

Stereotypes in cultural tourism

Reflecting on the role of CCIs in the consumption of the heritage city

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Issue and argument

Scene 1: Venice. Ext. outer space. Middle of the night.

Frank emerges onto a Venetian rooftop clad in mismatched pyjamas. The moon casts an ethereal glow over the labyrinthine cityscape, illuminating the ancient terracotta rooftops. He moves cautiously along the uneven tiles, while the camera captures his every move as he navigates the unfamiliar terrain, heightening the tension. With each precarious step, the audience feels his unease, amplified by the stunning aerial views of Venice's iconic architecture and shimmering canals below. Along the way, Frank encounters a series of obstacles—a chimney he needs to climb over, a gap he must leap across, and narrow pathways that require acrobatic manoeuvring. His actions are a mix of determination and bewildered improvisation, making for a comically entertaining spectacle against the picturesque backdrop of Venice's skyline. In accordance with his role in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's “The Tourist” (2010), his vulnerability and the absurdity of his situation create a contrast against the elegance and grandeur of the Venetian scenery.

Scene 2: Venice. Ext. outer space. Middle of the night.

The scene opens with a shot of the Bridge of Sighs, shrouded in mist. A parade of sleek gondolas emerges from the fog, delivering Ethan Hunt and his team to their destination: the Doge's Palace. An aerial shot shows its facade animated by an intricate play of lights, before offering a glimpse of the lavish, decadent party taking place within its courtyard. The camera follows Ethan's entrance, delving into a world

of spotlights and dark corners, where a mass of unknown bodies moves to the sound of music. Pretty soon, our protagonists are forced to flee through the candle-lit corridors of the palace, and out into the Venetian night. Ethan and Grace are chased through the misty city. Dark, mysterious, and almost unwelcoming to strangers, Venice becomes one giant escape room for Christopher McQuarrie's "Mission Impossible: Dead Reckoning - Part 1" (2023), as the actors run around its street as if on a dangerous playground.

Scene 3: Venice. Ext. outer space. Bright, sunny morning.

Vesper and James Bond, at the helm of a sailboat, soar into St. Mark's Basin as he officially hands in his resignation. Their romantic getaway, though, is quickly interrupted as someone from Vesper's past comes looking for her. Soon, the sun-filled shots are swapped for dark close-ups, as James uses ancient columns and convenient sconces to spy on Vesper's blackmailers. The ensuing chase takes us into a construction site. In a stunning mix of action moves and visual drama, the entire building starts sinking, creating a surreal experience as Bond plunges into the surprising depths of the Grand Canal. In a fusion of exaggerated visuals and daring feats, Martin Campbell's "Casino Royale" (2006) disregards basic notions of Venetian morphology and architecture in favour of the thrill of the chase.

These three vignettes can be inserted within a bigger, older trajectory. A quick montage of imaginaries from Canaletto's 18th-century proto-postcards to today's audiovisual productions, passing through Ruskin and Mann as well as the romantic atmosphere of films such as "Venezia, la luna e tu" (1958) reveals a shift: once the perfect setting for languid stories of love and/or despair, the city now offers a background to fast-paced mysteries and action-filled tales.

Scene 4: Ext. outer space. Bright, sunny day.

In the middle of St Mark's Basin, a series of gondolas cross the canal towards the island of San Giorgio. At their head is a line of gondoliers in elegant, fluttering dresses, carrying the bride and groom to the church. A long red carpet welcomes the bride, Nina, while the excitement of the guests and the rich Toni, the groom, is palpable. Meanwhile, Bepi, a womanising gondolier who is madly in love with Nina, is seen in a taxi on his way back to the island to win her back. To stall him, Bepi's friends arrange for some group photos to be taken. Toni arrives in his motorboat; there is no shortage of insults from the gondoliers, who are confused by the swell. He arrives on the island, looking distraught at not being able to stop the wedding, when Nina comes out of the church, hugs him and says she will marry him. The scene ends with Nina and Bepi in a gondola, embracing and declaring their love: a splendid and luminous Canal Grande provides the backdrop for these last scenes of "Venezia, la luna e tu", directed by Dino Risi (1958).

