

The social construction of the image of Girona: a methodological approach

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Abstract

This paper is based on the study of the image emitted of a cultural destination, which in this case is the city of Girona in Spain. The research aims to determine what is the socially constructed image of the city. We propose a new methodology that can be applicable to other destinations of similar characteristics. The study is based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the images (illustrations, photos and texts) that appear in the tourist guide books. It is suggested that a sequence of images appear with roots in a Romantic perception to the more complex visualisation of a post-modern period.

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1. Introduction

The idea of tourist image has been subject to various conceptual approximations based on diverse perspectives. However, some topics are becoming intrinsic to the definition of image: and authors such as Crompton (1979), Kotler, Haider, and Rein (1994) agree that image is the set of beliefs, ideas, impressions and perceptions that we have mentally constructed of a place. In other words, they are the mental structures (visual or not) that integrate the elements, the impressions and values that we project onto a determined place; and are based on a series of more or less material knowledge that we have about places, and on a series of perceptions of a more emotional and affective nature.

Miossec (1977a) differentiates three possible categories of images. The first are universal images. Some places have created a very solid image that has been installed in the collective imagination. Tourism is

basically fed by these kinds of images. They are stereotypes with a solid, historic under layer. The second are induced images. Images created by marketing with the explicit desire of associating a territory with a specific image. The third are accidental or ephemeral, in other words, they are formed in an unconscious way and rooted in a specific event.

Whatever they are like, universal, induced and ephemeral images are part of what may be termed transmitted images. The images reproduce signs with a meaning that has been socially constructed and disseminated. Therefore, there is a transmitter that, consciously or not, creates a certain image of a place. It transmits concepts, attributes, values, impressions, smells, words and visions that shape the image of an area. This study consider the images and image generation induced by tourist guides.

Images are individual perceptions, subjective introspections that are constructed in the mind of the visitor. In other words, images provide meanings that the tourist interprets based on his own perception conditioned by his psychology, anthropology, geographic, culture and own family setting (Mackay & Fesenmaier,

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1997). Thus, an important distinction needs to be made between perception a priori, perception in situ and perception a posteriori.

Perception a priori is the mental construction an individual makes of a place without having a physical connection with the place. This is a component of the tourist experience. Tourists are travellers before the journey. Tourists have already visited the place before they physically visit it. Therefore, in many cases, tourists do not get to know an area, but get to re-know it.

Perception in situ is a key moment in the tourist experience, because it contrasts what we have imagined with what we are perceiving. Tourists never arrive with a null perception; as noted, their presence is preceded with a previous image. To what degree is tourist experience mediated by this image? To what degree do tourists see what they see or what they should see?

Finally, some studies are starting to place the emphasis on a posteriori perception. The tourist experience does not end when the journey home starts, but tourist areas are consumed in the place of origin after the trip. Photographs have precisely this function: they capture a moment which is of an ephemeral nature, to be able to consume it in our daily lives.

In short, the tourist image is, at the same time, a subjective construction (that varies from person to person) and a social construction, based on the idea of collective imagination. Thus, two kinds of variable are interrelated, on the one hand, the cognitive variables (that add objective and material elements) and, on the other, the affective ones (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

This article is based on the study of the image emitted of a cultural destination, which in this case, is the city of Girona, Spain. The research, therefore, aims to determine what the socially constructed image of the city of Girona is, based on a proposal to create a methodology that is applicable to other destinations of similar characteristics.

2. Methodology

From one perspective, the image of a place is subject to a process of change and continuity. In other words, there exists the theory of Lerivray (1975) and Poutet (1995) who consider that the tourist image responds to romantic ideals set in the 19th century; but, on the other hand, it is possible to support the theses of Miossec (1977b), Martínez, 1996 and Tresidder (1999), who consider that the construction of image also depends on certain processes of transformation.

Therefore, the study is based on the hypothesis that tourist images were basically constructed in the 19th century, with the arrival of the romantic traveller, and have lasted to the present with some changes that have modified or complemented these universal images.

