



Abstract

01 SUBJECT

Modern travel media & rural romanticisation

02 CASE STUDY

Stanley Tucci: Searching for Italy

03 CONCEPT

The Artisan Spectacle

04 METHOD

Visual analysis + independent
socioeconomic data

05 CONCLUSION

Ethical visual storytelling



The Artisan Spectacle

Staged authenticity in travel media

FTV720 INDUSTRY RESEARCH | SIMON WACHLIN

Image source: Sovereign Luxury Travel (n.d.)

Staged Authenticity

MacCannell, 1999

curated / consumable



Image source: FlorenceTrip

labour / reality



Representative AI-generated image: Google Gemini (2026)

Dean MacCannell (1999: 91–98)

Local culture and everyday life can be presented as an authentic experience for an outside audience.

The Modern Theatrical Stage

From staged authenticity to the engineered image



Image: National Geographic / Disney+ (2026)

Daniel Boorstin (1961: 284)

Life has become stagecraft.

(cited in Rose and Wood 2005: 284)

01
REALITY > 02
CAPTURE > 03
EDIT > 04
SPECTACLE

Case Study

Stanley Tucci: Searching for Italy
CNN / 2021 - 2022

A premium travel series exploring Italy through food, culture and place.

Why this case study?

A consistent cinematic language applied across contrasting Italian regions



Analytical Boundary

Two contrasting contexts. One cinematic language

NORTH



Milan



Urban / Financial



Series 1, Episode 4



Image source: Citalia (n.d.)

SOUTH



Sicily



Agricultural / Rural



Series 1, Episode 6



Image source: AUGUSTALI. n.d.

One programme, two locations, and the same questions applied to both.

How I did the research

Combining screen analysis with independent socioeconomic evidence

Bell and Waters (2014: 28)

01 WATCH



Representative AI-generated image: ChatGPT / OpenAI (2026)

Selected sequences from
Searching for Italy
Milan (ep.4) & Sicily (ep.6)

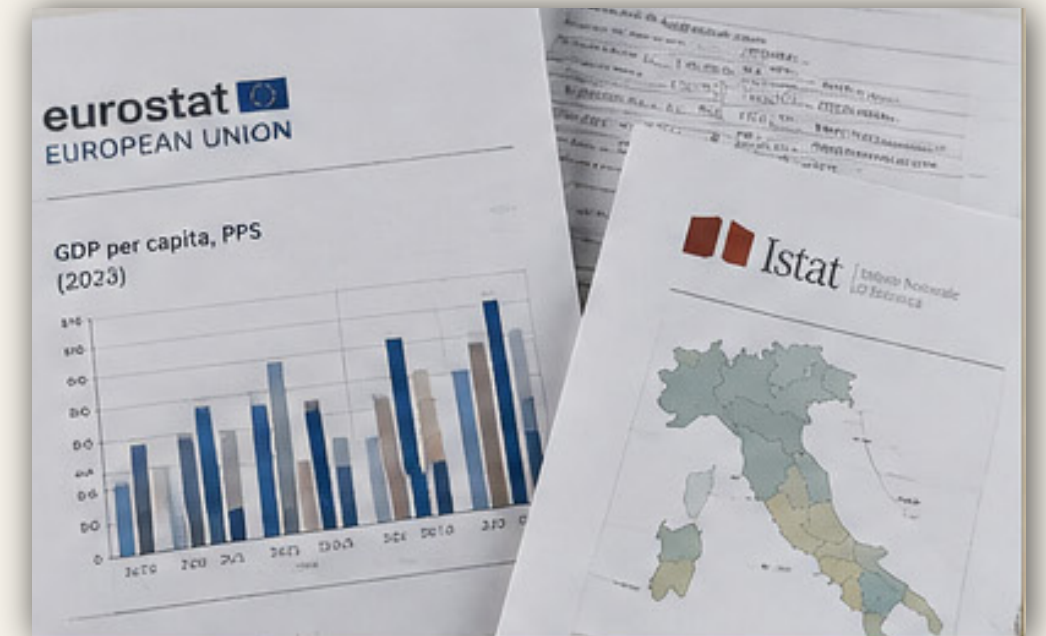
02 ANALYSE



Representative AI-generated image: ChatGPT / OpenAI (2026)

Framing | Camera
Colour | Sound
Editing

03 CONTEXTUALISE



Academic theory
Eurostat
ISTAT

The same analytical questions were applied to both locations.



