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THE INFLUENCE OF HERITAGE SITES AS FILMING LOCATIONS ON TOURISTS' DECISIONS TO VISIT SITES AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THEM. CASE STUDY: *GAME OF THRONES*

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This paper provides an overview of the authors' master thesis and addresses the effects of World Heritage Sites and heritage sites which are used as filming locations on visitor perceptions of a site and their decision to visit a site. Film-induced tourism is becoming increasingly popular and it is important to assess its impacts on World Heritage Sites and heritage sites used as locations. The integration of the different aspects of heritage and filming at a site including elements and the communication between all the different parties involved are also addressed. The case study used is the popular television series *Game of Thrones* focusing on various locations in Northern Ireland and Dubrovnik, Croatia. The paper aims to provide a starting platform for future research on heritage sites used as filming locations and the possible impacts that this may have.

Keywords: *Game of Thrones*, film-induced tourism, film locations, set-jetting, visitor perceptions, visitor travel decisions, World Heritage Sites.

Introduction

This paper presents the main ideas of the work undertaken for the authors' master thesis and its purpose is to address how the use of World Heritage Sites (WHS) and other heritage sites as filming locations can impact on a visitors' perception of a site and on their decision to visit it. Films are just one of many creative

industries and the use of WHS and heritage sites as locations adds an extra dimension to the site. This paper shall largely focus on the issues and recommendations that came about after conducting field research and the subsequent qualitative and quantitative analysis as well as looking to the future at what can be done in this area to address the impact of film-induced tourism on heritage sites.

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Film-induced tourism

Film-induced tourism is defined by Sue Beeton (2005: 11) as “visitation to sites where movies and television programmes and series have been filmed as well as tours to production studios, including film related theme parks”. It is defined by Anne Buchmann (2010: 233) as the “visitation of a site or a location, that is or has been used for or is associated with filming”.

During recent times film and television have been a prominent factor in influencing people’s decisions to travel to the places that are used as locations (Beeton 2006: 182) in ways that traditional advertising is unable to do. However, these locations rarely offer an authentic view when seen in reality (Bolan *et al.* 2011: 104–105). Sangkyun Kim (2012: 388) states that “when one visits an actual place, he or she might therefore feel that the place seems strangely familiar even though he or she has never previously visited” which in turn could greatly affect both the perception and original significance of a WHS or heritage sites.

As Diane Cynthia and Beeton write, “Film-induced tourism is a powerful tourism marketing and promotional tool [...]” (2009: 118) and can provide both long and short term promotion for a destination (Rewtrakunphaiboon 2009). Many national tourist organisations (NTOs) link themselves to successful films, for example New Zealand has greatly benefited from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Beeton 2006: 183).

Literature review

There is a growing amount of literature on film-induced tourism; however, the majority repeats previous work and few studies go in depth (Beeton 2008: 40) and the many different approaches generate a broad range of theories (Storey 2003: 72). Research includes Beeton (2004, 2005, 2006), Niki Macionis (2004), Stefan Zimmermann and Tony Reeves (2009), Peter Bolan and Noelle O’Connor (2008), Cynthia

and Beeton (2009), Simon Hudson, Youcheng Wang and Sergio Moreno Gil (2011), Claudia-Elena Țuclea and Puiu Nistoreanu (2011), Nilanjan Dey, Suvojit Acharjee and Sayan Chakraborty (2015) amongst others. Many studies conducted on film tourism suggest that “[...] the audiences personal engagement with TV programme and film create personalised memory and its associated symbolic meanings, and shape audiences feeling, emotions and attitudes toward places” (Kim 2012: 388).

Most research focuses “[...] on the tourism-inducing effects of film productions, very little has been written about the film location tourists themselves (Țuclea, Nistoreanu 2011: 25). Other studies on marketing and branding include Hudson and J. R. Brent Ritchie (2006), Bolan and O’Connor (2008). Research into the increase in visitor numbers due to their appearance in films includes Nichola Tooke (1996), Graham Busby and Julia Klug (2001), W. Glen Croy and Reid D. Walker (2016), Hyounggon Kim and Sarah L. Richardson (2003) and Beeton (2005).

