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Globalisation Gangnam-style: The domination of Gangnam-style in touristic online representations

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Abstract

This article presents cultural globalisation as a highly uneven and selective process, seeing that the exact nature of this “selectivity” of which cultural elements become globalised has not been intensively studied yet. In the case of online representations of places for the purpose of attracting tourists, certain place-schemata are selected to represent the destination and become globalised, while others are left behind. This study set out to analyze what global processes have allowed the Gangnam-style representation of the Gangnam district in Seoul to dominate its touristic online representation, while traditional heritage of the district which includes a UNESCO heritage site has become subsumed in terms of importance for representing the district online. The article draws on scholars of cultural globalisation such as Appadurai (1990), Harvey (1990) and Ritzer (2002) as well as empirical findings around Gangnam-style and the Gangnam district to analyze these processes of selective globalisation. We found that Gangnam-style becomes easily globalised through its fluid nature, being able to freely move through space and time, as well as being largely devoid of distinct content, which renders it more feasible for purposes of globalisation in this period of the globalisation of nothing. Gangnam-style also represents a certain lifestyle that fits well into global consumer culture, as it promotes consumption and can easily become commoditized. Because traditional heritage on the other hand still travels “slowly” through time and space and is full of distinct local meanings and less easily commoditized, it is a less feasible place-scheme for representing Gangnam online to tourists. We discuss the implication of this drawing on the theory of the Tourist Gaze 3.0, as well as how the findings relate to authenticity and intra-Asian travel.

Keywords: cultural globalisation; online representations; Gangnam-style; heritage; lifestyle; commodification.

The relations between tourism and globalisation have been examined by numerous tourism scholars, whereat a focus has often been set on cultural dimensions of increasing global interconnectedness and flows of information and materials (Cohen & Cohen, 2015; Meethan, 2003; Nijman, 1999; Rowe, 2006). Scholars have also emphasized a tight relation between communication technologies and the movements of cultural elements (Nijman, 1999, p. 148; Sheller & Urry, 2006). The usage of communication technologies is of significant importance for the tourism industry, as the online representations of destinations serve to create unique place-identities and to attract as many tourists as possible (Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2002, p. 286). These online representations of destinations typically consist of a number of stereotyped or simplified aspects of a place or culture and create an individual profile of a destination, resulting in specific expectations of tourists (Kim & Chen, 2015, p. 155). Such stereotyped aspects of place and culture are called “place schemata” (Kim & Chen, p. 157), which “consist of physical, social, cultural and structural information along with purposive and affective attachment of place” (p. 157). In other words, some simplistic views of a place and its inhabiting people are selected and assembled by tour operators in order to establish a particular online representation of a place for the purpose of tourism advertisements.

The South-Korean capital Seoul has experienced increasing tourist arrivals in the last decade, with tourist arrivals reaching an all-time high in August 2014 (Visit Seoul, 2013; Korea Tourism Organisation, 2016). This increase in tourist arrivals occurred shortly after the release of the song “Gangnam-style” from the pop-artist Psy, a name that refers to the Gangnam district of Seoul. With over 2.5 billion views on YouTube, Psy’s pop-song can be considered a global social media sen-

sation. The increase in tourist arrivals shortly after the publication of the song suggests a relationship between the increasing international popularity of Gangnam due to media representations and the growing interest of tourists travelling to South Korea (Visit Seoul, 2015). The Gangnam district that the song refers to is considered ultra-modern, with its shopping and entertainment areas as main attractions for residents and tourists. Psy’s pop song has become a flagship example for the emerging lifestyle and culture of Seoul’s young population as well as the rapid growth in popularity of Korean pop culture (Park, 2015). Following the global success of Gangnam-style, the city of Seoul has taken many initiatives to capitalize on this success and promote tourism using the Gangnam-style representation of the district. Examples for this are the creation of a tourism police force entirely dressed in Gangnam-style uniforms (Cripps, 2013) and the plan to build a statue honoring Psy’s iconic “horse dance” (BBC, 2015). In this BBC news report, Gangnam tourism director Park Hee-Soo is quoted, saying that “tourists can take pictures under the statue and the song will play automatically when you stand there” (BBC, 2015). This illustrates the importance of Gangnam-style to the strategy of the tourism director to promote tourism in the district. In this way, tourists are led to focus more on the Gangnam-style representation of the Gangnam district and Seoul at large, while mostly disregarding the cultural heritage sites that are also present. In other words, Gangnam-style has come to dominate the online representations of the district (Cripps, 2013; Richmond, 2012; Visit Seoul, 2013).

