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# FILM LOCATIONS AS PERILOUS REALMS OF MEMORY

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## TOURISTS NEGOTIATING MENTAL, VIRTUAL AND REAL TOPOGRAPHIES OF TOLKIEN'S MIDDLE-EARTH

**Abstract:** *This paper examines film locations as places of memory (les lieux de mémoire) and their role in individual imagination. Film-induced tourism creates specific sites of memory typical of global popular culture; the places of confrontation, negotiation, and interplay between fiction and reality which affect our mental as well as the real topographies. The aim is to analyse how memorised film images determine visitors' experience of real places and their imagining of J.R.R. Tolkien's fictional world, and vice versa. The film adaptations of Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" and "The Hobbit", directed by Peter Jackson, were shot in New Zealand, causing it to become touristically promoted and visited as "the home of Middle-earth" and "Middle-earth on Earth". This case is analysed as an illustrative example of the aforementioned processes.*

**Key words:** *les lieux de mémoire, film-induced tourism, The Lord of the Rings, Middle-earth, New Zealand, imagination, memory*

Places gain meanings through a complex interaction of real, virtual and mental topographies and can have significantly

different meanings and importance within said topographies.<sup>1</sup> As much as a physical category, space is also a product of social consensus and mental constructions; it is shaped by cultural conventions, values, our collective knowledge, and imagination, including the works of fiction. Geographies of fiction in many instances interact with the real-world geography, imbuing places with new meanings, and occasionally even physically changing them. An interesting example of that process is the locations in New Zealand whose meanings were affected and altered by the filming of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* trilogies and consequent development of film-induced tourism. The impact of these changes has been extensively discussed by a number of authors and from different perspectives, with issues of consumerism, culture commodification, cultural appropriation, (post)colonialism and erosion of cultural identities frequently raised,<sup>2</sup> so those topics are not discussed here. Instead, the aim is to offer a preliminary insight into the way people's imagination and memory are influenced by their encounters with the film locations, by analysing the results of the international online survey entitled *Visiting Middle-earth*,<sup>3</sup> conducted between 19<sup>th</sup> May and 19<sup>th</sup> June 2020, with 705 responses collected.

### *Tales from the Perilous Realms of Memory*

Since Pierre Nora used the phrase *les lieux de mémoire* (places of memory)<sup>4</sup> it has been widely acknowledged that the notion of place encompasses both spatial and mental categories. His definition from the preface of *Realms of Memory* clarifies the nature of the concept: "...a *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element

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1 The paper is the result of the research realised within the project *Modernization of the Western Balkans* No. 177009, financed by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

2 Some of the important publications being: Beeton, S. (2005) *Film-Induced Tourism*, Clevedon – Buffalo – Toronto: Channel View Publications; Lam, A. and Oryshchuk, N. (eds.) (2007) *How We Became Middle-earth: A Collection of Essays on The Lord of the Rings*, Bern: Walking Tree Publishers; Tzanelli, R. (2004) Constructing the 'cinematic tourist': The 'sign industry' of The Lord of the Rings, *Tourist Studies*, 4 (1), pp. 21–42; Cronin, J. (2019) *The Making of... Adaptation and the Cultural Imaginary*, Palgrave Macmillan; Goh, R. B. H. (2014) The Lord of the Rings and New Zealand: fantasy pilgrimages, imaginative transnationalism and the semiotics of the (Ir) Real, *Social Semiotics*, 24:3, pp. 263–282; Le Heron, E. (2008) *Making film-landscapes and exploring the geographical resonances of The Lord of the Rings and Whale Rider*, PhD thesis, Department of Geography, University of Sheffield; <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/14936/1/489722.pdf> [10. 6. 2020].

3 Available at <https://forms.gle/rK1fY2MB8NzVCHxX7>

4 Nora, P. (1989) Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire, *Representations*, No. 26, pp. 7–24.

of the memorial heritage of any community.”<sup>5</sup> *Symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community*. The community in our case is Tolkien fandom, and its places of memory discussed in the paper are film locations in New Zealand.

Tolkien fandom has been almost exclusively a literary fandom for nearly half a century. Tolkien gained admirers shortly after the publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937, but his fandom started growing rapidly in the late 1950s after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*.<sup>6</sup> Since the 1960s, Tolkien’s world has inspired numerous interpretations of varying quality, in writing, music, radio, theatre, visual arts, animation, film, games, comics, etc. Nonetheless, the most influential interpretation so far turned out to be Peter Jackson’s film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* (released in 2001, 2002 and 2003). This film trilogy has brought about the existence of fandoms exclusively devoted to the films, but is also to be credited for bringing numerous new readers into Tolkien fandom worldwide.

Peter Jackson’s adaptations offer an immersive experience of Middle-earth with the sense of depth and history, constructed to feel real in all its details and evoke the sense of authenticity and wonder in the audience’s imagination. The spectacular and sublime landscapes of New Zealand became the films’ character in themselves. They were carefully chosen and filmed in such a manner as to emphasise the grandeur and magnificence of New Zealand’s natural beauty. Tolkien’s fictional world has been a part of the public imaginary for decades, and Peter Jackson’s adaptations complemented it by introducing new possibilities of experiencing it, starting with the impact of the films on our visualisation of the world, and culminating in the fact that the tourists can actually enter and physically interact with the landscapes of Middle-earth depicted in the films.

As John Howe put it in *The Hobbit Location Guidebook*: “At no other time have two countries - a real place and a fantasy realm superimposed - emerged simultaneously before the eyes of a global audience. Not only is Middle-earth in the heart of every admirer of Tolkien’s tales, now you can truly go there, to a place where the landscape allows you to superimpose your imagination, to overlay a personal vision with a real one, and

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5 Nora, P. Preface to the English Language Edition: From Lieux de mémoire to Realms of Memory, in: *Realms of memory: rethinking the French past*, vol. 1: Conflicts and divisions, ed. Nora, (1996), P. Columbia University Press, XV-XXIV, p. XVII. It is a partial three volume translation into English of *Les Lieux de mémoire* which has seven volumes in French.

