

Original Research Article

An Introduction to Narrative Tourism

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Abstract | Narrative tourism can be referred to a type of tourism or a strategy through which stories, legends, myths, rituals of a destination or stories, memories, and experiences of a tourist from the destination are used as an effective tool to create and increase the attractiveness of a place or destination. Sustainable narrative tourism not only increases tourist attraction, increases incomes of government and local community, and enhances the quality of life of local people in the region, but also makes tourists more respectful of the conditions, traditions, and culture of the host community. Narrative tourism resources can be classified into two categories: the first category includes history, stories, myths, and legends of the destination, and the second includes experiences, memories, stories, and souvenirs of the tourist. In the following, the relationship between narrative tourism and historical-cultural tourism, nature-based tourism, adventure tourists, the quality of life of locals, and the digital age are discussed. With the help of new technologies in the digital age, the development and exploitation of narrative tourism are much easier than ever. Finally, narrative tourism is a simple strategy to use the potential of attractions in story-building, storytelling, and story-listening, which aims to maintain the variety of stories, narratives, and cultures by creating diverse stories, in addition to creating new attractions and reviving old attractions. However, narrative tourism is a new concept that needs further statistical and numerical research to understand its capabilities, effects, and consequences in various economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects.

Keywords | *Historical and Cultural Heritage, Nature-based Tourism, Narrative, Narrative Tourism, Quality of Life, Tourism.*

Introduction | The spread of the human species began with migration from North Africa to the east and west. The first human stories also became fascinating with the journey of humans and gods to other regions and worlds. Gilgamesh traveled to the underworld to reach eternal life but failed. In the meantime, the kings became the first travelogue writers in history and left part of their war travels among the inscriptions. Over time, many people became immortalized in human

history with their travels and their real and imaginary stories, such as Herodotus, Marco Polo, Saadi, and Christopher Columbus. With the Industrial Revolution, rising incomes, and the formation of the middle class in society, travel, and tourism became an integral part of daily life. However, over the past few decades, tourism has experienced steady growth and deeper diversity, making it one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world (UNWTO, 2013).

Tourism is an activity that has many social and cultural effects in addition to economic benefits and job creation.

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However, persuading and attracting tourists in tourism marketing is a fluid and variable process. Attracting tourists at this time requires various mechanisms using new methods in the digital age to familiarize tourists with the destination, create attractiveness and gain the trust of tourists. Destination branding means creating an image or reputation that attracts investors and tourists to that destination (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2004).

Destination branding creates an image of the destination in the tourist's mind and is the main lever of the tourist's considerations and criteria for decision making (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2003). One of the branding methods is storytelling to attract and communicate with the audience or the consumer and one of the charms of human life is the story. Stories and the magical power of the words brought together human societies, built empires, created gods, and created what we call history. Stories have long brought a deeper meaning to life for people (Fog, Budtz & Yakaboylu, 2005) and thus form the basis of human identity (Guprium & Holstein, 1984). Over the centuries, humans have always told each other stories about where they came from, where they live, and where they saw (Bassano et al., 2019).

The idea that storytelling is essential to branding a product is widely accepted (Wachtman & Johnson, 2009; Bierman, 2010; Alirezaei, Ghavam & Goodarzi, 2018). Stories target the critical points of listeners' lives, thereby facilitating emotional communication (Woodside, 2010) and brand communication value (Fog et al., 2005). In other words, there is nothing distinct about brands without a specific story (Bierman, 2010).

As stated in the theory of narratives of transmission, when consumers immerse themselves in a story, their attitudes and intentions change to reflect the story. This explains the persuasive effect of stories on consumers (Van Laer, Ruyter, Visconti & Wetzels, 2013).

