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The past, the present and the future

An analysis of destination marketing during lockdown

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Introduction and Theoretical Framing

> *There we were, flying high in the sky, roaming around the world, eagerly and happily taking on the role as tourists whenever we had the chance to do so, seeing and SoMe-ing all there was to see, spoiling ourselves with visits to the newest, hottest, un-spoilt destinations and getting wired at the latest last white spot.*

In 2019, this was the world tourism researchers studied, our research agendas filled with issues such as climate change, SDGs, over-tourism, anti-consumerism, aviation carbon emissions, sharing economy, impact measures, ocean garbage patches, green washing, and sustainable, or not, tourism development. However, alongside our concerns with tourism and its negative impacts, we eagerly advanced research on how destinations could catch the attention and interest of, attract, bond with, satisfy the needs of, and relate emotionally with (potential) tourists. By doing so, doing our bit to visitor numbers, tourism income and growth being key success measures for destinations around the world.

Research on attracting tourists and creating bonds between tourists and destinations is research, which neatly fits under the umbrella terms destination marketing and destination branding. A crucial element of destination branding is the idea that the brand personality (i.e. the 'human side' of the brand image) can form strong links with (potential) tourists and their self-image (Ekinci, 2003). As destinations have become more and more eager to position themselves and bond with tourists, we have witnessed the production and launch of increasingly innovative, emotional and creative promotional destination videos. This includes, for example, Sandra Oh travelling like a Canadian, Sweden's attempt to be listed on Airbnb, Australia's Super Bowl Crocodile Dundee movie trailer turning into a tourism ad, the Faroe Islands being closed for maintenance, and Nebraska not being for everyone. The resources that go into the marketing and branding of destination lights up, or litters (depending on one's perspective) media brandscapes with promotional

destination videos; some of which go viral and others barely being noticed by those, destinations across the globe so eagerly wish to form links with and so intensively communicate to.

> *And then COVID-19 hit the world; lockdowns, homeschooling, all-day-sleepwear-wearing, face shields, zoom meetings, online grocery shopping, social distancing, working from home, hand sanitizer, corona haircuts, not going to work, bars, restaurants, school, concerts, shops or museums; nor visiting friends and family becoming the new normal. Record high online sales of jigsaw puzzles, fitness equipment, baking mixes and gardening supplies saying much about the everyday lives of affluent consumers. In this new context, the experience economy (except from online businesses such as Netflix, PokerStars and HBO) came to a halt and especially tourism took a blow as it was converted to something we once did and might do again – someday.*

Kotler and Caslione (2009:187) remind us that *"when a recession strikes, many customers will reduce their spending. Companies in turn will introduce sharp cuts, particularly in the marketing budget"*. With tourism being reduced to a minimum in 2020, one would think that tourism destinations would fall silent; or at least radically reduce the resources they spend on marketing and particularly promotional videos. Quite interesting, this has *not* been the case for all destinations and several destinations produced and launched promotional videos during the peak of the pandemic. A simple reason for this could be that marketing budgets were approved and resources for branding allocated before the pandemic locked down the world. Although such budgetary considerations may be part of the reason why destinations kept launching promotional videos during 2020, the content of many of these videos differ fundamentally from how destinations communicated before the pandemic. This indicates that choosing to communicate to the world during the pandemic was not been 'business as usual' for tourism destinations. Instead, we witnessed creative attempts to create, maintain and/or enhance bonds with potential tourists with no sales or visits being foreseeable in near future. So, during those indeed unusual times, where destinations literally had no business, an interesting question to be addressed is how they communicated what to whom?

The purpose of this paper is to dig into *how* destinations used promotional videos to communicate with potential tourists during 2020. This is an interesting topic to investigate as the 'normal' objective of such communication (i.e. to encourage people to visit the destination) was obviously irrelevant in 2020. At a first glance, most of the promotional videos seem to share a set of characteristics such as empathizing with the confinement experience; reminding the target audience that the destinations are eagerly awaiting visits when we can travel again; fueling wishful thinking and daydreaming about travelling; and seeking to establish/maintain emotional bonds with the viewers. This article, however, digs deeper into a series of promotional destination videos to theoretically discuss and reflect upon how destinations communicated with (potential) tourists during 2020; a time where the pandemic made it impossible for most people to travel the world.

Blichfeldt and Smed (2018) remind us that destination branding and vacation marketing are never innocent endeavors, but voices that actively contribute to the wider web of meanings that dominant discourses and societies at large are made of – and made sense of. By taking proactive part in the online conversations during the pandemic, through their promotional videos, destinations contributed to the construction of discourses on life during the pandemic as well as life past and life in future. Consequently, by digging into how destinations communicated during the pandemic we contribute with more refined understandings of how destination marketing and branding position tourism and vacationing in wider webs of significance and

meaning, thus showcasing promotional videos as marketing endeavors that accentuate certain discourses whilst silencing others.

