful and well-founded statements about media tourism as a cultural, social, and economic phenomenon? The Western-centric focus of this research field has not only limited our knowledge on the particular topic of media tourism but has also refrained us from having a wider impact on important and topical debates outside the confines of our research field. We should try to de-Westernize and de-colonize media tourism research, and through that critically address wider issues of power in the domains of media and tourism that go beyond the horizon of a specific tourism niche.

An eye for diversity

It is important to note that the Anglo-Saxon media industry is not the only media industry and – depending on how you look at it – not even the largest. For example, an examination of the film industry seems to justify the proposition that Hollywood is no longer a leader but is now just one of many players in a global film market. Bollywood, the film industry based in Mumbai, now produces more feature films per year and serves a larger audience than Hollywood. Bollywood movies are watched not only in India (an immense audience, given that more than one in five people in the world live in India) but also among the Indian diaspora worldwide and countless fans abroad. The film and television industry in South Korea has also grown into a major player. The triumphant march of the ‘Korean wave’ started in Asia in the wake of the new streaming technologies. But K-drama has

now become popular worldwide, and series such as *The Squid Game* (2021–) and films such as *Parasite* (2019) and *Decision to Leave* (2022) are also widely viewed and appreciated by global audiences. In short, the film industry went through a globalization process in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, with the result that in 2024, there exists a complex network of different media cultures that partly operate side by side, but partly also operate jointly and in which popular productions regularly transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries. There is not one media world, but a hybrid multiplicity of several ‘worlds of the imagination’, of which each has its own centre and influences the others.

At the same time, the tourism industry has also undergone a process of globalization. Until recently, international tourist flows largely consisted of tourists from the Global North. In the annual lists of ‘international tourist arrivals’, subdivided by nationality, Americans were always at the top, followed by Germans and British. However, a change has been visible since the 2010s. The proportion of Asian tourists has grown significantly. China’s economic advance in particular has given tourism in and outside Asia a huge boost. More Chinese than Americans now cross borders as tourists every year.⁷ The proportion of Indian tourists has also grown strongly. The development of prosperity in India since the 1990s has created a large middle class, who is claiming its place in the world economy. International tourism is a form of spending and displaying this new wealth. Bollywood films play an important role in this: they not only literally show the way to interesting countries and cultures outside the Indian subcontinent but also promote the role of cosmopolitan tourists among their Indian audiences (Nanjangud 2022). Notwithstanding this trend of globalization, many audiences worldwide still lack the financial means to visit film spots – reminding us about the relations of power and the privilege inherent in tourism.

When these two developments are combined – the globalization of the media industry and the rise of international tourism in the Global South – the time seems ripe for a fundamental step in media tourism research. It is necessary to let go of the Anglo-Saxon bias and to perform more research into forms of media tourism outside the Global North. At the same time, more research needs to be conducted into transcultural forms of media tourism, in which media tourists look beyond the boundaries of their own media culture. Media tourism research can mean more in these moments, when cultural boundaries are crossed, and new knowledge is tapped or nuances are ‘lost in translation’. Only then can media tourism research go beyond the analysis of its own niche and offer a unique perspective on broader patterns and developments in and between contemporary societies, including questions of power. We hope that with this book, *Worlds of Imagination*, we can contribute to this broadening of our field of research.

Towards a holistic, multi-actor perspective

In addition, this book aims to address another research gap. Although the field of research into media tourism is now more than two decades old, our existing knowledge is still relatively limited and highly fragmented. Most of the research is based

on individual case studies: high-profile, mediagenic examples of media tourism, such as *The Lord of the Rings* in New Zealand and *Harry Potter* in the United Kingdom. These are certainly ‘high potentials’, which have provided a wealth of data, but it is difficult to arrive at more general theories based on a handful of individual, exceptional case studies. There are still many steps to be taken in the field of theory development (Connell 2012: 1012–1013, 1025).

What also plays a role here is that most case studies focus on one specific facet of media tourism, such as the motivation of the tourist, the impact on residents or the role of the film production team. Such a focus is sometimes necessary to arrive at an in-depth analysis, but it also entails a risk. Media tourism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon in which various social actors play a significant role. This not only involves tourists and residents, but also, for example, local policymakers, film production teams, tourism boards, local companies, and managers from the heritage sector. They all play a unique role in the creation and development of media tourism. These roles are usually not equal; there are often skewed power relationships. For example, various examples of media tourism have been documented, in which production companies had a decisive say in the creation of media productions and the resulting tourism flows, often at the expense of the needs and wishes of a local community (e.g. Póvoa, 2023). Studies that focus explicitly on one actor run the risk that this socio-political context of media tourism is left out of the picture.

