

Lights, Camera, Action: Film Tourism and the Triple Bottom Line

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Introduction

For the last century, the film industry has had a major impact on society and popular culture, influencing everyone's lives in some way. Whether you are a horror junkie or a classic cinephile, you can probably relate to a film series that you enjoy. Now imagine if you had the opportunity to interact with these movies first-hand, exploring the scenery and immersing yourself in the filming process. Film tourism refers to any business activity which attracts tourists based on cinema, offering guests the opportunity to truly live out their movie-going experience. An increasingly relevant trend in business is a consideration for the triple bottom line: People, Profit, and Planet. These principals guide many businesses and consumers, making them more important than ever. These shifts warrant an examination into the compatibility of film tourism and the triple bottom line in order to gauge the industry's future success

Film Tourism Growth and Issues

There are many separate branches of film tourism, including on-location, off-location, and commercial film tourism. On-location tourism refers to filming locations that tourists can visit, while off-location tourism addresses film studios and theme parks. Commercial film tourism refers to attractions built to serve tourists, such as tours of specific film sets and museums dedicated to different movies. The advent of the 21st Century has brought with it the extreme growth in film tourism, as summer blockbusters rule supreme and global film franchises such as *The Avengers* and *Star Wars* attract a multigenerational audience. Modern tourists are also more concerned with interactive activities and leisure time than past generations, and film tourism provides the perfect outlet for consumers of all ages to gain these experiences. As more businesses catch on to this trend, more opportunities become present for tourists to immerse themselves in popular culture.

Due to the sprawling nature of the film tourism industry it is difficult to measure the exact amount of revenue generated by these activities. However, there are many examples and case studies which display the impact of film tourism on different countries and local communities. One prominent case is Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which caused a major tourism increase in New Zealand where the filming occurred. The country has employed on-location and commercial film strategies in order to encourage tourism, bringing in an estimated \$27 USD for New Zealand annually since the saga's 2001 premier (Pinchefskey, 2012). Another consideration in the growth of film tourism is the exposure to tourist destinations that cinema brings to audiences. Figure 1 demonstrates the predicted economic benefit of New Zealand's exposure in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Clearly the film industry has a real impact on local and national tourism, and capitalizing on the marketing operations involved in cinema has allowed film tourism to grow into a multimillion dollar institution.

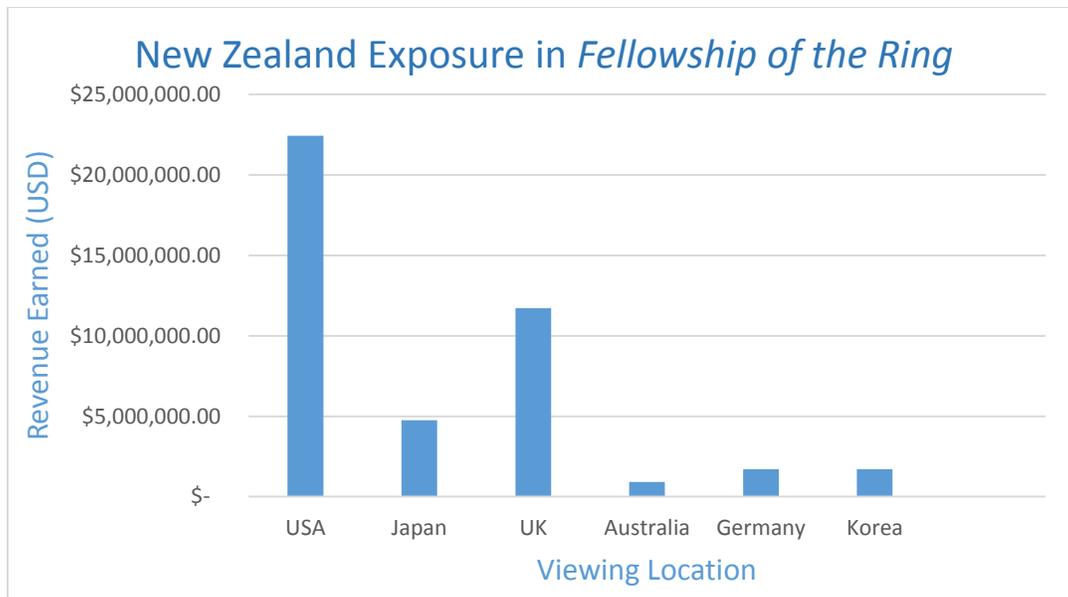


Fig. 1: New Zealand Exposure in *Fellowship of the Ring*

Source: Beeton, 2005, p. 114

In recent years, film tourism has come under scrutiny for its apparent disregard for the triple bottom line. The trend towards global awareness in modern society has garnered attention for the triple bottom line model, and critics question the ability of film tourism to respect different cultural and environmental codes. Some of the main concerns include a lack of respect for a culture based on stereotypes portrayed in the movies and potential overcrowding as an increasing number of tourists flock to filming locations. These issues are also a cause for concern among film tourism stakeholders, as they could negatively impact the profit associated with the business by deterring future film tourism. While these problems represent a departure from the goals of tourism, there are multiple strategies that the film tourism industry could use to better align itself with the triple bottom line.

