Cinematographic images of a city

Alternative heritage tourism in Manchester

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The postmodern heritage tourism market has matured and the contemporary preoccupation with an increasing number of topics from the past has resulted in the emergence of different criteria for defining and interpreting heritage in terms of popular images of preferred histories. Within this context, visual media-themed heritage products are making an important contribution to tourism development. Manchester’s ‘Hollywood of the North’ tour, which reconstructs the city’s image in its cinematographic past and present, is an example of new product development through interpretation and an alternative tourist experience of place which represents the coming of age of urban heritage tourism. Copyright © 1996 Elsevier Science Ltd

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Tourism destination products have been conceptualized in a variety of ways including ‘components’ perspectives where products have been described as bundles of activities, services and benefits and as physical and service features with symbolic associations. Within a marketing framework, tourism products have included ‘people’, ‘physical evidence’ and ‘process’ elements. In this approach, the ‘technical’ and ‘functional’ aspects of service are considered to be inseparable from other features of these complex products and their production is inseparable from their consumption which is characterized as an experiential process. This notion has been developed further in planning perspectives exemplified by Gunn’s conceptualization of tourism products as complex human experiences. As such, the visitor experience of place is an intricate sociocultural phenomenon – the outcome of the tourists’ motivations, perceptions, beliefs and mental categorization and evaluation processes influenced strongly by external stimuli including tourist destination images. This concept has particular relevance for the postmodern heritage tourism market characterized by eclectic combinations of visually stimulating reconstructions of selected elements from the past and present. The aim of the present paper is to discuss the tourism product as a visitor experience of place within the postmodern context of contemporary heritage tourism by examining Manchester’s ‘Hollywood of the North’ tour – an alternative heritage tourism product which reconstructs the city in the image of cinematography.

The postmodern context

There is no clear consensus amongst scholars about the origin and meaning of postmodernism nor is there a unified postmodern social theory, only diverse theories grouped together as ‘postmodern’. Postmodern society has therefore been characterized in a variety of different ways from imploded boundaries between ‘high culture’ and ‘popular culture’ and between appearance and reality to nostalgia for the old and a fascination with the new in eclectic combinations of styles extracted from all historic periods.

There is, however, a general consensus that two concepts – ‘decentring’ and ‘hyperreality’ – are central to the sociology of postmodernism. ‘Decentring’ describes a rejection of the traditional view of western rationality which maintains that meaning is centred on an object, by treating the object as a pure signifier. It proposes that the world is a system of signs in which the image and exhibition value of products is more important than their utility value. Rojek argues that in postmodern society ‘the super-
structure of advertising, television, fashion, lifestyle magazines and designer values has become more important than the economic substructure in explaining human desire and behaviour. The related concept of ‘hyperreality’ has been defined by Baudrillard as a ‘third order of simulacra’, where ‘simulacra’ are representations or copies of objects or events. The ‘first order’ of simulacra is the world of the ‘counterfeit of an original’. Baudrillard claims that this is the post-Renaissance artificial world of signs such as theatre, fashion and baroque art when simulacra first appeared. The ‘second order’ refers to the mechanical reproduction of the industrial simulacrum or series of mass objects which appeared in the Industrial Revolution. Finally, the ‘third order’ or ‘hyperreal’ represents the stage where simulation models actually constitute the world and the distinction between real and unreal is imperceptible or invalid. According to Baudrillard, hyperreal society is dominated by advertising and electronic mass media, by highly processed communication and by highly simulated pleasure and spectacle, and he argues that we no longer consume products, but signs or images.

