

1st INTOCUS International Conference

# TOURISM AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation

# PROCEEDINGS

8th and 9th of March 2024



Crowne Plaza  
Athens City Centre



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ΧΑΡΟΚΟΠΕΙΟ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ  
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ΤΟΥΡΙΣΤΙΚΩΝ ΠΡΟΟΡΙΣΜΩΝ  
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Main Building, El. Venizelou 70, GR17676 ATHENS GREECE

tel: +302109549107, email: [intocus@hua.gr](mailto:intocus@hua.gr)

The International Conference "1st INTOCUS - Tourism and Cultural Heritage: Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation" was held on 8 and 9 March 2024 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Athens, by Harokopion University, the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and the Interdepartmental Postgraduate Programme "Strategic Management of Tourism Destinations and Hospitality Enterprises" of the University of the Aegean.

The conference presented the most recent findings of relevant research by distinguished Greek and foreign academics and researchers, while the contributions of the invited speakers were of particular interest:

- Dallen J. Timothy, Professor-School of Community Resources, Arizona State University, Phoenix, Arizona, USA, “Cultural Heritage and Tourism: Protecting the Past, Sustaining the Future”
- Dr. Bernadette Quinn, Senior Lecturer, School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Technological University Dublin, “Regenerative tourism and cultural heritage: nurturing place and local knowledge”
- Alessia Mariotti, PhD, President of the Rimini Campus Board, Department for Life Quality Studies, Center for Advanced Studies in Tourism, University of Bologna, “Heritage form below, tourism from above? An endless game between governance and scale”
- Dimitrios Buhalis, Professor Bournemouth University Business School, Workshop “Publishing innovative research in top ranking journals and get recognised internationally”

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## **Review Process**

Abstracts were evaluated for relevance and accessibility, and all approved submissions were invited to be presented at the conference and/or to submit full papers for the proceedings.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the reviewers who contributed to maintaining the quality of all submissions.

## **For more details:**

You can find more details about the 1<sup>st</sup> INTOCUS International Conference by visiting the official website: [www.tourismheritage.hua.gr/intocus/](http://www.tourismheritage.hua.gr/intocus/)

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# PROCEEDINGS

## UNDERSTANDING IMPORTANCE OF GAMIFICATION AND STORYTELLING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMART DESTINATIONS

**Tamara FLORIČIĆ**

Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Faculty of economics and tourism “Dr, Mijo Mirković”  
Preradovićeve 1, 52100 Pula, Croatia  
email: tfloricic@unipu.hr

### ABSTRACT

The development of new creative Smart tourism products and experiences requires effective destination branding and brand support through authentic presentation and storytelling as well as technology supported gamification.

The aim of the paper is to highlight the attitudes and perceptions of the key stakeholders of the offer of tourist destinations: Destination management organizations (DMO), destination management companies (DMC) and hotel companies on the importance and impact of storytelling and gamification on the development of Smart destinations of sustainable tourism. The aim of the research is related with its purpose, that manifests itself through the pursuit of scientific and practical evaluation of development initiatives aimed at new excellence.

The study shows that tourist destinations are using technology and storytelling to promote cultural heritage values. Gamification, although not yet fully valorised by stakeholders, presents an opportunity for future research. Evaluating destinations based on various criteria can help decision-makers better understand the importance of incorporating smart initiatives in tourism. Maintaining the authenticity of cultural heritage is crucial, as irresponsible actions can harm local communities and visitor experiences. Education is key in raising awareness about preserving cultural identities. The integration of technology with cultural initiatives in smart destinations aims to enhance sustainability and competitiveness. Stakeholders believe that smart initiatives contribute to economic, ecological, and social responsibility, as well as improving the overall tourist experience. Cooperation among stakeholders is essential for the success of cultural tourism projects and establishing a destination's identity.

The contribution of the work is reflected in the recognition of the gap between the confirmed initiatives and the evaluation of their success in relation to the predicted values. The results also indicate the limitation of the study and the topics for the future research.

**Keywords:** Smart tourism destination, hotels, tour operators, gamification, storytelling, culture

### INTRODUCTION

Storytelling and its role in the successful marketing of integral destination tourism products, including the organization of themed hotel industry, is important for the development of attractiveness and market competitiveness. Gamification supported by digital technology and authentic storytelling are presented as tools that valorise cultural heritage (Pena et al, 2024; Jang & Kim, 2023). They influence the construction of the narrative value of the destination, hotel,

restaurant and other catering facilities, the so-called "narrative identity". By developing the scenario, the stories could be placed at the desired time, they are managed during its duration with rhythm and narrative tension, the message of the tourist attraction is emphasized and a digital and promotional hybrid network is built through which attention is drawn and marketing is carried out at desirable market niches (Kana, 2017; Moscardo, 2020). Stories and games can include different aspects of heritage from lifestyle and work, folklore, gastronomy, skills, myths, legends, music, dance to the collection of plants and agricultural activities. They should be conceived in narrative harmony with each other, the so-called space of flow, reflected as "spatial and contextual flow" (Zoncova, 2016, Volic et al. 2017). Creative storytelling is defined by developing unique narratives that can create a sense of community and belonging, engage and communicate with the audience, transform followers into promoters and inspire and show the creative process, ideas and invite the audience to join (Zing et al, 2023).

Smart Tourism is related with the integration of technology in the tourism industry in order to improve the experience of tourists and empower the business of tourist destinations. Although Smart concept presumes the integral valorisation of sustainability, technology, accessibility and creativity and cultural heritage, the paper focus on this later value of Smart destinations organisation. The aim of the paper is to highlight the attitudes and perceptions of the key stakeholders of the offer of tourist destinations: Destination management organizations (DMO), destination management companies (DMC) and hotel companies on the importance and impact of storytelling and gamification on the development of Smart destinations of sustainable tourism. The aim of the research is related with its purpose, that manifests itself through the pursuit of scientific and practical evaluation of development initiatives aimed at new excellence.

In continuance, research questions are posed:

RQ - "What is the level of perception, importance and implementation of storytelling and gamification in Smart destinations". Based upon extensive literature review that was mostly conducted prior the original questionnaire research the expected values were set. It was predicted that the two third of respondents will evaluate positively (highest grades at Likert scale), so these values were set in Chi square test.

## 1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *1.1. Storytelling intourism as a tool of authentic presentation of cultural heritage*

Storytelling presents art fo telling the cultural stories, that enables destinations to create an emotional connection with guests. Through stories, destinations can convey its unique cultural heritage, history and traditions (Krajinović et al, 2019). Zing et al. (2023), Goncalves et al. (2018) point out the importance of tangible amd intangible cultural heritage presentation within the sustainability concept. There is no universal recipe how to design and deliver stories about tourism destinations but the stages and steps in development of authentic cultural tourism product should be taken in consideration, elaborate Kim and Jang (2017). Continuously, Cumprubi & Planas (2020) explore and point out the advantages of strategic destination branding that tourism destination gain when synergically develop authentic storytelling and destination identity.

The art of storytelling is deeply intertwined with tourism development and management. Every destination has its own unique narrative to tell, and storytellers bring spaces to life by turning them into stories (Ghaderi et al., 2023). Tourism researchers Su et al. (2023), Moscardo (2018) focus on understanding tourists' experiences through their stories, which is crucial in today's digital age where social media, immersive technologies, and AI shape the way we interact with each other. As a result, destination brands are now leveraging the power of storytelling to create engaging digital, video, and print promotional materials that captivate audiences (Moin et al. 2020). Storytelling in tourism has an impact on the behavior of tourists and affects their intention to return to a tourist destination and recommendations to friends to visit them if the destination has a

story that is educational in terms of society, culture and history and that stimulates human feelings. Thus, the story represents a specific intangible tourist attraction (Hordov et al., 2019).

The fluency of the narration and retention of attention are issues in overcoming language barriers, points out Vidak & Resner (2018). As the performers and interpreter aren't often professional actors and storytellers, rather, very often the volunteers, the quality of the performance is in the focus of interest of Olsson et al. (2016) and Luo et al. (2023) who explore platform of performing arts in context of authentic storytelling. In continuance, Youssef et al. (2019) explore the modalities and aspects of impact measurement while Hartman (2019) elaborate influence on destination development.

### *1.2. Gamification and its role in tourism experience and marketing*

Gamification present the concept of applying games and the elements of competition in non-gaming contexts (Jang & Kim, 2023). Gamification should be differed from gaming as it implements the values of education, storytelling, entertainment in the gaming concept shifting the competition in the different context (Xu et al, 2017). It is an innovative concept of learning and entertainment through games applied to different age groups explore Hornoiu et al. (2018). Although the concept of playing games is stereotypically related with younger population, actually, the games and gaming concepts is oriented to the all generation groups and various niche segments. In context of gamification Liberato et al. 2021 explore niche segment of gastronomy and wine tourism, Lee (2019) is focused on cruise tourism while Bahtiar et al. (2020) research village tourism and smart gamification. In continuance Laque & Correa (2017) develop classification of games and take in consideration topic, type, activity and consumers where Millennials and Gen Z are identified the segment that valorize gamification through technology. Many authors develop theoretical platform of gaming: Skinner et al. (2018) analyse the aspects of the the worldwide known game Geocaching while Wei et al. (2023) explore immersive VR experiences. Mayragani & Dionvisios (2022) focus on AR technology and devices that enable specific sensory experience while Lent & Marciniak (2019) point out the importance of mobile apps in valorization of AR experience in gamification.

The Gamification model offers many advantages and can be implemented on many products and services and it can influence customer engagement and loyalty (Abau-Shouk & Soliman, 2021). They explain that in the context of the hotel industry, gamification can be instrumental in improving the guest experience and encouraging repeat visits. For example, hotels can implement loyalty systems that reward guests with points or rewards for activities such as reviewing the hotel, participating in local activities, or spending at the hotel's restaurant. (Jang & Km, 2023). In addition, hotel services can be shaped as challenges or missions, providing guests with a sense of achievement and fun during their stay and affirming co-creation and personal engagement of guests (Florivic, 2018, 2022). She points out that gamification represents an innovative way of brand communication, and brands that have implemented this business model show their orientation towards innovation, technology and contemporary trends. Conversations, two-way communication with tourists are encouraged, who in this way connect more and more with the offer of the destination and increasingly want to be involved in creating content for it (Kiralova, 2015). Gamification takes on its full meaning in the era of digital marketing and implies the use of games in marketing campaigns. It is an highly effective way of promoting and creating customer loyalty due to the fact that at the time of using the service, the customer is emotionally available and ready to receive new information. Gamification therefore increases the emotional connection between the customer and the product or service (Lee, 2019). It is also known that the human brain remembers the story behind the gamification better than the facts themselves. It leads to the more frequent use of gamification because it keep consumer's focus on the brand and services for a longer period of time (Cumprubi & Planas, 2020). In addition, the tourist is thus ready to share the game with other tourists because of the fun the game offers. By guests' participating and staying in

contact with the offer, companies in return receive free feedback, preferences, that are the basis formation of CRM databases at different levels (Hordov et al. 2019).

### *1.3. Gamification and storytelling – valorisation of innovative projects in Smart destinations*

Smart tourist destinations provide barrier-free for all tourists, offer multilingual services and digital accessibility. They focus on sustainability and natural resource management, reducing seasonality and involving the local community (Buhalis, Amaranggana, 2015). The application of digital technology is important in creation the tourist experience and the growth of local entrepreneurship. Smart tourist destinations focus on cultural heritage and creativity and redesign the tourist offer in accordance with the key values of the Smart concept: sustainability, accessibility, technology and culture and creativity (Sorokina 2022)

Cultural tourism affirms cultural heritage and new experiences through the formation of specific products, events, exhibitions, storytelling experiences, workshops, traditional activities and the new technologies experiences design (e.g. virtual tours, museums). Quality is an element that is given great attention, so the offer is aimed at creating quality products and services, which will guarantee guest satisfaction, and in this way ensure loyalty, a positive image, and competitiveness (Abau-Shouk & Soliman, 2021). According to the program European capitals of Smart tourism – Smart Dublin (2022), the smart tourism program is responsible for four key areas which include:

Digital transformations and smart tourism advocacy - the smart tourism program and its partners (industry, start-up companies and research centers) will be provided with access to digital expertise, international case studies, best-in-class design and technological solutions to inform and make decisions. related to the development of Smart destinations

Data evaluation - the use and analysis of data enables a better understanding of visitor behavior, in order to help the recovery of tourism in the coming years.