6 Scull, C. and Hammond, W. G. (2017) *The J. R. R. Tolkien Companion and Guide. Reader’s Guide*, Part 1. London: HarperCollins Publishers, pp. 389-390.

to take the two, forever interwoven, away with you.”<sup>7</sup> This statement properly indicates the reciprocity of the personal imagination and memory imposing fictional meanings on the spaces of New Zealand whilst being themselves influenced by its real topographies. As Galadriel warned Frodo, “Seeing is both good and perilous.”<sup>8</sup> and it can be assumed that visiting the film locations inevitably changes the manner in which people envision and relate to the films. Both real and fictional topographies are influenced in a myriad of ways by such an interaction and interplay, and they certainly can be good as well as perilous.

What are the locations that film enthusiasts can visit in New Zealand? As Danielle Firnigl pointed out, a touristic landscape of New Zealand as Middle-earth is “marked only by its absences and virtualities - little remains to show of ‘Middle-earth on earth’,”<sup>9</sup> meaning that the majority of the scenes were filmed in protected national parks, which required the built sets to be removed and the natural environment restored to its original state. Hobbiton is the most popular and the only fully preserved film set, situated on a farm owned by the Alexander family in Matamata.<sup>10</sup> Mount Sunday in New Zealand’s Southern Alps provided the perfect setting for Rohan’s capital city Edoras, and is one of the most remote *The Lord of the Rings* locations with public access. Some of the film locations for the land of Mordor can be found in Tongariro National Park, most notable being Mount Ngauruhoe standing for Mount Doom and Mount Ruapehu for Eryn Muil. The impressive Putangirua Pinnacles were used to film Dimholt and the Paths of the Dead. The forests of Rivendell can be found in Kaitoke Regional Park with a life-size Rivendell gate replica created by Weta Workshop. Mavora Lakes will bring back the memories of Nen Hithoel and the breaking of the Fellowship. One of the popular experiences related to *The Hobbit* trilogy is the Hairy Feet tour of Trollshaw Forest in Waitomo.<sup>11</sup> Many more places related to the filming of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* can be visited, but only the ones mentioned frequently by the survey participants are listed here. In addition to the remaining Hobbiton film set in Matamata,

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7 Brodie, I. (2014) *The Hobbit Motion Picture Trilogy Location Guidebook*, Auckland: HarperCollins, p. 31; quoted in: Cronin, J., op. cit., p. 258.

8 Tolkien, J. R. R. (2014) *The Lord of the Rings*, London: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 372.

9 Firnigl, D. E. (2009) *Tripping the light fantastic: exploring the imaginative geographies of Lord of the Rings ‘film tourism’ in New Zealand*, PhD thesis, Faculty of Social Sciences and Health, Durham University, Durham; <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/312/> [10. 6. 2020], Abstract.

10 <https://www.hobbitontours.com/>

11 <https://hairyfeetwaitomo.co.nz/>

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and the landscapes where the filming took place, tourists can visit some film-related facilities like post-production buildings and film prop workshops (Weta Cave and Weta Workshop, the workshop of Jens Hansen), some cinemas, Wellington Airport with several giant Weta Workshop sculptures, etc.

The basic premise of my research is that these places are constructed and negotiated as *sites of memory* through practices of film tourism. Memory binds communities together and affirms group identities. The acts of remembering are always founded in the repository of images, places, values and ideals agreed upon by the social group to which they relate, in this case Tolkien fandom. The film locations in New Zealand have become the part of the collective memory and heritage which “belong” to the community of Tolkien fans (shared also by Peter Jackson fandom). That does not mean that these places represent sites of memory or shared heritage for all the members of Tolkien community - there are many Tolkien fans who dislike the films and many voices opposed to such an appropriation and use of Tolkien’s legacy. However, the existence and the meanings these places have acquired due to their role in film adaptations cannot be ignored and are worthy of further investigation. It is reasonable to assume that most of the visitors to the film locations consider Peter Jackson’s version of Middle-earth to be a fair presentation of Middle-earth described in the books. The film imagery is imprinted on their minds and the sites function as the triggers of remembering the films’ content. Nonetheless, since almost all the locations were restored to their original state, creating connections between the films and the physical spaces often requires significant imaginative work on the part of visitors. This indicates that the importance of a fan’s “pilgrimage” to these sites lies not in the existence of authentic sets, but in the ways the tourists actively construct those places by inscribing the remembered and imagined identities and meanings onto them, thus creating the sites of memory.

*Not all those who wander are lost*

*The Lord of the Rings* film tourism, including tourist experiences and expectations, have been the subject of a number of studies, majority of them published in the decade following the launch of the films. Among them, the inspiring ones were the PhD theses of Anne Buchmann<sup>12</sup> and Danielle Firnigl<sup>13</sup> who investigated the

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12 Buchmann, A. (2007) *In the Footsteps of the Fellowship – Understanding the Expectations and Experiences of Lord of the Rings Tourists on Guided Tours in New Zealand*, PhD thesis, Lincoln University, Lincoln NZ; <https://hdl.handle.net/10182/145> [10. 6. 2020].

13 Firnigl, D. E. op. cit.

motivations and experiences of tourists visiting the former sets. The second thesis proved to be closer to my approach, thus the survey *Visiting Middle-earth* included a number of questions similar to the ones in Firnigl's questionnaire,<sup>14</sup> with the addition of the ones aimed to determine how the visitors' imagining of Middle-earth was affected by the visit. Drawing on a larger body of respondents, the aim of the following analysis is to contribute to the previous research by offering further insights into the complex interaction between real and imaginary geographies in the context of people's imagination and memory.

