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### Not Quite *Under the Tuscan Sun*... the Potential of Film Tourism in Marche Region

Beeton, S.\*  
La Trobe University (Australia)

Cavicchi, A.†  
University of Macerata (Italy)

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#### ABSTRACT

The relationship between film and tourism is complex and at times often subtle – not all movies directly encourage tourism, but they can influence tourist images as well as provide additional aspects to the tourist experience. This conceptual paper considers the role that film can play to encourage and enhance tourism in the Marche Region of Italy. Based on theoretical knowledge developed to date, a process to develop film tourism product is proposed. Such a practical application of academic knowledge will also provide data with which to further develop theoretical models in the field.

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**Keywords:** Film-induced tourism, Film Commission, Italy, Rural areas

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\* E-mail address: [s.beeton@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:s.beeton@latrobe.edu.au)

† E-mail address: [alessio.cavicchi@unimc.it](mailto:alessio.cavicchi@unimc.it)

## Introduction

People have been visiting Italy for thousands of years, with the notion of the 'Grand Tour' of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century acknowledged as one of the antecedents of modern day tourism, while others argue persuasively that tourism was well established in that region far earlier, such as during the Roman Empire (Lomine, 2005). Many of today's Italians rely on tourism as a major source of income, yet due to Italy's strong place on the 'tourism map', residents of cities such as Rome, Venice, Florence and Milan as well as regions such as Tuscany and Sicily tend to dismiss the role tourism plays in these places as something that will always be there, requiring little research, marketing, management or other attention. This attitude is being forced to change in some famous locations, such as in Venice which is slowly sinking (literally and figuratively) under tourism and environmental pressures (France, 2011). However, most Italians continue to treat tourism in a rather cavalier manner. Simply put, the region suffers from a surfeit of touristic and cultural riches.

Districts with a lower level of tourism often desire tourists, but seem unable to get them past the well-known churches, museums, archaeological sites and art galleries of the aforementioned destinations. One of the problems they face is how to differentiate themselves from being 'yet another' church with paintings of saints, a walled village, Roman ruin or museum.

As often seen in places where the nature of tourism is not well understood, residents of these districts tend to focus on what they have seen work elsewhere (such as art, history, museums, religious sites and so on); however, what tourists really want are experiences and stories, not simply sites, as inferred by Pine and Gilmore's description of the taxi driver who provided stories and food as part of his service (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; 1999). One way to tell or even create a story that enhances the tourist experience and encourages new tourists is through film, as Tuscany found with the movie *Under the Tuscan Sun* (2003), which in many ways celebrated the rural nature, characters and produce of the region rather than its art or heritage. Certainly, it is now well established that film (movies and TV series) have the potential to induce tourism to the locations where they were filmed and affect the images the world has of these places. In particular, tourism to rural areas has been significantly enhanced by movies and TV series, providing a positive response to the challenge many rural areas face in terms of differentiating themselves with limited tourism promotional funds. Some examples include the rural town of Matamata in New Zealand (the site of Hobbiton in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* movies), Goathland in the North Yorkshire Moors in the UK (site of the long running TV series, *Heartbeat*), Monument Valley in the US (used for many western movies and TV series, in particular those featuring John Wayne) and outback Australia as depicted in movies such as *Crocodile Dundee* (Beeton, 2004; 2005; 2015).

This paper proposes a strategy for developing tourism to a region not unlike Tuscany (they share a border), but less known, *Marche Region*, in central Italy. The region is not well known overseas and has not been sufficiently differentiated to attract viable levels of international visitors and provide a valuable tourist experience. By utilising the

filmic stories of the region, film-related tourism collateral can be developed that may provide such differentiation. This paper considers the potential of film tourism for the region, based on the film tourism research and knowledge developed to date as outlined in the literature, including the authors' direct knowledge of and engagement with Marche Region through the Film Commission and University of Macerata as well as related businesses.