Even within this shift, though, one tenet holds: the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs) play a pivotal role in shaping the perception and storytelling of locales. However, this a double-edged sword: while garnering recognition and fascination for these destinations, it concurrently risks perpetuating stereotypes. These, while potentially heightening the place's allure, may oversimplify or distort its true essence. This paper seeks to delve into the role of CCIs in shaping consumer behaviour in tourist sites, exploring how stereotypes mediated through artistic representations impact visitors' experiences.

We can identify a similarity between tourists' behaviours and attitudes and the portrayal of Venice by CCIs through their artistic and cultural products. Specifically, there's a common tendency to view Venice as a playground in both films and reality, especially with mass tourism. This perception is emphasised by the contrast between the romanticised city of Venice up until the 1970s, depicted as a timeless place full of postcards, and today's Venice. In the present, visitors feel compelled to do the 'impossible' such as climbing palace walls, diving into the canal, or speeding through the Grand Canal.

The surge in disrespectful behavior among tourists in Italy has intensified since Europe experienced a surge in visitors post the Covid travel restrictions. Instances of tourists engaging in destructive activities like swimming in UNESCO-protected canals, trespassing historic sites, and displaying reckless behavior, such as surfing down the Grand Canal or skinny dipping beside historical landmarks, have become more frequent (Buckley, 2023). The statistics underline a notable increase in such incidents. For instance, in Venice alone, there has been a surge in tourists swimming in canals, with the municipal police handling 43 cases in the first 10 months of 2022, nearly double the total for the entirety of 2021. Similar trends have been observed in cases of monument defacement (Buckley, 2023).

Despite historical instances of extreme behavior, such as stealing water taxis or even gondolas, the overall volume of such actions seems to have returned to pre-pandemic levels, contributing to what officials describe as an increase in disrespectful conduct. While certain extreme incidents might stand out, it's not necessarily a new trend. Such extreme behaviors have occurred before but seem more prominent now due to the overall rise in tourist numbers and their subsequent impact on Italy's heritage sites and cultural treasures (Buckley, 2023).

Tom Jenkins, CEO of the European Tourism Association, highlights that while tourists behaving poorly is not a new issue, there's a distinct pattern of incidents in Italy, largely due to the nation's exceptionally delicate cultural and environmental fabric (Buckley, 2023). Italy's emphasis on preserving its most vulnerable environments and architectural marvels as centers of art creates a volatile mix when combined with increased visitor traffic. Jenkins underscores that cities like Venice and Rome are not

just tourist destinations but living spaces where people coexist with invaluable cultural treasures. He notes a key difference, mentioning that even in France, the most visited country globally, there isn't a comparable level of sensitivity. France sees 65 million international visitors annually, yet the impact on sensitive spaces is less severe due to the sheer volume of places and lesser heritage exposure compared to Italy (Buckley, 2023).

The fragility of Italy's environment heightens the repercussions of any damage, as it often affects world heritage sites. This differs from other countries where the extent of heritage exposure is comparatively lower, leading to a higher susceptibility to damage when faced with irresponsible tourist behavior. The romanticized notion of the "*dolce vita*," portraying Italy as a place where one can freely indulge and let loose, has had detrimental effects on its cultural heritage. This perception isn't solely due to Italy's fragility, as noted by Italian experts. Contrary to similar stories emerging from France, Spain, or other popular European destinations in 2022, they believe that the behavior of foreigners in Italy is influenced by their perception of the country (Buckley, 2023).

Film historian Nicola Bassano points to movies like "*La Dolce Vita*," the iconic 1960 film directed by Federico Fellini, as contributing to this misconception. In this film, the scene where Marcello Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg jump into the Trevi Fountain to kiss embodies this carefree and uninhibited portrayal of Italy abroad. Such cinematic representations have created a false impression of Italy as a place devoid of rules, where unconventional behavior is not just acceptable but almost encouraged. This misrepresentation in popular culture influences how tourists perceive and subsequently behave in Italy, impacting the preservation of its heritage sites (Buckley, 2023).