Our mental lives and our sensory experience depend on *perception, imagination, and memory*. All three work together to enable us to make sense of our present, past and future. Although the link between memory and imagination has been intuitively recognised since antiquity, psychology and neuroscience confirmed that they are closely connected and that memory represents a basis for our imagination.<sup>15</sup> What we can imagine and visualise is largely conditioned by our experience, by what we have seen in the past and can retrieve from memory. Our imagining of any fictional world relies on memory, i.e. our knowledge and experience of the real world, as well as on our encounters with other fictions. Bearing that in mind, I wanted to investigate how people imagined Tolkien's fictional world and what were the main influences on their imagining and remembering of the world. From 2017, 4 surveys and 27 interviews were conducted, all targeting Tolkien fans, with the total of 2,294 participants.<sup>16</sup> A number of questions were identical in all the surveys and interviews, and I will occasionally compare those results with the outcome of the latest survey, conducted between 19<sup>th</sup> May and 19<sup>th</sup> June 2020, which targeted the fans who visited film locations in New Zealand. The basic analysis

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14 Ibid, pp. 256-258.

15 Zheng, H., Luo, J. and Yu, R. (2014) From memory to prospection: what are the overlapping and the distinct components between remembering and imagining? *Front. Psychol.* 5:856; <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00856> [10. 6. 2020].

16 I conducted an international online survey entitled *Imagining Tolkien's Middle-earth* from 20th February till 20th April 2018, with 2,085 responses collected; and also two surveys among Serbian Tolkien admirers during fantasy conventions held in Belgrade on 28th May 2017 (Tolkien Day, 112 respondents) and January 2018 (Festival of Epic Fantasy, 70 respondents). In addition, I realised 27 interviews with local and international participants between July and October 2018. Some results from the surveys and interviews realised in 2017 and 2018 are presented in the paper "Digital Poachers in Arda: Imagining, Interpreting and Remembering J.R.R.Tolkien's Secondary World in Participatory Culture", *Hither Shore: Interdisciplinary Journal on Modern Fantasy Literature*, 15, (submitted for publication). The questions analysed were posed in all the surveys and interviews, so the analysis included the sum of participants, being a total of 2,294 people.

of 705 responses will provide a preliminary insight into how *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* film locations were experienced by the participants and to what extent their imagination and memory affect and are affected by said encounters. The scope of the survey and the number of answers require further analysis and in depth comparison with the conclusions from previous audience and film tourism research (e.g. Buchmann, Firnigl, Barker and Mathijs, et.al.), impossible to achieve in this paper.

The survey *Visiting Middle-earth* consisted of 10 quantitative and 9 qualitative questions. Quantitative questions were about participants' gender, age, country of residence, whether they have been Tolkien fans and for how long, which of Tolkien's works they have read, what film adaptations they have seen, as well as if they visited any Tolkien-related locations in the UK or New Zealand. They were also asked to choose the dominant influences on their imagining of Tolkien's fictional world and Tolkien-related activities they particularly enjoy. In addition to the offered answers, quantitative questions also provided an open-ended option in order to account for possible answers which were not predicted by the author. Qualitative questions were aimed at investigating people's experience of visiting film locations in New Zealand, but the only ones analysed in detail are the ones relevant for determining how their visits corresponded to or influenced their imagining of Middle-earth.

A total of 705 respondents from 39 countries participated in the survey. The majority of them came from the USA (271, 38.4%), the UK (131, 18.6%), Australia (77, 10.9%), New Zealand (53, 7.5%), Canada (39, 5.5%), Germany (30, 4.3%), the Netherlands, France, and Austria (9 each, 1.3%), Ireland (8, 1.1%), and the Philippines (7, 1%). The number of respondents from the remaining 28 countries ranged between 1 and 6, and it is unnecessary to list them all, since taken together they comprise less than 9% of the total.

When asked *Are you a Tolkien fan?* 630 respondents said *yes* (89.4%), 68 (9.6%) chose the answer *I like his work, but I do not consider myself a fan*, 3 replied *no*, whilst 4 pointed out that they were the fans of Peter Jackson's films but have not read the books. The following question was *How long have you been a Tolkien fan?* 189 respondents replied for more than 30 years (26.8%), 209 (29.6%) between 19 and 30 years, 219 (31.1%) for 10-18 years, 45 (6.4%) between 5 and 9 years, 11 (1.6%) for less than 4 years and 32 of them (4.5%) said that they were not Tolkien fans. If we compare the numbers, we can see that whilst 75 respondents were reluctant to define themselves as Tolkien fans in the first question (whether because they consider that they do not know enough about Tolkien's works to be called fans, or

dislike the books and prefer the films), only 32 of them explicitly said they were not Tolkien fans in the second one. 398 (56.5%) of the respondents said that they had been Tolkien fans for more than 19 years, which roughly corresponds with 388 participants (55%) saying that they read the books before watching the films. 317 (45%) were drawn to Tolkien's books after seeing the films (among them are also those who have only seen the films, read the books partially or not at all). Many respondents pointed out that for them the films were an introduction into further exploration of Tolkien's world; and that they started reading the books straight after watching *The Fellowship of the Ring* in 2001.

The participants were asked to check which Tolkien's books they have read in entirety (Chart 1, with top 15 choices presented). Only 5 respondents said that they have not read any. *The Hobbit* ranked first with 93.5% of participants, although some of them later pointed out that it was a part of their school curriculum and basically the only book written by Tolkien they had read. It was followed by *The Fellowship of the Ring* with 91.6%, *The Two Towers* with 89.8%, and *The Return of the King* with 89.5%, which indicates that some participants started reading *The Lord of the Rings* but have not (yet?) finished it. However, we can assume that 631 participants read it in entirety, which is still a high percentage considering the fact that a higher number of only-film-fans could be expected in a survey dedicated to the film locations. There is a significant drop in numbers with *The Silmarillion*, which figured fifth on the list with 58.6% of readers, and then again with the sixth choice *The Children of Húrin* (36.3%), after which there is a steady decline.