The Lonely Planet describes the district of Gangnam as “associated with expensive real estate and upmarket shopping and partying in chic neighborhoods such as Apgujeong and Cheongdam” (Richmond, 2012). This was not always the case, as Gangnam was considered the least devel-

oped district of the city before the 1970s (Seung-hye & Park Eun-jee, 2012). The district also holds significant heritage sites such as the Samneung Park and Bongeunsa temple. Heritage, particularly built heritage, forms an important reason for tourists to visit a location and is often used to market locations (Yang, Lin & Han, 2010). According to Nuryanti (1996) “heritage tourism offers opportunities to portray the past in the present. It provides an infinite time and space in which the past can be experienced through the prism of the endless possibilities of interpretation” (p. 250). It is generally believed that UNESCO heritage sites in particular are a panacea to increase tourist arrivals at a destination (Yang, Lin & Han, 2010).

In more recent years, scholars in the field have seen a need to focus their efforts on the mutual impacts of globalisation and heritage tourism, noting for instance the impact of the ever increasing spread of free-market capitalist globalisation on the marketing and experience of local heritage, both built and intangible (Park, 2014). These interrelations between globalisation and tourism can hardly be overstated. In the words of McGrew (1992, p. 63 as cited in Park, 2014, p. 122): “In a shrinking world, where transnational relations, networks, activities and interconnections of all kinds transcend national boundaries, it is increasingly difficult to ‘understand local or national destinies,’ without reference to global forces.”

This article aims to contribute to our understanding of the global processes involved in selecting some and disregarding other elements of a local culture for global touristic representations, thereby adding to our understanding of the mutual ways in which globalisation and tourism influence each other to renegotiate global and local culture. To this end, the main research question of this article is “what global processes have allowed the Gangnam-style representation of the Gangnam dis-

trict to dominate its touristic online representation, while traditional heritage of the district has become subsumed in terms of importance for representing the district online?”

Backgrounds of the Article

The following paragraphs will outline the conceptual backgrounds of this article. First, contemporary notions of popular culture and the Gangnam lifestyle will be presented. Second, the uneven and selective character of cultural globalisation will be identified by reviewing major globalisation theories. Third, the concept of “lifestyle” will be examined, and its relation to cultural globalisation will be analyzed. This sets ground for the further study of the selective nature of cultural globalisation using the example of Gangnam heritage and Gangnam-style.

Popular culture and Gangnam lifestyle

Psy’s “Gangnam-style” is a good example of what can be characterized as “popular culture” which is conceptualized as “mass culture” from the people, for the people by Williams (1983, in Storey, 2009). Popular culture is often perceived as a Western phenomenon, however Asian popular culture experienced an immense growth in recognition since the 1990s. In South Korea, this new emerging form of culture is termed hallyu or K-pop, and plays a significant role for the self-understanding of the younger Korean generations (Jin & Yoon, 2014). Although originally regarded solely as an intra-Asian sociocultural phenomenon, K-pop also experiences success outside of Asia. Recently, a “New Korean wave” has been identified and termed Hallyu 2.0, as it is characterized by “the significant role of social media in media production and consumption,” the “penetration [...] in the Western markets” and “its global reach” (Jin & Yoon, 2014, p. 2). Using this description, Gangnam-style can be seen as a quintessential example

of Hallyu 2.0.

The name of the song, “Gangnam-style” refers to the lifestyle that is commonly associated with the Gangnam-district, namely one of wealth, status, consumerism, partying and drinking expensive coffee (Fischer, 2012). In the English translation of the lyrics it becomes clear that Psy describes a typical “Gangnam girl” as “a classy girl who know how to enjoy the freedom of a cup of coffee. A girl whose heart gets hotter when night comes” and himself as the perfect guy for this type of girl (Acuna, 2012). Gangnam-style can be seen as a lifestyle culture in accordance with Hallyu 2.0, which generally popularizes consumerist culture in Korea (Shim, 2006). The notion of lifestyles is becoming increasingly important for self-identity construction (Peters, 2010), so Gangnam lifestyle as part of Hallyu 2.0 popular culture is an element of the construction of collective identity in Seoul. To illustrate this collective identity of the Gangnam district to tourists, the emerging lifestyle of its popular culture is used within online representations of Gangnam. In this article, “Gangnam-style” is used both to refer to the song by Psy, and the lifestyle of Gangnam it represents.