Cultural products and stereotypes leave the masses with the impression that some behaviours are acceptable. This underscores the need to provide new narrations that deconstruct or reconstruct stereotypes, reinforcing local identity and respect.

Theoretical background

Stereotypes are widely studied in social psychology, sociology, and related fields. They relate to cognitive schemas or mental constructs that individuals form about objects, people, or places (Fiske & Taylor, 2013). In particular, this paper aims to investigate the impact of stereotypes born from cultural and creative productions and how these can influence the perception of tourist destinations in the eyes of consumers, tourists.

Research on stereotyping within the tourism literature has been on the rise, with several studies delving into various aspects (Tung et al., 2020). For instance, Bender, Gidlow, and Fisher (2013) and Woosnam et al. (2018) have contributed to this field. These studies have examined stereotypes across different domains, such as their

prevalence in media representations (Caton & Santos, 2008), their presence in tourism education (Tung & King, 2016), and their role in ethnic enclave tourism (Woosnam et al., 2018). Furthermore, investigations have explored how stereotypes impact destination image (Chen, Lin, & Petrick, 2013) and influence tourists' perceptions of service providers (Luoh & Tsaur, 2014).

As per Terracciano, Abdel-Khalek, Adam, and Adamovova (2005), national stereotypes refer to the beliefs regarding distinctive personality, social attributes, and physical and mental characteristics that are considered typical of individuals from a particular culture. These stereotypes often develop into cultural peculiarities and are disseminated through various channels such as media, hearsay, education, historical narratives, and jokes (Bender et al., 2013).

Despite the substantial research conducted on stereotypes in the tourism domain, there remains a need for further exploration to both identify and measure tourist stereotypes. Stereotypes are defined as beliefs or expectations regarding the characteristics of individuals from outgroups (Taylor et al., 1996). Assessing stereotypes holds significant importance due to the potential impact of mutual biases between hosts and tourists on perceptions and behaviors in each other's presence (Yzerbyt, 2016). Tourist stereotyping can result in adverse effects by skewing impressions, potentially leading to instances of discrimination and harassment (van Veelen et al., 2016; Tung et al., 2020).

Various mediums like literature, radio, television, newspapers, the internet, films, plays, opera, music, and photographs can portray cities in diverse ways through images, narratives, and discourses (Boland, 2008). Avraham (2000) highlights how these ingrained images become part of a city's symbolic identity. These portrayals can evolve and vary over time (Hall, 2003), sometimes leading to stereotyped conceptions that carry both positive and negative implications. Stereotypes can serve as cognitive shortcuts, helping individuals process information, shape expectations, guide behaviour, and simplify our categorization of the world (Adler-Nissen, 2014). Conversely, stereotypes can also result in bias, discrimination, prejudice, and overgeneralizations about countries and cultures, regardless of their true nature (Avraham, 2020).

Stereotyping in tourism has deep roots in the cultural construction of destinations. The global expansion of tourism in the 1980s and 1990s created a new focus on efficiency, product development, and destination branding (Morgan et al., 2018). In response, assessments of consumer satisfaction emerged (Calantone & Mazenec, 1991), intensifying the tendency to define a place by exaggerating or even inventing a few of its features. This quest for authenticity often turns into a contrived imitation of the original experience, meticulously shaped to satisfy tourists' preferences. This problem is closely tied to "commoditization" (Greenwood, 1977), where elements of local life become tourist attractions, losing their inherent value (Cohen, 1988).

An illustrative demonstration of the transformative influence of the tourism industry lies in its ability to reshape and redefine spaces and locations. This is demonstrated through various instances, including internationally renowned theme park attractions like the Walt Disney Parks (drawing an annual crowd of over 150 million visitors), colossal casino ventures such as those in Macau and Las Vegas, the evolution of major cities like Barcelona and Venice into tourist-centric destinations, and the overhaul of post-industrial areas into extensive real estate investments tailored for a mobile and affluent consumer base (Young, Markham, 2020).

