

Serendipitous nostalgia tourism through literature – an autoethnographic story

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Received 2023-11-20
Accepted 2023-12-20
Published 2023-12-20

How to cite

Fusté-Forné, F. (2023). Serendipitous nostalgia tourism through literature – an autoethnographic story. *LIT&-TOUR – International Journal of Literature and Tourism Research (IJLTR)*, (2). <https://publicacoes.ciac.pt/index.php/litntour/article/view/213>

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Abstract

This article discusses the relationships between nostalgia and tourism. While previous studies have analysed how film tourism stimulates nostalgic experiences, few studies have focused on the role of literature, and specifically children's literature, in the creation of nostalgia destinations. Based on the symbiosis between Hans Cristian Andersen and Odense, in Denmark, this paper argues, from an auto ethnographic study, that literary tourism can also foster nostalgia tourism in a cultural destination.

Keywords

Cultural tourism · Denmark · Film tourism · Hans Christian Andersen · Heritage tourism · Literary tourism

1. Introduction

While the relationships between literature and tourism have been largely addressed from a literary tourism perspective (Hoppen et al., 2014; Jenkins and Lund, 2019; Watson, 2006), previous research has scarcely examined these connections from the perspective of nostalgia (Busby, 2022). As it also happens with cinema (Kim et al., 2019), this article argues that literature is a driver of nostalgia tourism (Shi et al., 2021). This paper aims to analyse the relationships between nostalgia and tourism through literature to inform an exploratory perspective of literary-based nostalgia tourism. The methodology is based on an interpretive autoethnography (Denzin, 1997) which is evocative (see Ellis, 1997) of personal experiences that create the emotional resonance between the writer and the reader through storytelling – an autoethnographic story. In this sense, the author has considered the analytic approach to autoethnography (see also Tedlock, 2016), where the ethnographer is visible in the written narrative and where self-experience is nurtured by a commitment with theoretical analysis (Anderson, 2006). Drawing on the meaningful *tourism* connection created

between Hans Cristian Andersen and Odense, in Denmark, this paper contributes to the theoretical and practical understanding of nostalgia tourism through literature.

2. Nostalgia through the books you read when you were a child

Nostalgia is “a positively balanced complex feeling, emotion or mood produced by reflection on things (objects, persons, experiences, ideas) associated with the past” (Holak and Havlena, 1998). Following Sierra and McQuitty (2007), personal nostalgia is driven by a person’s direct experience and memory, for example in relation to her or his childhood. This personal nostalgia, reflected in this paper by the author’s childhood and children literature, differs from historical (also called vicarious) nostalgia that is not limited to one’s own past experiences, but rather a collective past (Merchant and Ford, 2008). In addition, according to Holak and Havlena (1998), cultural nostalgia derives from the processes of ‘becoming’ and ‘being’ which also refer to the creation of the own identity. When I was a child, I used to read the books written by Hans Cristian Andersen both at home and at the school. Together with other children’s writers, their fairytales were part of the learning processes and cultural knowledge gathered through real and imagined worlds. My primary motivation to travel to Odense was cultural tourism (McKercher, 2020), and novelty and knowledge seeking which drive the behavioural intention of cultural tourists (Li and Cai, 2012), together with authenticity (see Wang, 1999, who discusses the complexities around the understanding of authenticity in tourism motivation). However, during my trip to one of the most populated Danish cities, I realized that evoked nostalgia also appeared as a meaningful tourism consumption driver (Leong et al., 2015). Odense is a cultural tourism destination which is the hometown of Hans Cristian Andersen, but also offers architectural sites, a Viking history, and a vivid food scene. Odense is promoted as a place for culture *aficionados* where *the fairytale starts* (Visit Odense, 2023).

2.1. The inspiration’s home of Hans Cristian Andersen

You can visit the Hans Cristian Andersen house in Odense, which is now a contemporary museum

concept open to visitors who can enter the building through the annexed structure, which using indoor, also underground, and outdoor spaces, drives visitors to the understanding of Andersen’s life and work, and literary culture. There are many examples of writers, and other artists, who create a tourism attraction (see de Ruyter et al., 2018) based on the close relationship between their legacy and the places where they were born, grew up, or wrote. According to Busby (2022), “literary tourism is an old activity, as demonstrated by visitors to Shakespeare’s Stratford-upon-Avon more than 200 years ago”. He adds that “connections between real places and the author’s work are the motivation for visits” (*ibid*) which in this autoethnographic research resulted in the unexpected emotional engagement with place through personal nostalgia. The connection between a place and a writer has been previously illustrated based on children’s writers, like the case of Beatrix Potter (Squire, 1994) and its home place, Lake District, in England. This is also the case of Hans Cristian Andersen (Figure 1) and his home place of Odense, in the island of Funen, Denmark, where the house where he was born is located (Figure 2) and where his fairytales were inspired. This is also similarly observed in previous literature that focuses on the presentation of authors in literary tourism sites, which are constructed “around the life of an author or the characters and/or settings described in a literature” (Fawcett and Cormack, 2001).