The Uneven Nature of Cultural Globalisation

The study of cultural globalisation has been concerned with the increased mobility of cultural elements across time and space and the intensified interconnectedness between all aspects of social life worldwide (Meethan, 2003, p. 11). In this section, we will illustrate the uneven and selective character of cultural globalisation in order to establish a framework for the understanding of a globalised online representation of the Gangnam lifestyle.

Harvey (1990) examined the social construction of the notion of time and space in today’s globalising world. He suggests that the on-going social and

technological innovations have “generated repeated rounds of change in the fabric of time and space” (Warf, 2011, p. 145) and accelerated the movements of capital, culture, information, materials and people. Harvey describes “the general speed-up and acceleration of turnover time of” (Harvey, 1990, p. 418) culture, politics, capital and materials, and terms this phenomenon “time-space compression” or the “annihilation of space by time” (p. 418). Cultural knowledge about places is hereby unfixed in spatial and temporal contexts and can traverse boundaries to become a globalised aspect of international social reality. Especially intangible cultural elements such as music, dance or literature are highly mobile in combination with the growing importance of communication technologies, and therefore have a high capacity of traversing traditionally restricting boundaries of space and time. Harvey states that human geographers are increasingly concerned with “the whole conundrum of the changing experience of space and time in social life and social reproduction” (Harvey, 1990, p. 432) and therefore establishes a relationship between the time-space compression and cultural constructions of meanings.

The cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1990) also sets a main focus on the cultural dimensions of globalisation and further identifies a strong relationship between the acceleration of culture through media and technological innovations. He relies on the concept of de-territorialisation regarding the establishment of collective identities of groups and questions the traditional idea that the formation of culture and identity is shaped by geographical borders or the nation state. Moreover, he infers that “people and ideas are continuously flowing and coming into contact with each other around the globe” (Ampuja, 2011, p. 291) and establishes media and communication technologies as one of the central constituents of a collective

cultural identity (p.291). He conceptualises this phenomenon with the term “mediascapes” which delineate the global distribution of information, movements of cultural elements and the shaping of images of the world through a global media network (Appadurai, 1990; Jin & Yoon, 2014). The global movement of culture and its implications on geographical imagination of people through global media hereby appears as a major motive in cultural globalisation theory (Appadurai, 1990).

Robertson (2001) and Ritzer and Ryan (2002) identify two opposite movements of globalism and localism, therefore reintroducing the importance of spatial aspects for globalisation, and termed this dual process “glocalisation” (Nijman, 1999, p. 150). “Globalisation may simultaneously lead to dilution of local culture [...] and to a deepening of particularity” (p. 150), so cultural elements of a place can be strengthened and carried out into global social reality on one hand. On the other hand, aspects can be “left behind” and be in danger of fading into oblivion. Hereby, Ritzer makes a clear distinction of cultural forms which are loaded with content and those which are “empty forms that are centrally conceived and controlled and relatively devoid of distinctive content” (Ritzer & Ryan, 2002, n.p.). The authors conceptualise elements which are “lacking in distinctive substance,” illustrate “no local ties,” are “timeless,” “generic” and “dehumanised” (Ritzer & Ryan, 2002, n.p.) as “nothing,” and establish an “elective affinity” (Ritzer & Ryan, 2002, n.p) between globalisation and “nothing.” Hereby, “the basic argument is that globalisation is bringing with it the worldwide spread of nothingness” (Ritzer & Ryan, 2002, n.p). This illustrates that globalisation is an uneven process in which only specific cultural forms, mainly those lacking distinctive content, become accelerated through space and time to become a part of a global reality.

On the other hand, cultural elements with characteristic local and temporal content are “likely to be rejected by at least some cultures and societies because the content is more likely to conflict with [other] local content” (Ritzer & Ryan, 2002, n.p.) and is therefore not as easily globalised.