## 1. Literature

Studies of Hollywood blockbusters including *The Lord of the Rings* (Buchmann, 2006; Carl et al, 2007; Croy, 2010), *The Da Vinci Code* (Beeton, 2008) and even *The Sound of Music* (Im and Chong, 2008) confirm the positive role that a major movie can have in relation to tourism. Furthermore, long running TV series are also seen as powerful attractors (Coudry, 1998; Beeton, 2000, 2005). However, the successes noted above belie the fact that this is not a simple process, with film often playing a subtle, yet powerful role when there are a range of movies (or TV programs) filmed in a place, such as New York, London, Rome or Venice, rather than simply one movie encouraging (what is often limited) tourism (Beeton, 2006a; 2010). This creates issues relating to measuring and predicting levels and type of tourism induced by film (Busby and Klug, 2001). Consequently, Connell (2012) notes that strategic planning of film tourism tends to be opportunistic, rather than planned.

Further examples of the variety and subtlety of the role of the relationship between film and tourism, can be seen work by Frost (2010) who looked at images of the Australian outback and Beeton (2004), who applied movies and their related tourism promotion to a study of images of rurality in Australia, both illustrating the influence of film on tourism imaging.

In a comprehensive and critical review paper on the evolution studies of film tourism, Connell (2012) concludes that,

As a research community, we are now aware that film tourism occurs, that it is part of a range of motivators in the tourism destination decision-making process, that it creates a range of impacts, and has been adopted by savvy tourism marketers and businesses seeking uniqueness and novelty (Connell, 2012: 1025).

She also points out that, while there is debate regarding the longevity of film tourism (reflecting the earlier discussion of the difficulty of predicting tourism driven by a particular movie or TV series), there is the potential for long term association between film and tourism, especially with the growth of fan groups and the longevity of cult films (Connell, 2012). The rise of organised fan 'clubs' and events is an interesting phenomenon that has only recently received attention from the tourism industry and academe. Researchers into fandom, such as Hills (2004), are leading the field and enhancing the knowledge of tourism researchers.

While researchers have long acknowledged the complexities, variety and opportunities of film-induced tourism, destination marketing organisations (DMOs) and, in particular, film commissions are slower to see this. This is partly due to the shorter term political nature of many DMOs and film commissions who are driven by short term outcomes, missing the more subtle role that film plays in tourism. Furthermore, DMOs and film commissions have their own pressing needs, yet it is important that they consider the possibilities of film tourism, beyond developing simple trails of major films ('this is where xxx was filmed') that only add limited value to the destination. One of the aims of the proposal outlined in this paper is to expand this.

## **2. The Role of Film Commissions**

While not part of a usual literature review, it is appropriate to briefly consider the role of film commissions and their formal relationship with the tourism industry and DMOs. Primarily a film commission's role is to bring filming into its region by promoting sites for filming along with practical elements such as ease of access, established infrastructure and existence of an experienced workforce. Many work to make their regions 'film friendly', consequently having little time to focus on what happens after the film crew leaves, which is where the tourism aspect lies (Beeton, 2001; di Cesare et al, 2012).

