

## MYSTERY AND THRILLER TOURISM IN EUROPEAN CULTURAL DESTINATIONS

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*Our paper describes the potential of the mystery and thriller tourism in European cultural destinations and in using this sub-section of dark tourism to get young people keen in unveiling and exploring European cultural heritage. Moreover, it demonstrates the use of in-depth focus groups held with residents and tourists for determining their preferences for mystery and thriller mobile apps involving the dark cultural heritage of the city of Prague. Our results demonstrate the potential of interactive game-like app and reveal that in order to be successful they should contain a narrative, an interactive, GPS-based map, a virtual tour, a “treasure hunt” game with a possibility to play on-line. Furthermore, as to the mode of payment and the price, our results yield that the potential app should be offered at both App Store and Android Market Play for 2.99 EUR or less..*

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### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, both dark and fright tourism (that constitutes the sub-fraction of the former) found themselves in the scope of the public and research interest (Stone, 2006; Sharpley and Stone, 2009) and experienced a rise in popularity thanks to the increase of global communication and travel opportunities (see e.g. Ehtiyar and Altıntaş, 2012). However, the fictional (literary or film) aspect of dark and fright, tourism, and especially its potential in bringing cultural heritage to the



attention of the young European citizens, is still not exploited to its full (see e.g. Kassianidis, 2013).

According to Squire (1996), literary tourism can be described as an attempt to of the public to experience a version of the past (or imagined present) and to make connections between past and present, fact and fiction. Literary tourism (which is often associated with film tourism, since most of the popular literary works find their way into the film adaptations), attracts tourists and forms a part of the landscape of heritage tourism (Herbert, 2001).

In spite of the growing popularity of the literature and film tourism, there are not many research works that attempt to identify the success factors of this fast-growing phenomenon (see e.g. Riley, Baker and Van Doren, 1998; or Hudson and Ritchie, 2006.) This is quite unfortunate, since any further research on different genres, locations and icons is important in understanding the effect of film tourism, which still remains under-researched and represents a rich area for theoretical exploration (see e.g. Hudson et al, 2006, Bolan et al, 2008, or Beeton, 2004).

## **LITERARY AND FILM ASPECT MYSTERY AND THRILLER TOURISM**

As many researchers agree, mystery and thriller tourism represent one of the fast-growing fields tourism research (see e.g. Sharpley and Stone, 2009; or Vagionis and Loumioti, 2011). With regard to this, mystery and thriller tourism can be perceived as a part of fright tourism associated with a more amusing part of dark tourism. Visitors are often attracted to the places associated with mystical and horror events and described in the books or featured in films and TV series. However, a large share of these events is created by a pure imagination and never took place in real life. Therefore, mystery and thriller tourism allows visitors to enjoy the destinations without dealing with the grim part of dark tourism.

Tourist cites play an important role in mystery and thriller tourism. Although the plot of the most mysteries and thrillers does not put them into any specific location, there is a plethora of examples when the tourist cite constitutes an important part of the story (see e.g. Stylos and Andronikidis, 2013).

An important aspect of mystery and thriller tourism is something what can be identified as “fright film tourism”. The majority of the successful mystery and thriller literary works today find their way into films and TV adaptations which increase their popularity and

dissemination. Vagionis and Loumioti (2011) or Stylos and Andronikidis (2013) show that film tourism might be an effective marketing tool for promoting tourism destinations. Reeves (2001) points out that not only “feeling good” or being associate with romance or escapism” makes an important prerequisite for a popular visitor attraction – even small towns like Burkittsville, Maryland, the setting for “The Blair Witch Project” experienced an influx of visitors, and the Georgetown house in Washington D.C., the setting for “The Exorcist” film, is a major tourist attraction.

According to Beale (2012), a little town of Forks, at Olympia Peninsula in Washington, the setting of the largest part of vampire trilogy “Twilight Series” by Stephenie Meyer, experienced tourist economic boom: in 2008, after the release of the first film of the trilogy, the number of visitors nearly doubled reaching 19,000, and by 2010 it reached 73,000 people.

