

Let's Go to Westeros!

A digital ethnography of Games of Thrones tourism in Dubrovnik

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ABSTRACT

For the past decade, Croatia experienced an increase in their tourism after they branded themselves as the home of ‘Westeros’, the fictional world of the popular HBO award winning medieval fantasy television show called *Game of Thrones* (Irimiás, Mitev & Michalkó, 2017). For this reason, tourism in Croatia is blooming with tourists visiting locations where all 8 seasons of the show were filmed. Although *Game of Thrones* was filmed in multiple cities including the US, Spain, Iceland, Ireland and Malta, Croatia, more specifically the city of Dubrovnik gained a lot of popularity because it depicts King’s Landing, the capital of the seven kingdoms in *Game of Thrones* (Tkalec, Zilic & Recher, 2017). Furthermore, in this day and time, guided tours are gaining more popularity and thus have come to play an important role in the tourism industry (Sandaruwani & Gnanapala, 2016). In this regard, they are seen as representative of a destination and therefore have the power to influence a tourist's perceived experience of a particular destination. Consequently, due to the limited research that has been done on the Dubrovnik setting to determine the part that tour guides play in shaping tourists' individual experiences when they go on a tour, this research aims to understand how tourists experience on-site guided tours of *Game of Thrones* filming locations in Dubrovnik. Moreover, by following the principles and procedures of grounded theory, the digital ethnography research method was used. Data concerned 100 TripAdvisor reviews, 10 YouTube videos with *Game of Thrones* filming locations related content, and 4 in-depth interviews with tourists who participated in a *Game of Thrones* tour in Dubrovnik. Data obtained was analyzed with the help of the qualitative software, Atlas.ti. Moreover, after thorough analysis in Atlas.ti, it was revealed that tourists experience on-site guided tours of *Game of Thrones* filming locations through three different perspectives that are interconnected and unique at the same time namely, the main character experience, the old town experience and the guide's value experience. These experiences highlighted the role of tour guides in shaping and creating a tourist overall experience during a tour as well as the tourist's ability to link the fictional world of Westeros and the on-site location in Dubrovnik through an imaginative lens.

KEYWORDS: *Film-induced tourism, guided tours, fandom, Game of Thrones, tourist experiences*

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Table of Contents

Abstract and keywords	
Acknowledgement	
1. Introduction	1
2. Theoretical Framework	4
2.1. <i>Game of Thrones in Dubrovnik</i>	4
2.2 <i>Understanding film-induced tourism</i>	5
2.3 <i>Film tourism as a fan practice</i>	7
2.4 <i>The role of tour guide in building touristic experiences</i>	9
3. Methodology and research design	14
3.1 <i>Methods</i>	14
3.1.1 <i>Participant observation online</i>	15
3.1.2 <i>In-depth interviews</i>	15
3.2 <i>Data collection</i>	17
3.3 <i>Data analysis</i>	18
3.4 <i>Research ethics</i>	19
3.5 <i>Trustworthiness</i>	19
4. Results	21
4.1. <i>The main character experience</i>	21
4.2. <i>The old town experience</i>	27
4.3. <i>The guide's value experience</i>	31
5. Discussion	38
6. Conclusion	40
6.1 <i>Research limitations</i>	43
6.2 <i>Future recommendations for research</i>	43
References	45
Appendix A. Interview guide	49
Appendix B. Consent forms	51
Appendix C. Interview transcript	54
Appendix D. Coding tree	63
Appendix E. YouTube links	67

Appendix F. TripAdvisor reviews	69
Appendix G. Fieldnotes	74

1 Introduction

Even though movies, music and literature have long been a source of inspiration for tourists to travel, recently, film induced tourism is seeing growth in various destinations that hosted film productions (Irimiás, Mitev & Michalkó, 2017). According to Bolan and Kearney (2017), films and television shows influence a person's travel decision and thus lure them into visiting a particular destination they have seen on their television. Moreover, this particular form of tourism began to gain recognition and more popularity following the *Lord of The Rings* trilogy that premiered in the early 2000s and how New Zealand branded itself after this trilogy as the home of 'Middle Earth' (Bolan & Kearney, 2017).

For the past decade, Croatia experienced an increase in their tourism after they branded themselves as the home of 'Westeros' (Tkalec, Zilic & Recher, 2017). If it wasn't fictional, Westeros would be ranked as the most dangerous continent in the world. However, despite all its horrors, tourism in Croatia is blooming, thanks to this popular HBO award winning medieval fantasy television show called *Game of Thrones*, with tourists visiting locations where all 8 seasons of the show were filmed. Although *Game of Thrones* was filmed in multiple cities including the US, Spain, Iceland, Ireland and Malta, Croatia, more specifically the city of Dubrovnik gained a lot of popularity because it depicts King's Landing, the capital of the seven kingdoms, in *Game of Thrones* among other scenes (Irimiás et al., 2017; Mathews, 2018). This made an impression on viewers of the show as King's Landing is an actual city which encouraged the demand of tourists to visit Dubrovnik (Tkalec, Zilic & Recher, 2017).

The tourism industry concerns the collective efforts of different key players that have their own roles and responsibilities to entertain a pleasant tourism movement (Sandaruwani & Gnanapala, 2016). In this modern era, guided tours are gaining more popularity and thus have come to play an important role in the tourism industry. Furthermore, Sandaruwani and Gnanapala (2016) argued that guides are seen as representative of a destination and therefore have the power to influence a tourist's perceived experience of a particular destination. In this context, Irimiás et al. (2017) states that the management of guiding services with themes and co-creation should be properly organized because after all, creating memorable experiences is deemed as the core of the tourism industry.

By going on a guided tour, a tourist can visit sites where scenes or episodes were previously filmed and thus connect with the particular characters or scenes of a movie or tv show. Therefore, by looking at what can be offered to tourists when they are participating in a tour, this paper will seek to understand how tourists experience on-site guided tours of filming locations. More specifically, the main objective of this paper is to answer the question *How do tourists experience on-site guided tours of Game of Thrones filming locations in Dubrovnik?* Additionally, the following two sub questions were formulated to help answer and gain more knowledge in order to better understand the objective of this paper; *In what ways do tour guides incorporate co-creation to represent filming locations and characters on YouTube and TripAdvisor? And, in what ways does fandom shape the touristic experience of Game of Thrones?*

Although there is much research on how *Game of Thrones* impacted tourism in Croatia, research on tourist' experiences have been truly overlooked. Furthermore, even though tour guides are a well-known activity in the world of tourism which most tourists have at least once taken part in, in terms of research, guided tours have so far not obtained the attention that they deserve. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on tourist guided tours especially when it comes to tourists' experiences and interactions with guided tours. Moreover, limited research has been done on the Dubrovnik setting to determine the part that tour guides play in shaping tourists' individual experiences when they go on a tour. Therefore, this study will contribute to the literary field of tourism by providing attention to the previously mentioned concepts that would give insight into how tourists create memorable and unique experiences on guided tours and how the film industry impacts tourism in Croatia.

Furthermore, the societal relevance of this thesis topic is in gaining knowledge of how tourists experience guided tours as well as understand tourists' expectations when participating in such activity. According to Rassolimanesh, Seyfi, Hall and Hatamifar (2021), the creation of meaningful experiences plays an important role in tourism marketing and how to retain customers. Furthermore, these authors argued that nowadays tourists are knowingly seeking more and more unique and memorable travel experiences. Therefore, gaining knowledge and an understanding of what makes a tourist travel experience more memorable is important for the managerial efforts of tourism managers. In this context, by understanding how co-creation works and how it helps tourists shape their own unique individual tourist experiences, marketers can

use this knowledge to improve their quality of experience at every point of interaction. This is because an improved understanding of a tourist's behavior and individual experience at the destinations and the filming sites is crucial in order to meet the expectations of this particular market in tourism. Furthermore, with the knowledge obtained from this research, guided tours can integrate original ways of designing tourists experiences. Thus, this research will be valuable for *Game of Thrones* tours as well as other theme tours in the tourism industry as a means to both help improve the quality of their offered itinerary and transform themselves in order to meet the needs of their audiences. That is to say, my thesis aims to fill the literary gap between film induced tourism experiences in Dubrovnik and tourist theme guided tours.

In order to collect and analyze data to reach the main objective of this paper, the digital ethnography research method was used following the principles and procedures of grounded theory. Data will surround 100 TripAdvisor reviews, 10 YouTube videos with *Game of Thrones* filming locations related content, and 4 in-depth interviews with tourists who participated in a *Game of Thrones* tour in Dubrovnik. Data obtained will be analyzed with the help of the qualitative software, Atlas.ti. The remaining section of this thesis is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework and literature review of concepts related to the research topic. In this case, the concepts that grounded this research like film induced tourism, the role of fandoms, tourist experiences and guided tours are discussed in this section. Section 3 describes the research design that is used for this research. Section 4 will present the results and interpretation of the results obtained from the data analysis. And lastly, this is followed by section 5 that will present the conclusion of this paper with a discussion of the limitations and future recommendations.

2 Theoretical Framework

This following section will provide a discussion of different beliefs and opinions of researchers and previous studies on the concepts that are essential to the main objective of this research. Furthermore, the clarifications and discussions of the different concepts touched upon in this literature review have the purpose to familiarize the reader with the topic at hand and thus reveal why it is of importance to understand how tourists' experiences are shaped. Moreover, the concepts of film tourism, fandom and guided tours are theoretically explored since it is important to have an understanding of these concepts in general. For this matter, the following paragraphs will explore the role of fandom in film tourism, following the work of Reijnders (2011), Waysdorf (2020), and Williams (2015) on how film tourism connects the fictional world with reality. Moreover, the role of tour guides and guided tours are also discussed in this literature review, in order to acquire a broad insight and thus understanding, on the role they can play in shaping tourist travel experiences. In addition, the filming of the television show *Game of Thrones* will also be briefly discussed. In doing so, this section builds a theoretical understanding around the concepts of film tourism, film tourism as a fan practice and guided tours and eventually points to what will be more in-depth explored in the case study that involves the rest of this thesis.

2.1 *Game of Thrones* in Dubrovnik

Before the filming of *Game of Thrones* in Dubrovnik, this city was already a well-known European destination among travelers. However, the city's popularity bloomed when it started hosting the popular Home Box Office (HBO) series in 2012. *Game of Thrones* is a popular fantasy drama that was created by D. B. Weis and David Benioff for HBO. This series is based on George R. R. Martin's popular high fantasy book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (Depken, Globan & Kožić, 2020). In short, *Game of Thrones* follows the storylines of different families that are fighting for the Iron Throne of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. The major conflict in this television show is between the Starks in the North and the Lannisters in King's Landing. *Game of Thrones* broadcasted on HBO from 2011 to 2019, with a duration of eight seasons (Depken et al., 2020; Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2017).

Furthermore, the production of this show is based in Northern Ireland, which also hosts the filming of many parts of the Seven Kingdoms, particularly the popular house of the North. On the other hand, Dubrovnik hosts the filming of King's Landing, the capital city of Westeros as well as other locations such as the outer lands of Essos. Moreover, Depken et al. (2020) noted that there was enough indication from which could be concluded that the show had an influence on Dubrovnik's tourism since the scenes that were filmed in Dubrovnik were aired, the city experienced a growth in their tourism. Since 2012, various *Game of Thrones* guided tours have been organized and offered to the public and tourists. Next to these tours, several stores that offered *Game of Thrones* merchandise opened their doors in the city center of Dubrovnik (Depken et al., 2020).

In addition, Waysdorff and Reijnders (2017) claimed that even though *Game of Thrones* was filmed in many different countries like Morocco, Iceland and Malta among others, tourism focused on Dubrovnik since it hosted King's Landing but also because the filming locations in this city were easily accessible to the public. Filming in Dubrovnik began in the beginning of the show's second season with the episodes airing on television in 2012. Furthermore, Dubrovnik can be seen on television numerous times through the show's narratives since the city of Dubrovnik hosted many of the locations within and outside its city for the show. Moreover, Depken et al. (2020) emphasized on the fact that as the show's genre is high fantasy and thus takes place in a world that is entirely fictional and outside of our own world, the world building of Westeros draws its visual presentations, cultures and activities upon the medieval Europe by combining it with fictional elements. Thus, Depken et al. (2020) argued that even though King's Landing is not real and does not exist, it obviously has reference to our history which in a sense makes it appealing to the fans of the show and in the same way attracts them to visit 'King's Landing' in Dubrovnik.

2.2 Understanding film-induced tourism

As a matter of fact, in his study about destination image formation, Juškelytė (2016) stated that films are not usually produced with the intention to draw tourists to a particular destination, however they have the tendency to influence its viewers indirectly to visit a particular destination by being the main filming set or by just being in the background of a scene or a message. In light of this, Juškelytė (2016) argued that this is to be expected since

postmodern tourism is greatly influenced by popular culture and the film industry with known cases like *The Vampire Diaries*, *The Lord of The Rings* and *Harry Potter*. In addition, Juškelytė (2016) argued that a tourist's visual presentation of a destination is shaped indirectly through their consumption of television shows and films. In this sense, Rewtrakunphaiboon (2009) argued that film can influence its viewers to travel to a certain destination based on certain aspects of a particular country that has been depicted on screen such as the culture, people and nature. By taking these views (Juškelytė, 2016; Rewtrakunphaiboon, 2009) into consideration, Depken et al. (2020) forms the basis for his claim on how every little reference that King's Landing make to our history and reality, can have an influence on the viewers and fans of the show in their decision to visit a particular destination, which in the context of this research is Dubrovnik.

Film induced-tourism is defined by Gjorgievski and Trpkova (2012) as “on-location tourism that follows the success of a movie made (or set) in a particular region” (p.99). Macionis and Sparks (2009) take a broader approach in their definition of film-induced tourism by saying that film induced tourism involves both a tourist visit to the locations where tv show and movies were made and filmed, and a tourist visit to the film production studios and their respective theme parks like Movie Park and the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. More importantly, these authors also focused on the tourist perspective and/ or the activity they end up participating in at the filming locations. Furthermore, Macionis and Sparks (2009) put emphasis on the fact that this form of tourism is a unique and personalized individual experience because it is based on one's own consumption and interpretation of media images that has been depicted in a film or television series. In this context, Rewtrakunphaiboon (2009) explained that this unique individual experience has to do with the fact that viewers associate storylines, themes and actors to the physical properties (landscape and scenery) of a particular destination in a film which in turn shapes their attitudes, emotions and feelings towards that particular place. Furthermore, film locations and characters are given great meanings by viewers and thus become iconic tourist attractions that tourists visit with specific associations, memories, images and emotional attachments (Rewtrakunphaiboon, 2009).