Studies on the influence of locations used as filming sites on tourists travel decisions include Hui Fu, Ben Haobin Ye and Junzhi Xiang (2016), whilst studies regarding the authenticity of the sites with regard to visitor expectations include Bolan, Stephen Boy and Jim Bell (2011).

Work on *Game of Thrones* tourism includes Rodanthi Tzanelli (2016), Jorden Hellemans (2013/2014) and Abby Waysdorf (Reijnders *et al.* 2015). Studies on the links between sensation seeking and tourism (which shall be addressed in the methodology), including Elspeth Frew and Robin N. Shaw (1999), Wiebke Zumnick (2007); Andrew Lepp and Heather Gibson (2008); Stephen W. Litvin (2008) and Michael Galindo (2014).

Despite much research, there has been very little on its relation to heritage sites with David Martin-Jones (2006) being one of the only examples. There have been limited empirical studies in this field which have attempted to address the influences of film on viewers’ perceptions and behaviour in relation to filming

locations (Hudson *et al.* 2011: 178). One example is Bongkosh Ngamsom Rittichainuwat and Saphaporn Rattanaphinanchai (2015: 137) who utilised a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative research in order to look into the motivations of tourists who visit filming locations. Further empirical studies are needed in this area in order to understand the experiences of the film tourist (Kim 2012: 389).

Research questions

Main research question

How has the use of WHS and heritage sites as locations in films and television series influenced visitor decisions for travelling to the sites and their perceptions of them once they are there?

Subsidiary research questions

1. How will this affect the sites significance (e.g. its outstanding universal value (OUV)/authenticity/integrity and its physical state)?
2. How do these sites promote both film and heritage tourism?
3. How good is the level of communication between each of the involved parties?



Fig. 1. The Old City and Island of Lokrum (source: author's photography)

4. How well is each element of the site integrated with each other?
5. How does the tourist's age affect the influence of the use of a place as a filming location on their reason for visiting and their perception of it?

Case study: *Game of Thrones*

Game of Thrones was chosen due to its worldwide popularity and as it features in many online articles suggesting *Game of Thrones* holidays and tours (see losapos.com 2016). The two specific case studies are a variety of locations near the Giant's Causeway and Belfast, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom and the old city of Dubrovnik, Croatia and encompass a mix of cultural and natural heritage and well-known WHS. Robbie Boake, *Game of Thrones* locations manager is in charge of finding the locations needed to create the right setting for the show, the logistics getting all the relevant permissions and ensuring safety. The locations are always left in as good a condition as possible and are often reused *i.e.* Shane's Castle, Northern Ireland was the forge of the Red Keep, a cell on Dragonstone and Ned Starks' cell amongst others (Taylor 2014: 10). This is also the case in Dubrovnik with many locations being recycled or altered during filming to ensure maximum use, for example flipping the background to make it less recognisable such as the artificial inflation of Dubrovnik (see Fig. 1) by computer-generated imagery into the larger city of King's Landing (Matana, personal communication, 4 July 2016).

Case study 1: various locations, Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has experienced many years of conflict, which, combined with a variety of acts of terrorism has caused problems relating to its image. However, the cessation of violence

in recent years has led to stability and the country is now used as the location for many films and television series which has been used as an effective marketing strategy to attract more tourists (Bolan, O'Connor 2008: 20). It is the main base for *Game of Thrones* with the majority of interior shots being filmed in the Titanic Studios in the Harland and Wolff Docks, Belfast which stand in the shadow of two giant cranes Samson and Goliath in the shipyard and the Titanic Museum.

Although this is not part of a WHS it forms an important part of Belfast's industrial heritage which has been brought to the attention of a new audience through its use in *Game of Thrones* (see thelocationguide.com 2013; losapos.com 2016).

Game of Thrones location manager Boake stated that:

"There's a lot of fantastic stuff in Northern Ireland and it's mostly within an hour and 15 minutes from Belfast which makes it geographically ideal. It's very rich, natural and wild, with lots of different kinds of geography and vast differences in vegetation, from the Dothraki Sea to moorlands to limestone cliffs" (wikia.com 2016).