However, while some cities and towns with a literary and film potential are successful in profiting from it, others fail to exploit their tourism potential. For instance, the local community of Burkittsville, Maryland (the setting of “The Blair Witch Project” film) claims that the successful film caused “only unwanted popularity and troubles” upon their small community, while the profits from increased fright tourism were negligible (Fiore, 2010).

## **MYSTERY AND THRILLER TOURISM IN EUROPEAN CITIES**

Although the United States are the champion in fright mystery and thriller tourism, perhaps due to the importance of its leisure and entertainment market, the potential of this type of tourism should also be exploited in Europe.

Europe constitutes a very important place for global incoming literary and film tourism and many literary works of great importance are set in European cities. Table 2 provides a selection of the most successful mystery and thriller literary works set in European destinations from the end of the 19th century until nowadays.

As it has been already explained before, best-selling mystery and thriller novels often find their way into film adaptations. Table 2 provides some example of recent blockbusters set in European cities.

The quick analysis of the box office clearly shows that the British capital is, by far and large, the most popular film destination on the Old Continent, which can only be beaten by New York City. For instance, the most recent addition to the James Bond series “Skyfall” is set in London,

so is the bibliographical film “Diana” and the popular contemporary adaptation of “Adventures of Sherlock Holmes” that is called “Sherlock”.

**Table 1.** Examples of mystery and thriller literary works set in European cities

Year	Literary title	Author	Set in
1897	“Dracula”	Bram Stoker	Bran/London
1892	“Adventures of Sherlock Holmes”	Arthur Conan Doyle	London
1911-1925	“Fantômas series”	Marcel Allain/Pierre Souvestre	Paris
1937	“Master and Margarita”	Mikhail Bulgakov	Moscow
1920-1973	“Miss Marple/Hercule Poirot novels”	Agatha Christie	Various UK locations
1998	“Digital Fortress”	Dan Brown	Seville
1999	“Hannibal”	Thomas Harris	Florence
1997-2007	“Harry Potter”	Joanne Rowling	London
1997 – 2013	“Harry Hole novels”	Jo Nesbo	Oslo, Bergen
2000	“Angels and Demons”	Dan Brown	Rome
2003	“Da Vinci Code”	Dan Brown	Paris/London
2005-2007	“Millennium Trilogy”	Stieg Larsson	Stockholm
2007-2013	“Department Q novels”	Jussi-Adler Olsen	Copenhagen
2010	“Postcard Killers”	Lisa Marklund/James Patterson	Stockholm
2013	“Inferno”	Dan Brown	Florence, Venice, Istanbul

*Source: Own results*

All in all, it is apparent that mystery and thriller books and films represent an important share of Europe’s dark tourism potential. Since the majority of tourists keen for this type of entertainment are relatively young, developing this aspect of cultural heritage by associating popular books and films with cultural tourism destinations might help young Europeans in the creation of technology-enhanced cultural heritage

experiences, enabling them to generate user-created solutions (such as interactive city games, quests, mystery tours with the elements of the game and storytelling, etc.).

**Table 2.** Examples of films set in European cities

Year	Film title	Starring	Set in
2001-2011	“Harry Potter”	Daniele Radcliff	London
2001	“Hannibal”	Anthony Hopkins	Florence
2002	“Blade 2”	Wesley Snipes	Prague
2009	“Angels and Demons”	Evan McGregor	Rome
2006	“Da Vinci Code”	Tom Hanks	Paris/London
2003-2012	“Underworld Trilogy”	Kate Beckinsale	Budapest
	“Hugo”	Tom Hanks	Paris
2010	“The Tourist”	Angelina Jolie/Johnny Depp	Venice
2010 -	“Sherlock”	Martin Freeman	London
2011	“The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo”	Rooney Mara/Daniel Craig	Stockholm
2012	“Skyfall”	Daniel Craig	London
2013	“Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters”	Jeremy Renner	Augsburg
2013	“Diana”	Naomi Watts/Naveen Andrews	London

