



The Trifecta of Popular Culture Tourism: Pursuing eternal life among the living and un-dead

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to follow up and explore popular culture destinations over time to understand what makes them last. Travel driven by global fan cultures may emerge suddenly and surprisingly for destinations with unpredictable increase in demand associated with popular cultural phenomena such as films, literature, or music. Whether or not this interest will last is a critical question for businesses and other stakeholders that are looking to develop a destination for new visitor groups. We conducted interviews at the same three destinations associated with the Twilight Saga books and films as a previous study published more than 10 years ago. The findings show three different timelines with waves of formative events related to media products, people and artifacts assets and as the main forces driving development and change. For example, in terms of media products, all three destinations saw boosts in audience engagement through the release and re-engagement of books and films. Regarding people, local and a strong celebrity engagement as well as staff and fan engagement were evident at all Twilight Saga destinations, at varying degrees. Exhibitions, events, themed accommodations, merchandise, and guided tours were typical artifacts at all destinations. Our main conclusion is that meaningful interlinking of territorial capital, in the form of media products, people, and artifacts, are central in the creation of 'eternal' popular culture destinations, closely interlinked in evolutionary waves of formative events.

1. Introduction

In 2005, Stephenie Meyer released the first book in the Twilight Saga series. This and other books in the series that followed as well as films resulted in a global phenomenon of popular culture tourism associated with the Twilight Saga that continues to exist across many localities. Popular culture tourism is travel induced by various popular culture forms, consumed by global fan cultures, to some degree commercial, dependent on media, and related to leisure and everyday life (Lexhagen et al., 2023). It is highly demand-driven, and businesses and destinations transform their resources to benefit from this (Croy, 2010; Dubois et al., 2021; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006a; Kim et al., 2023; Lashua et al., 2014). Furthermore, a wide range of motives, often linked to strong emotion, attachment, and involvement, influence travel intentions (Connell & Meyer, 2009; Kim & Kim, 2018). For destinations, this type of tourism often emerges quite suddenly and with unexpected consequences and opportunities (Connell, 2012; Kim & Park, 2023). Consequently, one of the biggest challenges for popular culture tourism destinations is to

decide whether to invest in this form of tourism and, if so, to what extent, given the transient nature of popular culture.

In this paper, we address some established truths about popular culture tourism such as its sudden and massive increase in demand affecting destinations (Connell, 2012) and its short-term focus (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006b). More specifically, we explore the driving forces behind what makes a lasting popular culture tourism destination, and whether there are formative events and/or assets related to destinations and fans that secure its longevity. The findings of such a study could highlight the potential for destinations worldwide to harness popular culture for long-term tourism by identifying key factors that drive longevity by leveraging events and/or assets that can help destinations remain relevant and attract visitors long after their initial popularity.

All tourist destinations develop over time, as their development is contingent on their micro- and macro level environment that in turn influences their competitiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Popular culture tourism destinations are more subject to changes due to their dependence on sometimes ephemeral popular culture phenomena,

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making long-term planning and management challenging. Extensive use by scholars of [Butler's \(1980\)](#) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model has helped us analyze destination development in general. In subsequent adaptations of TALC, the evolution of a destination is described as a series of cycles ([McKercher & Wong, 2021](#)), taking into consideration what comes before, during, and after inflection points in the cycles or waves of a destination's transformation ([Agarwal, 2006](#)). Central to the evolution of a destination is its territorial capital. Territorial capital refers to a wide spectrum of tangible and intangible economic, cultural, social, and environmental assets within a region that secure its developmental potential ([Camagni & Capello, 2013](#)). In other words, territorial capital comprises the qualities that destinations may use to configure popular culture tourism development.

A few studies have addressed issues related to long-term development of popular culture tourism destinations. [Kim and Nam \(2016\)](#) recognized that the Korean government, in response to the growing Hallyu phenomenon, developed a mid-to long-term policy for its impact on tourism. Other studies have explored longevity through diversification ([Wright et al., 2023](#)) and the connection to long-term broader local development ([Lundberg & Lindström, 2020](#)). Using a longitudinal exploratory approach, [Thelen et al. \(2020\)](#) found that long-term planning within a broader regional development strategy is one key ingredient in successful film tourism planning and development. However, on the whole, there has been relatively little research on the long-term development of popular cultural tourism, and much remains unknown. Specifically, to the best of our knowledge, no previous study has examined popular culture tourism development in destinations over different time periods. This lack of studies exploring popular culture destinations over time that provide insights into factors contributing to their longevity in an increasingly volatile tourism landscape shaped by social media and rapid fashion cycles, was recently pointed out by [Gibson and Connell \(2024\)](#). They argued that in an era dominated by instantaneity and viral content, traditional understandings of tourism, like Butler's TALC model, require updating to reflect the impact of for example social media on destination popularity. Understanding what allows specific destinations to sustain interest amidst such fluctuations can provide valuable insights for local communities and businesses struggling to cope with these boom-and-bust patterns. They propose that a comprehensive study of popular culture destinations over time is needed to identify the key elements that contribute to their enduring appeal and that research will not only enhance our understanding of tourism dynamics but also assist local communities and policymakers in fostering resilient, vibrant cultural spaces in an ever-changing landscape. Therefore, in this study we reconnected with the three main Twilight Saga destinations more than a decade after our first study ([Larson et al. \(2013\)](#)) – based on primary research in Italy in 2010 and North America in 2011 – and more than 15 years after the popularity of the books and films exploded. Since then, we have continued to follow media reporting and news about the Twilight Saga, content in various fan groups on social media, as well as published information and updates from the destinations. In this study, Twilight Saga tourism at these destinations, evident in its expansive growth, local involvement, the still salient position of the Twilight Saga at these locales, and its digital expansion, are explored through a timeline of formative events and evolution of assets. With a descriptive and interpretative approach, the aim of the paper is to follow up and explore formative events and assets in the development of popular culture tourism destinations over a period of many years. Our findings offer insights for destination organizations, policy makers and individual businesses interested in developing popular culture tourism.

This paper focuses on Twilight Saga tourism. The Twilight Saga is a series of vampire-themed romance novels by Stephenie Meyer, comprising "Twilight," "New Moon," "Eclipse," and "Breaking Dawn." The story follows Bella Swan, who falls in love with the vampire Edward Cullen, and explores their relationship amid challenges, including a love triangle with werewolf Jacob Black. The series was also adapted into a

successful film series. In this paper, the formative events, and assets in the three main Twilight Saga destinations—Forks and La Push (U.S.) (hereafter Forks), Volterra, and Montepulciano (Italy)—are examined. In the case of Forks, the first tourists started arriving in 2005–2006, taking both the industry and locals by surprise. By 2011, the growth of Twilight Saga tourism had peaked, but tourism has nonetheless remained at a high level since then (corroborated by visitor center statistics from one destination and information from participants in this study). In 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Forks Chamber of Commerce and local stakeholders decided to offer their annual Twilight Saga celebration online (Forever Twilight in Forks virtual fan gathering) to share their destination experience with fans around the world. At the Italian destinations, tourists started to arrive in 2007, after the release of the second book in the series (featuring Volterra) and the subsequent movie (using Montepulciano as film location). Previous research show that the main strategies used to deal with and develop Twilight Saga tourism, implemented around 2010–2011, ranged from going all in and fabricating place authenticity, also known as *boosterism* as in the case of Forks, to a strategy of guarding existing place authenticity, such as in the Italian destinations, Volterra and Montepulciano, attempting to merge their traditional heritage with a new, modern Twilight Saga popular culture heritage ([Larson et al. \(2013\)](#)).