As a means to understand film-induced tourism, Macionis and Sparks (2009) said that it is important to explore the motivations and reasons behind the decision to travel of a film-induced tourist. For this matter, Macionis (2004) explained a film induced tourist's decision-

making process with the push and pull theory. The pull factors are the factors that attract a tourist to a particular destination such as the beach and sunshine, whereas the push factors are the factors that persuade a tourist to travel to a particular destination such as self-actualization and nostalgia. Furthermore, Macionis and Sparks (2009) explained that, in the case of film induced tourism, the '3 P's' (Performance, Place, Personality) that represents the pull factor are the most important attributes in a film-induced tourist decision-making process to travel to a particular destination. Moreover, Macionis and Sparks (2009) defined the 3 P's as follows: 1). place, as the film location as seen in a film or television series, 2). performance, as the country where a particular film is produced. And 3). personality, as a person's need to visit a particular place where actors played particular scenes, this is also explained by Gjorgievski and Trpkova (2012), as the moment of identification for a tourist when they visit a particular country just to stand at a particular place where a famous actor played a for example favorite scene of them. Furthermore, a study on film tourism by Tkalec et al. (2017) used the 3 P's as foundation to understand a tourist's motivation to visit Zagreb or Split.

2.3 Film tourism as a fan practice

Next to a thorough understanding of film-induced tourism, it is also important to take into consideration the reason behind tourists visiting particular filming locations. For this purpose, Waysdorff (2020) distinguished between two types of tourists, 1) the traditional tourist that focuses on authenticity of a particular destination and 2) the film-induced tourist who places meanings to the film as they have seen on screen, in view of the fact that the storyline, place and characters live on in their memories. Thus, a film-induced tourist's need for authenticity is reduced and replaced with their imagination and fantasy. Waysdorff (2020) further explained that this needs to connect with the fictional, revolves around fandoms since the texts and narratives of a specific film or television series gives pleasure as well as shape a fans' identity. Furthermore, Kelner and Sanders (2009) said that film locations are visited to link what is fictional and thus strongly imagined, a sense of reality. This is because these fictional worlds are particular features of fandoms that truly matter to fans. In this regard, Kelner and Sanders (2009) further explained that the fictional world often feels real to the fans and consequently occupy a space in fans' heads in the same way that what is 'real' holds space in their heads. However, Reijnders (2011) argued that fans know that these fictional worlds in fact are not real and do not exist outside

one's imagination, yet it is noted that sometimes one's imagination and reality are so incredibly intertwined in a way that fans particularly want to pick to pieces. In fact, Reijnders (2011) further explained that visiting a filming location in person can have a toll on a fan's boundaries of what is real and what is not and thus the pretense of the fictional and reality collapses, even if it's just for a minute.

However, Waysdorff (2020) argued that this idea of entering another world by visiting filming locations is part of how fans and film tourists connect with the different worlds that we inhabit. This notion of using tourism to experience and be part of the fictional world that people see online, on television and/ or read about has become an ordinary practice that is nowadays widely recognized by all types of fandoms. This, according to Waysdorff (2020), creates meaning for fans because it is all about what participating in the process of going to a particular destination to visit a particular site represents for them. In this regard, Reijnders (2011) emphasized on the fact that visiting filming sites not solely plays with the boundaries between the fictional world and our world but also offers a way for, in this case, the fans to reflect on their own fandoms. This fan practice recognizes the role that visiting filming locations has come to play in shaping a fans' identity (Reijnders, 2011; Waysdorff, 2020). And, accordingly, Waysdorff (2020), stated that the use of tourism to visit fictional places depicted in film and television series are now a standard activity that is acknowledged by fandoms.

Furthermore, Kelner and Sanders (2009) put emphasis on the importance of the tourist gaze and fandoms by using the example of an iron balcony in New Orleans. These authors explained that a traditional tourist would look upon this balcony and see a typical balcony whereas a film induced tourist with its tourist gaze would look upon this balcony and see *The Big Easy*. Kelner and Sanders (2009) wanted to emphasize the fact that without the tourist gaze, a tourist would only see an ordinary balcony and thus take its meaning for granted. Additionally, Waysdorff (2020) noted that film tourism is not only built on the gaze but also on oneself presence at a site and the sense of belonging to a fandom. This is because film tourism creates this sense that being physically present at a filming location is different from what has been seen and depicted on screen as it involves the 'true' experience of being present in the exact same place where famous scenes were filmed and thus also where your favorite actors were once (Kelner & Sanders, 2009; Waysdorff, 2020; Ritter, 2022). Moreover, research on insights into the experience of *Lord of the Rings* film guides by Buchmann (2010) showed that film tourists,

especially *Lord of the Rings* film tourists, wish to experience the fictional world of Middle-Earth as well as the ‘real’ New Zealand. Alongside this experience, these film tourists anticipate a genuine and authentic experience. In addition, Buchmann (2010)’s research also showed that film tourists tend to do their own little research by looking at previous tourists’ tour images, New Zealand itself, behind the scenes videos and documentaries before visiting a filming location or going on a location tour. This is done in anticipation of the trip, however Buchmann (2010) also explained that this pre-tour research proved to be essential for the construction of the tourists’ expectations.

As a matter of fact, Juškelytė (2016) disclosed that film tourism is not solely about fandoms. This author gives insights into how there are several filming locations tours, especially in the US, that are leaning less towards fans since their focus is to offer a tour with an itinerary that cover many filming locations used in various films and tv shows at once instead of purposely only one. However, Williams (2015) argued against this by saying that when tourists knowingly visit a particular filming location or participate on a thematic guided tour because of a particular television show or film, it often has to do with one’s attachment to this as a fan. Accordingly, Reijnders (2011) and Williams (2015) agreed on that fact that it is a fan’s emotional connection and attachment that pushes them to make the decision to visit particular filming locations whether it is an easily accessible location on a family vacation or traveling long distances with the objective to find a lesser-known filming location. Therefore, Reijnders (2011) argued that the practice of fans as film tourists offer both pleasure and, in some manner, shape their identities.

2.4 The role of tour guides in building touristic experience

Since fans as film tourists are visiting filming location with the intention to experience something out of the ordinary, Zillinger, Jonasson and Adolfsson (2012) highlighted the importance of guided tours in shaping tourists’ experiences. Furthermore, Sandaruwani and Gnanapala (2016) describes a tour guide as someone who provides and interprets information for visitors of a particular area or place in their own chosen language. In view of this description, Rabotic (2009) argued that a tourist guide, aside from having the task to guide a group of people from abroad or local through a series of historical sites and providing information about these specific sites, they are also responsible to promote the cultural and natural heritage of a country

in an active and engaging manner. Thus, the overarching role of a tour guide in a specific environment is defined as knowledgeable, entertaining, inspiring, interpretive and leading (Chilembwe & Mweiwa, 2014; Rabotic, 2009; Sandaruwani & Gnanapala, 2016). In addition, Sandaruwani and Gnanapala (2016) stated that the success of tourism at a particular destination often hangs on the tour guides' performance on a tour since they offer essential information to their visitors. It is because of this reason that these different authors (Chilembwe & Mweiwa, 2014; Rabotic, 2009; Sandaruwani & Gnanapala, 2016) come to the conclusion that the role of tour guides in the tourism industry is truly important and thus should not be overlooked.

Additionally, Chilembwe and Mweiwa (2014) expressed that next to their role as information providers, tour guides have the power to make a tour boring or pleasurable. Moreover, it is further argued that the reputation and image of a particular destination improves when tour guides offer a service of top quality to the tourists. In this sense, Rabotic (2009) emphasized on the fact that when a tourist recalls his/ her trip, they would always recall their tour guide even though he is a stranger and spent less than 5 hours in their company. Therefore, Rabotic (2009) opened the doors to the importance of tour guides by arguing that the way by which a tour guide offers and entertains his/her group of tourists on a tour can shape the tourists' experiences. Additionally, in his study of the creative role of tourist guides, Rabotic (2009) showed that the way in which a tour guide performs, to put simply, what they choose to offer or not to offer on a tour can either make a good lasting impression on the tourists or simply break a tour. In this regard, Rabotic (2009) agrees with the statement that tour guides are essential but also adds on the fact that tour guides have a central position in shaping and creating tourists' experiences. The reason for this argumentation is because according to Rabotic (2009), nowadays tourists are not interested or are not willing to put effort into creating their own experiences while traveling. In other words, tourists decide to go on a guided tour mainly because prior to their trip they do not want the responsibility of looking for the right places to visit but also because they are reluctant to invest physical and mental effort into their experiences while on vacation. This behavior results then into a collage of passing signs and images that appear and disappear without an ounce of excitement or a memorable thought for tourists (Rabotic, 2009). Therefore, Chilembwe and Mweiwa (2014), and Rabotic (2009) put emphasis on the role of the guide stating that it is them who help the tourists to see what is out there by providing cultural and natural oddities that are often misunderstood or ignored. Thus, Chilembwe

and Mweiwa (2014), and Rabotic (2009) argued that tour guides are the providers of tourist experiences seeing that they are the professionals that offer interpretation and explanation of the known, unknown and hardly seen sites of a destination.

According to Reichenberger and Smith (2020) a guided tour provides a tourist experience that compromises the tourists, the guide and the setting. This experience then happens when all the previously mentioned entities interact with each other with the focus to put the tourists' needs and thus experience during their travel first. Reichenberger and Smith (2020) are of the opinion that a tourist is completely dependent on a tour guide during the 4 to 8 hours of a particular tour and on this account this situation turns into one where several relationships need to be established as a means to offer tourists an amazing tour experience. These relationships include the one between the tour guide and the setting the tourists and the setting, and according to Reichenberger and Smith (2020), the most important one which is the relationship between the tour guide and the tourists. In this context, these authors further argued that tour guides should succeed in establishing this different relationship with the objective to ensure a positive experience for the tourists but that also concerns a beneficial experience for themselves (tour guides) and a rewarding experience for the setting and the destination in general.

When it comes to tourists' experiences on a tour, Campos, Mendes, Valle and Scott (2018) studied the importance of interactions and active participation with the framework of cooperative creation (co-creation). Following this study, these authors claimed that value comes to exist when a tourist makes use of a service, in this case, when they participate in a tour since value for tourists during a tour is a product that is co-created through interaction with each other and active participation with the tour guides but also other tourists. In accordance with Campos et al (2018), Reichenberger and Smith (2020) stated that co-creation unfolds opportunities that tourists themselves can utilize in their creation and shaping of unique and memorable experiences because in the end experiences are created by oneself and in their interactions with others. In the same fashion, Irimiás et al. (2017) support this statement by also saying that experience is further enhanced by tour guides ability to include co-creation in a tour. These authors argued that co-creation places a tourist's active participation as well as their interactions with others in the center of experiences. Because, in some ways, it is the tourists themselves that co-create their individual experiences by engaging and interacting with others but also by actively taking part in mental and physical ways which ensues in extra benefits and value

(Irimiás et al., 2017). In fact, in a study conducted by Buchmann (2010) on tourist experiences on Lord of the Rings tours, revealed that tourists wanted to experience the actual New Zealand as well as the fictional Middle-earth by connecting the fictional and the nonfictional with active interaction with various social actors provided by the tour guide in order to create authentic and sincere experiences. Accordingly, Sandaruwani and Gnanapala (2016) noted that tour guides play an important role in creating unique touristic experiences as they are the ones who encourage the active participation and interaction of tourists on a particular tour. Furthermore, research done by Reicheberger and Smith (2020) revealed how co-creation results in fun, emotional, memorable and knowledgeable experiences by examining the connections between tourism and fandom. As fandoms focuses on social interactions, these authors argued that co-creation inevitably create a sense of belonging and thus, when members of a fandom are placed in extraordinary places, they tend to link this sense of belonging to these particular unique places and consequently impacting their experiences (Reicheberger & Smith, 2020).

In addition, Tussyadiah (2014) expressed that only if or when tourist emotional and intellectual interpretations of their multidimensional realities are stirred, their tourists' experiences on a guided tour becomes memorable. On the other hand, this author said that it is in fact the tourists spent physical and mental energy towards their encounters, participation and interaction on tour that adds to the shaping of their memorable experiences on tour. In this regard, Irimiás, Mitev and Michalkó (2021) added the observation that the more attentive and focused a tour guide is by encouraging active participation both mentally and physically from the tourists during a particular tour, the more this attentive nature of a tour guide helps create the ever-present content of experiences in the tourists' memories. This is because experiences are created through each little encounter between a tour guide and a tourist, for example through co-creation, the active engagement and participation in tour activities that demands a level of attention from a tour guide that in the end results to an overall more memorable experience for the tourists (Irimiás et al., 2021; Neuhofer & Buhalis, 2018). In this context, as presented by Tussyadiah (2014), when it comes to tourism, experience should be centered around the tourists since they are the one that can create their experiences by themselves. However, Tussyadiah (2014) also argued that it is their (the tourists) interactions with others during a tour and especially with the tour guide that contributes to adding value to a particular tour since they are the one who are responsible for putting together the tour itinerary and realizes the actual tour.

Thus, tour guides are seen as the ones with the ability to offer a platform where unique and memorable experiences can be shaped and created (Irimiás et al., 2021; Neuhofer & Buhalis, 2018; Tussyadiah, 2014).

In the end, the concepts and ideas mentioned in this section were discussed in order to help readers familiarize themselves with the topic at hand and thus get an understanding on how all these concepts in some manner connect with each other in the creation of tourist experiences. Additionally, tour guides were also explicitly discussed as a means to acquire a deep and broad insight on the role they play in keeping tourists engaged and entertained during a tour, because after all it is important to understand how experiences are shaped and created.

3 Methodology and research design

This section will explain the steps that were followed in order to obtain the data necessary to explore how tourists experience *Game of Thrones* guided tours in Dubrovnik with the use of the digital ethnography research method. Furthermore, the methods used in order to seek understanding for the main objective of this thesis are thoroughly discussed in the following paragraph.