Development of digital trial applications - assist in the development of mobile applications that enhance and enhance the visitor experience

Planning and orientation of the visitor's journey - enables an easier understanding of how the visitor orients himself and explores the city in order to find a way to plan and orient the visitor that will become even easier and more efficient.

The future of tourism development is reflected in the implementation of a large number of different Smart projects. Their goal is not only the creation of IT technologies, but through the development of new technologies and innovations to contribute to the overall development of cities as smart destinations (Reinhold, 2023). Furthermore, values of Smart destinations produce an impact on their smart and sustainable development in context of regenerative tourism (Bellato et al., 2023).

The valorisation of heritage through storytelling and gamification projects is reflected on the visible/tangible and invisible/intangible elements that carry the story. It could include oral tradition and folk literature, cultural space - mythical landscape, the staging of plays, customs and traditional way of life, and, environmental and economic knowledge. Through valorisation of storytelling and gamification supply side stakeholders could recognize the potential of presenting local indigenous values in a sustainable and creative way. It could influence on increasing demand, encourage innovation in tourist experiences, revitalizee tourist products, and, create a positive affirmative atmosphere that evokes the perception of a special experience for the guest and the image of the destination or place (Pena et al., 2024). Aspects of the stories that can affirm a special experience and be the basis for the organization of services as a new themed tourist product are as follows (Floričić, 2022):

- they should be strong enough to successfully attract attention and generate new interest
- they should be recognizable in order to distinguish one destination from another
- they should match the values of the target emissive markets
- should be authentic and relate to the values that guests will find in the destination

they should avoid stereotypes and images that can humiliate local communities and their values.

A transmedia approach that includes transmedia narrative and multiplatform storytelling including multiple media (film, text, photography, art) is a potential to reach a wider audience (Moin et al).

Examples of gamification in tourism could be identified as gamified tourist guides, games in theme parks, games in cultural heritage, telling stories using different media, games in cultural heritage, gamified flight experience, gamified virtual tourist experience and location-based games using augmented reality (Skinner et al, 2018, Mayragani & Dionvisios, 2022)

## METHODOLOGY

The paper explores destination stakeholders at the international level. The research was conducted in January 2023 and March 2023 during the FITOUR and ITB tourism fairs. The survey included 65 respondents and 51 valid answers were obtained, which makes a responsive rate of 78.46%. The research design included a survey of stakeholders conducted by structured personal interview organised in four parts. Firstly, the sample was explored and the reliability tested, followed by set of general questions that explored attitudes of stakeholders about implementation of Smart concept leaning of storytelling and gamification. Third set of questions explored attitudes measured by 1-5 Likert scale.

The original questionnaire was designed upon the extensive literature review combining knowledge of following authors:

- cultural tourism sustainability and competitiveness: Hartman (2019), Zing et al (2023), Goncalves et al. (2018)
- technological innovations and smart tourism: Wei et al (2023), Lent & Marciniak (2019), Mayragani & Dionvisios (2022), Skinner et al (2018)
- aspects of storytelling: Cumprubi & Planas (2020), Youssef et al. (2019)
- aspects of gamification: Kana (2017), Jang & Kim (2023)
- aspects of authentic special experience: Su et al. (2023), Luo et al. (2023), Moscardo (2018)
- destination marketing and cooperation: Kim et al. (2017), Moscardo (2020)
- Smart tourism destinations: Sorokina (2022), Reinhold et al. (2023)

The results of the Chi-squared test are presented in the study. The Chi-squared test is a non-parametric statistical test that relies on the distribution of frequencies within a contingency table, rather than on the variables themselves. Assuming that the data is derived from a randomly selected sample, this test is used to determine whether observed frequencies deviate significantly from those expected under a certain hypothesis, or research question. In this case, the validity of the Chi-squared test was examined in the context of stakeholders' evaluation of quality and success of gamification and storytelling projects in Smart destinations. Additionally, the study analysed the arithmetic mean of Likert scale ratings (1-5) for each question or statement. In addition, varieties of scientific methods contribute to the research process combining qualitative and quantitative methodology.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results are summarized through numerical indicators. Table 1 presents a sample of respondents and argues for validity and reliability.

Table 1: Sample presentation

Respondents – sample	N	%
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National hospitality association	9	17.6
Tour operators/Travel agents	23	45.1
Tourism board	19	37.3
	51	100.0

Source: author's research

The validity of the sample is reflected through the profiling of the business activities of the researched stakeholder, its influence on the creation of the destination tourism product, and is based on the years of business operations in the destination, knowledge of the tourist attraction resources and the basis of tourism experience developed on it. Of the total number of respondents, 66,7% have more than 20 years of business experience in tourism, 10 to 20 years of them 23,5% and 1-10 years of work experience in tourism them 9,8%.

The first set of questions was intended to explore the general attitude of respondents regarding the implementation of technologies and innovative tourist experiences based on gamification and storytelling.

Table 2: Positive perception of respondents on positions of storytelling and gamification in tourism destination

	Does your destination develop smart tourism supported by technologies?	Do you promote heritage in your destination via technologies	Do you develop cultural authentic storytelling in your destination	Do you develop gamification projects in your tourism destination
N	51	51	49	24
%	100	100	96.1	47.1

Source: author's research

To the first set of questions, which perceive the position of the organization and development of innovative tourism products based on Smart technologies, gamification and storytelling, the respondents predominantly answered positively. That points to an organization self-assessment as a stakeholder of smart destination that promotes cultural heritage through the implementation of technologies (100%, N=51) and develop authentic cultural storytelling in destination (96,1%, N= 49). Interestingly, when considering gamification, only 47,1% (N=24) respondents affirm the development of gamification projects in tourism destination. This data is in conflict with the first question that is exploring the use of Smart technologies for the development of Smart tourism and experience creation. That data could implicate that the stakeholders are lacking in knowledge about aspects of gamification and competitive benefits that it could contribute to destination. Also, it can point to a wrong self-perception or deception that can prevent the development of full potential and the use of competitive advantages through modern technologies and innovative projects.

Table 3: Smart destination innovative initiatives – gamification and storytelling through the lens of destination stakeholders

	STATEMENTS										
	1	2	3	4	5.1.	5.2.	5.3.	5.4.	5.5.	5.6.	5.7.
Evaluation score 5 - N	17	15	20	7	9	12	5	15	24	19	23

Evaluation score 5 - %	33.3	29.4	39.2	13.7	17.6	23.5	9.8	29.4	47.1	37.3	45.1
Evaluation score 4 - N	30	28	22	25	24	30	19	28	27	28	22
Evaluation score 4 - %	58.8	54.9	43.1	49.0	47.1	58.8	37.3	54.9	52.9	54.9	43.1
Evaluation score 3 - N	4	8	9	19	17	8	11	8	0	4	6
Evaluation score 3 - %	7.8	15.7	17.6	37.3	33.3	15.7	21.6	15.7	0	7.8	11.8
Evaluation score 2 - N	0	0	0	0	1	1	8	0	0	0	0
Evaluation score 2 - %	0	0	0	0	2.0	2	15.7	0	0	0	0
Evaluation score 1 - N	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0
Evaluation score 1 - %	0	0	0	0	0	0	15.7	0	0	0	0
Total - N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Total - %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
AVR	4.3	4.1	4.2	3.8	3.8	4.0	3.1	4.1	4.5	4.3	4.3
1. Sustainable destinations of cultural tourism impact higher competitiveness index											
2. Tourists enjoy in use of technological innovation in my tourism destination											
3. Tourists recognize the values of cultural sustainable initiatives - impact on tourism experience											
4. Tourists are ready to pay more / accommodation / for the sustainable initiatives in smart destinations											
5.1 Evaluate your destination by: Storytelling											
5.2 Evaluate your destination by: Special experience affirmation											
5.3 Evaluate your destination by: Gamification "culturtainment"											
5.4 Evaluate your destination by: Cultural sustainability projects											
5.5. Evaluate your destination by: Authenticity											
5.6 Evaluate your destination by: Immersive projects and co-creation											
5.7 Evaluate your destination by: Cooperation of all cultural tourism stakeholders											

Source: author's research

Research results presented in Table 3 indicate the perception of destination supply side stakeholders about smart initiatives in destination related with cultural sustainability, storytelling and gamification. The context of cooperation, authenticity, special experience, immersive projects and co-creation is explored and the familiarity level and evaluation score presented as statistical mean is presented as the research result – contribution. Various statistical indicators were considered, but, as the results are predominantly extremely positive, (except the evaluation of gamification) it was decided that only the basic data and the evaluation ranking will be presented. The explored variables were values of cultural, Smart tourism and the ranking is following: 1) Authenticity (4,5), 2) Immersive projects and co-creation (4,3), 3) Cooperation of all cultural tourism stakeholders (4,3), 4) Cultural sustainability projects (4,1), 5) Special experience



affirmation (4,0), 6) Storytelling (3,8), 7) Gamification “Culturtainment” – cultural entertainment (3,1).

The research from the second part indicated that stakeholders are less able to develop gamification projects, and this was also confirmed in the second part of the research. Consideration of this context from two separate points of view confirmed the position and affirmation. On the other hand, the context of storytelling was also investigated, also through the question of developing storytelling projects in the destination, to which 91.1% of respondents answered positively. However, in the third set of questions, when the destinations were evaluated from the aspect of storytelling, they got the worst result along with gamification. The results are contradictory: tourist destinations develop culturally authentic storytelling, but when self-evaluating, they give poor ratings on its effectiveness. It also represents a position for the development of educational projects both for the local community and for tourists, as well as for cooperation and the development of network partnerships in order to affirm quality and competitiveness.

When considering values of gamification, on the question: “Do you develop gamification projects in your tourist destination, 47,1% respondents replied positively. Second set of questions evaluated the stakeholders’ perception of destination by gamification “culturtainment” and it is evident that the highest grades (5 and 4) in cumulative gave 47,1% respondents. This surprisingly equal percentage result indicates that of less than half respondents who perceive that smart destinations organize gamification projects, less than half of them think that they are organized in good way.

In order to test the predicted valuation, testing the value of gamification is indicated, given that numerical deviations were observed.

Table 4. Valuation of destination Gamification – "Culturtainment" projects in Smart destinations

	<b>Evaluation high grade -%</b>	<b>Mid.grad - indifferent -%</b>	<b>Evaluate low grade -%</b>	<b>Marginal Row Totals</b>
Obtained frequency	47,1	21,6	31,4	100
Expected frequency	65,0	20,0	15,0	100
<i>Marginal Column Totals</i>	112,1	41,6	46,4	200 (Grand Total)
Chi-squared test: 22.973	Degrees of freedom: 2		p-value: 0.00001027	

Source: Authors' research

The chi-squared test result data proves that tourism destination stakeholders' doesn't evaluate the organised gamification projects as successful as the grades are lower than expected. The obtained frequency when compared with predicted respondents' higher value results is 17,9% lower than expected result. Here, the chi-squared test result equals 31.634.