There are many examples in previous research that reveal how authenticity drives the construction of literary tourism sites (Jia, 2009), and specifically the relevance of literature in destination management and marketing (Hoppen et al., 2014), with examples derived from the Harry Potter fantasy novels written by the British author J. K. Rowling. Literary tourism has also focused on the attraction of writers’ houses (see Watson, 2020), also converted into museums, such as Charles Dickens’ Birthplace Museum in Portsmouth, United Kingdom, and the Maison de Victor Hugo in Paris, France (Quinteiro, 2022). The connections between writers’ houses and literary tourism results in experiences such as exhibitions, guided visits, and literary itineraries or dinners (*ibid*). Anna Frank’s house in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, is another example that connects literature and tourism (Çevik, 2020) through the creation of (dark) tourism experiences (see Busby and Devereux, 2015).



Figure 1. A sculpture of Hans Cristian Andersen (own source)



Figure 2. The birth house of Hans Cristian Andersen (own source)

2.2. The cobblestone streets and the charm of the wooden houses

As I mentioned above, when I arrived in Odense, the ambiance of the city added ‘nostalgia’ as an ingredient to the cultural experience. In this sense, Shi et al. (2021) reveal that the cognitive base of personal nostalgia is personal memory, which can be triggered by either internal or external stimuli, where the tourist attraction relies on familiar objects and settings, which reflect the past (my childhood) that, in turn, the visitor verifies through the present experience (my visit). The Odense city landscape is an orchestra of Andersen’s elements which do not only shape the ways the streets are talking to the visitors, but also engage them in a fairytale (see, for example, Figure 3), as it is also promoted by the destination management and marketing strategies. As I moved around the city of Odense I could not only feel the

charm of a historical city, but also the feeling of walking through the streets where *The Little Match Girl* could have appeared at any moment because of the atmosphere created by the combination of elements such as the houses and the street lighting. Based on previous research, places such as Coimbra in Portugal (Quinteiro et al., 2020) or writers such as the Croatian Marin Držić (Fox, 2008) are also examples of how we can turn a literary heritage (a place or a writer) in a cultural tourism product, as it also happens in Odense.



Figure 3. The enchantment of Odense’s streets (own source)

2.3. The sculptures around the city

Following Kim (2005), who states that “nostalgic desires are stimulated through active consumption of positive images of the past”, literary tourism is a driver of nostalgia which allows readers, and visitors, to be “included in the author’s world” (Çevik, 2020). Odense has created a symbiosis between the city landscape and Hans Cristian Andersen. The city develops a strategy of cultural communication (see Lum and Ferrière le Vayer, 2016) around the writer, which is found in every corner of the city, as it is also illustrated in other cities mentioned above. In this sense, Odense offers a tour which, step by step (Figure 4) guides the visitors around the most relevant Andersen’s landmarks. Among them, *The Lead Soldier* (Figure 5) and *The Paper Boat* (Figure 6) remind you back not only to early readings, but also to early play games, which accentuate the feelings of nostalgia.

According to Busby (2022), one of the motivations of literary tourism is nostalgia, where the reading of

literature encourages visits. This is also in line with other literary examples, where, for example, “Arthur Ransome’s books have led to nostalgia tourism in the English Lake District” (Busby, 2022). Previous research has also analysed literary tourism in English Lake District, home of children’s writer Beatrix Potter, to understand the visitor interpretation of literary places in relation to cultural production and consumption. Results show the visit is evocative of childhood values, and the author also states authenticity is a source of countryside and heritage preservation (Squire, 1994). The territorial symbiosis between Don Quixote and La Mancha region in Spain (Capdepón, 2014) is also a manifestation of the connections between literature and tourism through place and characters which are also informed by cinema – see the example of *The Lord of The Rings* and New Zealand (Agarwal and Shaw, 2017).