The contemporary tourist experience is inseparable from this broader picture of cultural transformation. Poon has described the emergence of a ‘new tourism’ characterized by ‘FSDI’ (flexibility, segmentation and diagonal integration) with products tailored to the individual needs of the discerning consumer. Similarly, Parinello has highlighted the increasing importance given to places and forms of tourism outside the traditional boundaries as tourism develops into ‘a series of tourisms’. Contemporary tourist activities and experiences are therefore being sought in a wider variety of locations than ever before, as less traditional places and subjects have become of interest and are being packaged and presented for tourist consumption through a process which Edgar calls the ‘anti-elitism of postmodernism’. They have become increasingly more difficult both to distinguish from other cultural experiences and to define with reference to the site or destination. Many ‘new tourism’ products could be described as hybrids in terms of their physical characteristics and/or the visitor experience because they do not fit easily into accepted classifications. To use Urry’s taxonomy as an example, a product’s interest can be both ‘romantic’ and ‘collective’, with eclectic combinations of elements that are both ‘historical’ and ‘modern’, and ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’.

Post-tourism and media images of place
One feature of the change in tourism industry has been the emergence of what has been journalistically characterized as ‘post (mass) tourism’ or ‘post-tourism’, with ‘post tourists’ who ‘move through liminal urban spaces in search of spectacles in a simulational world’. Urry argues that the post-tourists’ experience of the world is through a series of ‘framed images’ ranging from the tour operator’s brochure, car and coach windows to the camera’s lens, and even the television screen, which provides a constant source of images for the armchair post-tourist. Berry has suggested that today’s city is largely the product of information passing through a television filter, and, increasingly, leisure time is centred on the home with television viewing as probably the greatest single domestic pastime. Additionally, visual media influence has now been enhanced through cable and satellite television and through video cassette recorder market penetration which has reached over 70% of all homes in the UK. Moreover, the trend is likely to continue given the growth in satellite and cable television subscriptions in this country and the further development of digital compression technology in the USA. The latter includes a ‘multi-choice environment’ 600 channel cable featuring ‘stay at home shopping’ facilities, ‘nostalgia’ and ‘travel’ channels. The chairman of Time Warner, the company that developed the technology, described the system as a ‘video highway into the home’. Could this be a post-tourism dimension to the ‘no transport, no tourism’ maxim?

Goody suggests that media incursions into our perceptual space help to ‘mould our images of areas outside of those with which we are familiar’, and Butler argues that the relative significance of audio-visual sources of information is increasing as more people rely on visual media inputs rather than printed sources of information. This trend is important in terms of the decision-making process of contemporary tourists as their ‘organic images’ of places are developed through the vicarious consumption of film and television images without the perceived bias of promotional material. Popular films and television programmes act as ‘pull’ factors to tourists in terms of generating interest in the geographic locations which they feature. Riley and Van Doran report that Rayburn County in Georgia, USA has experienced a significant increase in tourism since the film Deliverance was released in 1972. Approximately 20 000 tourists per annum visit the area and generate gross annual revenues of between US$2 and $3 million. The authors have also documented the tourism development in Historic Fort Hayes, Connecticut and the plains of South Dakota because of their connection with Dances with Wolves and at Devils Tower National Monument in Wyoming because the site was featured in Close Encounters of the Third Kind.

The film- and television-induced deconstruction of space and its reconstruction in the image of tourism is a growing phenomenon which epitomizes the post-tourism experience of place. In an English context, the popularity of certain television programmes, including soap opera, has spawned a wide
range of regional tourist board media-themed products such as 'The Last of the Summer Wine Country', 'Emmerdale Farm Country', 'Eastender Breaks' and Shrewsbury's 'Home of Brother Cadfael'. Brother Cadfael, the charismatic detective monk of 12th-century Shrewsbury Abbey, was created by Shropshire author Ellis Peters, recreated through television imagery, and again through the 'In the Footsteps of Brother Cadfael' town trail where Cadfael's Chronicles weave fiction into real historical sites and events in what is, arguably, a hyperreal post-tourist experience of place where the boundary between the real and unreal is indistinguishable and no longer considered to be important by the majority of visitors.

