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**PLACE-PRODUCT OR PLACE NARRATIVE(S)? PERSPECTIVES  
IN THE MARKETING OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS**

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# PLACE-PRODUCT OR PLACE NARRATIVE(S)? PERSPECTIVES IN THE MARKETING OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS

## ABSTRACT

*This paper utilizes a narrative approach to critically appraise the challenges and paradoxes faced by tourism destination marketing, and the inherent weaknesses of the traditional marketing management framework to adequately address them. In so doing, the treatment of place as a set of attributes is contrasted with its conceptualisation as a set of meanings. In perceiving place as a set of meanings, the focus of attention shifts to a number of different issues, such as the role of culture and symbolic meanings in the construction and experience of place and the contested “realities” involved in the making of a tourism destination.*

**Keywords:** Tourism Destination, Narrative, Social Construction of Place

## INTRODUCTION

“There is a growing feeling that we need to respond to the environment as a singularity and not as something which is to be objectified, split and reassembled for it to make sense to us. Yet those who are supposedly at the forefront of the attempt to rethink our relation to environment are paradoxically those who are most steeped in existing norms, rules and modes of specialism”

(Desmond 1997: 348)

Tourism is a social and economic phenomenon of profound importance in contemporary society (Crick 1996). National governments, as well as regional and local authorities promote tourism destinations in order to drive economic growth and profit from its attendant benefits (Belk and Costa 1996; Hall 1997). In the contemporary environment, competition between destinations has become intense (Ashworth and Goodall 1988) and, in the fight for tourist market share, places are being encouraged to “think more like businesses” (Kotler *et al.* 1993:346). Thus, the marketing of places has been turned into an increasingly professionalised, highly organised and specialised industry (Gotham 2002).

However, place marketing has not been without its problems. Key among these have been difficulties associated with marrying the twin objectives of profitability and sustainability, and coordinating the activities of the various stakeholders associated with a tourism destination. In this paper, we argue that such difficulties may result, in part, from how place marketing is currently framed. That is, within marketing management,

tourism destinations are traditionally framed as *products* to be marketed. However, we provide compelling evidence that tourism destinations may be more usefully framed as *narratives*. This alternative frame produces a different set of inferences about place and, furthermore, directs us towards a whole new set of appropriate activities. Frames derive from metaphors and, in this example, '*product*' and '*narrative*' are competing metaphors of place. This is important because:

“In all aspects of life, not just in politics and in love, we define our reality in terms of metaphor, and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphor. We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor.” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 485)

### APPRECIATING FRAMES

As a result of the linguistic turn in science it is increasingly recognised that actors construct their own meanings through language (Ortony 1993). Scientific representation is not neutral but is driven by the scientist's own idiosyncratic beliefs, paradigmatic axioms and interaction with fellow scientists (Morgan and Smircich 1980; Peter and Olsen 1983). An emerging view of scientific inquiry, then, is that of “a creative process in which scientists view the world metaphorically” (Morgan 1980: 611). In this way, the language which filters and structures their perceptions of the subject of study is influenced by the specific metaphors which they implicitly or explicitly choose to develop as their framework for analysis. Thus, the framing of problems in terms of a particular metaphor generates a particular set of solutions.

Schön (1993) demonstrates this by contrasting two alternative approaches to dealing with the housing *problem* within social policy. One perspective frames slum areas as *diseased*, the other frames them as *natural communities*. When viewed as *diseased*, the problem becomes one of *eradicating the disease*, with the implied solution of urban renewal and regeneration. This involves tearing down slums in order to stop the cycle of *decay* and relocating the inhabitants of these *blighted* areas to newly planned and sanitised developments. In contrast, when viewed as *natural communities* the problem becomes one of *dislocation*. Natural communities should be *preserved* in order to maintain the beneficial outcomes of established *patterns of interaction* and *informal networks* which characterise them.

What we see here is that *things* selected for attention are named in such a way as to fit the frame of reference. These things then become the salient features to be studied and understood. More fundamentally, through this process of naming and framing, normative leaps are made from “data to recommendations, from facts to values, from ‘is’ to ‘ought’”. It is typical of diagnostic/prescriptive stories such as these that they execute the normative leap in such a way as to make it seem graceful, compelling, even obvious” (Schön 1993:147). Because, in the example above, there are already ideas about what is the right and proper response to disease (i.e. to eradicate it), the solution to the problem appears to be obvious and undeniable. “This sense of obviousness of what is wrong and what needs fixing is the hallmark of a generative metaphor” (Schön 1993: 148). Viewing a place as a ‘product’ also frames facts and values, as well as problems and solutions, in such a way as to also make them appear obvious. However, these particular issues are only obvious by virtue of the metaphor which *generates* them.