The next question tackled the film adaptations (Chart 2) and it showed that almost all participants have seen *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (99%). There is a slight decline in numbers with *The Hobbit* trilogy, however, more than 94% of the participants have watched those films too. When compared with the results for the same questions from my previous research (2,294 participants), the numbers are not significantly different.<sup>17</sup>

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17 For the books: *The Hobbit* 93.2%, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 92.8%, *The Two Towers* 89.9%, *The Return of the King* 89%, the difference is the most notable in the case of *The Silmarillion* 77.6%. For the films: *The Fellowship of the Ring* 98.4%, *The Two Towers* 98.3%, *The Return of the King* 97.8%, *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* 96.5%, *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* 93.7%, and *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies* 91.6%.

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Check the books you have read (in their entirety):

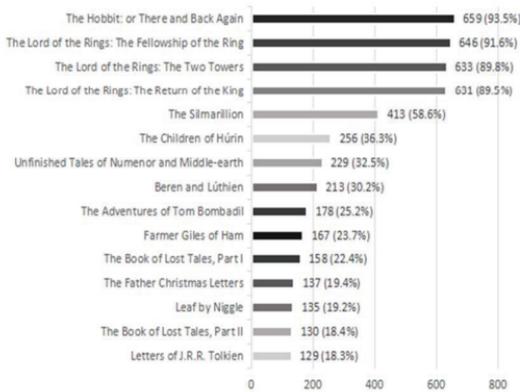


Chart 1

Check the films you have seen:

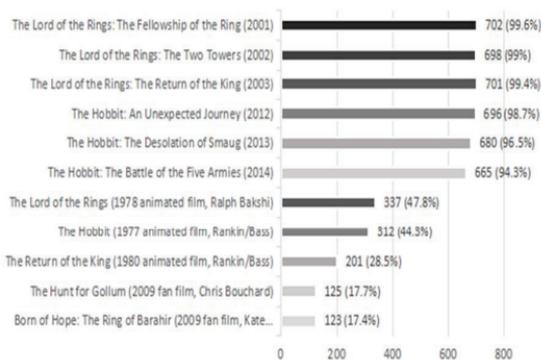


Chart 2

However, that's not the case with the two questions where participants were asked to choose or describe up to five influences on their imagining of Tolkien's world (Chart 3) and Tolkien-related activities they enjoy the most (Chart 4). If we compare the results with the data from the older surveys, the top 3 influences are ranked differently. The first place in the older surveys was occupied by the *descriptions and maps from the books*, the second most important influence were the *films directed by Peter Jackson*, followed by the *artworks of Tolkien artists like Alan Lee, John Howe, Ted Nasmith et al.* In the *Visiting Middle-earth* survey the *descriptions and maps from the books* ranked second, switching places with the films, the artworks ranked fourth, whilst the third most important influence were the *visited film locations in New Zealand* (Chart 3).

The way you imagine Middle-earth and its inhabitants is predominantly influenced by:

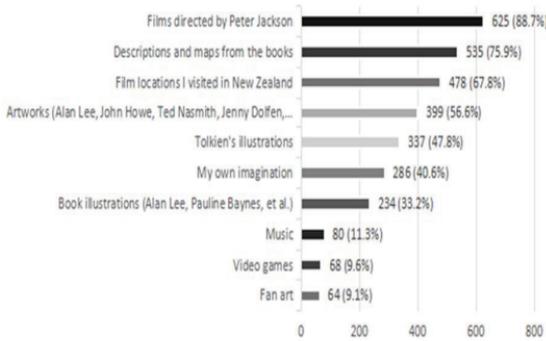


Chart 3

Tolkien-related activities you particularly enjoy are:

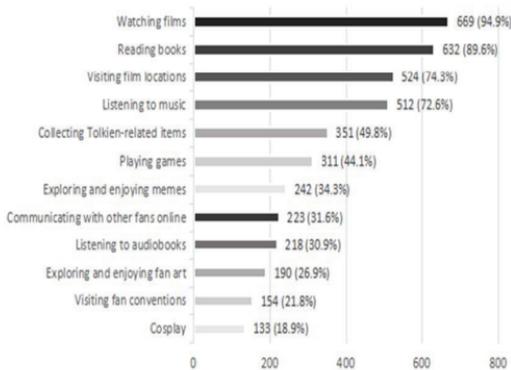


Chart 4

In the case of previous surveys only 4.1% of 2,294 respondents visited Hobbiton and 4.8% other film locations in New Zealand, so that experience did not figure at all as an important influence on participants' imagination in the overall statistics. On the other hand, for the participants of the *Visiting Middle-earth* survey, the effect of visiting film locations was of much greater importance (67.8%, Chart 3), which is also reflected in their choice of the Tolkien-related activities they particularly enjoy: the top choices correspond with the participants' ranking of the influences on their imagination (in both cases). Hence, *watching films* ranked first (94.9%), *reading books* second (89.6%), whilst *visiting film locations* was the third most enjoyable activity chosen by 74.3% participants (Chart 4).