Harvey’s compression of space and time, Appadurai’s mediascapes as the transmitter and building block of collective cultural identities, and Ritzer’s globalisation of nothing suggest that there is an uneven and selective nature of cultural globalisation. While certain cultural elements are “accelerated in space and time” and become part of the global geographical imagination of a place, other cultural aspects are not picked up by globalisation movements and therefore never become part of this geographical imagination about place. The following will give some examples of cultural elements that appear to exceed traditional spatiotemporal boundaries easily, and others that seem to be more closely linked to spatiotemporal contexts.

The Growing Importance of “Lifestyle” and Its Feasibility for Globalisation

Social identities are increasingly established through lifestyle and consumption patterns (Peters, 2010), so the emerging popular culture related lifestyle of Gangnam can be seen as an important aspect of identity construction in Seoul. The following paragraph defines the concept of “lifestyle” as it is used for the purpose of this article, and establishes a relation between lifestyle and cultural globalisation.

Lifestyles “comprise clusters of everyday practices that are situated in various arenas of consumption and are arranged in relatively consistent and coherent ways” and “work as means to organize a sense of personal identity and self-expression” (Giddens, 1991 in Dobering & Stagl, 2015, p. 452). Consumption patterns therefore be-

come a main aspect of how individuals construct their self-identity, self-understanding and further express their “selves” (Waters, 1995, p. 140). Life-styles therefore aid the construction of a “personally meaningful identity in the context of a collective identity” (Haenfler et al., 2012, p. 5). These consumption lifestyles, like for example vegetarianism, “green” lifestyles and even the emerging Gangnam lifestyle can be acted out by individuals all over the world and only seldom rely on a specific temporal or local context. The creation of a community of meaning (Cohen, 1985 in Haenfler et al., 2012, p. 4) that people identify with is of crucial importance, rather than the identification through mere geographical borders or a period of time (Haenfler, 2012). Of course, spatial and temporal frames are not inherently excluded in the construction of such lifestyle movements, but they play minor roles for the establishment of a coherent lifestyle. In the case of Gangnam-style, the main points of coherence constitute economic wealth, high social status, consumerism and partying (Fischer, 2012), while the specific context of life in Gangnam plays a secondary role.

Even though lifestyles are often part of a modern trend or social movement, they are often not specifically dependent on a temporal frame and can become part of social identity construction in any era, age or generation. Rather than being unique, lifestyles can also be regarded as what Ritzer calls “generic” (Ritzer & Ryan, 2002). The rich and chic consumption lifestyle of the prominent population of Silicon Valley could, in its essence, be related for example to Gangnam-style or “the Rich and Famous” in Dubai. Certainly, these lifestyle movements do involve individual contexts of the areas and eras they emerged in and are not identical, however the essence of a capitalist consumerist culture is comparable within the three-lifestyle phenomena. In the following, Gangnam-

style as a lifestyle will be analyzed regarding its feasibility for globalising movements and its implications for touristic online representations.

Analyzing the Selective Process of Globalising Gangnam

In the following, the selective nature of cultural globalisation will be examined using the example of Gangnam heritage in contrast to the notion of Gangnam-style. First, the fluid nature of the Gangnam-style as opposed to the static nature of Gangnam heritage will be elucidated on using Castells’ theory of flows (2000) and Harvey’s theory of space-time compression (1990). Subsequently, Gangnam-style will be analyzed through the lens of the globalisation of nothing (Robertson, 2001; Ritzer & Ryan 2002). Third, the notion of global consumer culture (Waters, 1995) and lifestyle will be set into relation. At last, the global media will be presented as a new space for the representation of cultural images, which has led to an on-going production of imaginations of Gangnam amongst tourists.

The Fluid Nature of the Gangnam Lifestyle

There seems to be a difference between Gangnam-style and the traditional cultural heritage with regards to their ability to move through space and time, which leads to touristic online representations of Gangnam focusing on the lifestyle movement rather than built heritage. With his concept of the “network society,” in which “informational networks that shape social organizations and relationships of production, consumption, power and experience” (Ampuja, 2011, p. 287) are constantly changing, Castells stresses the importance of global flows of information and materials in globalisation processes. He emphasizes that these global flows “are enabled above all by the new [...] media and communications technology” (Ampuja, 2011, p. 289), which he delineates as

“spaces of flows” (Castells, 2000).