2. Literature review

2.1. Formative events and assets at popular culture tourism destinations

When [Butler \(2009\)](#) revisited his seminal work on the TALC model, he concluded that tourism destination growth and development can be described as a dichotomy, consisting of dynamism and inertia, making future destination development patterns challenging to predict. Subsequently, the idea of destination cycles or waves has been discussed by, for example, [Agarwal \(2006\)](#), who suggested that a reorientation stage can follow destination stagnation, and [Baum \(1998\)](#), who proposed an exit stage where a destination withdraws from promotion of tourism completely. In sum, it has been suggested that most destinations undergo several different stages during their evolution. [Singh \(2021\)](#) challenged the single-lifecycle paradigm of destination development and offered the idea of sub- or super-cycles as a characterization of destination evolution over a longer time frame. In addition, in her review of the TALC model, [Piuchan \(2018\)](#) pointed out that a destination may not evolve through all the model's stages, and in some cases, it can exist in two different phases at the same time (e.g., stagnation and exploration) (see also [McKercher, 2005](#)). [McKercher and Wong \(2021\)](#) empirically challenged the idea of the "single-destination lifecycle" in their research on tourist arrivals at more than 200 destinations over 35 years. Their findings suggested six distinct lifecycle categories—exploration, growth, scalloped decline, scalloped growth, full cycles, and volatile—and suggested that destination development goes through numerous cycles. The overall implication of this literature is that to better understand popular culture tourism destination development and longevity, it is important to describe and analyze development over time, identifying the formative events that make up the waves and stages of destination development while acknowledging the likely non-linearity of the trajectory of development.

Furthermore, the notion of destination development influenced by a complex adaptive system was introduced by [Baggio \(2008\)](#). He proposed a "complexity network" framework, encompassing interdependent nonlinear relationships, structures, and characteristics impacting the tourism system. Subsequently, [Butler \(2009\)](#) argued that to better understand future development of destinations, an amalgamation of approaches was needed. [Sanz-Ibáñez et al. \(2016\)](#) argue that the notion of moments is central to the understanding of destination evolution through an event path-shaping trajectory. This would mean moving away from a "key moment" approach and instead contextualizing different events at specific destinations, taking into consideration what

comes before, during, and after individual inflection points. This approach entails a) a pre-moment scape (pre-conditions and trigger discourses), b) moment characteristics (intensity, durability, scale, and speed of shift), and c) post-moment scape (impact discourses and post-conditions). To add to the complexity, in the case of popular culture tourism, the evolution of destinations is equally reliant on the creative and tourism sectors and their inter-sectoral collaboration for long-term development (Lindström, 2019, 2024). This suggests that to fully understand the significance of a series of events that shape a development trajectory, we need to study which assets are available and used to shape these events.

A term used to describe destinations' elements and resources that shape events and drive change is territorial capital (Camagni, 2009). Territorial capital is comprised of the environmental, social/cultural, and economic assets of a place that allow for its development, such as natural resources; human, social, and cultural capital; and infrastructure (Camagni, 2009; Camagni & Capello, 2013). The concept of territorial capital has proven useful when evaluating a destination's strengths and weaknesses and leveraging and managing them (Orsi et al., 2024). Territorial capital serves as a foundation for aspects of long-term prosperity and resilient development such as economic growth, quality of life, innovation and entrepreneurship, touristic and cultural appeal, sound policy, and good governance. In the case of popular culture tourism destinations, territorial capital can include film set locations, musical heritage, cultural events and festivals, museums and exhibitions, heritage and historic sites, themed attractions, and fan communities (see e.g., Camagni & Capello, 2013; Lexhagen et al., 2023; Orsi et al., 2024; Perucca, 2014). For the emergence and longevity of popular culture tourism, such assets are crucial.

Different assets can be classified in different ways. The physical dimension is comprised of all elements of a space, which in this paper we refer to as *artifacts*; these include both tangible elements (movie props) and intangible ones (such as organized events or guided tours). Other elements are connected to humans, for example visitors, staff, and residents, interacting with the environment or with each other; in this paper, we refer to such assets as *people*. But at its center, popular culture tourism is based on the *media product* asset. It consists of original media products, such as screen productions, literature, and music, that act as a catalyst among the cultural phenomenon's audiences and trigger travel in the wake of the consumption of the popular culture expression in question.

Fundamentally, popular culture tourism destination development results in new place-making logics and implications. For example, regional planning and policy is said to be crucial to its development (Gyimóthy et al., 2015; Lindström, 2019). Previous research can be divided into different main streams of thought. The most prevalent is characterized by an optimistic management narrative, emphasizing popular culture tourism's many benefits (Lindström, 2019; Lexhagen et al., 2023). However, previous research fails to provide a comprehensive analysis allowing insights into the resilience, sustainability, and long-term development of popular culture destinations. This is particularly noteworthy given the often-transient nature of popular culture and the tourism in its wake. As Gibson and Connell (2024) highlight, identifying what keeps certain destinations appealing amid fluctuations in demand, can offer valuable insights for local communities and businesses, helping them foster resilient cultural spaces in an ever-evolving environment. With that said, Riley et al.'s (1998) visitation study of 12 US locations shows that tourism inspired by movies can last for many years. There are a few other studies that have explored long-term patterns of popular culture tourism development. Benjamin et al. (2012) used a visitor segmentation and impact approach to explore the Mayberry Days Festival and the town of Mount Airy, home of the "The Andy Griffith Show," which is eponymous with the actor. Benjamin and her colleagues propose that the town may be too reliant on its association with the show and suggest a future diversification of the destination's tourism product. Wright et al. (2023) also recommend diversification of

the tourism product at the Twilight Saga destination Forks. They suggest that a post-Twilight Saga environmental and social sustainable tourism future for the destination should focus on wellness and cultural heritage, given the place's unique natural and cultural features. In the next section, we will outline the methods employed in our research to identify formative events and assets, in the development of Twilight Saga destinations over a period of many years.

3. Methods

3.1. Destination Twilight Saga - the cases

"Well, this crazy thing that happened to us in this little, tiny town is a huge gift and we are extremely fortunate, and it has done us a world of good."

Staff at Forks Visitor Center on the Twilight Saga and Twilight tourism

In understanding popular culture tourist destinations, it is important to distinguish between *settings* and *locations*. Settings are places where the storyline is set, whilst locations are where the screen production is filmed (Frost, 2009). In the case of Twilight Saga, Forks and La Push in Washington, USA and Volterra, Italy are the main settings. Montepulciano, Italy and British Columbia, Canada¹ are the primary locations (Larson et al., 2013). Forks is a small town in Clallam County, Washington, USA with a population of 3335 (Data.census). The town has traditionally been associated with timber production, its national park, and nature-based tourism. However, since the town was featured in the Twilight Saga book series (first installment published in 2005) by Stephenie Meyer, the town has experienced an explosive growth of Twilight Saga tourism (Lundberg et al., 2012). A neighboring small community associated with the Twilight Saga is La Push, which has a population of 336 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). La Push's Native American Quileute people's legends speak of them being descended from wolves. Meyer's fictionalized version of this legend depicts the Quileutes as shape-shifters—wolves/werewolves—who are enemies of the main characters, the vampires. In Tuscany, Italy, lies the small town of Volterra (approx. 11,000 inhabitants), which dates to the Middle Ages. It is known for its local culture, long history of alabaster handicrafts, and Etruscan heritage. The town was also made a permanent Twilight Saga destination with the release of the second installment of the Twilight Saga book series—New Moon—when Meyer decided to locate the storyline of her new characters and royal vampire clan, the Volturi, in the city (Lundberg et al., 2012). Based on the materials we received from the tourist offices, tourism numbers in Volterra have steadily grown during the time frame when the book and movies were released. Surprisingly for the local stakeholders of the town, when it became time for the shooting of the New Moon movie, the production company decided to use the neighboring town of Montepulciano as location. Montepulciano, with around 14,000 residents, is traditionally well-known for its medieval character, architecture, and fine wines. It is also known for being a popular film production location which has hosted movies such as Under the Tuscan Sun (2003) and The English Patient (1996) (Lundberg et al., 2012).

