

# Unravelling imaginative heritage. Understanding a city through its crime fiction<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on media tourism - people travelling to places associated with film, TV-series, games or other forms of popular culture. In order to investigate the roles and impacts of the multiple stakeholders that are involved in this booming phenomenon, the concept 'imaginative heritage' is introduced. In particular, we refer to the multitude of popular, fictional narratives that have been projected upon or appropriated by specific sites throughout time and that together make up an important part of local place identity. As is argued here, imaginative heritage results from an active involvement of not only locals, fans and tourists, but also the media industries, the tourism industries and the local governments. By applying this concept to cases of crime fiction tourism and addressing the power configurations behind these heritage and tourism practices, this paper aims to contribute to a more holistic understanding of media tourism and, more in particular, the reciprocal nature of the relation between popular crime fiction, heritage and place.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

From Sao Paolo to Tokyo and from Cape Town to Helsinki: where-ever you go, you will find walking tours fully dedicated to crime fiction. Obfuscated by a thin, shiny veneer of national progress, mobility and cosmopolitanism usually associated with modern cities, lie layers upon layers of dark stories about crime, corruption, murder and mystery characterizing 'real life' in a *capital crime city*. This is a part of urban life which is according to some, best left to the dark.

And yet, according to others, this is precisely what draws people to the city. Crime fiction and mystery have been stimulating the urban imagination and related forms of tourism in its wake since the popularization of the realist Romantic novel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Booth,

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2009; Clayton, 2003). Recent decades have further shown a striking increase in crime fiction-tourism. Taking people ‘around the world in 80 sleuths’ (Gibbs, 2008) or on a ‘Crime Grand Tour’ (Lawson, 2012), popular crime fiction literally moves bodies across the globe, following in the footsteps of beloved detectives in an investigation of the hidden and obscured locations, events and protagonists that make up a city’s recent history and present. More in general, one could argue that crime and death are a form of heritage shared by all societies, and one that has been “an element of tourism longer than any other form of heritage” (Seaton, 1996). Although not exclusively, crime fiction tours are an easy and accessible way to put the tourist into direct contact with “the ultimate Other”.

Why would these people leave the safe confinements of their home and travel to a city close or far away in an attempt to dive head-first into the particular dark, grimy and mysterious parts of its past, central in popular crime fiction? And how do local communities and - governments alike make sense of this development? How do they value their homes being perceived, appropriated and ‘touristified’ in and through their representation in popular crime fiction?

Tourism in the wake of popular crime fiction is not an isolated phenomenon. More and more often it happens that a certain city or region suddenly becomes the centre of attention because of its association with a well-known film, TV series, book or video game. Popular culture, in other words, has a growing influence on the way people form an image of the world around them and on the affection that they may or may not develop for certain cities or countries (Reijnders, 2016). This phenomenon is not new. *Petrarch* is generally considered to be one of the first literary pilgrims, as his records from the fourteenth century entail a journey to various sites in Italy associated with the ancient poet *Virgil* (Hendrix, 2008). And as early as the nineteenth century, literary tourists went to Scotland, England and France in search of traces of novels beloved to them (Watson, 2006; 2009), signalling a popularization of the practice of visiting literary places. It could even be argued that there is an age-old, mutual relationship between travelling and telling stories (Gottschall, 2013; Lean et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the increasing influence of popular media in our society has accelerated this development. It is no longer just traces, but a network of popular associations that extends to every corner of a city or region (e.g. Brooker, 2007; Roberts, 2012). Every year new films, TV series and books are released which show the city or region from a specific perspective. Some stories fall into oblivion, others are the source of inspiration for new expressions of popular culture. Thus a rich, cultural ‘soil layer’ is built up over the years.

Underlying the rise in popularity of crime fiction-tourism in recent decades is the boom in media tourism in general, reflected in the corresponding growing academic attention for this topic. Starting with a few stand-alone, exploratory studies in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Cohen, 1986; Butler, 1990; Riley & Van Doren, 1992; Riley et al., 1998), and followed by the work of tourism scholar Sue Beeton in the 2000s (e.g. Beeton, 2001; Beeton, 2004; Beeton, 2006), the research field of media tourism took off a decade ago (Brooker, 2007; Roesch, 2009; Beeton, 2010; Reijnders, 2011a; Kim, 2012; Connell, 2012; O’Connor & Kim, 2014). Recent years have seen a further flourishing of a multi-disciplinary, global interest in the relationship between popular culture and tourism (Reijnders et al., 2015; Smith, 2015; Mansfield, 2015; Beeton, 2016; Cohen, 2017; Seaton et al., 2017; Kim & Reijnders, 2018;

Lundberg & Ziakas, 2019; Tzanelli, 2019; Van Es et al., 2020). Crime, as one of the most dominant and reoccurring themes in popular culture since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, makes up a significant part of the examples mentioned and analyzed in these publications.