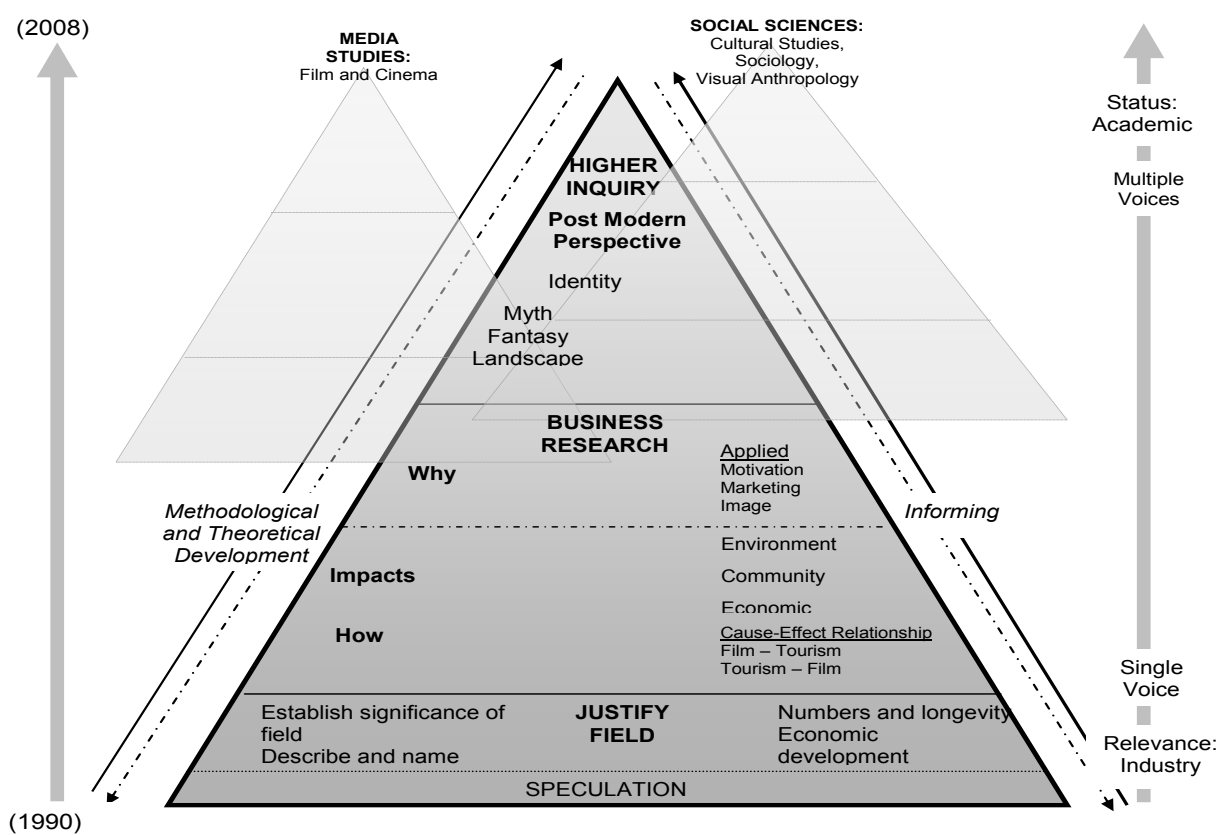
While some fans will actively search out destinations during the filming process, more often film-induced tourism occurs after the filming of the movie or TV series is released, and can have significant effects, both positive and negative, on the host communities (Mordue, 1999; Beeton, 2001). Yet, those involved with the cause of these effects (the film-makers) are long gone, unless they return to film a sequel. So, in effect, it is the Film Commission who should be taking a longer term perspective, yet this is rarely the case. While there are some film commissions who are engaged in tourism, such as in England, Scotland, New Zealand and the Bahamas (Hudson and Ritchie, 2006 ) these are more the exception than the rule.

## **3. The Process of Knowledge Development**

The academic study of the relationship between film and tourism has grown exponentially over the past twenty years, and can be traced through the various types of research undertaken over that time. While acknowledged as among the first to publish in the field, Riley, Tooke, Baker and Van Doren (see Riley and Van Doren, 1992; Riley, 1994; Tooke and Baker, 1996 and Riley et al, 1998) have moved to other fields of research, with others taking up the role of developing our knowledge of film tourism. Beeton has been continuously studying the phenomenon since the late 1990s and has been joined by others also taking a longer perspective, including Australian based researchers Croy (2003; 2010), Frost (2006; 2010) and Buchmann (2006; 2010) studying many international aspects of the phenomenon from a western perspective, with researchers emerging in Asia and Europe, such as Kim et al (2007), Kim (2010) and di Cesare et al. (2009).

