

Tactile Tourism: Tourist Attractions to Touch

Abstract

The present article explores tourist attractions that include touch as a significant component of the tourist's place-related experience. We have chosen to label this phenomenon "tactile tourism". The tradition of touching attractions is not new but has been a central part of the experience of specific place-related interests for a long time. However, despite its frequent and often significant presence in tourist destinations, few studies in tourism research study the phenomenon. The article is based on a theoretical line of reasoning which starts from a few concrete examples of different places in Europe where we have identified tactile features relevant to tourism. The empirical material for our discussion has been collected partly through e-mail correspondence with tourist organizations in the places selected for the study and partly through articles in social media and other relevant secondary data. This tactile experience contributes a substantial share of the primary enticement of the attraction and simultaneously invests the place with meaning, which in turn attracts tourists.

Keywords: tourism, tactile tourism, attraction, destination

1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, tourism has seen massive growth, meaning it is now considered one of the major industries in the world (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2022). For continued positive development, however, new knowledge about what makes us want to travel to places and visit their attractions is constantly required. As tourists, we often look for something new, exciting, and unknown, while we also look for a feeling of recognition, familiarity, and security (Blom & Nilsson, 2000). We expect memories and knowledge but also acquire attitudes to the places and their attributes that we visit and experience with our senses (Kim & Kerstetter, 2016). In general, as tourists, we seek experiences that stimulate all our senses, and their mutual interaction creates a complete experience when we get to know places and cultures (see for instance, Urry & Larsen, 2011; Xiong et al., 2015)

Our senses, corresponding with the material and narrative content of the place, construct a feeling of uniqueness and satisfaction through interaction with our knowledge, memories, and experiences. In tourism, aspects such as, for instance, bodily states, pseudo-events, and stimulation of our mental frames of mind are used to attract us to an activity or destination, which also has a cognitive function (Krishna, 2012; Poljanec-Borić et al., 2018). Acquiring a sense of place related to how our bodily senses interact with or have been integrated into places we visit is a vital part of the experience. Historically, the importance of vision concerning our lived experiences of the places we see has been foregrounded in tourism studies. This is not least obvious when the tourism researcher Urry presents an argument in the classic *The Tourist Gaze* (1990a) about the dominant role of seeing for the tourist's experience. Following Urry (1990a) and also the interventions by other tourism researchers such as Crang (1997), Lee (2001), Park and Kim (2018) and Szadziewski et al. (2022), the perceptions of our other senses related to places, landscapes, and encounters are seen more or less as complementary realities in the context. For them, the "significance of the gaze" speaks of the primary sense of creating an experience, but often complemented by the auditory through narrative (Pan & Ryan, 2009).

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An important factor that has influenced the focus on the significance of seeing is that we, as tourists, often wish to verify the place we visit and thus also be able to show others where we are or where we have been. In these cases, the camera (Ryan, 2003) and, even more, today, the mobile phone, with its built-in photo and film features and direct connection with social media, have significantly contributed to promoting the importance of seeing even further.

Sensuous geographies (Rodaway, 1994) are central to experiencescapes and tourism. The fact that our other senses also play a significant role is noted by Obrador-Pons (2007), who observes that a day at the beach engages all our senses, not just seeing, through the warmth of the sun on our skin, the touch of waves when we swim, the sound of waves and other people talking, and the smell of the sea and various sunscreen products. Except for a few examples, however, it is remarkable that our other senses have been downplayed to such a high degree or wholly neglected in tourism research. There is reason to assume, then, that our other senses, apart from seeing and hearing, have much greater importance for us in creating the full experience we often desire as tourists than has been demonstrated in tourism research. There are, however, a few studies in tourism research that indicate that the tourist experience depends on the contextual understandings that accompany an attraction and for which complexity is central (Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Mowl & Towner, 1995; Crouch, 2000; Wang, Zhang, Cao et al., 2019).