In his work on geographical imagination, David Harvey describes the notions of time and space as socially and culturally constructed realities, which are hence also subject to social change such as the movement of globalisation. He suggests that recently, the movements of information and materials through space and time have been accelerated by technological and capitalist developments of a “space-time compression” (Harvey, 1990, p. 419). Time and space are hereby seen as constructs of social organization and reproduction, through which groups and individuals make sense of their social reality. Now, as Harvey describes technological innovations as one of the main drivers of space-time compression, and Castells describes the global media as a “space of flow” (Castells, 2000), the advantage of the emerging notion of Gangnam-style to the heritage sites becomes apparent. The song “Gangnam-style” as an artefact of popular culture has the capacity to be exhibited in social media, which facilitated a rapid spread of the new self-understanding of Seoul’s young population across a broad range of people all over the world. This ability to move through space and time through the global media as a space of flow renders the emerging lifestyle of the ultramodern city district a suitable element for a touristic online representation of Gangnam. Gangnam-style can therefore be described as a “fluid” cultural artefact, which has the ability to easily be picked up by spaces of flow and become globalised through online media representations.

The older, traditional and built heritage of the city district has hereby moved to the background in terms of touristic importance, as it was not part of the online representations and social media hype responsible for the influx of tourists to Gangnam. Due to its fixed spatial and temporal dimension and its relations to built sites and cer-

tain period of time in the past, Gangnam heritage still “travels” slowly through time and space and has not become part of the modern media portrayal of the district of Seoul. This shows that the way in which online representations Gangnam were constructed is majorly determined by the fluid nature of Gangnam-style, as it became part of spaces of flow of the media and compressed in space and time. Hereby, globalisation is exemplified as a selective and unequal process, because mainly technologically consumable matters are accelerated, while others such as built heritage appear to be more stable and fixed in space and time.

Gangnam-style and the Globalisation of Nothing

Robertson (2001) identified two closely related key topics in globalisation theory, namely that of homogeneity-heterogeneity and the global-local and of particular interest is how these two interrelate (Ritzer & Ryan, 2002). Cultural homogenisation refers to the dominance of the global over the local, leading to a globally homogenised culture, while cultural hybridisation or heterogenization refers to the dominance of the local over the global, which leads to globally hybrid cultures with unique mixes of local and global elements. To what extent processes of cultural globalisation lead to either cultural homogenisation or cultural hybridisation is debatable, and likely the most balanced assessments includes both processes (Ritzer & Ryan, 2002). This interplay of cultural homogenisation and cultural hybridisation can also be identified in our case of the song “Gangnam-style.” Gangnam-style is characterized by a unique interplay of aspects of local Korean culture with well-known tropes of “western” global consumer culture, examples of which are discussed below. The argument here is that the cultural homogenous aspects of Gangnam-style, namely those that fit into global, largely Western popular culture, are

more visible and overpower the culturally hybrid and locally specific aspects. Using the theory of the globalisation of nothing, we argue that this dominance of images that are devoid of distinctive local content have allowed Gangnam-style to become globalised, while the dominance of locally specific and meaningful content makes it difficult for heritage sites to become globalised.

Although set in the specific context of the Gangnam district, the song and video of Gangnam-style very much feature images devoid of distinctive content, and therefore fit Ritzer's and Ryan's theory of the "globalisation of nothing" (2002). The video for instance focuses on scantily dressed women and material wealth, which is a very generic and often used concept in popular music videos (Sommers-Flanagan, Sommers-Flanagan & Davis, 1993), and the song features a few equally indistinctive lines in English, like "hey sexy lady" and "you know what I'm saying" while the rest is all in Korean. It is easy to see how these well-known tropes in global popular culture are not likely to be conflict with local cultures around the world, but rather easily become accepted as they are devoid of distinct content. In its form, Gangnam-style is not unique to the local culture of Korea and the same goes for the lifestyle it represents.

On the other hand, local heritage sites fall into the category of places that are rich in distinct meaning and content (Ritzer & Ryan, 2002, n.p.). Heritage sites are unique, full of local ties and relate to a specific period in time. Local heritage sites of the Gangnam district enjoy a long history of many centuries from being built, partly destroyed and repressed in following centuries and finally being restored and preserved again in later centuries. In order to fully understand their importance for the area and meaning in history, one has to get acquainted with local history and traditions. According to the theory of the globalisation

of nothing, this makes them particularly difficult to become globalised and thus less likely to dominant the online representations of the district that are going to be attracting tourists.