Ekinci (2003) defines the brand personality as the human side of the brand, that people may, or may not connect with. MacInnis and Folkes (2017) argue that when brands are depicted as human-like, consumers will anthropomorphize brands as humans. Dunn and Hoegg (2014) suggest that consumers' feelings of fear and anxiety may trigger desires for affiliation and consequently, consumers may form stronger emotional attachment to brands that share the same emotional experience of, for example fear or anxiety. Consequently, campaigns that depict destinations as human-like and use emotional appeals to show that they share consumers' feelings of fear and anxiety as well as their experience of confinement during COVID-19, may make consumers anthropomorphize these brands as relatable human beings. Therefore, a key element of our analysis of the promotional videos is to dig into the extent that the videos anthropomorphize destinations, for example by presenting an emphatic we.

Researching not destinations', but hotels' communication during COVID-19, Hang, Aroean and Chen (2020) suggest that communication emphasizing shared emotions and brand humanization can increase tourists' intentions to visit after COVID-19. Accordingly, communication with an emotional appeal may pay-off in the long run. Sobande (2020:1) discusses this issue and makes the following statements about brand communication during the pandemic:

> *"[S]ince the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, brands have been quick to invoke ambiguous yet arguably commodified notions of connectivity, care and community, in the service of capitalism. To (re)present their products, services and themselves as being essential, ethical and invested in people – not (just) profit – brands have produced marketing content and communication strategies that connect to the current COVID-19 situation and the myriad fears and concerns that it has catalyzed. At the center of many such advertising and branding messages is the idea that everyone is affected by COVID-19, and that this crisis is a unifying force: 'we're all in this together'"*.

Sobande (2020) looks at branding in general, not within tourism. However, analyzing destination branding during COVID-19, it is interesting to explore whether this communication contains the elements emphasized by Sobande; i.e. connectivity, care, community, fears, concerns and unity. Therefore, the analysis of the selected promotional videos digs into how destinations connect to the pandemic and which experiences are emphasized. In doing so, we discuss whether the videos used the pandemic as a unifying force and showcase themselves as invested in people as well as connecting to the fears and concerns the pandemic catalyzed.

Methodology

The paper is written from an interpretive perspective, guided by relativistic ontologies and intersubjective epistemologies. It applies qualitative methods to the study of a few selected pieces of strategic communication done by destination marketing/management organizations in spring and summer 2020. This paper only analyzes promotional *videos* launched by destinations during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are several reasons why the paper focuses on destinations' video marketing and video content. Firstly, videos have better chances of being consumed by a broad audience than other types of materials

and content; especially during the pandemic where the increase in time people spent at home considerable increased the general populace's screen time, Secondly, videos offer excellent opportunities for using emotional appeals and storytelling techniques. Thirdly, video content may direct traffic from e.g. Youtube or google to marketers' websites as well as increase dwell time (i.e. retaining audiences for a longer time on one's website). Lastly, a 1-minute video could be said to be equivalent to 1.8 million written words (https://www.breakingtravelnews.com/focus/article/importance-of-travel-video-marketing-for-the-tourism-industry-post-cov).

A deliberate choice was made to focus on videos launched early on during the pandemic. The paper thus studies destination marketing organizations' (DMOs') more immediate communicative reactions to a major disruption in tourism (in this case COVID-19). We hereby analyze what qualifies as a 'snapshot' of how DMOs contributed to develop and/or reinforce (dominant) discourses on tourism before, during and after the pandemic during the six months of the pandemic, during which uncertainties about the scale of the epidemic and the future of tourism were at their peak level. As such, with the choice of videos we try to present, and analysis, a 'snapshot' of DMOs' communication at a specific point in time, where the pandemic was at a (the?) peak and where uncertainties about the future of tourism and travelling were at their highest.

As the observant reader may have noticed, the theory section of this paper is short. This is due to the investigation being inductive in nature. The first rounds of analysis of the selected videos were therefore not guided by theoretical framings; or at least as freed from such framings as tourism scholars are able to. During later rounds of analysis, and particularly when moving from analysis of the individual videos to analysis an synthesis across the videos, we started enfolding relevant literature. Consequently, paying due tribute to the advantages of inductive approaches, in this paper enfolding of relevant literature is predominantly to be found in the discussion.