Figure 4. The steps to the Hans Cristian Andersen tour (own source)



Figure 5. Sculpture of *The Lead Soldier* (own source)

3. Conclusion and future research

Nostalgia “is a universal catchword for looking back” (Rodrigues and Kastenholz, 2022). The evocation of personal nostalgia (see Marchegiani and Phau, 2013) is related to a person’s individual identity and narrative, and its association with an ‘object’ (see Holbrook and Schindler, 1991). While nostalgia is a strong visitor motivation in rural tourism (Kastenholz et al., 2016), this research also reveals that it can be manifested spontaneously as part of cultural tourism.

In line with previous research, results show that both genuine – the birth house of Andersen – and artificial – the sculptures around the city of Odense – attractions can foster nostalgic experiences (Shi et al., 2021). Previous studies show that more research has been done on historical nostalgia rather than personal nostalgia, as revealed by a recent article which examined the relationships between nostalgia tourism and heritage destinations from the perspective of brand authenticity and brand attachment (Chen et al., 2021). In this sense, cultural destinations, such as Odense, can protect ‘heritage’ (Kim, 2005) while they promote ‘nostalgia’ (Verma and Rajendran, 2017). This is crucial both from a theoretical and practical perspective.



Figure 6. Sculpture of *The Paper Boat* (own source)

A nostalgia destination relies on both tangible and intangible heritages (Shi et al., 2021), which, as part of heritage tourism (Chi and Chi, 2022) impacts on destination image. This paper contributes to the understanding of the less explored potential of personal nostalgia on tourism management and marketing (Marchegiani and Phau, 2011). There are plenty of examples of destinations which have built their attraction based on writers and books, and the conclusions of this research also point to the diverse intersections between nostalgia tourism and other forms of tourism. Literary-based nostalgia tourism can not be observed as an isolated niche form of tourism (see Busby, 2022), and it overlaps with other forms of tourism like celebrity tourism. In addition, the development of nostalgia destinations may foster the relationships between real and imagined children's literature, and serve at the same time to develop family tourism, within the impact of tourist attractions for a non-complex nostalgia-driven tourism (Crompton, 1979).

In the context of literary tourism, this research expands the understanding of how places award tourism value to writers and their work, and how this also contributes to nostalgia tourism. Based on the city of Odense, this paper demonstrates that literature can expand the boundaries of cultural tourism (Hoppen et al., 2014). The geographical locations of literary-based tourism attractions (Yiannakis and Davies, 2012) are a source of tourism experiences which protect and promote the identity of people and places through literary practices (i.e., a writer's house) and accentuate the cultural learning of visitors (i.e., a writer's museum). This research also shows that

the orchestration of the literary elements can drive visitors to experience *emotion* and *imagination* in a literary tourism place (Jiang and Yu, 2020) which adds to the discussions of fairytale authenticity (see Lovell, 2019), inspired by the *extraordinary-ordinary streetscape* that engages visitors in the experiential authenticity of culture.

While the connection between authenticity and fantasy in film tourism destinations has been previously analysed (Li et al., 2021), this study is also a call for action to future exploration of these connection in literary tourism destinations where places' spaces represent a dialogue between ordinary (the cobblestone streets) and extraordinary (*The Paper Boat* navigating the Odense river) elements that stimulate nostalgia as a travel motivation (Lin et al., 2021). Nostalgia destinations also build their attraction on characters that influence the intention to visit and the place attachment of visitors, as it is observed with the case of *Heidi* and the Swiss Alps (Hosany et al., 2020), illustrated in Odense with characters such as *The Lead Soldier*.

Since autoethnography positions the researchers' experiences as part of the research narrative (see Lee and Ruck, 2022), this exploratory research may lead to further qualitative and quantitative studies which expand the research agenda and provide more robust work on the relationships between nostalgia, literature and tourism. From a supply perspective, research is required to reveal the role of places in building nostalgia "as an expression of values for childhood, countryside, authenticity, and heritage preservation" (Squire, 1994). This should also be analysed in relation to how other elements such as food experiences may evoke nostalgia tourism (Zhou et al., 2019). From a visitor perspective, nostalgia is often studied as a push motivation. However, nostalgia can also be a pull motivation related to destination attributes (Leong et al., 2015) which contributes to broaden the portfolio of destinations. This requires further investigation in relation to the personal background of visitors to refine destination's management and marketing strategies.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the University of Girona under the grants for the mobility of researchers (MOB 2022).

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