The Tourist Gaze

John Urry and Jonas Larsen (2011: 2) • The Tourist Gaze 3.0

The tourist gaze describes how places are seen through expectations shaped by culture, media and previous representations.

SELECTION • EXPECTATION • REPRESENTATION

Applied here:

How does *Searching for Italy* shape the way Milan and Sicily are seen?

North Sequence



Source: Stanley Tucci: Searching for Italy, Series 1, Episode 4 (CNN, 2021).

Milan

Series 1, Episode 4

Sequence window: 05:30 - 09:42

CAMERA

Fluid tracking and controlled framing

COLOUR

Cool, crisp tones

SOUND

Ambient kitchen noise, softened by classical music

FRAMING

Food and consumption foregrounded

Aesthetic focus: Milan is framed as a site of consumption and refinement

Sicily Sequence



Source: Stanley Tucci: Searching for Italy, Series 1, Episode 6 (CNN, 2021).

Sicily

Series 1, Episode 6

Sequence window: 08:50 - 14:43

CAMERA

Wide establishing views and gentle movement

COLOUR

Warm, sunlit tones

SOUND

Natural ambience

FRAMING

Architecture and landscape foregrounded,
emphasising place and heritage

Aesthetic focus: Sicily is framed through land, production and rural tradition.



Representative AI-generated image: ChatGPT / OpenAI (2026)

Privitera (2010: 59)

Agritourism can transform rural production into part of the visitor experience.

When Labour Becomes Aesthetic

The transformation of work into visual spectacle

01

LABOUR

Physical work remains visible



02

AESTHETIC

Warm light, composition and atmosphere reshape perception



03

SPECTACLE

Work becomes part of the destination's appeal

Who gets to speak?

Voice, agency and the outsider gaze



Visibility does not necessarily equal agency

Who is seen, and who is allowed to explain their experience?



Design asset: Adobe Express



Susafa Cooking School, Sicily. Image source: Susafa

Erik Cohen (1988: 383–384)

Selling Culture as a Product



Aesthetic focus:

Cultural practices can retain meaning while also becoming commercially valuable experiences.

Ethics of Equipment

How production choices shape distance, agency and labour.

Photo: Smithsonian Magazine by Cunevt Gumushaneli



DRONE
DISTANCE

Scale · Landscape · Spectacle

The worker becomes part of the landscape.

Photo:Stefano RELLANDINI/AFP



EYE LEVEL
PROXIMITY

Labour · Detail · Human presence

The landscape becomes somebody's workplace.

Analytical focus: Equipment does not determine ethics, but viewpoint influences what becomes visible

Who controls the image?

REPRESENTATION • AGENCY • **CONTEXT**



REPRESENTATION

What is shown?



AGENCY

Who has a voice?



CONTEXT

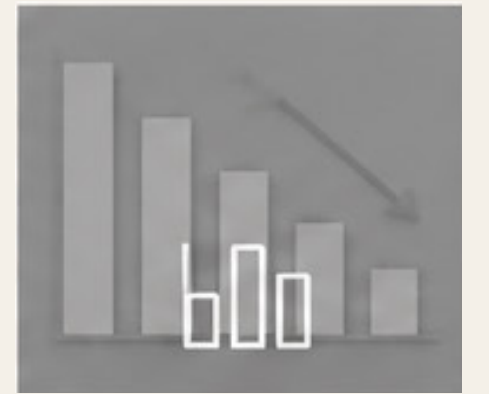
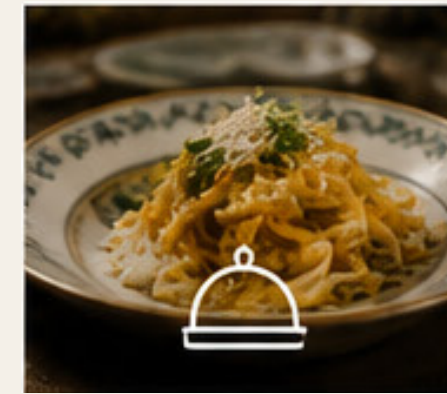
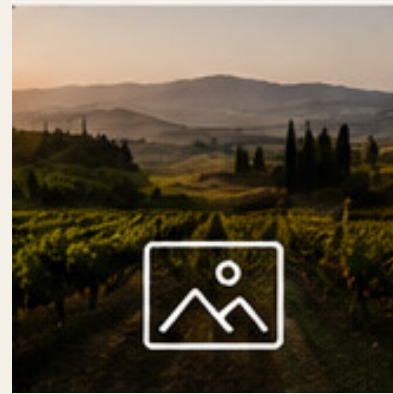
What is left
outside the frame?