In essence, these various studies are developing a body of literature that has moved from a focus on image and marketing through to theoretical development of the relationship between the viewer, film, tourist and location. Beeton (2010) summarises the development of knowledge of tourism as moving from justifying the field as a valid area to research towards what she refers to as 'higher level' studies incorporating the sociology and media studies fields, as represented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Model of Film-Induced Tourism Knowledge Development**



Source: Beeton, 2010:4

As the level of research continues to grow and develop our knowledge of the relationship between film and tourism, we are able to propose creative and potentially powerful solutions to the problems the industry faces, such as increasing tourists' experiences, satisfaction and desire to visit/return. Due to the subtlety of film tourism (apart from the clear blockbusters), it is important to consider how it can be developed in rural communities that, while not having major film presence, have had niche or domestically popular productions. This paper is one attempt to achieve this; however as such it remains partly conceptual until tested in the field, which will take a number of years due to the nature of film that, in spite of the spectacular examples cited at the

beginning of this paper, is a primarily incidental tourism motivator (Beeton, 2011). It is a long term prospect that also requires further commitment (and resources) from the associated film commissions.

#### 4. Methodological Approach

Based on previous research and the theoretical developments noted above, personal experience as a tour guide as well as numerous site visits to Italy over a period of four years, the case for a film tourism product is presented, followed by a proposed strategy. A single region in Italy is used as the case study, providing an appropriately bounded case as noted by Yin (2009) as central to any case study. As a region that has seen some popular domestic and niche films, but no international blockbusters, Marche Region is an appropriate Case Study in which to consider ways to encourage a more niche style of film tourism. This enables consideration of the potential for film tourism enterprises in less obvious regions.

#### 5. The Case: Marche Region

While Marche Region is not well known outside of Italy, it is attracting interest from tourists looking for a less 'mediated' experience than that found in some of the better known regions of Italy, including neighbouring Tuscany and Lazio (where Rome is situated). The Lonely Planet guide to Italy refers to the region as Italy in microcosm (Simonis et al, 2010). Marche Region is in central Italy, comprising five provinces (or as originally stated by the Longobards, *marca*), bordering the Adriatic Sea in the east, between Emilia-Romagna to the north, Tuscany and Umbria to the west, and Lazio and Abruzzo to the south, as shown in Figure Two.

**Figure 2: Location of Marche Region in Italy**



Source: Regione Marche, <http://www.regione.marche.it/>

The landscape moves from coastal environments through rural and manufacturing communities to the Sibillini Mountains, all with their historical towns, villages and churches, including the Sanctuary of Mary at Loreto, one of the most important religious sites in the country. The town of Macerata also hosts a well known open air opera season during the summer months, while Urbino regularly home-hosts students from as far away as Australia learning Italian. It is also a major centre of production, particularly known for shoes, hats and furnishings (Duranti, 2008).

During last decade preeminent journals and specialized magazines have encouraged tourism in this region. The first well known article (at least by local people) published on The Guardian in 2001 stated that Marche could be “really” considered the New Tuscany

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2001/sep/23/italy.culturaltrips.observerescapesection> ). Particularly the journalist Nick Cohen noted that “there are similarities, but the region's appeal lies in its difference. The Marche is on the same latitude as much of Tuscany and Umbria but has been isolated by geography and history. It is cut off from western Italy by the Apennines, and from the sixteenth to the late-nineteenth century was the private territory of the Vatican... the quiet of the Marche's interior is an astonishment and a relief”.