The selection and interpretation of an alternative urban heritage

Nostalgia (a 17th-century medical term coined to describe the melancholia of Swiss mercenaries fighting abroad) is today universally employed to describe a yearning for the past. A sense of the original meaning is retained in Ashworth's explanation of the word as 'not just a romantic idealisation of a past, but literally a painful longing to return to it'. Our desire for a sense of permanence and our anxiety over an uncertain future have strengthened a belief in the superiority of the past, and material that is salvaged has come to embody greater value and is preserved in greater quantity and variety than ever before. Lowenthal suggests that people used to express selective nostalgia about particular things and places, but that 'nostalgia has lengthened and deepened to such an extent that the cult of the everyday now competes with the bias towards the more spectacular and monumental relics of the past'.

Antiques have therefore become progressively more inclusive both in time and in content, and the spatial dimensions of our contemporary preoccupation with a growing number of artefacts and topics from the past are expanding. Shoard argues that, as historical consciousness has been extended, a more existential history has been recognised as valid and worthy of scholarship. This includes histories of private lives and social experiences such as work and leisure, childhood, old age and family life. Their transformation into heritage involves 'the creation of a marketable product from a selected set of historical associations and relict artefacts as interpreted and promoted for a targeted consumer group'. In turn, the marketable product must offer the tourist 'hyperreality (that which is better than reality) and fantastic experiences' – described by Boniface and Fowler as 'stimulation, through simulation of lives as we wish them to be, or to have been in the past'.

Images from a preferred past

The built environment is important in creating an overall atmosphere of antiquity and we tend to think of cities as part of the concrete, tangible world. However, each part of the 'hard' city not only originated in someone's imagination, but continues to be shaped by the perceptions of inhabitants and visitors. Today, buildings, neighbourhoods and even entire cities are perceived as being important and/or unique not only because of their architecture or their links with famous people and events, and increasingly because of their past association with the private lives of ordinary people, but also because of a particular image that has been created through the media.

The place of the past in the landscape is therefore as much a product of contemporary interest as of past history and represents, first, a selection from the stock of antiquities and/or images from a preferred past and, second, their subjective interpretation, i.e. a choice (of those aspects of heritage which are preserved or created) from the alternatives available. Lowenthal suggests that 'the touristic past jettisons seedy reality for spurious romance' (p 241). However, Fowler claims that representations of the past other than academic history and archaeology are much more attractive to the majority of people. Certainly, film and television images are more familiar and appealing than those portrayed in the academic press. Furthermore, the past is not an absolute quantity but a relative set of values and, in this sense, academic arguments for scholarship to be recognised as a basis for heritage products are less convincing than they otherwise might be.

Lowenthal suggests that 'the past is always altered for motives that reflect present needs. We reshape heritage to make it attractive in modern terms' (p 348). Postmodern tourism is receptive to historical references of all sorts, but is not so much concerned with accurate reproduction as with the creation of visually interesting and attractive environments so that almost any type of tourism experience has become both possible and popularly acceptable. For example, the M25, a daily nightmare for many of London's commuters, attracts the gaze of thousands of coach-borne tourists on a sightseeing tour of the motorway which includes a commentary on the development's recent history.

Heritage is therefore a complex issue in terms of the way in which it is defined, valued, communicated and, increasingly, packaged. Faulkner distinguishes between a 'heritage of objects' and a 'heritage of ideas'. The former comprises objects or buildings which are the works of an accepted master, primary historic documents and methods of construction or form that embody skills that are an important historic record. By contrast, in the 'heritage of ideas', the value is contained in illustrative evidence, or is symbolic and is related to the satisfac-
tion of an emotional need. Aspects of urban history can therefore be transformed into new heritage tourism products in two ways. First, in a direct way through preservation and/or enhancement with additional facilities which alter the physical appearance of the tangible heritage and/or its relation to the environment. Second, in an indirect way, in terms of how it is interpreted, perceived and appreciated. The public are no longer interested in seeing only great works of art or relics from distant historical periods. Consequently, the heterogeneous heritage tourism market has become increasingly segmented as a proliferation of alternative histories has developed including social, populist, feminist, ethnic, cultural and industrial. Lumley and Goodwin have noted that, amongst other things, radio, photography, cinema and television including soap opera sets are now preserved in museums. This shift from ‘aura to nostalgia’ has resulted in a situation where almost any aspect of the past – ‘objects’ or ‘ideas’ – may be imaginatively interpreted and presented for tourist consumption.

