

# *Narrations and Imaginaries in Tourism*

## Imaginaries in Tourism

Università degli Studi di Bergamo  
6/12/2023

Milos Nacic  
University of Belgrade – Faculty of Political Sciences  
[milos.nacic@guest.unibg.it](mailto:milos.nacic@guest.unibg.it)

# Topics of the lecture:

Imaginariness in Tourism

Imagining Spaces in Tourism

Imagining People in Tourism

# Stage for Tourism

Where does the world of travel take place:

Outside of familiar, known, experienced

In spaces yet to be discovered

(discovering is not on/off switch but process. We discover by means of travel, food tasted, people met, by experiencing logging, climate, etc)

# Stage for Tourism

Stage for Tourism is the stage of the unknown

Unknown → Percieved known  
↑  
Imaginaries

Tourism is based on a promise as it is a projected future activity at the time of the payment.

TRUST AND IMAGINED

# Imagining throughout the ages



Download from  
**Dreamstime.com**

This watermarked comp image is for previewing purposes only.

ID 24753406

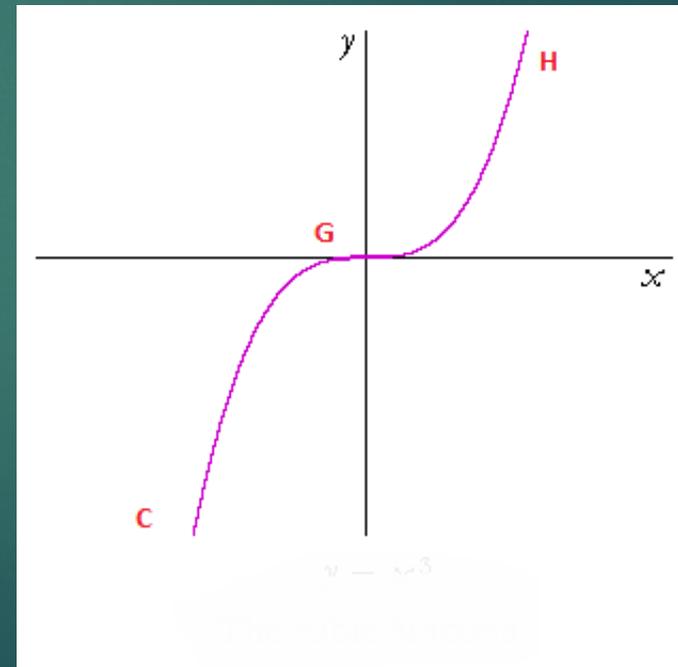
Fotokon | Dreamstime.com

# Imagining throughout the ages

Placing the unknown in the binaries

Distance from „US“ in space and civilization

Faraway lands and peoples  
as the deviation from the norm



# Imagining throughout the ages



# Imagining throughout the ages

Spatial component meant deviation from the „imagined“ norm.

The greater the distance, the better/worse the lands and peoples were.

Underworld, Islands, Sea shores etc. were the locations where Ancient Greeks placed monsters, horrendous deities and other semi-human creatures, dividing them spatially with the norm.

# Imagining throughout the ages

## Real people – Persians

Same as mythical creatures – Centaurs and Amazons

The image of Persians as enemies, but also feeble, prone to dictatorships, irresponsible, lustful and cowardly helped not only firm the opposites that were described to the Ancient Greeks, but to firm the imaginaries of spatially distant lands and peoples that endure until this day.

# Imagining throughout the ages

## Real people – Persians

Rich in material wealth

Lazy

Lacking the virtues of „civilized“ men and women

The lands of East → older societies and wisdom  
accumulation

# Imagining throughout the ages

## Not only Greeks

Envisioning the strange, unseen, unknown and attributing it with our own desires, conflicts, unresolved tensions and other internal personal or group characteristics is inherent to humans of the western thought, and not only.