In 2005, an article of New York Times by Christopher Solomon entitled “Is Le Marche the next Tuscany?”, described this region to be what Tuscany must have felt like 10 or 20 years before, when “it was discovered by tour groups and their omnipresent buses - carrying thousands upon thousands of travelers who flock there each year to try to recreate the pleasures of Under the Tuscan Sun” (Solomon, 2005: <http://travel.nytimes.com/2005/05/22/travel/22tuscany.html>). While he is critical of the popularity of film tourism generated by the movie, Under the Tuscan Sun, such a references confirms the power of filming in relation to tourism. While Marche Region has not had such a blockbuster filmed there, the 1972 movie, *Alfredo Alfredo*, starring Dustin Hoffman and nominated for a Golden Globe award was filmed in Ascoli Piceno in Marche Region. While some time ago, such movies resonate with film buffs and Hoffman fans alike. In 2010, Hoffman starred in a tourism promotion of the region.

Authenticity and Italianess are the words that were used to describe the people living in this countryside. Recently in July 2010, the AARP magazine, very popular among retired people in the U.S., considered Marche among the five earthly paradises where to live after retirement. The judgement is based on good health system, many opera festivals (especially during summer time), good prices and the opportunities for sports throughout the year, from the mountains to the sea. Tuscany and Umbria are instead considered by the magazine too expensive and prohibitive ([http://www.aarp.org/about-aarp/press-center/info-07-2010/best\\_places\\_retire\\_abroad.html](http://www.aarp.org/about-aarp/press-center/info-07-2010/best_places_retire_abroad.html) )

Even if international press has stress the similarities among these regions, data about arrivals and overnight stay during the period 2001-2011 hold steady.

**Table 1: Tourist Flows by Country of Origin, 2010: Marche Region Region**

Visitors Numbers			Number of nights		
<i>Country of Origin</i>	<i>Arrivals</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Country of Origin</i>	<i>Nights</i>	<i>%</i>
Germany	63.857	17,0	Germany	419.181	18,9%
Holland	29.766	7,9	Holland	198.388	9,0%
France	26.944	7,2	Czech Republic	151.494	6,8%
Switzerland	22.026	5,9	France	135.133	6,1%
Great Britain	21.733	5,8	Switzerland	106.603	4,8%
Russia	18.273	4,9	Great Britain	105.909	4,8%
Czech Republic	16.118	4,3	Belgium	94.622	4,3%
Belgium	14.901	4,0	Austria	91.911	4,1%
Austria	14.540	3,9	Romania	73.742	3,3%
United States	14.231	3,8	Russia	70.143	3,2%
Poland	13.695	3,7	United States	69.279	3,1%
Spain	10.465	2,8	Spain	53.008	2,4%
Other countries	108.621	29,0	Other countries	647.164	29,2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>375.170</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>2.216.577</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Regione Marche Assemblea Legislativa, 2012 p.1

Due to the legislative nature of this data, for this exercise we will pursue their results, proposing a focus on the top five countries in terms of arrivals Germany, Holland, France, Switzerland and Great Britain as well as Australia. The reason for focusing on increasing the numbers and length of stay of international visitors is that they bring 'new' money in to the economy, and are often higher spenders than domestic tourists. Moreover during 2012 many sources such as hotels and commerce associations' reports underlined huge decreases of domestic flows (especially in terms of number of nights) due to the big economic crisis that is affecting the whole country. Australia has a large expatriate Italian population and has been heavily influenced by Italian cultures since the post war migration, especially in the southern state of Victoria, where Italian wine-makers, fruit growers and restaurateurs dominate the hospitality scene. Furthermore, as a long-haul destination with a smaller population than European countries, any increase becomes significance due to the longer length of stay of Australians. While the focus of this paper is in on international tourism, the proposed film tour product may also be relevant to the domestic market.

One of the main issues the region faces in terms of increasing international tourism is the overall lack of English language skills in the community as well as at touristic enterprises. This issue is not simply one coming from the Anglo-centric focus of the author, as English is not only one of the primary languages used in tourism, but also has become the language of business, hence its global importance. Many other visitors apart from native English speakers have knowledge of English and it has often become the common form of communication between what are primarily non-English speaking cultures.