2.1. Study site

Girona is a small city (with approximately 100,000 inhabitants), 90 km north of Barcelona and 30 km from the Costa Brava, one of the tips of the so-called Mediterranean Arc. It is notable for its historical-monumental value, as it brings together, in the small perimeter of its old mediaeval city walls, the weight of more than 2000 years of history and a rich and varied artistic and cultural heritage, which includes the Cathedral of Santa Maria, the old Jewish Quarters and the incorrectly named Arabian Baths.

In recent decades, the city has become an important centre for cultural tourism. According to data provided by the Tourist Information Office, in 2002, the city received more than 140,000 national and international visitors, with a clear predominance of French and British tourists.

Thanks to its characteristics and specificity, Girona is considered an archetypal city of Spanish cultural places, which explains its selection as the setting for our study.

2.2. Resource and sampling

The source of data is the tourist guide books. These guides are an efficient instrument in the process of reconstructing the tourist image. In the first place, they act as image creators. At the same time, they are transmitters of images that already exist. They reflect the collective image. The tourist guides enables analysis of the visual materialisation of the image and, on the other hand, a study of the texts.

The criteria used to select the guidebooks were the following:

- Guidebooks explicitly aimed at visitors, meaning commercial guides, industrial guides or historic monographic guides were not included in the sample.
- Guidebooks solely dedicated to the city of Girona or, in their absence, the immediate geographical area.
- Guidebooks dated during the period of the study: 1850–2003. While the more recent guide books are easily accessible, localising guides from the 1850 to 1940 period required bibliographical research in the Historic Archive of Girona, the Library of Catalonia and the Documentation Centre of the *Institute of Tourist Studies* of Spain.
- The guidebooks were written in several languages (Catalan, Spanish, Italian, French, English, etc.), but the preferred versions were those written in Spanish or Catalan where alternative language versions existed.

The result of this process of selection was 42 publications that were ordered into four periods. This time division was based on a historic study about the

development of tourism in the Girona region (Donaire, 1996), which had been based on work by Harvey (1989) and Urry (1990) (Table 1).

The first period (1850–1899) coincides with the Romantic period, the period of the “birth” of the contemporary tourism, and the appearance of the first travel guidebooks. Artisan tourism (1900–1949) preceded mass tourism and was a transcendental phase, as at this moment the elements of the romantic image of the previous period were consolidated and disseminated. The third period is the Fordist (1950–1979), characterised by the appearance of mass tourism and the growth of the coastal destinations. Finally, the post-

Fordist period (1980–2003), which coincides with the change in the political organisation of Spain, was born from the crisis of the Fordist model which enabled a renewal of tourist products and of the very image of the city (Table 2).

2.3. *The method*

An exhaustive review of the various studies on tourist image published over the last 20 years showed the lack of agreement in the methodological proposals suggested by the diverse authors. Studies based on quantitative