Lifestyle and Global Consumer Culture

According to Kucukemiroglu, Kara, and Harcar (2005):

Lifestyle is how one lives, it is the total image one has of him or herself which is a result of how one was socialized in his or her culture. It includes the products one buys, how one uses them, how one thinks about them and how one feels about them. (p.212)

As discussed earlier, Gangnam-style represents a consumer lifestyle thought to be common for the Gangnam district, namely one with an overt focus on material possessions, outer appearance, night-life and coffee consumption (Fischer, 2012). This lifestyle fits into a global consumer culture, in which "consumption becomes the main form of self-expression and the chief source of identity" (Waters, 1995, p. 140).

This contemporary importance of consumption as a form of self-expression makes Gangnam-style a particularly attractive place-scheme for representing the district, and traditional heritage much less so. As material heritage can less easily be commoditised and consumed (Kockel & Craith, 2007), it can be argued that in highly developed consumer cultures, it has come to play a less significant role for the creation of a local identity and image. Gangnam-style as a celebration of global consumer culture on the other hand is a very appropriate place-scheme for representing the district online to tourists, as it is well equipped for processes of commercialisation, com-

modification and consumption. As one of the largest industries in the world, tourism is a fundamentally capitalistic undertaking, and there are a lot of incentives for destinations to get tourists to come to their location and spend as much money while on location as they can. This makes place-schemata that promote consumption as the core identity of the destination particularly attractive.

At the same time, global consumption culture has also affected heritage as scholars have identified efforts to commodify heritage. According to Baillie, Chatzoglou and Taha (2010) “heritage is increasingly subject to commodification” (p. 51). According to Goulding (2000), this commodification of heritage happens mostly in the context of museums and cultural heritage such as artefacts and costumes. Oftentimes, “only those images of history that have broad market appeal” are presented here in order to create an attractive narrative for visitors and tourists, while this leads to a simplification of the depiction of history as complexities are left out of the discourse (Goulding, 2000). However, regarding the built heritage of Seoul, the level of commodification seems low, as images of these sites do not play a major role in the online representations that are meant to stimulate the “consumption” of Gangnam as a destination by tourists. Similarly, the admission to the Bongeunsa Buddhist temple is free, and for Samneung Park roughly 85 eurocent for an adult (VisitKorea, n.d.; MyDestination, n.d.). This makes it less relevant to speak of the “consumption” of these heritage sites by tourists. All of this is not to say that the quest for authenticity is no longer relevant in tourism, and this problematic is taken up in the discussion.

The Media, Tourists and the Production of Imaginations

After examining the reasons for Gangnam-

style images dominating touristic online representations of the district in Seoul, it is now interesting to analyse the implications this has for tourism in Gangnam and broader social contexts. The rise of globally accessible media has created a new space for the representation of cultural images, which has led to an on-going production of imaginations about the Gangnam lifestyle.

With his concept of “mediascapes,” Appadurai (1990, p. 6) identifies a new, deterritorialisated, virtual space for the flow and exchange of ideas, information and images which evolved due to the on-going of globalisation and the emergence of a “global cultural economy” (p. 6). “Mediascapes [...] tend to be image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements [...] out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives [...]” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 9). These narratives establish imaginations and fantasies about the possible lives of cultural Others and can “become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement” (p.9). Thus, the concept of mediascapes illustrates how beholders of touristic Gangnam online representations are led to construct an imagination of the potential lifestyle of the population in Gangnam. Tourists, who view these representations created by inter alia tourism operators therefore form their expectations of a trip to Gangnam by relying on the presented narratives. The mediascape hereby serves as a created space for the collective construction of an imagination about Gangnam.