650 (92.2%) respondents of the *Visiting Middle-earth* survey visited the Hobbiton set and 642 (91.1%) visited other film locations in New Zealand. In order to evaluate how people feel about the whole experience and how they assess the influence of their visit on their imagining of Middle-earth, they were asked the following questions:

- *Out of the LotR locations you visited, which was your favourite? Why?*
- *Was there something you found disappointing or unexpected about the locations?*
- *How did you feel the locations compared to the landscapes and architecture in the films? Were the locations easily recognisable or you had to make a significant effort to identify them as places from the films? Did you prefer sites where you had to ‘use your imagination’ or the ones where you were instantly ‘immersed’ into Middle-earth such as Hobbiton?*
- *Following your visit to NZ, have you watched the films or read the books again? How has it compared to previous readings/ viewings?*
- *How did the real life appearance and experience of the filming locations affect the way you imagine Middle-earth?*

When asked *Out of the LotR locations you visited, which was your favourite? Why?* 382 respondents said that Hobbiton was their favourite (54.2%), Mount Sunday (former Edoras set location) was chosen by 98 participants (13.9%), whilst 46 (6.5%) said that both Hobbiton and Mount Sunday were their favourites. The rest of the participants (25.4%) singled out the other locations (Mount Doom, Weta Workshop, and Trollshaws being the most common) or said that they cannot choose a favourite location.

Hobbiton was mostly described as magical, epic, breathtaking, perfect, containing astounding detail, realistic and authentic, surreal, iconic, better than expected, but also “disturbingly real” (S.Cook, UK). Many responses emphasised the emotional aspect of the visit, stating that Hobbiton “felt like coming home”, “my happy place” and “a dream come true”. Recurrent phrases indicative of how immersive the set is were: “felt like stepping into the films”, “felt like I was in Middle-earth”, “I was instantly transported into fantasy world. Some of the responses illustrative of the general attitudes about Hobbiton are presented:

- “It was so magically real. You almost forget you’re in New Zealand and you just feel right at home. The detail is incredible and there is a level of immersion that is unlike anywhere else.” (J. Bowen, USA)
- “It took me in and enveloped me in the feelings of everything about why I love the stories.” (O. Lui, Australia)
- “It felt like the real thing and connected me to the films in a way I’d never imagined. Beautiful and touching to see in real life.” (Participant no. 670, USA)
- “It’s difficult to choose, but I think Hobbiton was my favorite. Being surrounded by a setting I’ve loved for half my life, in a country I’ve loved for even longer, was literally a dream come true.” (Meara B., USA)
- “Hobbiton / Green Dragon. The whole experience was great. The tour guides were knowledgeable and the food and drinks were delicious.” (Kazumi, USA)
- “Weta Workshop and Hobbiton were the best. Watching how the props were made and getting to hold them was an awesome experience, but to walk the paths of the Shire and drink at the Green Dragon is an irreplaceable and heartwarming activity.” (A.K., Singapore)
- “It was great seeing the work done on the scenic design and a very immersive experience.” (Heather O’Donnell, USA)
- “It looks EXACTLY like in the movies, and brings up so many amazing memories. I was really quite emotional through the whole tour.” (Kassie Benoit, USA)
- “Hobbiton, just because the set was still there and it felt like I had just stepped into Middle Earth - I may have cried.” (Anais Levin, Brazil)
- “Being a much bigger fan of the books, I was skeptical of visiting movie locations. However the overall experience of Hobbiton was surprisingly well done, the level of care and detail was impressive, and our guide knowledgeable beyond the movies and loved the books as much as I do. It was a lot of fun, and a bit cheesy at times, but not the pure movie-glorifying tourist schlock I was expecting. Any lingering doubts I had were dispelled by the design and decor details that purely referenced the books in the set’s The Green Dragon.” (Evan Burrows, USA)

- “Hobbiton - we could dress up as hobbits, drink ale by the fire, have a huge banquet feast in the Green Dragon, got to meet lots of people and carry lanterns to make our way back up to the party tree later. It was magical.” (S. J. T., Australia)
- “Hobbiton was magical – it was such a fun immersive experience... Few other media franchises have “living” spaces you can visit.” (Grace, USA)
- “Visiting Hobbiton was fantastic. On the one hand it felt like actually setting foot in the Shire, which I’d always dreamed of. But then it was also fascinating from the standpoint of visiting a film set to see how they produced the visual effects, and looking at all the small details. I felt genuinely moved to stand at the spot where Sam returned to his family at the very end.” (Eleanor G., USA)

As these examples show, many participants were excited about the opportunity to visit the film set as it was their big desire to do so. For the most of them, the set met their expectations, and it was described to be just as they imagined/remembered it. Some participants like Evan Burrows were positively surprised as the set exceeded their expectations, but a number of them were disappointed that the set was too crowded. Many answers were just general expressions of enjoyment and thrill, the power of which was such that some participants cried from happiness and excitement. The opportunity to taste food and drink at the Green Dragon was praised by many Hobbiton lovers, who found it to be a great addition to the overall experience and contributed to the feeling of being completely immersed in the fictional world. On the other hand, some visitors found Hobbiton to be fascinating from the point of view of making the films and it increased their appreciation of the efforts invested into creating and maintaining the set.

It is interesting that similar explanations related to the immersive quality of the location were offered for both Hobbiton and Mount Sunday. People noticed that both locations “made the films come alive or made you believe you were in Middle-earth” (Ashley Proulx, Canada), but that they were immersive in a different manner - Hobbiton as the only fully preserved set, and Mount Sunday as an evocative spot. Despite the absence of the set, many respondents said that Mount Sunday was extremely recognisable and immersive and *felt like stepping into the films*: “it still held the magic of the set even though it was dismantled” (Participant no. 452, Australia), “I truly felt like I was in Middle Earth.” (D.D., USA) and “Of all the places, it was recognizable even without the buildings on it and the surrounding mountains

were awe inspiring. Even just recalling it I can hear the music and see Edoras in my mind. I call it my happy place” (Kate M., USA). Mount Sunday was also described as majestic, iconic, stunning, spectacular, beautiful, peaceful and serene, otherworldly. The people who singled it out as their favourite explained that they loved its remoteness, the absence of people, and the amazing scenery of the untouched landscape. Some respondents also pointed out that it was “a perfect match to Tolkien’s descriptions”: “Edoras was my favorite because it was exactly how Tolkien described it and Peter Jackson did a great job at making it such a special place. You can picture people actually living there and the site looks exactly like it did in the films.” (Colt Taylor, Canada). Other explanations were similar:

