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### **Business Tourism Aspects of Film Tourism: The Case of Budapest**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Although the research field of film tourism has become increasingly popular, the business tourism related aspects of film tourism have received less academic attention. The aim of the present paper is to investigate the tourism related aspects of film productions in a certain location. The focus is on the case of Budapest, a Central European city that has hosted numerous international film productions in the last two decades. The findings of the paper show that filmmakers and above-the-line-crew members are long-stay business travellers who constitute an important segment of the city's tourism and hospitality sector. The case of Budapest evidences that the institutional and policy support through tax credits and incentives aimed to enhance co-productions and to attract international productions offer benefits for the local film industry as well as for the tourism sector. Although the policy support is narrowly focusing on the immediate economic benefits of foreign film productions without constructing a long-term strategy to boost local film industry and to reinforce Hungary's visibility through the wide media exposure.

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**Keywords:** Tax Credit, Co-productions, Tourism Consumption, Filmmakers.

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## Introduction

"*Bruce Willis arrives in Budapest to begin filming of new movie A Good Day to Die Hard*". In 2012, this was the headline of Daily Mail announcing the new adventure of the Hollywood action movie star. In the movie, the Hungarian capital city stood for Moscow although the whole filming took place in Budapest. Recently, Budapest has become the location for several international film and television productions and popular stars like Brad Pitt, Robert Pattinson or John Cusack turned the lights on Hungary and reinforced its fame as a safe, comfortable and trendy place for shooting.

In the last two decades, the emerging field of film tourism has become a widely researched area (Connell, 2012; Nicosia, 2012). The main focus of the research was on tourism destination marketing through leveraging on films and television series (Busby & Klug, 2001; Messina & Bocchioli, 2008; Riley & Van Doren, 1992; Tooke & Baker, 1996), impacts on destination image (Iwashita, 2008; Frost, 2006; Shani et al. 2009) film tourists' motivations and behaviour (Macionis, 2004; Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015) and impact on local community (Beeton, 2005, 2008). However, in tourism literature less attention has been paid on the business tourism related aspects of film productions (Connell, 2012; Ward & O'Reagan, 2010). Business tourism related to film productions is understood in a broad sense as travels and tourism consumption of the production staff and their stay in a destination. There is a growing competition between cities and regions to attract big budget film productions and to win filmmakers to their destination. The above-the-line-crew: producers, directors, assistant directors, art directors and film stars among others, arrive to a destination with working motivations. In this aspect they are long-stay business travellers who generally stay less than one year and heavily depend on tourism and hospitality services. Popular filming locations are managed to meet filmmakers as well as productions' needs. Thus, the process of location selection is crucial to understand motivations, push and pull factors that determine such a decision.

The decision of filmmakers to choose a destination for filming and the long stay of the crew significantly contributes to the hosting city's economy. Economic benefits for the tourism industry are in terms that the crew heavily depend on high-category tourism suppliers and services (airlines, transport and chauffeur services, five or four star hotels, restaurants and bars etc.)

The location of runaway productions or destinations that stand for another city or region can hardly benefit from the effects of film induced leisure tourism (Bolan, Boyle & Bell, 2011). Since the late 1980s, Hungary, especially Budapest, has become an important location hosting numerous international movies and television productions, although the majority of these films were runaway productions. In consequence, the Hungarian capital has hardly ever interpreted itself but has offered the background for another city (Irimiás, 2012). Still, Hungary continues to increase its institutional and financial support for international productions and invests resources to win foreign productions to come to film in Hungary. Budapest has turned to be an important business tourism destination for filmmakers and specific services and products have been elaborated to meet their needs. In more, Budapest's image as an ideal film tourism destination for filmmakers has been recently reinforced.

The aim of the present paper is to analyse Budapest as a business tourism destination for filmmakers. Firstly, the process of location selection is studied through the review of past academic literature. Secondly, through the qualitative research based on face-to-face, semi-structured interviews the strengths and weaknesses of Budapest as a business tourism destination for filmmakers are explored. It must be noted that business tourism related aspects of film tourism have received less attention in academic research and the majority of the studies has been carried out in Anglophone countries. The study of business tourism related aspects of film tourism in emerging destinations like Central Eastern European countries have been neglected, this paper attempts to bridge this gap. The present paper contributes to the enhancement of knowledge on film tourism investigating the prospective of filmmakers who are considered long-stay business travellers in a filming destination.