Narrative tourism can be referred to as a type of tourism in which stories, legends, myths, rituals of a destination or stories, memories, and experiences of a tourist from the destination are used as an effective tool to create and increase the attractiveness of a place or destination. The tools include oral, written, and visual resources from the history, culture, folklore, and traditions of the destination, as well as the experiences and memories of the tourists who visited the destination. Piciocchi et al. (2011) outline three steps for place storytelling management (Fig. 1), which include story-building, story-telling, and story-listening. Story-building is divided into three sub-categories: autobiographical analysis (selection of unique aspects that characterize a place and important events already associated by stakeholders to a region) (Longo, 2008), the definition of a plot (narrative

structure such as epic drama, melodrama, comedy, etc.) (Fontana, 2013) and creating a spatial story (by textually structured description to convey the essence of a place to stakeholders, strengthen the relationship between people and place, and achieve a better position than competitors) (Fombrun & van Riel, 2003).

Story-telling requires different media in the destination and off-destination to make the story effective. In other words, for a viral story, it is necessary to spread the story by different tools and in different places to be heard enough. The last step is to listen to the story to monitor its success. New technologies in social networks will greatly contribute to the success of the story as well as its reconstruction and correction. Narrative tourism resources can generally be classified into two categories: a. History, stories, legends, and myths of the destination; b. Experiences, memories, stories, and souvenirs of the tourist.

In general, narrative tourism can be considered the same as tourism, assuming that each tourism attraction contains a collection of stories, myths, experiences, or memories. However, narrative tourism is trying to highlight the tools to create and develop sustainable tourism, especially in areas where the tourism economy can have a positive impact on the quality of life of the locals. Narrative tourism can be defined as a sustainable strategy for tourism marketing. In other words, narrative tourism is a concept that intends to bring sustainable benefits of tourism for the environment and community of destination and purer experiences along with more pleasure for the tourist using the historical and cultural potentials of the host community and the ability of tourists as storytellers of the new era. Narrative tourism is a new concept and so far no research has been conducted exclusively on this subject. However, much research has been conducted on the biological and behavioral effects of narrative and story, or the effect of narrative on marketing and destination branding. Narrative tourism cannot be considered a new type of tourism such as cultural tourism, agricultural tourism, or ecotourism.

In other words, narrative tourism can be considered as a new perspective in tourism that pays attention to the existing potential capabilities for the development and survival of sustainable tourism. Hence, narrative tourism should be considered as an approach or strategy, not a specific and limited type of tourism.

Now the question is how narration and story-telling can be used in the service of tourism and what basically is needed for this? What part of tourism can be included in narrative tourism and what effect can it have on the community and the environment of destination and origin? The purpose of this article is to investigate