Analysis

In this section, we present our first order analysis of five destination videos. Thereafter, in the discussion section, we present the theoretically grounded, higher order analysis and synthesis across the five videos. We have contacted the organizations behind these videos and asked for permission to show screenshots from the videos. Unfortunately, we only obtained permission from some of the organizations and therefore, screenshots are only included for those videos, for which we obtained such permission.

MySwitzerland's "Dream now – travel later", March 25, 2020

The 'dream now – travel later' video lasts 29 seconds and has no voice-over. The text in the video is comprised of four short written statements and the soundtrack is soothing and simple guitar music. The first statement, *'Dream now – travel later'*, is accompanied by footage of mountains, the second statement, *'stay safe – stay home'*, by footage of a jogger in the mountains and the third, *'just for a while',* by people kayaking in a winterly lake. The final statement is divided into two parts. The first part, *'but let us inspire you'*, is accompanied by footage of a train in the mountains (and two MB-riders in the distance) and people on the train looking out on the scenic mountain landscape. The second part, *'to welcome you back soon'*, is presented together with footage of a solitaire male traveler on a modern and comfortable train, arrival of the train at a train station and greetings (from friends perhaps) upon arrival. The video is ended with

footage of sun, skies and mountains taken at high altitude and thereafter, the MySwitzerland logo (which is also visible in the upper left corner during the entire video) is shown full screen.

The video contains intertextual references to MySwitzerland's other marketing material and campaigns. It emphasizes parts of the destination identity that are also prominent in the DMO's other marketing material, e.g. active nature tourism, scenic mountain landscapes, adventure tourism and modern travelling by train. The video does not explicitly address COVID-19 or everyday life during the pandemic, albeit it urges viewers to stay at home. The video has a very strong discourse of travel bands being *temporary* and *short-whiled*, suggesting that travelling will be possible 'soon' and 'just' after 'a while'. Furthermore, in contrast to some of the other videos, this video is rather direct in its emphasis on tourism: Both in terms of the travelling and touristic activities presented throughout the video and in the explication of the goal; inspiring the viewer to travel to Switzerland, soon.

Finally, it is worth noticing that instead of using a phrase such as *'welcoming you to Switzerland',* the final sentence is about welcoming *'you back'.* The inclusion of the word 'back' in this sentence might be interpreted as a reference to going from 'the new normal' and back to normal, travelling life. However, it could simply have been included as people, who have a special interest in Switzerland and/or have visited before, are more likely to pay attention to the video; and are thanked for this attention with the more personal associations that the phrase 'welcoming you back' aspires to trigger. The anthropomorphized brand is an 'us' that emphasizes care (stay safe) and connectivity with those, that are to be welcomed back soon.

The Portuguese National Tourist Board's "It's time to stop", #CantSkipHome, March 20, 2020

This promotional video starts with the message that the footage was captured "*when we could spend time outside*". The video shows footage of beautiful landscapes - sometimes with a solitaire person, but often without any people present in the scenic shots. The video also contains footage of activities and settings that were shot down during COVID-19 lockdowns; i.e. scenes from an outdoor music concert; a group of people at the beach; audiences at crowded live events; a group of people launching a lighting balloon; and a crowded outdoor café. The narrator consistently points to it "*being time to stop*", "*to take a break from the world*" and for the present "*being a perfect time to not visit anything*". The video repeatedly uses the word stop and associated terms such as taking a break/pause/stand still and it builds the argument that to stop is necessary to get back to the normal way of living. Even though the video sends the message that it is "*a perfect time to not visit anything*", it also emphasizes that the stop (or even moving backward as some footage visualizes) is a means to an end and that desirable end is to be able to take on the role as a tourists again, or in the words of the narrator, it is necessary to "*make a pause so we can play again*" and "*the faster we stop, the sooner we will bond again*". The video's message is that we need to stop, but only "*for a while*" and it reassures the viewer that "*nature, landscapes, beaches and monuments aren't going anywhere, they will still be waiting for a better time to be lived*".

The video's main discourse is one of social distancing, staying at home and inability to travel being a *temporary abnormality* whereas taking on the role as a tourist (including immersing oneself both in nature and crowded places) are portrayed as *the normal state of things*; and a state that will reemerge when we can 'bond', 'play' and visit again. The video does not explicitly mention COVID-19, corona or the pandemic. However, there is an abundance of references to the 'new normal' situation and lockdowns; starting with a reference to the past when *'we could spend time outside'* and informing the viewer that *'the narrator's voice was recorded at home'*; continuing with statements such as now being a time to *'look out for each*

other at a distance', 'meet no one', 'not visit anything' and that 'for now our main strength is to be apart; and ending with a call to 'respect our times'. The video does not use the word *you* at all but uses phrases such as our-selves (1), our (3) and we (8 times) extensively and consistently.