*Source: Authors' own results*

## **PROPOSED E-SOLUTIONS FOR MYSTERY AND THRILER TOURISM**

Although personal computers became probably the most important must-have item in the 1990s, the 2000s and beyond belongs to smartphones and tablets. Since the introduction of an iPhone by Apple in 2005, a revolutionary gadget that combined the features of a mobile phone and a portable computer, had a multi-touch screen and virtual

keyboard, smartphones gained wide popularity. While most of Apple's devices were relatively expensive and therefore unavailable for the larger masses, the introduction of Android-based devices by Google made smartphones and tables widely available to the people from virtually all income groups which has been achieved by the smart marketing campaign that reflects one of the finest examples of PR strategies ever devised (see e.g. Kasl Kollmanová, 2012; or Kasl Kollmannová and Matušková, 2013).

It can be shown that smartphone apps represent one of the most interesting ways for exploiting the mystery and thriller tourism in European destinations and for attracting young Europeans to get to better know their cities. Currently, there are many smartphone apps of this kind available either from Apple Store or Google Market Play: for example an app focused on Italian mysteries and called "Mysteries Italy" by GeersTrea and representing an atlas of mysteries both in Italy and Vatican. The app contains over 165 mysteries to be solved and revealed, together with their detailed descriptions, GPS locations, documents, photos and videos. Smartphone apps, such as this one, represent one of the relatively cheap but also very effective ways of promoting mystery and thriller tourism in European cities. The apps should include a contest-like element of multiple users playing against each other in real time, or competing for a prize or some incentive, thus resembling the "urban games" or "urban quests" that are often organized by the local residents in large cities and include elements of treasure hunt and gaming.

We tried to come up with the exact specification of the proposed app that can be used in order to get to know the uncanny side of the city of Prague. The legend of Golem was selected as the basis for the app development through the feedback obtained in focus groups.

According to Wisniewski (1996), the legend of Golem is often associated with Prague and it found its way into many Czech popular films and cartoons, as well as into fiction literature (e.g. Meyrink, 1915). It is also often a popular name for restaurants and cafés in the Czech capital. According to Idel (1990), in Jewish mythology Golem resembles an animated anthropomorphic entity created entirely from inanimate matter (e.g. sand, clay, etc.). Although there are several legends featuring Golem that took place in various parts of Europe, perhaps the most famous legend involves Judah Loew ben Bezalel, the 16th century Chief Rabbi of Prague and the famous Cabbalist who allegedly created the Golem to defend the Prague ghetto and the local Jewis (Sherwin, 1985). Rabbi Loew made the Golem from the clay taken from the banks

of the Vltava (Moldau) river and brought it to life using rituals and Hebrew incantations (inserting the small table with incantations into the slot on Golem's forehead). The Golem helped Prague's Jews and carried out difficult tasks for Rabbi Loewm, until one day it became increasingly violent, killing people and causing violence all around Prague. Rabbi Loew had to destroy Golem and its remnants were stored in the attic of the Old New Synagogue where, as some legends have it, it can be found nowadays.

The 'Golem' app that would be based on the legend, was envisaged to feature a storytelling element, as well as the GPS-based map featuring the tour of the Old Town of Prague. The tourists and the local residents alike would be able to stroll around the narrow streets of the Old Town while learning the legend of Golem and experiencing the atmosphere of locations mentioned in the legend.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

Focus group interviews are quite common in all fields of social sciences as a form of qualitative research analysis. The first of them were used in the early 1920s, perhaps due to the fact that some social scientists had doubts about the accuracy of traditional information-gathering methods and started turning to focus group sessions instead (Bogardus, 1926; or Strielkowski et al., 2012). A focus group is typically made of people accommodated in an appropriate venue and having a discussion on a suggested topic and expressing opinions and suggestions in an interactive manner. A focus group is usually led by a moderator who leads the discussion and prevents it from deteriorating from the topic of discussion.