Ethical focus: Beautiful storytelling should not come at the expense of people, context or lived reality.

The power of the edit

What remains · What disappears · What becomes the story

RECORDED
REALITY



EDIT

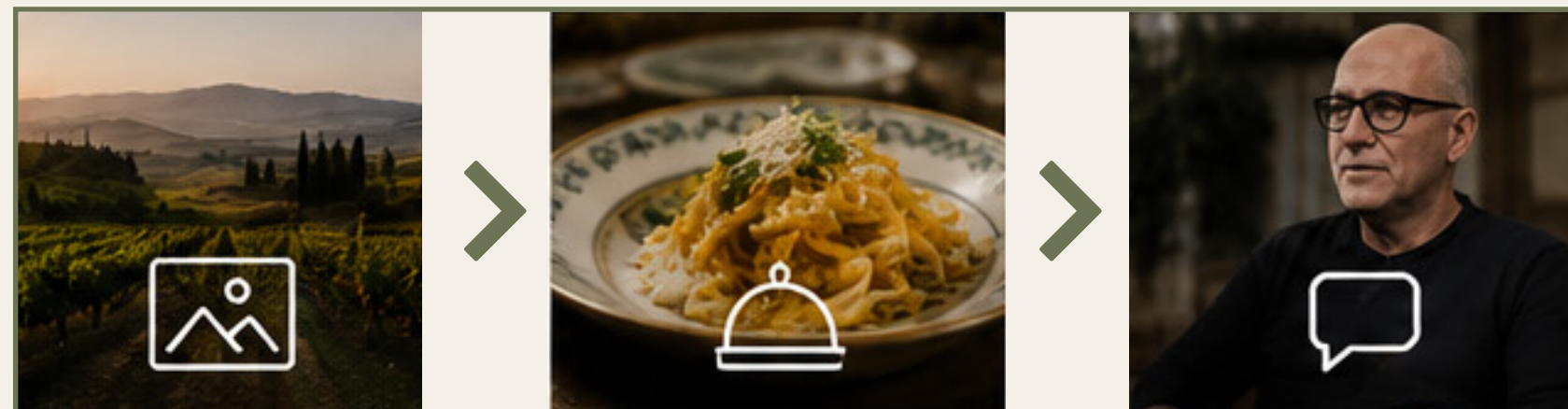


SELECT
What enters
the story

ORDER
How meaning
is created

OMIT
What the audience
never sees

FINAL
BROADCAST
IMAGE



Ethical focus: The audience only encounters what survives the edit.

Documentary ethics:

Aufderheide (2007: 127)