It is not until 2:09 in the 2:18 video that it becomes clear to the viewer, who 'we' are or that the video inspires the viewer to 'visit Portugal' – when 'those amazing days come'. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on 'we' and that 'we' (i.e. the unknown sender and the viewer) can play and bond again some time in future, if we first pause and stop. A viewer knowing Portugal might have realized that the footage is from Portugal during the first two minutes of watching. However, the most iconic elements of Portugal are not emphasized in the video and when the authors asked a number of people to watch the video, very few of them realized that the video was promoting Portugal before the visit Portugal slogan appeared, or as one of the viewers said: "*I thought it was a video about COVID-19, not a country*".

Throughout the video, the brand aspires to be anthropomorphized by the heavy usage of ourselves; our and we. Furthermore, the video emphasizes care, concern, unity and the pandemic is cast as a temporary hinderance that will be followed by amazing days when travelling will be possible again.

Soca Valley Tourist Board's campaign 'Back to the spring', #socavalley, April 17, 2020

Apart from the closing shot, which shows the logos of the senders (Soca Valley along with I feel Slovakia, Dolina Soce and Julijske National Park), this entire 1:18 video is a visual journey back to the source/origin of the river. The video does not mention that 'the river' is the Soca river, but the (predominantly angling and adventure) tourist, who has visited in the past may recognize the distinct emerald green color of the river and/or the canyons, narrow rocky gorges and cascades shown in the video – exemplified in figures 1, 2 and 3.

Fig. 1: Going back to the river

Screenshot from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiBjKNo_6EM. Reproduced with permission from the Soca Valley Tourist Board.

The footage of the river comes in different forms; from panoramic views to close-up above or below water – the last type of footage is exemplified by figure 2.
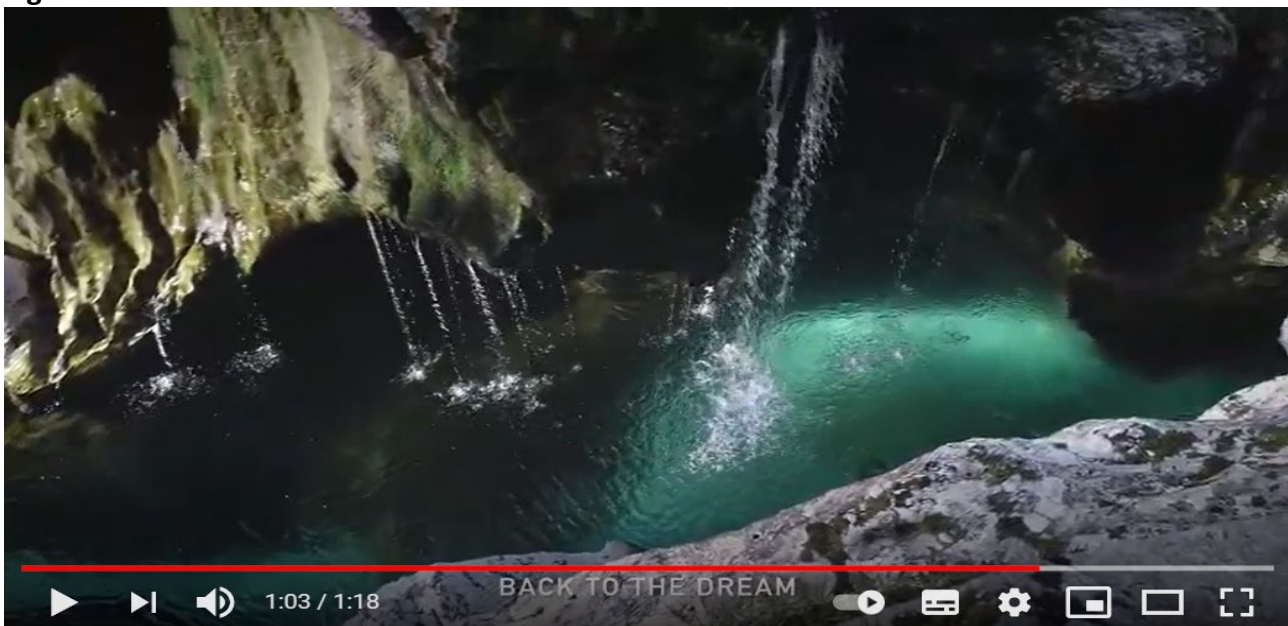
Fig. 2: Underwater close-up.

Screenshot from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiBjKNo_6EM. Reproduced with permission from the Soca Valley Tourist Board.