## CONCLUSION

In the conclusive remarks, it should be pointed out that storytelling and gamification are key tools for improving the competitiveness of the tourism and hotel industry with special emphasis on regional specificities and identity. Through telling stories about the rich cultural heritage, traditions and natural beauties and implementing games and competitions, the destination stakeholders of the tourist offer can create deeper emotional connections with the guests and provide them with an unforgettable stay experience. These strategies encourage guest loyalty, positive reviews and

contribute to the growth of tourism and the economic prosperity of the region. The key is to carefully plan and integrate these strategies into the overall guest experience in a way that is subtle and natural, thus ensuring their successful implementation and long-term positive impact on the tourism industry.

The results of this study indicate that tourist destinations, through the business activities of stakeholders, implement creative initiatives that affirm cultural heritage and its tangible and intangible values predominantly through technology implementation, followed by storytelling. Gamification as a specific tool is still not recognised by explored stakeholders and present a platform for future scientific and practical explorations. Furthermore, the results of explored attitudes, namely destination evaluation through complementary criteria present valuable contribution in understanding the lacking comprehension of destination decision makers. It can contribute to shift of educational platform with the focus on Smart initiatives in tourism destination. Taking into account the fragility of cultural heritage, especially that of an intangible character, the importance of the responsibility of stakeholders in the creation of an integral tourist product is highlighted. Irresponsible behaviour and endangering authenticity can cause irreparable damage that changes both, the pattern of social life of local community and guests' expectations. This is precisely why education is crucial; while bridging theory and practice, it raises awareness of the dangers of losing authentic cultural identity. Further analysis of the results indicates that, considered in the context of sustainable Smart destinations, the perception of strong relation between cultural initiatives and technology is confirmed aiming to achievement of destination excellence and competitiveness. The respondents confirmed that they believe that Smart initiatives in their tourist destination contribute to integral sustainability, ecological, economic and cultural - social responsibility, as well as to a higher level of the competitiveness. Also, the impact on the tourist experience by valorising the authenticity and immersive projects supported by technology is highlighted. Synergistic development presupposes the connection of all stakeholders of cultural tourism in a tourist destination, as well as cooperation and marketing on strategic development projects that establish the destination's identity. The results point to the limitation of the study, the possible false perception of the positions. At the same time, they present a platform for future research, namely, tourists' satisfaction and experiences perception as well as the potential of creation of specific integral tourism product that would include gamification and authentic storytelling.

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## THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF POSTCOLONIAL HERITAGE: TIANJIN WUDADAO AS WANGHONG TOURISM DESTINATION

**Chensi SHEN**

EIREST, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne  
Architecture School, Tianjin University  
chensi.shen.tju@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

In China, the tourism destination has undergone a significant transformation driven by the rise of social media, which is called WangHong Cities phenomenon. This research aims to delve into the underlying mechanisms of this process by examining the case of former concessions in Tianjin, with a particular focus on Wudadao, the former British concession that has now become a popular tourist destination on social media.

This research seeks to explore the role of WangHong Urbanism in postcolonial debates, particularly regarding the formation of new networked identities at the intersection of digital media and urban tourism promotion. Former concession areas in China's major cities have been greatly impacted by these trends, with their Western-style architectural facades and street culture becoming highly sought-after. Leveraging the "exotic" and "romantic" imagery associated with Europe, these neighbourhoods have become platforms for marketing business concepts and even lifestyles through the influence of social media. This study aims to investigate how this digital transformation of tourism destinations shapes the heritage discourse and explores the new modes of engagement involved. Through on-site fieldwork and interviews, the research intends to examine how these images function as iconic communication symbols in the creation of WangHong spaces, where heritage sites play a pivotal role in their cultural and historical contexts. By closely studying the case of former concessions in Tianjin, particularly the transformation of Wudadao into a popular tourist destination, this research aims to shed light on the complex dynamics at play between digital media, urban tourism, and postcolonial narratives, and to critically examine the cultural authenticity and sustainability of digital tourism as it reshapes the relationship between residents and tourism practitioners.

**Keywords:** Social media, Digital tourism, Post-colonial tourism, Tourism imagination, Tianjin, Wudadao

### INTRODUCTION

A trend known as Wanghong Cities has transformed tourism dynamics in China in recent years, significantly influencing heritage landscapes. The word Wanghong (网红) refers to popular

content on social media platforms. The circulation of the tourism destination on social media has reshaped how has formed with the image staged and presented of the digital economy. This article specifically examines Tianjin Wudadao (Five Avenues), a former concession area with post-colonial heritage characteristics. The study investigates its evolution into a popular 'cyber destination' for heritage tourism, driven by social media, while the colonial past has been leveraged as symbolic capital. The Wanghong discourse thus influences heritage tourism by transforming heritage narratives into what could be called Wanghong languages. From three studies conducted from 2021 to 2024 and extensive interviews with residents, tourists, tourism industry practitioners, businesses, and tourism authorities, the paper aims to answer the following questions: Why has this former colonial area become a popular destination online? What elements contribute to its online popularity? How do various stakeholders mobilize the concession history to achieve the goal of becoming a successful Wanghong destination?

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Social media is playing an increasingly important role in tourism studies, particularly in transforming socio-cultural values that shape tourism structure (Zeng& Gerritsen, 2014). This paper would like to explore this impact, which is especially evident in the context of how it is reshaping colonial heritage values. Former colonial heritage sites are often considered typical foreign destinations where visitors are predominantly European or white to experience the empire's history, thus ignoring the element of domestic tourism competition (Jørgensen, 2019). While tourism is more and more important in fostering economic development in domestic competition with seeking transformation in post-industrial cities, social media bridges this gap by serving as a crucial tool for tourism promotion and a source of tourism discourse in these regions (Brito-Henriques, 2014). It highlights how tourism in ex-colonial destinations can amplify this advantage in domestic competition through the tourism imaginaries inspired by the colonial history, or the exotic sense (Wijesinghe et al., 2020). These tourism dynamics are not merely about nostalgia for imperial glory or the consumption of implicit social memories. They involve proactively reconfiguring these non-local elements, transferring them into a language of welcoming international exchanges while being able to consume foreign goods with a middle-class taste, thus attracting tourists with an identity of being part of the popular elite class (Shen, 2023). In China, while former concession areas are not colonial areas in the typical sense, however still share the postcolonial characteristics which are used in building a social media popular destination. Therefore, we try to explore the following question with the case study of Wudadao, a former British concession in Tianjin: how has the Wanghong phenomenon reshaped the postcolonial imaginary to make it a domestically competitive destination?

To answer this question, it is first necessary to understand why the concept of Wanghong has become important in contemporary China. Wanghong is a Chinese term that is well used on social media where "网" (wǎng) means Internet and "红" (hóng) means red, symbolizing something is popular on the Internet. Initially, the term described the key opinion leaders who could lead the trend with their beauty and lifestyles. It quickly expanded from a noun to an adjective to describe objects, food, lifestyles, and even places that are celebrated online or with the potential to go viral online (Morris& Cong, 2024). Wanghong destinations, which repeatedly appeared on social media, soon became synonymous with popular tourist spots. These destinations are characterized by their visual appeal, making them perfect backdrops for photographs and impactful compositions, and by their unique experience which triggers their communicative power. These visual elements are often associated with specific aesthetic imaginations and certain consumption groups which are tied to middle-class sophistication.

While Generation Z accesses news, engages in public opinion, and shapes their personal images on social media platforms but not from traditional media channels, these platforms have

become their new modes of perceiving the world. As traditional media declined, streaming platforms became the primary venues for circulating images and video-centred information. A Wanghong destination thus forms a specific vocabulary on social media platforms that is centred on image and video sharing, including spatial, decorative, colourful, and identity features, particularly linked to qualities of cleanliness, sophistication, beauty, and leisure. A new narrative logic is formed where the destination elements are carefully selected and placed in the photos, while the experience is designed and staged in the video to trigger imitation trends. The spreading effect of these images is amplified by the recommendation algorithms, creating explosive chain reactions.

Cities, recognizing the economic, social and even political value brought by the attention economy and influx of visitors from the Wanghong narrative, have begun to actively cater to this trend. The municipal government are positioning itself as Wanghong cities, creating social media accounts and inviting influencers to establish the brand of Wanghong destination. The Wanghong phenomenon, as a similar process to "Instagram tourism", has its unique characteristic not only changes the tourists' experiences but also reshapes urban agendas. This process leads to the creation of so-called new media spectacle cities (Kellner, 2003). While different stakeholders are participating to craft the city's social media identity and achieve post-industrial urban transformation goals, it is characterized by a Disney-like approach to creating photogenic scenes that mobilize certain imaginations, forming a hybrid space of imagination and reality.

Creating the Wanghong Disneyland means providing a staging for high-quality photos and videos to promote a Wanghong city brand, provoking user sharing and discussion, thereby increasing the city's visibility and reputation (Zhang et al., 2022). Including manufacturing destinations and improving urban infrastructure, Wanghong elements are incorporated to create visually striking and photogenic spots and buildings. These scenes are often brightly coloured, uniquely designed, and ideal for photos and social media posts, making them key attractions. Landscapes, cultures, and activities are selected and presented in a new way which is more accepted by the Internet circulation logic, to attract younger generations of tourists. The influx of tourists driven by the Wanghong phenomenon not only boosts tourism but also stimulates related service industries such as dining, accommodation, and retail, also developing for local residents. Consequently, urban economies experience significant growth, forming a positive cycle that supports the cities' transformation objectives from industrial-centred to consumption-oriented.

As a photo backdrop and also as a key element in the image, cultural heritage plays an important role in this process of manufacturing Wanghong Cities. While tourism has become an important motivation for the discovery, invention and enhancement of contemporary cultural heritage, it has become an important material in the creation of Wanghong cities, enabling the cities to mobilize the heritage identity to define their landscape characteristics and city value to seek difference in the competition. On the one hand, cultural heritage often provides striking and attractive images when photographs have become the most important promotional tool. The historical and cultural additions that cultural heritage carries with it have also become a unique advertising opportunity for the Wanghong experience. On the other hand, the creation of Wanghong cities has prompted city authorities to proactively tap into the city's cultural heritage, to reinterpret and redefine the heritage meaning and its role in the new city agenda. Wanghong cities narrative has also changed the presentation of heritage sites, with the renewal of heritage sites centred on providing background, the use of Site- and angle-specific publicity in promotion, and finally, the identity and value of heritage also present specific elements selected by the Wanghong economy.

Among all the newly considered Wanghong cities and Wanghong destinations, China's former concession areas were almost the first to be affected by the wave. International concessions

emerged in several major commercial cities in East Asia during the 19th and 20th centuries, with China serving as a prime example. As a result of unequal treaties, specific areas within these cities were designated for foreign settlers from various colonial empires, complete with their own independent and well-established administration, judiciary, and urban planning systems. In contrast to the traditional narrative of oppression and resistance, these urban enclaves, often referred to as semi-colonial spaces by Osterhammel (1986), showcase the intricate political, social, and spatial tensions between locals and foreigners, as well as between different empires. They provide an alternative history of globalization, as emphasized by Singaravélou (2017). Acting as laboratories of modernity (Marinelli, 2009), these concessions experimented with urban planning, architectural design ideas, and the associated Western infrastructures, supplies, and techniques, thus contributing to the initial steps of Chinese urban development modernization. While the history of concessions may evoke painful and traumatic memories, they are also seen as evidence of China's journey towards openness, globalization, and modernization in the post-1990 urban development agenda, owing to their distinctive economic and symbolic capital (Gravari-Barbas et al., 2021). Municipal governments have taken the initiative to restore, transform, and restructure these concession areas into cultural heritage sites, using their historic architecture and urban character as the basis for creating an exotic cultural theme park. This strategy has successfully attracted tourists, fostering economic momentum while establishing a distinct urban identity as an international metropolis and a hub for creative consumption.