Our sensory perceptions of a place are very much linked to what we bring when we encounter an area defined by tourism, the current place information available at the time, and what is present based on what we see, smell, taste, hear and touch. We contend that, in relation to the formation of our personal experiences of places and their attributes, narratives about haptic experiences should also be included and thus given far more attention. This is not least related to the fact that many place-related attractions play an important role as symbols of the value of a place and for which touch is a central aspect of the experience. Previous tourism studies that have touched upon tactile experiences have primarily focused on the development of Virtual Reality in tourism (Cheong, 1995; Alyahya & McLean, 2021) and accessibility for persons with disabilities (Martin-Fuentes et al., 2021; Cerdan Chiscano et al., 2021). Here we can see a lack of tourism research regarding a more explicit focus on our other senses and their importance for creating satisfaction for tourists and attracting and drawing visitors to a specific place while they are travelling as tourists. In the article "The more-than-visual experiences of tourism", Edensor (2018) emphasizes that tourism should be understood to a greater degree as a multisensory practice and contends that tactile aspects should be granted more weight in the tourist's experience of a place. In other words, it is more than just the visual content that contributes to an experience of the tourist location (Hughes, 1995; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). At the same time, the cultural landscape conveys historical and geographical meanings to the specific place, seen as a destination (Relph, 1976).

To avoid the *ocularcentrism* of tourism experience-scapes, we foreground the importance of the haptic dimensions and experiences associated with destinations. The aim of the present article is, therefore, to conceptually highlight the significance of tactile attractions. The tactile experience is spatially arranged in a place based on a tourist-specific experience of that place. Still, the emotional content is simultaneously challenging to categorize, so we have focused solely on destinations that offer tourists a chance to touch well-known attractions. Touch constitutes a vital aspect of the conditions for a visit, alongside a narrative component which is also essential for creating interest, expectations regarding actions, and the tourist's experience. A critical discussion at the general level has already engaged researchers regarding the problem of the relatively one-sided focus on seeing in tourism studies (Graburn, 1995; Jacobsen, 1997; Selännemi, 1999; Edensor, 2018). For instance, Pan and Ryan (2009) stress that there should be a much greater focus on the visitors' five senses compared to what is discussed today to enhance the tourist experience. This line of reasoning is also presented by Agapito et al. (2013) and Mossberg (2007), emphasizing that a prerequisite for creating a positive experience is that all our senses must be stimulated and interact.

However, the present article will not discuss the tourist's considerations, whether the tourist is an active or passive recipient in connection with the visit or the extent to which the event should be seen as an ordinary or extraordinary aspect of the visit to the place in question. We would instead like to regard this type of attraction as a form of play or "make-believe" and as a momentary pleasurable act for the tourist. Examples in our discussion about tactile tourism-related experiences include the sculpture "The Bronze Pig Fountain" in Florence, the statue of Everard t'Serclaes in Brussels, the statue of Juliet in Verona, attributes in the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela and a bronze statue in Bremen.

2. The importance of the senses for understanding the tourist-specific place

2.1. The significance of place

By paying attention to the place-related experiential space of the senses, we expose and contribute to clarifying the tradition and home of an individualized tourist attraction. In connection with a clear representation, both informed and emotional, the intrinsic relevance of the attraction for the tourist is revealed. For instance, Ley (1977) mentions that it is a social product associated with a particular place where our actions concerning this product – the attraction - are expected to signify various meanings to us. Further, in this context, Tuan (1977) has chosen to emphasize the importance of our feelings and sensory perceptions when they focus on our experiences, which confirm the meanings of the attractions when combined. Cresswell (2008) discusses this problem when he says that a place, in its most elementary definition, is a combination of location and the meaning of the place for a specific individual. The same argument is also presented by Aronsson (2020), who emphasizes that a place is fundamentally constructed by people's social actions and interactions and relationships with their material surroundings over time.