Northern Ireland was used for the Northern and forested areas of the world of *Game of Thrones* (losapos.com 2016) and the country's average 300 days of rain or cloud per year benefitted the filming of the not so sunny areas shown in the series (metro.us 2014). A £20,000 *Game of Thrones* tourism campaign has created an £8.6 million boost to Northern Ireland's economy (Cable 2014) alongside iconic places such as the Giant's Causeway and the Titanic Museum and has successfully drawn in tourists. Brian Ambrose, chairman of Tourism Ireland, stated that despite there being some nervousness about visiting Northern Ireland, people were generally positive and spread their good experiences through word-of-mouth (Cable 2014).

Case study 2: Dubrovnik, Croatia

Croatia and indeed Dubrovnik has had a complex and troubled history (Početna Stranica Hrvatske 1994–2016) and Dubrovnik is one of Croatia's seven WHS and boasts some fantastic city walls and a large number of Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque palaces, churches and monasteries (like Croatia). Its World Heritage Status was granted in 1979 under criteria *i*, *iii* and *iv* with a boundary extension being added in 1994. It has suffered major damage from an earthquake in 1667, and recent armed conflict. In the 1990s it became the focus of one of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) major restoration projects (unesco.org 1992–2016). A trip to Dubrovnik can be "a beautiful *déjà vu*" for fans due to the good integration of the city into the filming of the series (kingslandingdubrovnik.com 2016). Production designer Deborah Riley highlighted Dubrovnik's importance and stated that "[...] with Dubrovnik there is a very particular look that is resonant of King's Landing [...]" (Taylor 2014: 127) due to both being walled coastal cities, allowing the crew to film both exterior and interior shots (metro.us 2014) and due to its spectacular nature there was very little need for any special effects or scenery in order for it to portray King's Landing but inevitably some was used in the filming (Matana, personal communication, 4 July 2016).

Filming took place at the locations as St. Dominika Street, the Minčeta Tower, the Pile Gate (kingslandingdubrovnik.com 2016) and Lovrijenac amongst others (brandsandfilms.com 2016). Filming also took place at Lokrum Island used to represent the city of Qarth on the continent of Essos (radiotimes.com 2017a) whilst Trsteno Arboretum, about 20 minutes from Dubrovnik (radiotimes.com 2017b) and Hotel Belvedere on the outskirts of Dubrovnik (Machan 2015).

Game of Thrones location tours

Visiting *Game of Thrones* locations is promoted online as a way for fans to “stay connected” to the show in between seasons (metro. us 2014). There are many different tours on offer at the various locations as well as numerous online articles telling the reader about the different places used in the series. Two years ago Paul Oswell published a book titled *Game of Thrones: An Unofficial Travel Guide* (2015) listing the locations used in the series providing information about getting to the sites, accommodation and the filming which took place there. Figures 2 and 3 provide a sense of the number of the tours available at both locations.

Research design

A mixed method approach was used in this thesis based on Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai (2015) and encompasses elements of both quantitative and qualitative research in order to gain as much information as possible. The quantitative research created “statistically valid generalisations” from the population (British Library 2016: 8–10) from a number of visitor questionnaires distributed at each location (two for Northern Ireland and one improved questionnaire for Dubrovnik). The Dubrovnik questionnaire included several Sensation Seeking questions to measure if

people (Seery, Morris Paris 2015; Lepp, Gibson 2008: 741; Arnett 1994: 290) to see if this related to peoples decisions to travel. Data was also collected from a general online survey created through Survey Monkey.

The qualitative research added a different, more personal perspective to the research (Qualitative Research Consultants Association 2016) and consisted of interviews with tourist boards, guides and site managers at both destinations, both online and in person as well as personal observation.

Results

Due to a lack of quantitative results, this is not a fully reliable statistical study, and the paper focuses on the issues and recommendations that came about as a result of the research and provides a basis for future research and ideas and questions that can be developed and adapted for future use.