The Triple Bottom Line

Considering the triple bottom line in conjunction with the film tourism industry, there are many factors that fall under the umbrella of People, Planet, and Profit. The people and cultures involved in film tourism range from tourists to local residents of tourism sites, local governments, and tourism authorities. The planetary aspect of the triple bottom line addresses the resources used in film tourism and the physical environment being impacted by the film tourism industry. The profitability of film tourism can be used to analyze the monetary contribution to the local economy and the different stakeholders involved in the tourism process. Figure 2 highlights the main concerns of the triple bottom line and film tourism.

People: cultural insensitivity associated with film tourism

Planet: overcrowding and sustainability of film tourism sites

Profit: money being generated and distributed to film tourism stakeholders

Fig. 2: The main concerns of the Triple Bottom Line and Film Tourism

One of the major issues associated with the people involved in film tourism are the cultural ramifications involved in the portrayal of different societies in cinema. One example is modern critics' claims regarding "whitewashing" casts. Whitewashing refers to the practice of casting white actors in non-white historical or scripted roles. This concern has been brought to light with classic films such as *Westside Story*, which centers around a largely Puerto Rican cast of characters portrayed mainly by American actors and more recent pieces of cinema such as Johnny Depp's representation of the Native American sidekick in 2013's *The Lone Ranger*. These instances of inaccurate casting have drawn negative attention from more progressive filmgoers and the actual cultures being represented in these films. This is indicative of a problem with the people aspect of the Triple Bottom Line which currently abounds in the film tourism (and film) industry, as potential tourists avoid venues they deem culturally insensitive. However, if directors and film tourism stakeholders would collaborate on this issue instances of whitewashing in film could be avoided, and the film tourism industry would experience a boost in profitability.

The main issue associated with the planet and film tourism is the overcrowding of film tourism sites. This problem is made abundantly clear in the case of Skellig Michael, the remote island based off of the Irish coast and featured in the film *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*. The island, established around 1500 years ago as a monastery, was fading into obscurity until the 2017 installment of the *Star Wars* saga brought the island to the movie-viewing public's attention. Since then, over 10 million tourists have flocked to the island to relive Luke Skywalker's experience in seclusion (Roughneen, 2017). Besides the adverse effects this could have on the cultural respect for the island, the filming location is not equipped to handle this number of visitors. The local government and historical societies are concerned that continued tourism at these levels could have a

detrimental impact on the scenery and wildlife native to Skellig Michael. Increased consideration on the part of tourism agencies combined with stricter policies enacted by local governments could prevent these kinds of issues from happening in the future, increasing the sustainability of the tourism industry and creating an atmosphere of respect for the planet among film tourism stakeholders.

As cinema becomes more of a cultural phenomenon, the profit involved in film tourism has increased. The construction of theme parks by companies like Disney and Universal Studios has bolstered the economic health of the film industry. Millions of fans visit filming locations, cinematic exhibits, and actual film studios each year, all of which contributes to the profit experienced by local economies and film tourism stakeholders. Still, a concern regarding the profit side of the Triple Bottom Line is that the problems experienced by the people and planet could lead to an indictment of the industry and result in decreased profits. The best way to combat this situation is through the use of marketing strategies and a shift in attitude among film makers in order to present film tourism as an ecologically and culturally conscious system.

The PEST Model

A more detailed model which could be used to address these concerns is the PEST Model, which concentrates on the Political, Economic, Social, and Technological aspects of an issue. Figure 3 lists the different groups impacted by these four factors.