Notwithstanding these diverse contributions, most of the existing research remains limited to two major themes: the impact of media tourism on local communities and the way media tourism is experienced by tourists. These themes were particularly important during the early phase of media tourism, when this phenomenon was still driven by the interest and fascination of individual travellers. However, over the years media tourism has grown into an important niche within the tourism sector with a huge economic impact, and has gradually been taken over by the media and tourism industries. At the same time, the media and tourism industries are increasingly converging (Tzanelli, 2004; Tzanelli, 2007; Gyimóthy et al., 2015). These power dynamics behind media tourism have remained off the radar for (too) long. Therefore, there is a need for a broader, multi-actor approach to media tourism that takes into account not only the fans and travellers, but also the role of media producers, tourism professionals, locals and other stakeholders involved in the development of media tourism.

Following this line of thought, this paper argues for a holistic, process-based approach to the development of media tourism. To be able to investigate and map this dynamic, the concept of imaginative heritage is introduced in this paper and subsequently applied to cases of contemporary crime fiction-tourism. In particular, we refer to the multitude of popular, fictional narratives that have been projected upon or appropriated by specific sites throughout time and that together make up an important part of local place identity. As is argued here, imaginative heritage results from an active involvement of not only fans and tourists, but also the media industries, the tourism industries and the local governments. This will be illustrated through applying the concept of imaginative heritage to the field of media tourism in general, and crime fiction in particular (see Van Es & Reijnders, 2016; 2018).

What is the added value of the concept of imaginative heritage? Firstly, and in line with the above, it allows for an in-depth analysis of the power configurations behind media tourism, looking at the roles of the different central actors that are involved in the development of this phenomenon. Secondly, this concept forms a welcome intervention in a research field that is strongly compartmentalized. Media tourism, as defined in this paper, includes tourism towards places associated with fictional stories, conveyed through a wide range of media, including literature, film, novels, video games and animation. In practice, these media also overlap and intertwine. But research into this phenomenon still largely takes place along the lines of traditional disciplines: literary scholars investigate isolated examples of literary tourism, film scholars keep an eye on tourism related to specific movies or TV series, while game researchers focus on the interfaces between tourism and video games. The concept of imaginative heritage invites scholars to transcend individual cases and to look beyond the boundaries of 'their' medium, acknowledging the intermedial nature of the popular stories that move audiences across the globe. Crime fiction stories, though more often than not having their roots in literature, are considered to be multi- and transmedia narratives by definition. This is reflected in, amongst others, the fact that popular crime narratives are almost instantaneously rolled out over a variety of media

platforms, such as TV/film, games, merchandise and apps, resulting in an extensive 'multimedia afterlife' (Clayton, 2003) of classic crime fiction stories. In addition, popular crime fiction tropes, characters and events are frequently borrowed, modified and applied within contemporary media productions. The main protagonist of the *House MD*-series, for example, draws heavily on the medical doctor-as-detective, and parallels between dr. House and the 'urdetective' *Sherlock Holmes* are abundant. And, what if it was the protagonist himself who was responsible for the larger share of the murders and mysteries occurring in an attempt to 'clean up' the city and regulate his own 'dark passenger'? This is the main premise that the series of *Dexter* is built upon, following the similarly named homicide-detective as he engages in the morally ambiguous acts of spiking and killing city dwellers that, at least in Dexter's mind, have done more harm than good.

Thirdly, this concept aims to intervene in the domain of heritage studies, by addressing the role that popular stories play in shaping heritage. As argued before, crime fiction stories are an important part of contemporary urban heritage around the world. For example, the stories of the likes of *Jack the Ripper* and *Sherlock Holmes* seem to be intrinsically intertwined with the Victorian era of London. Heritage is often perceived as based in reality; it derives its power from being 'authentic' (Otero-Pailos, Gaiger & West, 2010). As this paper aims to show, the fictitious can actually contribute to heritage and in some cases might even be at the heart of a local place identity. Fiction doesn't flow freely above places, but is engrained in the very 'roots' of a place. By exploring the reciprocal nature of the relation between fiction, heritage and place, this concept also questions the dominant dichotomy between tangible and intangible heritage, in line with the work of critical heritage scholars like Rodney Harrison (2011). Imaginative heritage is not about the tangible or the intangible, but precisely about the cross-pollination of both dimensions.