## **PLACES AS PRODUCTS**

The assumption that underlies the marketing management of tourism destinations is that a place can (and should) be treated as a product:

“Tourism destinations can undoubtedly be treated as products. They are logically the point of consumption of the complex of activities that comprises the tourism experience and are ultimately what is sold by place promotion agencies on the tourism market” (Ashworth and Voogd 1990:7).

So, what exactly is being marketed, or what is the place-product? A place contains a set of facilities and products and at the same time can be perceived as a facility and a product in its own right (Ashworth and Voogd 1990). Buhalis (2000) describes the destination as an amalgam of all products, services and ultimately experiences provided locally (attractions, accessibility, amenities, available packages, activities, ancillary services). Murphy *et al.* (2000), building on Kotler *et al.*'s (1996) model of a product's environment, propose a conceptual model of the place-product as a combination of the place's macro environments (political, social, legal, technological, economic, cultural, natural) and the products and services offered from the infrastructure sector (accommodation, transportation, travel, shopping, recreation and attraction, food), all of which create the tourist's experience of the destination. Therefore (aspects of) the natural environment, culture and built environment of a place can be treated as the

place's valuable *assets*, resources, or inputs that create the right ambience for the realisation of tourism consumption. Such a framing of tourism destinations also calls into action a range of marketing instruments similar to those used in f.m.c.g. marketing, such as SWOT analyses, branding, market segmentation, the marketing mix, market penetration, extension, development and promotion strategies in order for destinations to be successfully marketed (see for example Kotler *et al.* 1993).

Within this frame, destination marketing is concerned with the design of the place mix (Kotler *et al.* 1993; Buhalis 2000), that is, the selection and development of particular place attributes and the creation and positioning of the destination as a strong brand (Morgan *et al.* 2002). The main resources for the development of a competitive destination brand are the physiography, culture and history of the destination (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999). Therefore, marketing efforts involve the creation and promotion of attractive destination images (Ashworth and Voogd 1994) drawing on elements from these resources in order to differentiate the destination and enhance its competitiveness. Here lies the first challenge for destination marketing. In treating landscape, culture and history as objective resources there is no appreciation of the contested relationships involved in how societies make sense of them or how marketing is implicated in this. How do marketers decide on the number of attributes to be developed into the place offering from the infinite possibilities that a place exhibits? An immediate business response is that the process of selection is determined by what is perceived to be attractive to the particular tourism segment targeted.

This presents a second challenge. There is an inherent paradox in the marketing of tourism destinations, because the marketing concept (a focus on demand as the driving principle for the marketing activities) is not necessarily the best orientation. For example, Haywood (1990:200) emphasises that tourism is inevitably a "community industry" and notes that destinations that attempt to adapt their resources solely for the satisfaction of the tourists' needs, may neglect the needs of the community. This, in turn, may sacrifice what made these destinations originally attractive and unique to tourists (Mill and Morrison 1985). As Ryan (1991: 108) notes: "market research within tourism means not only an identification of a market in terms of consumers and competition, but also careful design of a product that is consistent with the environmental setting of the product". The recognition of this paradox is closely related

to the negative impacts that the development of tourism is perceived to have on destinations, such as environmental degradation, cultural imperialism, and economic dependency (Belk and Costa 1996). Such impacts harm the appeal of destinations and may eventually result in a drop in visitations (see Morgan 1991 for the case of Majorca).

Therefore, the consideration of the needs of the local community and the preservation of the natural environment are essential factors in the marketing of tourism destinations (Lichrou and O'Malley, 2006). Local communities are part of what the tourists seek to experience and locals are thought to have the potential to "assist in the maintenance of an atmosphere conducive to tourism" (Nuryanti 1996: 256, see also Pretes 2002 for a discussion of the role of the Quechua miners telling tourists their history in the Potosí tourist experience). Moreover, the natural environment of a destination and its history and culture are parameters of its core attractiveness (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999; see also Slater 2004 for a discussion of brand Louisiana as a unique historical, cultural, musical and culinary experience). Furthermore, the increased interest in ecology is creating new tourism market niches, such as eco-tourism (Herbig and O'Hara 1997). As a result, concern over a destination's sustainability is growing (Middleton and Hawkins 1998). Sustainability involves preserving the local culture, improving the quality of life of the host community, providing a quality experience for the visitors, and maintaining the quality of the environment of the destination (Ryan 2002). Belk and Costa (1995), offering a macromarketing perspective, suggest that the goals of marketing in the context of tourism should be oriented towards making tourism a sustainable source of economic growth, minimising social problems and empowering tourism hosts. From a strategic destination marketing perspective, Buhalis (2000) argues for a model that sets the objectives of delighting visitors by maximising their satisfaction, enhancing the long term prosperity of local people, maximising profitability for local enterprises and optimising tourism impacts, by ensuring a sustainable balance between economic benefits and socio-cultural environmental costs. Buhalis (2000) further suggests that strategic destination marketing should be employed so that destinations achieve these objectives.