This relates to the notion of the globalised tourist gaze as described by Urry and Larsen (2011). The concept of the tourist gaze “orders and regulates the relationships between the various sensuous experiences while away, identifying what is visually ‘out-of-ordinary,’ what are rele-

vant differences and what is ‘other’” (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 14). It is a means of social production and reproduction of constructed social realities and is therefore closely related to the concept of power (p. 14). According to Urry and Larsen (2011), people need to “learn how, when and where to gaze” (p. 12), so the power lies with those actors who have agency to shape the tourists’ expectations and perceptions. In the case of Gangnam-style, online representations which are created by tourism operators like the Lonely Planet (2012) establish a specific image of Gangnam and therefore shape the gaze of tourists. Appadurai’s mediascape is therefore a space where tourism operators and other actors can shape the gaze of tourists into a specific direction, which leads to the re-production and proliferation of the social reality of Gangnam lifestyle in Korea. Urry and Larsen (2011, p. 30) identify that “tourist sites proliferate across the globe as tourism has become massively mediated” (p. 30) and term this phenomenon “the globalising of the tourist gaze” (p. 30). The notion of mediascapes, a newly created space through globalisation, and the emergence of the mediated, globalised tourist gaze therefore illustrate how tourism operators can deliberately shape the expectations and behaviours of tourists through the media before they actually visit Gangnam, and direct the tourists’ gaze onto the lifestyle of the population. This in turn leads to the increasing importance of Gangnam lifestyle for tourism perspectives, as the lifestyle progressively becomes part of Gangnam’s mediated narrative through on-going processes of social production and reproduction of imaginaries about the exotic cultural “Other.” The domination of the Gangnam lifestyle compared to the built traditional heritage within online representations has thus led to a reciprocal production and reproduction of Gangnam-style as a place scheme, and promoted it to be-

come part of the imaginations and expectations of tourists about Gangnam.

Discussion

The focus of this article has been on processes of cultural globalisation by which Gangnam-style has come to dominate touristic online representations of the district. As is the case in much of social sciences, social reality is often endlessly complex and cannot be grasped by just one set of theories alone. Gorton (2010, n.p.) notes “it seems doubtful that one approach alone [...] could capture the whole of social reality in all its multi-textured dimensions.” We have chosen to focus on the cultural globalisation aspect of our case, as it allowed us to analyse the peculiar case of Gangnam which got thrust onto the global scene of awareness because of one infamous song. At the same time, it would be a vast overstatement to say that all tourists traveling to Seoul have become disinterested in its traditional heritage sites. The quest for authentic places is still very important in tourism today, as it has been in the past (Wang, 1999). Generally, what is perceived as authentic is culture in its traditional form, not yet modernised and commercialised, and unlike what tourists are used to back home (MacCannell, 1976). Although this study was not directly concerned with the perceptions of tourists, the findings might suggest evidence that the need for and expectation of authenticity is not ubiquitous and might differ per destinations. If the touristic online representations of Gangnam are any indication to the expectations of the area by tourists, then there might be a shift in what is being perceived as authentic by tourists in the globalised world of today. The lifestyle that is represented in Gangnam-style appears to be perceived as representative of local customs of a very modern Asian city. Part of this may also be that the overwhelming majority (80%) of all tourists visiting Seoul are from within Asia (VisitSeoul,

2016) and the studies on authenticity in tourism have predominantly focussed on Western tourists. A few studies have suggested that tourists from Asia “are generally not looking for object authenticity”, but rather are “searching for signs of technological achievements” (Cohen & Cohen, 2015, p. 31). However, the importance of authenticity in intra-Asian travel requires further scholarly attention.

Another important note is that although it is largely devoid of distinct meaning, the Gangnam-style song and video are intended to contain very specific contents. The video is meant as a caricature of people and lifestyle in Gangnam and was originally expected to “only attract the attention of those who got the joke” (Bedirian, 2016). Ironically, the idea behind the song and video was a subtle social commentary on the emptiness of material wealth and consumption focussed lifestyle that dominates the Gangnam district, as becomes clear when Psy states “Human society is so hollow, and even while filming I felt pathetic. Each frame-by-frame was hollow” in a behind-the-scenes video (Fischer, 2012). Nonetheless, Gangnam-style can easily be mistaken for a silly pop-song, as the social commentary is rather subtle and easily missed, as it is something that is generally “not done in mainstream Korean pop music” (Fischer, 2012). Because this critical message is subtle, it was largely overthrown by the more obvious signs presented in the video, like the sexual innuendo, celebration of material possessions and the “horse dance,” which experienced a lot more recognition (Park, 2015; Fischer, 2012). These more dominant signs can be classified as largely “empty” forms of content and, as we argued, exactly this has allowed Gangnam-style to become part of the touristic online representations of Seoul through what Ritzer describes as “the globalisation of nothing.” In a way, through his

immense popularity Psy has become part of the global consumer culture he intended to ridicule. These two points show that in a globalising world in which global consumer culture dominates and places fight to attract tourists, the quest for authenticity, something meaningful and local is not lost, but rather it easily becomes overthrown by global calls for consumption.