**Product development through interpretation:**

**Manchester’s cinematographic history tour**

*A postmodern experience of place*

Manchester’s ‘Hollywood of the North’ tour is the city’s alternative cinematographic tourist attraction. It could arguably be classified as an industrial heritage product because the tour itinerary includes the site of the old Mancunian Studios in Rusholme, now Manchester’s bustling Indian community where billboard images of ‘Bollywood’ overshadow the small plaque in Dickinson Road which marks the studios’ former location.

However, in contrast with most mines and mills and many heritage centres where industrial heritage tourism meets modern industrial tourism, at the ‘Hollywood of the North’ industrial heritage tourism meets postmodern industrial tourism. In more traditional heritage attractions, there tends to be more emphasis on the tangible aspects of heritage. In this case, the attraction is a ‘heritage of ideas’ in which the value is symbolic and associated with a nostalgic or representational quality. Additionally, in more traditional attractions, the topographic and architectural features of the environment are filtered subjectively through both the interpreter’s and the tourists’ perceptual screens to form the focus of the visitor’s gaze. In this heritage product, however, the important visual features of the tour, such as film locations or relevant landmarks, are significant because they have already undergone an initial process of mediation through the cinema or television screen: for example, the sites within the city that were used as locations for Hollywood’s *Reds* and *Yanks*.

The reconstruction of the city in the popular image of cinema and television provides the requisite signs from a more visually spectacular preferred past and present. The signs result from the combined effect of the tourists’ nostalgia, desire to escape and their own indirect perceptual experiences, i.e. those images which have been conjured up through their cognitive and effective orientation (provided by media-induced ‘organic images’), the spatial context and the content, sequencing and timely interjection of interpretive material which gives character and identity to places throughout their experience in motion. The ‘Hollywood of the North’ tourists’ perceptions of these features therefore represent a postmodern experience of place in the sense that they are images of the interpreters’ perceptions of media images of the city and are accepted as such in the spirit of spectacle. Furthermore, the demand for the product and the behaviour of the cinematographic tourist can be more readily explained in terms of the superstructure of film and television and its transformation of the urban environment than in terms of the more traditional tangible features of urban heritage.

The tour consists of a 60 minute round-trip coachborne experience of the city’s cinematographic heritage in a sequence of ‘framed images’ à la Urry, followed by a film that was shot in the Manchester area, screened at the Cornerhouse Cinema. The cinematographic tourist experience of the city regularly includes the social realism of Walter Greenwood’s novel *Love on the Dole* and its film adaptation; interpretations of Frank Randall’s *Holidays with Pay* shot in Rusholme in 1948; and the 1960s television adaptations of the Howard Spring novels: *Shabby Tiger* and *Dark Satanic Mills*. Alternatively, the tour may include such surprises as Charlie Chaplin’s school days in Ardwick; the birthplace of Robert Donat and the home of Burt Kwok in the south of the city; trivia like the Withington pub where Julie Walters worked as a barmaid while studying at Manchester Polytechnic; images of the alleged exploits of Jack Nicholson and Warren Beatty at the Sandpiper in Fallowfield; and many interesting and amusing anecdotes – ‘a hook every half mile or so’ (C P Lee, ‘Hollywood of the North’ tour, interview, 6 October 1994). The formerly mundane – buildings, streets and districts – suddenly acquires interest, status and ambience because of its role as a film location and/or its association with the famous. For example, Brooklands garage in Wardle Road, Sale, is only significant because it was used as the location for ‘Malcolm’s Garage’ in Granada television’s comedy series ‘Watching’. Wardle Road has since gained further status because it was also used for filming an episode of ‘Cracker’, Granada’s recent police drama series starring Robbie Coltraine as criminal psychologist ‘Fitz’.