More in general, many examples of media tourism are based on external, stereotypical representations of local cultures and histories, produced by foreign media companies. For example, it is well documented how Dracula tourism in Romania is based on a stereotypical, orientalist representation of Romanian history, one that is decried *culturally* by many Romanians but still facilitated because of its *economic* revenues for local tourist entrepreneurs (Reijnders, 2011). Likewise, the American series *Narcos* has painted a rather negative image of Colombia as a corrupt state, ridden by drugs and crime. This stereotype is eagerly repeated and performed in the popular *Narcos* tours. Although popular among international tourists, these tours are generally seen as ‘unwanted tourism’ by the local community (Van Broeck, 2018).

In order to understand the complexity of the phenomenon of media tourism, a general, holistic perspective is needed, in which media tourism is examined in its full breadth and in which attention is also paid to forms of cooperation or conflict between the various parties involved. Such a holistic perspective may be difficult to achieve within the limited space of a research paper – the usual form of reporting within this research field – but we hope that with this book we can offer the scope to rise above the level of individual cases and achieve a more comprehensive picture of media tourism, among others by addressing critical issues of power and politics in media tourism.

With that goal in mind, the book *Worlds of Imagination* is divided into four parts, each of which focuses on a certain phase in the development of media tourism and its associated actors. The first part concerns the imagination of place in popular fiction. Film and later television are considered to be the storytellers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, joined more recently by the genre of video

games. At the same time, literature has remained a powerful source for imaginative practices ever since the nineteenth century. As mentioned above, recent years have also seen an increasing collaboration and convergence between these different media platforms, creating powerful transmedia franchises built around successful global ‘brands’ such as *Pokémon*, *Star Wars*, *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, or *Harry Potter*, whose worlds are rolled out in novels, movies, cartoons, and theme parks. All these stories, circulating in the media and beyond, together create a rich associative imagination of the world. Next to media producers, fans also contribute to the development of these imaginary worlds, for example by writing fanfiction or by creating geofiction maps and sharing them online (Wolf, 2017).

The five chapters from Part 1 offer important insight into the historical and contemporary dynamics involved in these processes of image-making. Setting the scene, Chapter 1 by Emiel Martens delves into the early interwoven history of film, tourism, and empire, exploring the location production of *A Daughter of the Gods* (1916), often considered the first Hollywood blockbuster with a budget over \$1 million, in British colonial Jamaica. By adopting a twofold comparative perspective, connecting different histories and countries, the chapter shows the potential of a transnational perspective within film (tourism) historiography. Alfio Leotta’s contribution (Chapter 2) shifts the focus to New Zealand, tracing the evolution of film tourism in the country, before, during, and after the impact of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy on New Zealand’s global popularity. Highlighting the relationships between New Zealand, film, and tourism, the chapter explores both the economic and cultural consequences of the country’s popular association with fantasy lands. Notably, both Martens and Leotta highlight the connections between film tourism and colonial culture, arguing that the ‘exotic’ landscapes of both Jamaica and New Zealand have come to represent ‘transposable Otherness’. Then, Chapter 3 by Krzysztof Stachowiak explores the imaginative geographies in Indian films set in Eastern Europe, shedding light on the simplistic and, again, exoticized portrayals of the region in these films. In addition, the chapter reveals how local film commissions and destination marketing organizations contribute to the shaping of these, often problematic, perceptions. In her chapter (Chapter 4), Rebecca Nedregotten Strand centres on Norway and proposes a potentially new form of media tourism through the utilization of radio archives to share cultural heritage while exploring landscapes. The chapter details the creation of Pastfinder, a prototype web application that uses historic audio from the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation to enrich a landscape with cultural history and imagine a place’s heritage in situ. Finally, Rodanthe Tzanelli’s chapter (Chapter 5) introduces a novel perspective by examining ‘environmental imaginaria’ in the current Age of Extinction, exploring how themed locations and natural environments are increasingly mediated on digital platforms. This chapter maps competing arguments regarding the role of these imaginaria in the context of global crises induced by climate change, presenting them as opportunities for activism, money-making enterprises, and sites for turning visitors into pilgrims, collectively forming a ‘critical zone’ that challenges traditional notions of travel, tourism, and agency in the Anthropocene.