Suggestions for Future Research and Further Implications

Recommendations for future research include a rigorous analysis of the changing touristic landscape of Seoul and the Gangnam-district over time. It is suggested that the same global processes analysed in this article that led to the rapid thrust of Gangnam onto the global scene, resulting in increased name recognition, tourist arrivals and even changes in the visual landscape in the city (e.g. a Psy statue, local police force dressed in Psy costumes), might similarly lead to a rapid change in successor place schemata that might take Psy’s Gangnam-style place. This can have important complications for tourists’ experience as well as tourist-host interactions. Another recommendation for further research follows the more practical concerns shared with Ballesteros and Ramirez (2006, p.677), who write about the importance of taking “symbolic and identity-related factors into account when planning, designing and managing tourist products and destinations”, and thus the call is for more research into the social identities of Gangnam locals and the interplay between local communities and ever changing online representations.

The findings of this article bear implications which need to be considered in future research. Analysing Gangnam-style through theories of cultural globalisation has shown that a lifestyle movement can be accelerated through space and time in a very rapid way. This implies that other

social movements could experience the same process, challenging cultural and economic social practices and ultimately changing patterns of consumption (Wahlen & Lamanen, 2015). Therefore, this review has shown that globalisation theory appears as a useful lens to examine and understand social and cultural movements, especially regarding the notion of “lifestyle.”

Conclusion

We have shown that in the context of touristic online representations of place, certain place-schemata come to dominate others through a number of characteristics of their form. The article has contributed to our understanding of how this happens, by analyzing the global processes that have allowed the Gangnam-style representation of the Gangnam district to dominate its touristic online representation, while traditional heritage of the district has become subsumed in terms of importance for representing the district online. What we have found is that Gangnam-style becomes easily globalised through its fluid nature, being able to move through space and time through the global media as a space of flow. Traditional heritage, on the other hand, still “travels slowly” due to its fixed spatial and temporal dimension and its relations to the location of built sites and certain period of time in the past. Gangnam-style also, both the song and lifestyle it represents, are full of “empty” (Ritzer & Ryan, 2002, n.p.), non-distinctive elements that can be found in popular culture all around the world (Storey, 2009, p. 31). Using the theory of the globalisation of nothing, we showed that this renders Gangnam-style more feasible for purposes of globalisation and domination of online representations than local heritage which is full of distinct content and meaning. Additionally, Gangnam-style represents a lifestyle that fits well into global consumer culture as it evolves around material possession and subscribes

to the notion that consumption determines identity and social status. Gangnam-style thus can be easily commodified, this in contrast to local heritage which is much harder to be commodified and thus may play a less important role in the construction of image, character and attraction of tourists. Lastly, we analyzed a main implication of Gangnam lifestyle images dominating media representations. Here, we found that there are on-going processes of the social construction of imaginations by tourists, whose experience of Gangnam is determined by their gaze, which is in turn constructed through the media representations.

In this article, we did not start from a clear stance on whether cultural globalisation leads to cultural homogenization or cultural hybridisation. Rather, we have shown that cultural globalisation consists of a multitude of complex processes with non-straightforward outcomes. By relating contemporary globalisation theories to the forms of culture presented in online representations of Gangnam, we have analyzed global processes of mediatized representations of places, new modes of consumptions relating to lifestyles and the implications for tourism in Gangnam. In our discussion, we have briefly touched the relation of essentially “empty,” globalised forms of culture to the quest of authenticity, which is still an important aspect for tourism studies. As we have focused on the specific context of Gangnam and the way it is being represented online, we benefited from cultural globalisation theories evolving around the rise of the global media (Appadurai, 1990; Castells, 2000). Further research relating to this topic could benefit from the use of the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006), in order to analyze the movement of tourists in Gangnam and the relations to touristic online representations.

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