Last but not least, and as will be argued in the following section, the concept of imaginative heritage can be used as an important instrument by local governments. On the one hand, it allows them to stimulate new media tourism initiatives that engage and interact with other types of local heritage. On the other hand, it will help them to unlock 'forgotten' forms of imaginative heritage from the past.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. THEORIZING IMAGINATIVE HERITAGE

Earlier, this paper engaged with the idea that media tourism emerges from a more general process of place identity formation. As is now generally accepted, places do not have one, static identity. On the contrary, the identity of a place is constantly being (re-)negotiated, based on an intrinsic dynamic between the geographical characteristics, the living practices and the symbolic representations of a certain location (Vanclay, 2008). In theorizing about place, cultural geographers have, for a long time, acknowledged the presence of the symbolic dimension, while never particularly emphasising it (Lefebvre, 1991; Gieryn, 2000; Easthope, 2004; Vanclay, 2008). However, in order to acknowledge today's increasingly

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<sup>2</sup> It would be challenging to visualize these networks of imaginative heritage (per city or region) on a digital map. Such a map should then have a layered character, in the tradition of 'deep maps', in which each medium or franchise is assigned its own layer (Bodenhamer, Corrigan & Harris, 2015; Fitzjohn, 2009). A dynamic display with a historical lapse of time is also possible.

mediatized society, several authors have argued that the effect of popular culture on the formation of place identity needs to be put more to the fore (Morley, 2001; Edensor, 2002; Orgad, 2014; Gyimóthy et al., 2015: 21-22). In addition to popular culture, other 'sign industries' (Tzanelli 2004, 2007) should also be taken into account, such as the tourism industry. Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries and is increasingly involved in the formation of place identity.

This paper proposes to launch a new concept to further pinpoint and theorize this dynamic between popular culture, tourism and place. 'Imaginative heritage' refers to the multitude of popular, fictional narratives that have been projected upon or appropriated by specific sites throughout time and that together make up an important part of local place identity. In a sense, imaginative heritage is composed of the sum of literary heritage, cinematic heritage, television heritage, videogame heritage, folk tales heritage etc., while also acknowledging the many links and tensions between these domains. For example, as Van Es and Reijnders (2018) showed in their study on crime-detective fiction tours, literary heritage and cinematic heritage are often combined (but not conflated!) in media tours, especially where cinematic adaptations of original novels are concerned. In these instances, the literary links are often considered to be 'more authentic' and closer to the 'core' of the city than their cinematic counterparts (Van Es & Reijnders, 2018, p. 511).

One could argue from a critical perspective that all forms of heritage are constructed – at best selective interpretations of history - and as such 'imaginary' or 'fictional'. However, when using the term imaginative heritage we do not refer to this constructed nature of heritage, but to the whole of fictional stories anchored in a certain place. Fiction is here seen as an inherent imaginary practice; it is based on a conscious and willing agreement between storyteller and listener that the narrated events are not 'true' but invented for the sole purpose of entertainment, reflection or aesthetic pleasure. As such, storytellers and listeners temporarily engage with an alternative universe, one that might be close to the real world but one could that could easily also be centuries or lightyears away. All linkages between these alternative fictional universes and that what is considered the real world together make up the imaginative heritage of a place.

Imaginative heritage has become an increasingly relevant player in the competition for tourists, yet popular culture as a legitimate vehicle for articulating place identities often remains contested in the localities concerned, especially in those instances where representations from popular culture are seen as non-native and hostile, particularly relevant in the case of narratives revolving around crime, corruption, murder and mystery. For example, while many international tourists are eager to visit the city of Medellin related to the Netflix series *Narcos* (2015-2017), many Colombians decry the underlying negative associations between their country and drugs traffic, which reinforce traditional stereotypes of Colombian history and identity. Another example would be the popularity of Dracula tourism in Romania, cherished for the tourist revenues but at the same time criticized by many Romanians for the portrayal of Romanian culture as backward, in particular concerning the association between Dracula the vampire and national hero Vlad Tepes (Reijnders, 2011b). That said, there are also examples in which imaginative heritage inspired by crime fiction is actually celebrated by the local community and seen as complementary to other, more factual heritage discourses. Sweden, and Stockholm in

particular, have been welcoming of the opportunities provided by the success of *The Millennium Trilogy* in conveying culture and heritage to a younger, international demographic. Hardboiled crime fiction set in the Los Angeles of the roaring twenties and thirties, such as the writings of Raymond Chandler and adventures of private dick Philip Marlowe, are considered by some locals to be the only heritage – albeit fictionalized – available which approximate the historical reality of this cities' *heyday* characterized by crime and corruption, a past all too gladly forgotten by the powers that be (Van Es & Reijnders, 2018).