Problems encountered during the research

In Northern Ireland two main problems occurred. The first was wrong information regarding the Giant's Causeway. Despite being listed on IMDb (imdb.com 1990–2016), the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast and Glens were not actually used as a location and

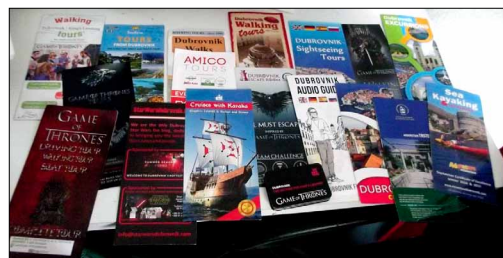


Fig. 2. Northern Ireland *Game of Thrones* tours (source: author's photography)



Fig. 3. Dubrovnik *Game of Thrones* tours (source: author's photography)

were used in conjunction with nearby several locations as a single case study. The second problem was communication, especially with the tourist board both prior to and during the research trip which in turn led to a major lack of results on the trip with only 20 respondents to the questionnaires. This trip led to improvements of the questionnaire and the addition of the sensation seeking survey, but some valid points were raised which shall be addressed. In Dubrovnik the only problem encountered was gaining responses to the questionnaire, which occurred for a variety of reasons including a lack of time, lack of interest and lack of English. The trip gained only 50 out of the 100 hoped for responses, an improvement on the trip to Northern Ireland, but still not enough to do extensive statistical analysis.

Quantitative results

Visitor numbers

In Northern Ireland the overall visitor numbers to Northern Ireland have increased by some 38% between 2007 and 2014 (Walker 2016; Tourism Northernireland 2016). At the Giant's Causeway there has been a definite increase in official numbers over the last three years, however, this is not the total number due to many unofficial visitors including *Game of Thrones* tours (Walker 2016). Between 2007–2015 there was roughly a 100% increase in the total of visitors to Dubrovnik due to the growth in international arrivals with a general yearly increase in tourists of around 5–6%, sometimes even up to 12% (Milesovic, personal communication, 5 July 2016). There is also a variety of *Game of Thrones* tours and bookings. However it is difficult to measure whether or not tourists were there solely to visit *Game of Thrones* locations and many people were interested in Dubrovnik's heritage (Milesovic, personal communication, 5 July 2016).

General online survey

The survey had 135 respondents and the main outcome was that the majority of the respondents would not be influenced by the use of a site as a filming location. Other outcomes were that the majority of respondents had heard of UNESCO, the World Heritage List (WHL) and *Game of Thrones*. However less than 50% knew about the use of WHS as locations in the series and even less knew about *Game of Thrones* tours. When providing comments, two issues that were raised was the need to consider and respect any religious aspects of a site and the fact that a site being used as a filming location would put people off from visiting (surveymonkey.com 1999–2016).

Northern Ireland

An anomaly arose in the Northern Ireland results in that some respondents were not aware of UNESCO and the WHL, but knew that WHS had been used as filming locations. *Game of Thrones* was an influence, however, heritage was also important and there was little change in visitors' perception of a site due to *Game of Thrones*. As already stated there were a very small number of results and is not a true representation, but forms a basis for future research. The surveys used were combined and developed for the trip to Dubrovnik including the addition of a sensation seeking survey.

Dubrovnik

The results showed significant correlations between a visitors' knowledge of heritage and their desire to travel to sites and the decision to visit the site as was awareness of *Game of Thrones*. A difference in the outlook of various age groups was also expressed as was a relationship between sensation seeking and the knowledge

of *Game of Thrones* versus the awareness of heritage.

Qualitative results

Northern Ireland

The trip to Northern Ireland was frustrating due to communication issues and problems encountered in obtaining responses leading to the results being substantially less than originally planned for. Email conversations took place with Alastair Walker, (site manager of the Giant's Causeway), Patrick O'Kane (Northern Ireland Statistics) and Dawn Sellar (Northern Ireland Tourism) in email conversations regarding visitor numbers for Northern Ireland and the Giant's Causeway. *Game of Thrones* tour guide Sharleen Crossin (2016) highlighted the fact that the Magheramorne quarry which represents Castle Black on the Wall in the North is privately owned and is the only site which is not open to the public and was purely a drive-by location on the tour.

The Northern Ireland tourist board has a dedicated page on its website giving an overview of *Game of Thrones* in Northern Ireland including information regarding its success and how it has helped to showcase Northern Ireland as a tourist destination. A checklist is provided for companies wanting to offer *Game of Thrones* tours to the locations (Tourism Northernireland 2016).