This process can negatively impact residents' lives by causing an unsustainable surge in tourism, potentially diminishing local identity and self-worth in tourist destinations. Tourism production, often likened to a 'second nature' (Smith, 2008), is commonly criticized for its detrimental impact on both nature and culture. Moreover, the prioritization of profit over the well-being of communities and locations leads to the displacement of locals, soaring rents, and a decline in quality of life due to heightened congestion and overcrowding (Young, Markham, 2020). Residents may feel they exist mainly to cater to tourists' needs and desires (Duignan et al., 2022). This perception can reinforce negative stereotypes of locals as subordinates, existing solely to serve tourists. This emphasises the need for strategies to cope with these stigmas and stereotypes (Adler-Nissen, 2014; Walters & Mair, 2012).

A contemporary common instrument able to shape perception and stereotypes about tourist destinations is guidebooks. As per McGregor (2000), guidebook texts play an active role in shaping, adapting, and solidifying the perceptions, beliefs, and perspectives of present-day cultural communities. McGregor suggests that these guidebooks continuously influence and alter these understandings (Bender et al., 2013). They serve as tools that construct mental images of locations for readers, even without their physical presence, essentially offering frameworks through which the world is viewed (McGregor, 2000). As outlined by Lee (2001), the creation of the tourist gaze heavily relies on tourist brochures and guidebooks (Bender et al., 2013). These informational materials hold significance as they are the platforms where specific attractions and destinations are selected and portrayed. Lee suggests that the construction of what tourists perceive and focus on is shaped within these sources of tourism information (Lee, 2001; (Bender et al., 2013). Indeed, guidebooks are influential in both creating and perpetuating stereotypical images. As they condense intricate details about a destination, guidebooks necessarily engage in categorization to simplify the information for readers. This process of simplification often leads to the formation and perpetuation of stereotypes associated with certain places or cultures. Therefore, guidebooks play a significant role not just in forming these stereotypes but also in their ongoing maintenance and utilization (Bender et al., 2013).

Tourist destinations often owe their image and allure also to cultural and creative outputs like movies, TV series, and promotional campaigns, tourist guidebooks, influencing both residents and visitors. Visual media plays a pivotal role in portraying

countries like Iceland, where the emphasis on its uniqueness in cultural and creative industries (CCIs) has shaped its tourist appeal. For instance, TV series not only contributed to popularizing Iceland but also played a role in crafting its tourist image, aligning with the nation's branding efforts (Loftsdóttir et al., 2017).

This trend has roots tracing back to medieval travel writings (Ísleifsson, 2011), which were instrumental in shaping Europeans' perceptions of distant lands (Pratt, 1992). These writings serve as early examples of how narratives and visual representations influence how tourist destinations are perceived. Early travelers to Iceland, inspired by the landscapes depicted in Icelandic sagas, sought to capture these scenes through drawings and paintings, essentially becoming the "first tourists" who transported Icelandic landscapes through their writings and imagery (Jóhannsdóttir and Eysteinnsson, 2010; Loftsdóttir et al., 2017).

Movie-induced tourism is evidently on the rise globally, drawing tourists to visit places featured on screens, thereby potentially fostering stereotypes (Muchiri et al., 2018). Films act as persuasive visual tools, enticing audiences and driving the desire to explore destinations by showcasing their offerings (Cohen, 1986). The effectiveness of these visual representations relies on their simplicity, distinctiveness, appeal, and most importantly, their believability (Kotler & Gertner, 2004). While many images reflect reality, some are rooted in myths and stereotypes. These inaccuracies and stereotypes can create a negative image, distorting customer expectations (Banyai, 2009). Pritchard and Morgan (2001) aptly highlight that how landscapes and destinations are portrayed in images significantly influences how these places and their inhabitants are perceived by others (Muchiri et al., 2018).