Its attraction was promoted as an opportunity to experience Western architecture and urban planning, as well as to experience the upper-class life of the time and enter the living environment of the cultural celebrities. The sense of cultural isolation of being an elite in history, the experience of time-travelling and the sense of being in Europe, made the Concession a favourite destination for tourists, and also for the creative economy. While more and more creative businesses are choosing to open in the former concession areas, experiencing a middle-class life in the former concessions, taking photos of being in Europe and consuming foreign goods and creative products became a popular social media discourse that spread through influencer-sharing. These behaviours in turn further encouraged the creation of more shops with Wanghong characteristics. Beginning with Shanghai, more and more cities' former Concessions have become typical Wanghong hotspots, where many tourists come to take photos and consume Wanghong goods, wishing to share their photos and share their experiences on social media. The history of colonisation is mobilised as an element and backdrop for new middle-class consumption.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Case Study: Tianjin Wudadao*

Using the example of Tianjin Wudadao, this paper hopes to explore how Wanghong tourism has integrated elements of the former concession to achieve the success of being a social media-welcoming destination. Tianjin, a city of 13 million people located in northern China where approximately 120 km from Beijing, rose to prominence with its waterborne commerce. It has a unique history of being the site of nine international concessions: British, French, Japanese, German, Austro-Hungarian, Italian, Russian, Belgian, and American concessions, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The area of Wudadao (Five Avenues) is the second extension of the British Concession, mainly consisting of residential buildings and is particularly famous for housing famous political and cultural elites of modern China history.

The main methodology of this paper for the urban transformation process of Tianjin Wudadao towards a Wanghong destination. First, it depicts the history of a continuous field survey



from 2019-2024. Then, the research tries to classify the different reactions of stakeholders in the process, mainly through interviews with relevant participants, including tourists, shopkeepers, managers and residents, as well as the observation of different spaces.

#### *A Brief history of Wanghong tourism at Tianjin Wudadao*

After 1990, the Tianjin government saw Wudadao as the opportunity to build a popular tourist destination with the effort to list it as a heritage site. Restoration and investment in several important historical buildings began, gradually transforming Wudadao into the name card of Tianjin, and also the evidence of Tianjin becoming an international metropolitan city. With the aim of creating a creative city brand in Tianjin, the creative business is encouraged to put their business in Wudadao, in hoping the environment of being the exposition of the world architecture can help creative tourism. With fancy restaurants, cafes and bars gradually opening in the area, Wudadao is becoming a trendy place.

Influencer tourism started around 2015 with some design-focused bookstores, cafes, and restaurants. These stores are gradually more focused on interior design that would welcome consumers to take photos. It also brings an experience of the middle class: Wudadao featured authentic and expensive dining options, drawing on colonial history for a "bourgeois" vibe with high prices, creating a high-end consumption atmosphere. By 2017, more people sought aesthetic and experiential products, boosting more Wanghong-oriented shops in Wudadao. By 2019, Wudadao's creative shop scene peaked.

In 2019, facing an economic recession in the traditional industry, Tianjin's tourism development plan for the first time proposed the creation of a "Wanghong City" as an official goal, with a special focus on leveraging the former concession area to build this new identity. After the impact on tourism during COVID-19, influencer tourism and Wanghong cities are becoming the most dominant discourse on social media, and Wudadao will become a key destination in 2022. The creative business attracted Wanghong tourists, and soon more and more Wanghong shops were opening, making it a successful Wanghong destination. Alongside the roads, photo spots and influencer-focused shops emerged. By 2023-2024, Wudadao became a top check-in spot for Wanghong tourism, but overcrowding and uniform tourist experiences led to criticism that its historical value was diminishing.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**

### *Different dynamics of Wanghong tourism at Wudadao*

#### *Creating Wanghong scenery: Local entrepreneurs*

Inside the famous tourist destination Qing Wang Fu, a Qing dynasty prince's residence at Wudadao, a shop owner rented the building's attached peripheral space to run a cafe and bar. The cafe was designed by a designer who specialises in Wanghong shop design and decoration. "I will carefully choose my design perspective... I will consider in advance with the shop owner which highlights to create for online popularity. For example, I will consider the best photography background and trendy photography elements." In this cafe, offering modern and exotic merchandise, providing photo backgrounds and photo props are top of mind. For example, their coffee selection is "Coffee Global Journey", which means experiencing coffee flavours from all over the world in this cafe. They invited a dessert chef who studied in France to create desserts with modern artistry, and encouraged influencers to take photos of the place. Everything is

carefully presented as delicate scenes and objects, thus providing a perfect photo background and indeed attracted many influencers.

#### *Discover the local Wanghong: Tourists*

However, colonial attributes are not the only ones that could attract Wanghong tourism: after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, Wudadao was inhabited by ordinary, giving it the character of local Tianjin. As a result, not only Western imaginative tourism but also food with Tianjin's local flavour attracted the discovering tourists. Some of the local shops, that serve the everyday life of the habitants, have also been discovered as Wanghong spots. Wudadao became a hybrid model: tourists experiencing a heterogeneous heritage while searching for local cultural characteristics. "Tianjin" emerges as a hybrid image, formed by a hybridization of the local identity and Western imagination.

#### *Manufacturing Wanghong: Local institutions*

In Wudadao, making Wanghong a destination is not only a bottom-up entrepreneurial act, when the local government realised Wanghong tourism's huge economic potential and urban advertising effect, they began to intentionally cultivate and participate in this act through public-private partnerships. Policy involvement and encouragement have made Wanghong a spectacle of greater influence and urban scale. Entrepreneurs with more capital gained access to policy support. They rapidly replicated, expanded, and aggregated forms of Wanghong, leading to the emergence of a number of Wanghong business clusters on Wudadao. These Wanghong hubs tend to have a larger cluster effect and wider influence. They have also become home to the "soft" infrastructure of Wanghong: urban festivals, live streaming events and creative markets take place in these venues and continue to benefit from policy support for these activities.

#### *Creating online-offline Wanghong circulations: Platforms*

Wanghong cities and destinations are an online-offline spatial complex. On Xiaohongshu, a popular social media platform in China, people find the best way to experience the Wudadao by searching for travel tips. Makeup, dress, and experience are directed online, and practised offline, and the cycle completes with new sharing online. Themes like "Traveling to Europe" and "Back to the Republic of China" illustrate the body politic of experiencing pre-colonial spaces via social media. Platforms actively engage in these cycles. For instance, in the 'Tianjin Drunkard Map', Xiaohongshu partners with a beer shop to encourage users to follow a specific route and share it online, creating an online-offline content production circulation of Wanghong tourism.

#### *Rejecting over-Wanghong-tourism: Residents and cultural elites*

While many tourists believe that hitting the photo spots is the number one driver of the experience at Wudadao, they are often unaware of the history of Wudadao as a former concession. In fact, history has taken a back seat to become a context and background for taking photos and consuming Wanghong goods. This has displeased some of the cultural-oriented businesses that use the Wudadao as a cultural backdrop. Sangqiu Bookstore, for example, whose owner has made clear his distaste for the Wanghong economy by refusing to allow photo-taking in the shop and reacting to the excessive Wanghong tourism of the neighbourhood with plans to move out of Wudadao. With the Wanghong economy receiving encouragement from the government-entrepreneur-tourist coalition, the landscape of Wudadao has shown a tendency to become overly touristy, which has led residents to express their dissatisfaction with the influx of too many tourists. Some residents and researchers are also concerned that the cultural and historical values of the Wudadao will be compromised in the process of over-tourism.

*CONCLUSION*

Images are iconic communication symbols in Wanghong urbanism, and heritage sites centred on cultural and historical contexts are integrated into Wanghong narratives. Tourism transforms these heritage spaces/images and promotes them through Wanghong features. Local entrepreneurs facilitate this process and generate economic income through fostering Wanghong tourism. A new aesthetic community has emerged, defined by the practice of producing simulated images online. The construction of images depicting the new tourist city and its significance as a consumption spectacle and is supported by local government policies seeking an urban transformation. Wanghong discourse not only promotes existing heritage sites but also promotes a new round of heritage creation and a new model of urban discovery. In Wudadao in particular, exoticism is at the core of Wanghong promotion. Heterogeneous heritage and elite history legitimize "escapism". In the context of what was once "modern" and "high-end", it provides a footnote and photographic background for today's sophisticated lifestyle and becomes part of global circulation again through the consumption of former concession landscapes. Tourists can also explore local culture, and create urban experiences that are different from traditional tourism practices. Colonial history is used as a consumption symbol, combined with local cultural experiences, constructing a new urban identity.

*Images*



Figure 1 Taking a Wanghong Photo at Wudadao, photographed by Chensi Shen (2022)



Figure 2 Bar on Chongqing Road, taken by Chensi Shen, 2023

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## WALK TO PLATO'S ACADEMY: AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE ON THE HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE OF ATHENS.

**Maria Karagiannopoulou**

Dipylon Society, mkaragiannopoulou91@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

Have you ever wondered which ancient road led to Plato's Academy and what his students would experience during the walk to the Gymnasium? How did the natural landscape embrace their walk? The history of Athens is reflected in its cityscape, and the best way to explore it is by wandering its streets, as Pausanias did, and discovering all the visible and invisible aspects of the city. The web app *Walk to Plato's Academy* is a walking tour designed for kids and adults; an invitation to an alternative route in the city of Athens along the traces of the ancient road that connected the Kerameikos with the Academy. The walk is accompanied by watercolors in an Augmented Reality environment, and a philosophical narrative. In addition, the app provides the possibility of a digital tour through a two-dimensional web map, offering the online user a unique immersive walk. The objective of the project is to raise cultural awareness by involving the Athenians and modern travelers in the archaeological heritage of Athens in its everyday urban context. With digital technologies and storytelling adjusted to diverse audiences, we aim to revive antiquities that have been absorbed into the modern canvas of the city, to highlight the transformations of the Athenian natural landscape and to involve less known neighbourhoods in the city's cultural map.

**Keywords:** digital humanities, urban archaeology, cultural awareness, sustainable tourism, augmented reality, walking experience

### INTRODUCTION

#### *The Athenian metropolis and its cultural topography*

Athens is a historic city and a European metropolis characterized by its urban sprawl, with a densely populated city centre surrounded by suburban and peri-urban areas. The metropolitan area has distinct historic neighbourhoods and modern districts, each with unique characteristics. The essence of Athens is multifaceted; it is steeped in historical significance, revered as a paramount city of antiquity, and adorned with a cultural tapestry that spans millennia. However, beyond its ancient renown, Athens pulsates with modern energy, exuding a vivacious charm that captivates visitors and residents alike.

Among all the diverse blends that define the contemporary character of Athens is its archaeological wealth, a testament to its layered past. Countless excavations have unearthed ancient remnants from various chronological periods, resembling pieces of a multi-layered puzzle. While Athenian antiquities are widely acknowledged, understanding how these intersect with the modern urban fabric poses intriguing questions. How do the famous ancient monuments come to the fore? How does the ancient urban fabric functionally coexist with the visible remains in the archaeological sites?

To fully conceive the history of Athens, we need to look at all the multiple layers of the city that lie beneath modern establishments and have been revealed gradually by the so-called rescue excavations (Fig. 1). These excavations have meticulously revealed fragments of antiquity

scattered throughout the city, often preserved hidden in basements, squares, and even shops. These remnants compose a unique urban topography, inviting exploration and offering a glimpse into the everyday life of ancient societies.



Figure 1. A snapshot from the rescue excavation on Amalias Avenue during the Syntagma Metro station construction, 1992-1994. Source: Zachariadou, O., "Syntagma Station" in: *The city beneath the city: Antiquities from the Metropolitan Railway excavations*, Parlama, L. and Stampolidis, N. C. (eds.), Athens 2000, pp. 148-161. © Ministry of Culture, Museum of Cycladic Art, Kapon Editions.