Following from the above, marketing should be concerned with an understanding of the needs of the local community, with an appreciation of its history and culture, and with

the sustainability of the natural environment. However, as Hall (2000) argues, destination marketing, in objectifying places, often leaves the needs of the people constituting a place outside the marketers' frame of reference. Indeed in the conceptions of places as products there is little or no reference to the local people, in contradiction to the significance that they are given when discussing destination marketing objectives. Furthermore, local communities are not homogeneous in their attitudes towards tourism, but the various groups within the community have different approaches because of diverse interests (Williams and Shaw 1992). Places are complex entities, collections of "individuals and communities" (Goodwin 1993: 149). The nature of places is "characterised by an 'open system' of interdependent, multiple stakeholders, where the actions of one stakeholder impact on the rest of the actors in the community" (Jamal and Getz 1995: 193) and on the way the tourists perceive the destination overall (Buhalis 2000). Hence, marketing's task is not only to develop and promote the place-product, but also to bring together the different stakeholders and negotiate their interests (Buhalis 2000). All of the stakeholders' wishes, views and interests have to be seriously engaged with (Yuksel *et al.*, 1998; Robson and Robson, 1996; Buhalis, 2000) in an attempt to achieve collaboration (Jamal and Getz, 1995; Sautter and Leisen, 1999). This highlights the need for developing the ability to appreciate the experiences of place that different groups and individuals involved in the destination have and the way they affect the "reality" or "realities" of the destination.

On the other hand, the concept of sustainability in tourism has been treated with a certain degree of cynicism (see Butler 1990 and Wheeler 1993; 1994; 1997). Indeed, Hall (2000:19), captures a contradiction inherent in the discussion of sustainable growth, in that "business is rarely interested in long-term social and environmental need as opposed to short-term revenue and profits..." Moreover, Peattie (1999) highlights that a number of important assumptions within neo-classical economics continue to complicate the notion of sustainable marketing. These include: the conception of social and environmental costs involved in the production, distribution and use of products as "externalities"; the notion that market mechanisms can correct environmental problems; the perception that the biosphere is limitless and stable, and; the assumption that commodities without a market are worthless. These assumptions place marketing in an "economic hyperspace" (Peattie 1999:135), which limits appreciation of how environment, society and economic activity interact. For instance, in framing tourism

destinations as products (e.g. Murphy *et al.*, 2000) it is often difficult to see how the different categories of the destination's environments interact with each other or with the other elements of the product. Indeed, tourism destinations, as will be discussed later, can be conceptualised as products of these interactions. Similarly, Hughes (1995) discusses how the economic frame in sustainability objectifies the environment (by treating it as "natural capital"), washes out the domain of culture, fragments the wholeness of the qualitative human experience and defines environmental issues in functional terms. He calls attention to the need for articulating felt experience in relation to the environment and to rethinking the construction of tourism in the context of cultural and economic changes taking place in society. Marketing should place tourism destinations within socio-cultural contexts and put the human experience back into the production of place.

A (principally) functional framing of places as products overlooks the cultural context and leaves out the human experience of place, thus contradicting two basic tourism-marketing assumptions. First, originating in services marketing thought, the concept of the tourism product as a process rather than an outcome, further implies that its consumption (or the tourist experience of place) is inseparable from its production. Hence marketers and consumers (and local communities) co-create place. Second, there is a view that the dreams and fantasies of consumers are a defining characteristic of tourism (Seaton and Bennett 1999). In this sense, a crucial marketing concern is the understanding of the processes through which such intangible constructs are formed:

"Tourism is not simply about places - it is about the experience of place, about meeting people, the interaction between host and visitor and with fellow tourists. Of all the service industries it is perhaps the most intangible of all. People save their money and their weeks of escape from work to buy what becomes a memory" (Ryan 1991: 102).