This starting point indicates to us that, from a tourist perspective, it matters that there is, on the one hand, the symbiosis between the intentions related to the attraction and, on the other, between those intentions and the general demand that tourists desire for an attraction to be successful (Ćorluka et al. 2021). An essential factor in this context is how the place, with its various attributes, is marketed to the tourists (Cherifi et al. 2018). Ward and Gold (1994), Morgan and Pritchard (1999), O'Dell and Billing (2005), and others highlight that it is important for the place to generate a positive image among tourists and that its unique features are foregrounded to be able to create the identity in demand.

Our experiences comprise a combination of impressions we receive through our senses, and the attraction should ideally be considered unique (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Our senses are given different weights depending on what attraction we visit as tourists. At the same time, it is difficult to assess the significance of the different senses concerning each other to establish which of our five senses is predominant in terms of making us feel satisfied and giving us a positive general experience in a specific context. It is likely that the combination of how our senses correspond with each other and to what extent some kind of synergy effect is present provides the basis for how we experience and receive satisfaction from visiting a landscape, a place, or a concrete attribute. Our previous experiences and memories also constitute important components in the context, which contribute to how our experience is construed (Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

This discussion should be developed in the light of what Mossberg (2015) calls experiential space, where the material enactment, which includes encounters with other people, influences our general impression and, in a way, our experience of an attraction. This is also highlighted by Tussyadiah (2014), who claims that tourism is primarily about creating experiences that cater to the different senses of the visitors. Mossberg and Johansen (2006), as well as Helmfalk (2017), have also chosen to emphasize that the more senses are involved in connection with our experience of a tourist-related attraction, the more attractive the message

that we expect will be conveyed will seem, which in turn might influence our inclination to wish to visit that attraction as tourists. From a tourism perspective, place, identity, and storytelling are critical concepts for attracting tourists.

It is impossible to talk about the identity of a place in the singular, however, since areas have several different identities that are constantly changing based on people's various relationships with that particular place (Blom, 2017). The human geographers Tuan (1974) and Relph (1976) have also presented the same argument, and both focus on the importance of an individual's specific feeling in a particular place. This line of reasoning is developed by Tuan (1977), who suggests that our emotional needs enable us to identify with a specific place where our previous experiences provide a foundation for the new experience that we receive from it. This emotional need relates, then, to a combination of the different impressions that we receive through our senses, and we think that the role of the tactile aspect for the value of an experience has so far been relatively overlooked in this context.

2.2. The place-related experiential space of the senses

To better understand the significance of the senses in place-related experiential spaces, we would like to provide a brief overview of previous discussions in this field of research. It is clear that all our senses are co-creators, but we might give one or several senses a particular focus at different attractions. Narratives, visual experiences, smell, taste, and opportunities to touch create an interaction in us which constitutes experiences that we associate with places, attributes, and people we have encountered. In marketing places or a specific attraction from a tourism perspective, it is clear that seeing and hearing are the senses that usually receive attention. Smell and taste are primarily related to culinary experiences, while the experiential value of touch has so far attained relatively little attention in this context. As a starting point for our discussion, we ask how our senses are expressed in various ways in tourism.

The significance of seeing for our experiences when we assume the role of tourists is important, and seeing is one of our five senses foregrounded in the tourist industry (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Urry (1990b) also stresses this fact in a discussion about the meaning of visual impressions when we consume what can be called attributes or features of landscapes, specific places, and individual attractions. The various attributes we receive visually at the same time construct a mental category for our experience and the expectations that we have of a place. Through literature, film, marketing materials, and social media, we encounter geographically situated attributes, or symbols, which generate an identification in our minds centred on the visual (Blom & Nilsson, 2000; Urry & Larsen, 2011; Huang et al., 2017; Salim, 2017). Travelling and visiting places and cultures different from our everyday environment have always been closely related to seeing in the field that can be defined as tourism. The attributes or symbols our gaze focuses on represent a place that offers the visitor an identity-related association rather than a focus on the attribute or character (MacCannell, 2013). In this context, MacCannell also highlights that as tourists, we do not only regard, for instance, San Francisco as a city in more general terms, but instead, we see Fisherman's Wharf, Golden Gate Bridge, and Union Square, which together form a whole which in turn create a complete experience through synergy in our minds (MacCannell, 2013).