Reality Check

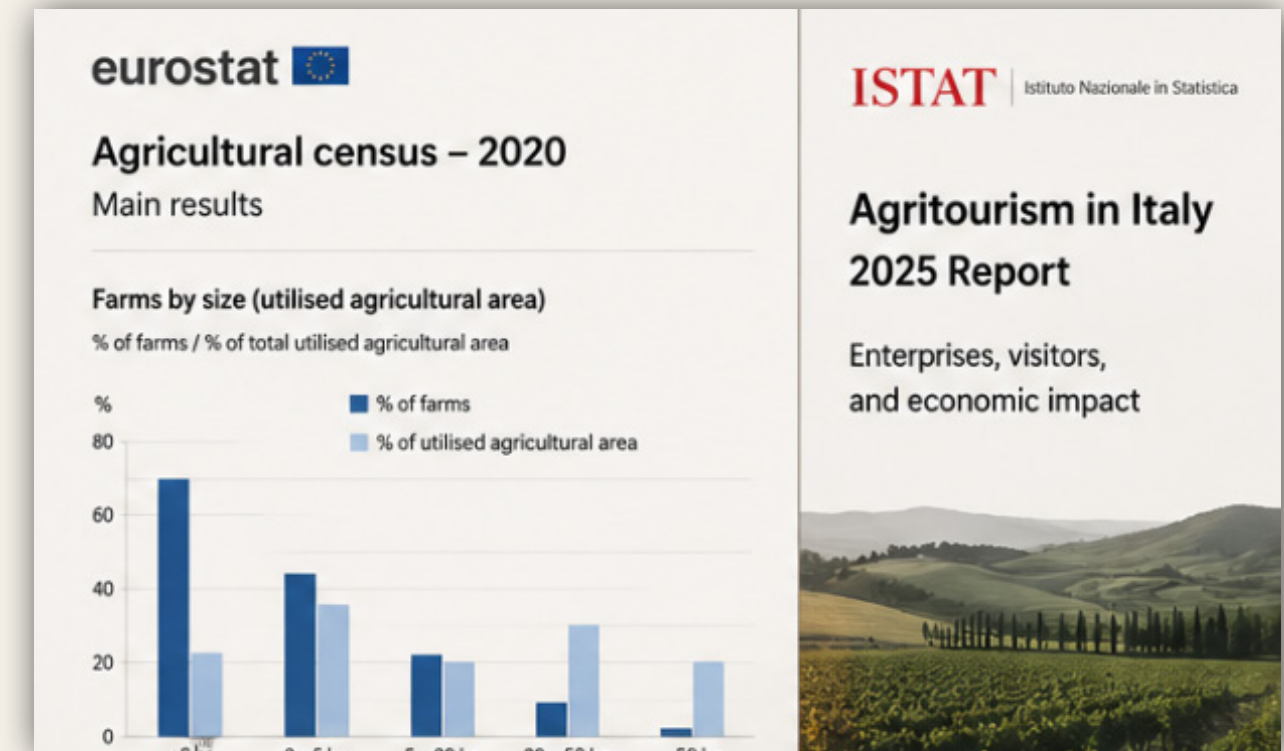
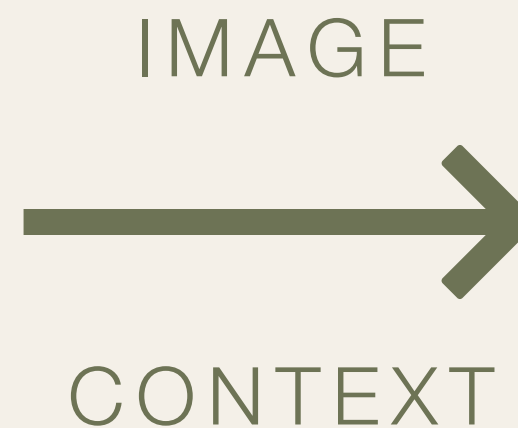
Looking beyond the broadcast image