These three cases differ considerably in their overall destination characteristics and tourism development. However, we believe that, through thick description of the cases from the perspective of popular culture tourism, including a rich presentation of study data, the results are meaningfully transferrable to other, while perhaps not all, popular culture tourism destinations, offering a broad understanding and practical utility. The timing of the study, set just over a decade after the

¹ British Columbia, Canada was excluded from this study as Larson et al.'s (2013) study on Twilight Saga destinations showed that the destination had no strategy or interest in capitalizing on Twilight Saga tourism, solely invested in satisfying the needs of the screen production industry.

initial research, can be justified on several grounds. Our return to the Twilight Saga destinations is explained by the passing of a just over a decade since our first study (Larson et al., 2013) and the release of the fifth installment in the book series Midnight Sun together with the release of the films on streaming services like Netflix. The release of a new book and the launch of films on streaming platforms are anticipated to reignite interest among both existing and new audiences and consumers of the phenomenon, potentially resulting in new or increased tourist visits to the destinations. In addition to this, longitudinal studies often span years or decades to track individuals, phenomena, or replicate findings. Therefore, our timing of the study is not merely arbitrary but strategic. This timeframe allows us to observe significant changes, both major and minor, which are crucial for understanding current trends and projecting future developments. Additionally, the study's timing coincided with the pandemic and significant shifts in tourism, particularly notable with for example the digital adaptation of the Forever Twilight in Forks event. This adaptation highlighted the enduring relevance of Twilight Saga tourism, contrasting with transient examples of film-induced tourism often discussed in literature, which typically fade after a short period. Thus, our study's timing was pivotal, capturing a dynamic period of change and resilience in tourism practices.

Since our first study of Twilight Saga tourism, tourism in Forks has been significantly shaped by the global success of the phenomenon, transforming the small town into a major destination. Even nearly two decades after the release of the first book, Forks continues to draw around 40,000 visitors each year, with many businesses embracing Twilight Saga themed attractions, such as a museum, memorabilia, and recreations of elements from the series. The economic impact has been substantial, providing a lifeline to local businesses, hotels, and restaurants. Some residents view the phenomenon with pride and gratitude, crediting it with keeping the town afloat during tough economic times. However, the influx has also posed challenges, including strains on infrastructure, a lack of accommodations, and disruptions to the town's quiet lifestyle. Concerns about privacy, safety, and the behavior of some overzealous fans have been voiced by residents. Despite occasional frustrations, Forks acknowledges the benefits of this unique tourism boom, recognizing it as an enduring and vital part of the local economy and identity (Crosbie, 2024; Pitney, 2022). Volterra has experienced a growing number of international guests, particularly from France and Germany. Volterra's tourism is characterized by a mix of short-stay visitors and those who choose to stay overnight in or near the city. The city's tourism success has been attributed to proactive digital marketing, collaboration with local businesses, and strategic reopening efforts after the Covid-19 pandemic that ensured safety and accessibility. Social media campaigns, partnerships with hotels, and promotions for proximity tourism has further bolstered attendance. Additionally, investments in museum improvements and a focus on guided tours enriched the visitor experience. Volterra's approach highlights a broader trend of sustainable, small-scale tourism in Tuscany's villages, with potential collaborations, such as joint exhibitions with neighboring towns, aimed at creating integrated tourism circuits for future growth (Giannini & Baratta, 2020). In Montepulciano, tourism has been thriving, with growth rates surpassing the regional average. Renowned for its cultural and architectural heritage, the town has celebrated landmarks like the 500th anniversary of the Renaissance masterpiece, the temple of San Biagio. Montepulciano's tourist base has expanded from primarily European visitors to a significant international presence, notably from the United States. Additionally, the town has seen a rise in domestic Italian tourism, spurred by shifts in travel preferences influenced by global events. While foreign tourists often stay longer in agritourism accommodations, Italian visitors typically opt for shorter stays, contributing to a year-round influx of visitors (Giannini, 2018).

3.2. Research design, data collection and analysis

Based on an epistemological position of pragmatism (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), we focus this study on the research problem of understanding what can secure longevity of popular culture tourism destinations. We seek rich descriptions of popular culture tourism phenomena and to understand meaning through interpretation of a socially constructed reality. In line with this, we choose to focus on following up on contacts that we established in our first study of these destinations in 2010/2011 and to interview centrally placed people with significant understanding and information about the past and current situation of Twilight Saga tourism. Furthermore, as researchers, we are situated close to the topic of our study. In varying degrees, we identify as fans or at least familiar with the books and films of the Twilight Saga. Also, one of the researchers identify as Italian and therefore holds a specific position in relation to understanding the Italian context for Twilight Saga tourism.

This study is based on semi-structured interviews with key informants engaged in Twilight Saga tourism at the three destinations under study: Forks, USA, Volterra, Italy, and Montepulciano, Italy. Where possible, the same informants interviewed in the first study (Larson et al., 2013) were included in this study (see Table 1). Since this research is a follow-up study, we believed that pursuing interviews with the same people (or representatives of the same role/organization) was the best approach, as they were in a unique position to provide insights into the topic under study. Also, the interviewee in Forks has been in intermittent contact with the researchers during the past ten years. However, it should be noted that the current study employed a different conceptual framework (TALC, territorial capital) from the previous study (Larson et al., 2013) in which destination strategy was used as theoretical foundation. It should also be noted that data included in the current study was collected in 2020–2021 and did not include primary data from the previous study.

All the Italian interviewees were provided with an information letter about the study, the data, their rights, and contact information for one of the researchers (Italian speaking). We obtained oral consent for recording the interviews. The interviews with the Forks resident were an online interview and a follow-up email interview in the summer and early fall of 2020 respectively. The 7 Italian interviewees were interviewed mostly in person, while two interviews took place online in the early spring of 2021. In many cases, several representatives were interviewed in small groups. The interview in Forks was conducted in English, while Italian was used in the destinations in Italy. The interview guide for the Italian cases was based on the interview guide from the previous study (Larson et al., 2013), while the interview with the representative from Forks was based on the current situation because contact with the Forks representative has been more continuous compared with the Italian representatives. The objective was to track the development of Twilight Saga tourism over time, i.e., a follow up study. The interviews lasted for approximately 1 h and were transcribed verbatim. The interviews were further informed by observing online environments to trace the development of Twilight Saga tourism in all three cases such as the introduction of digital events during the Covid-19 pandemic.

To ensure validity based on credibility of our study, we used member

Table 1
List of study participants.

Forks, WA (U.S.)	Volterra (Italy)	Montepulciano (Italy)
Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center ^a	Public administration representative ^a , tourist office staff ^a	Public administration representative ^a , tourist office representative ^a , tourist guide ^a , fan

^a Indicates that the same person or person in the same capacity as in the earlier study in 2010/2011 was interviewed.

checking. The study participants were regularly updated on the study's progress and were contacted for feedback on our analysis and visualization of formative events and assets. Participants agreed to be identified by their roles only. We used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Walters, 2016), conducted jointly by the researchers through abductive reasoning (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018) that involved moving back and forth between the empirical material and previous literature related to destination development and popular culture tourism, looking for a plausible explanation to how Twilight Saga tourism has continued and evolved in these destinations. Therefore, the theoretical framework evolved as our understanding of the data progressed. The main themes, including *Media Product*, *People*, and *Artifacts* (hereafter referred to as the Trifecta of Popular Culture Tourism Destination Development), emerged from the Forks interview and were then applied to the Italian interview transcripts. To increase confirmability of our study, themes were placed in a timeline for review by interviewees, and categorized as *Media Products* (books, films, and other media products), *People* (those influencing Twilight Saga tourism and their activities such as fund raising, donations, and communities), and *Artifacts* (tangible and intangible elements like buildings, guided tours, and merchandise). To further strengthen confirmability, the categorization decisions for the thematic analysis were collaborative, and the Italian cases were initially coded by an Italian language-proficient researcher before joint discussion and final decisions were made.

4. Findings - the Trifecta of Popular Culture Tourism Destination Development

4.1. Forks, WA – North American home of vampires and werewolves

According to the Chamber of Commerce, in Forks the pinnacle of tourism was in 2010, with almost 73,000 people signing the Visitor

Center guest book compared to about 5000 before the Twilight Saga books were published (see references to formative events and assets in Fig. 1). As also reported by the Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center, the significance of the Twilight Saga phenomenon was observed by the Washington State governor, who said that the Twilight Saga saved the state in terms of the positive economic impact on sales taxes.

4.1.1. The media product

For Forks, the defining aspect of the media product centers around how this tiny town not known at all as a tourism destination suddenly became known through the Twilight Saga books and films. An important starting point was:

She [the author of the books] came up here about a month before it was published and she said that it was like it was created for her story, so you know I think that it was like hitting the lottery for Forks [...] she really made it feel authentic and did a really good job in her research and really captured the feel of the place (Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center).