3.1 Methodology

Digital ethnography was the research method used in order to examine how tourists experience *Game of Thrones* filming locations with a guided tour in Dubrovnik. Digital ethnography is explained by Sandlin (2007) as a qualitative research method that is used to study online cultures and communities that emerged thanks to the internet. According to Thanh and Kirova (2018), digital ethnography stands out at telling stories and thus assists a researcher in their development of themes from, in the context of this research, the tourists' viewpoints. For this reason and to better understand tourists' experiences, the digital ethnography approach was adopted since the research question of this study is of exploratory nature. In this manner, digital ethnography in this research was based on the collection of tourist reviews posted on the internet that included detailed information about their experiences on a guided tour. In addition, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the possibilities to do participant observation physically in Dubrovnik were limited. Therefore, after taking all these aspects into consideration, digital ethnography was deemed as an appropriate research methodology for this study, because it could provide the resources necessary to conduct research online since information that is published online can be easily used to identify and understand the needs of a particular audience and thus gives researchers the opportunity to observe the online environment and natural behavior of its research subjects (Shao, Li, Morrison & Wu, 2016; Ritter, 2021). Furthermore, the data that was collected was further analyzed in order to gain an interpretive understanding of touristic experiences with guided tours. Hence, the epistemology of this study is interpretivism. Moreover, the nature of this study is inductive as it is creating theory from the data that was collected (Bryman, 2012). In addition, because this study concerned itself with the interactive process of language and communication and thus how a person can understand the world around

them which in this case were the experiences that tourist communicates through reviews and YouTube content, constructionism was justified as the ontology of this study (Bryman, 2012).

3.1.1 Participant observation online

Data for this study was gathered from TripAdvisor and YouTube to establish a context for the in-depth interviews. Furthermore, 100 tourist reviews were collected from the TripAdvisor website. Moreover, 100 tourist reviews on *Game of Thrones* guided tours in Dubrovnik between 2021 and 2022 were collected. These reviews are between 2 to 5 sentences long. And as for YouTube, several videos with *Game of Thrones* guided tours and *Game of Thrones* filming locations related content in Dubrovnik were observed. These YouTube videos were between 10 - 20 minutes long and were published between 2016-2002. The reason for this wide range is due to the COVID-19 pandemic that affected the tourism industry for the past two years. After observation, 10 of these observed YouTube videos were collected for further analysis. In addition, TripAdvisor reviews and YouTube videos in the English language were included in the sample.

3.1.2 In-depth interviews

Taking into consideration the interactivity and flexibility that in-depth interviews provide, for this thesis, four in-depth interviews were added to the data collection in order to obtain a more in-depth understanding of a touristic experience from tourists that participated in a *Game of Thrones* guided tour in Dubrovnik. Bryman (2012) defined in-depth interviews as a qualitative research method that concerns the nature of one-on-one interviews as a means to study a person's views on a particular topic. Therefore, for this research, in-depth interviews were considered truly valuable as the interviews were conducted in order to obtain in-depth information about a tourist's behaviors, thoughts and experiences of when they went and participated in a *Game of Thrones* guided tour. In addition, the flexibility that comes with the nature of interviews, allowed me to make changes during the interview depending on the tone and flow of the interviews with each participant giving me more room to explore their experiences more in-depth.

For this matter, four semi-structured interviews were conducted. In these interviews, the participants (tourists) had the room to freely express themselves and speak one's mind on the

different aspects that concerns travel experiences as solely a tourist as well as a fan. The interviews explored, next to the topic of film tourism as a whole, two subtopics including, the role of fandom and tour experiences (see Appendix A, interview guide). In this order, each interview started with introductory questions where the participants would talk about themselves but also their thoughts on film tourism. Following this introductory section, we moved onto the first subtopic which was the role of fandom towards film tourism. In this first line of questions, the participants could express themselves on the topic of *Game of Thrones* as a TV show, about themselves as fans and the filming locations of *Game of Thrones* in Dubrovnik. Some of the questions in this subtopic were '*How did you feel when you were first exposed to a filming location of Game of Thrones in Dubrovnik?*', '*How did your role as a fan of Game of Thrones impact how you felt when you visited these filming locations?*' and '*Could you give examples of how a location in a film can influence your knowledge as a viewer/fan?*'. Following this subtopic, we moved onto the next subtopic which was about the tourist experiences with guided tours. Some questions asked in this part of the interview were '*Did the tour include co-creation? (Meaning, was there interaction between tourists, the guide and the filming locations)*' and '*was it easy to link fictional scenes from specific Game of Thrones episodes to the actual location?*'. At this point in the interview, the participant could express in detail what they thought about the tour, how they experienced it and what role the tour guide had in making their tour experience memorable. Finally, after this stage of the interview, some closing questions were asked about the participants themselves but also their thoughts on film tourism for the future.

For this research, four tourists who went on a *Game of Thrones* guided tour in Dubrovnik, Croatia were interviewed. From these tourists, three were women and one was a man, and they were all between the ages 20 and 30 years old. These participants were from Curacao (2), Sint Martin (1) and Barcelona (1). Initially, the idea was to interview tourists who left a review on TripAdvisor however, due to the online and international nature of this interview, some of the contacted tourists through TripAdvisor did not reply or did not want to participate. In the end, only one tourist contacted through TripAdvisor replied back and agreed to participate, however his daughter did the interview since he wasn't fluent in English like his daughter was. This could be arranged because they went on the tour as a family. Next to this one participant, the second participant was contacted directly through social media since she was an acquaintance and knew because of her online postings that she went on this particular tour.

Furthermore, this participant went on this tour with a friend of hers. This third participant was also contacted directly thanks to information provided by the second participant. And the fourth participant was reached through Instagram. In addition, the participants chose for anonymity during this interview and thus opted for their names not to be mentioned in this research.

Furthermore, interviews were conducted online through Zoom due to the nature of this research and limitations to meet physically. Moreover, the participants had to digitally sign their consents before each interview began (See Appendix C, consent form). In addition, interviews were conducted between March and April 2022 and each interview lasted between 40-60 minutes. This length is considered appropriate for each participant to freely discuss each question asked. Due to the online nature of the interviews, it should be noted that thorough observation of the participants during the interviews were ignored. Moreover, it should also be noted that because the interviews were conducted online, the participants found it more convenient in terms of flexibility to arrange a day and time for the interviews considering three out of the four participants do not live in the Netherlands. In addition, the participants were comfortable with how the interviews were conducted because the application Zoom was not something new to them since the pandemic made them familiar with the application as they were used to using Zoom as well as other online applications for school or work. Furthermore, interviews were conducted in English, except for one, where sometime the participant would switch to Spanish in order to express herself better, these Spanish parts were later translated to English. Each interview was audio recorded and later transcribed for further analysis.

3.2 Data collection

For the collection of reviews from TripAdvisor, the following strategy was used. By searching ‘Game of Thrones tours in Dubrovnik’ in the search bar on the TripAdvisor website, brought up a list of the different tours offered in Dubrovnik. From this list, the first two tours of Game of Thrones were selected. Furthermore, 50 reviews from each of these tours were collected. Thus, 50 reviews were collected from the tour ‘Game of Thrones tour’, and 50 reviews were also collected from the tour ‘Game of Thrones extended tour’ which sum up the total of 100 reviews. Such reviews are usually very short and contain between 50-100 words. Furthermore, a similar approach was taken for the collection of the ten YouTube videos. First, by typing ‘Game of Thrones tours in Dubrovnik’ in the YouTube search engine brought up several

results. Secondly, YouTube videos with content related to the objective of this study were observed for ten days in order to feel and see the dynamic to which these people interact with each other online but also in the videos. In other words, this allowed me to observe these tourists' interactions and narratives in the context of the videos. After the observation of these YouTube videos, the reviews from TripAdvisor and the transcripts of the interviews, were transferred to the qualitative software Atlas.ti for further analysis.

3.3 Data analysis

After all data was transferred to Atlas.ti, the analysis of these data started, and this followed the principles and procedures of grounded theory. According to Bryman (2012), this is a well-known approach in qualitative research that derives theory from data since it allows one to uncover meanings, interactions, experiences, patterns and themes that transpire from texts. This means that the process of analyzing data consisted of reducing data into codes and creating categories where meaning was shared. This was all made possible because of Atlas.ti. This qualitative software was used since it supported the analysis of a great amount of text by creating codes, categories and finally turning these into broader themes (Cho & Lee, 2014). After having all the data collected and gathered into one file, this file was then uploaded in Atlas.ti. With the use of this software, the process of coding started with the open coding.

In this stage of coding, all the data that was collected (interview transcripts and reviews) were once again examined. After this, these data were then turned into small components of data. Each component of data was labeled with a descriptive name based on the interpretations made from these data. Data that shared the same subject was coded the same. In other words, this means that these data were given the same label. The amount of data collected was deemed enough since data saturation was reached. According to Bryman (2012) data saturation is reached when there is no new information to be found from the data collected and as a result the coding of data should come to an end. Following this, the process of finding connections and relationships between the codes created in the first step started. This second step is known as axial coding. At this stage in coding, the connections between the codes that were created were identified. Much time was spent on the process of grouping the codes that were created in the first step of open coding because it was necessary to look at the context of each code and see how they connected with other codes in order to be properly grouped together into possible

categories. And finally, after going through the data one more time, the interpretation of the results started where the categories created in the previous step were placed into overarching themes. These themes are important as they function as a way to interpret and describe the underlying meanings of the categories created for the purpose of presenting my findings. This resulted in 3 broader themes of tourist experiences on guided tours.

3.4 Research ethics

It is important to always consider the research ethics when one is doing research. Furthermore, as this thesis concerns participant observation in an online public environment, as a researcher, I was able to make use of data that was publicly published on YouTube and TripAdvisor. This is precisely because one can make use of content that is on TripAdvisor and YouTube without being registered on both sites. Moreover, as the nature of this research revolves around online observations, it would have been impossible to acquire consent from everyone (Ackland, 2013). However, because the data that were collected for this thesis was publicly published online, I could argue that the data that was collected for this thesis is legitimate and thus can be used for my thesis without acquiring consent. Furthermore, next to TripAdvisor reviews and YouTube videos, this research also consisted of 4 in-depth interviews. Since in-depth interviews are known to bring forth personal information of oneself but also others, (Ackland, 2013), before the interviews were conducted, each of the participants were required to sign an informed consent where they agreed to participate in the interview as well agreed to being recorded during the entire interview (See Appendix C, consent form). These informed consents were sent to each participant online and thus were also signed online. The reason for this was because the interviews were conducted through Zoom. Furthermore, this informed consent also means that, as a researcher, I am responsible to inform the participants of the nature of this research and that a participant is voluntarily and willingly being part of a research (Ackland, 2013).

3.5 Trustworthiness

For my results to be considered good and authentic, as a researcher, I ensured that my research process was logical, can easily be followed and well documented. Connelly (2016) stated that confirmability of a research involves the inter-subjectivity of the data collected for the

respective research. This means that the interpretation should be grounded in the data collected for research and not built on a researcher's own preferences and point of views (Connelly, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Therefore, in order to ensure confirmability of my results, how the interpretations were established are well documented in the results section and like so shows that the findings originated directly from the data collected (Connelly, 2016). Thus, as a researcher, I show how the interpretations and conclusion for this research was reached.

4 Results

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the results of the data collection and analysis that had been done in the previous chapter. The in-depth observations and interpretations of the results will give an understanding on how tourists experience on-site guided tours of filming locations. More specifically, to answer the question *How do tourists experience on-site guided tours of Game of Thrones filming locations in Dubrovnik?* In addition, in order to achieve the objective of this research, two sub questions were constructed to help with further in-depth analysis. These two sub questions are namely *in what ways do tour guides incorporate co-creation to represent filming locations and characters on YouTube and TripAdvisor?* And, *in what ways does fandom shape the touristic experience of Game of Thrones?*

Furthermore, the data collection for this research consisted of 100 TripAdvisor reviews, 4 in-depth interviews, and 10 YouTube videos. After the data required was collected, these were imported to Atlas.ti for further analysis. This qualitative software was used to gain an interpretive understanding of touristic experiences with guided tours. Furthermore, the initial results showed that the feeling of being part of Westeros, the fictional continent of *Game of Thrones* that is depicted on television but also in the books by George R. R. Martin, served as a pull factor for tourists (mostly the fans of the show) to visit Dubrovnik and experience the locations where most of the filming took place. Moreover, after thorough analysis in Atlas.ti, three different tourist experiences emerged, namely, the main character experience, the old town experience and the guide's value experience. The following section will discuss these tourists' experiences in further detail.

4.1 The Main Character experience

This tourist experience describes the role of the tourist as a fan and the feelings that arise when they visit the *Game of Thrones* filming locations in Dubrovnik with guided tours. Initial observation showed that tourists used language like “wonderful”, “magical”, “fascinating” and “amazing” to describe what they felt during the tour and at the filming locations where scenes of *Game of Thrones* were filmed. These words were used in an attempt to put into words what was difficult to describe and fully articulate. Data also revealed that some tourists would be in such

wonderment when they gaze upon a filming location that they would engage in quiet reflection which is for them a more private and personal act of connecting with the show but also themselves as fans of the show because these filming locations were perceived as a means of access to something that is truly meaningful to them. This experience is therefore important to explore in order to get a clear understanding of how tourists experience filming locations in Dubrovnik since this particular experience highlights the feelings that arise at filming locations, the importance of belonging to a particular fandom and being in a place with people who have similar interests.

In this regard, the coding process revealed that when tourists first see or step foot at a particularly known filming location, they experience a sense of connection with themselves as a fan but also with the show itself. This connection happens often at precisely 2 moments, namely when the tourists are simply just standing at a filming location and imagining the world inside their head, and when they are standing exactly in the same spot as some of their favorite actors stood once upon a time and acted out several scenes. These acts together can be understood as the tourist being overwhelmed by emotions and thus interpreted as the tourists being connected to the physical and emotional adventure that they develop when they visit and experience these *Game of Thrones* filming locations in person. For example, this imagination of the fiction was observed when a tourist would point out a particular location and, in this particular case, said “just imagine this … do you see it? … it’s just amazing”. This particular moment is shown in the picture below (figure 1).



Figure 1 Bianca, B (2019). GAME OF THRONES: King's Landing Tour | Film Locations | Dubrovnik, CROATIA | Bianca Valerio. *YouTube*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XuGq8OKtjQ>. Screenshot by Shanira.