Source: Susafa, Sicily

The broadcast image

Landscape · Tradition · Craft · Pleasure



Source: Eurostat; ISTAT

Independent context

Agriculture · Demographics · Economics · Tourism

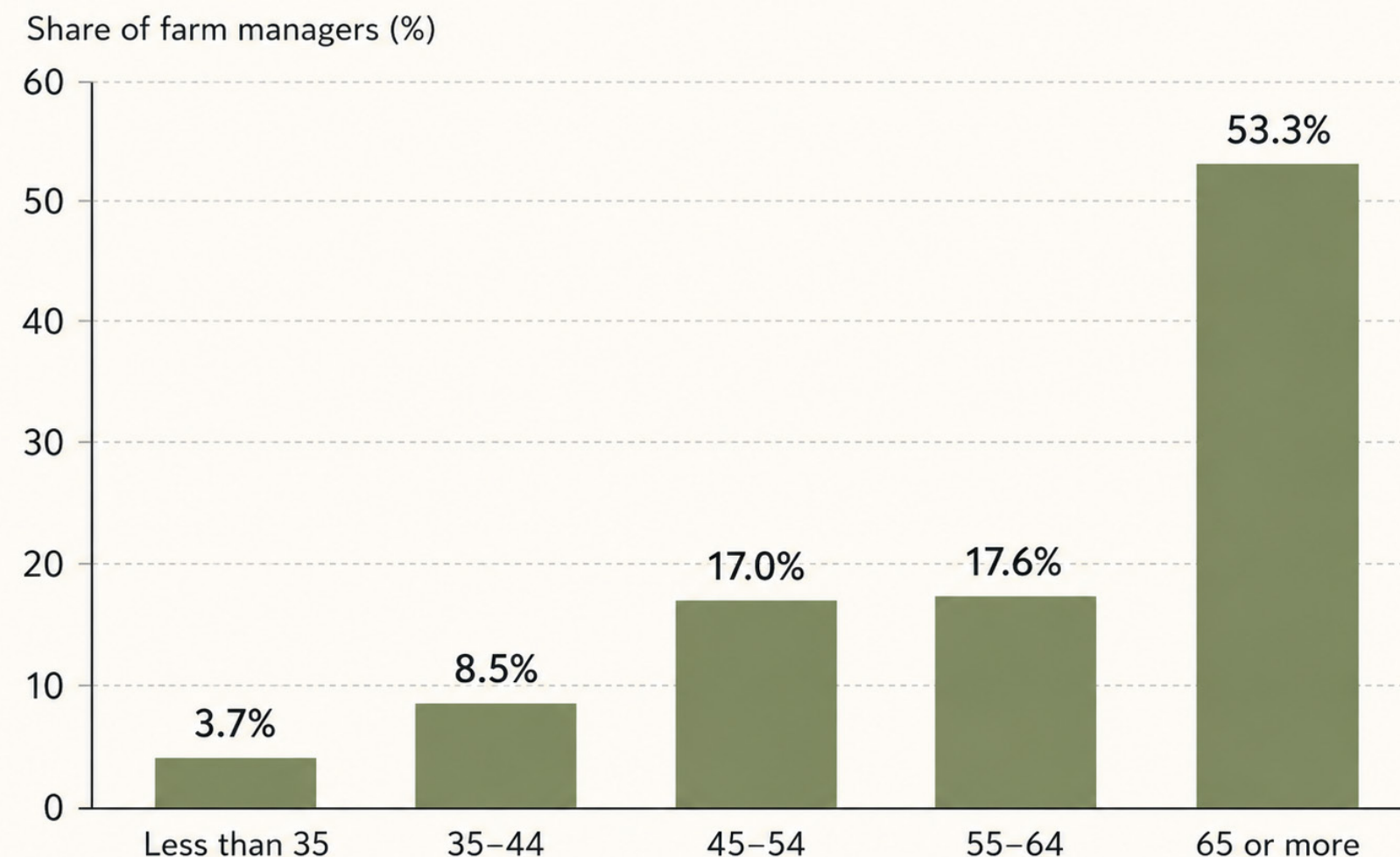
Analytical focus:

Independent data reveals socioeconomic conditions that may be less visible within the television image.

Farming Crisis

What the agricultural data reveals about Italy

Age structure of farm managers, Italy (2020)



Source: Eurostat - Age structure of farm managers (ef_fsi_agesex), 2020

Analytical focus:

The romantic image of rural continuity sits alongside ageing labour, the dominance of small holdings and a long-term decline in the number of farms.

Italy: Structural Reality



53.3%

of Italian farm managers are aged 65 or more

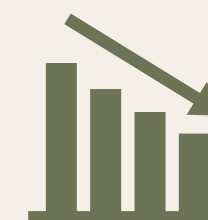
Eurostat, 2020



60.6%

of Italian farms are under 5 hectares

Eurostat, 2023



-27%

decline in the number of Italian farms, 2005 - 2023

Eurostat

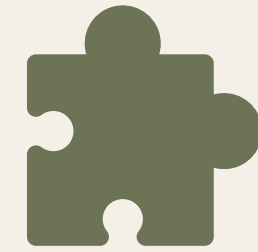
The Television Filter

What the frame includes, and what it leaves outside.