In framing tourism destinations as products, marketing risks overlooking the intangible aspects of place (e.g. the set of meanings that constitute a place), because such a frame makes sense of places by emphasising their physical and tangible aspects (e.g. the set of attractions and amenities available). Second, treating places as objective and given, and hence unproblematic, leaves little space for an appreciation of the historical and cultural circumstances that produce place, as well as the social interactions and the discourses involved. In addition, such an understanding of place is not conscious of the interactions of nature, culture and economic activity in the creation of tourism destinations and the

role of marketing in these processes. Third, to conceive destinations as products inevitably fixes them in time and space, views them as static objects, or snapshots of the constant and dynamic processes involved in the making of place. In contrast, a view of places that capture their intangible, cultural, historical and dynamic aspects may be more enabling for marketing purposes.

## **PLACES AS CULTURALLY MEANINGFUL ENTITIES**

An alternative framework for tourism destinations is determined by the assumption that places are not static, objective or a priori phenomena (McCabe and Stokoe 2004). Tourist destinations represent specific historical and cultural phases in society and are better understood as social contexts (Saarinen 1998). They are not only physical spaces, but fluid, changeable, dynamic contexts of social interaction, shared cultural meaning and collective memory (Stokowski 2002). Meethan explains that the production of tourist space is “as much a symbolic order of meaning as a form of material production” (2001: 168). From this perspective, culture cannot be viewed simply as a part of the place-product sum or as an asset/resource of the destination product, but rather as a dynamic context within which destinations are produced and consumed. Greenwood (1978) points out that while for planners and economists culture is a “natural resource”, part of the land factor and part of the “come-on” factor, for anthropology it is an integrated set of meanings through which the nature of reality is established and maintained. More recently, other authors have discussed the divergence between the economic and socio-cultural orientations in tourism (Morgan and Pritchard 1998; Framke 2002) and draw attention to the usefulness of the cultural perspective in understanding place (Voase 1999).

Furthermore, tourism destinations are also constructed within the cultural context of the places in which tourists live. In this sense, rather than the destination’s ‘pull’, ‘push’ forces are seen to trigger travelling (Framke 2002):

“There is no evidence that any destination ever attracted, in a literal sense any tourists. [...] The main causal factors of tourist flows are not located in destinations but in traveller generating regions, in places where trips begin, where the forces that stimulate tourists’ motivations are located and where marker systems directing tourists to nuclear elements of attractions begin.” (Leiper 2000:366)

Tourists have perceptions of various tourism destinations even if they have never actually visited them. They are socialised in their own cultures to appreciate tourism practices. Moreover, it is within the context of their own cultural framework that knowledge, expectations and fantasies, as well as perceptions and representations of the identities of tourism destinations are created (Iwashita 2003). Crick (1996) remarks that tourism can be seen as a vehicle for providing a simulacrum of the world. Rojek (1997) notes that tourist spaces are culturally significant; they engender representational cultures, which increase the accessibility of sites in everyday life. He further explains that signs, images and symbols make the site familiar to tourists in their ordinary culture through the process of indexing. This involves the creation of visual, textual and symbolic representations of places through the media and the semiotic conventions associated with signifying a site. Examples of such media include travellers' tales, printed texts such as travel brochures, as well as novels and poems, dramatic and cinematic traditions and television. Therefore popular culture can be seen as a medium for the construction of places in the tourists' minds (Iwashita 2003; Santos 2004). It is particularly important from a marketing perspective to fully appreciate the processes through which tourism destinations are constructed in culturally meaningful ways.

A fundamental aspect in the conception of tourism destinations is that they are demarcated from the everyday/ordinary places by signifiers in the landscape and the marketing industry (Shaw and Williams 2004). Indeed, a tourist site is a spatial location that is distinguished from everyday life by virtue of its natural, historical or cultural extraordinariness (Rojek, 1997). Moreover, travel sites are usually physically distant from our ordinary locale, and their consumption involves abandoning our everyday life routines and social places and physically entering new areas (Rojek, 1977). Hence tourism sites invoke the unfamiliar. Images of "Otherness" are therefore essential in the creation and consumption of tourist destinations and as Urry (1990) argues, tourism consumption essentially involves gazing at the unfamiliar. Hence the tourist gaze concerns viewing unfamiliar aspects of what was thought familiar, viewing ordinary aspects of social life in unusual contexts, carrying out familiar tasks in unusual visual environments, and viewing extraordinary objects (Urry 1990: 13). Thus marketers capitalise on imagery that distinguishes a destination from ordinary/everyday places in an effort to evoke and maintain the destination's distinct aura. In addition, as Borgerson and Schroeder (2002) remark, this has political and ethical implications; because

representations have the potential to construct the way societies see places, but also because they have the potential to powerfully shape the people of the tourism places see themselves.