American sociologist Robert Merton developed focus groups for the evaluation of audience responses to radio programmes in 1941. During World War II, Merton used focus group techniques to investigate morale in the U.S. Army (Merton, 1987). Although academics and researchers were not very interested in using focus groups in the 1950s at first, market researchers used focus groups as a research tool to identify the attractiveness of their products and related customers' preferences (Kreuger and Casey, 2000). In the 1980s focus group interviews were rediscovered by social scientists who adopted some of the practical strategies from market research experiences. According to Morgan (1997), focus groups can be used as a preliminary step in the design of surveys for further research, since they could help researchers get a better

idea of individual issues to be tackled by questionnaires during the next stage. The purpose of a focus group is to listen and gather information on a well-defined research topic.

The focus groups are widely used in tourism studies. For instance Vernon et al. (2003) applied focus groups for investigating the 'greening' of tourism micro

- businesses

Strielkowski et al. (2012) describe the use of focus groups for assessing users' preferences for tourism-related e-services in three European cities. The results of the focus groups are also used for the next, a more profound, step in the analysis of consumer preferences, namely a conjoint analysis (see e.g. Tilikidou et al., 2013).

Focus group interviews presented in our paper were conducted with a purpose to create a reference framework for the development of a smartphone application available from iTunes and Google Market Play. They targeted the main potential users of an e-services platform represented by Prague residents and tourists. Our focus groups first aimed at discussing which e-services are perceived as lacking and which existing e-services need better integration. Additionally, our focus groups aimed to stimulate discussion with different categories of potential e-users to promote creative and innovative ideas of how a possible platform should look, what features it should contain, and in general how it should work in order to be considered user-friendly. Finally, the focus group discussions were aimed at assessing people's preferences for integrated e-services, e.g. to what extent people would use these services, and which payment vehicle they would deem appropriate, if any.

## **THE RESULTS OF THE FOCUS GROUPS**

In total, 12 focus groups with 86 people (48 tourists and 38 residents) were held in Prague between September and December 2012. The participants were tourists visiting the city of Prague as well as local residents who can be perceived both as potential tourists to other destinations as well as citizens and residents of the city. This was done due to the fact that local residents can cultivate their own mystery and thriller tourism cultural heritage (and disseminate it through the Internet, for instance in the form of blogs and e-forums). In addition to tourists who might feel the need for specific game-like apps that can help them to know the city better, local residents can help the researchers to identify the attributes of the apps they would like to have in order to access their cultural heritage (in our case mystery and thriller heritage associated with

Prague). Local residents live in the city and apart from their daily routine (work, errands, etc.) enjoy the city’s cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. Local residents also visit museums, galleries, theatres and local fairs and festivals. Therefore, residents were defined as people who lived or worked in Prague on a daily basis (commuters were also included into the sample).

The tourists’ aim is to enjoy the city and their visit; their secondary aim is to understand and explore cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. For the purposes of this research, tourists were defined as people who have come from another city and whose main aim of visiting the city is tourism (a non-business or work-related trip) and who spend at least one night in the city. The results of the focus groups were checked against the demographics and tourism statistics in Prague and found consistent. The response rate in the focus groups was satisfactory and on average met the recommended standards. Summary statistics for both tourists and residents is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Summary statistics for the focus groups respondents in Prague

Variable		Tourists	Local residents
		Value (in %)	
Gender	Males	68.5%	65%
	Females	31.5%	35%
Age	Mean age	28.75	27.43
	Median age	26	25
Education	Compulsory level or less	9%	12.5%
	High school	12.5%	19%
	University	79.5%	68.5%
Civil status	Single	%	23%
	Married	68%	54.5%
	Other (divorced/separated/widowed)	16%	22.5%

*Source: Authors’ own results*

The main objective of the first focus group agenda was to review and compare the basic attitudes towards mystery and thriller tourism across different participant categories, aimed at understanding how the participants perceived the potential of this type of tourism and what IT solutions they perceived as helpful and useful in order to manage,

understand, and explore Prague (with a special focus on the Jewish Quarter and the legend of Golem).