Although it has been many years since the books and the films were released, the Twilight Saga still plays a significant role for tourism in Forks. This is further fueled by the release of new *Media Products* such as the *Midnight Sun* book (released in 2020 in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, which in turn made it difficult for stakeholders in Forks to plan anything around the release of the book). Importantly, relating to the media product:

The beauty of it being a book series is that you know new generations are being introduced to it all the time. I think that there are so many fun Twilight things still happening in the world that this Midnight Sun announcement, we've been calling it, you know, the Twilight renaissance,

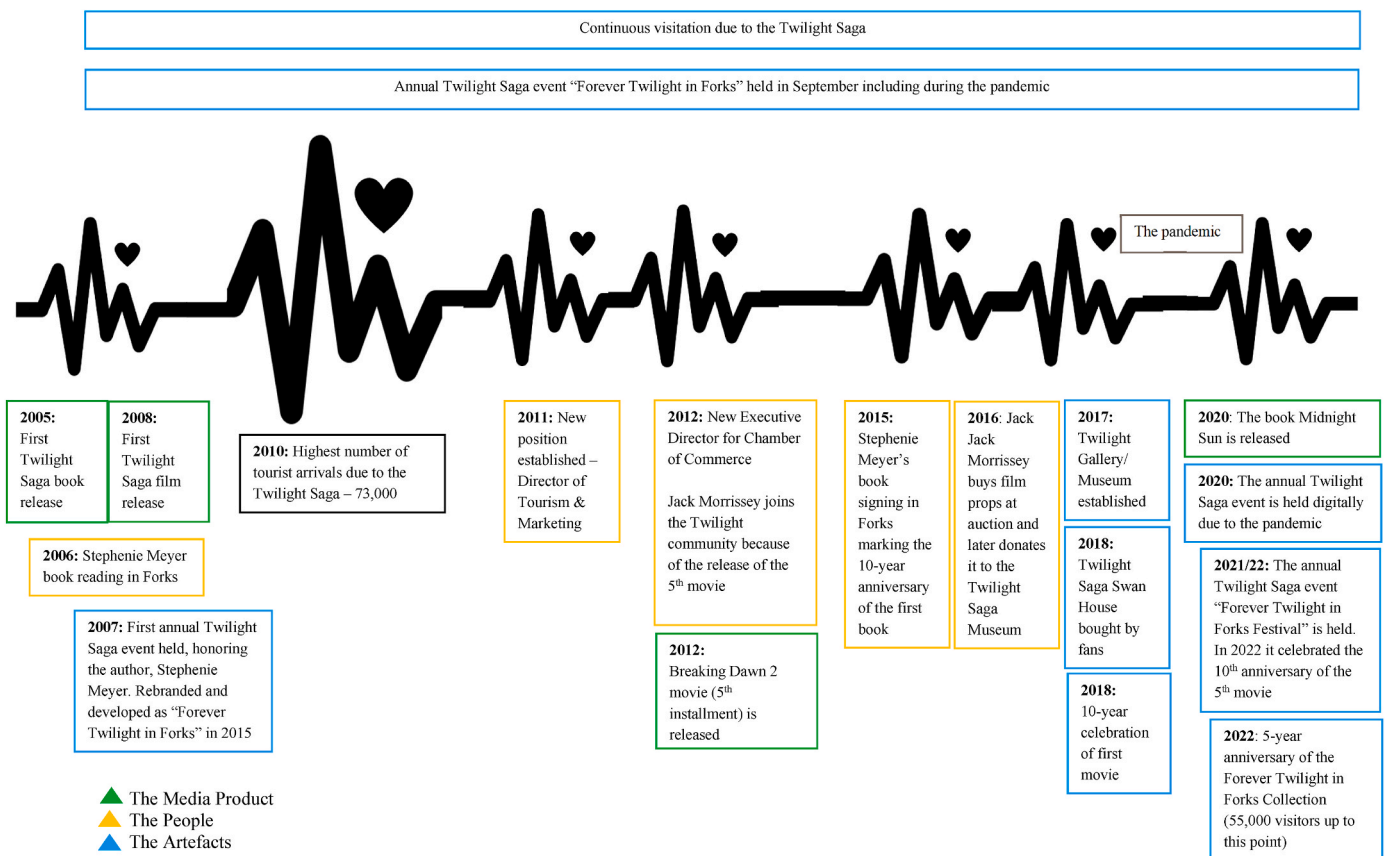


Fig. 1. Formative events and assets for Twilight Saga tourism in Forks, WA, USA.

because there's so much nostalgia in Twilight and there are so many new people coming in and wanting to learn about Twilight and falling in love with Twilight and so forth. [...], people are like what are you going to do when this book is over; then it will be over, and it's like it's never been over. [...] I think that it's just gonna be perpetual and people will love it for many years to come (Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center).

Tourism in Forks would likely have further increased if the movies had also been filmed there, but as the Forks Chamber of Commerce/Visitor Center states:

I think because we are the setting of the story, we have a lifelong connection with the Twilight Saga [...] we just feel really fortunate [...], and so it's been amazing and the fans keep coming and are so excited always to come here, and they always want to give back to the community and stuff, so it's just a great fandom to be a part of.

The releases of books and films have been important events throughout the history of Twilight Saga tourism in Forks, for example, the release of the first book, and the first (*Twilight*) and last movie (*Breaking Dawn Part 2*). When it comes to rumors on remakes of the movies or a TV series (Hollywood Reporter, 2023) and any potential new books, the Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center said:

I think they'll remake the movies. I really believe that because I think that this is a "golden goose" that people want to keep alive, and people talk about a TV series and stuff [...] if Stephenie Meyer feels like she has a success with *Midnight Sun* [the latest book] [...] it will inspire her to write additional stories.

The *Media Product* can put a spotlight on destinations that previously have received little attention from tourists. In the case of Forks, the Twilight Saga resulted in visitors discovering other attractive aspects of the destination during their visit, creating an opportunity to further develop the destination based on its new cultural asset.

Once they find out that Forks is a real place and that they can actually come to Forks and all the things that Forks is also known for that people want to learn about and so there's so much to offer up here [...] and most people when they come they have no idea how beautiful it is so they can't wait to plan another trip (Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center).

4.1.2. The people

The author of the Twilight Saga books, the fans, and several other key people make up significant parts of the asset *People*, through their personal contributions and strong commitment. The author has made several appearances in Forks. For instance, in 2006 she traveled there to do a book reading at the local library, and in 2015 she did a book-signing, which in turn attracted people from all over the world, marking an important moment for Twilight Saga tourism in Forks: "*She is even described as 'The Queen of our World'*" (Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center). However, as they also point out:

We kind of as chamber [Chamber of Commerce] gave up the event to private individuals to organize things and I think looking back with hindsight I wish we had not done that; I wish we had maintained control all of those years.

Some individuals in particular play a key role in the development of Twilight Saga tourism in Forks. For example, fans as well as people behind the film have purchased costumes and props from an auction in 2016 with the purpose of starting a Twilight Saga Museum. Their contribution, through the purchase of many costumes, and helping with things around the gallery or running the social media accounts for *Forever Twilight in Forks*, is all done on a volunteer basis. Other examples of the importance of *People* with passion and skills are cosplayers. Both in Forks and Volterra, there are people contributing to the

Twilight Saga experience through their various cosplaying activities.

Another important aspect of *People* is how individuals care about and think of each other. As the Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center stated, "*I post a lot of stuff in the group just because I want to make sure that I stay really connected to the fan base [...] and that they think of me as a friend.*" As the author of the book series has the same social media company as Forks (running its public page), they also mentioned this as a great collaboration and example of people's engagement in Twilight Saga tourism in Forks: "*Those ladies are such huge Twilight fans that they can use their expertise as Twilight fans to really reach other Twilight fans.*"

Thus, passion and commitment seem typical for the *People* of the Twilight Saga community. The Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center states:

For me and for a lot of people, the Twilight Saga represents a fandom family, so these are friends that we've made through the Saga [...] we just hired a gentleman to work here. He's from Australia and he just moved over here. It's about really being able to connect with people and count on them when times are good and when times are bad.