The logistics of the tour routeing and restrictions
on time (because of the screening with each tour) often preclude the inclusion of many areas of Greater Manchester and their cinematographic connections in the tourists’ experience. For example, parts of Marple which were featured in Empire of the Sun, many of the locations from Reds (which employed over 500 locals in the production of the film) and places connected with Salford’s famous sons – Albert Finney, Ben Kingsley and Robert Powell – are regrettably excluded from the itinerary. Nevertheless, for the cinematographic history tourist, the collection of signs from the extant superstructure of media images of Manchester is clearly preferable to a more traditional diet of the city’s interpreted heritage.

**Developing the product**

The ‘Hollywood of the North’ tour was the brainchild of Chris Lee. It evolved from his keen interest in Manchester’s cinematographic history and his reputation for regaling people with amusing anecdotes. The tour began in 1988 and the initial concept was ‘something of a joke’ (C P Lee, interview, 6 October 1994), in that whilst teaching on a part-time basis at the Cornerhouse Cinema, he made a facetious comment that it would be interesting to do a Hollywood-style coach tour of Manchester. To his surprise, this was met with considerable interest and support from the management of the cinema. The rest is (cinematographic) history! In the research and development stage of the project, information sources included film and photographic material, scrapbooks and assorted memorabilia from Mancunian Studios, Peter Blakely’s grandson Johnny Blakely who owned the studios which were located in Dickenson Road, Rusholme in the south of the city. This material was added to a rapidly expanding database derived from sources such as ‘Mr. Manchester’s Diary’ in the Manchester Evening News and stories from interested parties who approached Chris Lee once the development of the product was under way. This information was subsequently subjected to a process of conscious selection and interpretation as part of its transformation into a marketable product in line with Ashworth’s definition of heritage given earlier. The ‘Cornerhouse’, which is situated immediately to the south of the city centre adjacent to the Refuge Insurance building in Oxford Street – the location of the final scene of Hell is a City starring Stanley Baker – provided an initial subsidy for the project from their educational budget, a ticket outlet and a direct link to the British Film Institute archives. The BFI connection meant that they were able to obtain relevant films which were shot in the city, including Love on the Dole, A Taste of Honey, Charlie Bubbles and Murders in the Manchester Morgue.

At the outset, the tour was able to generate a significant amount of free publicity through radio coverage including a live phone-in with Chris Lee on Radio 2’s Derek Jameson show, a mini-documentary on Piccadilly Radio, a piece on Radio 5 and an enthusiastic response from GMR (Greater Manchester Radio). Granada television screened a 10-minute feature on the tour including an interview with Jack Lemmon who was starring at the nearby Palace Theatre at the time. This exposure, together with the positive word-of-mouth publicity which the tour generated and an affordable price of £3.50, attracted a wide range of cinematographic heritage tourists including film enthusiasts, fans of particular movie stars, members of the Cinema Preservation Society, local historians, people who worked in or simply remembered Mancunian Studios in Rusholme, and nostalgia seekers. Additionally, when The White Bus was screened, it attracted actors who had been in the film, but had never actually seen it. After the initial impetus from ‘below-the-line’ sources, however, promotion of the tour was hampered by budgetary constraints, an apparent lack of interest from the city council and the limited distribution of promotional leaflets. Nevertheless, demand continued to grow steadily over a three-year period until Chris Lee accepted a full-time teaching post at University College Salford in 1991. Because of his key role as guide and interpreter, he was inseparable from the product itself. Consequently, the project was temporarily withdrawn. However, there are plans to re-launch the tour in the near future as a result of popular demand, Chris Lee’s enthusiasm and the product’s following strengths:

