
9 Popular culture tourism: trend or transition?

Valeriya Radomskaya

The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Explore recent developments in cultural tourism;
- Identify directions for future cultural production in tourism;
- Further develop the concept of popular culture tourism;
- Identify the new market implications;
- Conclude that popular culture is an important feature of new tourism markets.

Keywords: Cultural tourism, popular culture tourism, cultural marketing, marketing tool, tourism development, new markets

Introduction

This chapter explores recent developments in cultural tourism. It argues that many tourist activities involve popular culture. Empirically, this chapter draws on the findings of a study undertaken in 2018 that explored alternative forms of cultural representation in tourism (Radomskaya, 2018). Today, cultural tourism covers a vast range of activities and experiences. For many tourists, cultural experiences are the foremost motivation for travelling (Bendixen, 1997; Armbrrecht, 2014; Richards, 2016). For decades, cultural tourism has been an instrumental force in destination development. As a result, cultural activities have become a significant feature of many tourism development policies (Smith and Richards, 2013; Throsby, 2016). Cultural products and cultural production processes influence the direction of tourism development (Edgell, 2016; Roberts et al., 2017). It is hardly sur-

prising, that popular culture, a collective label that encompasses a diverse range of products and experiences, is becoming an additional and significant resource for destination development (Crouch et al., 2005; Seaton and Yamamura, 2015; Beeton, 2016). These new developments provide the bases for the identification of new markets based on popular culture interests. The phenomenon can be labelled popular culture tourism (PCT). In this chapter the concept of PCT is initially explored, then its ephemeral or enduring nature is discussed. Subsequent sections of the chapter consider multicultural dimensions in popular culture tourism, assess current practices and outcomes, and then identify the new market implications from these issues.

The scope of PCT

In the tourism literature, PCT is an umbrella term comprising, but not limited to, several fields: screen tourism, literary tourism, music tourism, arts tourism, special events tourism, contents tourism (*kontentsu tsūrizumu*), and food tourism (Radomskaya, 2018). Many of these activities fall within the domain of urban tourism, specifically, urban events tourism. Yet some studies acknowledge the potential of PCT for regional tourism development (Gehman and Soublière, 2017; Radomskaya, 2019). As a tourism marketing tool, popular culture induced events and attractions have been known to further several agendas: educational, recreational, political, and cultural (Radomskaya, 2018). The increased cultural consumption and rising demand for cultural amenities (Richards, 2016) further propel the development of PCT.

Popular culture is a promising arena for cultural experiments and is often used as a testing ground for innovation. Technological innovations (e.g., interactive digital signage) bring forward the possibilities of using popular characters as 'messengers' to deliver travel recommendations and promote a range of tourist activities (Radomskaya, 2018). Popular media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Youtube, Twitter, Weibo), social media marketing, and user generated content affect tourism development and planning (Kim et al., 2017; Tiago et al., 2019; Femenia-Serra and Gretzel, 2020). In urban spaces, street food and street art influence the urban tourists' search for new experiences and meanings from other cultures (Henderson et al., 2012; Pappalepore et al., 2014; Insch and Walters, 2017). Popular movies not only attract tourists to filming locations but create new attractions that can redefine the space (Connell, 2012; Salazar, 2012). Special events, such as urban arts and urban food festivities, comic and gaming conventions attract a new type of cultural tourist, the one interested in 'casual' cultural practices (i.e., 'everyday' culture as opposed to 'high' culture) (Reijnders et al., 2014; Lokhman et al., 2018).

While innovation can drive tourism and facilitate tourism development, it can also detract from the established heritage sites and affect the recreational and experiential value of more traditional attractions. Similarly, popular culture can produce controversy concerning the interpretation and meaning of pop-culture artefacts and attractions. For example, there are debates on the value of street art and its effect on urban landscape (Insch and Walters, 2017; Hannes, 2018); the appropriateness of using fashion and commercial districts in tourism promotion campaigns (Miller, 2011); the concerns about the impact of screen tourism on local communities (Beeton, 2008; Connell, 2012).

Bentley et al. (2007) note the difficulty of working with popular culture. Its trends and fashions are constantly shifting, and business outcomes are hard to predict. According to Bentley et al., there is a randomness associated with popular culture, where ideas become highly popular sometimes by chance alone. As such, shifts in popular preferences are unpredictable, with wide variation even across similar populations (Wang et al., 2016; Wissinger, 2015). This can make the task of adopting PCT as a marketing strategy rather difficult.

PCT: the new normal or a passing trend?

Despite the excitement and activity generated by PCT in recent years, some critical voices question whether PCT is a promising direction in the development of cultural tourism. Perhaps, it is simply a well-publicized but passing trend. This is a viable question given the contradictory and somewhat inconsistent nature of popular culture itself (Freccero, 1999; Storey; 2009). One could argue that PCT is a trend driven by the popularity of 'fast' culture: a "pervasive cultural craving for immediate amusement, risk, and peak sensations, a momentary aisthesis that briefly pulls us out of the emptiness and indifference of our everyday lives" (Aho, 2007: 447). As such, it may gradually subside and shift to the periphery of cultural geography. Perhaps, PCT is a product of "cultural boredom". A boredom described by Aho (2007) as one triggered by the forgotten value of "genuine, purposeless leisure" and confused with "instrumental distractions like shopping, dining, or going to the movies" (2007: 447). If we were to interpret the success of PCT as a result of feverish consumption of goods and services (one dictated by our overstimulated environment), would there be a point of saturation beyond which PCT would not be able progress? If so, can PCT, after reaching a point of stagnation, face rejuvenation or will it fall into decline?

Another approach sees PCT as a transition. As a phenomenon, PCT has persisted for a considerable time (certainly for a few decades), with occasional spikes in popularity as new countries join in the cultural race (Reijnders et al., 2014; Richards, 2016). One could see the increasing interest in