In order to address this issue, English is being taught in schools and there are some university courses in English, such as a Rural Tourism program at the University of Macerata. However, such programs are longer term projects, with an urgent need for English language knowledge. However, this paper does not directly address this issue, rather looks at ways to increase visitors from the English speaking world regardless of the language issue as well as improve their experience through other means, such as film. When more English speakers arrive, the industry will move more quickly towards developing and employing multi-lingual staff.

## 6. Regional Tourism Strategy and the role of Marche Film Commission

The 2012 yearly programme for tourism promotion (Programma Annuale di Promozione Turistica) released by the *Legislative Assembly* underlines the importance of diversifying and creating new services in order to increase tourism competitiveness in Marche. Several strategies and actions are presented: developing thematic tourism itineraries, increase the level of internationalisation, diversifying the attractions, effective managing of the impacts of seasonality, increasing the competitiveness of internal rural areas. All these activities have to be carried out through several traditional tools such as participation to press conferences, international fairs and workshops, direct promotion to tourists through the enhancing of the institutional websites and of the social media.

Surprisingly, despite the specific objectives mentioned in this document and considering the role that film-induced tourism can have in terms of positive economic effects (the chance to spread the seasonality of visitors and activities and the diversification of local income and opportunities, among others) there is no reference to the work that could be done by the regional film commission.

Formed in 2009, the Marche Film Commission is charged with supporting the cinema and audiovisual sector in relation to the Marche region. Its primary objectives are to promote the territory in Italy and abroad as a film set in terms of the natural and historic-cultural environments as well as the tourism capabilities offered by cinema (Marche Film Commission, 2010).

To this end, the commission has established an impressive website with information on potential film sites as well as an online interactive film tourism map at <http://marchecinema.cultura.marche.it/map.asp> with a range of self guided tours throughout the region. While it is in Italian, the Google translation in English is passable in part, but does not translate all of the text; furthermore, it is not clear which movies are actually available in English, or with English sub-titles. In discussions with the manager of Marche Film Commission, Anna Olivucci, this is considered to be an issue. Some of the movies filmed in the region include *I delfini* (1960), *Alfredo Alfredo* (1972), *Delitto d'autore* (1974), *Il grande Blek* (1987), *Cuori al verde* (1996), *The Big Heart of Girls* (2011), *Mio papà* (2014). Many of the storylines of these movies are romantic comedies, which sits very well with the interests of many tourists to Italy, enabling further development of a film tourism product. With an appropriate guide and tailored

experience, it may be possible to create a tourism product that can transcend this problem in the short term, while further developing English sub-titling in the future. The scant attention given by regional government to the Film Commission in both the yearly (2012) and triennial (2012-2014) programme for tourism promotion presents an opportunity to discuss the role that film could play to encourage and enhance tourism in Marche Region.

## **7. Proposal: Developing a Film Tour**

In order to address the issues of increasing international visitors to the region and improve the tourist experience through the application of a film tourism experience, a number of elements outlined above need to be considered. The primary issue is the lack of knowledge of Italian film in the relevant visitor markets, however that issue can and is being addressed through increasing the profile of Marche Region at dedicated Italian cultural as well as film festivals around the world, such as the Italian Festival in Sydney Australia, which the film commission plans to attend. There are also Italian Film Festivals held in various parts of the world, including Australia, where the Lavazza Italian Film Festival operating across six major Australian cities. In 2009 there were some 70,000 admissions to 350 screenings (Siemienowicz, 2010). Engaging with such initiatives will target those already interested in Italy and Italian film, and not only are many already visiting a film festival as tourists, they are themselves a strong potential market for film related tourism (Beeton, 2005).