El Dorado – City of Gold

The lands of the Holy Grail

Biblical lands

Utopia



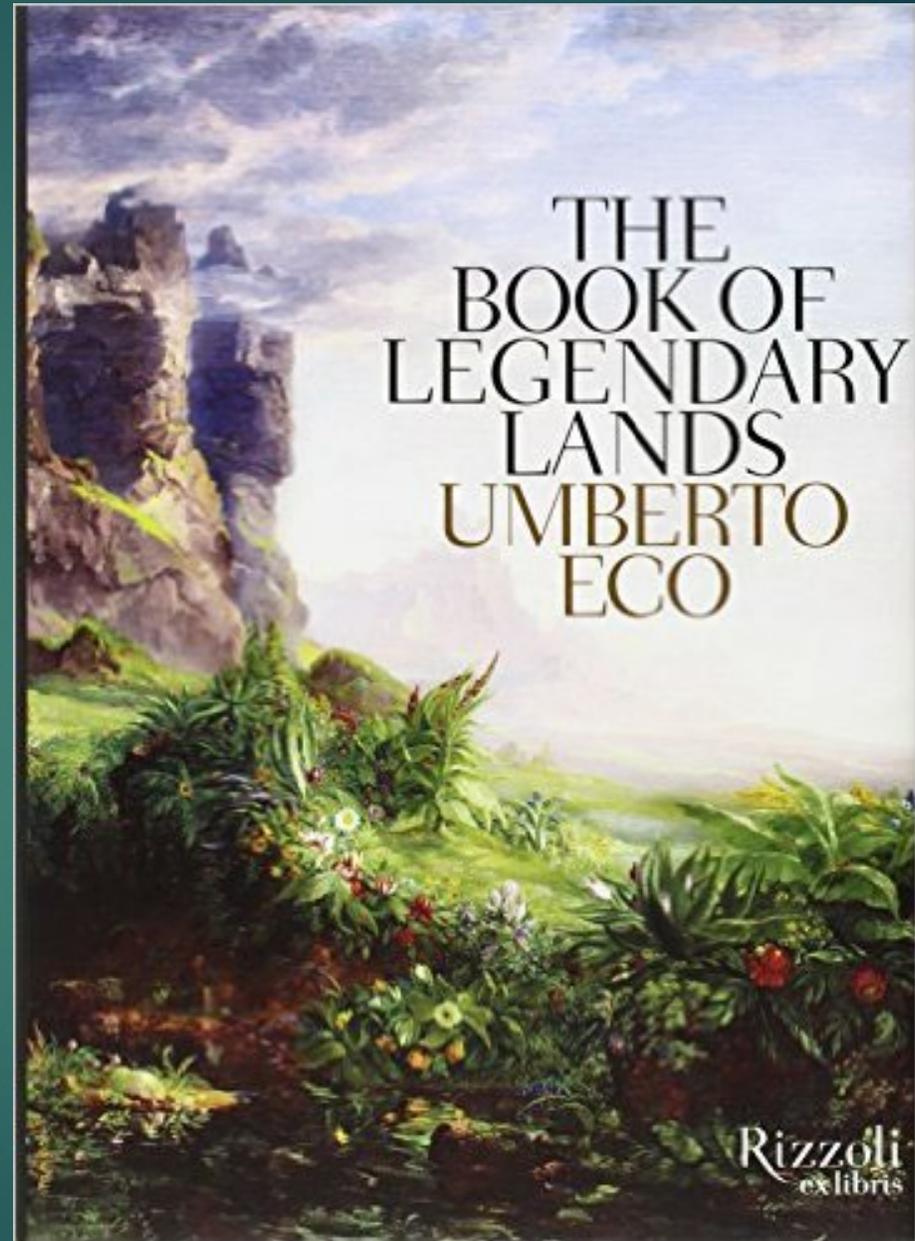
Imaginaries always come from the lack of information / knowledge

Imaginations always reflect those who imagine than the imagined.

It reveals hidden tensions, conflicts, fabrics of society or a person imagining.

Imagination impact in real worlds.

Knowing the genealogy of imaginations enhances the strenghts to confront them.



# Imagining throughout the ages

## Middle age



Lack of knowledge

Dominance of master narrative



# Imaginarities in tourism

Imaginarities of Spaces

Imaginarities of People



Imaginarities of processes, activities, material culture

# Imaginarities in tourism

## SPACE

Importance of space in tourism:

- 1) Inherited properties of space (Mountain – SKI)
- 2) Constructed properties of space (Eating, Drinking, Walking, Bicycle-riding)

**Tourist imaginaries represent a specific sector of the overall worldview of individuals or social groups concerning places outside their primary residence where certain types of leisure activities could take place.**

# Imaginarities in tourism

## SPACE

Spatial imaginaries - the potential of a place as a tourist destination

Process of relating meaning to certain spaces, rendering them suitable or not for personal/group touristic participation.

Create desire

Render the place attractive

Make travel plans concrete (selection of the place & activities on site)

Reduce the „distance“ to the destination

# Imaginarities in tourism SPACE

Make transition between:

- 1) Here and there
- 2) Familiar and Exotic
- 3) Known and Unknown

**Without a tourist  
imaginary to select  
among the whole  
range of desirable,  
attractive or  
challenging  
destinations, there can  
be no travel plans.**

# Imaginaries in tourism SPACE

Imaginaries are not homogeneous:

Class, Gender, Background, Religion, Bodily abilities...