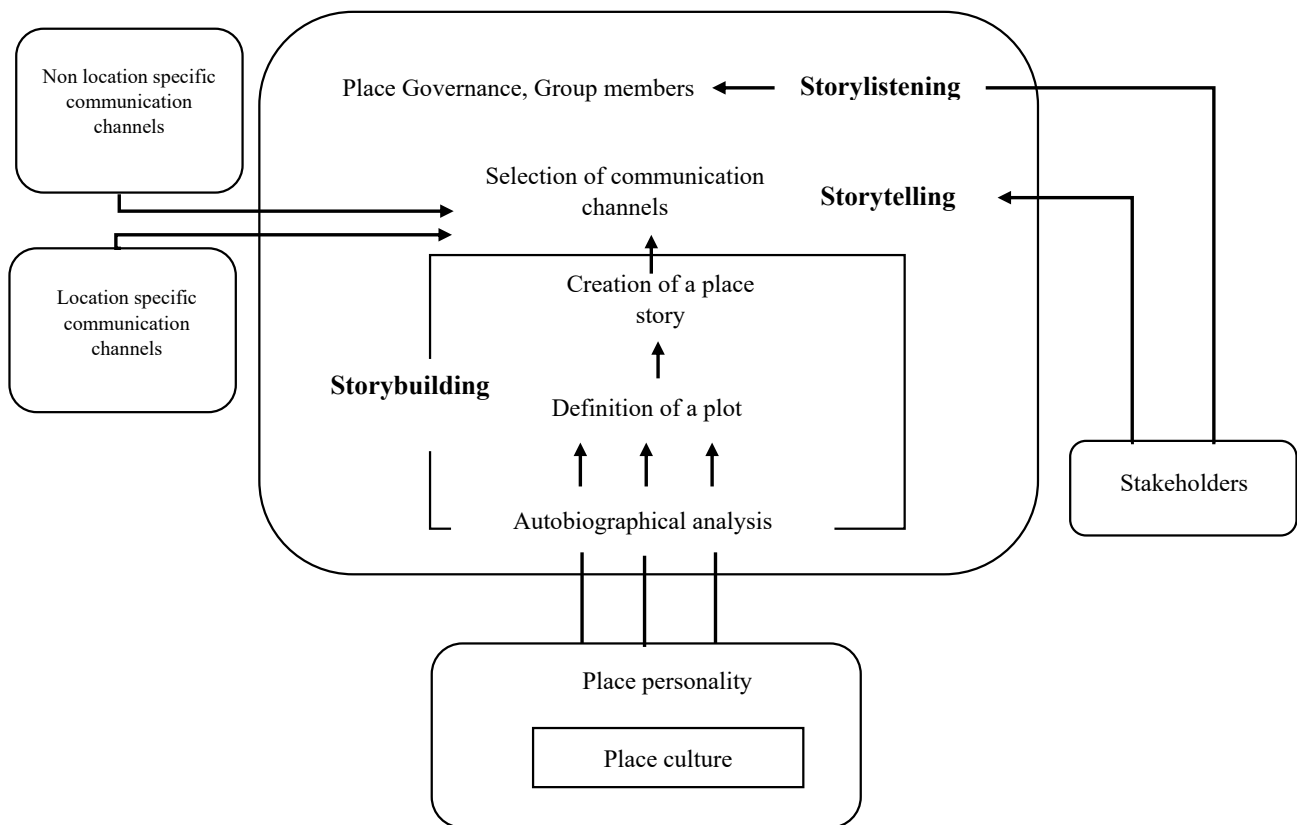


Fig. 1. Proposed model of place storytelling management. Source: Piciocchi, Bassano, Siglioccolo & Paduano, 2011.

the concept of narrative tourism, its potential, and its relationship with other tourism sectors and also to explain the necessity and the use of this strategy in different areas, especially in less developed countries.

The Resources of Narrative Tourism

• History, Stories, Myths, and Rituals of the Destination

Cultural and historical heritage has a huge role in the development of domestic tourism. Throughout history, humans have exchanged cultural experiences, ideas, values, and goods through art, trade, and migration. The closeness of stories, legends, myths, folk tales, rituals, and even different languages has been a sign reflecting the effectiveness and impressiveness of different people and regions on each other. The historical and cultural potential of a country is one of the main factors of tourism for the following reasons (Ismagilova, Safiullin & Gafurov, 2015):

- a) It is the most important tool for tourist participation, as familiarity with historical and cultural heritage is the strongest motivation for tourism.
- b) Cultural and historical heritage objects are an

important asset for profitability and economic development in modern cities.

- c) In the social sphere, it is important to moderate seasonal fluctuations and equal distribution of tourism streams.

d) It creates a favorable image of the region by branding cultural and historical heritage.

- e) Finally, in addition to bringing more revenue to the region, it provides grounds for locals to be proud of their unique heritage and sharing it with tourists.

However, just having cultural and historical heritage will not be a guarantee to attract tourists. For example, Iran, with 24 registered places in the UNESCO World Heritage List, is still not very desirable in the tourism industry in the region and the world. Of course, the conditions prevailing in the Middle East and the political relations between governments should be taken into account, but the lack of attention to narrative tourism, both in the destination and in the origin, has reduced the attractiveness of tourism in Iran and similar regions.

Historically speaking, Iran has played a major role in world history since the agricultural revolution and from

the expansion of civilization and the elimination of the great early civilizations such as Babylon and Assyria to the establishment of the first new empires and the introduction of sustainable innovations such as “Qanat”. The traces of Iran’s influence on the world can be found in different events and periods from different aspects. However, lack of attention to stories and narratives will leave a part of history incomplete and will destroy the desired potentials in tourism.