Furthermore, locals get involved and "*It's getting to the point where people are coming up and saying 'Oh my gosh I went there with my granddaughter who's visiting and it's so amazing and I just love it, can I volunteer for your next event?'*" (Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center). Their own passion as a fan of the Twilight Saga means a lot for the work that they do. In fact, the position of Director of Tourism and Marketing was created to keep the momentum going from the massive interest from visitors back in 2009–2010. However, they state:

They were hesitant to hire me because I wasn't from here and I didn't have the knowledge of the area and stuff, but they said I was such a huge Twilight fan they thought that might work in their favor.

The *People* of the Twilight Saga are also important for the future of tourism in Forks and the Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center believes that "*there's still enough, you know, passion within me and within the people that I collaborate with. We still have a lot of fun to have with Twilight.*" In her view, the work everyone does with the *Forever Twilight in Forks Collection* will attract interest for the coming 10 years and be known worldwide. Overall, they are optimistic about the future: "*The great thing about Forks is that we are very versatile here and we adapt, so I think if something is not working, we're going to change it to a different way.*"

4.1.3. The artifacts

In Forks, there was initially not much in terms of Twilight Saga artifacts and evidence for visitors to experience. Now, *Forks Chamber of Commerce* is a center for Twilight Saga visitors exhibiting the *Forever Twilight in Forks Collection*, which is a gallery free of charge for visitors. Costumes are rotated and new items are continuously added. Before the Covid-19 pandemic the average number of visitors was about 40,000 people signing the guest book per year. Furthermore, there are still restaurants in Forks that have Twilight Saga themed items on the menu and shops that sell Twilight Saga items. Stores in general still accommodate many Twilight Saga visitors, regarding which the Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center noted: "*We're definitely keeping the Twilight love alive in the local businesses.*"

However, over time, some things that visitors could experience earlier are no longer around. For example, currently there are no organized guided Twilight Saga tours (only self-guided), and the *Dazzled by Twilight* store was closed in 2012 because of a fire. There are ideas and plans around starting a nonprofit for the *Forever Twilight in Forks Collection*, and through donations, moving into a new building. The Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center states: "*In that way maybe [we will] raise donations to also donate to schools and so forth.*" One of the main tangible long-term assets is the annual *Forever Twilight in Forks* festival. During the Covid-19 pandemic it was transformed into a digital festival, offering participants different ways of experiencing

Forks (e.g., online guided tours with cosplayers, concerts, a virtual cooking class, workouts, and dance sessions). Other examples of long-term, tangible assets are the *Twilight Swan House*, which fans of the series bought and converted to make it look like in the movies and offered it as an Airbnb accommodation. The Forks Chamber of Commerce/Forks Visitor Center expresses a positive outlook on the future of Twilight Saga artifacts:

Even if not another thing was produced, I think that we have enough love for Twilight and content that can celebrate it and keep it going for many years to come/ ... /That's a very healthy amount because what happens in a place like Forks is you definitely want as much business as you can get but you can only handle so much. I think that the locals are really happy, I think our businesses are happy and I think that with the infrastructure that we have in place and especially with the Twilight collection as a long-term project there's a healthy balance.

4.2. Volterra – Italian birthplace of the Volturi vampire clan

According to data from the local Tourism Office, Volterra experienced significant tourism growth in the 1990s which later slowed down, and by the time visitor flows generated by the Twilight Saga began, Volterra was able to absorb an increasing number of visitors. After this big peak, growth slowed down. Between 2007 and 2010, the Volterra Tourist Office estimated that, on average, 30% of incoming tourists were interested in New Moon (i.e., the Twilight Saga book in which Volterra was featured). In Volterra's case, the formative events are strongly connected to the traditional tourism products that are tied to the town's heritage, and to the work with the Twilight Saga by some specific actors who are involved in the promotion of tourism of the area (please see references to formative events and assets in Fig. 2).

4.2.1. The media product

As for the Media Product, Volterra has embraced its association with the Twilight Saga books. And while there was some initial disappointment over the choice of another location for the filming of the second installment, New Moon (i.e., in neighboring Montepulciano), their involvement in the filming of the TV series *The Medici* has crystalized insights on being a setting versus being a location. In *The Medici*, Volterra acts as stand-in for Florence:

People cannot distinguish it is Volterra or Montepulciano [referring to Twilight New Moon]. People remember Volterra. And then we did, we just saw, or we had proof with the script on the Medici, they have filmed entirely here, but there was no tourism reward because everyone thought it was Florence (Volterra Tourist Office 2).

Whilst Volterra did not enjoy how the filming in the region brought lots of people, props and scenography, the interviewees reported a number of benefits being associated with the production. For example, they traveled to the Rome Film Festival as a delegation and were seen on the broadcasting of the red carpet for longer than expected: *"Our flag wavers were on the red carpet in Rome for 20 min"* (Volterra Tourist Office 2). Subsequently, they developed a relationship with the Toscana Film Commission, which is the regional organization in charge of assisting film productions in the Tuscany region (Toscana Film Commission, n. d.).

Much as in the case of Twilight Saga New Moon, Volterra was referred to as Florence in *The Medici*, but it is described as a very positive experience. The movie production took place during the off-peak tourism season and the place felt *"like being at Cinecittà"*² (Volterra Tourist Office 1). There were many props made for the movie which

were donated to the city that are still used for the annual Medieval festival.

4.2.2. The people

The development of popular culture tourism is dependent on assets and stakeholders such as the media product(s), the creative and tourism industry stakeholders, and relations and interactions between them. In the case of Volterra, the *People* working at the local tourist office at the time of the surge of the first Twilight Saga visitors exhibited true engagement and commitment in securing long-term Twilight Saga tourism. They collaborated with fan clubs, with Forks Visitor Centre/Chamber of Commerce as well as contacts with cosplayers participating in local events and gatherings. One of the key people working at the tourist office reported an incident when staff were missing for a Twilight Saga guided tour, when he stepped in as one of the Volturi vampires to help facilitate the strong emotions often associated with this form of touristic experiences:

And then these three Volturi arrived in the darkness. And there the reactions were contrasting, a little girl started to cry/.../ and a child hit me in the lower leg with such force (Volterra Tourist Office 2).

Not only *People* leading the tourism development and organizing activities proved to be important. Tourist office employees stated that their expectations of a stereotypical Twilight Saga tourist starkly contrasted with arriving Twilight Saga tourists. They ended up welcoming cultivated visitors who had read the books. Tours and gatherings organized for them and fans' engagement were described as important moments in the development of the Twilight Saga tourism phenomenon. In particular, organizers support participation of invested Twilight Saga tourists in the experiences:

If someone is not passionate, maybe the boyfriend that maybe the girlfriend likes it, but the boyfriend doesn't ... Well we have always tried to dissuade people who did not know the story from participating. Because you earn the money on the spot, but then you ruin the atmosphere for the group (Volterra Tourist Office 1).

4.2.3. The artifacts

Volterra, like any Italian city, has a very long cultural and historical tradition. It was stressed by the people working with the promotion of the city that its image should remain anchored in their heritage, which has always been the main component of the city's tourism offerings and region:

It is all an idea of cultural tourism, because for us just tourism is not interesting. I mean, tourism, what do you want, do you walk? No, it has to be tied to culture, tied to experience, tied to, like, the food aspect, the nature aspect (Volterra City Council member).

Interviewees stated that they had a certain fear that Twilight Saga tourism would result in over-commercialization detrimental to the city's identity. However, it was stated that this was avoided due to the careful planning and management of its development, partly by connecting the city's characteristics with the Volturi legend. People engaged in Volterra tourism are very adamant that: *"Volterra is not a city of vampires, it is the city of Volturi"* (Volterra Tourist Office 1). Volterra is famous for its alabaster stone, which has been linked to the Volturi's very white skin. Volterra is also the home of historical buildings and subterranean spaces. The Twilight Saga narrative locates the Volturi living quarters in these underground areas, so a manhole located on one of the small streets of the city has become part of the tour as an entrance to the Volturi world.

According to a local restaurant owner with whom we conversed, whose establishment is part of the tour, the tours are perceived as an important and welcomed source of visitors. They have up until recently been offered regularly. This is an important change in the development of Twilight Saga tourism for the city. Even though the tour is now only

² Cinecittà is the place in Rome where movies are filmed. A comparison could be saying that it felt like being at Hollywood.