In fact, Buchmann (2010) argued that fans are conscious that the fictional worlds they love so much are not actually real but when they are at these particular filming locations, they tend to get a feeling of 'as if'. In this context, the interviews, reviews and observations showed that the tourists' role as fans of the show have an understanding that Westeros is fictional and thus is entirely imagined. Furthermore, Reijnders, (2011) claimed that reality and one's imagination influence each other and thus are not wholly separate. He further argued that a fan's imagination becomes more intense the moment it meets with reality and in turn this reality becomes even more significant for a fan since it comes close to their meaningful imaginaries. In the context of this research, the following was expressed in an interview:

“... because some of these places shown in this show for me ... sometimes were hard to believe are real places like Kings Landing, I couldn't imagine that there was a possibility to actually walk through those streets. Because even though you know it not really there, when you are actually walking the streets in Dubrovnik where the filming took place, it really feels like I was walking in King's Landing and anytime I could walk by Cersei Lannister”

Accordingly, Reijnders (2011) emphasized on the point that fans usually relish in the joy of testing and playing with the boundaries where reality and the fictional meet. In this case, data confirmed this scenario by revealing how the tourists (fans) brought the fictional world of Westeros into the 'real' city of Dubrovnik through practices like re-enacting, taking photos and singing. Indeed, from the observations on YouTube, it was noted that when the fans would arrive for the first time to a particular filming location, they would start humming the *Game of Thrones* soundtrack and dance around as illustrated in the pictures below (Figure 1).

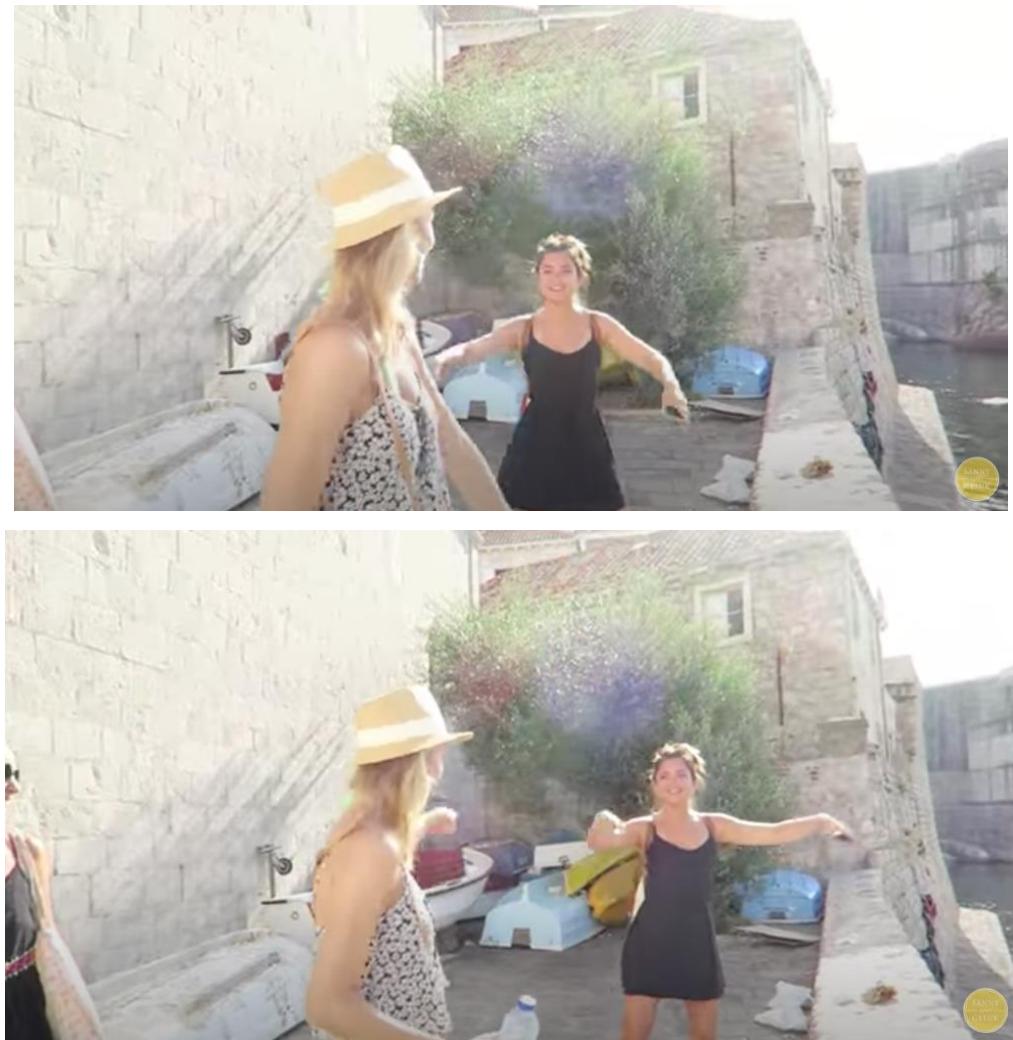


Figure 2 Verhoeven, S (2015). Super vet! Game of Thrones Tour in Dubrovnik. *YouTube*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yeg8WDiv-sE>. Screenshot by Shanira.

And as has been rightly proved by the results, the fans of *Game of Thrones* visit these filming locations to experience the reality of what is then only imagined.

Furthermore, these desires to connect the reality and the fictional can be linked to the reason why tourists feel the need to re-enact some of their favorite scenes when they are at a specific location of a specific scene. Accordingly, Waysdorff and Reijnders (2017) argued that the act of re-enacting and role playing of popular scenes makes it easier for fans of the show to connect to the filming location and thus they feel like they become part of the narrative of the show. In this regard, data showed that role playing scenes at the actual filming locations

enhances the tourists imaginative experience hence strengthening their memorable experience of visiting Dubrovnik as the demonstrated by the following quote:

“...the walk of shame of Cersei ... definitely that part of the tour where we would walk the stairs and the guide would say “shame” ... just like the scene in game of thrones ... the best thing for me from this tour experience.”

Indeed, role playing and the re-enactments of particular scenes, either by the tourists themselves or the tour guide, are important to the shaping of a tourists' memorable experiences because it is through these role plays and re-enactments that tourists can connect the fictional and reality of Westeros. This connection is in fact illustrated in the picture below (figure 2) where this tourist is re-enacting the scene 'stairs of shame'.

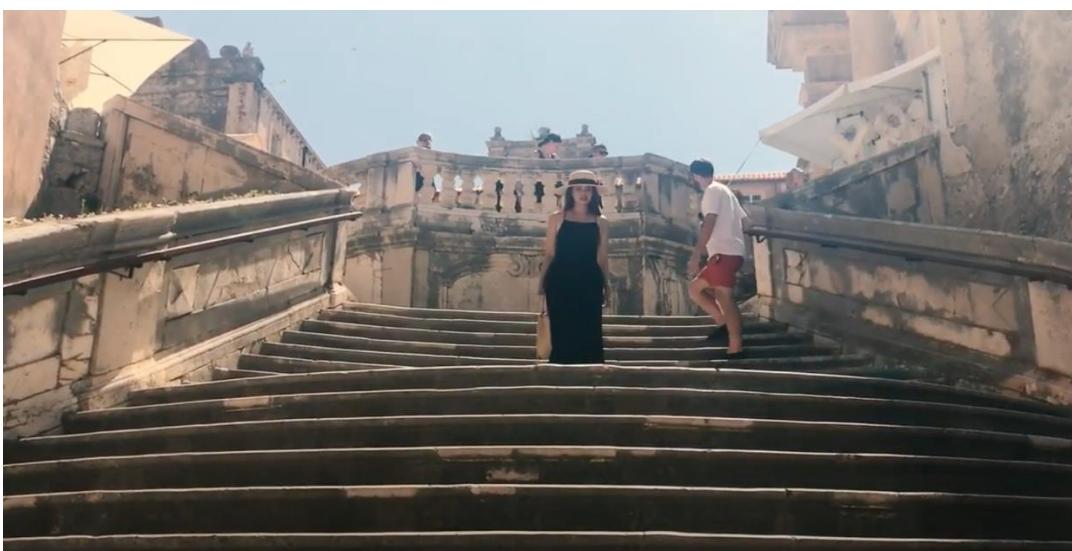


Figure 3 Bianca, B (2019). GAME OF THRONES: King's Landing Tour | Film Locations | Dubrovnik, CROATIA | Bianca Valerio. *YouTube*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XuGq8OKtjQ>. Screenshot by Shanira.

It is there at the stairs of shame, in King's Landing, the Red Keep, and the Iron Throne that the *Game of Thrones* phenomenon becomes further soaked into the reel and real relation for the thronies. This is due to the fact that at any one of these filming locations the tourist is not only seeing what is in front of their eyes but also driving themselves into the landscape of the fictional narrative. In this context, data showed that it is in this role playing that the relationship between the tourist and the show's narrative intensifies because the tourists (fans) find pleasure into taking on a particular character's role and feelings from the story such as the role play and re-enacting the popular scene where Cersei walked the stairs of shame. This notion is explained by Lee (2012) as the altering of the meaning for tourists, where the ordinary gains an important and symbolic meaning.

Furthermore, these re-enactments required the tourists to make physical and mental effort on several occasions during the tour. However, Lee (2012) claimed that all these exertions are essential in the shaping of one's experience. In the context of this research, some reviews and observations from YouTube showed that tourist would complain about their struggle to climb the stairs in the city, the city walk itself with several steps and the heat in Dubrovnik however next to this they would mention that all these efforts done during the tour are seen as rewarding since it is a small effort pay in order to experience a top-quality *Game of Thrones* tour. In addition, these physical and mental efforts can be interpreted as efforts that increase a tourist's attention span as well as encourage them to engage and participate in the tour experience. As a matter of fact, Urry and Larsen's (2011) findings about the performative roles of tourists are confirmed by this research. Consistent with this prior research, data revealed that tourists, in their roles as fans of the show, liked to role play, re-enact their favorite scenes, interact with others and take pictures of the beautiful locations with their phones and/ or camera. Furthermore, in this performative engagement at and interpretation of the filming locations, the phone or camera turns into an active means that shapes the tourists experience which results into unique and memorable memories that are posted on TripAdvisor and social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook.

As shown above, this main character experience shows how the role of a tourist as a fan brings forward inner feelings that emerge when a tourist first steps foot onto a *Game of Thrones* filming location. These feelings are understood as their love and admiration for the show that is only then rewarded for their investment in the show since the tourist, in their role as fans, looks beyond the reality of the city of Dubrovnik and imagines the fictional world of Westeros in its place. Because, in the end, on these *Game of Thrones* tours, but more importantly by also being surrounded by their fandom, the tourist is granted temporary entry into Westeros, which in turn, easily contributes to their overall experience of the tour. Thus, it can be argued that fandom shapes a tourist's experience by physically connecting them in many ways to the fandom of *Game of Thrones*.

4.2 The Old Town experience

It is a known fact that *Game of Thrones* played a key role in the growth of tourism in Croatia, especially the city of Dubrovnik (Waysdorff & Reijnders, 2017). However, data showed that once the tourists arrive in Dubrovnik, they take a liking to the city and take an interest in the history of Dubrovnik. Therefore, this next experience discusses the additional information that tour guides provide the tourists during the entirety of a tour. This experience is another angle that is important to explore in order to understand all the factors that come into play in the shaping and creation of tourists' experiences. Furthermore, Bowyer (2017) stated that, for most people, receiving background information on a city where filming of a movie or tv show took place, tends to make the place considerably more memorable, special and unique in the eye of the visitors. In the context of this research, data showed that tourists really appreciated the extra information they obtained during the tour about the history of Dubrovnik and the locals next to the obvious information on *Game of Thrones* and the filming locations. Moreover, this appreciation was articulated with words like "it was great to hear about the history of the city" and "I really liked the story behind the locations". In addition, data showed that the reason behind the tourists' interest for background information of Dubrovnik and more specifically history of the filming locations, was for the fact that for them, especially the fans of the show, when they connect fiction with reality it manages to make the fictional more real and plausible in what one thought to be only fictional and thus existing only on tv and in their imagination. For example, the following was expressed by a reviewer on TripAdvisor:

“Very informative not just about game of thrones, but all about Dubrovnik and its history. Learnt about locations for filming but also their purpose in real life”

In addition, this interest in the merging of the fictional and reality lies into how the tourists want to see his imagination come to life however not only how the show’s scenes come to be in reality but also how, for example, the past and the present of Fort Lovrijenac comes together into being one popular filming location for *Game of Thrones* which is known as the Red Keep.

Waysdorf and Reijnders (2017) emphasized on the fact that while the show is what brings tourists to a particular destination, while they are at this destination, they tend to immerse themselves into the history and culture of the city. Furthermore, guides are aware that when tourists participate in a tour it is not only for the show but also for the city which is why guides would throw a little history lesson during the tour of the locations. In this context, the data revealed that one of the main reasons tourists visit *Game of Thrones* locations was to get a better understanding about *Game of Thrones* itself but also the ‘real’ places where the filming took place. For example, these tourists would express how touring and walking the streets of Dubrovnik would make them feel as if they were part of the fictional-medieval world of Westeros all the while keeping in mind that this place is real and much more than just a filming location. While the tour is about *Game of Thrones*, receiving additional information about the culture and history of Dubrovnik that is unrelated to the show and the books both allows the tourists to have a sense of familiarity with the city and contributes to the tourists’ overall experience of an enchanting Dubrovnik.

Next to this interest in the city of Dubrovnik, data also showed that most tourists are really interested in the guide’s performative role as an ‘extra’ in some of *Game of Thrones* scenes and a secret keeper. The following was expressed by a reviewer on TripAdvisor:

“He was so knowledgeable about the filming process and locations, as well as local culture and history of the city. He was an extra in many of the seasons of GOT and showed us great screen captures of him in scenes, and told us all about the filming process. We saw tons of cool sights and got great local insight about other things to do. Absolutely loved this tour”

In this sense, a guide's role can be seen as an important aspect in the creation of tourist's experiences since the guide has the ability to make anyone an insider into the world of *Game of Thrones* through his knowledge. In this regard, data confirmed that for tourists, their experiences are not only centered around 'seeing' the filming locations of *Game of Thrones*. The tourists were interested in knowing how the show's characters interacted with the locations, how the show was made and how the locations in Dubrovnik were transformed for the show. This is because, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, when film tourists visit a filming location, in this context the *Game of Thrones* filming locations, the show becomes part of their imaginative experience of the locations where the filming took place. Therefore, the ability of the guide to provide this information during the tour added the extra value that is needed to shape a tourists memorable and unique experience. Thanks to the fact that some of the guides were extras in some scenes of *Game of Thrones*, they were able to provide the tourist with more backstage information and everything that was happening when they were on set filming. In addition, data showed that tourists would describe this information provided by the tour guide as "interesting" and "informative" and even describing this portion of the tour as "exciting" because it was something that unless you visit these locations, one wouldn't exactly hear in detail what happens when the camera is not rolling.