• **Stories, experiences, memories, and souvenirs of tourists**

As mentioned, transferring travel experiences has been a common and influential matter throughout history. Travel narratives are not only an essential component in building a personal, social, and spatial identity, but also are important in the process of rethinking, experiencing, recalling, and disseminating travel and tourism experiences (Tivers & Rakic, 2012). Tourists are the co-creators of tourism experiences in which narratives are co-created through interaction between producers and consumers (Chronis, 2012).

Thus, the narrative is at the heart of the tourist, because experiences are essentially common stories (Bendix, 2002) which can make the destination visible and unique. However, instead of introducing the destination as the protagonist, the destination can be introduced as a story in which the tourist is the narrator, the main character, and the hero. Ultimately, the success of storytelling depends on the involvement of tourists, enthusiasm, and the ability to actively participate in the storytelling experience (Chronis, 2012).

Narrative Tourism

• **Narrative Tourism and Historical-Cultural Tourism**

In the classification of narrative tourism resources, the first part is related to the destination history, stories, legends, myths, and rituals that tourists are persuaded to reach their destinations due to the charm of the stories and their related historical and cultural remains. Of course, before tourism being an economic activity, it indicates a cultural connection consisting of elements of the tourist, the host community, and the environment. Culture is formed as a system of communication between people with various manifestations of customs, heritage, and other material and aesthetic products and expresses the reality of society. It is from this perspective that people give a special shape to their natural and human world with their culture (Zangiabadi, Mousavi & Kholghipour, 2011).

According to Ismagilova et al. (2015), historical and cultural tourism has acquired one of the main and progressive types of tourism that makes the routes attractive, broadens the sight horizons, expands

intelligence, creates an elegant taste, and helps to better realize a true picture of the world.

If we remove these stories from many tourist attractions, nothing much more interesting will remain. An example is the Biston complex in Iran. On the slopes of a mountain known as the Mountain of God, there is a lithograph that was accompanied by a collection of fictional stories related to myths before it was deciphered. This lithograph is related to Darius I of the Achaemenids, in which he told the story of his accession to the kingdom. On the other hand, a flat plate has been dug on the slope of the mountain near it, which is known among the natives as Farhad Tarash (dug by Farhad). Farhad Character is one of the most Iranian love stories, the romantic poem of Khosrow and Shirin. Khosrow II or Khosrow Parviz fell in love with an Armenian prince named Shirin. To reach the kingdom, Khosrow was forced to go to war with one of his generals named Bahram Choobin and asked the Byzantine Empire for help to achieve victory. Meanwhile, another person named Farhad fell also in love with Shirin and his love stories were spread throughout the Persian Empire.

To get rid of his competitor, Khosrow instructed him to dig a tunnel in the heart of the mountain to reach his beloved. With the progress of the work by Farhad, Khosrow sent the news of Shirin’s death to Farhad and he died of grief. Some of the events of this legend correspond to the historical reality of Iran, but the fact that other parts are fictional not only does not have a negative effect on attracting tourists to this place but also the reason of being known the place in Iran is because of these love stories more than Darius’s lithograph.

Another benefit of narrative tourism is that it contributes to the sustainability of indigenous culture. In other words, destination communities experience cultural contradictions if they are in constant contact with tourists from different cultural and social backgrounds. Over time, this will change the social structure, traditions, beliefs, and culture of the destination community. Narrative tourism is a powerful tool in the hands of the indigenous culture of the destination to be able to defend itself against unwanted invasions. Another issue to consider is that in the process of globalization, cultural diversity especially in less developed regions is more at risk of extinction. Preserving cultural heritage and cultural diversity in a region will help to maintain a connection with the past, create a sense of pride and attachment to the region among local communities.

• **Narrative Tourism and Nature-Based Tourism**

Understanding the right relationship between tourism and the environment requires a comprehensive and holistic view. The relationship between the tourist and

the environment is influential in three dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, and environmental.