Table 1
List of documents used for the study

Year	Guide name	Author	Edition
1853	Gerona Histórico-Monumental	Narciso Blanch è Illa	1st edition
1862	Gerona Histórico y Monumental	D. Narciso Blanch è Illa	2nd edition
1866	Guía Cicerone de la Inmortal Gerona	Enrique Claudi Girbal	1st edition
1885	La Inmortal Ciudad	J. Narciso Roca	1st edition
1905	Guía Ilustrada del Tourista de Gerona	Ignacio Fius	1st edition
1910	Gerona	Sociedad Atracción de Forasteros	1st edition
1911	Guía de Gerona y su Provincia		1st edition
1912	La Provincia de Gerona	Alfredo Opisso	1st edition
1913	Guía Michelin España	Sociedad Anónima Michelin	
1914	Guía de Gerona y su Provincia	Esteva, Montsalvatge, Pla, Ibarz	2nd edition
1921	Gvidlibro de Girona		1st edition
1925	Girona	Carles Rahola	1st edition
1929	Gerona y sus Monumentos	Carles Rahola	1st edition
1931	Guía de Gerona	Ramón Rodríguez Grahit	1st edition
1946	La Provincia de Gerona	Joaquim Pla i Cargol	2nd edition
1947	The Handbook of Spain	H. Williamsonne	1st edition
1949	Guía Comercial, Industrial y Turística de Gerona y su Provincia		1st edition
1951	Itinerarios		1st edition
1957	Guía Turística de Gerona y su Provincia		1st edition
1958	La España del Este	Pierre Deffontaines, Marcel Durliat	1st edition
1960	Guía Intern.de Gerona y su Provincia y su Costa Brava		3rd edition
1961	Guía Turística de Gerona y su Provincia		7th edition
1962	Guía Turística de la Provincia de Gerona	Luis Solá Jover (dir.)	1st edition
1965	Guía Turística de la Provincia de Gerona	Luis Solá Jover (dir.)	2nd edition
1966	Gerona	Joaquim Pla i Cargol	1st edition
1969	Rutas. Guía Turística de Gerona	Joaquim Gironella Garañano	5th edition
1974	Guía de Gerona y Nomenclator de Municipios	Vicente Aransay Sierra (ed.)	1st edition
1977	Gerona	Mariano Oliver Alberti	1st edition
1979	Girona Vella	Jaume Marquès i Casanovas	2nd edition
1981	Guía de la Girona Monumental	Narcís-Jordi Aragó	1st edition
1985	Conèixer Girona	Ajuntament de Girona (ed.)	Brochure
1987	Girona	Generalitat de Catalunya (ed.)	Brochure
1989	Girona	Ajuntament de Girona (ed.)	Brochure
1989	Guía de la Girona Monumental Girona	Narcís-Jordi Aragó	1st edition
1990	Girona	Ajuntament de Girona (ed.)	2nd edition brochure
1991	Guía de Girona i comarques		1st edition
1995	La Guía de Girona	Ajuntament de Girona (ed.)	1st edition
1997	Girona	Ajuntament de Girona (ed.)	1st edition
2000	Girona Guia del visitant	Joan Moreno, Narcís-Jordi Aragó	1st edition
2001	Girona	Ajuntament de Girona (ed.)	Brochure
2001	Guía Verde Michelin	Michelin (ed.)	
2002	La Guía Verde Michelin	Michelin (ed.)	

Table 2
Distribution of the guides by periods

Period	Number of publications
Romantic Period	4
Artisan Period	13
Fordist Period	12
Post-fordist Period	13

analysis are predominant, to the detriment of those that are based on qualitative analysis.

One of the aims of this research was based around this point: the creation of a methodology that allows a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis is based on the classification and categorisation of the images that appear in the tourist guidebooks, but the qualitative analysis is centred on the contents and a semiotic analysis of the images and texts.

First, was analysed the promotional image as portrayed on the cover of the guidebooks. This image is a summary of the city, the metaphor, the starting point of the image that a destination wishes to project. Visually, it represents the first contact between the visitor and the destination.

Second, complementary images were examined. The complementary images bring together all the other images of the guidebook that are presented by a tourist destination. The study of the 42 guides enabled the identification of 880 complementary images. In this case, a precise selection or a synthesis of the city is not examined; rather a diversity of images shape the initial image we have of a place. The analysis of the complementary images was done using the method of Dilley (1986), who classifies the images into four main themes: (a) landscapes and nature, (b) culture, (c) services and (d) leisure. The importance of the cultural theme in the particular case of Girona (and this would also be the case for other monumental cities) led to eight categories: fragments of the heritage (a capital, a corbel, a frieze, etc.), monuments, museums, monumental sites, tourists “consuming” heritage, cultural traditions, festivals and gastronomy.

Most of these images were assigned without discussion to a category. Only in some cases (approximately 7% of the images), did controversy arise as they could have been assigned to two simultaneous categories, for example a general image of the city and its immediate surroundings or a festival in a heritage setting. In these cases, each image was assigned to a single category, the one that was most explicitly predominant.

The second part of the study emphasised the content of the images and the texts of the guidebooks, based on the interpretation of the signs or symbols, the identification of explicit or implicit messages. The determination

of the meaning of the images, rather than their classification or quantification, can have a strong subjective bias. Despite this, it is clear that the images have a meaning that goes beyond the simple physical form in which they are presented. As stated by Urry (1990): “*The gaze is constructed through signs, and tourism involves the collection of signs. When tourists see two people kissing in Paris what they capture in the gaze is “timeless romantic Paris”. When a small village in England is seen, what they gaze upon is the “real olde England”.* (Fig. 1).