Besides this, it was expressed by many reviewers and during the interviews that it was truly wonderful and informative to see how many of the locations used in Dubrovnik were transformed with Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) as a means to create the fictional continent of Westeros. The following interviewee said the following about the tour:

"our guide was very informative, he had a story for everything, he even had some behind the scenes knowledge that was very interesting. I did appreciate how knowledgeable he was because it added something extra to the tour"

Accordingly, Waysdorf and Reijnder (2017) stated tourists appreciate a filming location more, when they have the knowledge of how much work went into finding the right locations for the depiction of a fictional world as well as see with their own eyes how these real locations were transformed (Figure 2).

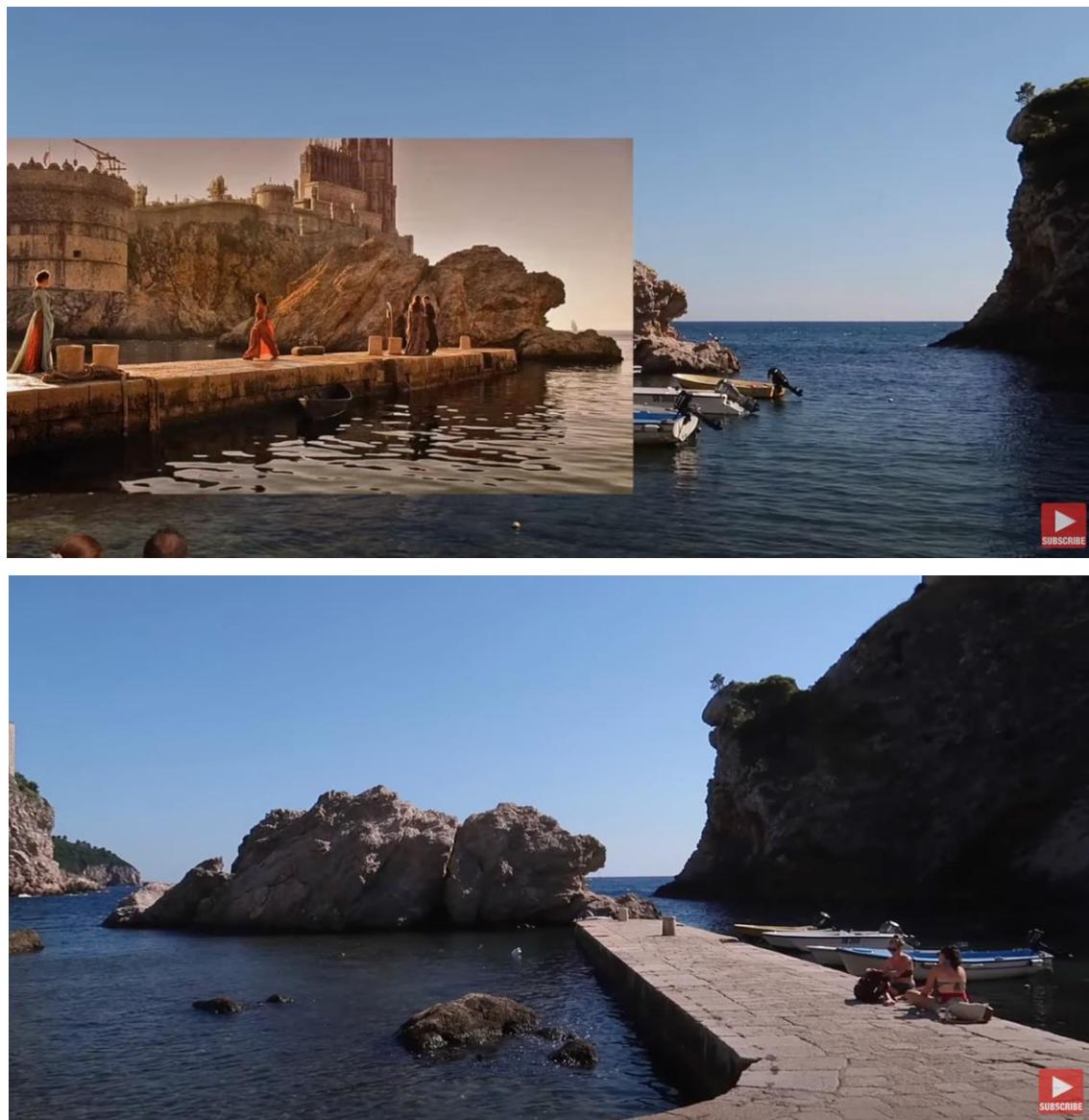


Figure 4 The Chaos Diaries (2021). Dubrovnik Old Town & Game of Thrones Filming Locations | Croatia Travel Diaries. *YouTube*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpqyzVqlArU>. Screenshot by Shanira

For example, the following reviewer talked about how nice it was to see pictures of scenes when touring the filming locations:

“...and his picture book that showed different places that we were looking at, with the CGI and other effects that were in the show made it so much better.”

Having these visuals in front of them when they were standing at the exact spot where the scenes were filmed helped tourist get a newfound respect for the people working on set as well as admire the high production that went into bringing Westeros to life because some of the elements of the filming locations are seen on the show, but those were minor. In addition, it was observed in several videos on YouTube that these visuals help the tourists in remembering certain scenes of the show. For example, when tourists are at a particular filming location where specific scenes were filmed, they tend to react among themselves like “do you remember this scene”, “this really important scene was filmed here”, or “a lot of scenes between Sansa and little finger were filmed here”. After this walk down memory, the tourists often converse among themselves about the scenes they remember, and as mentioned above, when they gaze upon these filming locations, they often take a moment to themselves to look back and think about the show. This can be interpreted as a moment where the tourists are experiencing a big awareness of appreciation, feelings and longings in their role as fans of the show.

With all this in mind, by experiencing more than just the filming locations but also the city of Dubrovnik itself and getting to know a little of what happens behind the cameras, which is usually hidden from the world, adds to tourists’ overall experience of the tour. The reason for this is because this additional information on the city but more importantly additional information about the show itself is something rare that one would not receive if they do not participate in these tours. In this case, the tourists become more engaged and thus making the tour more exciting for them. This opportunity that is given by the guide to the tourists, helps the tourists, and especially the fans, gain a better understanding into what it took to actually produce *Game of Thrones* as a whole and hence helps the fans in their role as tourists visiting Dubrovnik perceive and value the show in a whole new way.

4.3 The Guide’s Value experience

This experience discusses the guide’s level of performance during the entirety of the tour which also concerns the tour guide’s ability to encourage co-creation during the tour. This next and last tourists experience is explored because data revealed the important role that tour guides play in making a tour unique and memorable by several tourists. In this sense, these tourists highlighted the qualities that the guides possessed during the tour that truly impressed them such

as “extremely knowledgeable about the filming and making of the show” and “was personable, knowledgeable and entertaining”. Furthermore, the guides of the *Game of Thrones* tours were described by many tourists as “friendly”, “very nice”, “knowledgeable”, “engaging” and “patient”. Data showed that most tourist were greatly satisfied with a tour when the guide took into account that they are tourist and fans of different age and thus was very patient and did not rush anyone when they were taking their time admiring the landscapes and locations, because due to the group nature of the tour, one can easily feel left behind, left out or rushed because the tour is moving on.

Moreover, Irimiás, Mitev and Michalkó (2021) studied the role of guided tours and concluded that a tour guide has multiple roles during a tour. The guide’s first role is to lead the tourist around a particular setting. This main role is entwined with the guide’s second role to involve the tourists emotionally as a means to encourage these tourists to jump between the physically on-site location, the historical site and the fictional show’s narrative. And in-between all these moments, it is the way the tourists behave and verbally engage during the entirety of the tour that co-creates their tourists’ experiences. In this context, this is supported by the following quote:

“The guide Kristian was really friendly and great at explaining where each shot was filmed and how everything was put together to make a scene in the show. The tour includes visiting Fort Lovrijenac ... which again I am glad I did as part of the tour otherwise I would not have spent much time there. Kristian was great at answering any questions that were asked even if they were not directly related to the Game of Thrones tour.”

According to Rabotic (2009), a tour is a group of tourists with different behaviors and expectations. On one hand, some of these tourists choose to go on a tour by anticipating a genuine and unique experience and on the other hand, some tourists go on a tour without many expectations by just going along with what is provided by the tour. The former tends to watch vlogs from tourists that already went on these tours, look at the tour images online and watch behind the scenes clips as a means to have some knowledge on what can be expected when they go on the tour themselves (Rabotic, 2009). Similar to what Rabotic’s (2009) explanation of tourists with different behaviors and expectations, Buchmann (2010) argued that even though tourists do not have high expectations of their tour guides, they expect their guides to be

qualified to provide a successful tour and they expect their guides to be knowledgeable, meaning the guides are able to hold the attention of the tourists and care for their needs. In addition, tourists also expect that their tour guides are familiar and know the areas around the filming locations, for example, guides should be able to point out where certain scenes of the show, in this case *Game of Thrones*, were filmed since in most cases the tourists themselves do not know such information about the locations themselves (Buchmann, 2010).

In this regard, from the analysis it can be seen that tourists truly enjoy when the guide would show them what happened at that particular spot they are standing at the moment, especially when it concerned small scenes or little things that most fans of the show would not notice or remember. This particularly is enjoyed because most tourists said that due to their excitement during the tour, they tend to overlook the small things and only focus on the big scenes, the ones that had an impact or were seen as popular. For example, this reviewer expressed the following on his experience on the *Game of Thrones* extended tour:

“Robert was very knowledgeable, personable and funny, not only able to answer questions about Game of Thrones, but about the history of the city and Croatia. His passion for the series, the city and sharing his knowledge with his guests was apparent with the time he’d taken to provide stills of scenes from the show, bringing alive the locations we saw”

However, Buchmann (2010) also argued that for some tourists the act of standing on the exact same spots where some scenes were filmed can at times be less meaningful if the guide does not involve them emotionally in the setting and the show. To put simply, the guide adds that something extra in the act of visiting filming locations, that tourists (fans) are looking for when they decide to go on a tour. In addition to this, how the guide encouraged participation and engagement during the tour was notable as a great drive to create experiences for the tourists. This was revealed by how tourists truly loved when guides would include co-creation into their tour. For example, the tourists enjoyed when they were role playing and there were actual props available in order to enhance their act of role playing a scene. Indeed, Reichenberger and Smith (2019) emphasized on the fact that the role of tour guides is to provide the tourists participating in a tour with a memorable experience which is done by incorporating co-creation into the tour.

This is because co-creation creates the possibility to use tourists themselves into creating their own memorable and unique experiences. These authors further explained that through co-creation one can better understand how tourists' experiences are shaped. In the context of this research, the incorporation of co-creation by the guides, placed a tourist's own interaction with other social actors and their active involvement during the tour at the center of their own experiences. In fact, Irimiás, Mitev and Michalkó (2021) observation on guided tours showed how a tour guide's ability to direct a tour together with their performance during a tour have an influence on how a tourists perceive and experience a particular site. In the context of this research, this observation is confirmed in this following quote:

“The extended tour takes you to all the amazing views in the area and shows screenshots of different areas. Our tour guide was an extra in the film and was able to give us some insight and even let us pose with some duplicates of props on the show. He was able to point out how things were done in certain scenes and also great things to do and see in the city.

Accordingly, tour guides encourage interactions and give tourists the chance to engage and participate in the creation of their own experiences by including the use of props such as swords, daggers and coats in a tour. This usage of props during a tour allows tourists to give meaning to the filming locations they visit. For example, the picture below (Figure 3) shows a tourist with a fake dragon on her shoulder, in this specific moment she is taking the role of 'Mother of Dragons' over just like in Game of Thrones thanks to the dragon that the tour guide provided.



Figure 5 Yvonneandbeyond (2021). THE ULTIMATE GAME OF THRONES TOUR (in Dubrovnik, aka King's Landing). *YouTube*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aUGToysgME>. Screenshot by Shanira.

This inclusion also blurs the lines between the fictional Westeros and the reality of physically seeing the actual location in real life. To this, Irimiás et al (2021) argued that tour guides can motivate emotional engagement by making use of visuals from the show together with the use of different props. In this regard, data showed how several tourists expressed how “amazing” and “wonderful” it was to interact with other fans on the tour when it came to role playing and using props that were provided by the tour. The reason for these feelings was because they said that they understood each other on a level that only fans of *Game of Thrones* would understand. For example, when they remember a few lines from particular scenes, gush of the mother of dragons, pretend to be the chosen one to sit on the thrones and/ or re-enact several of Arya Stark’s fight scenes.

Furthermore, data also showed that tourists enjoyed and appreciated the effort that guides put into the tour by having booklets of pictures of scenes that were shot at particular locations as illustrated in the picture below (figure 4). This encouraged the tourists a more vivid imagination of how Dubrovnik was transformed into Westeros.



Figure 6 Yvonneandbeyond (2021). THE ULTIMATE GAME OF THRONES TOUR (in Dubrovnik, aka King's Landing). *YouTube*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aUGToysgME>. Screenshot by Shanira.

Tourists even said that this additional information and kind of activities made them feel like they were part of the show. Furthermore, all these different activities that the tour guide incorporate in the tour make an impression on the tourists and make for a more entertaining experience that will forever hold a place in the tourist's mind but also strengthen their role as fans of the show because these visual imagery and usage of props helps them easily connect the on-site location of the show with the fantasy world of *Game of Thrones* as showed in the following quote:

“Our tour guide ... worked on Seasons 2 & 4 of GoT so we got lots of great insider info about the show! He was so nice & very enthusiastic. He is very knowledgeable about the city & there was never a dull moment! ... it was amazing! Vlaho took photos for us & insisted that we do the “walk of shame” while he captured it on video. He got the crowd into it too.. mortifying for me, but I’m glad we did it in the end.”

In fact, as evidenced by the data, tour guides prompt the process of shaping memorable experiences through stimulating active engagement in the tourist's interpretation of the fictional and reality. In addition, data also revealed that the guides ease to create a sense of community during the tour also add something extra for the tourists' experience as it makes the tourist feel like they are part of something which creates, even though it's for only those 4 hours of the tour,

a sense of happiness and excitement as expressed by a few reviewers “... he really made the whole Game of Thrones experience brilliant”. At last, all this can be interpreted into the more engaging, knowledgeable and friendly a guide is, the more likely the guide will add to the overall experience of a tourist when they go on a tour.