Hearing in the form of different narratives that are significant for our experiences is also an essential component of tourism (He et al. 2019). It often provides us with added value when we as tourists visit an attraction where we, in addition to the visual perception, receive verbally mediated facts, for instance, from a guide, and also have a chance to listen to narratives and anecdotes. This type of narrative - storytelling - is used increasingly as a value-enhancing strategy, both in tourism and in efforts to promote a company's brand and its products. Narrative meaning, seen as a tool for marketing a tourist destination or a specific attraction, is also discussed by Lichrou et al. (2008), who emphasize that the use of narrative constitutes an essential aspect of highlighting the immaterial dimension of an attraction, which thus also enhances its value for tourists.

Gabriel (2000) stresses this process of value-creation as well, who contends that the purpose of storytelling is not only to convey facts but also to create meaning concerning the tourist destination (Mossberg & Johansen, 2006). This can, in turn, develop a sense of participation so that the tourist's imagination, supported by the dramaturgy that has been constructed around the attraction, increases the value of the experience (Stasiak, 2013). Mossberg (2008) moreover notes that a narrative can make it difficult for others to copy the attraction since place, identity, and storytelling create a specific identity.

An example is the statue Manneken Pis in Brussels which also exists as copies in other locations worldwide (for instance, in Broxeele in France and Koksijde in Belgium). Another example is the more miniature replica of the Statue of Liberty on the island Grenelle in the river of Seine in Paris, which is approximately 11 metres high, compared to the original in New York, which is 46 metres high. These examples do not contribute to any considerable "tourist value" for the place, except as curiosities. However, storytelling also provides the visitor with a particular entertainment value, which invokes feelings, meaning, and a sense of context that enhances the product's tourist value (Prebensen et al., 2014; Mossberg & Eide, 2017).

Rodaway (1994) and Porteous (1985/2006) point to the significance of smell as an essential aspect for creating emotions concerning places and establishing a clear identity. The associations that may emerge when confronted with a particular smell can give us emotional associations that relate to something that we experienced a long time ago and that can be reactivated by stimuli (Henshaw, 2013). At the same time, a smell which one person might experience as unpleasant or relatively insignificant may, for another person, initiate an emotional process which instead generates positive associations (Blom, 2016; Xiao et al., 2020). Xiao et al. (2020) call this place-related experience, for which smell is centrally crucial in terms of the associations that it inspires, a "smellscape", which is a concept introduced by Porteous (1985/2006). At the same time, Agapito et al. (2013) stress the difficulty of distinguishing between smell and taste, as these two senses interact.

Our sense of taste is usually related to food and drink experiences and is closely linked to creating tourist attractions where culinary experiences are in focus (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Food and drink as the reason for visiting a region or a specific place are therefore significant factors in the tourist industry. In addition to the visual experience, tourists wish to taste what a destination offers and thus gain deeper insight into the regional and local (food) culture (Hall et al., 2004). However, Hall and Mitchell (2001) point out that it is not only the food and drink as such that constitute the main attraction here, but this type of offer may also include visits to food producers, food festivals, and restaurants, which contribute to the whole experience of the visitor. Franklin (2001) notes that this taste- and place-related expertise means that we are not generally looking for a touristic landscape but rather seek a "taste-scape", i.e., that which we perceive as genuine and the kind of food culture that exhibits a clear place-related identity (Sims, 2009). The significance of food and meals from the perspective of destination marketing is also discussed by Berg and Sevón (2014), who argue that places should consider sensory positioning to a greater extent by offering multisensory experiences to promote a positive brand image. To reach this kind of complete experience, tactile components are essential.