Many authors (Barthes, 1957; Uzzell, 1984, Hopkins(1998a,b), Jenkins, 2003) chose to identify the traditional “myths” that are presented in the images. The methodological proposal suggested follows these lines. A series of oppositions were identified that make clear the tension in the construction of the image of Girona, and by extension, in the image of monumental cities. This is an approach that was partially explored by Urry (1990) and by the post-modernist authors who considered that contradiction and paradox are tools for analysing reality (Minca, 2002). Therefore, the qualitative analysis of the contents is based on the



Fig. 1.

confrontation between an image and its anti-image (old-modern, real-imaginary, romantic-illustrated, etc.). (Fig. 2).

Ten such dichotic pairings were carried out based on a study of the image of monumental cities in Catalonia (Royo, 2002) and images of monumental sites: the old city versus the new city, the Christian city versus the Jewish city, the empty city versus the full city, the fragmented city versus the travelled city, the city of individual consumption versus the city of collective consumption, the grey city versus the city of colour, Girona versus its catchment area, the real city versus the imaginary city, the aging city versus the reformed city, and finally, the romantic look versus the illustrated look. (Fig. 3).

The relationship between the quantitative data and the qualitative data is possible thanks to diachronic study. For each study period, the degree of survival of the traditional image was identified as were the new elements that, at least partially, tinge the image. Both the identification of continuity as well as the elements of change are based on a combination of statistical information and qualitative information. This has enabled validation of the central hypothesis of the study; in essence, the image given of the city of Girona was generated and structured in the Romantic period and maintained without substantial changes over the 150 years analysed. (Fig. 4).

3. Results

As an initial result of the study and based on the hypothesis initially suggested, it can be seen that the image of the city of Girona was created in the 19th century, based on the romantic conception of space and time. During the romantic period, the basic elements of the tourist look were created and what Miossec(1977a,b) calls the universal image was modelled. This romantic



Fig. 3.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 4.

image has shown an extraordinary capacity for survival, despite urban changes, despite the development in the aesthetic appreciation of places, and particularly, despite the change from aristocratic tourism (at the end of the 19th century) to mass tourism (in the second half of the 20th century). (Fig. 5).

However, despite the fact that this romantic conception of the city has lasted over time, each historical period reformulates, deforms, incorporates or blends some of the elements of the universal image of Girona. Therefore, the social construction of the tourist image is the play between continuity and rupture, between the universal romantic image and the new inclusions. (Fig. 6).

3.1. Continuity

The study of the classification of complementary images permits verification of four periods of an unchangeable structure in the organisation of images. First, the weight of cultural images of Girona was compared to the remaining images (see Table 3). Secondly, the cultural images were divided (see Table 4).



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

The basic structure in relative terms stayed constant, around 90% of the images of Girona were cultural images. There was an almost absolute assimilation between the city and its cultural attractions. The remaining categories had an insignificant, or even null, representation. Nature images, which represented about 4.5%, referred to the Devesa urban park, the mountain and the city's rivers. The fact that they linked the city with its municipal and extra-municipal territory showed the importance that natural open areas possess as a reference point in the romantic vision of the world.

Again, the structure of the cultural images is sustained in a constant way during the four periods. In all of them, approximately half the cultural images showed monuments (as isolated or integrated into a scene), a quarter showed fragments of the heritage (a capital, a frieze, an arch, a rose window, the dome of a building, etc.) and the other quarter showed monumental sites. The three main images of the cultural image of Girona during the four periods are "dead" elements, while the images relating to the life of the city (festivals, traditions, tourists themselves, etc.) hardly appear.

From this quantitative interpretation and the study of the images and antiimages (qualitative analysis), six essential elements in defining the universal, romantic image of the city of Girona are identified.

- (a) The first element is the aesthetic conception of the urban landscape itself. From the middle of the 19th

Table 3
Categories of the complementary images (%) by period

	Romantic	Artisan	Fordist	Post-Fordist
Nature	0	4.64	4.07	4.61
Services	0	3.61	2.03	1.61
Leisure	0	2.58	0.81	1.84
Others	0	0.52	0.81	0
Culture	100	88.66	92.28	91.94
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: *Our own statistics.*

Table 4
Cultural categories of the complementary images (%) by period

	Romantic	Artisan	Fordist	Post-Fordist
Monuments	75.0	49.42	42.29	49.12
Museums	0	2.33	1.32	3.76
Sites	25.0	23.84	25.11	26.57
Fragments of heritage	0	23.84	29.07	18.80
Tourists	0	0	0.88	1.75
Traditions	0	0.58	1.32	0
Festivals	0	0	0	0
Gastronomy	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: *Our own statistics.*

century to the present, the guidebooks have been looking at the city with a purely contemplative look, seeking aesthetic enjoyment.