Dubrovnik

The research trip to Dubrovnik was far more productive and greatly benefitted from meeting local tour guides, brother and sister Tomislav Matan and Tonka Matana. The site was already popular prior to the series and is seen by many as the touristic capital of Croatia. *Game of Thrones* had boosted an interest in Dubrovnik, especially amongst younger travellers, but once they arrived, they tended to appreciate

the historic attractions of the city just as much as the *Game of Thrones* element, the *Game of Thrones* tour is his most popular, however, many tourists "[...] already wanted to visit Dubrovnik and the popularity of the show has given them an extrareason to come here" giving "[...] an interesting face lifting to the already popular destination [...]" and making it "[...] stand out among the rest of similar holiday options in the Mediterranean" (Matana, personal communication, 4 July 2016). Matana is a licensed tour guide and was an extra in the show and emphasised how *Game of Thrones* has brought more tourists into the city, but that many people who go on her tours are also interested in the heritage of Dubrovnik (personal communication, 4 July 2016).

Regarding the shows economics seasons 2 and 3 were largely free due to the majority of the city aside from the city walls being free to film in (this is now not the case) as well as tax breaks. Fortress Lovrejinak is now used as a theatre and concert venue and HBO were able to use the electrics of the theatre which further helped to reduce their costs (Matana, personal communication, 4 July 2016).

Personal observations

In both locations there was lots of *Game of Thrones* information, tours, merchandise and advertising. There was also a large presence of heritage information and tours including the Titanic Museum, the Giant's Causeway and the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge and the centenary of the Easter Rising in Northern Ireland. In Dubrovnik there were many tours out of the city including to the nearby islands and to the town of Cavtat and out of country tours to the WHS of Kotur in Montenegro.

Issues and recommendations

I. The need to raise awareness of all involved parties of each element and their

relation to each other as well as the effects on the site.

Recommendation 1 is to establish the main reasons for visits to the site through creating a standardised questionnaire whilst.

Recommendation 2 is to raise awareness through social media, education programmes, leaflets and websites, or information points at the site.

Recommendation 3 is to create a dedicated section of a management plan or system whilst.

Recommendation 4 is to promote the different elements of a heritage site used as a filming location through websites and social media.

Recommendation 5 is to establish a set of guidelines regarding management and promotion etc. to be referred to by all parties.

II. Lack of official communication.

Recommendation 1 is to create a position which will be a point of liaison between all parties.

Recommendation 2 is to form a group of representatives from all parties chaired by liaison officer.

Recommendation 3 refers again to the creation of a set of guidelines for all parties to use.

III. Lack of knowledge of unofficial visits to the Giant's Causeway.

Recommendation 1 for this issue is to ensure more monitoring and research with parking officials noting numbers coming to the site on tours.

IV. Funding.

Issue a: The possibility of problems in getting funding for the implementation of the recommendations.

Recommendation 1 is to ensure all available funding options are explored.

Recommendation 2 is to establish a mechanism to put extrarevenue into conserving, protecting and promoting the sites.

Issue b: The need for an effective process of negotiating payment structure for filming companies. The recommendation is to establish a worldwide database of fees charged to companies for the use of the sites.

V. Data collection. Lack of response to the questionnaires and restricted time to gain responses.

Recommendation 1 is the standardisation of the questionnaire.

Recommendation 2 is the translation of the questionnaire into different languages.

Recommendation 3 is to allocate more time to research trips and find alternative ways to get responses. This will allow for more information regarding tourists reasons for visiting a site used as a filming location.

Answers to research questions

Main research question

“How has the use of WHS and heritage sites as locations in films and television series influenced visitor decisions for travelling to the sites and their perceptions of them once they are there?” Most tourists decide to go to a site as a result of its heritage status however; there is a growing trend for tourists to visit places that are used as locations. This appears to be especially true for younger visitors, however, once there they seem to embrace the sites heritage which seems to be introduced through *Game of Thrones* tours amongst other things.

Subsidiary research questions

“How will this affect the sites significance (e.g. its OUV/authenticity/integrity and its physical state)?” Most people seemed to appreciate both the heritage and filming elements of a site, but it is important to remember that the potential increase of visitors to a site after its use as a location can alter its significance. However, it is currently difficult to measure the potential impact on the various elements of significance at a site as there is no concrete evidence to indicate the reasons behind peoples' visits, for example not knowing the full visitor numbers to

sites meaning it is important to undertake more research to understand this.