- “Maybe because it was the first and it hit me right in the LotR feels. It’s such an iconic location and such beautiful surroundings.” (Foe Rodens, Germany)
- “Truly felt like it could have been Middle-earth.” (Rachel Weisbrot, Canada)
- “I loved the visuals in the movie and then being there, hiking up the hill and having this beautiful 360° view, it was breathtaking. It just gave you this incredible feeling. There’s just nothing else around to disturb your peace.” (Stefanie Koboltschnig, Austria)
- “Edoras location was my favourite, the walk across the river and the climb really brought the atmosphere, and the view was exactly as shown in the films, and as I had pictured Edoras when I first read the books.” (E.A.H., Scotland)
- “My favorite was Edoras because it was very remote, not many people were there and it had amazing views. It felt like you had stepped into the movies.” (Xandi, Austria)
- “The location itself was beautiful and so Rohan-esque. It was very immersive to stand on top of Mt Sunday surrounded by the mountains and picture the scenes from the movies.” (J.W., Canada)
- “DEFINITELY Edoras! It was so magical, and exactly how it looked in the movie. You could really feel immersed in the scenery, like Rohan had truly come alive and you were standing in Theoden’s hall.” (Participant no. 404, USA)

As evident from some of these answers, it was easy for the participants to transport themselves into an imagined past of this landscape and believe that Rohan really existed at the spot.

The ability to instantly recognise the hill where Edoras set was built and the surrounding mountains required less imaginative investment and the visitors could rely on their memory and the evocative power of the landscape in order to be fully immersed.

Very similar impressions and statements were shared by the participants who chose both Hobbiton and Edoras as their favourite locations. It is interesting to have them compared:

- “Hobbiton. It mixes an incredible location with art. The food is amazing. The place is just magical. Mount Sunday is a close second. I’ve been so impressed with ALL the other locations, but Mount Sunday is by far the location which makes you feel like you’re actually in Middle-earth. Hobbiton is magical, but Mount Sunday feels like another world and another time.” (Joseph Howes, NZ)
- “I loved the supper at the Green Dragon. It was all we hoped it might be. Hobbiton was delightful. I would go again in a minute. Going to Mount Sunday was a spiritual journey beyond the category of favourite. It was profound.” (C. Woodall, Canada)
- “I cannot choose between two. Standing on top of Mt Edoras dressed as Eowyn, was one of the highlights of my life. No special effects needed for this place - absolutely stunning valley surrounded by misty snow covered mountains... and of course Hobbiton, so beautiful and interactive, wonderful just like the movie. Wonderful food!” (arwenblue, Australia)
- “My Sunday (Edoras) was my absolute favourite, there was just a peace there that I had never felt before, the landscape was so epic and beautiful and rugged at the same time. Second to that had to be Hobbiton, like stepping into the movie/book.” (Hannah, UK)
- “Hobbiton as it is seen in 2016 because it looks so realistic. Edoras because it is 100% nature, no CGI and it is mindblowing to stand where the Golden Hall stood.” (Maria M., Germany)

Many respondents expressed an honest admiration for the beauty of natural scenery in New Zealand, some remarking that they are glad that all the landscapes were returned to their original state after filming so they were able to see the nature intact. When asked if there was something they found disappointing or unexpected about the locations, the majority answered that there was nothing disappointing (66%). Nonetheless, 82 participants (11.6%) said that they were disappointed because Hobbiton was overcrowded and too touristy, they disliked being rushed to finish

the tour, and some remarked that the set was overpriced and too commercialised. 35 participants (5%) said that it was a pity that all the sets except Hobbiton were removed from the landscapes, leaving them very hard to identify. 27 participants (3.8%) complained that some destinations were very remote, lacked signage, and were difficult to find without guidance, whilst 14 of them (2%) were disappointed that some locations were not accessible at all. The same number of participants expressed dissatisfaction with the forests of Rivendell in Kaitoke Regional Park, failing to find any connection between the location and the films. Some found the landscapes to be significantly different from what they imagined based on the films, especially in terms of scale - they were described as smaller than expected. 24 respondents (3.4%) regretted that they were not able to enter the hobbit holes in Hobbiton, obviously longing for even more fully immersive experience. A number of participants noticed that "It was strange seeing the proximity of some of the locations to roads and other modern man made things, or quite close to something distinctly not "Middle-earth" that you don't think about when you're immersed in the movies. Part of the reason Mt. Sunday and some other locations felt so remarkable was how remote they were." (Danni Nemati, USA).

The next set of questions was *How did you feel the locations compared to the landscapes and architecture in the films? Were the locations easily recognisable or you had to make a significant effort to identify them as places from the films?* Approximately one third of the participants (29%) answered that most of the places required little or no effort to recognise and imagine. 128 of them (18.2%) thought that the locations were both more or less recognisable, depending on the location, whilst 111 (15.8%) said that they used visual aids in order to identify them (screenshots, personal or provided by tour guides / Brodie's guide). 7.4% of the respondents pointed out that the locations required a significant effort to identify and a noteworthy work of imagination. A number of answers were just general expressions of enjoyment and not precise enough, and some participants did not answer all of the questions.