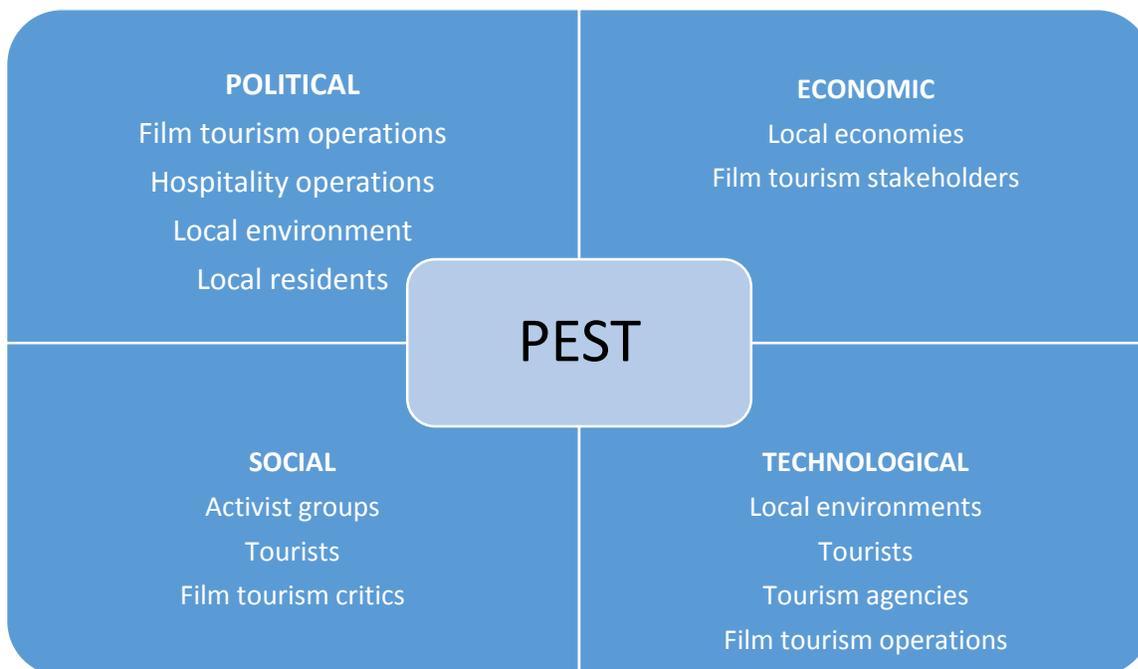


Fig. 3: Film Tourism stakeholders effected by the PEST Model

Politics could be a useful tool regarding the planet of the Triple Bottom Line. Legal policies could be enacted by the government in order to monitor the activities of film tourists and limit the amount of visitors to a tourism site. These policies would likely be put into place with the input of tourism facilitators, conservation and historical groups, and hospitality industries in the area. Tourism operators would be impacted by these policies in that they could limit the amount of visitors allowed to a location at a time, or dictate the types of resources used and activities available to tourists. Such policies would protect the environment by limiting overcrowding and marginalizing the harmful influence of tourism activities on the planet. Social groups could assist the government in considering current problems, and hospitality industries (lodging and food & beverage) could stand to be made aware of possible changes in revenue based on these policies.

The economic side of the PEST model could be used to consider who profits from film tourism. Used in conjunction with the politics of film tourism, the wealth could be distributed among the economy to benefit the local community, not just direct stakeholders. The people and profit of the Triple Bottom Line would be impacted by an economic analysis of film tourism. An even spread of wealth would improve the local culture's attitude towards tourists, causing a ripple effect which increases the amount of tourists and, subsequently, income.

Social pressure plays a large role in the people of the Triple Bottom Line. Social pressure could be applied by activism groups to spread awareness concerning cultural issues, which would in turn decrease instances of these problems in the film industry. While this social activism could have a negative short-term impact on tourism by deterring tourists, the long-term goal of increasing cultural and societal respect would ultimately give film tourism a more progressive reputation. Societal differences among tourists and local residents could also be used as a learning experience, affording film tourists the opportunity to consider cultural tourism and increase their own knowledge of different societies.

Technology could be used to decrease the amount of natural resources involved in film tourism and as a marketing tool to increase profitability. The use of technology to produce renewable energy, predict the impact of film tourism on the environment, and monitor the local environment contributes to the planetary side of the Triple Bottom Line by increasing sustainability. This would have a positive effect on film tourism by prolonging its operation in a particular area, expanding the maturity stage of the organization life cycle. Technology could also be used to capitalize on the modern trend of social media by promoting destinations and spreading the knowledge of film tourism opportunities to social media users. Technology could even be employed to get a sense of the type of movie a person enjoys, allowing marketers to cater to these interests and increase the profitability of film tourism.

Conclusion

While film tourism is a flourishing sector, its rapid growth has led to many problems regarding the triple bottom line. Critics have offered viable criticism concerning these adverse environmental and cultural impacts, harming the profitability of the industry and attracting negative attention. Currently, film tourism is failing to act in accordance with the triple bottom line; however, through research it is clear that sustainable, culturally sensitive film tourism is possible. The use of stricter policies, collaboration with social groups, and technological advances would contribute to a more sustainable film tourism industry. In conclusion, film tourism *is* compatible with the triple bottom line, and by employing the PEST model stakeholders can create an improved business strategy conducive to the industry's future success.

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