Master-narratives → Imaginaries

Adaptation  
for  
appropriate  
audiences

**'Nightmare. My holiday is ruined':  
Western tourists complain that death  
of Thai king has spoilt their holidays as  
all nightlife is shut down for a month  
and full moon parties cancelled**

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3838673/Western-tourists-complain-death-Thai-king-spoilt-holidays-nightlife-shut-month.html>

Imaginarities in tourism

SPACE – expectations vs. reality

[http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel\\_news/article-3498662/Expectation-vs-reality-Great-Wall-China-Thailand-s-Maya-Beach-holiday-spots-don-t-look-like-brochure.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel_news/article-3498662/Expectation-vs-reality-Great-Wall-China-Thailand-s-Maya-Beach-holiday-spots-don-t-look-like-brochure.html)

# Imaginaries in tourism

## SPACE

Destination in 3 categories:

1) Terra cognita – known spaces

2) Terra intimidus – known, but avoided (except for niche tourists, who do it for thrill and risk)

3) Terra incognita – places and regions unknown to tourists. Some may be potentially attractive and some become big attractions. It is the potentiality of these sites for tourist consumption that oftentimes leads tourists into certain destinations.

# Imaginaries in tourism

**SPACE** – Terra cognita – known spaces

Spaces exclusively for tourists

Known by all participants in tourism

- 1) Hotels
- 2) Central squares
- 3) Theme-Parks
- 4) Shopping-malls

**These are the places most often featured in book guides and included in all guided tours and package holidays**

# Imaginarities in tourism

**SPACE** – Terra intimidus – avoided spaces

Spaces known by travellers, but often avoided

- 1) Risk
- 2) Harm
- 3) Bodily or physical discomfort

**Small number of tourists flock to such places in search of thrill, excitement and risk.**

# Imaginarities in tourism

SPACE – Terra incognita – (yet) unknown

Places and regions not yet discovered by travellers

Carry potential for becoming tourist attractions

Such a potential is crucial to destination making process

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g\\_eUoFMceA8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_eUoFMceA8)



# SOVIET BUS STOPS

LIMITED EDITION PHOTO BOOK BY CHRISTOPHER HERWIG



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5bIVHx\\_VNE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5bIVHx_VNE)

# Imaginarities in tourism SPACE

All-inclusive package - Terra cognita is dominant



Tailor-made travel packages - Terra incognita is  
dominant



# Imaginaries in tourism

## SPACE – Invented places

Network of imaginations → invention of places

Sourced in imaginaries shared on a larger scale

Existence based in group/cultural imagination

# Imaginarities in tourism

## SPACE – Invented places

Sherlock Holmes Museum in London

Address modified to suit the needs of an imagination

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ME09Rq1dmGM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FH4X0u56wk>

# Imaginarities in tourism

## SPACE – Invented places

Zhongdian → „Shangri-La“

Shangri-La is fictional land from 1933 novel Lost Horizon by James Hilton

Officials did it in order to enhance the tourism in the area.



# Imaginaries in tourism

## SPACE – activities

To imagine a space is to imagine what could be done there. No imagination is free of activities.

Seaside resort – desirable and forbidden activities

Imaginaries of a place go beyond the empty neutral space, space that is in vacuum. It also stretches further to include the practices that are associated with such spaces in imaginaries that always come from certain cultural ethos. This is why we imagine the countryside or the mountainside or the seaside also by imagining activities associated with these spaces.

Imagining space is imagining possibilities and constraints

# Imaginaries in tourism

## SPACE – cities as museums

Much of the imaginaries in tourism revolve around „old“

Cities are becoming museums to themselves.

Kyoto, Bruges, Bergamo.