The third question posed in this set of questions was *Did you prefer sites where you had to 'use your imagination' or the ones where you were instantly 'immersed' into Middle-earth such as Hobbiton?* 70% of the participants responded and the answers ranked as follows:

1. I preferred the immersive experience - 184 (26.1%)
2. I enjoyed both equally - 163 (23.1%)
3. I preferred using my imagination - 77 (10.9%)

4. The whole country is immersive, it felt like Middle-earth, every landscape could be imagined to belong to Middle-earth - 70 (9.9%)

When answering the questions *Following your visit to NZ, have you watched the films or read the books again? How has it compared to previous readings/ viewings?* only 56 participants (7.9%) said that they have not read the books or watched the films after the visit. 67 participants (9.5%) found that their experience of the books and the films remained unchanged. Excluding some vague answers (68), the rest of them could be differentiated in the following manner:

1. The films are memory triggers now, they take me back to my trip, and make me want to go back to New Zealand, make me feel nostalgic and say/think "I have been there!" - 130 (18.4%)
2. Visiting film locations enhanced/enriched the watching of the films, made it more fun and enjoyable, made it special and made me love the story and the world even more - 115 (16.3%)
3. I like recognising the places I visited when watching the films - 82 (11.6%)
4. I am more emotional about it and feel more connected with the films, it is more personal, I have a sense of belonging and can imagine myself there when watching the films - 45 (6.4%)
5. I like sharing my enthusiasm and my experience with others while watching the films, which can be annoying sometimes - 44 (6.2%)
6. Made it more real, vivid, tangible, familiar, and the fact that I know the places are real made the watching more enjoyable - 43 (6.1%)
7. Increased my appreciation of the film locations and of Peter Jackson's choices and efforts, increased my knowledge and appreciation of the filming process - 37 (5.2%)
8. Made it easier to imagine and visualise Middle-earth - 34 (4.8%)
9. When watching the films, it was strange/surreal/less immersive/distracting to know that the places are real and I have been there - 14 (2%)
10. It changed my mental model of places, gave me a different sense of scale - 11 (1.6%)

11. Increased my appreciation of New Zealand - 11 (1.6%)
12. Inspired me to read the books again, or read other Tolkien's works - 7 (1%)

Hence, the majority of respondents said that their visit enhanced the experience of the books and films, especially the films, since watching them became more personal, exciting, emotional and enjoyable. The experience made them feel more connected to the world, with the fictional world becoming "more real" for them. Some pointed out that the visit only affected their experience of the films, since they are looking for the places they visited while watching and have a different idea and more vivid images of those places. The fact that the largest number of respondents described the films as memory triggers which make them recollect on their trip (answer 1 above) is indicative: the memory of the films became overlaid with new personal meanings (answer 4 above) and was transformed by the experience of visiting film locations. Although less explicitly, the responses which also point to the process of recollection are the ones emphasising the aspect of recognising the places visited (answer 3 above) and sharing their knowledge and experience with other people (answer 5 above), as well as the ones mentioning "the feel" of it and putting the stress on the physical side of experiencing the places (answers 6 and 10 above). The effect of the visit for majority of the participants was that their memory of the films was changed, since watching them now means evoking beautiful memories and physical experience of the trip. Thus the films acquired new meanings, reflecting the inevitable relationship of reciprocity described by John Howe.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from the answers to the question *How did the real life appearance and experience of the filming locations affect the way you imagine Middle-earth?*:

1. Made it more real, vivid, tangible, enriched it, enhanced it, made it more personal and relatable, created new memories, made it unforgettable, made me love it even more, made the watching of the films more fun and emotional experience, created a personal connection with the films - 279 (39.6%)
2. It did not affect it at all - 160 (22.7%)
3. Perfectly matched and strengthened my imagination based on the films, previous vision got more details and depth, solidified the vision from the films and made its imagery the strongest influence - 82 (11.6%)
4. "New Zealand is Middle-earth" - 60 (8.5%)

5. Increased my appreciation of Peter Jackson's choices and filming efforts - 42 (5.9%)
6. It enabled me to imagine the world better, made visualisation of Middle-earth easier for other locations that do not appear in the films as well - 36 (5.1%)
7. Confirmed Peter Jackson's vision, but it did not affect the way I imagine the world when I read the books - 17 (2.4%)
8. My imagination combines all the sources and experiences, including the visit - 12 (1.7%)
9. My imagination is still dominant, although it is slightly affected - 7 (1%)
10. I imagine landscapes and places of Middle-earth based on the films and the places I visited, but the way I imagine the characters is based on the books - 7 (1%)
11. Made me want to live in New Zealand - 7 (1%)
12. Disappointing, I imagined it to be more impressive - 3 (0.4%)

Almost 40% of the participants estimated the personal connection with the fictional world to be the most important consequence of the visit (answer 1 above). A significant number of respondents felt that their vision of the world was not changed at all (answer 2 above), being already based on the films (or on the books in case of 9 participants). Others pointed out that their vision based on the films was enriched and solidified by the encounter with film locations (answer 3 above). In many cases the answers were complex and were sorted into several categories of answers mentioned above. Said complexity is well illustrated by the following examples:

- “My wife and I were already entranced through our own imaginations, prior to any films, by reading *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Jackson's careful treatment of the material was stunning, from (most of) the screenplay, the locations, the casting, and the craftsmanship of props, costumes, makeup, etc. New Zealand simply created another rich array of past memories and future longings to return completely compatible with our love for all things Middle-earth.” (Jim and Emily Wert, USA)
- “I'm not sure it did - although it's easier to picture specific locations with real-world detail, they were so well designed to fit the style of existing famous Tolkien artists (which I saw long before the films and probably affected

my mental picture of Middle-earth first) that nothing felt like it was being replaced from what I already imagined. It's easy to separate the real experience of New Zealand from the imaginary Middle-earth - visiting just meant the imagined locations got more depth and detail." (H. Quayle, UK)

- "Surprisingly, not much, for Middle-earth overall. Alan Lee's illustrations were my first visual experience of Middle-earth (he illustrated my first copies of both *The Hobbit* and *LOTR*), and as he was a main concept artist for the films they ended up reflecting my existing imagination to a large degree - I was pleasantly surprised when most of *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*, which I read before the films came out, matched my imagination closely. The real appearance of the locations has increased my awe at the film's versions of Lothlórien and the Anduin, at least, as I now have a personal experience of their actual size (those canyons in the Anduin are deeper than they looked), and generally made my experience of Middle-earth much more immersive as I can now recall what it is like to actually be in (the film versions of) many of the locations. But it is also funny to look back at the films and, for example, think "ah yes, the Extendable Mountains" or recall that when Sam sees an oliphant, what are made to look like trees with use of miniatures are actually smallish shrubs!" (Tas Cooper, UK)

Hence, for many participants the previous imagery was already so embedded in their minds that they couldn't perceive any significant change - the art of Alan Lee and John Howe has to a great extent shaped the way people imagined and visualised Middle-earth even before the films, and their involvement in the making of the films decisively confirmed their aesthetics as a dominant influence. However, some participants said that visiting film locations enabled them to imagine the world better and made visualisation of Middle-earth easier for the locations that do not appear in the films (answer 6 above).