Regarding touch or tactile experiences associated with tourist attractions, this has rarely been the focus of research relevant to tourism. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) point out, however, that tourism needs five-dimensional brands that can represent the real experiences of the tourist. Furthermore, the multi-sensory experience is a crucial aspect of tourism. It generates sensory signatures that create presence, emotions, and identity, which Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) also touch upon in their discussion. Cheong (1995), at the same time, highlights the importance of being able to develop methods for stimulating our senses in connection with artificial "travels", which take place virtually using virtual reality technology (VR). Cheong (1995) further finds it crucial for us to receive a whole experience through VR technology, for users to receive simulation of all our senses, not just visual impressions, to have the full range of experience we demand.

3. Method

The study is based on a conceptual discussion highlighting a few empirical examples to illustrate our argumentation and contextualise the theoretical debate. The premise for selecting empirical material is that the attraction fulfils the well-known criteria and is supposed to be touched by the tourist. The choice of attributes has been made intuitively, against a background of the selected attractions frequently being highlighted in the marketing of each place and thus possible to regard as significant for that place. Contacts have been established with representatives of official European tourist organisations for each area. The material was collected and analyzed in autumn 2021 and spring 2022. The collection of empirical data has been carried out in three different ways to, include data collected from official webpages, data from questionnaires sent to representatives of official tourist organizations, and information about the places and attributes collected through social media to acquire an understanding of how the tactile content is communicated in those channels.

Five places in Europe have been selected: Florence, Brussels, Verona, Santiago de Compostela, and Bremen, all of which have attractions which feature tactile aspects and draw a relatively large number of visitors each year. As the selection of study objects is limited, we have not aimed for the study to be comprehensive or to yield any quantitative results. Instead, the purpose is to highlight the significance of initiating a discussion of the role of the tactile dimension of tourist attractions.

4. Discussion

Historically, touch was not associated with tourism and tourist activities but rather healing. One of the most famous historical persons who practised touch in this sense was the Roman physician Galenos (130 BC), who used massage for medical purposes (Doktorn, 2022). This is just one example of touch being central and, in different ways, foregrounded in historical texts. The Bible is another example of a text in which personal touch is centrally important. To use the contact for various purposes, then, has been a practice for centuries. Above all, this action has been related to prayers for a cure and specific religious ceremonies. Still, it has also increasingly been part of a tourist-related practice. It can be seen as a ritual as the tourist pays a visit and is planned and determined in advance, including conditions and procedures.

In Piazza del Mercato Nuovo in Florence, "The Bronze Pig Fountain" or "Il Porcellino", as the locals call the famous sculpture, is placed in the fountain (figure 1). The Bronze Pig Fountain was designed and constructed (1612) by Baroque master Pietro Tacca (1577–1640) after an Italian marble copy of a Hellenic marble original which Pope Pius IV donated to Cosimo I in 1560 when he visited Rome. Today, the original sculpture can be found in Museo Stefano Bardini in Florence, which means that the sculpture that tourists touch is a copy, but this is, in fact less significant in the context since here it is the place as such that matters (Destination Florence, 2021). Nevertheless, the tourist attraction value of the sculpture is substantial. Large crowds of tourists come to see the statue each year due to the historical narrative and myth associated with it. Tourists are supposed to place a coin inside the boar's mouth, hoping that the coin will fall through the grid and into the well. As the coin hits the water, the person who placed it is supposed to make a wish. There is also a story, related to the sculpture, which says that a woman who wishes to give birth to a son should rub her nose against the boar's snout. Another story has it that those who want to be sure that they will return to Florence should pat the boar's snout, which is visible from the wear on the snout of the sculpture (Florence Inferno, 2021).

An important factor in the successful marketing of an attraction is that it is mentioned in literature and/or featured in films, social media, or in other ways visible, which will increase its status and thus create a clear place-related identity (Blom & Nilsson, 2000). The Bronze Pig Fountain has, for instance been made visible in *The Metal Pig* (1842/2020) by Danish writer H.C. Andersen (1805-1875) and is also present in *The Chamber of Secrets and the Deathly Hallows: Part II* in the Harry Potter series, and in the 2001 film *Hannibal* featuring Anthony Hopkins (Destination Florence, 2021).