However, such markets tend to be sophisticated in terms of their knowledge and expectations of Italy and film, looking for behind-the-scenes, backstage experiences as described by MacCannell (1973; 1976), Pearce (1982) and in particular Beeton (2005) who further developed this theory in relation to film-induced tourism. It is important to provide them with an experience they will not be able to access themselves from the self-drive film tour map, but will also support and build on that existing collateral. It is also crucial that the host community and other stakeholders are engaged in this process, as a disenfranchised community has the potential to destroy the tourism experience (Beeton, 2006b). While this is often acknowledged in developing nations, the role of the community in tourism is equally important in those first world countries where tourism has a long tradition, such as Italy.

Following is a range of proposed steps to facilitate the development of such an experience, divided in to three main areas: that of utilising film festivals to identify a market, developing a tour product that will meet their needs as well as the tour guides themselves, who form a crucial part of the tourist experience.

### **1. Italian Film Festivals**

- a. Find the international markets who are familiar with Italian film via connections with Italian Film Festivals (eg the Lavazza Italian Film Festival in Australia);
- b. Survey organisers and patrons as to their interests in Italian film.

- c. Find what relates to the Marche region and stress those films and locations to event organisers.
    - d. Consider sponsoring the festivals that have the most relevant patrons in terms of interest and propensity to travel to Italy.
  2. Develop a flexible tour itinerary based around research in to their primary film interests. May include:
    - a. meetings with actors, directors
    - b. visiting locations off limits to normal tourists, such as on private property or hard to locate locations
    - c. viewings of movies not seen previously in their country and then visits to the locations
    - d. visits to the production areas of film studios
    - e. meet special effects staff
    - f. hands-on 'make your own movie' workshop
    - g. Find the 'interesting' stories about filming in various locations – personal anecdotes that are amusing or provide insight into the stars or production process can work.
  3. The Tour Guides:
    - a. Train tour guides to be responsive, enthusiastic and exciting. They must be multi-lingual, with English as one of their languages.
    - b. Develop a strong script for the tour guides that is about filming in the region. One aspect people enjoy is learning how places were made to look a certain way in a film.
    - c. Employing trained actors as guides can provide people with the skills to work with a script as well as a passion and knowledge of film.
  4. Continually develop the tour and undertake regular research.
  5. Engage the host community and tourism industry in all stages of the process.
  6. Finally, the tour will eventually need to be promoted and sold through the tourism distribution network as well as via film festivals, so costing will need to make sure that appropriate provision is made to pay various commissions, which can take up to 50% of the price charged.

The key to all of these proposals is that they must be based on appropriate local research and not simply presenting what the tour guides believe to be important, which is what is currently on offer, and a common mistake made around the world (Weiler and Ham, 2001). If the guides go with what they know, the tours will remain the same as they are now, and fall into the realm of 'yet another tour of old buildings and museums' as noted in the Introduction.

## Conclusion

Film related tourism does not only occur in the realm of the blockbuster movie and mass tourism, but it is not always considered as beneficial. In this paper, we have suggested that there is an opportunity to develop niche based tourism products by

considering a region with mass tourism limited on the seaside during the summertime, resulting in a sustainable tourism industry. While having limited resources and being relatively new in its role in the region, the Marche Film Commission is open to collaborations and wishes to actively engage with this knowledge, which has the potential to provide an excellent basis from which to apply the academic theoretical knowledge to a region searching for its place in the Italian tourism landscape.

By applying the theoretical knowledge that has been developed through and testing this proposal in the field, additional models can be developed to contribute to our understanding of the organisation and planning of film tourism. At this stage, the paper and its proposals are conceptual, due in part to the issues noted earlier regarding the limited resources of film and tourism commissions (or DMOs). Nevertheless, there is the potential for substantial outcomes to arise by applying such theoretical knowledge. Such a proposal has direct importance to the tourism industry in general, as well as having particular pertinence to Marche Region, as the majority of the film tourism research has tended to revolve around theoretical discussions amongst academics, with limited information filtering out to the film and tourism professions. Significant gains in knowledge have been achieved, and by taking a forward looking approach rather than simply looking at what has already occurred, we can start to apply this knowledge in a manner that is relevant to the sector.

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