CCIs can perpetuate stereotypes through media such as images, videos, films, travel documentaries, and blogs. However, they also have the potential to deconstruct these stereotypes by promoting new, sustainable ideas for heritage appreciation.

Methodology

This paper explores the role of stereotypes in shaping tourism dynamics, using Venice as a case study. It proposes a participatory video lab, led by an artist, as a tool to reshape city images through CCIs and participant perspectives. Participants were purposely chosen among local residents to explore possible discrepancies between locals' and tourists' views of the city. This choice stems from the supposed discrepancy between the way tourists and locals see the city and the frequent incompatibility between these two categories in terms of needs, objectives, and views, even though COVID-19 has shown that the economy of the city of Venice is strongly based on and dependent on tourist flows. This led to the development of a video lab prototype, examined in this research through an ethnographic approach. As such, the primary goal of this paper is to present a toolkit for de-stereotypization, rooted in artistic

intervention and participatory processes. This method was first tried out in Venice, with the aim of engaging citizens in collaborative value creation through video making. The process is approached as "artistic research", which includes creating an artefact using artistic or arts-based methods to make discoveries (Bell, 2019; Leavy, 2009).

In the spring of 2023, we invited people to join a participatory video lab focused on portraying the city of Venice. This opportunity was only open to those living or working permanently in Venice. The lab was led by a video maker and film director. Participants were taught video-making techniques and asked to reflect on both the stereotypical images of the city and narrative techniques. The goal was to understand the perspectives of locals, ascertain whether stereotypes equally affected residents and visitors, and explore the possibility of deconstructing them.

The role of the artists as CCIs was crucial in the process. Video was chosen as the artistic medium because of its value in uniting individuals and cultures and stimulating creative thinking and subsequent innovation. The video's purpose is to foster dialogue and cultivate a sense of community that transcends differences. This becomes feasible when we acknowledge that "what the arts most offer and what traditional academic writing most fails to accomplish is resonance" (Leavy, 2009, p. ix). The video is designed to combine an intellectual and a visceral engagement with the subject (Pullen & Vachhani, 2021), facilitating a different form of "understanding" or "aesthetic knowledge" (Taylor & Hansen, 2005, p. 1214) regarding leadership, gender, and language within organisations. This approach recognizes the intricacy of society and people's potential for innovation, focusing on unifying varied perspectives to surpass preconceived ideas.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding, researchers from the University actively participated in the video lab, immersing themselves in all the activities, and even independently creating their own videos. The analysis centres on the workshop, encompassing all stages, participant interactions, and feedback received. An analysis of the resulting videos is also included, along with the response of the public and local authorities following the action's presentation.

Takeaway and results

The result of the video lab was a short film based on the individual videos. The lab itself, the dynamics characterising it, the final product, and the feedback of participants and locals gave us a new understanding of the potential contribution of CCIs to sustainable tourism. By relating their outlooks and encounters, the participants succeeded in emphasising various aspects of the city, which are often overlooked or misunderstood. The coral structure highlighted the diverse contributions arising from the whole workshop process. The lab contributed to a more authentic and nuanced understanding of the city, serving as a powerful tool to challenge preconceived notions:

this lays the foundations to make the workshop a repeatable model in other tourist destinations suffering the same challenges as Venice.

Film, as a unique art form, transcends mere storytelling and engenders an "aesthetic experience" by engaging our visual, auditory, and embodied senses. It offers unconventional avenues for connection, empathy, and learning from its presentations, more than just "telling a story" (Biehl, 2023; Carreri, 2022). This aesthetic dimension partly alleviates the challenge of employing language to discuss language (Learmonth & Morrell, 2019, p. 57).

This project serves as a testament to the power of artistic expression and collaboration in reshaping narratives and promoting a more inclusive and authentic representation of a place. This addresses the problem of over-tourism by inserting itself into the dynamics of stereotype construction by contributing to the reimagining of a place through a participatory process of creation. It can be seen as a new methodology that can involve artistic means and language and a creative approach to research.

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