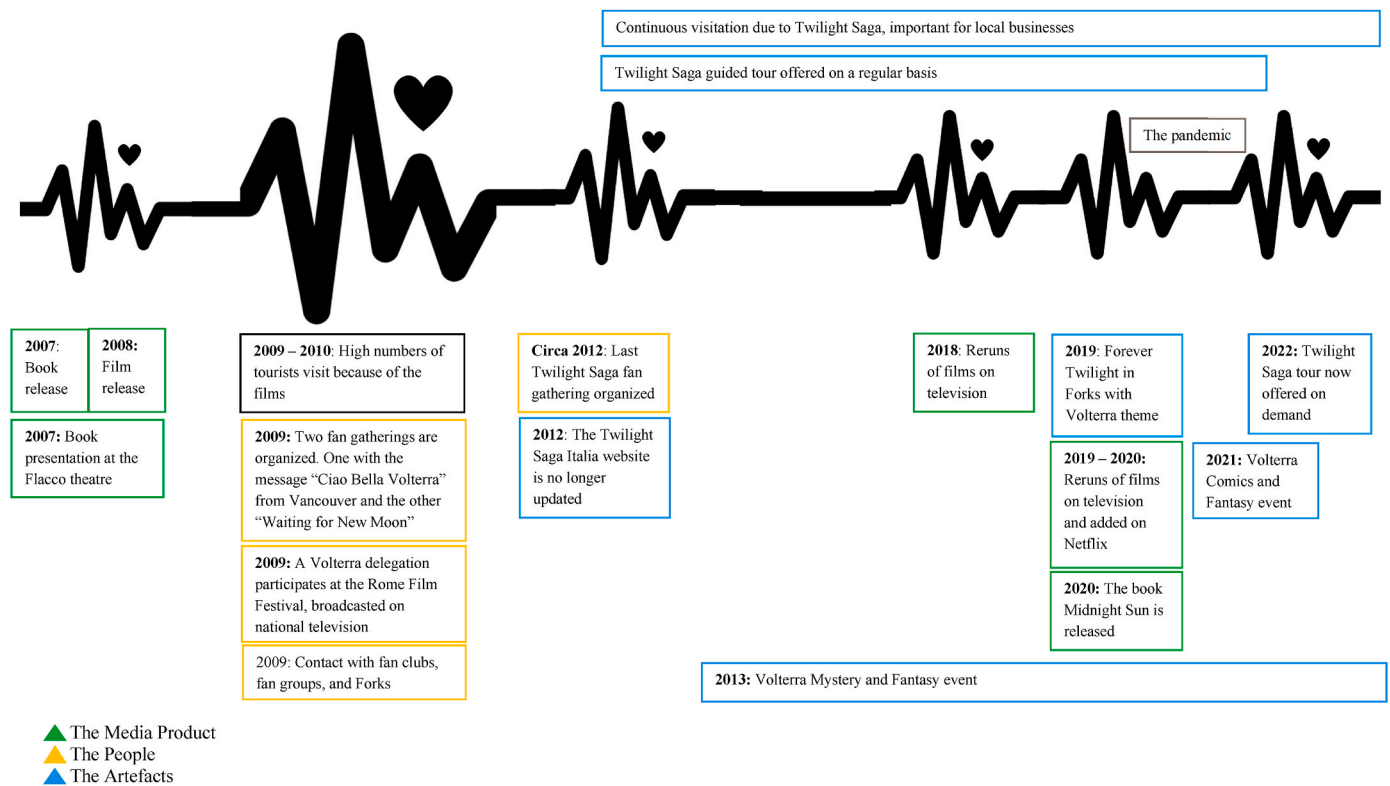


Fig. 2. Formative events and assets for Twilight Saga tourism in Volterra, Italy.

offered on demand, the general perception is that new, younger fans are visiting after coming across the Twilight Saga phenomenon through the books and/or through platforms such as Netflix:

And they explained to us that still today all of this return of the Twilight New Moon phenomenon is tied to the fact that now it is aired on Netflix

and so this girl not only had read all the books, but she had also seen all of the movies on Netflix (Volterra Tourist Office 2).

Another important *Artifact* is the merchandise produced and sold at the destination. In Volterra, examples of such artifacts are t-shirts and bookmarks, which to this day are still produced and sold, even though

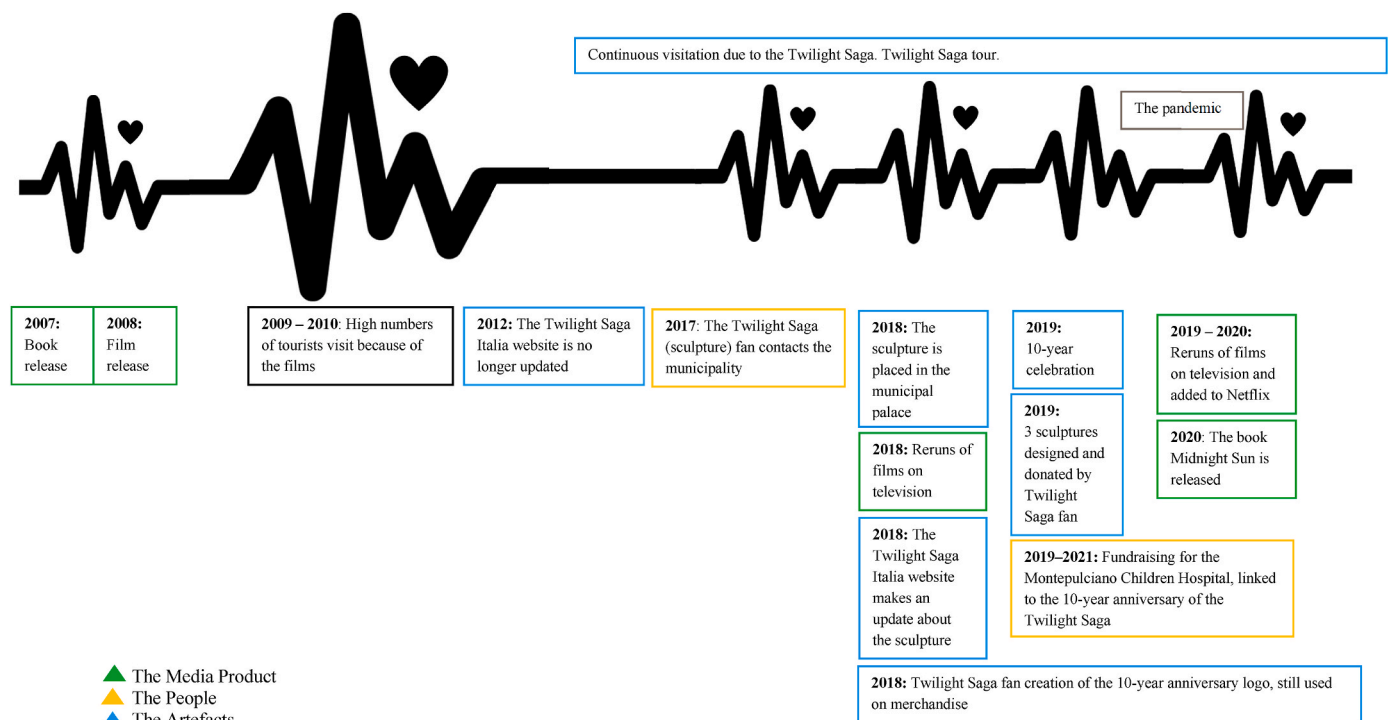


Fig. 3. Formative events and assets for Twilight Saga tourism in Montepulciano, Italy.

interest is not the same as it once was.

4.3. Montepulciano – location for the Italian vampire stronghold

According to Montepulciano's Tourism Office, the total number of tourists has generally increased and their data showcase high numbers, much higher than for other countries, of US visitors in 2011. One possible interpretation of these numbers is, according to them, partly due to a rise of Twilight Saga visitors, and these numbers were consistent, up until the Covid-19 pandemic. As in the case of Volterra, Montepulciano's identity is strongly tied to its traditional and historical identity. Montepulciano is primarily associated with wine production and lately has been exploring its historical roots more deeply. Please see references to formative events and assets in Fig. 3.