This article introduces the *Walk to Plato's Academy* project, a web application designed to offer a historical, archaeological, and philosophical walk; an immersive journey through time on the traces of an ancient route, along which the 21st-century traveler will uncover the layers of both ancient and modern city life. By tracing the footsteps of ancient Athenians and travelers, such as Pausanias, the modern wanderer will be immersed in a rich tapestry of history and culture, exploring hidden antiquities, all woven into the fabric of this route.

By experiencing Athens through these fragmented antiquities, visitors and locals can contextualize the past, reconstruct ancient realities, and forge a deeper connection with the city's historical identity. This immersive journey allows individuals to embrace Athens' dynamic ambiance and cultivate a profound sense of place.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *The city as an open museum*

Archaeological sites are integral landmarks within the modern topography, yet conceiving the entire city as an open museum is essential (Fig. 2). While iconic sites like the Acropolis and Agora are widely recognized by residents and visitors alike, what about the rest of the ancient city? How does the archaeological landscape shape our comprehension and experience of the contemporary city?



Figure 2. This photograph is a collage that captures and at the same time connects three diverse moments of the biography of the Themistoklean city-wall at Pesmazoglou and 14 Aristidou Streets. Starting from the left, one sees the city-wall as it is preserved today in the basement of the building. At the centre, is the curtain wall (back) and the proteichisma (front), and in between is the ring road as revealed during excavations in 1966. Finally, on the right, one can see the city-wall section recovered during the W. Dörpfeld excavation in 1892. © Markos Katsianis& Dipylon Society.

Cities are complex socio-cultural spaces profoundly shaped and defined by their historical and cultural legacy. Urban centres, particularly historic cities such as Athens, are destinations that act as repositories of culture and history. The concept of the city as an open museum aligns with various theories and perspectives within tourism studies, particularly those that emphasize the importance of cultural exploration, heritage tourism, and the significance of authentic urban experiences.

Heritage tourism (Timothy and Boyd, 2003) and place attachment theories (Scannell and Gifford, 2010) intertwine with urban tourism (Gravari-Barbaset. al. 2019), inviting visitors to delve into historic and modern districts, archaeological features, and cultural hubs. Considering Athens as an "open museum" invites us to experience the city by exploring the concept of *the city beneath the city*; following the ancient remains far from the fenced archaeological sites, one can truly immerse in the rich mosaic of Athens' cultural heritage, and engage with the local communities.

In practice, the concept of the city as an open museum emphasizes the value of preserving, promoting, and interpreting cultural assets and heritage sites within urban environments; cities act as living repositories of culture and history that contribute to the quality of life for residents and the enrichment and authenticity of the experience for travelers. To uphold this "living" heritage, active involvement of the community is paramount. Encouraging people to embrace the city as an open museum entails raising awareness about its cultural richness and historical significance and fostering opportunities for exploration, interpretation, and meaningful engagement.

## METHODOLOGY

How can archaeology reinforce the sense of belonging and participation in cultural heritage tourism processes? Raising cultural awareness through public archaeology can significantly enhance locals' feelings of connection and involvement in cultural tourism and deeply integrate travelers into the authenticity and richness of the urban ecosystem. A key approach to increasing cultural awareness involves creating digital tools, such as web applications, which provide interactive and immersive walking tours offering a range of experiences, from on-the-ground walking tours to remote journeys, complete with historical reconstructions, audiovisual materials, and interactive maps. This way, users may conveniently discover the city's heritage from their devices. The walking tour *Walk to Plato's Academy* web app is such a case.

The *Walk to Plato's Academy* project is created by the Dipylon Society, a team of archaeologists, topographers, cartographers and informatics engineers specializing in the study of ancient topography and cultural environment. The methodology of the project is structured in the

following three major steps: 1) the detailed archaeological mapping of the study area, 2) the content production, and 3) the development of the digital web application.

### 1) Detailed archaeological mapping

A prerequisite for implementing the digital application was the collection of the archaeological data of the excavations on a geospatial database and the georeferencing of the remains to a modern topographic background of the Hellenic Cadastre. This work is an essential aspect of the project and highlights the scientific background on which the application is based. As a first step, a mapping of all published excavations that have been carried out on either side of the ancient road that connected DipylonGate at the Kerameikos to the Academy was carried out to determine the data of the study area, which would be transformed into the content of the application. The indexing process involves the input and systematisation of the excavation data for the built environment into a database. Detailed information on the results of these excavations was obtained from the published reports of the *ArchaeologikonDeltion*, the annual journal of the Greek Archaeological Service and, in addition, from various other scientific journals, as well as from the proceedings of archaeological conferences. For the spatial location of the excavation sites, cartographic backgrounds were examined to obtain a more accurate mapping of the area during the last decades. These backgrounds were georeferenced and integrated into the Hellenic Geodetic Reference System EGSA '87 (Fig. 3).

Once all the excavation data had been collected, classified and georeferenced, an extensive study of the material followed, which informed the setting up of the scenario in the first place and then the overall content of the application.



Figure 3. Left: The published excavation sites georeferenced on a modern topographic background of the Hellenic Cadastre. Right: A preliminary stage of the georeference process on the 19<sup>th</sup> c. historical map "Athen mit Umgebung 1881 (Maps of Attica, Sheet I "Athens and surroundings") © Dipylon Society.

### 2) Content production

Following the preliminary stage of putting all archaeological data on a unified map, the work on shaping the content of the digital web application was pursued. The first step was the study of the archaeological data; this resulted in the selection of Points of Interest (POIs), which included historical and archaeological information. An exploratory field survey was then carried out to identify the visible remains of the route and accessibility to the proposed POIs. For each of the POIs, extensive research in archives, bibliography and iconographic material followed to structure the scenario of the touring experience.



The narratives accompanying the POIs are addressed to adults, children and philosophy enthusiasts; the creation of three different approaches aims to include more social and demographic groups, transforming the content into a maximum inclusive experience. As for the composition of the narratives, it intends to stimulate reflection both on the ancient remains themselves - whether visible or invisible - and on the path itself, in the footsteps of Plato. At the same time, the objective of the content is to give today's traveler a sense of journey through the thread of historical and philosophical narrative and to highlight the natural landscape and water flow that once echoed in the area.

For the best rendering of the 19th-century Athenian landscape and optimal user experience, we incorporated watercolours that framed the POIs as a visual narrative. Each pictorial representation was digitized, integrated into the location coordinates and transferred to a two-dimensional Augmented Reality environment. For the design of the drawings, iconographic research was conducted beforehand to document the artwork's individual anthropogenic and physical elements. The visual narratives aim to provide the user with an enriched understanding of the area's transformations and to highlight Attica's lost natural landscape through the visualization of this information.

### 3) *Design and development of the digital web application*

The design and development of the web application concern the creation of an open-access web app available on computers, tablets and mobile phones. Specifically, the application involves developing a geotagging web app, using panoramas at the POIs. At each point, a 360° panorama with an integrated 2D sketch is displayed, while additional information is provided through narratives, audio files, and rich visual material. This implementation offers direct access to the route regardless of the location one stands. Thus, the tour addresses both the user walking along the route and the web user, offering the possibility of a remote experience. Both users can navigate via a digital map and receive information on the different POIs (Fig. 4).



*Figure 4. Selection of visual narratives of the Walk to Plato's Academy web app. On the left, a watercolor in an Augmented Reality environment is displayed, in the middle, the interactive map with the POIs indicating the location of the user, and on the right, the narrated audio accompanied with archival material. © Dipylon Society*

The two-dimensional rendering of two cartographic backgrounds was chosen for creating the digital map: the modern topographic background and a historical map entitled *Athen mit Umgebung 1881* (*Maps of Attica, Sheet I "Athens and surroundings"*), drawn by the German topographer J.A. Kaupert. This map depicts with admirable completeness and great accuracy the Attic land and antiquities visible at the end of the 19th century (Fig. 5). Both cartographic backgrounds have incorporated audio navigation instructions for accessing each POI. The travelers who follow the on-the-road tour can use their device to monitor their course and receive information. One can open 360° panoramas with Augmented Reality technology with their device at specific locations, including 2D sketches adapted to the actual environment.



Figure 5. The Points of Interest (POIs) are displayed on diverse basemaps; on the left, they are georeferenced to the modern topographic background and on the right to the 19th c. historical map of the area, entitled *Athen mit Umgebung 1881* (*Maps of Attica, Sheet I "Athens and surroundings"*). © Dipylon Society.

The use of panoramas at POIs combined with the insertion of drawings in an Augmented Reality environment captures the transformations of the area through an interactive experience. Furthermore, it is a way of implementation that offers the possibility of enrichment in the future with new data, such as photogrammetric rendering of excavated finds and three-dimensional visualization of architectural remains, if appropriate.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The Walk to Plato's Academy project*

The Walk to Plato's Academy project (Fig. 6) is a bilingual audiovisual web app (audio tour) available for free, offering a philosophical, archaeological and educational walk in the modern area of Plato's Academy. The route is designed for children and grownups and lasts about 2 hours, with all necessary stops. Following an alternative route in the city of Athens, the 21st-century traveler walks along the traces of the ancient road that connected the ancient Kerameikos with the Academy. Having as a starting point the main entrance to the ancient city, the Dipylon Gate, the modern travelers end up in the area of the ancient Gymnasium and the Philosophical School of Plato, where they are guided around the visible antiquities within the renowned grove of the Academy.

In more detail, the web application provides an interactive map with 15 POIs, accurate coordinates that allow the user to spot the ancient remains, audio narratives for kids and adults, a timeline, historical information, and rich visual material. During the walk, the visitors can alternate the cartographic background of the route between today's basemap and the 19th-century map of the area image (*Maps of Attica, Sheet I "Athens and surroundings"*, J. A. Kaupert); this allows them to navigate between the past and the present and get to know about the landscape before urban expansion. They can discover the natural environment, the abundant watercourses that once ran through the area, the crops, vineyards and the olive grove that stretched all along the route and trace the change over time. Additionally, the walk is enhanced with watercolors in an Augmented Reality environment and a philosophical narrative and provides the possibility of a digital tour via a two-dimensional web map, offering the online user a unique immersive walk.

The Walk to Plato's Academy project intends to bridge the contradiction between "ruins" and "the present" and focus on the sustainability and conservation of cultural and historical assets of the city. By leveraging the new opportunities presented by digital technologies for non-intrusive preservation and enhancement of archaeological and architectural heritage, this application aims to preserve and integrate the invisible and intangible components of the city into the contemporary urban landscape and local community.

In the broader context of heritage tourism, the Walk to Plato's Academy web app reintroduces the historical landscape of Athens to both its citizens and visitors and involves less-known modern neighbourhoods of the city, specifically the Metaxourgeio and Plato's Academy(Kolonos) districts, in the city's cultural map. The antiquities acquire their original unity on a cartographic background, and the users can explore their relationship to contemporary landmarks. In this context, the application invites the user to unravel the thread of the historical narrative by following an alternative route of the city and to capture the transformations of the area through a dialectical relationship between past and present, thereby creating an immersive walk for locals and travelers.

A significant aspect of the project is its emphasis on social inclusion and accessibility. The web tour feature offers an immersive experience for individuals with movement limitations and other disabilities. Moreover, the storytelling tailored for adults and children ensures the active participation of families, which are often marginalized in cultural heritage tourism (Poria et al. 2003). Hopefully, the historical tour provided by the app will trigger the curiosity of both Athenians and modern travelers, will facilitate their understanding of history, encourage a reconsideration of space, and promote active observation within a city that is an open museum.