The concept of imaginative heritage is partly inspired by the notion of 'cultural landscapes', as discussed by Beeton and Seaton (2018), Salazar and Graburn's use of 'tourism imaginaries' (2014) and the concept of 'imaginative geographies' as developed by Said (1978, cf. Roberts 2012 on 'cinematic geographies'), but differs from these in two ways. First, it focuses more explicitly on the role of *fictional narratives* in the formation of place identity.<sup>3</sup> Imaginative heritage refers to the reciprocal nature of the relation between fiction and place. Media tourism often involves everyday places such as an alley or a square, which would not normally be worth visiting. But precisely because of the association with a beloved story, these places suddenly acquire a special quality: they form a gateway to that other, imaginary world (Reijnders, 2011a). Everyday places gain something 'special' from being associated with powerful stories, while these stories themselves derive their power partly from their near-real character. As such, the concept of imaginative heritage escapes the classical, Cartesian binary between tangible and intangible heritage (cf. Harrison, 2011). Imaginative heritage is not so much about the material or the spiritual world, but about the many instances when those two worlds meet and mutually reinforce each other.

Second, a focus on imaginative heritage shifts the emphasis from actual landscapes and their representations to the heritage practices performed by the stakeholders involved. Here, 'heritage' is interpreted in line with the critical heritage studies approach as advocated by scholars like Rodney Harrison (2011) and Susie West (2010). Imaginative heritage should not be seen as a static and undisputed collection of artefacts (e.g. the canonical novels and movies set in a specific city), but as a dynamic, social process of heritage-in-the-making, involving several actors and authoritative discourses, as well as conflicting notions of identity and heritage. Heritage needs to be 'performed' – e.g. by doing a walking tour - in order to exert its power. Underlying the performance of urban crime fiction heritage is the central role for the guide-as-detective, allowing for the participants to engage in a spatial re-enactment of fictional- and 'factual' narratives making up the heritage of a city. This entails following in the footsteps of the guide-as-detective, threading unconventional paths and a gradual descent into the urban unknown, exposing fact from fiction and ultimately, peeling down the narrative layers to get close to or a glimpse of a presumed core identity of the city (see Van Es & Reijnders, 2018). So yes, the guide takes a central role, but in the end he is only one out of many 'actors' that participate in the phenomenon of media tourism. The challenge is to capture the dynamics of this dispute between the different actors

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<sup>3</sup> One could argue that place identities are always narratively constructed and as such the difference between fictional and factual narratives is artificial. However, such a line of argument ignores the fact that this divide between fiction and fact is experienced as very real by most media tourists. The marking and temporary crossing of the symbolic divide between a world of fiction (rooted in imaginative practices) and the 'real' world (rooted in sensory experiences) is key to understanding the *joy* of participating in such a media ritual (Reijnders, 2011).

involved, investigating how sites related to popular culture become designated (or not) as a valuable part of local, national or transnational identity.

In this process, three key steps are identified (see Figure 1). Firstly, the media industry and its fans are involved in the production and consumption of popular movies, novels, films and video games. As will be argued, popular narratives are always set in specific places, either real or not. Thus, the media industries are engaged in imagining place. Fans and other audiences expand these imaginary worlds through world-building practices and co-determine which of these productions become truly popular. Secondly, the tourism industry is eager to appropriate these imaginations and ‘drag’ (Torchin, 2002) them to recognizable, geographical locations within their vicinity, making them part of the imaginative heritage of a place. Tourists are evidently part of these practices, but they are, just like fans, not easily manageable; tourist flows are notoriously unpredictable. Finally, local governments try to develop policies that help to stimulate the media and tourism industries and their joint ventures, thus ideally contributing to a community which is economically viable and comfortable to live in. Some of these governments will also have to deal with grass-roots place-making practices that actually protest against media tourist initiatives, for example because part of the local community is dissatisfied with the way it is represented by the media and ‘consumed’ by tourists. Ultimately, these place-making practices will prompt and streamline new initiatives for imagining and touristifying place – an unending process that adds layer upon layer of imaginative heritage to a place. These three steps of imagining, touristifying and making place – each with their own dynamic - will be further elaborated in the following sub-sections.