Figure 1
The Bronze Pig Fountain



Source: Thomas Blom.

The attraction for tourists to touch The Bronze Pig Fountain in Florence is significant from the tourism perspective since many tourists who visit the sculpture also buy souvenirs, go to cafés and restaurants nearby, and perhaps stay overnight in the city. There are no official figures for visits to the sculpture as such. According to statistics, however, Florence had 15.8 million overnight stays of tourists in 2019 (Statista, 2021a). Therefore, it can be assumed that many of the tourists who visit the city also visit The Bronze Pig Fountain. We think this assumption can be substantiated using the response that we received from Touristinfo Firenze (Touristinfo Firenze, personal communication, 2022) regarding our question about people's interest in visiting the statue: *"I confirm: it is one of the most popular attractions"* and *"It has always been very popular. Still, it seems that it's constantly increasing"*. Furthermore, in response to the question of how the statue is used in marketing, the following information was provided: *"We used it as a logo to promote the Museo Stefano Bardini (one of the Municipal museums, where the original version is kept)"* and *"It is probably one of the most famous statues of Florence"* (Hidden Italy, 2022).

As for the number of visits per year, the Florence tourist organization informed us that *"we don't have statistics on this. But I confirm: it is one of the most popular attractions"*. Notably, the attraction has become increasingly popular recently, which is established as follows: *"It has always been trendy, but it seems that it's constantly increasing"*. This is somewhat surprising, not least since the sculpture is not foregrounded in the general marketing of the city but is used more specifically for Museo Stefano Bardini, which can be seen in the following quote: *"in some occasions, we used it as a logo to promote the Museo Stefano Bardini, one of the Municipal museums, where the original version is kept"*.

Everard t'Serclaes (circa 1320 - 1388) in Brussels is considered to have been significantly involved in expelling Flemish troops from the city and has been regarded as a liberator of Brussels in 1356. t'Serclaes was

honoured with a statue sculpted by the artist Julien Dillens (1849–1904), which has been possible to view at the entrance to the street Rue Charles Buls from the square Grand Place (figure 2) since 1902. Over time, a narrative has developed that the statue brings luck to people who touch it and makes their wishes come true. During World War I, touching the statue's right arm through caressing it was seen as a sign of luck and success. This action has then developed into a practice for visitors who wish one year of luck to touch the statue by caressing it from its head to its feet. In addition, visitors should ideally find the three mice hidden in the wreath, enhancing their wishes further. The narrative also states that touching the arm of the statue verifies that the person doing so will, at some point, return to Brussels (Brussels Life, 2021). Based on the different stories related to the statue, these incentives create an almost religious experience among visitors since the proximity and sense of touch signify luck and provide each individual with a feeling of satisfaction and strength (Nilsson, 2018).

Most tourists who visit another well-known statue in the city, Manneken Pis, tend to start on their walk to Manneken Pis from Grand Place, which means that they pass the statue of Everard t'Serclaes. According to official statistics, the number of visits to museums and other attractions in Brussels in 2019 was around 5 million (Statista, 2021b). Since Grand Place is one of the most visited tourist attractions in Brussels, it is possible to assume that a substantial proportion of the tourists who visit Brussels have also visited Grand Place and at the same time also seen the Everard t'Serclaes statue. Since touch is an essential aspect of the experience, alongside the visual impression, it is moreover likely that most visitors have also touched the statue (Planetware, 2021; World Packers, 2021). The search term "Everard t'Serclaes" yields many images of people touching the statue on the Internet. On the TripAdvisor (2022) website, pictures of tourists at the statue are accompanied by comments such for instance: *"Our guide told us if you rub the statue of the corpse, you'll get a wish. Every time we walked by this statue, there were tourists there all trying to get some good luck"*, *"Everard't Serclaes is a hero of Brussels - it is said if you touch the statue's arm, it will give you good luck and you will return to Brussels someday"*, *"A visit to the grand place is not complete without a venture down Charles Buls street stopping at the statue of a local hero, it is said if you rub them, it will bring good luck and a return to Brussels, must work we keep coming back"* and *"It's said that if you run this statue, it'll bring you good luck. Well, we did. Just be sure to sanitize your hands afterwards"*.