Figure 6. A snapshot of the *Walk to Plato's Academy* project. © Dipylon Society

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## **HAPPINESS AND TOURISM/T FOR SUSTAINABLE DESTINATIONS: A BIBLIOMETRIC EXPLORATION**

**Aigli KOLIOTASI**

PhD student, Ionian University, 4 VrailaArmeni str, "Kalipso" Building, 49100 Corfu island,  
Greece, telephone: +30 2661087953, e-mail: [aspkoliotasi@ionio.gr](mailto:aspkoliotasi@ionio.gr)

**Sofia KARAMPELA**

Assistant Professor, Ionian University, 4 VrailaArmeni str, "Kalipso" Building, 49100 Corfu island,  
Greece, telephone: +30 2661087953, e-mail: [skarampela@ionio.gr](mailto:skarampela@ionio.gr)

**Konstantinos KOSTALIS**

MSc, Ionian University, 4 VrailaArmeni str, "Kalipso"  
Building, 49100 Corfu island, Greece, telephone: +30  
2661087953, e-mail: [k.kostalis@gmail.com](mailto:k.kostalis@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

Happiness, a concept with diverse interpretations, is often linked to subjective well-being (SWB) in psychology and experienced utility in economics. This study examines the impact of vacations on happiness, highlighting both direct effects during trips (anticipation, experiences, afterglow) and indirect effects through memories. Key factors include photos, souvenirs, emotional storage, and social connections, which enhance family bonds and overall life satisfaction. The research explores how positive interactions at travel destinations boost happiness, although levels vary across travel phases and diminish post-vacation. A systematic review of scientific articles using the terms “happiness” and “tourism” or “tourist” was conducted in the Scopus database, yielding 374 documents. Keywords, author affiliations, and case study countries were analyzed, revealing a focus on tourist behavior and quality of life, with a notable absence of sustainability themes. The findings underscore the geographic diversity of research on happiness and tourism, with significant contributions from China, the USA, and Europe. By unraveling the intricate link between happiness and tourism, this research provides valuable insights for both the tourism industry and academia. Overall, the keyword analysis and thematic categorization of scientific papers reveal significant trends and gaps in the current research on happiness and tourism.

**Keywords:** bibliometric analysis, happiness, sustainable tourism, supply, demand

### **INTRODUCTION**

Happiness, a concept with diverse meanings across history, is now often equated with subjective enjoyment or “subjective well-being” (SWB) in contemporary psychology and “experienced utility” in economics (Nawijn and Mitas, 2012; Kahneman, 2003). Despite its varied interpretations, the notion of happiness is universally cherished and sought after, influencing numerous aspects of human life. In recent years, the exploration of happiness within the context of tourism has garnered significant attention. This study aims to systematically investigate the

intricate relationship between happiness and tourism, with a focus on understanding how travel experiences contribute to overall well-being.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The conceptualization of happiness encompasses several overlapping constructs, including subjective well-being (SWB), quality of life (QOL), and life satisfaction. Filep and Deery (2010) emphasize that these terms, while interconnected, can be interpreted in many ways, reflecting the complex and multifaceted nature of happiness. In the realm of tourism, happiness is not merely a fleeting emotion but a profound experience influenced by various phases of travel, from anticipation and actual experiences to post-trip reflections.

Vacations are widely recognized as a source of happiness, offering direct benefits during the trip through the anticipation, enjoyment of experiences, and the afterglow of memories. These experiences are further enriched by tangible and intangible elements such as photos, souvenirs, emotional memories, and social connections. The role of holidays in strengthening family bonds and enhancing satisfaction in love, family, and social life is well-documented, highlighting the broader implications of travel on overall life satisfaction (Nawijn, 2010; Sirgy et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2018).

The destination experiences themselves play a crucial role in enhancing overall happiness. Positive interactions with service providers and memorable experiences at travel destinations contribute significantly to this enhanced well-being. However, it is important to note that happiness derived from travel can fluctuate across different phases of the vacation. Research indicates that post-trip happiness levels often decrease, suggesting that the positive impact of vacations tends to diminish once the holiday ends (Buonincontri et al., 2017; Filep and Deery, 2010). Furthermore, the pre-trip phase, particularly the workload and stress associated with preparing for a vacation, can negatively affect health and post-vacation well-being, especially for women (De Bloom, Geurts and Kompier, 2013). Despite these challenges, travel experiences are tied to fulfilling leisure activities, which play a pivotal role in promoting happiness and influencing customer return rates in the tourism industry (Glatzer, 2000; Khan and Hussain, 2013).

While some studies suggest that the impact of vacations on happiness is brief (Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff, 2002), others propose that prolonged and meaningful travel experiences can lead to lasting satisfaction (Puczkó and Smith, 2012). This study seeks to delve deeper into these dynamics, employing a systematic approach to examine the connection between happiness and tourism. Through this research, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how travel experiences contribute to sustained happiness and overall well-being.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To investigate the relationship between happiness and tourism, a comprehensive search of scientific literature was undertaken. Articles containing the terms “happiness” and either “tourism” or “tourist” in their titles, abstracts, and keywords within the Scopus database were targeted. This extensive search, executed in July 2023, yielded a total of 374 documents.

From this initial collection, the most frequently referenced keywords were identified, drawing on the concepts introduced by Karampela et al. (2017) and further refined by the present authors (see Table 1). In addition to keyword analysis, the countries of origin of the contributing authors were determined so to understand the geographical distribution of research on this topic (see Table 2).

In the next phase of the study, the abstracts of these 374 documents were carefully reviewed. This review process aimed to pinpoint those papers that specifically addressed the intersection of “happiness” and “tourism or tourist”. Through this focused screening, the selection was narrowed down to 121 papers that directly engaged with the theme.

After the abstract review, a thorough examination of the full texts of these 121 selected papers was conducted. This in-depth analysis facilitated the categorization of the papers into five principal themes: sustainable development and sustainability, demand, supply, residents, and various forms of tourism (see Table 3).

Moreover, the countries used as case studies within these papers were identified to map the geographical contexts of the research findings (see Table 4). This systematic approach yielded a structured overview of the existing literature and highlighted key areas of focus and geographical trends in the study of happiness and tourism.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Keyword Analysis of Scientific Papers*

The analysis of keywords from the scientific papers, summarized in Table 1, reveals significant insights into the focus areas of contemporary research in happiness and tourism. A substantial proportion of these papers include the term “happiness”, indicating a strong interest in this concept. Additionally, many papers concentrate on “tourism” and the “tourism market”, suggesting a prevalent interest in the economic and experiential aspects of tourism. Geographic information, including specific countries, regions, and characteristics of case study areas, is frequently mentioned, highlighting the importance of contextual and locational factors in tourism research.

Keywords related to tourist and consumer behavior appear often, reflecting the emphasis on understanding how tourists make decisions and how these decisions impact their well-being. Moreover, terms such as “wellbeing”, “subjective wellbeing”, and “quality of life” are commonly used by researchers in the tourism field, indicating a multidisciplinary approach that integrates psychological and sociological perspectives on happiness.

Interestingly, there is a notable absence of terms like “sustainability” and “sustainable tourism development” in the keyword analysis. This suggests that, despite the growing global emphasis on sustainable practices, the integration of sustainability concepts into happiness and tourism research remains limited.

**Table 1.**Keywords from Happiness and tourism or tourist articles in the Scopus database (July 2023)

<b>Keywords in categories</b>	<b>Number of results (N)</b>
Happiness/tourist happiness/subjective happiness/pursuit of happiness/happiness index/gross national happiness	125
Tourism/ tourism market	121
Countries/regions/geographic position-Characteristics	95
Tourist Behavior/travel behavior/social behavior/consumption behavior/behavioral intentions	81
Well-being/subjective Well-being/Wellbeing	64
Tourist Destination	52
Life satisfaction/satisfaction/tourist satisfaction/personal satisfaction	45
Human	35
Tourism development	34
Psychology/positive psychology	33
Quality of Life	33
Sustainabledevelopment/sustainability/sustainable	29

Keywords in categories	Number of results (N)
tourism	
Gender	26
Perception	26
Questionnaire survey	18

*Source: www.scopus.com, processed by the authors*

### *Geographic Distribution and Themes of Research*

Most of the research papers on happiness and tourism are predictably published in tourism journals. Table 2 provides an overview of the authors' country affiliations, with China leading with sixty-two authors. This is followed by significant contributions from researchers in the USA, UK, Australia, Taiwan, South Korea, and Italy. Other countries like Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands also make notable contributions, indicating a broad international interest in this research area.

**Table 2.** Happiness and tourism or tourist papers by country of authors' affiliation

Country of authors' affiliation	Number of results (N)
China	62
United States	54
United Kingdom	35
Australia	30
Taiwan	26
South Korea	21
Italy	20
Spain	19
Portugal	19
Netherlands	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>305</b>

*Source: www.scopus.com, processed by the authors*

The selected articles were categorized into five main themes, as presented in Table 3. Out of 121 articles, only nineteen (19) focused on sustainability, underscoring the earlier observation about the limited focus on sustainable tourism development. Thirty-two (32) papers examined the happiness of local communities in tourism destinations, shedding light on how tourism impacts the well-being of residents. Twenty-five (25) articles explored different forms of tourism, indicating a diverse range of interests within the field. As expected, many articles also studied the dynamics of supply and demand in the tourism industry.

**Table 3.** Themes of the 121 selected articles

Themes	Number of papers
Sustainable tourism development/sustainability	19
Supply	52
Demand	73
Residents	32
Forms of tourism	25

*Source: www.scopus.com, processed by the authors*

### *Methodologies and Geographic Focus*

In the final phase of the review, methodologies employed in the articles were examined, and the countries selected as case studies were identified. This analysis facilitated the pinpointing of geographic areas where research on happiness and tourism is actively taking place. Table 4 highlights countries chosen as case studies more than once, indicating regions with a concentrated focus of research efforts. This geographic analysis is crucial for understanding the global distribution of research activities and identifying potential gaps or areas for further study.

**Table 4.** Case study countries

Case study countries	Number of results
China	18
Italy	7
South Korea	7
Spain	5
USA	4
Turkey	3
Portugal	3
Netherlands	3
Switzerland	2
Taiwan	2
Bhutan	2
Thailand	2
India	2

*Source: www.scopus.com, processed by the authors*

This study delves into the intricate relationship between happiness and tourism. While happiness is a multifaceted concept with varying interpretations, the findings highlight the positive influence vacations have on happiness. This influence is felt both directly during the trip and indirectly through cherished memories and strengthened social connections.

Tourism's contribution to happiness is further amplified when travel experiences align with personal leisure goals and destinations prioritize the well-being of local communities. Ultimately, the overall experience at a destination plays a crucial role in shaping individual satisfaction.

The clear association between happiness and travel stems from the positive emotions, novel experiences, and sense of freedom individuals associate with their journeys. Traveling allows for exploration, fosters mindfulness, and strengthens connections, all of which contribute to the overall well-being and happiness of travelers.

By unraveling the intricate link between happiness and tourism, this research provides valuable insights for both the tourism industry and academia. Further exploration in diverse geographical contexts and broader research themes, such as cultural impact and sustainable practices, can significantly contribute to a comprehensive understanding of this vital connection.

Overall, the keyword analysis and thematic categorization of scientific papers reveal significant trends and gaps in the current research on happiness and tourism. By understanding these patterns, we can better appreciate the diverse approaches to studying the intersection of happiness and tourism and identify areas where future research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of this field.

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## **SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT AND THE CONTEMPORARY ROLE OF TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS**

**Polymnia PANAGIOTOPOULOU**

PhD candidate in Sustainable Destination Management,  
Department of Economics and Sustainable Development Harokopio University of Athens,  
[ppanagiotopoulou@hua.gr](mailto:ppanagiotopoulou@hua.gr)

**Sofoklis SKOULTSOS**

Assistant Professor in Sustainable Tourism and Culture,  
Department of Economics and Sustainable Development Harokopio University of Athens,  
[skoultso@hua.gr](mailto:skoultso@hua.gr)

### **ABSTRACT**

This study, through a systematic literature review, illustrates the contemporary status of the stakeholders' role in the recent literature and their adaptation to the new conditions of the modern era. The review of the stakeholders' course is done through the description of the main aspects of their engagement and the main problems and challenges that they experienced in order to achieve successful management procedures of a sustainable destination. Each destination has different features, so it needs a different approach in terms of sustainability criteria implementation, ways of stakeholder communication, and knowledge utilization and interpretation. An effective coordination will ensure that all these diverse interests are considered, leading to a more inclusive and comprehensive decision-making process.