Nature-based tourism refers to all types of tourism that rely on relatively undisturbed natural environments or natural features (Buckley, 2009). Therefore, nature-based tourism includes the following forms of tourism:

- Tourism in natural environments (e.g. adventure tourism);
- Tourism about special elements of natural environments (e.g. wildlife tourism and agri-tourism);
- Developed tourism to protect natural areas (e.g. ecotourism) (Hall & Boyd, 2005).

The highlight of nature-based tourism is that it encompasses different levels of sustainability in different sectors. Due to the rapid growth of the tourism industry, the stakeholders around the world realized the pressure of this industry on nature and therefore the need to protect the environmental, cultural, and social heritage (UNEP, 2002). Of course, the way of dealing and interacting with the environment in the past has been different than today. For example, in the culture of ancient Iran, nature and its elements such as soil, water, land, and food were considered sacred. This thought and belief have led to the fair and sustainable use of nature, and consequently, they have considered environmental conditions more than maximizing profits in the exploitation of nature.

Agri-tourism can be a good example of the interaction of tourist, environment, and narrative tourism. During the stay, vacationers find opportunities to participate in farm life, feed animals, and harvest crops, and learn about farmers' daily routines (Greif, Rauscher & Söntgerath, 2011 cited in Wolter, 2013). All these tools are in the service of narrative tourism. Adventure tourism, wildlife tourism, and ecotourism can also be used to preserve nature and sustainable tourism in the service of narrative tourism.

It should be noted that narrative tourism is not limited to the story of places and experiences of tourists, but can also include unwritten rules in dealing with nature. Mankind's manner to deal with nature has always been an exploitative and abusive view for centuries, especially after the Industrial Revolution. For example, the view that humans are the superior, most intelligent, most self-aware, and most righteous beings on earth has led to the endless exploitation of natural resources by humans. However, narrative tourism will have the ability to incorporate the laws necessary to interact with and protect nature in a respectful, acceptable, and practical way during story-building and storytelling. In other words, narrative tourism can play the role of education for the host community and tourists before arrival and during the presence of tourists. This is especially true in

areas with high tourism potential and environmentally sensitive because the arrival of major tourists without considering environmental considerations by responsible organizations, locals, and tourists will eventually cause excessive and irreversible destruction of nature. . Training and using the potentials of narrative tourism is logical and cost-effective. For example, preventing the dumping of waste in nature is much easier than collecting and compensating for the damages caused by that.

• Narrative tourism and adventure tourists

Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) defines adventure tourism as a journey that has at least two of the following three parameters: physical activity, natural environment, and cultural immersion. Between 2010 and 2014, the adventure tourism industry grew by 195% but still plays a small role in the tourism industry. The adventure tourism industry also helps to raise awareness of sustainability, the need to support local communities, and promote social responsibility (Huddart & Stott, 2020). Experts and policymakers in the industry adhere to sustainable environmental practices because they know that without pristine natural environments and meaningful cultural experiences, the industry will disappear. With the help of narrative tourism, these values can guarantee the sustainable future of the industry . However, we can categorize adventurous tourists into a larger group that has not always adhered to these principles. Adventurers are the vanguard of travel to distant and unknown places. Christopher Columbus was one of the pioneers and discovered the American continent. However, he and his followers followed an unsustainable path. The stories and narratives of these groups show the basic conditions of the region and how they treated the region and its inhabitants.

Adventure tourists are important because they play an important role as leading groups in creating the image and story of the destination. Behavior and interaction with locals also affect the behavior of locals with subsequent tourists. Interactive storytelling by adventure tourists and the host community has a great impact on creating sustainable narrative tourism that is compatible with the environment and culture of the destination.

• Narrative Tourism and Quality of Life

Tourism is one of the major socio-economic forces in today's world where consumers and governments have invested heavily in tourism experiences and development to improve the quality of life of inhabitants in the destination. Initially, the success of policies and investments in this area is measured by economic criteria such as tourist expenditures, tax revenue, and the number of jobs created. However, the positive and negative effects on the physical environment and residents' sense of

satisfaction and happiness have also been considered (Uysal & Perdue, 2012). The primary result of narrative tourism will be the increase in the absorption of tourists and thus the increase in the economic income for the destination. However, creating a sense of satisfaction in both the local community and tourists will be another result of this strategy.