The second part of the book focuses on the spatial appropriation of these imaginary worlds, often in a tourist context. This initially involves fans, who mark certain locations in the public sphere as ‘the’ location from a popular novel, film, book, or game (e.g., Milazzo & Santos 2022) but also increasingly commercial organizations that offer a TV or film tour, for example, through which fictional and historical stories are linked together at a location (Schiavone & Reijnders 2022; Lovell 2019: 5). The main focus is on the evolving concept of the media tourist and the ways authors are re-evaluating the influence of media on travel experiences and affects in different contexts.

To get things started, Christine Lundberg, Vassilios Ziakas, and Kristina N. Lindström’s chapter (Chapter 6) introduces the ‘everyday tourist’ as a new kind of traveller who goes beyond traditional tourism boundaries, incorporating everyday activities and fandoms. This approach allows for increased freedom, pluralism, and the reconstruction of social conditions through the blending of alternative travel modes and elements of popular culture. Matt Hills (Chapter 7), in his exploration of comic-cons within the framework of the experience economy, suggests a shift in perspective, viewing comic-cons not just as experiences orchestrated by professionals but as co-created by attending and blogging fans. This challenges the conventional categorization of fans and emphasizes a co-existential fandom where various elements (text, brand, place) are interconnected. Qian Jin’s (Chapter 8) examination of travel practices inspired by the Japanese transmedia work *Laid-Back Camp* further delves into how audiences in China navigate the boundaries between fiction and reality, representation and practice, and different geographical locations through media consumption. The study highlights the intricate intertextuality in content tourism and provides insights into transnational, transcultural, and transmedia practices in media-induced tourism. Lastly, Nanjangud and Reijnders’ chapter (Chapter 9) on Dutch Hindustanis as a Bollywood audience explores how Bollywood cinema profoundly influences the perceptions and travel decisions of diasporic communities, introducing the concept of a ‘cinematic itinerary’ to describe the film-induced tourism practices among this audience.

The third part of the book deals with the perspective of local residents, organizations, and action groups in relation to media tourism flows. Media tourism can be welcomed and contribute to a form of local pride, but we are increasingly seeing examples of media tourism that lead to resentment and protest, for example because of over-tourism or because people feel that local narratives about the genesis and identity of a place are being overwritten by new place narratives derived externally from popular culture (Castro, Kim & Assaker 2023). For example, in the small town of Bermeo (Euskadi, Spain), a filming location for the HBO series *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019), residents posted messages in public spaces such as “This is not Invernalía. You are now in Euskal Herria” in an attempt to manifest a regional identity.⁸

The contributors to Part 3 have used different methodologies to delve into these intricate power dialectics between popular culture and place. The chapter by Nancy Reagin (Chapter 10) examines fan tourism to homesites by taking the *Little House on the Prairie* series as a case study. In particular, Reagin reflects upon how the

homesite Laura Ingalls Wilder's, understood as a place of collective memory and national history, can be drawn into debates of public history. Alexandra Kolesnik and Alisa Maximova (Chapter 11) analyse place-making processes through memorialization of Western music (e.g., The Beatles) and heritagization of late Soviet rock music in the city of Ekaterinburg, Russia. Kolesnik and Maximova also reflect upon the local enactment of global phenomena in media heritage. Drawing on conversations with different local stakeholders, Timo Thelen (Chapter 12) explores how witch-themed tourism is locally contested and negotiated in Harz, Germany. Thelen also argues how pop-cultural shapes local witch heritage to make the latter fit into visitor's expectations. Finally, the account by Deborah Castro (Chapter 13) investigates the demographic profile of local film tourism supporters in Seville, Spain. She also explores local residents' suggestions for (future) film tourism initiatives, such as the creation of film tourism related events also targeted at the local community.

The fourth and final part of this book focuses on the (potential) development of media tourism. This primarily relates to local, regional, and national governments and the committees set up by them, such as VisitMéxico, Incredible India, or Visit Sweden. Their policies partly affect the kind of imaginative practices as discussed in Part 1. Next to these governmental organizations, there are multiple other stakeholders involved, including, for example, local entrepreneurs who are setting up and trying to promote their own (media) tourism businesses.