Furthermore, tourism works through dreams, myths, fantasies, hyperreality, liminality and libidinality (Hughes 1998). Metaphorical, allegorical and false information remains a resource in the pattern of tourist culture as an object of reverie, dreaming and speculation (Rojek 1997). For example, the imagery of Ireland as a tourism destination still relies to a great extent on 'pre-modern' associations with friendly inhabitants and empty spaces. This imagery continues in spite of the dramatic changes to both the people and the landscape evinced by the 'Celtic Tiger' (Foley and Fahy 2004). Britton (1973) notes the endorsement by marketing of mystification, fantasy, associations with Disney world and indulgence in unreality and argues that intangible skills of fantasy creation are crucial to tourism.

It seems then that the 'mythical' is unavoidable in discussions of travel and tourism, and, to some degree, the social construction of sites always involves the mobilisation of myth (Rojek, 1997). There is a close link between tourism destinations and mythical discourses both in terms of the marketing and consumption of place. Traditional as well as contemporary mythologies are sources of the imagery that surrounds places. There are numerous examples of the role of mythical discourses in the construction of popular tourism destinations. Urry (1995) shows how myths can construct a destination, by presenting the example of the Lake District. Costa (1997) examines the paradisaical discourses involved in the marketing and consumption of Hawaii. Terkenli (2001) refers to the myth of "Aegeanity" in her discussion of the construction of the Aegean as a tourism landscape. Echtner and Prasad's (2003) research revealed three myths underlying the western tourist gaze on the third world. These involve the myth of the unchanged, the myth of the unrestrained and the myth of the uncivilised. Such myths have important implications for marketing.

Selwyn (1996) discusses the myth-making inclinations of tourists and how the consumption of tourism can be thought of as the pursuit of myths. The tourist imagination constructs ideas, images, myths and fantasies about the Other (Selwyn 1996) that influence tourism places. Voase (1999) argues that the business metaphor in

place consumption is not appropriate and proposes instead a cultural perspective, which foregrounds the relationship between tourist place and mythical meaning. He notes that tourists are creating their own personal dramas about places, through symbolic interaction processes involved in the consumption of place. In this view, tourism destinations are largely psychological and to a large extent symbolic; the “real” tourist experience is defined in the mind of the tourist (Voase 1999).

“Peoples’ basic motivation for consumption is not simply materialistic. They rather seek to experience “in reality” the pleasurable dramas they have already experienced in their imagination” (Campbell 1987, cited in Urry 1990:13)

This presents another interesting point for marketing, which is the idea that tourism – because of its combination of the “visual, the aesthetic and the popular”- epitomises a widespread phenomenon in consumer culture, the aestheticisation of consumption (Urry 1990: 87). Consumer culture uses images, signs, and symbolic goods that summon up dreams, desires and fantasies, which suggest romantic authenticity and emotional fulfilment (Featherstone 1990). Salzer-Möling and Strannegård (2004) describe the aestheticisation that is taking place in the consumption of products, where symbolism and style increasingly usurp utilitarian function and the social landscape is turned into a commercial brandscape. Furthermore, with the increasing de-differentiation of tourism from other leisure activities like shopping (Urry 1995; Meethan 2001), there is an increasing appearance of “tourism destinations” in our ordinary space-time (e.g. themed shopping mall complexes).

### **Places as narratives**

The important question that arises from the discussion on the socio-cultural insights on tourism destinations is the implications of this perspective for tourism destination marketing. From this perspective, the marketing of tourism destinations is better understood as dialectic between material practices and symbolic meanings, because marketing works by assigning the material attributes of space “symbolic and aesthetic value” and these “representations or *narratives* of people and place assume an exchange value as the objects of consumption” (Meethan 2001:37 emphasis added). Therefore, “marketing creates narratives, images and brands that mediate a place to the potential tourist in the traveller-generating regions” (Framke 2002: 106). In this light, tourism destinations can be conceived as texts and sets of spatial narratives (Voase 1999; Meethan 1996), which involve “not only written media such as documents, books, and

brochures, but also spoken, visual and non-verbal media” (Stokowski 2002:372). Thus, the conception of place as narrative is a useful conceptual tool for tourism destination marketing, highlighting the intangible dimension of place and marketing’s role in the creation of the place’s symbolic meanings. Marketing can be thought of as part of the cultural mediums for the creation and circulation of tourism destination narratives. As Hughes (1998) notes, the guidebook, the advertisements, the tourist brochures and the tourist trails concomitantly produce tourist space.