A widely used and popularised slogan "New Zealand is Middle-earth" was employed as a response (answer 4 above), showing that a number of people identifies New Zealand with Middle-earth in their imaginations (on the other hand, some participants pointed out a distinction between the two, emphasising that they are not the same thing). In the case of both the previous question and this one, people mentioned that the experience has given them a greater appreciation of the filming efforts and choices of Peter Jackson and his crew. Some participants said that their imagination relies on a number of different sources (answer

8 above), which confirms that the fans are in many instances well aware that they are making a composite reconstruction of Tolkien's world based on multitude of sources and that such a process enables them to establish individualised representations of Middle-earth.<sup>18</sup>

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The experience of visiting film locations is offering something more real than the films themselves: moments when a beloved dream or imaginary becomes tangible. "It is about transcending the status of scenes as scenes, and approaching a cherished world via its instantiation in a material world."<sup>19</sup> When fans are not visiting an instantly recognisable film set or location (e.g. Hobbiton and Mount Sunday), they have to constantly and actively recreate Middle-earth out of the real-world setting that they see. In doing this, they rely on their memory and imagination in order to achieve insertion of themselves into the story and the world of the films. Visiting the locations reaffirms the previous film imagery in visitors' memory, but also produces new emotions and memories. Hence, during these visits the real and fictional topographies merge in visitors' minds, and the places perceived blend with the previously imagined and memorised imagery.

As the survey *Visiting Middle-earth* demonstrated, a visit to film locations in many ways affects people's memory and imagination related to a specific fictional world. Two thirds of the participants explicitly singled out the visited film locations as one of the main influences on their imagining of Tolkien's world (Chart 4). Although 22.7% participants said that their imagining of the world was not affected by their visit, many of them added that their imagination was already based on the film imagery, so it could not be significantly changed. This influence was further explained through the responses to open-ended questions, which confirmed that the personal experience of the locations and the memories created during their trips gave new meanings to the films and to the fictional world in itself.

Peter Jackson's films have significantly altered and defined the current visual experience of Middle-earth, with the characters and places from the films being permanently etched in the minds and memories of the audience. In addition, the film locations in

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18 Barker, M. and Mathijs, E. Seeing the Promised Land from Afar: The Perception of New Zealand by Overseas The Lord of the Rings Audiences, in: *How We Became Middle-earth: A Collection of Essays on The Lord of the Rings*, Lam, A. and Oryshchuk, N. (eds.) (2007), Bern: Walking Tree Publishers, 122.

19 Jan Cronin, op. cit. p. 250.

New Zealand became the sites of memory as *symbolic elements of the memorial heritage of fan community* - both of Tolkien fans who appreciate the films and the film fans who have not read the books. The meanings that these places have gained by appearing in the films also transformed them into the sites of memory in New Zealand's imaginary topography; a specific testimony well described by one of the respondents: "I am grateful that NZ has embraced maintaining some of the key locations around the country, not just as tourist attractions but as an important record of their cultural heritage and their contribution to cinema and location-based filming." (Darian Lawrie, NZ). This contribution, although severely criticised by many authors, should not be regarded as excluding and destroying the existing meanings these places have had, but rather as a way of producing added values and new meanings in the context of geographies of fiction, which are usually underestimated but for many people equally or more important than the real ones.

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## ФИЛМСКЕ ЛОКАЦИЈЕ КАО МЕСТА СЕЋАЊА

### ТОЛКИНОВА СРЕДЊА ЗЕМЉА ИЗМЕЂУ МЕНТАЛНИХ, ВИРТУЕЛНИХ И СТВАРНИХ ТОПОГРАФИЈА

#### Сажетак

У раду се локације снимања филмова анализирају као места сећања у смислу у ком их је дефинисао Пјер Нора. Будући да су ове локације у филмовима неретко дигитално модификоване и побољшане, поставља се питање на који начин их публика перципира у биоскопској сали и када се нађе *in situ*, те у којој мери запамћена филмска слика условљава доживљај реалног простора, и на који начин посета филмским локацијама повратно делује на то како посетиоци памте и замишљају вољени фикционални свет. Филмовима индуковане менталне представе, у спрези са планским брендирањем, од постојећих географских дестинација стварају места сећања глобалне популарне културе, која утичу како на менталне, тако и на стварне топографије. Као илустративан пример преплитања имагинарних и стварне географије узете су рецентне екранизације Толкинових дела *Господар прстенова* и *Хобит*, реализоване у режији Питера Џексона, и њиховим снимањем узроковано мапирање и денотирање Новог Зеланда као „дома Средње земље”. Ови процеси се сагледавају кроз призму памћења и имагинације, а на основу резултата анкете *Visiting Middle-earth* реализоване путем интернета у периоду 19. 5 – 19. 6. 2020. Анкета је била намењена туристима који су посетили локације снимања поменутих филмова на Новом Зеланду и сакупљено је 705 одговора чија се прелиминарна анализа износи у раду.

**Кључне речи:** места сећања, филмски туризам, „Господар прстенова”, Средња земља, Нови Зеланд, имагинација, памћење