### **1. Literature review**

Several destinations have become 'film friendly' places with the aim to attract big budget film productions. The benefits of film productions are several, it has been acknowledged that they boost local economy, ensure jobs in the local film industry and are beneficial for the tourism and hospitality sector. Services offered by film commissions like location scouting, database on local film producers and qualified below-the-line-crew, logistic support, local incentives are all aimed to attract the special segment of business film tourists and to boost local economy through attracting film productions (Nicosia, 2012; Di Cesare & Rech, 2007; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006). As Connell (2012) argued numerous film commissions, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and local production services encourage filmmakers to choose their city for filming hoping for the economic spin-off from the production. Hudson (2011) called for a more intense collaboration between the tourism and the film sector to leverage on film productions to advance leisure tourism. The author evidenced that film producers would benefit from such collaboration because it would reduce off-set costs during filming. The role of DMOs prior and during filming can be essential to highlight tangible and intangible resources of the destination and make the location visible for potential leisure film tourists. Although Di Cesare et al. (2012) observed that several DMO's around Europe miss the opportunity to leverage on films in destination marketing. What is even more surprising is that more than 40% of the interviewed 30 destination managers affirmed that they were aware of wasting a good opportunity not to leverage on films (Di Cesare et al. 2012).

The primary role of film commissions is to offer logistic and technical services to productions and to help them during filming (Di Cesare & Rech, 2007, Nicosia, 2012). In the film industry, the soft-system has a great influence on production decisions. The soft-system implies trust, loyalty, alliances, networks and other non financial factors that might influence filmmakers' and producers' decisions in selecting the place that better suits their needs (Alfred & Lambert, 2012). Filming is highly time sensitive which means that delays on schedule might cause serious problems influencing the success or failure of films (e.g. if location selection takes too much time that might increase

production costs). Similarly, problems emerging from logistic issues can damage the success of productions. Considering these aspects, the selection of filming location is a highly relevant managerial decision (Alfred & Lambert, 2012). The decision to choose a filming location is influenced by the following factors:

- budget of the film (runaway productions - US media productions filmed in non-US satellite production centres - usually head to places where the operational costs of filming are lower)
- script and its relation to the authentic film location (e.g. a love story set in New York would lose credibility if a different location had been selected for filming)
- local incentive programs (key role of film commissions in guaranteeing local incentives)
- tax credits
- word of mouth among filmmakers
- personal and professional relations (so called soft-system)
- qualified and experienced local below-the-line-crew.

The process of location selection is driven by creative forces (skilled labour, script, aesthetics etc.) and by economic forces (budget, tax credits, local incentive programs, operating costs). The presence of local skilled labour and high quality film infrastructure in a location significantly contributes to the reduction of costs because the employment and transport of the expert staff might be restrained. Ward and O'Reagan (2009) observed that film productions could be defined as a specialized tourism segment of long-stay business tourism. In their research on the Australian Gold Coast the authors highlighted that the well-known tourism location has become a fashionable production location as well. Film commissions were promoting the filming location as a pleasure place for working holiday. The connections between the service economy for tourism and production suppliers were evidenced while tourism and hospitality expertises were identified as significant pull factors for future productions in the region. In addition, Ward and O'Reagan (2009) demonstrated that the following factors significantly influenced producers' location selection:

- tax credits
- favourable exchange rate
- positive and supportive attitude of local decision makers and local community
- qualified and experienced local crew
- perceived safety and comfort during their stay.

It has been acknowledged that when directors, producers or 'A list' actors are convinced that their needs will be met in a safe and comfortable environment it is easier to attract productions to a location. The Gold Coast film studio highlights in its brand communication that it is a 'World Class Studio in Paradise' assuring a safe and efficient working environment, developed world standards in filming as well as high quality production, communication, transport, tourism and hospitality services. Similarly, the role of comfort as a determining factor in location selection was evidenced by Alfred and Lambert (2012). In *table 1*. the film and television productions'

value chain core activities and services are evidenced, highlighting the role of the tourism and hospitality sector. Tourism, hospitality, catering and transport services play a key role in the pre-production, during production and in the post-production phase of filming. The quality of such services might have an influence on the filmmakers' perception about the destination and can later determine their opinion on the filming location.