Most rural areas have only one major attraction (Dybedal, 1998) and the Soca river is the iconic attraction for Soca Valley. The footage of the river is accompanied by a rather simple piano tune and a male voice-over useing very short sentences and pausing in-between every sentence as if reading out loud a poem. The voice-over is *Let's turn/let's go back/back in our mind/let's try to remember/how we rushed/how we streamed/how we left/let's return to the origin/let's go home/away from the world/back to the river/back to the dream/back to the spring.*

Figure 3: Soca river screenshot

Screenshot from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiBjKNo_6EM. Reproduced with permission from the Soca Valley Tourist Board.

The main discourse in this video is nature, represented by the river. Nature as a word accentuates life that develops on its own accord, persisting human intervention and the entire video shows only the river and the nature it cuts through, with no people, manmade elements or human interventions shown in any of the shots. The idea of nature as that which is wild and untouched by man is contestable in today's world where it is difficult to find any place on Earth that is truly 'untouched by man'. Uggla (2010, p. 80) discusses this issue and boldly states that *"[t]he notions of nature and the natural, as distinct from culture and society and untouched by humans, can be questioned since we cannot find any site on earth that fits that description".* To Uggla (2010), ideas of nature and culture are inherently opposite, with nature seen as wild, untouched, untamed and freed from human intervention and settlements, whereas culture and human settlement are defined as development that free, or at least shelter humans from the un-spoilt, wild, untamed and potentially dangerous nature. Modern man is thus cast as having escaped wild nature by developing societies that dominate and regulate external natural environments (Williams, 1983). However, in contrast to the idea that man has escaped the dangers of nature, the biophilia hypothesis (Wilson, 1984) asserts that humans have an innate desire to (re)connect with nature. The video inscribes itself in discourses anchored in the biophilia hypothesis as it urges the viewer to *'go back'*, *'try to remember how we left',* *'return to the origin'* and *'go home, away from the world'*. In this video nature is *home*, and the (manmade) world affected by the pandemic is therefore not, thus associating nature with the safety, familiarity and security of home and disassociating it from nature as potentially dangerous and something our manmade homes shelter us from.

The video does not mention COVID-19 directly, nor does it suggest why we should go back to the river/nature/the spring. However, indirectly the video does, intentionally or not, relate to the pandemic discourses of the man-made world, and humans, as dangerous and to be avoided. In contrast to modern man's traditional conceptions, the video urges the viewer to go away from the world and go home as in back to nature and it reinforces this discourse by its footage, which shows no evidence of human presence or intervention. However, the video does not speak to a solitaire viewer. Instead, the notion let's; let *us*, is used consistently throughout the video and is the starting words for all of the five central sentences, each of which urging *us* to turn, go back, try to remember, return to the origin and go home. However, who it is that is an 'us' together with the viewer remains unknown until the logos of the senders are revealed at 1:13 into the 1:18 video.

The video accentuates connectivity between the sender and the viewer, and even more importantly connectivity with nature whilst reducing references to the pandemic situation and living conditions to such an extent that the video could also have been launched at times where the pandemic did not exist.
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VisitScotland's Absence makes the heart grow fonder, April 3, 2020

Starting and ending this 1:51 minute-long video with the saying that *"absence makes the heart grow fonder"*, the video inscribes itself in a tradition of love poems dating back to the Roman poet Sextus Propertius. The video contains footage of various parts of Scotland – including nature in the form of scenic landscapes and culture in the form of cities and buildings. It includes a welter of scenes with people (either one or two, but never more than two) engaging with nature. These engagements include walking by the sea, in the forest or up a hill; gazing at or taking photos of nature; and people being active in nature (walking, kayaking and paddle-boarding). Only two scenes are shot inside - one with a couple having a cup of tea (figure 4) and one with two women in a pool/at a spa. With its emphasis on nature, the video

inscribes itself in the strong discourses of human activity in and connectivity with nature that could be found in many of the western countries, where social distancing was requested during the lockdowns, but confinement to one's home was not. However, it inscribes itself in this discourse in a different way than the Soca Valley video, as the Soca Valley video presents gazes of nature untouched by man, whereas this video presents nature as a stage for human activity and a place people actively engages and connects with.