- (b) The romantic image is a fragmented image, in other words, it is a mosaic of pieces, unequal in size and significance. The romantic look rejects the image of a whole and identifies singular pieces. Girona city is a mosaic made up of unequal pieces and the guidebooks are a catalogue of elements of its heritage.
- (c) In the romantic period, the main *sights seen* of the city were fossilised, in other words, the elements that were most emblematic became universal icons, and have been maintained as such during the whole period studied.
- (d) The urban area is presented as a stage for individual consumption. The other tourists are invisible; in fact, the tourist act itself is invisible. The guidebooks address visitors who do not consider tourism as a ritual act based on collective consumption, but as an individual opportunity for communication between heritage and oneself.
- (e) The city outlines an urban area in which the main elements are the religious buildings. The heritage of the city is in essence an ecclesiastic heritage, and the civil elements, the green areas, the streets and the defence features are almost invisible.
- (f) The city projects an image of a grey, damp city, marked by the profile of stone and enveloped in a misty atmosphere, an environment that corresponds in full to the romantic ideals of contemplating the place.

However, there are enough elements that oblige this universal image to be tinged. Each period coincides with a process of re-elaboration, of re-edition of Romantic elements.

3.2. Changes

Paradoxically, one of the most significant changes is the constant variation in the cover image of the guidebooks. While the complementary images were static, the cover image changed according to the differing periods of the study. In the romantic and artisan periods, there was a predominance of the vision of a global city. A whole city in which what is defined as the *skyline* of Girona prevailed. This image was to be replaced in the Fordist period by the image of the Costa Brava. The new form of tourism that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, based on a change of model and of motivation, was to move visitors to the coast. Despite the clear ideological connection that was maintained with the romantic references (idealisation of the natural area), there was a change in the tourist model. The coast substituted the city-capital as far as the summary image

was concerned. The starting point of the destination was no longer the city of Girona, but its coast, that managed to bring together all the values that were desirable to be projected in the new stage it was experiencing (the Spanish tourist boom).

During the post-Fordist period, the element that abounded in the promotional image of the city was that of houses overlooking the river, painted in a very scenographic chromatic way. The intentional *Florencising* of Girona based on reforming the houses overlooking the river and the resulting mirror effect, was to become the new image the destination wished to offer: an image of a living, colourful city. In the same way, it is clear that in the Fordist and the post-Fordist periods, the image of the global city was still maintained, now, though, with a change of angle. The *skyline* of Girona was seen from a new perspective (from south to north). It continued to be the subject of the “gaze”, although from a different point of view.

In addition to changes in the image on the cover of the guides, more intense changes in the two later periods were also discernable. The artisan period (1900–1949) was essentially characterised by the affirmation of the Romantic elements (the extroverted look, the fragmented interpretation of the city, the identification of the Romantic ideals of orientalism, the Gothic, or religion, praise of the past, etc.). Despite this, in this period there was incorporated into the image of the city two new elements that did not appear in the previous period: the Devesa park-garden and the industries. The description of the industrial activity of the city is a residue of the illustrated look and a certain antidote to the image of an unproductive urban area. The second element was the view of the Devesa urban park. If, in the previous period, the Devesa had mainly been an urban park, integrated into the mental plan of the city, now the Devesa was seen with romantic eyes: the water, the corners and fragments or the dreamlike atmosphere were prevalent in its representation as an urban park.

Fordism, on the other hand, implied a more significant change. Fordism tourism was, in fact, a radical rupture from the previous tourist model, as it involved the leap from individual, aristocratic, elitist tourism to democratic, popular and collective tourism. This also involved a transformation of the very concept of tourism, which was more a ritual of socialisation than an exercise of romantic introspection. However, what needs to be underlined is the fact that the changes in the tourist model are much more violent than the transformation of the tourist image of the city. The new tourism takes as a reference most of the elements that make up what is termed the universal image of Girona; the fragmented city, the sights, the religious city, the fiction of the individual consumption of the city, etc.