As shown above with this review and several other reviews coded in the analysis, the guide’s value experience highlights the guide’s positive performance during a tour. In this regard, it can be concluded that a guide’s guiding style, meaning the ways in which they incorporate co-creation with props for example to bring a scene or characters to life, is essential to a tourists’ enjoyment and entertainment during a tour and therefore become an important key in the creation and shaping of a tourist’s experience. This is because when all is said and done, happy memories and memorable experiences are what every tourist is seeking and what every tour operator is looking to provide.

5 Discussion

As discussed earlier, Kelner and Sanders' (2009) study on tour guiding showed that film locations are visited by tourists as a means to link what is fictional and thus strongly imagined, a sense of reality. In this regard, these authors explained that the fictional world often feels real to the fans of a particular book, movie or TV show. Kelner and Sanders' (2009) clarified this statement by saying that these fictional worlds have a place in a person's head in the same way that the real world does. This statement proved to be true by this research since data revealed that these fictional worlds are particular features of fandoms that truly matter to fans as such to make the decision to visit, in this context, the *Game of Thrones* filming locations. Such importance for visiting these filming locations is understood as a matter of connecting to one's identity as fans of the show since these chances to glimpse into the 'real' that made the fictional possible is an opportunity to imagine the fictional world as it is supposed to be. As a matter of fact, according to Waysdorff (2020), this creates meaning for fans because it is all about what participating in the process of going to a particular destination to visit a particular site represents for them.

Furthermore, this research confirmed how tourists engage and deal with the boundaries between the fictional and the reality. Data revealed that tourists (fans) brought the fictional world of Westeros into the 'real' city of Dubrovnik through practices like re-enacting, taking photos and singing. In line with this finding, in his study about imaginative experience, Reijnders (2011) emphasized on the point that fans usually relish in the joy of testing and playing with the boundaries where reality and the fictional meet. In addition, he explained that visiting a filming location in person can have a toll on a fan's boundaries of what is real and what is not and thus the pretense of the fictional and reality collapses, even if it's just for a minute (Reijnders, 2011). However, he further argued that fans know that these fictional worlds in fact are not real and do not exist outside one's imagination, yet it is noted that sometimes one's imagination and reality are so incredibly intertwined in a way that fans particularly want to pick to pieces (Reijnders, 2011). In this sense, the results showed that in many moments throughout a tour, tourists would engage in private reflection, dissect how some scenes were filmed, and 'see' everything that went into bringing these scenes to life that are in fact so different from what they are physically seeing on the tour.

More specifically, data confirmed that for tourists, their experiences are not only centered around 'seeing' the filming locations of *Game of Thrones* since tourists were also interested in knowing how the show's characters interacted with the locations, how the show was made and how the locations in Dubrovnik were transformed for the show. This is because, as already stated, when film tourists visit a filming location, in this context the *Game of Thrones* filming locations, the show becomes part of their imaginative experience of the locations where the filming took place. In light of this, a study conducted by Buchmann (2010) on tourist experiences on *Lord of the Rings* tours, revealed that tourists wanted to

experience the actual New Zealand as well as the fictional Middle-earth by connecting the fictional and the nonfictional with active interaction with various social actors provided by the tour guide in order to create authentic and sincere experiences. In the same fashion, Irimiás et al. (2017) supported this statement by also saying that experience is further enhanced by tour guides ability to include co-creation in a tour. In this sense the findings showed that a guide's role can be seen as an important aspect in the creation of tourist's experiences since the guide has the ability to make anyone an insider into the world of Game of Thrones through his knowledge.

In addition, Urry and Larsen's (2011) findings about the performative roles of tourists were also confirmed by this research. Consistent with this prior research, data revealed that tourists, in their roles as fans of the show, liked to role play, re-enact their favorite scenes, interact with others and take pictures of the beautiful locations with their phones and/ or camera. Furthermore, these findings are also in line with the research done by Reicherberger and Smith (2020) that revealed how co-creation results in fun, emotional, memorable and knowledgeable experiences by examining the connections between tourism and fandom. In fact, Irimiás et al.'s (2021) observation on guided tours showed how a tour guide's ability to direct a tour together with their performance during a tour have an influence on how a tourists perceive and experience a particular site. This is further emphasized by the findings of this research where the tour guides were greatly praised for their performance during the tour.

6 Conclusion

In the past decade, film induced tourism have seen extensive growth in various destinations that hosted film productions (Irimiás et al., 2017). Accordingly, Croatia experienced an increase in their tourism after they branded themselves as the home of ‘Westeros’, the fictional world Game of Thrones. Although Game of Thrones was filmed in multiple cities, the city of Dubrovnik gained a lot of popularity because it depicts King’s Landing, the capital of the seven kingdoms, among other scenes ((Irimiás et al., 2017; Mathews, 2018). This made an impression on viewers of the show and thus encouraged the demand of tourists to visit Dubrovnik (Tkalec at al., 2017). Furthermore, Irimiás et al (2017) argued that in order for tourists to get the most out of these filming locations is by going on a tour that has an itinerary that offers all the ‘must sees.’ In this sense, Sandaruwani and Gnanapala (2016) stated that tour guides have the power to influence how a tourist perceives and experiences a particular destination since they are seen as representatives of that particular destination. Therefore, Irimiás et al. (2017) argued that tour operators should organize an intensive and detailed tour in order to engage and provide memorable tourism experiences, because after all, creating memorable experiences is deemed as the core of the tourism industry. By going on a guided tour, a tourist can visit sites where scenes or episodes were previously filmed and thus connect with the particular characters or the show’s narrative. At these locations, tourists, especially the fans of a particular show, have the chance to experience and have an imaginative experience by blurring the lines between real world and the fictional world. Therefore, based on a series of TripAdvisor reviews, in-depth interviews and observations on YouTube, this research aimed to understand how tourists experience on-site guided tours of *Game of Thrones* filming locations in Dubrovnik. As data showed, tourists experience on-site guided tours of Game of Thrones in three different ways.

In the first place, tourists experience on-site guided tours of *Game of Thrones* as a main character experience. This experience described the role of the tourist as a fan and the feelings that arise during their visit to *Game of Thrones* filming locations. For this reason it was important to explore this type of experience in order to get a clear understanding of how tourists experience filming locations in Dubrovnik. In the sense that since it highlights all the different feelings that arise at filming locations, the behavior of a tourist at these particular locations, the importance of belonging to a particular fandom and being in a place with people who have

similar interests. Furthermore, this main character experience showed how the role of a tourist as a fan brings forward inner feelings that emerge when a tourist first steps foot onto a *Game of Thrones* filming location. These feelings are understood as their admiration for the show that is then rewarded for their invested time in the show. This reward for the tourists, especially in their role as fans, comes in the form of imagining what is beyond the real in front of them and thus imagines the fictional world of Westeros in its place. Additionally, the desire to connect the reality and the fictional is linked to the reason why tourists feel the need to re-enact some of their favorite scenes when they are at a specific location of a specific scene. Because, in the end, on these Game of Thrones tours, but more importantly by also being surrounded by their fandom, the tourist is granted temporary entry into Westeros, which in turn, easily contributes to their overall experience of the tour.

Secondly, tourists also experience on-site guided tours of *Game of Thrones* by having a sense of an old town experience. This experience is described as the experience that tourists obtain through additional information that tour guides provide the tourists with during the entirety of a tour. The reason behind the tourists' interests for background information on not only the *Game of Thrones* locations but the history of Dubrovnik itself comes due to the fact that, especially the fans of the show, when they connect fiction with reality it manages to make the fictional more real and plausible in what one thought to be only fictional and thus existing only on tv and in their imagination. Next to this, tourists really appreciated the effort of the tour guides to provide information about CGI and how this made them an insider into everything that happened behind the scenes as well as have an idea on how Dubrovnik was transformed for *Game of Thrones*. Having these visuals in front of them when they were standing at the exact spot where the scenes were filmed helped tourist get a newfound respect for the people working on set as well as admire the high production that went into bringing Westeros to life. In this case, experiencing and getting to know a little of what happens behind the cameras, which is usually hidden from the world, adds to tourists' overall experience during the tour because it is something rare and thus makes it exciting. This opportunity that is given by the guide to the tourists, helps the tourists, and especially the fans, gain a better understanding into what it took to actually produce the show and hence helps the fans in their role as tourists visiting Dubrovnik value and perceive *Game of Thrones* in a new way. Therefore, this experience was another angle

that was seen as important to explore in order to understand all the factors that come into play in the shaping and creation of tourists' experiences.

And lastly, tourists experience on-site guided tours of *Game of Thrones* through the lens of the guide value's experience. This experience described the guide's level of performance during the entirety of the tour which also concerned his ability to encourage co-creation during the tour. Furthermore, this was highlighted by how tourists would enjoy themselves when the guide would encourage participation through co-creation with props and role playing. In addition, all the different activities that the tour guide incorporate in the tour make an impression on the tourists and make for a more entertaining experience that will forever hold a place in the tourist's mind but also strengthen their role as fans of the show because the visual imagery and usage of props helps them easily connect the on-site location of the show with the fictional world of *Game of Thrones*. At last, all this can be interpreted into the more engaging, knowledgeable and friendly a guide is, the more likely the guide will add to the overall experience of a tourist when they go on a tour. In this regard, it can be concluded that a guide's guiding style is essential to a tourists' enjoyment and entertainment during a tour and therefore become an important key in the creation and shaping of a tourists experience because at the end, happy memories and memorable experiences are what every tourist is seeking and what every tour operator is looking to provide.

To conclude, this research showed that tourists experience on-site guided tours of *Game of Thrones* filming locations through three different perspectives that are interconnected and unique at the same time. This interconnectedness between the different experiences is the work of the tour guide who is revealed to be fundamental in creating and shaping tourists' experiences during a tour. Equally important to the overall role of a tour guide in shaping experiences on tour, is the fact that visiting a filming location stimulates a tourists' emotional feelings, attachments and individual memories towards the show they have seen multiple times prior to actually visiting these locations. This is because these locations would then be experienced through an imaginative lens that links the reality and the fictional that are embedded with symbolic meanings and value for the tourists. Therefore, guided tours should manage and provide a tour itinerary that include co-creation as its core as a means to bring the most out of a tourist's role as a fan of the show all the while creating great tourist experiences. Additionally, in a more general view, this research shows how fandom has become an essential factor in the

imaginative experience of fictional worlds and characters and thus it can be said that it has turned into a way for tourists in their role as fans to explore and experience the world.

6.1 Research limitations

It is important to take notice of the few limitations that were encountered while doing this research. The first of which has to do with the data collected for this research. This research was mostly based on reviews posted on TripAdvisor by tourists who participated on these Game of Thrones guided tours. Therefore, tourists who did not post a review on TripAdvisor about their experience with this tour were not involved in this research. In the context of using TripAdvisor reviews, one must take into consideration that among reviews there could be reviews that were constructed on biased views. Another limitation is the fact only two Game of Thrones tours were selected for data collection, both of which were based in Dubrovnik. This means that this research cannot be generalized for film tourism seeing as its focus point was Dubrovnik and thus can't be applied to other countries that offer similar tours.

6.2 Future recommendations for research

Due to the limited sample size of the conducted research, a larger sample of in-depth interviews with Game of Thrones tourists would be needed to better explore how tourists experience filming locations. Furthermore, continued research is needed into the topic of tourist's experiences and how this can be shaped and created. In addition, based on the results of this research, it would be important to identify which factors are implicitly and explicitly at play when it comes to tourists' satisfaction during their on-site experience. This means that there is a need to further understand how social settings, service attributes and physical settings can all have an effect on experience. A thorough informed understanding of this would allow tour operators as well as the tourism industry in general, to be smarter in how they design, plan and deliver a particular service that would be in line with the experience tourist's desire. Furthermore, the tourism industry, more specifically public and private tour operators, would benefit from more in-depth research into the relationship between tourist' interpretation, satisfaction and experiences since they are the one whose plans demand for the incorporation of interpretation in the positive provision of tourist experiences. While there are theoretical explanations for these relationship dynamics (Campos et al, 2018; Kelner & Sanders, 2009;

Sandaruwani & Gnanapala, 2016) further research is needed in order to understand how they truly affect tourist experience. Finally, future research should consider the viewpoints of tour operators in order to reach a broad understanding on how the COVID-19 pandemic have truly affected the sector of local guided tours as a means to understand how these tour guides are facing the future of guiding moving forward.

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Appendix A - Interview Guide

Introductory questions

1. Where are you from?
 - a. How old are you?
 - b. Are you a frequent traveler? If so, where have you been? Name a few places.
2. What do you think is the definition of film tourism? Please elaborate.
3. Have you ever traveled to a destination only because it was featured in a film?

The role of fandom towards film tourism

4. Do you consider yourself a fan of Game of Thrones? If so, since when? (Meaning since season 1 was released or later along the way)
5. When you visited Dubrovnik, was visiting the filming locations the main part of your trip?
 - a. Who made the decision to visit this film location?
6. Have you watched all the seasons of Game of Thrones?
 - a. In your opinion which three words best describe the landscapes shown in seasons of Game of Thrones? Please explain why you have chosen these words.
 - b. Which locations/ landscapes do you remember best from the seasons of Game of Thrones? Please elaborate.
 - c. Which three words best describe the actual landscapes of the film location you have visited? Please explain why you have chosen these words.
 - d. Were the film locations/ landscapes you have visited as you expected them to be?
7. How did you feel when you first exposed to a filming location of Game of Thrones in Dubrovnik?
 - a. Did you feel like you were part of something bigger?
 - b. Did your 'fan girl' side of you come out?
8. How did your role as a fan of Game of Thrones impact how you felt when you visited these filming locations?
9. Could you tell me how important the setting (place/location) in a film is for you?
 - a. How does it contribute to your experiences of watching Game of Thrones?

10. Could you give examples of how a location in a film can influence your knowledge as a viewer/ fan? Please elaborate

Tourist experiences with guided tour

11. How did you find out about the tour of Game of Thrones you went on in Dubrovnik?

12. What did you do during the tour? Please elaborate.

13. Which sites did you visit during the tour?

- a. Was it easy to link to fictional scenes from specific Game of Thrones episodes to the actual location?
- b. How did you feel when were exposed to these filming locations?

14. Did the tour include co-creation? (Meaning was there interaction between tourists, the guide and the filming locations)

- a. Was there use of props on the tour? Please elaborate.