Tourists will live in pleasure with these stories and their manifestations for a while and will satisfy their need for the trip if the interesting stories and narratives match the destination. In return, sharing these good feelings will motivate people to travel to the destination. On the other hand, the host community will feel more satisfied and comfortable by receiving respect for its environment, culture, and traditions as well as increasing income.

Sustainable narrative tourism not only enhances the quality of life of the local people in the region but also makes tourists more respectful of the conditions, traditions, and culture of the host community, in addition to enjoying their journey.

• Narrative Tourism and Digital Age

Before the beginning of the printing industry, stories and narratives were spread orally and with frequent changes, mainly in informal communities. With the advent of the printing industry, writing resources became more widely available to the general public, but the extent of story-building, story-telling, and story-listening has not been as widespread to this day. Beeton, Bowen & Santos (2006) state that the view of tourism is becoming more and more mediated. Jansson (2002) also states that the more organized tourism becomes, it mediates more. The term of mediation in the tourism environment refers to an individual's active effort to facilitate or transfer the tourism experience to others (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2008). In the digital age with the increasing development of communication, media and social networks have played an important role. As social media provides a popular space for people to connect and share content, it has become an important resource for potential tourists to find and search for information on prices, suppliers, availability, and product features (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015).

That is why social media has become such an important marketing channel. According to Barnes (2015), about 60% of destination management organizations allocate funds for social media-related activities. However, the marketing process is getting out of the marketers' control because part of the process is created and changed by informal user conversations. While a destination may have its own story, the story-telling of tourists derived from personal experiences and opinions creates a new story for the destination.

Thus, social media also helps to facilitate the popularization of media content production and the transfer of power to the consumer. According to Bassano et al. (2019), story-telling in the digital age has become increasingly important due to the competition of places for tourism, the costs of economic development and the convey of culture and knowledge. However, the negative effects of social media development should not be overlooked. Guy E. Debord uses the term the society of the spectacle to refer to the culture that has completely become the consumer culture and its function is to forget the history within the culture (Zangiabadi et al., 2011). In virtual tourism, this happens both among virtual tourists and among the host community. Powerful and fundamental narrative tourism at the initial point and especially at the destination can prevent the creation of an absolute spectator community. In other words, narrative tourism prevents the commodification of culture and tourism. Narrative tourism in accordance with the beliefs, traditions, and myths of the host society prevents cultural collapse and disintegration of the destination. In this case, the host community, while being effective and impressive, can proudly preserve and maintain its culture and beliefs.

Conclusion

As tourism has become one of the leading economic industries today, further studies and the adoption of new strategies seem inevitable. For centuries, humans have believed in a series of stories to keep themselves on the path of progress and survival. Old stories, although somewhat outdated, show the path of human mistakes. In the 21st century, the human species has a unique opportunity to create its own desirable story to make a better life, a healthy and powerful environment, and a sustainable economy. Narrative tourism provides this opportunity for human beings. The spread of narrative tourism has become much easier than ever with the help of new technologies in the digital age.

Narrative tourism is a simple strategy to use the potential of attractions in story-building, story-telling, and story-listening. The strategy aims to preserve the diversity of stories, narratives, and cultures by creating diverse stories, in addition to creating new attractions and reviving old attractions. However, narrative tourism needs constant monitoring to correct and optimize narratives to identify and highlight their positive features. Consequently, the positive effects of tourism and narrative tourism will be increased on nature, the quality of life of locals, and the sense of satisfaction of tourists along with other economic, social, cultural, and political criteria.

From this perspective, narrative tourism should be

examined with a new and effective perspective in the policy-making sectors and the strategy should be used to advance economic, social, and cultural goals, especially in the destination community. By understanding that many tourist attractions will lose their appeal without narration, the importance of narrative tourism can be

realized and the collective understanding should lead to the promotion of narrative tourism and its sustainable use in society. Finally, narrative tourism is a new concept that requires further statistical research to understand the capabilities, effects, and consequences in various economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects.

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