Despite this, it is clear that the Fordist model also includes new elements: the change of scale (Girona is now a peripheral place on the new Costa Brava that has become the tourist epicentre of the territory), the fragments or pieces of the city are no longer presented in an isolated way but are integrated into scenes, the grey city no longer has romantic connotations, etc.

The Post-Fordist tourist image is an adaptation of the romantic ideals conditioned by the new tourist scene. The most important change of the period occurred with the democratic transition and the institutional decision to change the urban model which obviously had effects on the image of the city that was transmitted. This decision implied the integral reform of the urban centre, a decision for a new city, a recovery of urban centrality and a process of *Florencisation* in the urban intervention of the Barri Vell (the old part of the city), particularly in the showpieces of the houses overlooking the river. Once again, the changes in the territory and in the tourist model are much more evident than the transformation of the romantic image. The particular features that illustrate the universal romantic image of Girona during this period are the following:

- (a) The incorporation of the new city into the tourist images. This is a fragmented, specific presentation, but with a high symbolic value. Within these new scenes, we find the *Noucentista* heritage, the contemporary city, scenes of everyday life, and, most importantly, the eruption of the Jewish legacy into the collective image of the city. The Jewish legacy was, without a doubt, the most significant change in the slow evolution of the image of Girona, because it involved an integration into the hierarchy of the sights of an element that, until that time, had been invisible in previous periods. Yet again, the hypothesis that tourist images are social constructions that are explained by social and political contexts is valid.
- (b) The second transformation was the gradual appearance of tourists in the images themselves. Visitors became part of the tourist image itself: tourists “got into” the tourist images. This process coexists with a clear heritage conception of the religious elements that have now had their spiritual connotations removed. It can be said that in the post-Fordist period, tourism burst into its own image and became integrated in its contents.
- (c) The third and final element to highlight is the re-reading of the city: From the grey city to the chromatic city. The most important metaphor is the play of colours of the houses overlooking the River Onyar that reject the previous greyness. The *Florencisation* is also a vindication of light, of the Mediterranean look, of opening, of the new city, in

short, overcoming (here as a result of the territorial changes) the grey city of the Franco period.

Therefore, the image of Girona is the result of tension between the survival of the traditional, romantic models and the incorporation of the new pieces in each of the successive periods, in a complex production of change and survival.

4. Conclusions

This analysis of tourist images (the illustrations, the photos and the texts) detects a series of structural features of Girona (its cultural condition, the singular nodes, the pre-eminence of the city—monument, etc.) that do not change over time. Since their formation in the romantic period, these characteristics of the image have lasted despite the transformation of the city and of the visitors themselves. There are, however, some partial modifications, such as the passage from the fragmented city to the city as a site or the consolidation of the marketing of the heritage, that demonstrates at the same time a slow modification of some elements of the tourist image of the city. Change and continuity. This is the tension that prevails in the historic process of the tourist image of Girona. This conclusion validates the contributions made in this field by authors about different geographical areas, such as Cazes (1978) in his classical study on the Third World, Lerivray (1975) in the analysis of the Michelin and Hachette guides, Poutet (1995) for the case of Spain or Donaire (1996) in his study on Tunisia.

The implications of this affirmation on the management of tourist destinations are evident. Most places are “prisoners” of their own images, which have a very old conception phase (the 19th century), in such a way that the changes in the management models, the kind of visitor or the changes in the physical area itself only partially modify the old topics. It is clear that these statements only refer to the image given and not to the image received (which depends on other factors). Despite this, there is a certain link that is more or less tinged between the images perceived and the images given (Jenkins, 2003).

This article was based on the tension between images and anti-images and between classification and interpretation. The first provides objective and concrete numerical information that is easily comparable, while the second offers a more complex and in-depth reading. The combination of the two sources of analysis can be combined based on adiachronic study that enables a comparison between elements that change and those that survive. Although the study is based on the city of Girona, and therefore its immediate use is centred on monumental cities, the methodological procedure can be used for other non-cultural destinations.

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