15. What was the highlight of the tour?

16. Did you have any expectations before going on a Game of Thrones tour?

- a. Did the tour meet your expectations? Please elaborate whether it did or not
- b. Did the film locations live up to your expectations? Please elaborate whether it did or not

17. Would you like to improve or add anything to the tour you participated in? (For example, better access to sites, more use of props, more time to take pictures)

18. Were satisfied with the tour you went on? Please elaborate.

19. Were you satisfied with the tour guide of the tour you went on?

- a. Did the tour guide give enough information during the tour? (Unknown facts, behind the scenes stories etc.)

20. Was there anything available to purchase at these filming locations? If so, did you buy anything? (For example, souvenirs)

Closing questions

21. Have you been to other film locations of Game of Thrones?

22. Are you planning to visit other film locations of Game of Thrones?

- a. If so, where?

Appendix B - Informed consent

Standard EUR Informed Consent Form template

M. Nariman and M. Domingus, December 2016 (incl. adjustments ESHCC)

Erasmus

Confidentiality	Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. No personally identifiable information will be reported in any research product. Moreover, only trained research staff will have access to your responses. Within these restrictions, results of this study will be made available to you upon request. As indicated above, this research project involves making audio recordings of interviews with you. Transcribed segments from the audio recordings may be used in published forms (e.g., journal articles and book chapters). In the case of publication, pseudonyms will be used. The audio recordings, forms, and other documents created or collected as part of this study will be stored in a secure location in the researchers' offices or on the researchers password-protected computers and will be destroyed within ten years of the initiation of the study.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalised or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the primary investigator: By email: shanira.hanst@outlook.com
Statement of Consent	Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree that you will participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form. For research problems or any other question regarding the research project, the Data Protection Officer of Erasmus University, Marlon Domingus, MA (fg@eur.nl) If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.
Audio recording (if applicable)	I consent to have my interview audio recorded <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Standard EUR Informed Consent Form template
M. Nariman and M. Domingus, December 2016 (incl. adjustments ESHCC)



INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title and version	Let's Go to Westeros! A digital ethnography of Games of Thrones tourism in Dubrovnik
Name of Principal Investigator	Shanira Hanst
Purpose of the Study	I am inviting you to participate in this research project about touristic experiences on Game of Thrones guided tours. The purpose of this research project is to get an understanding on how tourists experience guided tours of filming locations.
Procedures	You will participate in an interview lasting approximately 40-60 minutes. You will be asked questions about The role of fandom towards film tourism and Tourist experiences with guided tour. Sample questions include: "How did you feel when you first exposed to a filming location of Game of Thrones in Dubrovnik?" You must be at least 18 years old
Potential and anticipated Risks and Discomforts	There are no obvious physical, legal or economic risks associated with participating in this study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to discontinue your participation at any time.
Sharing the results	Your plan for sharing the findings with the participants should be provided. If you have a plan and a timeline for the sharing of information, include the details. You may also inform the participant that the research findings will be shared more broadly, for example, through publications and conferences.

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Standard EUR Informed Consent Form template
M. Nariman and M. Domingus, December 2016 (incl. adjustments ESHCC)



Secondary use (if applicable)	I consent to have the anonymised data be used for secondary analysis <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	
Signature and Date	NAME PARTICIPANT	NAME PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
	SIGNATURE	SIGNATURE
	DATE	DATE

Appendix C - Interview transcript

The first interview was conducted via zoom meeting on Monday 4th of April at 14:00

Interview duration: 44:02

‘S’ stands for Shanira (S)

‘P’ stands for participants

S: Hi, Hello thank you again for participating in my research, I really do appreciate it. How are you doing?

P: Hey, I’m doing good thank you for asking and uhm no worries it is no problem at all.

S: So uhm we will start with some introductory questions before we dive into the more specific question related to my research.

P: alrightt, go ahead ask away hahaa

S: oh this will be fun ahaha, so uhm the first question is where are you from?

P: I am from curacao, born and raised, yep that’s it uhm I’m from curacao haha, sorry I don’t know why I keep laughing, I guess im super curious and excited to rehash my experience from 2 years ago in Croatia [smiles]

S: Hey no worries, it also means you are comfortable which I find pretty amazing because I can be really awkward when someone shows discomfort, so uhm I;m enjoying this energy [smiles]

P: aah perfect, that good uhm real good.

S: yeah, so how old are you?

P: I’m 26 and will be turning 27 soon in May.

S: So, are you a frequent traveler? And If so, where have you been? Can you also name a few places for me.

P: so yeah, I love traveling so every chance I get uhm I'll book a ticket to some place new. Uhm I do consider myself a frequent flyer. Since I've moved here to the Netherlands 4 years ago, I've been to a lot of places, I don't know how many out of the top of my head but uhm maybe the count is around uhm 12 countries. Uhm I've been to Italy, Spain, France, Philippines, Greece, Malta, Portugal, Morocco and obviously Croatia. The list can go on ahaaha but I'll keep it to that. [smiles]

S: nice, that's pretty impressive. I also like to travel so I know what you mean. So, what do you think is the definition of film tourism? Please could you elaborate.

P: Uhm for me film tourism I guess is going to countries because of the movies one has seen on television, is that right? Hahah, like how I went to Croatia because of Game of Thrones and London mainly for Harry Potter but also because I mean its London [smiles].

P: haha yes yes you got it right, and I know what you mean, so have you ever traveled to a destination only because it was featured in a film?

S: uhm yeah, I mean I went to Croatia because of Game of Thrones hahaha, I knew I wanted to visit the places I've seen in game of thrones, and obviously next to this I uhm, look for other things to do in Croatia to uhm obviously getting to know and discover Croatia itself.

S: yeah I get it. So, no we'll move onto the next section of this interview which is the role of fandom towards film tourism. And the first question for this section is uhm do you consider yourself a fan of Game of Thrones? If so, since when? (Meaning since season 1 was released or later along the way)

P: Yes, I definitely consider myself a fan of Game of Thrones, maybe not a hardcore fan, but a fan nonetheless, I've watched this show maybe uhm [thinking] 4 times? i've started watching the show when it had 3 season released and ever since been obsessed hahah, I love daenarys, hodor is my love haha and don't get me started on sansa stark my queen of the north yeah but anyways I'm a fan [starts laughing]

S: oh my god, whenever someone mentions hodor my mind immediately to that one scene and I don't even have to mention it for you to know which one I'm talking about ahahaha.

P: yeah please let's not mention it, it will be the dead of me hahaha

S: my lips are sealed. So uhm when you visited Dubrovnik, was visiting the filming locations the main part of your trip?

P: uhm you know, the main reason was Game of Thrones, uhm to visit some filming locations especially the stairs of shame, so uhm yeah I could say the decision to visit Croatia especially Dubrovnik specifically was because of game of thrones.

S: so, who made the decision to visit this film location or Dubrovnik in general?

P: uhm me hahaha, I did, I went with a close friend of mine that is also kind of a fan of the show and I came with the idea and obviously she went on board immediately [smiles]

S: so have by now I know you have watched all season of game of thrones.

P: yeah yes

S: yes so uhm in your opinion which three words best describe the landscapes shown in seasons of Game of Thrones? Please explain why you have chosen these words.

P: ah that's a difficult question, uhm let me think for a second [thinking] uhm I guess I would go with uhm beautiful, magical and uhm ethereal. Beautiful because Game of Thrones was very good in filming the surroundings of every for example the castles and cities depicting beautiful sceneries. Uhm magical and ethereal can go hand in hand because some of these places shown in this show uhm for me uhmm sometimes were hard to believe are real places like Kings Landing uhm I couldn't imagine that there was a possibility to actually walk through those streets. Because even though you know it not really there, when you are actually walking the streets in Dubrovnik where the filming took place, it really feels like I was walking in King's Landing and anytime I could walk by Cersei hahaha.

S: I liked the words you have chosen to describe the landscape, really nice. So uhm which locations/ landscapes do you remember best from the seasons of Game of Thrones? Please elaborate.

P: ah like I said king's landing for sure as it was such a big part of the show, uhm dragonstone, oh Winterfell and of course the famous stairs.

S: So uhm which three words best describe the actual landscapes of the film location you have visited? Please explain why you have chosen these words.

P: uhm haha I will use beautiful again because I was in awe with everything I got the opportunity to see in real life. I guess I would say old country village style, I know that not one word but that is how I feel about inner Dubrovnik in person, I just love it hahaha

S: haha I like the sound of that though so uhm were the film locations/ landscapes you have visited as you expected them to be?

P: oh and so much more, I mean it was everything I did not expect and more, I don't know, you always see something on television especially in fiction and you just don't expect it to be real, so I was really impressed with the city and uhm how much work went into it behind the scenes to transform these real places into Westeros.

S: yeah I get what you mean. So how did you feel when you first exposed to a filming location of Game of Thrones in Dubrovnik? Did you feel like you were part of something bigger?

P: oh yes, I was living the dream ahaha

S: hahaah did your ‘fan girl’ side of you came out?

P: you know I say that Im not a hardcore fan but the moment I walk the stairs of shame I went ballistic, I was fangirling hard ahhaha I mean that one specific scene lives in my head rent free.

S: yeah yeah it’s the same for me, I would have gone ballistic too, if I ever walk those stairs [smiles] so how did your role as a fan of Game of Thrones impact how you felt when you visited these filming locations?

P: uhm I think because I was a fan I felt like a connection with these places, like I would walk the halls of the city and know everything about them, their darkest most shameful secrets and uhm knowing how dark game of thrones was, it definitely felt like I knew stuff most people didn’t know about [smiles]

S: so could you tell me how important the setting (place/location) in a film is for you?

P: uhm what do you mean exactly?

S: so how does the setting (place/ location) contribute to your experiences of watching Game of Thrones?

P: uhm I guess, it doesnot play an important role for me, as to what and how something if filmed, or where specifically, I’m on board for anything as long as it logical and makes sense.

S: alright good good, so uhm could you give examples of how a location in a film can influence your knowledge as a viewer/ fan? Please elaborate

P: like I said before, walking the streets of Dubrovnik aka king's landing, felt like knowing something no one else knows. What I meant to say is that because I watched the show and a fan in its own words, I feel something, it's like when I'm walking and visiting these places I've seen and become 'obsessed' with Game of Thrones, it's like I am uhm transported into this fictional world, and that is something that someone that did not watch the show can ever experience. For example, I walk the stairs of shame and I can just hear the 'shame' and bells in my head.

S: ah hearing you say that I can just imagine the feeling oh my god, so now we will move onto our final section which is tourist experiences with guided tour, so the first question is how did you find out about the tour of Game of Thrones you went on in Dubrovnik?

P: uhm on the internet, I remember searching something like Game of Thrones in Dubrovnik and you get different tours as results haha

S: so, what did you do during the tour? Please elaborate.

P: oh, we did a lot, it was nice, our guide was very informative, he had stories for everything, he even had some behind the scenes knowledge that was very interesting. I did appreciate how knowledgeable he was because it added something extra to the tour.

S: oh that's nice indeed, so which sites did you visit during the tour?

P: oh like I said we went everywhere, to like the most known places and more lesser known places, to every place we visited uhm the tour had a story or told something about the show like a scene that was filmed there or so

S: So was it easy to link to fictional scenes from specific Game of Thrones episodes to the actual location?

P: yeah It was soooo easy, I think that was because I was a fan. Of the show and rewatched the show multiple times that I could uhm easily linked the scenes to the locations.

S: yeah I can imagine haha, so how did you feel when were exposed to these filming locations?

P: it is an unexplainable feeling to be honest, [thinking] its like I was there but at the same time I wasn't, I could not imagine or believe that I was actually at the same place some of my fav actors were or step foot on. It's just ugh I can't explain, just amazing [smiles]

S: nice, so did the tour include co-creation? (Meaning was there interaction between tourists, the guide and the filming locations)

P: yeah yeah, like I said the tour guide was very informative and talked a lot about the scenes and locations, he even let us play out some of the scenes, it was just so cool

S: so was there use of props on the tour? Please elaborate.

P: hahah yeah, there was the throne, where we could sit and take some pictures, and uhm there were also some of daggers, where we could act as if we were doing a fighting scene haha, it was just awesome, you know the thing is, you go on a tour and don't expect all of these add-ons from it which makes it awesome.

S: so what was the highlight of the tour?

P: oh everything hahaha, no but seriously uhm [thinking] if I had to choose one moment it will probably the walk of shame of Cersei uhm yeah definitely that part of the tour where we would walk the stairs and the tour would say "shame" hahahaha just like the scene in game of thrones. That was just I think the best thing for me from this tour experience.

S: wow that's so cool, I mean role playing that one particular scene, cool. Uhm so did you have any expectations before going on a Game of Thrones tour?

P: uhm no, [thinkin] I did not have any expectations whatsoever before going on this tour. I mean what I expected was getting to see the filming locations I have seen in game of thrones in real life and I did so yeah

S: so you could say that the tour met your expectations in a way.

P: uhm [thinking] I guess yeah, because I did see the locations.

S: so did the film locations live up to your expectations? Please elaborate whether it did or not

P: the tour did more than that, I think uhm [thinking] because I went without expecting much, my experience was 100% amazing and uhm because everything that came as an extra with the tour was unexpected and appreciated

S: so would you like to improve or add anything to the tour you participated in? (For example, better access to sites, more use of props, more time to take pictures)

P: uhm no, uhm to be honest I think the tour was great, I wouldn't change anything and that is just my opinion

S: so you were definitely satisfied with the tour you went on then.

P: oh for sure, super satisfied, I wouldn't change it for the world.

S: so uhm this question you also answered already, uhm that you are satisfied with the tour guide of the tour you went on and that he gave enough information during the tour. Like unknown facts, behind the scenes stories etc.

P: oh yeah, he was amazing, I would definitely say if I ever would like to experience this again, I will want to book a tour with him as the guide hahaha.

S: hahah wow that good was he, I want to go now hahaha

P: yeahh, you should.

S: I will one day, so was there anything available to purchase at these filming locations? If so, did you buy anything? (For example, souvenirs)

P: uhm from the tour itself there was an uhm stand with tour stuff but I didn't buy anything.

S: so we are almost done, I just have a few closing questions for you, uhm the first one being uhm have you been to other film locations of Game of Thrones?

P: yeah for sure, I've been to Harry Potter platform in London and visited New York for a gossip girl experience.

S: ohh I also went to New York and did a gossip girl experience there, it was amazing ahaha, so uhm are you planning to visit other film locations of Game of Thrones? And If so, where?