Figure 2
Tactile experience



Source: Thomas Blom.

William Shakespeare's tragedy about Romeo and Juliet, published in 1597, has touched many people ever since. The play is set in Verona, Italy, and has developed into an important tourist attraction. Juliet's house with the famous balcony is located at the address Via Capello 23. To enter the building, tourists have to pay a fee, but they can visit the courtyard and view the balcony and the statue of Juliet for free. According to the myth created around the story, a person who touches the statue's right breast will be lucky in love, and most visitors do so when they visit the site. This action is also confirmed by tourists who write comments about their visits on TripAdvisor (2022), for instance, stating that: *"You cannot go to Verona and not visit the Balcony. Always busy and the strange custom of rubbing Juliet's right breast", "The whole place is packed with people so get to the courtyard early. The Juliet statue is worth a look, even if only to see her shiny breast from people rubbing it for good luck" and "Juliet's Balcony is not real. It's simply a prop that Verona established to attract naive tourists. This place is swarming with people taking harmless snapshots and posing while rubbing the breast of the Juliet statue in the courtyard"*.

Furthermore, it is possible to say that the attraction has been actively promoted through product development over time since it is now possible to write letters to Juliet, and the best love letter can win a prize. After paying a fee, it is also possible for visitors to enter what is considered to be Juliet's sarcophagus beneath the monastery San Francesco al Corso via Luigi da Porto 5, as Shakespeare's play is supposedly based on a true story (Visit Verona, 2022a). In 2019, 5.1 million tourists visited Verona, and since Juliet's house is one of the attractions promoted by the city, it can be expected that a substantial proportion of visitors to Verona also visit the statue of Juliet (Visit Verona, 2022b; Duperier's Camino de Santiago Blog, 2022; Statista, 2022)

Many of the pilgrims who walk along the Way of Saint James visit the 12th-century cathedral in Santiago de Compostela to demonstrate their gratefulness and reverence to God for having been able to complete the pilgrimage. Many pilgrims also perform several rituals when they arrive at the cathedral. However, some of the rituals performed in the cathedral that focus on touch are no longer possible since the structure and artefacts need to be protected from visitors' touch. At the statue of Santo dos Croques, for example, not only pilgrims but also university students facing examinations used to be able to knock three times on the forehead of the statue to ask Santo dos Croques to share some of his great wisdom. After knocking, the procedure was to perform a so-called "coscorron" - to lay one's forehead on the forehead of the statue, as this is considered a way to open up the senses (Duperier's Camino de Santiago Blog, 2022). Yet another ritual centred on touch is inserting fingers into the marble pillar that symbolizes the Tree of Jesse (figure 3). After 800 years of touching, imprints from fingers are visible on the stone. Since 2008, to preserve them, you cannot touch either the Santo dos Croques or the Tree of Jesse (Duperier's Camino de Santiago Blog, 2022). Comments on TripAdvisor (2022) indicate that touch is a meaningful action, something that is expressed, for instance, in the following quotes: *"When we arrived at the Cathedral in Santiago after walking 151 km. We found out that we would not be able to touch the Tree of Jesse" and "It is incredible to think how many entered at this location and took a moment to rest their hand on the statue and pray. You can see the handprint on the marble. Very significant in the pilgrim's journey" and "We were able to easily touch the Tree of Jesse which has a pilgrim hand imprint in the stone which has been naturally worn away over time (a testament to the millions of pilgrims who have passed thru here)."*