Alfred and Lambert (2012) analysed the process of production selection of film producers through eleven case studies of filming in Louisiana (USA). It is understood that the producer and the director are responsible to keep the costs within the limits of the budget and film production is a capital intensive process with high financial risks.

**Table 1. Film and television value chain**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Core activities</b>	<b>Indirect services</b>
Pre-production	Location scouting and selection, permitting, location agreements, insurance, directors/writing, line producers, casting	<i>Business services:</i> Accountants, financial specialists, tax credit accountants, lawyers, publicity, real estate agents, structural engineers, <b>tourism and hospitality services</b>
Production	Casting, location and set organization, special effects, cameras, sound, lighting	<i>Suppliers:</i> <b>Tourism and hospitality services, catering,</b> carpenters , caterers, freight transport, drivers / Limo services, car rentals, furniture store, printers, office suppliers, hardware stores, camera equipment, portable toilet rentals
Post-production	Picture editing, sound editing, music / composition, previewing, subtitling, dubbing, lab processing	Sound technicians, local musicians, electronic suppliers, caterers, audio/visual companies, computer supplies, office supplies, transportation, <b>tourism and hospitality services</b>

Sources: elaborated by the author based on the executive summary of Georgia film and television industry, 2014.

This means that high quality services available for a lower cost in a certain destination make it competitive to win film productions. In most cases (85%) the producers affirmed that the presence of skilled labour force in a location is one of the most important pull factors along with tax credits, local film incentives, high quality film

infrastructure and previous positive work experience in the location. The case of Louisiana is interesting considering that this is one of the less prosperous States in the US and until two decades ago its reputation as a safe place was questionable. Decision makers in Louisiana identified the potential economic growth in hosting film productions and offered 30% tax credits to attract film productions to the region (Christopherson, 2006). The film sector is a closed environment where the influence of word of mouth (WoM) among professionals is significant, good or bad experiences in a production location are usually shared and might determine filmmakers' decision to choose a destination. Alfred and Lambert's (2012) findings confirmed that personal and professional relationships as well as previous positive experiences play a significant role in location selection. As Coe (2000) also highlighted analysing Vancouver's film industry, producers' interpersonal relations influence the selection of a location for filming. To sum up, trust, loyalty and personal contacts all have an influence on location selection along with tax credits and incentives. Attributing the success of a location to attract film productions only to one pull factor (e.g. tax credits) would lead to a narrow understanding of the location selection process.

## **2. Methodology**

The present paper is based on an ongoing exploratory research to investigate business related aspects of film tourism in Hungary. In order to explore the tourism related aspects of attracting international film productions, qualitative research methods were applied. According to Yin (2014) case study research offers the possibility to explore why and how questions. In order to base the research on a proper framework, past academic research articles on film productions, location selection and film commissions were analysed and the key issues were determined. In the second phase of the research, key informants were identified and contacted for face-to-face interviews. Key informants were selected according to their professional background in the Hungarian film industry and their professional skills in the operational aspects of filming. For the research two film production service companies, a location manager, an assistant director and a film studio director were contacted for interviews. The majority of the semi-structured interviews took place between November 2011 and May 2012, while the location manager and the assistant director were interviewed in September 2014. The interviews were registered and transcribed and the transcriptions were content analysed.