4.3.1. The media product

Montepulciano was not specifically featured in the Twilight Saga when it was selected as the main Italian film location. However, the city has a long history of film production, of which its stakeholders are very proud:

You know, because when time passes, people lose the memory a little bit. But the push, I think a lot of people came here because of the movies, starting with the English Patient, Under the Tuscan Sun, New Moon (Informant 4, local guide).

Contrary to Volterra, Montepulciano relishes the experience of being selected as the Italian film location for New Moon. When tourism stakeholders reminisce about this period, they describe many memorable experiences:

Two weeks ... Well, I don't remember. I do remember this mass of people that was around the village. Very weird episodes that happened that were told to me. Like attacking the ashtray where he [actor Robert Pattinson playing the main character Edward Cullen] had left his cigarette (Informant 5, local guide).

and

We will always remember those red mantels [worn by hundreds of extras], because in the beginning there was a great demand also for the stage costumes. I mean, they wanted specifically the mantels, since there were so many (Informant 6, Montepulciano Tourist Office).

Despite the unexpectedness of being associated with the Twilight Saga phenomenon, Montepulciano's connection to the Twilight Saga New Moon has developed into an important and cherished experience for its tourism stakeholders.

4.3.2. The people

As previously mentioned in the case of Volterra, People play a central part in the development of popular culture tourism. Montepulciano is no different in this sense. However, in this case, there is one fan who stands out in terms of connecting the Twilight Saga to the town. In 2017, this fan contacted the Montepulciano Municipality with the intention of donating a piece of Twilight Saga New Moon artwork (a sculpture) to the city.

And, near the elevator, maybe you have not noticed because it is a bit covered by, well, the signage. At the elevator there is ... an installation, practically an art piece in wrought iron and marble, maybe, well. It has been donated to Montepulciano by a [...] fan (Informant 4, Montepulciano City Council member).

Mostly because of this fan, the connection between the Twilight Saga and the town was strengthened. The artwork was the first sculpture donated. For the 10th anniversary of the Twilight New Moon movie, three more sculptures were created. One is located in the Town Mayor's office, and another is in the Tourist Office. The same fan also organized a fundraiser to collect money for the local hospital in need of special beds

allowing mothers to be close to their newborns. This resulted in a donation of 12 beds which was dedicated to the Twilight Saga legacy.

As in the case of Volterra, Tourist Office staff, a local tour operator, and other stakeholders have played important roles in the development of Twilight Saga tourism. The interviewed Twilight Saga tour guide often tells the story of a girl stopping the city mayor in the main square, where Twilight Saga New Moon was filmed:

And there, in 2019, for instance, during the Bravío day, which is this ... one of the celebrations, let's say, important, in the cultural tradition of Montepulciano, while we were coming out from the main door of the municipal house, a girl blocked the mayor saying that she wanted to take a picture with him right in front of the palace and then well, in front of the door where ... of the famous scene (Informant 4, Montepulciano City Council member).

4.3.3. The artifacts

In the case of Montepulciano, the artifacts and the people are very closely intertwined. One example is the fan who donated several Twilight Saga themed sculptures. The first donated sculpture was not only an homage to the book, but also to the town of Montepulciano:

"Let's say that this sculpture was really meant as a gift, specifically to Montepulciano, where the movie was set, but also something bigger, an ode to the sentiment of love, that's what it wants to be. And in it let's say, every part of this sculpture, of this piece, represents something, because the base is made of marble, and that is not a coincidence, it is inspired by the rock that covers all the buildings in Montepulciano [...] Then of course there is the column in wrought iron that represents the art of Montepulciano [...] and then there is the vine that wraps the column and which of course represents the Nobile [...] which is anyway the first Italian wine to get the DOCG and it is anyway a wine of very ancient origins, really (Informant 7, local Twilight Saga fan).

Another sculpture, designed and completed for the Twilight Saga New Moon's 10th year anniversary, shows the time at 5 min to 12, the time on the local clock tower when the character Bella races across the square to save Edward from a certain death. Furthermore, the Montepulciano architecture and local square are very important artifacts. Remnants of the film production can also be seen in the red painted corridor of the municipal palace, despite it being painted white when the movie was completed. One of the most sought-after artifacts by Twilight Saga tourists visiting Montepulciano, the fountain that Bella plunges into in her race to save Edward, is, however, missing:

They especially ask us about the fountain. We always tell [them], this is really a thing that ... [...] ... that we gladly explain to everyone, and it happens [...] that many come here after having been to Volterra. Because maybe they go there and in Volterra they do not recognize the places of the movie or anyway it is told to them that it has been filmed here and then they arrive in Montepulciano (Informant 6, Montepulciano Tourist Office).

Other examples of artifacts are the local Twilight Saga themed tour that continues to run in the city together with themed merchandise sold at local stores.

4.4. Trifecta of all destinations

When combining the formative events and assets of the trifecta themes of Media Product, People, and Artifacts for all three destinations (see Table 2), our results illustrate how their development trajectories continuously rely on the media product such as through new releases, new media distribution channels, new audiences, or new media products related to the Twilight Saga, as well as the special bonds between the destinations and the story as with Forks and Volterra that are real places where the story was set. It is also clear that people are essential for long-term development. Engagement from different groups of people such as

Table 2
Trifecta of all three destinations.

Trifecta theme/ Destination	Forks, WA (U.S.)	Volterra (Italy)	Montepulciano (Italy)
The Media Product	Release of new books, new audiences for previous books and films, films released for TV and streaming, eventual remakes of films, discovery of the real place of books & movies	Release of new books, new audiences for previous books and films, films released for TV and streaming, film festival, relationship with film commission	Release of new books, new audiences for previous books and films, films released for TV and streaming, history of film production
The People	Author visits, fan employed as dedicated staff for tourism and marketing, staff commitment, celebrity engagement in Twilight community, celebrity donation of film props, fan volunteering & fan engagement	Tourist office staff engagement, fan engagement, connecting with fan community and Forks	Fan donation and fund raising, engagement of locals, tourist office staff & local tour operator
The Artifacts	Events, gallery exhibition, property used in film bought by fan offered as themed accommodation, themed menus in restaurants, merchandise, self-guided tours	Events, guided tours, merchandise, careful planning and management of Twilight Saga tourism and traditional cultural heritage	Tour package, sculptures, anniversary logo, architecture and city spaces, remnants of film production, themed tour, merchandise
Discontinued assets	No more guided tours, closed Twilight specialized shop	Guided tour only on demand, the Twilight Italia website no longer available, no more fan gathering events	Film props no longer in place

fans, staff, celebrities and the author, constitute vital assets that help secure longevity for all destinations. In particular, Forks is a case where engagement by many people seems particularly strong across time. Furthermore, a variety of *artifacts* shape the development trajectories of these destinations highlighting the importance of tangible and intangible assets that drive development and change of the Twilight Saga tourist experience. Some of them directly related to or part of the media product (e.g. film props), and some created by businesses or actors at the destinations or by fans. Across the three destinations there are also examples of assets that have been discontinued over time.

5. Discussion and final remarks

In this study we explored formative events and assets of popular culture tourism destination development over time to understand what makes popular culture tourism destinations last. By exploring the evolution of Twilight Saga tourism in the three destinations of Forks (U.S.), Volterra (Italy), and Montepulciano (Italy) we find both similarities and differences that advance our understanding of the longevity and driving forces of popular culture tourism development. In relation to [Butler's \(2009\)](#) idea about dynamism and inertia in development, the main similarity is that they all still attract visitors and offer popular culture tourism experiences (although at a different level compared to the initial peak flow around 2010), but with different formative events in their

respective development trajectory. The general impression is that Forks has a more dynamically sustained level of tourism, with formative events throughout the time period involving the *Media Product*, the *People* and the *Artifacts*, while Volterra and Montepulciano experienced a more noticeable and continued drop in their level of tourism a couple of years after the peak. Also, Forks' representative explores the many changes in the destination during the period, while the Italian destinations describe the development of Twilight Saga tourism more as a natural continuation of what started many years ago. Therefore, the differences are mainly concerned with how certain types of assets and events shape the development of the respective destination. Differences in the choice of development strategies used by the same destinations were also detected in the early stages, where Forks used a boosterism approach while Volterra and Montepulciano used a community-oriented approach ([Larson et al., 2013](#)), suggesting the use of different assets and ideas about future development. Similar to what [McKercher and Wong \(2021\)](#) suggested, the waves of formative events in the development of all three destinations appear scalloped and volatile. In particular, and as expected from popular culture tourism being dependent on a media product, offering new destination artifacts seem clearly related to reruns and new distribution channels of movies and new book releases. Therefore, a managerial implication is to monitor how the media product is further developed over longer time periods.