**Keywords:** destination management, stakeholder engagement, sustainability management, destination frameworks, stakeholders' role, stakeholders.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the involved stakeholders in all the processes of developing a sustainable destination is an essential element and a key factor of success. Each destination, among other things, is driven through partnerships, shaped by the various stakeholder collaborations, and therefore depends, to a great extent, on their commitment to this goal. (Jamal and Getz, 1999; Mowforth and Munt, 2003; Friedman and Miles, 2006 as mentioned in Waligo, Clarke and Hawkings, 2013)

The passing of time has had an impact on the role of the stakeholders. Their role in destination management has therefore evolved, changed, and adapted to new conditions. This role transformation occurred due to various factors such as changes in the tourism industry, the social values, and the many technological achievements that destinations have at their disposal. It is quite clear that their role has developed to embrace and include a broader range of interests and concerns within the framework of each destination (Bhat, 2012; Roxas, Rivera and Gutierrez, 2020; Vijayanand, 2013; Panse, 2021).

Today, destination management emphasizes on sustainability more than ever before. It focuses on the engagement of the community, responsible tourism, and the use of technology as a tool to manage all the evolving challenges and opportunities. Thus, a collaboration between stakeholders is becoming more necessary to ensure the long-term success of tourism destinations.

This study, therefore, which was conducted in the form of a systematic literature review, has two main goals: i) to track and organize the main issues regarding the stakeholders' role and involvement in the context of sustainable destination management during almost the last 5 years and (ii) to identify the research gaps for future research. Based on these two main goals, the research questions that occurred for this study are the following:

- RQ1: What are the key points in the literature on the stakeholders' contemporary role inside a sustainable destination?
- RQ2: What are the possible research gaps that can be used in the future?

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

For over the last 30 years, stakeholders and the importance of their roles have been examined in the literature. Scholars have highlighted the stakeholders' importance, analyzed their interaction, and identified their role inside various destinations. (e.g., Savage et al. 1991; Mitchell et al 1997; Medeiros de Araujo and Bramwell, 1999; Cummings and Doh, 2000; Hardy and Beeton, 2001; Aas et al., 2005; Vernon et al, 2005; Byrd, 2007)

Throughout the remarkably extensive literature on the subject, all destinations focus on sustainable tourism planning as part of their balanced and long-term evolution and development.

This path seems to be simple but there are significant gaps and difficulties between strategy and actual implementation (Pham, Anderleck and Vogt, 2023). Despite the problems and the difficulties, all destinations make constant efforts towards the implementation of sustainability, as a way to maintain a viable, productive, and profitable environment for future generations. (Roxas, Rivera and Gutierrez, 2020). The implementation procedure is a multifunctional mechanism and can only be achieved through strong partnerships, cultivated cooperations and strong networks between various types of stakeholders. (Marianiet al 2022).

Different authors (e.g. Matias, Nijkamp and Neto, 2007; Romão et al., 2013) have already emphasized the concept of tourism destinations functioning as multi-product areas for multi-segment markets and for that reason, the involvement of stakeholders is a vital key point at the successful development of destinations. So, scholars investigate the relations between the various stakeholders, in order to reach a deeper understanding (Kujala and Sachs, 2019) and give significant explanations for these complex and constantly evolving interactions (Lehtimäki and Kujala, 2017).

### **2.1 The role of stakeholders in sustainable destination management**

Authors seem to agree upon the importance of sustainable destination management and the existence of specific steps followed towards this direction, such as marketing, coordinated planning etc (Pasquinelli and Trufino, 2023). The main question for almost all destinations is “who” will actually be a key player and consequently “who” will manage the destination because the ability to control is a pre-requirement for successful management. (Pike and Page 2014). In addition, according to Morrison (2019), in destinations where important stakeholders are not involved, then there is a high risk of conflict among groups of stakeholders.

Given the interdisciplinary character of tourism, the network of its stakeholders covers a wide range, that involves individuals both within and outside the tourism industry. Certain stakeholders play more prominent and influential roles than others, while some of them keep a low and silent profile inside the development processes of a destination (Sharma and Arora, 2024). The most important groups among tourism stakeholders typically include businesses, tourists, local community residents, government bodies, and destination management or marketing organizations (DMOs) (Liu and Ma, 2017). Each of these groups and each destination have its own unique set of challenges and opportunities and it is precisely this variety of institutions and organizations with different objectives that create a competitive environment, which makes it difficult to achieve the harmonized and well-coordinated cooperation and activity required for the sustainable development of a destination. (Feyers, Stein and Klizentyte, 2019)

### **2.2 The involvement and collaboration of stakeholders in sustainable destination management**

The involvement of stakeholders in a destination may be affected by numerous factors, such as their mindset, information quality, implementation priorities, and leadership ability (Wondirad, Tolkach and King, 2020). Others showed through their research, that social influence, government regulations and familiarity with technology could affect stakeholders' participation in destination management (Anh and Bessiere, 2022). The long-term viability, commercial efficacy, profitability, and sustainability of a destination are achieved by strong networks and mutually beneficial collaborations. (Nguyen, Johnson and Young, 2022)

The effectiveness of these collaborations led some scholars to examine multi-stakeholder approaches through frameworks for specific destinations, such as Cornwall by Waligo, Clarke and Hawkings (2013), Sunshine Coast in Australia by Tham (2019), Pinellas County in Florida-USA by Feyers, Stein and Klizentyte (2019), Sendona in Arizona-USA by Pham, Anderleck and Vogt (2023). Other authors estimate that the efficiency of the stakeholders' cooperation and collaboration contributes to different problem-solving situations, such as the lack of shared

objectives about sustainable development, lack of knowledge and miscommunication issues (Nguyen, Johnson and Young, 2022)

### 3. METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review was used for this study and this methodology was based on the steps that were indicated by Pickering and Bryne (2014): i) Definition of the research questions, ii) Formulation of a specific review protocol, iii) Searching related to subject literature, iv) Apply exclusion and inclusion criteria, v) Analysis of the results.

The early stage of the study includes a broader search for the involvement and collaboration of different stakeholders in a sustainable destination. This primary part of the study aims to locate the main issues regarding the stakeholders' role and involvement in the context of sustainable destination management. The second part of the study includes a time-limited search based on the two main goals, the two research questions, and the specific exclusion and inclusion criteria. A brief overview of the process followed in selecting the articles for evaluation is shown in Figure 1.

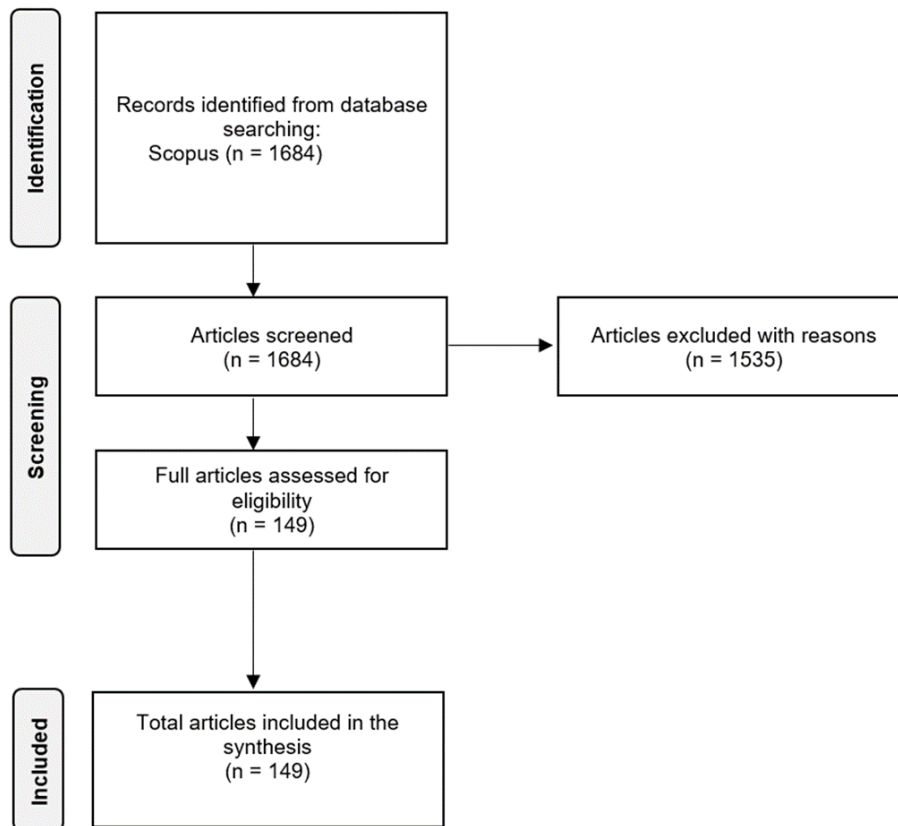


Figure 1: Literature review flowchart

#### 3.1 The research questions

The research questions are based on the role of stakeholders in the literature and the key points of their participation in sustainable destination management procedures. In particular, the first research question aims to underline the key point in the literature of the stakeholders'

contemporary role inside a sustainable destination. The second research question aims to locate any possible research gaps that can be used in the future.

The formation of the review was based on the SPIDER (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research type) tool, as described in table 1, according to Methley et al. (2014), to create questions that are interesting, relevant, feasible and clear (Tawfik et al. 2019).

<b>SPIDER tool</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>SAMPLE</b>	Stakeholders in sustainable destination management: DMO's, hotels, travel agencies, restaurants, visitors, tour operators, government, local community, educational institutions, etc
<b>PHENOMENON OF INTEREST</b>	The contemporary role of stakeholders in destination management between 2019-early 2024 (February)
<b>DESIGN</b>	Published literature of any research design between 2019-2024
<b>EVALUATION</b>	Qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods of primary research
<b>RESEARCH TYPE</b>	Any type

Table 1: The SPIDER tool used to formulate the research questions of the study

### **3.2 The review protocol and the search terms**

The SPIDER protocol was followed because it was evaluated as the most suitable for this type of search. The search terms included a set of predetermined keywords in the SCOPUS database. The research process took place from June 2023 until February 2024 and the keywords that were used for the search of articles and the determination of all relevant studies were:

stakeholders OR stakeholder OR visitors OR tourists OR dmo's OR "destination management organizations" OR residents OR "local community" OR government OR governance OR employees OR hotels OR "travel agencies" OR "tour operators" OR restaurants OR "educational institutions" AND involvement OR collaboration OR engagement OR role AND "destination management" OR "sustainable destination management" AND "focus groups" OR "delphi method" OR survey OR questionnaire OR interviews and the search were conducted within the "All Fields" section.

### **3.3 Application of exclusion and inclusion criteria**

The restrictions that were imposed for this study's purpose in the SCOPUS database, were i) Document Type: only journal articles were included and other types like books, conference papers, etc were excluded, ii) Subject Area: Two main subject areas were included. Social Sciences and Business, Management, and Accounting and the rest areas that were irrelevant to the subject, such as Computer Science, Energy were excluded, iii) Language: only articles in English were selected, iv) Time Range: The search was limited between 2019 and early 2024, as these almost 5 years will show the contemporary aspect of the subject.