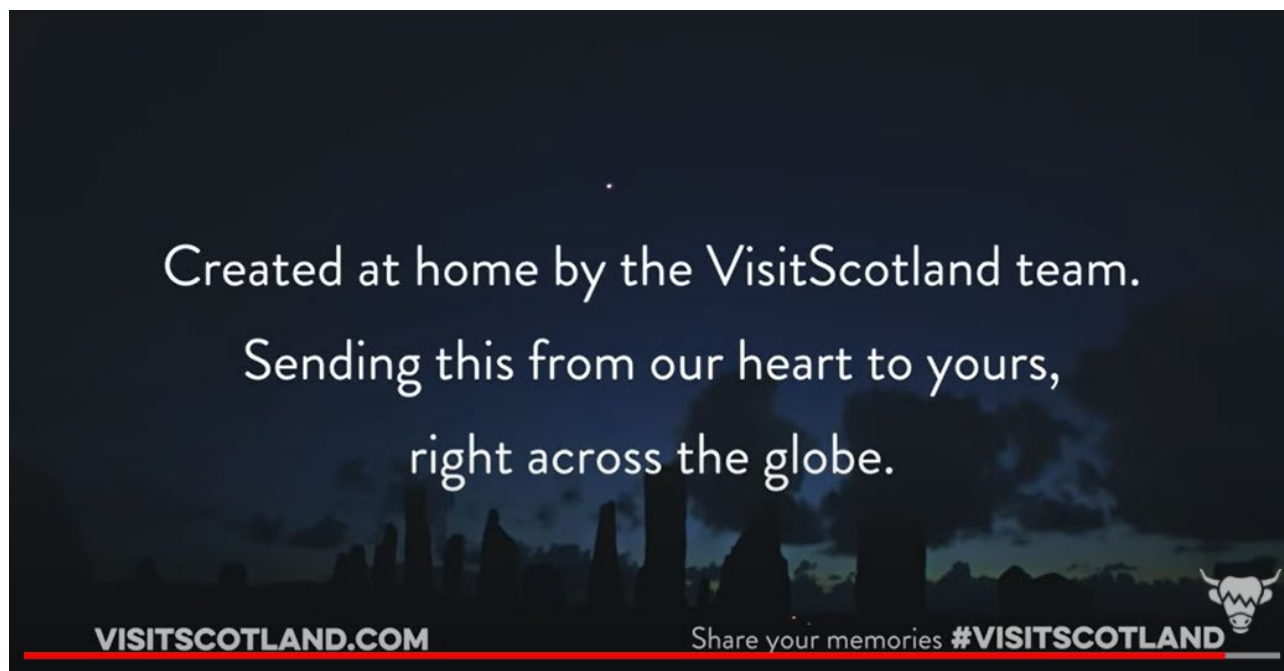**Fig. 4: One of the two indoor shots**

Screenshot from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRja3__xMo0. Reproduced with permission from VisitScotland.

The video visually presents iconic elements of Scotland that are likely to be presented in any promotional video of this destination, such as scenic landscapes, highlands, lowlands, shores, rivers, lakes, modern cities as well as rural settlement, ancient ruins and seafood. However, the soundtrack differs fundamentally from more traditional promotional videos as it includes both soothing music and a poem.

The poem is narrated in English with a Scottish accent. The poem contains 255 words and is thus too long to reproduce here. The tone is emotional and affective dimensions are emphasized by using words such as heart (6 times), suffering, need, help, sadness, longing and hope. The poem starts out with the sentence: *"This is a time for the heart"*, stating how the empathetic hearts of VisitScotland *"go out to those suffering"* and *"those in need"* and *"find space in our hearts to help those we can"*. The last line of the poem also uses the notion of hearts, pointing to the inability to travel being not altogether sad as *"absence makes the heart grow fonder"*.

The video is ended with the text: *"Created at home by the VisitScotland team. Sending this from our hearts to yours, right across the globe"* while showing the visitscotland.com logo and suggesting that the viewer can "share your memories #visitscotland" (figure 5).

Figure 5: Created at home

Social responsibility and appliance with lockdown are emphasized by stating that the video was *"created at home"* and global connectivity and care are pointed to by the adding of the notion *"right across the globe"*. VisitScotland is consistently referred to as an inclusive 'we', inviting the viewer to see her/himself as part of this we, who *"find space in our hearts to help those we can – even when all we can do is stay away"* and who feel *"sadness"* and *"longing"* standing behind *"our windows"*. In total, the notion 'we' is used 14 times in this 255 words poem.