Figure 1. The co-production of media tourism. Source: Reijnders (2020).

### 3. IMAGINING PLACE

In pre-modern societies, it was mainly oral narratives that painted a picture of the outside world. Myths, legends, gossip and songs described distant wars, violent crimes in nearby towns, or magic and supernatural events in places outside the safe borders of the village community. In modern societies, a major player has been added: mass media. In particular, 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. In terms of these popular stories that are being told today, it is worthwhile noticing that the vast majority of these have their roots or origins in literature. During the popularization of the realist novel in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Booth, 2009; Clayton, 2003), the defining features of the genre of crime fiction were outlined and became tradition for subsequent stories within the genre to build with and -upon. From popular urban crime- and mystery novels to crime- and detective-pulp fiction magazines at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have all been of vital importance in setting the 'standard' for the protagonists, events and places where crime fiction narratives unfold. As such, there is a large extend of intermediality and corresponding intertextuality (Jensen, 2016) characterizing present day popular culture as a whole and crime fiction in particular. Popular stories are told over an increasingly wide array of media platforms, building on familiarized tropes, themes, events and characters, filled with intertextual references, paying an homage or tribute to (cf. Jameson's notion of 'pastiche', in Duvall, 1999) or a satirical, self-reflective and critical subversion (Hutcheon's notion of 'parody', in Duvall, 1999) of seminal characters, events, locations or otherwise atmosphere of the genre.

Recent years, as such, have also seen an increasing collaboration and convergence between these different media platforms (Jenkins, 2006), creating powerful transmedia franchises build around successful 'brands' such as *Sherlock Holmes*, whose world is rolled out in novels, movies, cartoons, videogames, merchandise etcetera. These popular representations together offer the promise of literally being able to see events far away (cf. Orgad, 2014). All these stories, circulating in the media and beyond, together create a rich associative imagination of the world (Lukinbeal & Fletchall, 2014). Of course, this imagination is not equally spread across the globe; the popular imagination has its own centres and peripheries. Likewise, not every individual and every country are equally involved in these world-building practices (Boni, 2017). But overall, one can identify an intimate relation between popular culture, imagination and place on a global scale.

In the case of crime fiction, this intimate relation with place and imagination on an international scale is in particular characterized along two main lines. First, the genre builds on a high extent of realism in its depiction of places, peoples and events. An important part of what defines the genre of crime fiction is its firm grounding in a respective spatial- and temporal context. Variations in the historical and socio-cultural context of crime fiction narratives are also important criteria for demarcating sub-genres, such as *Nordic Noir* in contemporary Scandinavia, *hardboiled* crime fiction in early twentieth century United States and *Crimen Latino* set in the recent history to present-day Latin America. Second, although not exclusively, crime fiction tends to emphasize *urban* settings, conflating crime, corruption, suspense and mystery with city life, stimulating a particular imagination, shaping the 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 1990) of contemporary urbanity, in line with its depiction in popular crime fiction. Crime-fiction's employment of urban (historical) realism in



combination with fictionalized events and characters make it particularly suitable as an illustration for imaginative heritage.

How do these particular associations between story and place come about? As argued before (Reijnders, 2015), stories do not occur in a vacuum, but always literally take place somewhere. Narratives, defined here as a string of events (Bal, 1994), need a space in which to unfold. In some cases, these narrative spaces might be little more than a backdrop to the story. In other cases, the narrative space takes a leading role in the narrative development, steering the story in certain directions and – as was the case in many of the realist, Romantic novels from the nineteenth century (Watson, 2006; 2009) - symbolizing the emotional states of the central characters. When popular narratives occupy recognizable, ‘real’ locations, they even have the potential to ‘inject’ landscapes with certain symbolic meanings that go beyond the narrative realm. In this way, the media industries, mostly unintentionally, pave the way for the construction of imaginative heritage - waiting to be appropriated and ‘anchored’ in space by their audiences. Fans have a pivotal role in this process: their consumption practices not only co-determine which media products become truly popular, but many fans are also involved in world-building practices. For example, the world of *Sherlock Holmes* has been expanded way beyond the original books, movies and TV series in the many online fan productions, such as narrative maps, drawings and fan fiction, together creating a rich “hyperdiegetic world” (Hills, 2002) of Holmes’ late-Victorian London.