It is, however, still possible to embrace the sculpture of the Apostle Saint James in the cathedral to express gratitude to him for helping the pilgrim complete the challenging walk. The tradition is prevalent, and there is usually a long line of people waiting to approach the statue of the Apostle. Of all the rituals carried out by pilgrims, this is one of few that have been kept since the earliest days of pilgrimage, and it is the most well-preserved tradition today. The embrace symbolizes the end of the pilgrimage and represents reunion with God, faith, or the pilgrim's self (Santiago Ways (2021)). The number of pilgrims who arrived in Santiago de Compostela was 347,500 in 2019, while the total number of tourists visiting the city was a bit more than 2.5 million (Statista, 2021c). It is possible to estimate that the cathedral is seen by most tourists who visit the city since it has a significant role in the marketing of Santiago de Compostela. Those who visit the cathedral

without previous knowledge of the stories about the attributes receive information on-site about what they mean, including an emphasis on the importance of touch.

Figure 3
Tree of Jesse



Source: Mats Nilsson.

Usually, in this context, attractions with a long history featuring a central narrative are foregrounded, but there are also examples of more recent types of tactile attractions. One of the more innovative tourist attractions is a bronze model, which has been on display in central Bremen since 2019. It is a designed attraction intended to allow visually impaired persons to experience the structure of nearby buildings through touch (Bremen Tourismus, personal communication, 2022). A response to a question via an e-mail about the value of the Tree of Jesse to the attraction of the place, the following is highlighted: *"It is a wonderful addition to the traditional attractions around the Market Place which fits perfectly in its appearance to the historic town hall and Roland Statue (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2022) as well as the bronze sculpture of the Bremen Town Musicians"*. A study by the local tourist organization shows that around 80 per cent of tourists visiting the city can be expected to see the model (Bremen Tourismus, personal communication, 2022). However, it is unusual to count tourists at these attractions since they are usually part of the general design of open cityscapes. Hence, it is difficult to establish the exact number of visitors.

5. Concluding remarks

Taking as our premise the place itself, with its unique identity, this article has aimed to highlight the importance of the haptic to destination attraction and place-related "value". Moreover, the paper seeks to identify and understand the significance of tactile attractions from a conceptual perspective. The field has been relatively unexplored in tourism research, both surprising and unsurprising. It is stunning that the tactile meaning in

a particular context often constitutes a significant component in the total experiential value of an attraction. On the other hand, it is not surprising that tourist organizations in places where such interests can be found only marginally tend to promote this type of tourist destination in their marketing of the place.

To a great extent, these attractions seem to take on "a life of their own", mainly through word of mouth and stories shared among tourists as well as communication on social media. Based on this study, we conclude that distinctly tactile attractions, like many other tourist-related attractions, are (re)formulated through their history, culture, and narrative components. The latter aspect, in particular, is incredibly significant for their value as attractions. At the same time, this type of attraction does not always have to have a long tradition or start from a myth or a religious narrative. Indeed, the attribute can be created in the present and then "invested" with identity through narratives, which can be fictive or based on reality.

We also conclude that there is, in many cases, a clear "passage" between the myth, the visible elements, and the added symbolic meanings which mould tourist practices via narrative. This engenders a unique way of seeing and using the attraction (Cosgrove, 1984). In this way, an understanding based on shared frames of reference is created and confirmed socially affirmed through constant activity - the action itself - during the visit, for which a well-defined ritual is centrally important. It is also essential to keep in mind in this context that the value of an attraction for tourism is fundamentally staged and not natural, so it could instead be seen as a result of history manipulated to contribute added value in economic terms. We have also shown that tactile components, which allow tourists to acquire a multisensory experience, including a clear place identity, constitute a significant factor with the potential for further development.

To sum up, this makes a plea for taking the haptic seriously in tourism studies. It also provides examples for understanding the interplays between tactile attractions, places, and tourists, especially in destinations where history, beliefs, and values comprise vital components. The result of this process in the tourist industry indicates that it is relevant to highlight and acknowledge the significance of tactile aspects when trying to attract tourists to a specific place. We can identify many other areas for further research in tactile attractions, such as studies on tourists and their motivation, the creation of tourist value from a strategic place development perspective, and models for the sustainable planning of these attractions.

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