CONTEXT

Important context
that sits outside
the broadcast frame.



COMPLEXITY

The full story is
more complex than
the frame can show.



STRUCTURAL REALITY

Wider structural and economic realities
that shape the places we see.

Analytical focus: The image is not false, it is selective. What television foregrounds can shape what audiences understand as authentic.

The myth has value

When representation becomes visitor demand



Susafa, Sicily. Image source: Susafa.



IMAGE

Romantic
rural identity



DESIRE

The destination
becomes attractive



VISIT

Food · Stays
· Experiences



VALUE

Tourism
income

Analytical focus:

Beautiful rural images can hide some of the reality, while still helping attract visitors and income.

Italy, 2023

Agritourism has measurable value

AGRITOURISM FARMS IN ITALY | YEAR 2023

Agritourism production grows, farms doubled in 20 years

► In 2023, active agritourism farms numbered **26,129** (+1.1% compared to 2022); the greatest growth occurred in the **Centre (+2.3%)** and the **Islands (+1.7%)**.

The **value of agritourism production** is growing strongly compared to 2022 (+15.4%).

There are **4.5 million** agritourists (+11% compared to 2022), 51% are foreigners; 72% choose facilities in the **Centre and North-East**.

+3.2%

The average annual growth rate of agritourism farms between 2004 and 2023

Over the last 20 years, farms offering tasting sessions grew at an average annual rate of 4.7%, agri-restaurants by 3.4% and accommodation facilities by 3.1%.

64%

Municipalities with at least one agritourism farm vary from 85.7% in the Centre to 53.1% in the North-West

1.9bn

The value in euros of agritourism production

51% of the economic value is produced by 43.8% of the farms located in the North.



26,129

active agritourism farms



4.5 million

agritourism visitors



€1.9bn

value of agritourism production



51%

of visitors were international

Analytical focus:

The rural image does more than attract attention, it supports a significant tourism economy.

The authenticity loop

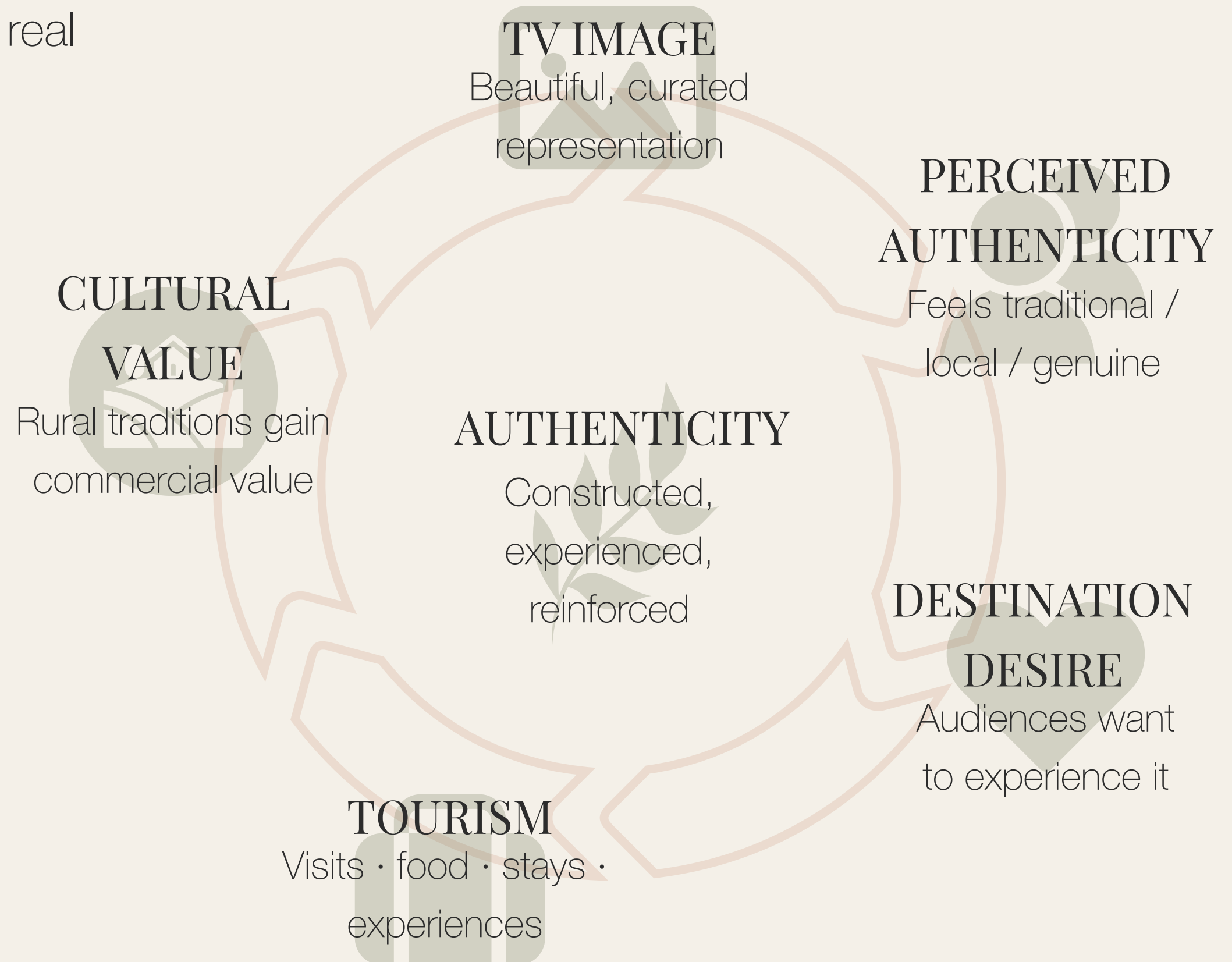
How constructed images can still feel real