- It represents a relatively low-cost and flexible form of new product development for the ‘Cornerhouse’. A 12-seater bus was used for the first tour. Subsequently, 50-seater coaches were employed as demand grew.
- The product can be marketed as an all-year-round, all-weather attraction. This is a particular advantage in a city with a well-founded reputation for wet weather.
- The product can be developed and/or tailored to the needs of specific markets by changing the elements of the tour: the interpretive material and themes, the film, and alternative material from either the existing stock of film locations and/or new sites which have cinematographic history interest. As a result, there may be more of a dramatic, romantic and/or comic orientation.
- Unlike a large number of tangible heritage products which are relatively brittle environments, the cinematographic history tour – a heritage of ideas, or arguably, a heritage of images – is capable of absorbing additional visitor numbers with only a minor impact on road congestion in the city centre. The current tour route avoids the central areas of Manchester at busy times of the day and week, and there are additional suburban
locations which can be used to either change or augment the tourists’ experience of the city.

- Whereas the visual arts, in general, are patronized by mainly the higher socioeconomic groups, the cinema has wider appeal and is currently increasing in popularity. This highlights the potential for further development through the integration of cinematography with tourism.

### Enhancing the city’s tourism portfolio

Manchester’s industrial past is an important legacy which is of central relevance to contemporary tourism in the city. As the first city of the industrial revolution, ‘Cottonopolis’ developed largely because of a boom in cotton textiles in the last century. The city is currently experiencing a late 20th-century post-industrial boom, but today, Granada Television’s Coronation Street is one of the leading exports. Arguably, the northern soap opera continues Manchester’s long traditions of social realism and a sense of place exemplified by the literary works of Dickens, Engels, Gaskell and others. Moreover, as Granada Studios Tour’s core product, the Coronation Street Experience also demonstrates the strong influence of media images on tourist perceptions of place, the highly selective nature of urban heritage development and promotion and, above all, that heritage interpretation is the product of contemporary wants and ideas.

Media-themed tourism is rapidly becoming an important economic activity in Manchester. The city’s short-break portfolio currently includes television weekends at the Copthorne hotel and soap and greasepaint weekends at the Charterhouse hotel in addition to breaks at the television-themed Victoria and Albert hotel. All of these products include a Granada Studios Tour. Furthermore, Granada’s brand extension strategy includes a forthcoming ‘media city’ development adjacent to the Granada Studios Tour site. The City Council claim that Granada Studios Tour is ‘Britain’s only film and television tour’. However, Manchester is also the location of the ‘Hollywood of the North’ tour, the city’s ‘alternative’ cinematographic history tour which differentiates itself from the former on the basis of its focus on real places and real people (C P Lee, interview, 6 October 1994). The critical mass of media-themed attractions in the city offers considerable potential for the positioning of this alternative but complementary cinematographic product, which could also be marketed effectively within the types of package described above. Moreover, as Manchester attempts to reposition itself as a major European tourist destination throughout the 1990s, heritage, media and culture will continue to develop as the dominant features of the city’s tourism product. Recent events in the city such as the Festival of Expressionism in 1992, the City of Drama Festival in 1994 and the Boddington’s Manchester Festival of Arts and Television have already demonstrated the significance of these themes. Within this context, there is a window of opportunity for a tastefully packaged and effectively marketed cinematographic media product that will both complement the existing portfolio and support the recent attempts to reposition the city in the mental maps of prospective visitors.

Currently, the principal markets for Manchester’s tourist attractions are the day visitor market, which accounts for 85% of visitors to all attractions, the local community and the educational market. The city is also increasing its share of the short-break market. This is significant given the predicted growth in this sector of between 15% and 20% over the 1990s. Additionally, cultural attractions, including the visual arts, always feature prominently in the list of reasons for visiting a destination given by both domestic and overseas tourists. The city has a favourable geographic location and an excellent regional, national and international communications network including Europe’s first light rapid transit system – the Metro – which provides direct access to the Cornerhouse Theatre on Oxford Street where the cinematographic tour is based. Manchester’s strengths and opportunities in the tourism market therefore indicate a potential for growth in the medium term. However, tourist perceptions of the city continue to reflect the negative aspects of its industrial past despite a considerable amount of redevelopment and aggressive promotional effort. Consequently, Manchester’s extant image is the biggest single hindrance to weekend occupancy rates in the city’s hotels. Clearly, there is a need for more effective marketing of the destination including both repositioning and new product development strategies.