**Table 4.** Attributes and their levels for “Golem” app

<b>App attributes</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Mentioned in FG</b>
<b>Narrative (storytelling)</b>	Listen to the new twist of the old legend of Golem set in Prague’s Old Town and featuring the most prominent landmarks of Prague’s Jewish Quarter (e.g. Old New Synagogue, Spanish Synagogue, Jewish cemetery, etc.) and get detailed information on a chosen attraction	I, II, III
<b>Interactive GPS-based map</b>	Find one’s way in Prague’s Old Town, locate one’s position on the interactive map and get help in choosing the best tourist route to the next attraction	III
<b>Virtual tour</b>	See (and download) information about the interior (such as important buildings) and the exterior (such as the urban surrounding) of the attraction of choice	I, III
<b>“Treasure hunt” game (off-line and on-line)</b>	Participating in on-line (or off-line) game that features looking for the clues in order to be pointed to the next attraction (possibility of winning a small memorabilia was also mentioned). Exchange opinions about the app with other tourists and residents. Communicate ideas, suggestions and criticism to the local tourism services providers	II, III
<b>Mode of delivery</b>	Both App Store and Google Market Play	II, III
<b>Price</b>	2.99 EUR or less	I, II, III

*Note:* I, II, and III indicate the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> phases of focus groups

*Source:* Author’s own results

The basic aim of the second phase of the focus group agendas was to understand how different groups of participants perceived the potential of game-like apps for mystery and thriller tourism in Prague and how they

can better understand, manage, and enjoy the city, further engaging with its cultural heritage (including the legend of Golem) with the help of game-like app. The basic goal of the third phase of the focus group agenda was to understand how different groups of participants perceived the potential of game-like “Golem” app to better enjoy, appreciate, and manage the mystery and thriller potential of Prague. The additional aim of all focus groups was to learn how the “Golem” app should be provided and also to gather ideas about the possible mode of payment and the affordable price.

Our results reveal that a “Golem” app should feature a narrative (storytelling), an interactive GPS-based map, a virtual tour, a “treasure hunt” game with a possibility to play on-line, and it should be offered at both App Store and Android Market Play for a price of 2.99 EUR or less (Table 4).

## **MAIN CONCLUSIONS**

Our paper disseminated the results from 12 focus groups held Prague and dealing with the potentials of mystery and thriller tourism enhanced by the advanced IT applications. The key findings from this research can be summarised as follows: Overall, it appears that mystery and thriller tourism constitute a considerable part of dark tourism potential both in Prague (where the research was held) and in other European cultural destinations. The people who enjoy this subset of dark tourism (both in the case of tourists and residents) are typically young and keen in using smartphones and mobile apps. Developing this aspect of European cities’ cultural heritage might help in the creation of the new market for technology-enhanced cultural heritage experience featuring novel solutions, such as interactive city games and quests, mystery tours with the elements of the game and storytelling, etc.

Moreover, our research revealed the specifications for the game-like app for smartphones (provisionally called “Golem”) that would enable the tourists and local residents to enjoy the city’s cultural heritage in a novel way. Our research determined that in order to be successful, the “Golem” app should provide a virtual, GPS map-based tour of places mentioned in the legend of Golem, and include both an element of interactivity, such as a treasure hunt game, and an element of competing for a small prize in the end of the game. This mystery and thriller tourism app should be offered via iTunes store or Google Market Play for a small payment, or free of charge, depending on the solution of city’s tourism authorities.

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