Rose and Wood (2005: 294–295)

Audiences can recognise that media is constructed while still experiencing it as authentic.

Analytical focus:

Something can be constructed and still feel authentic



Practice as research

Turning critical research into creative decisions



Filming 'Echoes of the Dee, Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, Wales

Practice focus:

Research changes the choices I make behind the camera.



RESEARCH

- Theory
- Evidence
- Analysis
- Data



PRACTICE

- Viewpoint
- Agency
- Context
- Edit



REFLECTION

- Reflection
- Learning
- New Understanding
- Informed future work

Barrett and Bolt (2014: 1–3)

Creative practice can generate new understanding through making and reflection.

What the research revealed

01

AESTHETIC FRAMING

The programme adapts its visual language to contrasting contexts.

Milan is framed through refinement and consumption; Sicily through land, labour and tradition.



MILAN



refinement
consumption



SICILY



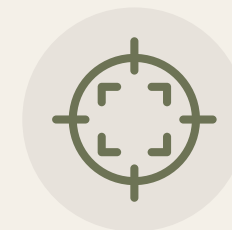
land
labour
tradition

02

ECONOMIC CONTRADICTION

Beautiful rural representation can obscure complexity while also creating value.

Structural pressures may sit outside the frame, while the same imagery helps generate tourism demand.



STRUCTURAL PRESSURES
(outside the frame)



TOURISM DEMAND
(visitors, experiences, interest)



ECONOMIC VALUE
(jobs, income, investment)

Key finding: Travel television does not simply record authenticity, it constructs a selective version of it.

Beauty without erasure

Premium aesthetics and grounded
honesty can coexist.



BEAUTY

Emotion

Desire

Value



CONTEXT

Reality

Complexity

Economics

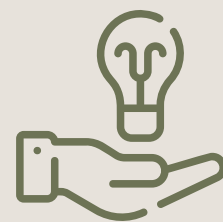


AGENCY

Voice

Presence

Perspective



The challenge is not to stop making beautiful images,
it is to ensure that beauty does not erase the people,
labour and realities that make those images possible

What this study cannot prove

Defining the limits of the analysis

01 INTENT

No access to internal production briefs or editorial decisions.

You can analyse what appears on screen, but you cannot claim why producers made those choices.

02 ECONOMIC IMPACT

No access to private farm or contributor finances.

The ISTAT data shows the wider value of agritourism, but you cannot prove that *Searching for Italy* directly caused economic benefit for a particular region.

03 SCOPE

A focused comparison of selected Milan and Sicily sequences.