As the tourism/leisure ratio changes and tourism faces a growth in competition from not only other forms of leisure but from changes in the way in which leisure time is used, including an increase in day trip activity, the pressure to develop new and differentiated products in line with the demands of clearly defined market segments will increase. Middleton suggests that as markets mature and become more competitive and sophisticated over the next decade, there will be a growing interest in newer forms of urban leisure in centres which offer cultural activity. There is general agreement that too much tourist attention is directed towards a small proportion of the tangible heritage in our towns and cities. Like many other cultural centres, Manchester has its share of objects and places which may be of potential interest, but which currently lie outside the boundaries of tourism’s mass heritageism awaiting relevant and appropriate themes to justify their existence in the tourist frame of reference. As different criteria are emerging as the basis of perceptions of heritage, there are increasing opportunities
for the development of what may be described by conventional heritage tourists as an 'alternative' urban heritage. However, in many ways, this phenomenon represents the coming of age of urban heritage tourism where the cult of the absolute – the familiar focus on the 'oldest' and 'first' themes – and academic pleas for authentic heritage are of less concern than that which is considered to be interesting, entertaining and popular in the public’s eyes.

This type of development has important implications for intra- and inter-industry competition if, indeed, a distinction between the two can be made. For example:

- It is likely that tourism products or experiences at the 'specific level' will increasingly be conceptualized, developed and marketed by consumer-orientated organizations from 'outside' the traditionally accepted boundaries of the tourism industry as they strive to satisfy the increasing demands of the fragmenting market.
- New product development in heritage tourism will be characterized by well-researched, innovative and imaginatively interpreted and promoted products tailored to the requirements of particular segments and/or specific sites. This could potentially involve the development of ‘heritage of ideas’ tourism products through a process of indirect transformation of the environment.
- The products are more likely to be characterized by images of and/or links with visual media and differentiated from competitor offerings on the basis of superior design and quality, on entertainment, fun and spectacle value, and on value for money rather than on dimensions such as authenticity and/or educational worth.

Conclusion

Heritage interpretation is as much a product of contemporary interest as of past history and represents images of a preferred past. As post-industrial heritage tourism markets mature and tastes become increasingly more sophisticated, nostalgic affection for an increasing number of topics from the past and the demand for new, differentiated heritage products will continue to grow. Increasingly, the superstructure of media images of place is playing an important role in enhancing the visitor experience of destinations, simulacra are accepted in the spirit of spectacle and tourists are provided with the hyperreality they seek.

Manchester’s 'Hollywood of the North' tour is a postmodern 'heritage of ideas' or images that reconstructs the city’s image in its cinematicographic past and present. The visitor’s direct and indirect (cerebral) perceptual experience consists of a sequence of framed images from the window of an alternative media-themed heritage coach tour to the actual cinema screen, with the latter pervading, mediating and focusing the entire experience. The tour could be open to criticism because of the superficial subject-matter and its neglect of certain aspects of heritage that are perhaps more worthy of inclusion from an academic perspective. However, the nostalgic pastiche of factual and anecdotal material using a wide range of historical and contemporary references and the imaginative interpretation of predominantly film and television material do provide a new and somewhat refreshing perspective on Manchester’s urban heritage and a positive, more romantic image for the city. They epitomize new product development in a 'new tourism’ environment characterized by a fragmenting market-place, flexibility and diagonal integration, and represent the coming of age of urban heritage tourism as a postmodern media image experience of place.

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