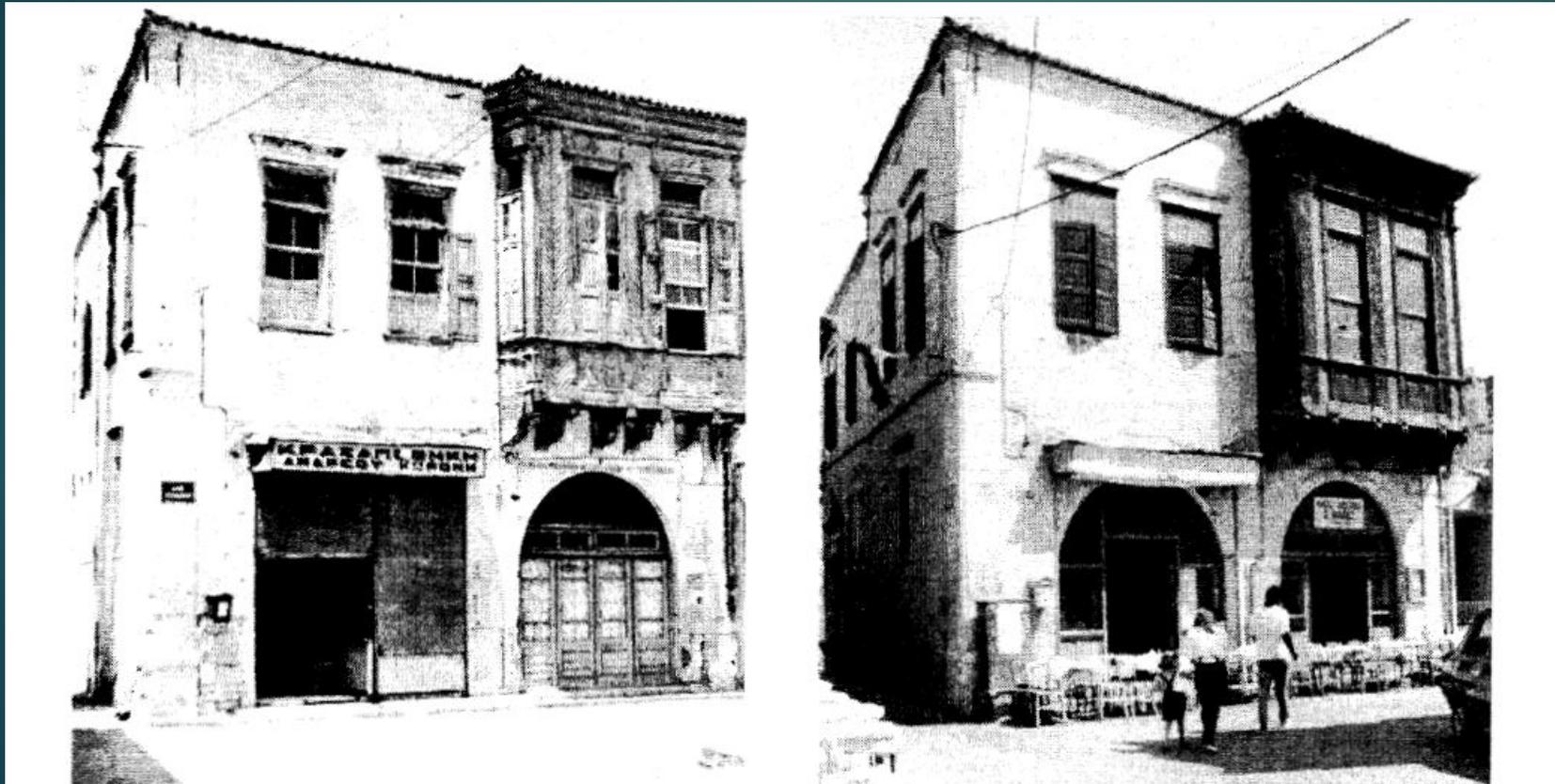
Architecture and Ambience – remaining old.

# Imaginaries in tourism SPACE – cities as museums



Street music, Trieste, Italy - S. Deepak, 2011

# Imaginaries in tourism SPACE – cities as museums



Michael Herzfeld - A Place in History: Social and Monumental Time in a Cretan Town

# Imaginarities in tourism

## SPACE – Wilderness

The absence of humans means purity.

Mathematical distance vs. Cultural distance

Wilderness in vicinity vs. Far away familiarity

Human influences often include cellular phone coverage, paved roads, renovated or contemporary architecture, sounds of motor vehicles, and above all presence of other tourists.

Paradox situation in which travellers require safety and accessibility without wanting to sense any of the integral parts of such requirements.

# Imaginarities in tourism

## PEOPLE

Imaginarities are not made up in thin air

They are products of everyday individual experiences and globally circulated images in which upbringing, education and class/gender/race identities account for much of the formation.

Tourism imaginaries: shared representations + tangible and intangible images (souvenirs and dances for example)

# Imaginaries in tourism

## PEOPLE

### False divisions: tourists and locals

investors

travel industry staff

sellers and purveyors

technical & business  
experts

gastronomy

media

workers in tourism

owners

uninvolved residents

entertainers

NGOs

religious officials

# Imaginaries in tourism

## PEOPLE

Duality does not come in groups *Tourists* and *Locals* but between each members of diversified stakeholders on the destination

Tourist guides aligning themselves with tourists and not locals.



Gilles Nicolet's photograph of Barabaig people with tusks borrowed from the museum. NG issued an appology.

# Characteristics underlying tourist fantasies

## 1) Overcoming of monotony

(overcoming meaninglessness of everyday life with more satisfying experiences—escapism and the desire for exoticism or difference)

## 1) Boosting of personality

(ego-enhancement, leading to the accumulation of symbolic capital)

Desires are not internalized personal wishes but part of widely shared imaginaries that are articulated through constellations of social practice and media.

# Suggested reading

