

## A Structuralist Account of Austrian Tourism

Klaus Pfatschbacher  
University of Applied Sciences IMC-FH-Krems

### Abstract

How can you present the characteristics of Austrian tourism in a nutshell? Such a question appears to be pro-eminent as it not only presents essential benchmarks but also showcases areas suitable for improvement. A very modern way of deciphering the typical features refers to a structuralist approach in literature: Following Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* we are going to frame several categories of tourism allowing us to define outstanding genres of tourism including all their drawbacks and potentials. This might lead to innovative visions of how to perceive touristic offers in Austria.

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The main component in a folk story is represented by the hero who experiences unusual adventures and fascinates people by special deeds. This also ties in with tourism-related aspects of a country. In this context Austria plays the role of the hero who impresses others for example thanks to its Alpine landscape, its superior taste for classical music or because of striking monuments dating back to the Habsburg Empire.

The stunning traits of such a hero make a country memorable and allow it to play a decent role on the touristic world market. It acts as a serious competitor and people admire it because of its exceptional standards. However, the hero also has to face challenges caused by the villain. In tourism the latter becomes tangible in the setbacks a region has to suffer. All the necessary investments which have been neglected so far, all the mandatory improvements which have not been tackled and the potential which has not been exploited yet, must be considered in such a scenario.

Examples of the villain part, for instance, refer to the lack of service provided to the visitor. In Austria, people rely too much on the notion of "Gemütlichkeit" (cozy and laid-back atmosphere) which prevents waiters or hotel staff from establishing real contact with the guests who are sometimes left to their own devices. Another drawback arises in Austrian bureaucracy which has turned out to be too massive, discouraging visitors from satisfying activities such as fishing (compared to Norway Austrian regulations prove to be a real obstacle). A last setback of Austrian efforts could relate to climate changes which force

entrepreneurs to change their business plan and to invest into more sustainable projects compensating for the lack of snow in many low-altitude resorts.

These disadvantages have to be dealt with. Their list could be elongated and made exhaustive: the role of the comparison to literature always consists in delivering a pattern of illustration which makes insights more relevant and comprehensible as a network of associations and parallels are uncovered.

In popular tales the love story plays an important role; it allows the reader to feel with the hero more easily involving him/her emotionally. A love story provides ample opportunity to appeal to the inner feelings of the public, drawing upon irrational aspects which tend to be extremely influential when it comes to evaluating a product: If the love story component is well developed, the reading will be dragged in necessarily. This also applies to the emotional sides of tourism. Austria prides itself on numerous ways of touching the tourist's heart: classical music events, hiking in unspoiled nature or skiing down adventurous slopes in the Alps point the way for attracting a large number of clients. The question which surfaces in the given context revolve around increasing the emotional impact in order to constantly evolve into a more fashionable tourist destination: possible answers for instance range from organizing stunning events of classical music in exotic locations (for example the concert given by the Philharmonic Orchestra in front of Schönbrunn Palace – a possibility for worldwide destination marketing) to specially designed hiking trails (open to all age and health groups) in hidden Alpine paradises and developing authentic types of accommodation using local materials and architecture (following the Norwegian and Swedish way of preserving their typical wooden chalets).

The role of the helpers in folk tales appears to be outstanding as well. In tourism this aspect relates to areas where entrepreneurs and the state can invest tremendously. Helpers in literature contribute to reaching the hero's goal. They collaborate in many ways, rescuing the protagonist, accompanying him in dangerous situations or giving useful advice. In tourism the task of helpers becomes manifest when it comes to offering the best service: staff members in a hotel can for instance seek to put the hero's vision of perfectly catering for the guests into practice. The government or regional authorities, on the other hand, could also emerge as an institution providing aid: by constructing mandatory infrastructure, lowering social security taxation or rendering working hours or hiring regulations more flexible. The most important feature all the helpers share is their commitment to a common target they identify with and which they aspire to at any price. Subsequently, keeping employees motivated ranks among the essential tasks of a professional. Without the helper's support the hero cannot proceed to superior levels of success.

Examples of helpers in Austria pertain to efforts made by the government to constantly enhance infrastructure. New motorways have been built, thus completing a dense network of roads which limit travel time extraordinarily and facilitate access to remote areas. Regional authorities, on the other hand enabled the construction of an impressive number of hotels and conference centers, for instance at the venue of the Alpine Skiing Championships 2015 in Schladming. Probably the most striking influence of helpers becomes visible in the numerous skiing resorts: over the last few years Austria's range of lifts and cabin cable cars has been overhauled (the country prides itself on the stunning modernity of the facilities), areas have been considerably enlarged (making certain villages such as Saalbach rank among the largest skiing domains in the world) and booking accommodation in the mountains has proved to be surprisingly simple thanks to the affiliation with the big platforms on the Internet.

The ending naturally marks the architecture of a fairy tale. If we apply this feature of the story to tourism we come to the conclusion that endings can be classified as goals and visions: where should tourism head to? How will it develop in the next few years? Which challenges does it have to react to quite rapidly? Possible scenarios in Austria appear to be positive: due to climate change and rising temperatures all over Europe Austria will become more and more attractive to tourists looking for opportunities to actively spend their holiday without suffering from the scorching heat. In addition, Austria will benefit from its well-developed facilities and infrastructure which will entail a positive response in the luxury segment, an area which will prosper in the future at astounding rates. Finally, Austria's position as a kind of relatively safe harbor in a world shaken by terrorism will figure among the main reasons for coming to the country. Marketing efforts will at least indirectly touch upon the topic of security which will prove to be decisive in many people's mind.

The short overview of Austrian tourism based on the dominant structure of popular folk tales could act as a guideline for the future analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of a tourist destination. It could provide a first aid kit which allows professionals to rapidly come to grips with the challenges a nation has to face, as it constitutes a simple but very reliant pattern (tested and proved by thousands of folk stories) and thus helps experts understand the complexities of a touristic situation much better. In terms of scientific approaches, our paper fits in with the linguistic or narrative turn in tourism research, regarding the hospitality sector as a long text which unfolds its true meaning through the methods of literary analysis. So let us wait for the next structuralist accounts of other touristic landscapes.

## References

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### **Dr. Klaus Pfatschbacher**

Lecturer for French

University of Applied Sciences IMC-Krems, Piaristengasse 1, 3500 Krems, Austria

klaus.pfatschbacher@fh-krems.ac.at

Fields of research: literature and tourism, Jules Verne, authors of the 19th century and their visionary role for current developments in tourism.