Overall, the trajectories of all three destinations show that they depend on a complex interdependent amalgamation, or weave, of formative events rather than any significant main key moments ([Baggio, 2008](#); [Baum, 2009](#); [Sanz-Ibáñez et al., 2016](#)). Thus, our findings suggest that the longevity of popular culture tourism depends on linkages between what the destination can control and what the fandom and media sector create. In Forks, continued releases of *Media Products* as well as fandom experiencing nostalgia create eternal life for the destination. Furthermore, as Forks is the main setting of the Twilight Saga phenomenon, it has a life-long connection to the Twilight Saga. Undoubtedly, this has managerial implications in terms of keeping close to the fandom as well as flexibly adapting to unpredictable changes when it comes to the media product.

All three destinations display how several different examples of environmental, social, cultural, and economic assets ([Camagni & Capello, 2013](#)) are used in formative events to leverage and manage the development of popular culture tourism. In Forks, long-term development is built on a comprehensive use of assets related to the *Media product*, the *People* and the *Artifacts* combined and linked through events along the trajectory. In Volterra, formative events are more connected to the use of assets linked to the town's traditional heritage and tourism offerings, while at the same time specific actors promote Twilight Saga tourism. Similarly, but differently from Forks, in Montepulciano, *Artifacts* play an important role in the development of this popular culture tourism destination, whilst there is less indication of the use of assets beyond the traditional and historical identity (e.g., a wine region with historical roots) for the benefit of Twilight Saga tourism development. From a managerial perspective, this demonstrates how distinctly different assets need to be combined to allow for diverse strategies in each unique destination.

In popular culture tourism destination development, the role of a *Media Product* should not be underestimated. A territorial asset that was not previously present is suddenly introduced through association (e.g., setting for a story of a book) or directly in the form of presence of film production. The media product played different roles in the formative events of the three destinations in this study. Forks is the setting for the story of the books, but not a filming location. Montepulciano was quite unexpectedly used as a filming location but has also a long history as a location for a variety of films and with a still abiding memorable experience of the Twilight Saga filming. Volterra, like Forks, is a setting for the book story but with an initial disappointing decision of not being selected as a filming location, they stayed in touch with the film commission and later learned what it means to be a filming location for other

on-screen projects.

Assets related to *People* are clearly important for all three destinations. In Forks in particular, new and old fans, volunteers, dedicated staff and other individuals, celebrities, and the author of the book series have in many cases been crucial for the continued dynamic development of Twilight Saga tourism. They represent not only new and/or different visitor segments and regular visitation, but also sustained engagement and passion with an interest in “all things Twilight Saga” as well as constitute an asset of volunteering, skills, and other types of contributions (e.g., fund raising, donations, care for others and the community), which in turn add to the destinations’ ability to adapt and change or collaborate between destinations.

In this study, the continued development of artifactual assets related to the Twilight Saga seem of vital importance, yet less important than people, for longevity. Although some businesses that were established in Forks during the peak period of Twilight Saga tourism have closed, less merchandise is produced; guided tours are now only offered on demand in Volterra. Twilight Saga tourism in Montepulciano remains important for visitation numbers, and in Forks the Twilight Saga is still a very visible and important part of the overall development of Forks as a tourism destination. Annual events, continuous development of exhibitions, and installments of film prop replicas as well as self-guided tours are all examples of continued active development of Twilight Saga tourism while at the same time being reflective of how this popular culture tourism corresponds with other destination images.

5.1. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to examine popular culture destinations over time to identify the factors that contribute to their longevity. In conclusion, the findings of this study reveal three distinct timelines, each marked by waves of key events tied to media products, people, and artifacts, which serve as the primary drivers of development and change outlined in the *Trifecta of Popular Culture Tourism Destination Development*.

In terms of the *Media product*, all three destinations saw boosts in audience engagement through the release of new books, re-engagement with older books and films, and films being made available on TV and streaming platforms. Forks and Volterra had film-related events and collaborations with film organizations, while Montepulciano emphasized its film production history. As regards, *People*, Forks had strong celebrity involvement and local engagement, with fans contributing through volunteering, donations, and the employment of staff dedicated to promoting Twilight tourism. Volterra and Montepulciano also engaged fans but to a lesser degree. Volterra focused on staff and fan engagement, while Montepulciano involved local communities in fundraising and tourism. In regard to *Artifacts*, Forks offered themed experiences like exhibitions, accommodations in properties associated to the books and films, and self-guided tours. Volterra integrated Twilight tourism with traditional cultural heritage, offering events, guided tours, and themed merchandise and Montepulciano focused on historical city spaces, architecture, and remnants from the film production, including sculptures and themed tours. It should however also be noted that a number of attractions had been discontinued since the 2010/2011 study (Larson et al., 2013). In Forks, some key Twilight Saga attractions like guided tours and themed shops have closed, in Volterra, only on-demand tours remain, and fan events have ended, and Montepulciano has lost access to film props from the production. Overall, Forks have had the most extensive engagement with fans and themed experiences, while Volterra and Montepulciano offered more limited and sometimes discontinued activities.

In conclusion, this study enhances the literature by offering a comprehensive, time-based analysis of the factors that contribute to the rise and decline of popular culture destinations by identifying the primary drivers of development and change. It should however be noted that this research has focused on three Twilight Saga destinations in the

United States and Italy, and its conclusions should be viewed through the lens of a western context and applicable primarily to this popular cultural phenomenon. Thus, more research on different popular cultural expressions as well as different geographical context is needed to confirm its transferability. With that said, the main theoretical contribution of this study is the integration of the models and concepts of destination life cycles, formative events, and territorial assets as an amalgamated approach to understanding non-linear trajectories and longevity of popular culture tourism destinations.

Based on the findings of this study, a number of practical implications have been identified. The Media Product asset is central for popular culture tourism development and the introduction of new forms of media products will expand the destinations’ appeal. As a result, 1) *Leveraging media products and content updates* will play a pivotal role for this form of tourism. By keeping the phenomenon relevant, destination stakeholders can continually refresh the fan base and invite new demographics, sustaining long-term tourism flows. With the People asset being so important for the overall development of popular culture tourism, 2) *Cultivating of fan and celebrity engagement* needs to be at the forefront for all parties involved. For example, high-profile support and fan-led initiatives can increase visitor interest and build community goodwill and commitment. Furthermore, 3) *Engaging local community and businesses in (popular culture) tourism activities* are of outmost importance for the continuation of this form of tourism. Local engagement help foster a shared commitment in the destination’s success, minimizing the risk of alienation among local stakeholders, including residents, and help secure authentic tourist experiences. The third and final important asset of the Trifecta of Popular Culture Tourism – the Artifact – shows that 4) *Developing and promoting themed artifacts and experiences* will help the destination stakeholders to cater to various visitor preferences in the form of themed restaurants, accommodations, tours, exhibitions, and merchandise. 5) *Preservation and integration of cultural heritage* in the artifacts and experiences at popular culture tourism destinations will help balance this modern cultural heritage with the traditional heritage at the destination in the form of local history, natural landscapes, and architecture that may enrich the overall visitor experience and broaden the destinations’ appeal. Finally, 6) *Planning for decline and/or shifts in interest* must play a central role for destination stakeholders at popular culture tourism destinations given the phenomenon’s transient nature. This includes contingency plans, that offer flexibility in terms of transition of assets to match demand shifts, managing the popular culture tourism destination lifecycle and the unavoidable, evolutionary wave of formative events that it will face.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Christine Lundberg: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Maria Lexhagen:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Cecilia de Bernardi:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation.

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