Little is known about how this process of imagining place takes place in practice. What locations are selected as backdrops for popular media products? Who are the gatekeepers in this process (O’Connell, 2014), and how do they choose locations based on what criteria? What is the role of the tourism industry in this process? How do fan practices affect the imagination of place? At the same time, it is relevant to investigate how places might actually take an active role in the creative process of media production. More than just being backdrops, places have the power to inspire the creative professionals of media industries from an early phase onwards in the production process and steer the narratives based on the geographical, cultural or social conditions of a place. Cities, such as Vancouver (eg. Brooker, 2007) engage in this competition through having more generic big city qualities, allowing them to function as a suitable (and financially more viable) stand-in for the production of movies or TV-series set in New York. Other cities aim to highlight unique and familiar characteristics that set apart Amsterdam from London and Berlin from Paris, where crime fiction can be employed as an important instrument in branding this ‘uniqueness’, though not unproblematically, as will be discussed later. Moreover, little is known about how these production practices might differ between media such as film, television, video games or literature.

#### **4. ‘TOURISTIFYING’ THE POPULAR IMAGINATION**

From the moment a film, TV series, book or game breaks through and enjoys popularity among the public, the likelihood increases that the locations from these stories will become tourist attractions. The tourism industry is aware of the influence of popular culture on travel and consumer behaviour and has therefore developed various strategies to influence

this process (Busby & Klug, 2001; Connell, 2012; Gyimóthy et al., 2015; Lundberg, Ziakas & Morgan, 2018). However, research into these strategies is still scarce and fragmentary (Lundberg, Ziakas & Morgan, 2018). We would like to propose investigating these strategies in relation to each other under the umbrella term of ‘touristification’. This paper follows Freytag and Bauder (2018) in interpreting the term ‘touristification’ in a broad sense as “the process of a tourism and tourist-based transformation” of specific locations, involving a wide spectrum of stakeholders and actors, ranging from national tourism boards and travel organizations to individual guides. In the case of media tourism, three main steps of ‘touristification’ can be distinguished: appropriating, marking and commodifying.

The notion of ‘appropriation’ refers to the phenomenon in which people interpret cultural products in a way that is in line with their world view and interests (De Certeau, 1980). In the case of media tourism, it involves mostly a *spatial* appropriation, in which a fictional environment is linked to an existing geographical location by individuals or companies that benefit from this association. Such appropriations are increasingly being made, but in essence they remain an artificial construct. Fiction, by definition, takes place in an imaginary world. Even if the media product contains literal references to geographical realities, it is by no means true that both worlds are actually the same. The artificial nature of this act is confirmed by the fact that there are several known cases in which locations compete with each other for the ‘authenticity claim’.

The appropriation of fictional worlds into more general ‘tourism imaginaries’ (Salazar & Graburn, 2014) is followed by the marking of specific locations in the (urban) landscape as being ‘special’ because of their link to fictional worlds. Buildings, squares, rooms or doors that have figured in popular stories are highlighted by guides and guidebooks as concrete proof of the supposed link between both worlds, thus celebrating the imaginative heritage of a place. Through its link with popular crime fiction, seemingly common and everyday urban spaces are turned into ‘strange spaces’ (Watson & Hansen, 2009), worthy of careful examination. In some cases, placards or information boards are posted that report on the scenes recorded at these locations. A seemingly common, though typically British, red phonebooth in the centre of London is ‘strangefied’ by Sherlockians, filled with post-its and handwritten notes wishing *Sherlock* well after plunging to his (near-)death after an altercation with his archnemesis Moriarty on top of the St. Bartholomew’s hospital in the modern-day BBC recreation of this epic Reichenbach-falls moment. Part of the ‘marking’ also takes place online, when fans on Instagram or other social networks testify as to their presence at a movie or TV location. But in all cases, the same claim arises: here a place of the imagination is marked in everyday life and therefore this place is worth a visit.

The process of ‘touristification’ is completed by linking the experience of being there with the consumption of concrete products. Buying such a product is not only a financial transaction but also a symbolic act, in which one crosses the border between the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘imaginary’ world. Almost all parts of the tourism sector have become involved in this process. For example, tour operators offer film and television tours and - more recently - apps that provide users with information and accompanying images and excerpts from books, films, series and games on location. Event managers are involved in organizing temporary exhibitions of popular film props (e.g. the “For Your Eyes Only” James Bond exhibition in the Imperial War Museum in London, 2008). The publishing industry produces

maps and travel books on media tourism (e.g. “A Guidebook to Breaking Bad Filming Locations”, published in 2018), while several hotel chains are advertising ‘special’ rooms where certain characters stayed (e.g. sleep in the same room as *Da Vinci’s Code’s* Robert Langdon, or enjoy a BBQ in *Ozark’s* Blue Cat Lodge). These are all examples in which imaginative heritage is being commodified: turned into an economic good.