P: of course, like uhm I don't know yet, maybe other places where game of thrones was filmed like Northern Ireland and Malta, or New Zealand for a lord of the rings experience, maybe in the near future, for now tho I don't have nothing like that planned.

S: oh that sounds like a nice plan, and I hope you get to do that, uhm we have reach the end of this interview just like that ahha, hey thank you again so much for doing this for me.

P: no need to say thanks I have uhm really enjoyed doing this interview. Thank you.

Appendix D - Coding tree

Quotes	Codes	Categories	Themes
“I love daenarys, hodor is my love haha and don’t get me started on sansa stark my queen of the north yeah but anyways I’m a fan”	Fan		
“it is an unexplainable feeling to be honest, its like I was there but at the same time I wasn’t, I could not imagine or believe that I was actually at the same place some of my fav actors were or step foot on. It’s just ugh I can’t explain, just amazing”	Good memories		
“I mean when you have watched to show as many times as time I could easily picture the scenes in my head, also seeing them happen in my head while walking the sights. I uhm felt at times really overwhelmed”	Overwhelming emotions		
“I think because I was a fan I felt like a connection with these places, like I would walk the halls of the city and know everything about them, their darkest most shameful secrets and uhm knowing how dark game of thrones was, it definitely felt like I knew stuff most people didn’t know about”	Prior knowledge	Fans	The Main Character experience
“if I had to choose one moment it will probably the walk of shame of Cersei, definitely that part of the tour where we would walk the stairs and the tour would say “shame”, just like the scene in game of thrones.”	Unforgettable scenes		
“It was great to relive some of the most interesting scenes of kings landing (and other parts).”	Relive scenes		

“Ivana was funny, knowledgeable, and an absolute blast and made sure we all had time to soak in the sights and get plenty of pictures.”	Taking photo	Relive scenes	
“His passion for the series, the city and sharing his knowledge with his guests was apparent with the time he’d taken to provide stills of scenes from the show, bringing alive the locations we saw.”	Transported into Westeros		
“I mean the city of Dubrovnik truly is beautiful and to see how much work went into transforming this real city into parts of Westeros was truly nice to experience and see for oneself.”	Discover Croatia		
“With a great guides (for us it was Robert) except informations about filming this show, you will find out a lot of important informations about past of this amazing city.”	The City of Dubrovnik	Getting to known Croatia	
“magical and beautiful can go hand in hand because some of these place shown in this show for me sometimes were hard to believe are real places like Kingslanding uhm I couldn’t imagine that there was a possibility to actually walk through those streets.”	Ethereal	Film Location	
“All the sites are stunning in their own right (so non-fans will still enjoy it - and can even learn a little!)”	Film sights		
“His passion for the series, the city and sharing his knowledge with his guests was apparent with the time he’d taken to provide stills of scenes from the show, bringing alive the locations we saw.”	Picture book of locations		The Old Town experience
“He was an extra in many of the seasons of GOT and showed us great screen captures of him in scenes, and told us all about the filming process”	Behind the scenes information		

“He was a natural at this and his picture book that showed different places that we were looking at, with the CGI and other effects that were in the show made it so much better.”	Use of technology for the show	Extra information	
“Robert was a great guide, with a fun personality, he was very knowledgeable about all the GoT filming locations, along with history of Dubrovnik and Croatia”	Good guide		
“She was extremely knowledgeable about the filming and making of the show, and I can wholeheartedly recommend this tour for any GoT fan.”	Knowledgeable guide		
“I did appreciate how knowledgeable he was because it added something extra to the tour.”	Surplus memories		
“She kept the group together and was conscious of steps and the range of abilities in the group, I would definitely recommend taking a tour with her!”	Comfortable pace	Tour Guide	
“When they saw "ultimate", they mean it! They took us to filming sites that they didn't even include in the booking write-up!”	Unexpected moments		
“it does not play an important role for me, as to what and how something is filmed, or where specifically, I'm on board for anything as long as it logical and makes sense.”	Zero expectations	Expectations	The Guide's Value information
“Thought he was better and had more energy than the second tour guide. They even give you props at the walk of shame to take pictures and reenact scenes.”	Re-enacting		Cocreation

“and let us take plenty of time at each for all the photos we wanted, icing on the cake was the inclusion of GoT props for photo ops.”

GOT props

Appendix E - YouTube links (10) – between oct 2015 – December 2021

Name	Published	Link
Dubrovnik Old Town & Game of Thrones Filming Locations Croatia Travel Diaries	7 - 11- 2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpqyzVqLArU
Super vet! Game of Thrones Tour in Dubrovnik	22 -10-2015	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yeg8WDiv-sE
THE ULTIMATE GAME OF THRONES TOUR (in Dubrovnik, aka King's Landing)	21 -09-2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aUGToysgME
GAME OF THRONES: King's Landing Tour Film Locations Dubrovnik, CROATIA Bianca Valerio	14 -04-2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XuGq8OKtjQ
4K Dubrovnik (King's Landing Game of Thrones) Walking Tour. Virtual treadmill. Croatia.	5 -11- 2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWn_-VHDHEk
Dubrovnik City Walls Tour Croatia : King's Landing Game of Thrones Walking Tour	16 -12-2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-GlixBxg2to
DUBROVNIK & THE GAME OF THRONES TOUR Vlog 1	5 -11- 2018	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TrpZ0ZacMi8
THE REAL WESTEROS Game of Thrones film locations in Dubrovnik!!!	16-07-2017	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvy8qV59GZk

ALL Game of Thrones SCENES in DUBROVNIK (Guide)	2 -08- 2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSDjf4Q6v-M
EVERY Game Of Thrones Location in DUBROVNIK Your Virtual Guide	20 -12-2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z424pfgFiAk

Appendix F - TripAdvisor reviews

20 Game of Thrones Extended Tour

1.

Name: Scott K – April 2022

Dora was our tour guide and she was absolutely fantastic! Very knowledgeable and had fantastic English, one of the better tours I have ever done!

The locations were very easy to access and the stories told were very interesting - there is no way you could visit these spots without the tour stories it wouldn't be the same!

2.

Name: Travisreiter – April 2022

We had an absolutely wonderful time on this tour with our guide, Ivana! She was an enthusiastic fan that shared our excitement throughout the tour, despite having 7 years of history giving the tour. She was extremely knowledgeable about the filming and making of the show, and I can wholeheartedly recommend this tour for any GoT fan.

3.

Salatiel Lopez – March 2022

Ivana was very talkative and friendly. She made the tour very enjoyable. dubrovnik is a jewel on itself adding GOT related turism is just the cherry on the cake

4.

Adna K – March 2022

We had the most wonderful time on this tour. For all fans of Game of Thrones, this is a must tour in Dubrovnik. With a great guides (for us it was Robert) except informations about filming this show, you will find out a lot of important informations about past of this amazing city. Also you will receive a recommendation about everything what you can need on your trip. For us that was very helpful. The pictures say the rest :) Book and enjoy.

5.

Jodie A. – Oct 2021

We had an absolutely great time!! Our tour guides were tons of fun and super knowledgeable. They were also really patient about us taking our time to reframe photos of the scenes we brought to show the areas and helping us find them. All the sites are stunning in their own right (so non-fans will still enjoy it - and can even learn a little!) but learning how the show impacted the town and how they altered things scenes to make it work was fascinating :)

6.

Pam Z. - Nov 2021

Our Dubrovnik GoT Tour was fantastic! ROBERT was a great guide, with a fun personality. He was very knowledgeable about all the GoT filming locations, along with history of Dubrovnik and Croatia. Robert's GoT picture book was outstanding. You will LOVE this tour! Thank you Robert!

7.

Kelly T. – Aug 2021

We had so much fun - Robert was a blast and had such good info and stories. He was a natural at this and his picture book that showed different places that we were looking at, with the CGI and other effects that were in the show made it so much better. Would definitely recommend the tour and you have to ask for Robert! (he also actually threw in some Croatia/Dubrovnik history as well, which was nice on top of the GoT information.

8.

Nikki C. – oct 2021

We were lucky to have Vlaho as a guide. He was very knowledgeable and we not only got all the GoT gossip but learnt about Dubrovnik too which was great! Would highly recommend this tour when visiting Dubrovnik!

9.

Emme C. – oct 2021

An absolutely amazing tour!! We loved every second and thoroughly enjoyed all of the knowledge our guide had to share with us. Definitely recommend this tour to anyone who is a game of thrones fan.

10.

Drew And Maria – sept 2021

Both of the two guides we had (one for the walking tour within the old city and another for the driving portion of the extended tour) were very good, but Vlaho, who took us around the city, was extraordinary -- friendly, fun, and knowledgeable about the show. A great guide

11.

Thomas L. – sept 2021

The extended walking tour had so many predictable and just as much unpredictable moments. It was great to relive some of the most interesting scenes of kings landing (and other parts). The guide (Robert) made it so so much more enjoyable with all the anecdotes he had personally and otherwise. Instead of just guiding us, Robert painted a whole picture using GoT and history of Dubrovnik itself as well as other facts (e.g. What other movies were shot there).

Exactl what I/we hoped for.

12.

Dominic L. – sept 2021

When they saw "ultimate", they mean it! They took us to filming sites that they didn't even include in the booking write-up! Guides Robert and Ivo were beyond excellent, very knowledgeable about the film sites and let us take plenty of time at each for all the photos we wanted. Icing on the cake was the inclusion of GoT props for photo ops. Absolutely no complaints - an outstanding tour worth every penny, Euro or Kuna!

13.

Cecile D. – sept 2021

Great tour! Learned a lot ans Marija was amazing. She really showed us around town and was very accommodating with us and the pushchair. Will definitely recommend!

14.

Patryk O. – jul 2021

Every part of the tour was like a teleportation into the Westeros, our guides knew a lot of details about GOT shooting in Dubrovnik and they answered all the sneaking questions. This tour will always have a special place in my heart.

15.

Jason B. – oct 2021

Our tour guide, Robert, was amazing. He was extremely knowledgeable while also being very entertaining! Would recommend!

16.

Laura R. – oct 2021

The Game of Thrones Tour with our guide Robert, was a fascinating insight into how the filming was done in Dubrovnik and other Locations. Robert was very knowledgeable, personable and funny, not only able to answer questions about Game of Thrones, but about the history of the city and Croatia. His passion for the series, the city and sharing his knowledge with his guests was apparent with the time he'd taken to provide stills of scenes from the show, bringing alive the locations we saw. The tour was very relaxed, and with only 4 people on the tour we felt we got a fantastic and personal service. I would highly recommend this tour whilst in Dubrovnik, a great few hours spent in the city.

17.

David T. – oct 2021

Our tour guide was an extra for the queens gard and had lots of funny inside stories to tell. Loved that he also told us more about the place and the area. His focus on detail and enthusiasm for the show made us want to rewatch game of thrones.

18.

Lynne A. – oct 2021

We have just had the best day tour with michaela, around Dubrovnik on the extended GoT tour, she was interesting , funny, friendly and really made the whole GoT experience brilliant, it really couldn't have been a better day, absolutely fantastic , loved it , thank you so much and thank you Michaela, lynne and Saul ashley

19.

Callieb129 – oct 2021

We had such a great time on this tour with Robert! He was so knowledgeable about the filming process and locations, as well as local culture and history of the city. He was an extra in many of the seasons of GOT and showed us great screen captures of him in scenes, and told us all about the filming process. We saw tons of cool sights and got great local insight about other things to do. Absolutely loved this tour and would recommend it to anyone.

20.

Shaydon A. – oct 2021

This tour is an absolutely must do for any fan of Game of Thrones...or you know, anyone looking for an interesting tour of the city mixed with an introduction to the show. Ivana was funny, knowledgeable, and an absolute blast and made sure we all had time to soak in the sights and get plenty of pictures.

Appendix G - Field note

28 March (13:00) – 30 March (20:00) on YouTube

Observations:

I have observed a total of 8 videos during these days, three of which are in my collected list of videos for my research (linked below):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpqyzVqLArU>,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yeg8WDiv-sE>,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSDjf4Q6v-M>

Mi a wak ongeveer un seis video den e dianan aki and mi por bisa ku mayoria di nan ta touch upon kosnan similar. Den e videonan aki, e hende nan aki no a actually bai den tour, but mi a hinka nan den lista como e tbt un kaminda bo por mira kon nan ta experiensia kana na e location nan aki. Pa ta mas komprendible, den un video un pareja a bai Dubrovnik and a disidi di kana wak e sitionan kaminda Game of Thrones a wordu filma como nan ta fantico di e show. Hopi biaha ora e hende nan aki yega na un sitio por ehempel na Blackwater Bay, kual ta un di e location nan di Game of Thrones, nan ta pone portret di un actual scene di e show ma illustra kon differente e ta mustra den e show. Loke mi a observa tambe ta kon kada bes ku nan ta na un sitio, e hende nan aki tin e noshon di konta kiko tur a pasa na e sitio nan aki den show. For example, ora nan a yega na e sitio kaminda nan a filma The Red Keep, nan a papia di yen escenas ku a pasa einan, I kon nan mes ta feel ora nan ta para einan. Un otro observashon ta ku nan ta korda hopi one liners di e show, manera ‘shame’ ta un ku a kom op hopi voor, vooral ora nan a yega na e stairs of shame. Nan a papia kon epic e scene tabata i e mucha muhe a actually hasi e walk of shame manera den e show.

Un otro observashon ta kon mayoria biaha ora un hende yega na un sitio, nan ta kuminsa kanta of mas bien humm e soundtrack di e show. Mi a haña e kos ei actually hopi pret i leuk paso bo ta mira kon exicted nan ta pa djis yega i para un kaminda ku a wordu uza pa un escena. Manera tambe mi a menshona kaba, e oberservashon aki ta echt konta paso tur biaha ora e hende nan aki yega na un sitio nan ta kuminsa papia di e escenannan ku a wordu filma einan, ta mane nan ta expert of ke splika tur hende dikon ta asina awesome pa actually hasi e tour di locations aki si bo ta un fan of gewoon bisa of persuade un otro pa bai wak e show pa despues por

experiensia loke nan ta bezig ta exepensiando. Den un video specific mi ta korda ku un hende a menshona kon hasiendo e tour aki ta manera Disneyland pa nan. Den un otro video, ma observa tambe ku ora hende ta kana rond na e sitio nan aki, hopi biaha otro turista ta aserka nan i ta puntranan si nan ta un fan di e show and despues nan ta bond door di e show pa mane 10 minut kual mi a haña ta eksepshonal.