In contrast to the other four videos, this video comes across both as a piece of place branding and a piece of destination branding. Destination branding usually targets (potential) tourists, whereas place branding audiences, apart from tourists, include residents, businesses, investment etc. Instead of addressing people, who may visit Scotland in the future, this video first addresses all, who are suffering and in need and later it mentions all who have in common *"a love for Scotland"*. The video communicates to local residents (by using the phrase 'exploring our backyards); expats and temporary residents (by referring to *"the years you lived within our shores"*) and tourists (i.e. *"the years you visited our shores"*). However, the accompanying text on youtube communicates to visitors, stating: *"Although you cannot visit our welcoming country right now, we are with you, and we want you to know that we will be here when things calm down."*

As the other videos, the VisitScotland video points to the situation of social distancing and staying at home as temporary. It first points to longing to *"one day walk freely"* and there being *"hope. Hope that brighter days will come again"*. Later on, however, the text states that *"when the time comes",* the inclusive we will *"once again explore our backyards, our history, our ancestry, our culture and our food"* and *"show our country the love it deserves"*. What is particularly interesting about this part of the poem is a) that it does not use the vaguer *if*, but the confident *when* the time comes and b) it asserts that the future will allow us to act and travel as we did before the pandemic.

The brand personality presented in this video emphasizes connectivity *"right across the globe"* and consistently uses the notion of *"we"* to create community and connectivity. The video does not explicitly

mention COVID-19, but refers to confinement, social distancing, inability to travel, suffering, sadness and longing. It emphasizes care and concern. The brand personality is presented as being socially responsible, accepting and reinforcing that we need to stay at home both directly in poem and indirectly by accentuating that the video was created *at home*. Finally, it has a strong discourse of confinement, staying at home and social distancing as being temporary; pointing to a brighter future when (not if) we once again can travel and explore other countries.

VisitIceland's "Let It Out!" campaign, #LetItOutIceland, July 15, 2020

With close to 8 million views during the first 6 months after release, this campaign is the most watched of the five videos – and the online commentary suggests that at least some viewers took up on Iceland's offer to 'let it out'. The one-minute video starts by announcing Inspired by Iceland as the sender. It then shows unhappy (or at least not happy) people in their homes engaging in different lockdown activities; *i.e.* a woman in her bed, sighing while watching the news 'more bad things happening, again' on her tablet, a man trying to give himself a corona hair-cut, a woman zapping through TV channels, a man finishing a jigsaw puzzle, and a woman trying to work from home while a child tries to catch her attention. At 0:17 the woman in the bed screams out loud and as she screams, she and her bed are reallocated to a valley down a scenic waterfall (figure 6).

Fig. 6: Letting it out in Iceland.

Screenshot from https://www.iceland.is/press/photos. Reproduced with permission from Team Inspired By Iceland.

The woman in bed is the first of a series of screaming characters (including the man doing a corona haircut, a man holding a 'happy birthday to me' homemade cake and other characters introduced during the first 17 seconds), who find themselves reallocated to scenic Icelandic nature settings. At 0:37 the text 'You've been through a lot' appears, followed by the question: 'Looking for the perfect place to let it all out?'. Accompanied by footage of Icelandic nature (canyon, waterfall, a herd of reindeer) the next text is: 'It looks like you need Iceland'. At this point, the video returns to the corona hair-cutting man. Standing in his bathroom, he looks at Inspired by Iceland's Let it Out app on his smartphone – an app that allows for the recording of screams. The subsequent text 'we will release it into Icelandic nature' accompanies footage of Icelandic nature where yellow outdoor loudspeakers are placed in different locations, letting out screams. At 0:52 the video returns to the man in the bathroom, who (as the very first of the characters in the video) is smiling. The video thereafter shows the yellow loudspeakers in the Icelandic nature, the slogan 'let it out' and the Inspired by Iceland Subscribe logo. The screaming hereafter stops and the soundtrack turns to that of nature non-interfered by human noise.

Although the video does not mention COVID-19 directly, it uses a welter of references to portray the mundanity, confinement, boredom and frustrated state of life during lockdown. The characters confirm this depressive storyline through their appearance as being ungroomed, bearded, in need of haircuts and wearing baggy clothes. Care and consideration are shown by the empathic Icelandic 'we', who offers to transmit the frustrations, that seemingly need to be let out by screaming, to Iceland. The brand personality is one that emphasizes connectivity, care, community, fears, concerns and unity as well as notions of *'we'*.

Discussion and Conclusion

Sixty years ago, one of the founding fathers of the marketing discipline introduced the notion that *"selling focuses on the needs of the seller, marketing on the needs of the buyer"* (Levitt, 1960:4). The videos analyzed in this paper align with this perspective on marketing as none of them, at least not directly, try to sell holidays or encourage viewers to visit the destination any time soon. Instead, the videos generally remind the viewer that the destination is 'still there' when it, at a later point in time, becomes possible to roam the world and take on the role as tourists. The videos thus inscribe themselves in the relational perspective on marketing, which aims at building long lasting relationships with consumers. The five videos distance the senders from the transactional perspective, which emphasizes the selling of holidays, or rather a holiday in singular.