Some might protest this commodification claim by stating that there are also a lot of non-commercial initiatives, such as fans organizing an individual ‘media pilgrimage’ to filming locations, fictional crime-scenes or authors’ homes. Indeed, fans are often the first explorers of new places of the imagination, paving the way for other travellers. However, as soon as these fans share their experiences with other fans through social media and stimulate the awareness of a certain site, they will, at least to a certain degree, contribute to the overall process of touristification. It’s also important to acknowledge that tourists are not always that easily manageable. Whether or not a (media) tourist site will become a popular attraction, and for whom, depends to a certain degree on the individual choices made by fans and other tourists.

It is expected that the more intensively the media and tourism industries work together, the more intertwined the processes of mediatization and ‘touristification’ will become. However, empirical research is required to critically investigate these claims. Media theme parks like *The Wizarding World of Harry Potter* in Orlando, *Bollywood Parks* in Dubai and *Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge* in Anaheim would offer a great point of departure for these research lines. Interestingly, theme parks based on crime fiction seem to be largely absent in contemporary culture. Apparently, there is some friction between this genre’s heavy reliance on realism through being firmly rooted in actually existing places versus the idealized, artificial and ‘clean’ fantasy worlds of the theme park. While ‘Main Street, USA’ does feature an advertisement for a gun store and boasts two 19<sup>th</sup> century town square cannons, other references to modern crime are neatly omitted.

## 5. DEVELOPING MEDIA TOURISM POLICIES

In addition to the media and tourism industries, a third major party is involved in the development of media tourism, namely national and local governments. They are responsible for the development of policy in both sectors and therefore have a significant influence. The starting point is the idea that in the long term, governments will not benefit from the unilateral encouragement of more and more tourists. We assert that the cultural policy of governments should not limit itself to ‘branding’ a certain country or city, but that it should think about what a community needs from a more holistic perspective and how tourism can play a role in that. Tourism must serve a community in a sustainable way, without disturbing the local balance between “people, profit and planet” (Waligo et al., 2013; Twining-Ward & Butler, 2002). In that sense, tourism is not an end in itself, but a means. Greg Richards (2017a; 2017b) points out the importance of place-making as an alternative to place marketing. Lundberg et al. (2018) and Mason and Rohe (2019) also point to the possible contribution of media tourism to forms of place-making.

A disadvantage of the concept of place-making is that it has not yet fully crystallized and is interpreted differently within different disciplines. According to a recent review article

(Lew, 2017), at least two different approaches can be identified. On the one hand, from an urban planning perspective, place-making is discussed as a top-down policy instrument, aimed at organizing and regulating public space. On the other hand, the concept of place-making within cultural geography is interpreted in a completely different way, as a bottom-up process assuming that individuals and social groups are naturally inclined to shape their environment in line with their own values, needs and world vision (*ibid.*). In practice, it is about the way(s) in which these central actors, located both at the 'top' and 'bottom', are involved in the (at times rather chaotic) co-creation of place. As such, urban space can be made meaningful through employing crime-detective fiction in a multitude of ways. This is ranging from a more specific or concrete embedding of crime fiction narratives and -characters in the city, such as protagonist- or detective-tours – for example *Baantjer* in Amsterdam, *Sherlock Holmes* in London, *Wallander* in Ystad and *Montalbano* on Sicily, to name but a few – to a more general employment of urban crime atmosphere as, for example, characterizing annual literary- and film noir festivals, such as *Murder One* in Dublin, *BCNegra* in Barcelona, *Film Noir Festival* in San Francisco and *Iceland Noir* in Reykjavik. In addition, cities also often host urban crime or -torture museums, tying into wider international trends towards exhibiting and preserving urban- or national crime heritage.