Your findings are specific to this case study and shouldn't be presented as representative of all travel television.

Analytical limit: The study identifies patterns and relationships, not producer intention or direct causation.

From research to audience

Adapting the same research for different professional contexts

01 ACADEMIC

Audience:
students, researchers, media
scholars

Format:
adapted written case
study / article

Purpose:
contribute to discussion around
authenticity, representation and
travel media

DISCUSSION

Generate dialogue and
share insights.

02 INDUSTRY

Audience:
producers, commissioners,
filmmakers

Format:
short visual case study +
practical ethical checklist

Purpose:
translate the research into usable
production principles

APPLICATION

Provide practical value
for decision-making.

03 PROFESSIONAL / PUBLIC

Audience:
wider creative and travel media
audience

Format:
portfolio feature / professional
network post / short visual
summary

Purpose:
make the research accessible
beyond academia

ACCESS

Reach a broader audience
and extend impact.

Dissemination focus: The research changes format depending on who needs to use it.



From critique to practice

How this research changes my approach to travel production

01

BEAUTY

Keep the cinematic quality.

Strong composition • movement • colour • atmosphere

02

CONTEXT

Show more than the picturesque surface.

Place • labour • economic reality

03

AGENCY

Keep contributors active within the story.

Voice • perspective • participation

04

EDIT

Protect complexity in post-production

Selection • balance • what remains visible

Industry application: Beauty + context + agency + editorial care
= more responsible travel television

Academic foundations

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- FIGURE 8 · SLIDE 6 — ANALYTICAL BOUNDARY: SICILY | AUGUSTALI. n.d. Agriturismo Augustali, Sicily [online image]. Available at: <https://www.augustali.it/it/chi-siamo/> [accessed 16 August 2026].
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- FIGURE 11 · SLIDE 8 — THE TOURIST GAZE | GETTY IMAGES. 2024. Positano, Amalfi Coast, Italy [online image]. From: Condé Nast Traveler [online]. Available at: <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/the-best-things-to-do-on-the-amalfi-coast> [accessed 16 August 2026].
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- FIGURE 13 · SLIDE 10 — SICILY SEQUENCE | STANLEY TUCCI: SEARCHING FOR ITALY. 2021. 'Sicily'. Series 1, Episode 6 [TV still]. CNN, 21 March 2021..
- FIGURE 14 · SLIDE 11 — WHEN LABOUR BECOMES AESTHETIC | CHATGPT. 2026. Vineyard worker harvesting grapes [AI-generated image]. OpenAI. Available at: <https://chatgpt.com/> [accessed 16 August 2026].
- FIGURE 15 · SLIDE 12 — REPRESENTATION & VOICE | ADOBE EXPRESS. n.d. Silhouette illustration [digital design asset]. Adobe Express. Available at: <https://www.adobe.com/express/> [accessed 16 August 2026].
- FIGURE 16 · SLIDE 13 — CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION | SUSAFA. n.d. Sicilian cooking workshop [online image]. Available at: <https://www.susafa.com/en/cooking-workshops.html> [accessed 16 August 2026].

Image references

- FIGURE 17 · SLIDE 14 — ETHICS OF EQUIPMENT: DRONE | GUMUSHANELI, Cuneýt. 2022. Sunset at Tuscany [photograph]. Smithsonian Magazine Photo Contest [online]. Available at: <https://photocontest.smithsonianmag.com/photocontest/detail/sunset-at-tuscany/> [accessed 16 August 2026].
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- FIGURE 23 · SLIDE 21 — AGRITOURISM HAS MEASURABLE VALUE | ISTAT. 2025. Le aziende agrituristiche in Italia – Anno 2023 [report image]. 7 February. Available at: https://www.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Report-Agriturismi_Anno-2023.pdf [accessed 16 August 2026].
- FIGURE 24 · SLIDE 23 — PRACTICE AS RESEARCH | Filming Echoes of the Dee, Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, Wales [production photograph]. Simon Wachlin personal collection.
- FIGURE 25 · SLIDE 28 — FROM CRITIQUE TO PRACTICE | WACHLIN, Simon. 2026. Camera and lens equipment [photograph]. Personal collection.