Even more importantly, the videos construct, or reinforce, very clear and strong narratives of the past, present and future, hereby inscribing themselves in what seems to be dominant discourses on life before, during and after the pandemic that were formed during the lockdowns in 2020.

The *present* (the present being 2020 when the videos were launched) is presented as a time to stay away, stay at home, stay safe, stay inside, take a break from the world, dream, not going anywhere, not meeting anyone, go back, away from the world, pause, stand still, stop – while dreaming, longing, being in need and suffering. This 2020 present life, in lockdown, is presented as a *temporary* situation that will only last 'a while' and will *soon* be replaced by a normal way of life. In 2020, we all learned the phrase, *the new normal*. The videos, however, do not present life during the pandemic as normal in the sense that it is usual. On the contrary, life during the pandemic is presented as dissatisfying, constrained and unhappy – with no references to potential positive elements of slow living induced upon us by the pandemic. The videos inscribe themselves in a discourse where the new normal is not usual, but a highly unusual and

unhappy time that will soon be replaced by normal and usual conditions. But what is the normal conditions that can be expected in future?

The *future* is presented as an unproblematic and romanticized version of the past, where we can roam the world pretty much as we did before the pandemic. It is a future, in which the videos promise that we can travel, explore, play, bond and visit again and it is also a future that is cast as *better* than life during the pandemic; allowing us to be free and experience brighter or even amazing days. The videos analyzed in this paper advertise messages of "*we are here for you*", consciously providing empathy and care during the COVID-19 pandemic, while reminding potential tourists that they can (re)visit these destinations in a *better* future (Ekinci, 2003). The videos hereby inscribe themselves in the same discourse as UNWTO did with the #TravelTomorrow campaign, which argued that "b*y staying at home, we can travel tomorrow*". Quite interesting, or ironically given the focus on over-tourism and climate impacts that characterized tourism discourses prior to the pandemic, the *better* future portrayed in the videos is one, in which the world goes back to a time where we all can, and will, be tourists.

The videos thus portray a future where tourism yet again becomes an integral part of life - at least for the more affluent parts of the world's population. The dominant discourse build by these videos, alongside UNWTO's #TravelTomorrow, is one that does *not* go 'back' to tourism as it was before the pandemic hit the world. It is a world without discussions of over-tourism and general concerns about the resources used as we were flying high in the sky, roaming around the world, eagerly and happily taking on the role as tourists whenever we had the chance to do so, seeing all there was to see, spoiling ourselves with visits to the newest, hottest, un-spoilt destination and getting wired at the last white spots. The videos portray a future where destinations across the global eagerly and happily welcome tourists and where over-tourism, carbon footprints, civil protesting and concerns about limits to (unsustainable) growth seem to not exist, or if they do, they only do so as clouds in the distant skies.

Following the lead set by critical discourse analysis, analyzing promotional material is not only a matter of analyzing what is said. It is also, and perhaps most importantly, a matter of analyzing what is not said. What is none-existing in these videos is a future, in which COVID-19, or other pandemics, exist and where new normal living conditions effect how we live and travel. The videos do not present scenarios where travelling and tourism have been fundamentally changed by physical distancing, face shields, continuous testing, crowd avoidance, hand sanitizer usage, COVID-19 passports, travel restrictions etc. Thus, the videos present a strong discourse of a future where man has beaten nature and has, literally, erased any tokens of the virus from the planet, reducing the pandemic to an anomaly in history. What is also none-existing in the videos is a future that resembles tourism as it was in the years before the pandemic locked down our industry. The videos equalize future tourism with tourism before (at least some) consumers started pondering about issues such as climate change, SDGs, over-tourism, anti-consumerism, aviation carbon emissions, sharing economy, ocean garbage patches, green washing, flight-shame and sustainable, or not, tourism development. One could, and we will, acknowledge that promotional videos made by destinations around the world are not to blamed for all the negative effects of tourism on the planet. And we also acknowledge that promotional videos are made to promote destinations, not to save the planet. That said, destination marketing during the pandemic seems to have done its share to paint the following picture of the future:

> *Here we go again, flying high in the sky, roaming the world, eagerly taking on the role as tourists, seeing and SoMe-ing all there is to see, spoiling ourselves with visits to the newest un-spoilt destination and getting wired at the latest last white spot. Once in a while, deep down in our oldest, most worn and almost forgotten handbag; in the chest of drawers in the guest room; or in the darkest corner of the attic, we come across a packet of face masks or a bottle of hand sanitizer and we think to ourselves: What strange times those were.*

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