What is proposed in this paper is that governments play a dual role in this place-making process: they will have certain ideas about how the city or the country should be organized and what role (media) tourism can play in this, but at the same time these governments and local councils are dealing with locals who may not agree with the choices made and protest against the way in which their habitat is taken and used by the media and tourism industries. In the past, various cases have arisen in which local residents and environmental action groups have protested against the admission of media productions into their community and the resulting tourism flows (e.g. Kousis, 2000; Novy & Colomb, 2016; Hughes, 2018; Barton, 2019). In this sense, those types of 'dark' imaginative heritage based on the gritty, crime-ridden, murderous and mysterious crime fiction narratives seem to operate within two main fields of tension. On the one hand, these narratives can bring negative or otherwise deemed undesirable connotations to place and locality based on the central tropes of crime fiction – not everyone would appreciate their home being intrinsically bound to murder, crime and corruption, or otherwise celebrated for its slum-like, favela-like or ghetto-like character. On the other hand, tourism in the wake of popular crime fiction also proceeds to dominantly take place in capital cities, locations which are generally considered to be suffering from over-tourism already, as manifested in the frequent anti-tourism protests engaged in by locals in Amsterdam, Berlin, Barcelona, Paris, etc.

However, rather than exacerbating already pre-existing issues related to over-tourism, sustainability, discontent and resistance amongst local urbanites, popular culture in general and crime fiction in particular do have the potential to alleviate some of these pressures as well. In actively branding peripheral cities or regions in line with their representation in popular crime fiction, parts of the tourism flows can be dispersed and relocated, while simultaneously contributing to the development of previously underdeveloped tourism industries. The *New Nordic Noir*-project, initiated by Filmby Aarhus in Denmark, is an example of this (Waade, 2022). Through close cooperation between local government, filmmakers and tourism professionals, Denmark's municipality of Ringkøbing-Skjern on the

west coast will feature prominently in upcoming *Nordic Noir*-productions, with the intent of ultimately generating and developing tourism towards this region.

In practice, this will most probably come down to finding a balance between, on the one hand, the development of an active media tourism policy, in which new media productions are welcomed and facilitated as much as possible, and, on the other hand, listening to the needs and experiences of the local population. Media tourism can be used to contribute to a culturally proud and economically viable community, but the imaginative heritage of popular culture can also conflict with other notions of heritage, such as local histories or religious heritage. Consideration could also be given to making cooperation between the media production team and the local population a requirement. Past experience has shown that deploying locals as extras or advisers can have a positive effect on both the production team and the local population (Mayer, 2016).

An interesting suggestion has been made by Lundberg et al. (2018), who argue that local authorities should try to align new media productions with local heritage, because this would add to the 'authenticity' of the place. Although notions of authenticity are highly debatable in this context, and there has in fact been no proper investigation into these dynamics, it would be a valid idea to do further research into the relationship between popular fiction and local history. Following this, the concept of imaginative heritage offers a valuable tool to pick up that particular gauntlet – this, based on the premise that popular fiction offers more than only a boost to existing heritage; it has the potential to become heritage itself.

In this setting, it is crucial to pay attention to the societal context in which media tourism is created. A clear blueprint for the development of media tourism does not exist, as each national or urban community has its own challenges and local issues. It is precisely for this reason that it is essential to conduct empirical, comparative research into current policies with regard to media tourism in different contexts.

## 6. CONCLUSION

For a long time, research into media tourism has also been driven by a fascination for individual cases: one square, street or house that has suddenly acquired something 'magical', 'strange' or 'scary' through its association with a well-known story from popular culture. These places functioned as magical, star-dusted portals that offered access to another, fictional reality. Research into such individual cases has yielded a great deal, but we argue that it is time to enrich the field with more case-transcending research, looking at the way in which these cases relate to each other, both in space and in time, and together form networks scattered around the world. Only in this way can we acquire a better understanding of the phenomenon of media tourism.

Such a holistic approach not only provides insight into recurring patterns in a multitude of individual cases, as has been attempted to illustrate here through relying on research conducted towards crime fiction, but also reveals the relationships and hierarchies between these cases. In this context, explicit attention must also be paid to the diachronic dimension:

how popular stories have contributed to the development of a place identity over time. Old histories are forgotten, but also make way for or otherwise recycled into new stories in the 'soil layer' of our culture. We have argued that specific genres, such as crime fiction, each deliver their own unique contribution to the identity of a place, though in practice we also recognized a lot of cross-overs between genres and mediums. Moreover, instead of focusing only on the experiences of individual fans, it is time to acknowledge the complex power configurations that are at play behind media tourism, exploring how and why certain narratives are told while others are not. The world at large is littered with a layered network full of stories and characters, visible to anyone with a keen eye and desire to see it. One of the ways to further investigate these networks and unravel their underlying mechanisms is through the concept of imaginative heritage introduced in this paper.

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