The chapters in this section reflect this holistic perspective. Evoking discussions from Part 3, Débora Póvoa's chapter (Chapter 14) traces a chronology of film tourism development in vulnerable locations in Brazil from the perspective of different local stakeholders. By proposing an understanding of film tourism as a phenomenon of production, she identifies the various contextual factors that determine a project's success or failure and argues for a developmental approach that is respectful of local communities' wishes and needs. Xin Cui, Les Roberts, and Wallis Motta (Chapter 15), on the other hand, introduce the case of the Hengdian World Studios in China to explore the relationship between film-related tourism sites and governmental agendas regarding the promotion of national culture. Through participant observation and interviews with tourists, the authors discuss the potential of film-related tourism to showcase local traditions and cultural heritage, and critically address related issues of loss of authenticity and cultural commodification. Kyungjae Jang and Sean Kim (Chapter 16) delve deeper into policy analysis by systematically comparing the 'Cool Japan' and 'Korean wave' strategies. Through the examination of these two national policies, the authors raise critical questions as to the effectiveness of government intervention in cultural policy and the importance of setting clear scopes and scales in national campaigns regarding popular culture and tourism. Finally, Emiel Martens and Edmund Onwuliri (Chapter 17) take a discursive approach to the study of Nollywood tourism development in Nigeria. Using newspaper articles and other publications as their source material, the authors analyse how the connections between Nollywood and tourism are discussed in the public domain and evaluate the extent to which certain expectations surrounding the development of these creative industries are met in the Nigerian context.

Reality cannot be captured in clear-cut models and the phases identified in the four separate parts of this book will sometimes take place in a completely different order. The development of media tourism is infamously capricious and depends to a large degree on the local situation (Póvoa 2023). Nevertheless, we believe that the phases identified and analysed in this book offer an appropriate way to look at the development and dynamics of media tourism as a socio-cultural phenomenon in a more holistic, coherent way. Many local examples will deviate from this model, but it is precisely in the way in which they differ from the standard that the unique characteristics are revealed and a basis for comparison is created. The trick is to do justice to the uniqueness of each individual example of media tourism, delineated in time and place, but at the same time to observe the way in which these examples relate to the bigger picture. In the end, the aim of our volume is not about opening all the thousand doors, one by one, but about imagining the larger world beyond.

Notes

- 1 S.E. Gracia, “Is It Time for a ‘White Lotus’ Vacation?” *New York Times*, 25 December 2022. Downloaded on 14 February 2023 from: www.nytimes.com/2022/12/25/style/white-lotus-vacation.html
- 2 K. Nath, “Quiiky Tours launches ‘White Lotus’ guided tour in Sicily”. Downloaded on 17 March 2023 from: www.traveldailymedia.com/quiiky-tours-launches-white-lotus-guided-tour-in-sicily/.
- 3 “Popularity of Turkish soap operas leads Latin American tourists to flock to Turkey”, downloaded on 22 March 2023 from: www.hurriyetdailynews.com/popularity-of-turkish-soap-operas-leads-latin-american-tourists-to-flock-to-turkey-association-138141
- 4 P. Harjani, “India’s tourists flock to Spain”. Downloaded on 22 March 2023 from: www.cnngo.com/mumbai/life/indian-movie-boosts-spanish-tourism-694426
- 5 For a recent WTO initiative in this direction, see: www.unwto.org/news/unwto-and-netflix-partner-to-rethink-screen-tourism. See Tzanelli (2019) for a more in-depth, critical perspective on the relation between ‘cinematic tourism’, capitalism and environmental activism.
- 6 Examples of this are the HBO series *Last of Us* (2023–) and the film *Uncharted* (2022), which both originated from video games, and the animation *SpongeBob Square Pants*, which spun off comic books, films, theme park rides, video games, and even a Broadway musical.
- 7 For an overview of international tourist arrivals, see the UNWTO tourism data dashboard, downloaded on 17 March 2023 from: www.unwto.org/tourism-data/un-tourism-tourism-dashboard.
- 8 Gara (2017). “This is not Invernalía, you are now in Euskal Herria”. *Gara*, 29 November 2017. Downloaded on 1 March 2023 from: www.naiz.eus/eu/hemeroteca/gara/editions/2017-08-29/hemeroteca_articles/this-is-not-invernalía-you-are-now-in-euskal-herria

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