## **3. Business tourism of filmmakers: the case of Budapest**

Budapest is the capital city of Hungary, a Central European post-socialist, European Union member country. It is the main urban centre of the country and for many foreign visitors it is the only destination to visit (Rátz, Smith & Michalkó, 2008). The capital city is the primary location for national and international film productions. The city and its hinterland host three world class film studios: (1) Raleigh Film Studio, a leading post production company with its headquarter in Los Angeles; (2) Origo Film Studios; and (3)

Korda Film Studios in Etyek which is about 40 kms distant from the city. Budapest is the centre of creative industries attracting qualified and skilled labour force from the whole country as well as from abroad (Egedy & Kovács, 2009). The below-the-line-crew with qualified and experienced labour force of film industry is concentrated in Budapest. The majority of this labour force is constructed by freelancers who are employed with short-termed contracts by Hungarian production companies. In 2004, the Act II on Motion Picture entered into force in Hungary which assured for international film productions 20% tax credits from their overall spending. In order to apply for the 20% of tax credits the film had to show the cultural tangible or intangible heritage of Hungary and it was necessary to employ local crew for filming. Ten years later, in 2014 the Motion Picture Act was revised and tax incentives were increased up to 25%, with the same Act the costs of outdoor shooting were standardized and the permitting system was simplified. Policy makers interested in reinforcing Hungary's film industry clearly aim to attract more foreign productions to the country and to enhance co-productions among Hungarian filmmakers and international film productions. The core of Hungary's film industry is situated in Budapest but Hungarian taxpayers from all around the country support the productions through the tax credits and incentive programs, although they obtain hardly any benefit from it. This contextual background has offered a short glimpse on the institutional framework of filming in Hungary. In the next paragraphs, based on the semi-structured interviews, the links between the tourism industry and the film sector are highlighted with the aim to analyse the business tourism related aspects of film productions. In Budapest, the collaboration between foreign film productions and local film production services is necessary as for the effective filming as for the access to local financial support. In the European film industry co-productions are widespread which is in part due to the enhancement and support by the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production (<http://conventions.coe.int>). On one hand, co-productions are essential to assure work for local film industries, on the other co-productions offer the possibility to apply for EU financial support and local incentives in different countries (Morawetz et al. 2007). In the last decade, Budapest has hosted mainly European co-productions and some big budget Hollywood productions (*A Good Day to Die Hard* starring Bruce Willis and *In the land of blood and honey* directed by Angelina Jolie).

The local production service companies enter into competition to win the foreign film production once it is known that a foreign film producer has considered the possibility to film in Hungary. The local production service companies usually provide a budget for filming and the foreign filmmaker makes a selection from the offers and chooses the service company to work with. This selection is primarily based on the budget elaborated to meet the production's needs, and the most cost efficient it is, the more probability has to be accepted. Although in location selection the soft system plays a significant role as well. An international production with previous positive filming experience in Hungary is more inclined to work with the same production service company. A satisfied filmmaker is the service company's best promotion. The European film industry is relatively restricted and filmmakers usually share their filming experiences among each other. Due to effects of WoM, filmmakers from the

Scandinavian countries, from Spain, from Germany or from the UK more probably select the service company that has had experience with filmmakers coming from their country and it has a reputation among fellow filmmakers.

The strengths of filming in Budapest are as follows:

- high quality infrastructure with world class studios
- great variety of outdoor locations (e.g. historical quarters, residential areas, urban parks, riverside, derelict areas or World Heritage sites)
- good weather conditions (unfriendly weather conditions might cause delays in schedule and increase costs)
- 25% tax credit (on all the expenditure spent in Hungary without the obligation to present a detailed justification of spending)
- last but not least, qualified and experienced Hungarian workforce.

Following the decision of the foreign filmmaker on which Hungarian service company suits best his/her needs an agreement is signed among the parties. Once the agreement is signed the local service company is responsible for the production and for the logistic issues related to it. This means that the Hungarian production coordinator arranges all the travelling and transport issues, proposes accommodation providers, restaurants and other related services to the filmmakers. The production coordinator plays a key role in selecting hotels and his/her decisions are influenced by personal and professional contacts and network. Based on the budget, four or five star hotels (e.g. Marriott, Millennium, Le Meridien or Kempinski) or luxury apartments are offered to the above-the-line-crew. These hotels usually employ a person whose only task is to look after the filmmakers and to meet all their needs. This hotel employee must be available during the whole stay of the business film tourists and he/she must be efficient and flexible to resolve any problem and to fulfil any requirement. Business film tourists usually stay in the same hotel during all the filming which can take months. The meetings, the casting, the costume selections are carried out in the hotel which rents its conference rooms to the production.

