

Film tourism in Somerset

Glastonbury: Isle of Light

Graham Busby and Natalie Semley

Galatia Films, Hollywood

Visit Somerset

2013

Contact: G.Busby@plymouth.ac.uk

The Service and Enterprise Research Centre (SERC) carries out world leading research in the fields of services and enterprise, and their applications across a range of public, private, voluntary and community sectors. The aim of SERC is to provide research, consultancy and advice regarding a wide range of service operations, marketing, enterprise, innovation, and impact issues affecting small, medium and large businesses, organisations and agencies.

Case study: Film tourism in Somerset

Context

Films and television programmes encourage viewers to visit locations, both at home and abroad. Some productions have lasting effect; for example, *The Sound of Music* was released in 1965 and American visitor numbers doubled in the first few years afterwards (East & Luger 2002) and remain very healthy. The impact seems to be irrespective of genre. For examples, romantic comedy *Notting Hill* influenced visitors to the London district (Busby & Klug 2001) whereas television chef Rick Stein has had a very marked influence on individuals visiting Padstow, Cornwall (Busby, Huang & Jarman 2013). Furthermore, the presence of a particular actor or actress can act as imprimatur, validating representations of a destination (Busby, Ergul & Eng 2013).

The impact of films and television programmes has been studied from several perspectives: from that of the visitor (Busby and O'Neill 2006; Roesch 2009) and of residents (O'Neill, Butts & Busby 2005; Busby, Brunt & Lund 2003) besides that relating to audiences (Kim 2012). The impact has also been examined in terms of the production team as business tourists (Ward and O'Regan 2009) and relating to brand construction (O'Connor and Bolan 2008).

At most destinations, the concept of cultural capital is also salient. There are two forms: personal and destination-based (Busby & Meethan 2008). In the personal sense, the term seems to have first been used by Bourdieu and Passeron (1973) although a much wider audience was reached with the 1979 publication of Bourdieu's seminal work *Distinction* (English translation 1984); personal cultural capital explains why different visitors interpret the same location in different ways. It is heavily influenced by the level of individual education. Less frequently, cultural capital has also come to relate to the inventory of 'assets' at a specific destination (Alzua et al. 1998; Busby & Meethan 2008).

Glastonbury, in Somerset, has many of these assets and the film *Glastonbury: Isle of Light* illustrates how they can be used to tell a story which, at the same time, helps promote the destination. An initial movie site, established by writer/producer Daniel McNicoll shows aspects of these assets, viewed at <http://issuu.com/galatiafilms/docs/glastonbury-media-kit-11/7>. From the Destination Marketing Organisation perspective, there are updates on the progress of film production – <http://www.visitsomerset.co.uk/isle-of-light-news/2013/1/24/major-glastonbury-movie-news-as-motion-picture-capital-to-package-glastonbury-a248> - as the latter website indicates, 'since the inclusion of the Glastonbury: Isle of Light movie blog, we have seen an almost 40% increase in web traffic totalling some 22.5 Million hits to the website in 2012'.

As with many destinations, there are multiple representations; from stereotypical images portrayed in films (Busby & Klug 2001), such as *Hot Fuzz* (2007) to recorded coverage of the

Glastonbury Festival, and literature such as *The Bones of Avalon* (Rickman 2010). What many of these representations conjure up are the myths of Avalon, King Arthur, Joseph of Arimathea and the Holy Grail. Myths mean different things to different people and at least one group of residents find the associations with Glastonbury to be of great personal importance.

As discussed above, the conceptual perspective examined is that of destination-based cultural capital. Busby and Meethan (2008) argue that there are two types: latent, almost always tangible, and potential cultural capital. The latter is based on stories, author links and particular localities although this form can be juxtaposed with tangible heritage. Most destinations comprise latent and potential cultural capital; it just waits to be unlocked for the wider audience. Almost invariably, this is a function of translation to the small and large screen. Ultimately, the place of a feature film can then be classified as a key event, a tourism inducing event that can be used as a tool for sustainable local economic development.

Project aims

The research provides a case study approach to the making of one particular Hollywood film on a rural location in England's West Country. Involvement with the Destination Marketing Organisation, Visit Somerset, from early on, provided the researchers with the ability to monitor each step, from resident consultation onwards. Filming in New Zealand commenced in 2013 with Somerset-location filming taking place towards the end of the year. This case study is, therefore, very much a work-in-progress.

Research methods

'Film companies are themselves now actively involved in the marketing (and making) of locations as sites of tourist consumption' (Roberts (2012:136). This is not always of added value. Specifically in relation to Glastonbury, Roberts (2012) draws upon a direct connection with a location upon which a film production is based via the example of Nicolas Cage and his promotion of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* at Glastonbury Abbey. Due to the nature of the film and style of promotion, 'local residents were reported to be "horrified and disgusted" that such a sacred place has been allowed to be used to promote a film associated with "sorcery and magic"' (Robert 2012:137). It is crucial to depict the story that is intended to be told, and ensure residents are comfortable with the implications this may have upon the portrayal of their destination and historical mythologies.

To that end, the research adopted two stages of data collection. Each stage will consist of loosely structured research agendas (Gillham 2005) that allow thematic interests and concerns to emerge (Bryman 2004), pre-production. The first stage will consist of elite interviews (Marshall & Rossman 1995; Gillham 2005) with 'advanced practitioners' (Gillham 2005:56) – the producer, screenwriter and marketer – and took place in March 2013. The

second stage will comprise of a series of focus groups with key stakeholders – local residents and business owners from Glastonbury – and will be undertaken in May 2013. The elite interviews will enable the experts to convey their understanding, intentions and knowledge of the research area to surface, having a distinctive value (Gillham 2005). The focus groups will then act as a fact-finding stage of data collection (Veal 2006), allowing resident's aspirations and concerns towards the film's development to be conveyed. Taken as a whole, these two approaches will enable the views of those who are especially knowledgeable (Gillham 2005) about the film production and marketing to become clear, alongside the community's hopes and desires, pre-production, before filming begins. With this, due cognizance is taken of Bramwell and Sharman's (1999) emphasis of individuals being involved early on in any tourism process.

This research tells the story, in terms of conceptual development of the movie. In the medium to long-term, it is anticipated that the research will examine impacts on Glastonbury and the extent to which sustainable local economic development is possible, over time, as currently there does not appear to have been any research of the impact of film tourism from a pre- and post-production perspective. Instead, research has focused on post-production exposure (Croy & Walker 2003). However, by identifying the economic impacts of film-induced tourism and the post-production exposure impacts, key stakeholders can be encouraged to adopt policies and further promote their area, and diversify their rural economic base, to lead to a more sustainable form of local development.