"How do these sites promote both film and heritage tourism?" There are numerous online articles promoting *Game of Thrones* holidays as well as the tourist board website, site websites, social media, tourist information offices and tour guides as well as information boards around the site. This is generally quite good but will also be improved through further research.

"How good is the level of communication between each of the involved parties?" The research highlighted a need for better communication between all parties involved in the different elements of a site used as a filming location. This will involve regular meetings and other communication with each other as well as with a specific person who is in charge of communication. As mentioned previously there should also be a set of guidelines created in order for each party to refer to so that a site used as a location can be both effectively promoted and protected. This will create an element of standardisation for all heritage and WHS used as filming locations and will also aid all other elements including integration, communication, promotion and indeed tourists' decisions to visit a place.

"How well is each element of the site integrated with each other?" Better communication between all the different parties is vital as previously mentioned as are regular meetings and referral to the guidelines and a specific section of a site's management plan or system. It is also important to address in future research how natural and cultural sites may respond differently to the effects of filming allowing for better protection and adaptation to any effects from filming at a site as well as more effectively integrating each element of a site and will also benefit from future research.

"How does the tourist's age affect the influence of the use of a place as a filming location on their reason for visiting and their perception of it?" There is a general correlation between age and the reasons for visiting a site. Younger

people tend to be more influenced by films and television series whilst older people are more influenced by heritage. This could be an important element of future promotion of a site and will also need to be investigated.

Contribution to future research

This work is just the first step in addressing the larger scope of the impacts of filming at WHS and heritage sites, highlights, amongst other things how the age ranges of visitors to a site are changing and widening, in part due to them appearing in films and television series. It is also important to investigate how the use of a site as a filming location can encourage younger visitors to a site and to encourage them to become involved in the heritage of a and it can aid our ability to understand different visitor needs and what they want from the site and can be addressed by the use of a standardised questionnaire.

There is also a need for further research in order to more effectively promote both the heritage and filming elements of the site and to manage the site properly in order to protect its heritage. Improvements in communication will be largely aided by this and by the creation of a set of guidelines and also by the development and standardisation of the questionnaire. This will in turn aid in assessing the tangible and intangible impacts on the site including how its significance may change.

Conclusions

Game of Thrones does seem to have been a factor in tourists' decisions to visit the sites used as case studies, however, once there they seemed to have a greater appreciation of the heritage. There is a large need to improve communication between the different parties involved and a need to further raise awareness of these two elements of a site and their relation to each

other. The final questionnaire could be generalised, standardised and adapted for future use in order to greater understand this element of tourism that may be present at a heritage site. A lack of funding could halt the implementation of the recommendations and also needs to be addressed. Future research should encompass all of these elements as well as ensuring that the original tangible and intangible significance of a site is preserved whilst still effectively promoting the new element of a site.

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PAVELDO VIETОВIŲ KAIP FILMAVIMO VIETŲ ĮTAKA TURISTŲ SPRENDIMAMS JAS LANKYTI IR SUVOKTI. ATVEJO TYRIMAS: *SOSTŲ KARAI*

Emily BOWYER

Straipsnyje pateikiama autorės magistro diplominio darbo apžvalga ir nagrinėjama pasaulio paveldo vietovių ir paveldo vietovių kaip filmavimo vietų įtaka tam, kaip lankytojai suvokia paveldo vietovę, ir jų sprendimui joje apsilankyti. Filmų skatinamas turizmas tampa vis populiariesnis – svarbu įvertinti jo įtaką pasaulio paveldo vietovėms ir paveldo vietovėms kaip filmavimo vietoms. Be to, nagrinėjamas skirtingų paveldo aspektų integravimas, filmavimo paveldo vietovėje klausimai ir skirtingų šalių komunikacija. Pasitelkiamas populiarus televizijos serialo *Sostų karai* atvejo tyrimas, susitelkiant į skirtingas filmavimo vietas Šiaurės Airijoje ir Dubrovniko (Kroatija). Straipsnio tikslas – pateikti pradinį pagrindą, skirtą paveldo vietovėms, naudojamoms filmuoti, ir jų galimam poveikiui.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *Sostų karai*, filmų skatinamas turizmas, filmavimo vietos, keliaujančios pasaulinės žvaigždės, lankytojų suvokimas, lankytojų kelionių sprendimai, pasaulio paveldo vietovės.