Narratives construct place and places are sites for the emergence of narratives. Narratives are of relevance in the discussion of tourism marketing, and in the production and consumption of place. Stokowski (2002) emphasises that language plays an important role in the formation of a sense of place and that sense of place is rooted in narration. Bendix argues that narration is an important means to create tourist attractions and notes how tourist destinations receive visitors “through the narrative morsels it plants itself or that are put in circulation by others” (2002:476). Cary Hom (2004) discusses how the tourists’ experiences can be treated as narratives, as the tourism consumption is characterised by the creation and sharing of stories. Meethan (1996) explains how the development of heritage attractions in order to promote post-industrial cities as tourism destinations creates spatial narratives by assigning a certain set of values to the townscape. Santos (2004) analyses travel articles as powerful narratives involved in making sense of the various tourist destinations by the readers.

Therefore, narratives are not only structures of meaning, but also structures of power (Santos 2004), because the “ability to assign meaning to a place is an act of power which has real effects on the people living in it” (Human 1999: 83). Symbolic values and meanings are not given, but contested and actively involving processes and the construction of place entails the interests or positions of dominant groups (Meethan 1996). Urry claims that “it is hard to envisage the nature of contemporary tourism without seeing how such activities are literally constructed in our imagination through advertising and the media, and through the conscious competition between different social groups” (1990:13). Philo and Kearns (1993), in their discussion of the marketing of post-industrial cities, suggest that the selection of certain aspects of place in the process of destination marketing tends to favour and promote certain interests over others; the interests of dominant groups in particular. Therefore an understanding of

place requires the exploration of the social relations that underlie the production of text (Gotham 2002).

The narrative frame is useful because of its relevance to the cultural understanding of place. First, the narrative conception of place recognises the dynamic and contested nature of tourism destinations. Second, it appreciates the role of culture as a context in which places are meaningful. Third, it is aware of the symbolic processes involved in the construction and consumption of tourism destinations. Finally, it relates the marketing of place to the consumption experience.

## **CONCLUSION**

The framing of place as product offers an account of the services, attractions, infrastructures, activities and environmental resources available in the tourism destination. A change in demand could cause a change in the arrangement of this agglomeration as a destination marketing response. This provides a practical snapshot of the destination. However, it poses the risk of focusing mainly on the physical aspect of place and treating place as static and given phenomenon. The danger involved in such a focus is to miss the intangible, contested and dynamic nature of tourism destinations, which are culturally significant phenomena. The social practices involved in the selection, marketing and consumption of destinations as sets of different elements depend on the cultural context in which places, marketers and tourists are embedded. From a marketing perspective the intangible and symbolic aspect of place is of essence, because destinations are culturally meaningful and we make sense of them through images, myths and signs.

The framing of places as narratives highlights the dynamic and contested nature of places as social contexts, constantly constructed by means of shared language and symbolic meanings. Hughes, in a discussion of sustainability, notes that “what turns the physical environment into scenery is the cultural context in which that environment is embedded” (1995: 52). In a similar way, a narrative frame recognises that what turns the physical and tangible aspects of places into tourism destinations are culturally meaningful processes. Since language mediates the way we make sense of the world it is appropriate to think of destinations as narratives. Narrative is the means through which

social and individual reality is constructed (Hopkinson and Hogarth-Scott 2001, Shankar *et al.* 2001). Moreover, narrative is the means through which place is constructed (Stokowski 2002).

Furthermore, the narrative frame makes possible the inclusion of ethical concerns in the marketing and consumption of tourism destinations. These involve the identification of organised interests involved in the manufacturing of cultural signifiers and the consequences of their actions (Gotham 2002), as well as the resistance to powerful forces involved in the construction of the Other in tourism (Selwyn 1996). Hence, the narrative frame is capable of embracing a 'critical' or macromarketing perspective (see Desmond 1997, Crane, 2000) that entails a moral shift from a marketplace ethos (Hall 1997) to a socially responsible marketing ethos.

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