The relationship between the local production coordinator and the hotel is based on trust. It is the interest of both parties to satisfy filmmakers' needs in the most efficient way in order to assure good reputation among filmmakers and business film tourists. The costs of the above-the-line-crew is also negotiated between the production coordinator and the hotel. It is the production coordinator's responsibility to reduce the costs and to keep the expenditure within the budget limits. The hotels, in order to be competitive to attract business film tourists, significantly reduce their prices and offer special 'packages' for filmmakers. Furthermore, the production coordinator organizes the crew's international travels as well as their transport within the city. The coordinator must guarantee a comfortable environment and favourable working conditions to the crew and transport services play a key role in this duty. The chauffeur service must be excellent because the director, the producer and other members of the staff have their personal chauffeur during their stay, and good communication and interpersonal skills are required by drivers.



In general, every year 15 - 20 international productions come to film in Hungary and their primary destination is Budapest. In past, the Hungarian capital hosted such foreign television productions as *The Borgias* (2011-2013), *Robin Hood* (2006-2009) or *Cadfael* (1994) mainly because filming in Hungary was cost efficient. The Hungarian film production companies missed the opportunity to negotiate credits to promote Budapest and Hungary through film productions. On one hand, these television productions have significantly contributed to the expertise of local film industry and of the Hungarian below-the-line-crew. On the other hand, the media exposure of the city could have been exploited through the collaboration with the tourism sector to leverage on these television productions to promote Hungary. The advantages of Budapest such as beautiful urban scenery, historically and architecturally rich quarters, and easily accessible World Heritage sites for filming are exploited by the local and international production companies for a relatively low price. The potential of leveraging on film and television productions to promote Budapest for leisure tourism seems to be repeatedly missed. In many cases foreign filmmakers work with a script specifically written for locations or studios in Budapest. The city's faces can be easily adapted to different film genres and settings in diverse historical eras. These attributes create the basis for potential film productions, although local incentives, tax credits and low below-the-line-crew wages constitute the main pull factors in attracting film productions.

### **Conclusions**

Hosting international film productions in a destination is beneficial for the tourism and hospitality sector. Although the immediate economic benefits are recognised, a long-term strategy to build a destination as a 'film friendly' location and as a safe and comfortable place for filmmakers needs to be elaborated and managed. In the present article it has been evidenced that the process of location selection is complex and it is influenced by various factors. The involvement of DMO's in the pre-production stage could be beneficial for the local tourism sector and for the foreign film productions as well. Assistance in location scouting, logistic issues and accommodation would offer the possibility to DMO's to get in touch with the production and to negotiate credits to promote the destination. A film location can be promoted to leisure and to business film tourists as well. As Hudson and Ritchie (2006) highlighted the attraction of future film productions to a destination is one of the elements of the destination marketing strategy to leverage on films. The case of Budapest as a destination for business film tourism is exemplary because it clearly demonstrates the challenges that the tourism and the film sector face. Firstly, foreign film productions and international co-productions are institutionally financed through tax credits and local incentives, although it is extremely difficult to track the economic and social benefits of high (25%) tax credits for the whole country. Secondly, the tourism and hospitality sector is involved in the process of film productions from pre-production to post-production phase. This involvement is regulated by personal networks, contacts and bilaterally negotiated agreements without the construction of a transparent and long-term

strategy. Thirdly, the examples analysed in the literature review such as the Gold Coast, Louisiana and Vancouver demonstrate that filming locations strongly depending on foreign film productions are in competition to attract filmmakers. Although the current practice of rising tax incentives and reducing below-the-line-crew's wage might boost the film and the tourism sector in a destination for a short term but, in my view, in the long-term it seriously damages both sectors. Practical implications of the findings are that DMO's should collaborate with the local production service companies to understand when and how they could get involved in attracting and hosting foreign film productions. A sustainable economic and social strategy that takes into account the interests of all the stakeholders (foreign filmmakers, local production services, local crew, hotel managers, transport agency managers, DMO's, policy makers and last but not least local community) would be needed to construct a service environment that aims to benefit all the interested stakeholders.

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