### **3.4 Analysis of the results**

In total of 1684 articles were the results of the search retrieved from Scopus database, as shown in Figure 1 above. All of them were downloaded to be screened and sorted. All abstracts were screened to confirm the article's relevance, resulting in 1535 irrelevant to research questions or methodology articles being deleted. The final sample that was examined 149 articles.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

After the processing and analysis of the data from the final sample, the research questions that were initially set, have been answered. The role of the stakeholders within the destination seems to be of considerable concern within the international literature. Each stakeholder individually has a different role, interest, and willingness to participate. Authors discuss the relationships of stakeholders, their involvement in specific actions, and in some cases highlight their role in critical or problematic situations within the destination. Each destination is unique with different characteristics. The development and the way each destination is organized determines the type and level of involvement and the role of each stakeholder in the whole process towards sustainability.

In particular, the results of the study are divided into sections and have been discussed. A synopsis of the results is presented in Table 2.

Research Questions	Results	Number of Articles	Percentage
RQ1: What are the key points of the stakeholders' contemporary role inside a sustainable destination?	Stakeholders' Participation and Involvement in Destination	56	37.6%
	Stakeholders as parts of collaborative approaches and frameworks towards sustainability	45	30.2%
	Awareness and responsibility towards sustainability	17	11.4%
	Increased role of governance in sustainable destination management	17	11.4%
	The role of stakeholders and the reviving tourism (post-pandemic era)	14	9.4%
	TOTAL		149
RQ2: What are the possible research gaps that can be used for future research?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Evidence-based multi-stakeholder frameworks</li> <li>2. Information and knowledge sharing and understanding</li> </ol>		

Table 2: Synopsis of the results

Considering the searched keywords, the data analysis shows that the literature, from 2019 until early 2024, focuses on specific key points of the stakeholders' contemporary role inside a sustainable destination. The key points, that were tracked and analyzed, focus on the following points:

- a. **Stakeholders' Participation and Involvement in Destination.** The 37.6% of the articles search and analyze the ways, the level, or the intention of various stakeholders to participate and get involved with the sustainable development of the destination. Since the stakeholders are the ones who determine the course of the destination, it is clear that their involvement and participation is of particular interest to the academic community. Problems, ways of inclusion and participation, different types of stakeholders, challenges in their relations are points highlighted in the extensive literature. Alonso-Cañadas et al (2023) point out the key role of higher education organizations in promoting Sustainable Development. Others provide an in-depth analysis that highlights the Destination management organizations (DMOs) that increase cooperation and coordination among stakeholders and contribute to the competitiveness of specific destinations, in this case, the destination of Cappadocia by Cobanand Yildiz(2019).
- b. **Stakeholders as parts of collaborative approaches and frameworks towards sustainability.** Multi-stakeholder approaches seem to be a subject of 30.2% of the papers. The collaboration and parallel involvement of different stakeholders give a more integrated and inclusive solution to destination management, taking into account different factors, points of interest, strategies, objectives and philosophies. Most of the articles seem to stay at a theoretical level and only a few of them talk about evidence-based (real-life) frameworks. Some researchers discussed alternative tourism and approaches, that included various important actors inside the destination, such as the multi-stakeholder approach that explores thermal tourism destination competitiveness by Blanco-Cerradelo et al (2022). From another point of view, researchers developed the I.T.S.P. (Immersion, Tutelage, Stewardship, and Proposition), a Sustainable Religious Tourism Development Framework of Selected Philippine Congregation-managed Marian Shrines (Chuajap et al 2024).
- c. **Awareness and responsibility towards sustainability.**The 11.4% of the articles focus on the increased sense of responsibility of stakeholders and the awareness that their role indicates towards the sustainable development of the destination. In the same spirit of empowering the destination in the context of sustainability, raising awareness among stakeholders can change the way the strategy is implemented and eventually, the destination is developed. The way stakeholders perceive sustainability issues and their reactions can have a significant impact on the efficiency and overall performance of the destination. For Fonseca and Carnicelli (2021) the research focuses on how small family businesses implement corporate social responsibility and sustainability practices. Al-Sakkaf et al (2023) based their research on stakeholder and social exchange theories and they support that tourism development is strongly influenced by destination social responsibility (DSR).
- d. **Increased role of governance in sustainable destination management.**It seems that the role of governance gathers the interest of 11,4% of the papers, as they focus on the importance of governance in promoting a sustainable destination, implementing efficient strategies and providing awareness and guidance to actors of a destination. The constant evolving environment of a destination that follows the principles of sustainable management, enhances the need of an active and strong participation of all governance structures. The governance plays a critical role, influencing main policies, important decision-making processes, and the overall direction of the destination. So, all these governance frameworks that bring together different stakeholders, such as government agencies, local communities, businesses, and non-governmental organizations, to collaborate on sustainable destination management, need to be highlighted. Bichler and Lösch (2019) contribute with their paper to a refined assessment of Collaborative Governance in tourism with special attention to the role of leadership and institutional settings. From another point of

view, Bono, Clavé and Fa (2023) with their research aims to determine how governance is internalized in tourism destinations management organizations (DMO).

- e. **The role of stakeholders and the reviving tourism (post-pandemic era).** The 9.4% of the articles focused on building sustainable post-pandemic destinations and search ways to rebuild travelers' trust in the post-pandemic era. The pandemic was a major milestone in the daily life of all stakeholders, both personally and professionally. The literature focuses mainly on their recovery from the pandemic based on sustainable practices. More particularly, some scholars investigate ways to boost post-covid tourism revival by making the residents become consumers of tourist products, to provide a post-pandemic recovery of the society (Cruz-Ruiz, de la Cruz, and Caballero-Galeote, 2022). Other studies provide important insights on the operational and strategic measures for stakeholders and other policymakers for effective management and recovery from the pandemic and the impacts that left behind (Aggarwal, Kaurav, and Gursoy, 2022).

From the analysis and evaluation of the sample, there are some research gaps that were tracked and could be used for future research. An important gap seems to be the lack of evidence-based multi-stakeholder frameworks. As Damijanić, Pičuljan, and Peršurić (2023) indicate, most articles in the literature concentrate on the theory or examine the logic behind the participatory approach. Very few articles focus on the practical aspect of a multi-stakeholder framework. There is a need to examine whether all these theoretical frameworks apply in real-life contexts. Each destination has different features, so it needs a different approach.

Another important point, valuable for further future research is the information exchange and knowledge among stakeholders. The development of a destination, and by extension the relationships and roles of those involved, should be based on appropriate information and knowledge. As Scuttari et al (2023) indicate, it is important to link knowledge production based on specific indicators of sustainability, transferable knowledge and knowledge sharing to bring the required transformation and development within each destination. It is therefore necessary for stakeholders to be able to understand the knowledge and information, but above all to be able to use it in order to upgrade their role within the destination and achieve the goals they have set.

#### **4.1 Limitations of the study**

There are some limitations associated with this study. Firstly, although an important database was used (SCOPUS), there is a need to expand the search to other databases, in order to have a larger sample and findings that can be generalized. Secondly, some important articles may not be included, due to a lack of effective use of keywords. The search engine was unable to retrieve all articles, as some authors used keywords that weren't suitable or associated with the keywords of this research, even though the content of their article may be appropriate for the sample of the study according to the specific inclusion and exclusion criteria that were set. Thirdly, this is an ongoing research field, so at the time being, several papers may not be included.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

As for the management of sustainable destinations and the role of stakeholders in the whole process over the last five years, there do not seem to have been any major changes. The researchers through their work focus on all the long-standing issues that have always been the subject of analysis, such as the participation of stakeholders, their involvement within the operations of the destination, their cooperation and the problems they face depending on their characteristics and the characteristics of the destination. Special attention to the involvement of stakeholders in the development of the destination is given to the concept of governance as a link between development and influence, while the role of destination stakeholders is quite active when



it comes to issues of recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and dealing with its effects. Last but not least, the awareness of stakeholders on sustainability issues seems to be of interest to the researchers as it gives another perspective on the function of their role.

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## NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR GREEK TOURISM

**Konstantinos ELEFThERAKIS**

MSc “Sustainable Tourism Development, Heritage, Environment, Society”, El. Venizelou 70,  
17676, +306955449185, konstantinos-el@outlook.com

**Theano S. TERKENLI**

Department of Geography, University of the Aegean, terkenli@aegean.gr

### ABSTRACT

The main objective of the research is to examine and understand the developing interrelationship of Greek tourism with new technologies, through a stakeholders’ survey, also eliciting opinions on these technologies’ anticipated future impact on the tourism industry, and more specifically on Greek tourism, followed by a SWOT analysis of these opinions. The research methodology is based on a survey, a qualitative ethnographic methodology of the Social Sciences, specifically that of semi-structured in-depth interviews of the survey participants grouped into 3 categories (hoteliers & general hotel managers, tour operators & transport professionals, and academic professors), according to their knowledge of the importance of new technologies in the tourism industry, selected so as to complement each other for purposes of deriving a comprehensive view of Greek tourism’s relation with new technologies. The main takeaway from the answers we received in the survey is that, apart from the uses of well-established technologies like social media, rating websites and platforms (such as those related to Booking.com) that are commonly implemented for marketing and reservation purposes, the advanced Industry 4.0 technology uses implemented in Greece are practically non-existent, i.e. besides the sporadic implementation of VR in luxurious hotels, the rest of these technologies appear only in their prototype business plans. Furthermore, deficiencies in staff education, slow digital transformation, and the poor overall state of necessary infrastructure are slowing down any potential development and innovation for the Greek tourism sector.

**Keywords:** Greek tourism, Industry 4.0, new technologies, crises in tourism

### INTRODUCTION

This research addresses the interface between tourism studies and the field of new technologies, especially those of Industry 4.0. Tourism and technology have always been closely related, as various social economic and environmental drivers have been leading humanity at accelerated rates to technological innovations and changes that subsequently make an impact on tourism. At the aftermath of a series of global or more localized crises, the knowledge economy and the experience economy had a great impact on the emergence of Industry 4.0, with particular relevance to the case of Greek tourism. This research carries both scientific/ academic and practical

value, since it is potentially useful to tourism and technology researchers, tourism experts, entrepreneurs, and all parties (such as public officials) involved in tourism development in Greece and elsewhere, as the trends under study are rapidly expanding globally and therefore it is important to know the perceptions, attitudes, opinions and visions of all parties involved in this regard.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *The birth of technological production & Industry 4.0*

The world is rapidly changing due to the rise of modern capitalist trends in the globalized economy and the new age of technology and information (Terkenli, 2006), as customers have vast access to information; details on items and experiences they like to follow and convey, and have multiple angles to digest it (Samson, Mehta and Chandani, 2014). The creation, reproduction, distribution of ideas or goods and the breaking of the old model of production have thusly escaped spatial constraints leading to new “cultural apprehensions, visions, and constructs of space and landscape” (Terkenli, 2006, p. 3). This cycle facilitated the production of digital goods and services for enterprises and led into a new cycle of tools in order to extend the options for creation and distribution (Industry 4.0).

Industry 4.0 refers the 4th Industrial Revolution that introduced new methods of producing and contributing assets. The term is used to explain the vast changes “in the design, manufacture, operation and service of manufacturing systems and products” (Davies, 2015, p. 2) and it consists of several types of technologies and tools that are used to improve different aspects of the day-to-day activity (such as VR, AR, AI, Iot, Big data and Cloud Manufacturing).

### *Greek tourism: Crises and their aftermath*

Greece faced two of the most significant crises of the EU’s modern history (the financial crisis starting in 2009, & the refugee crisis starting in 2014).

Year	Arrivals (International) Millions	Receipts (Billions)
2009	14,9	10,4
2010	15*	9,6*
2011	16,4*	10,5*
2012	15,52*	10,02*
2013	17,9*	11,7*
2014	22*	13*
2015	23,6*	13,6*

Table 1. The performance of Greek tourism during the financial crisis: (Source:SETE) \*Cruise numbers are excluded from the marked figures.

Although Greece recovered very well by recording an adequate number of arrivals and receipts “the importance of tourism for the Greek economy became widely acknowledged and understood by policymakers in the aftermath of the economic recession”(Papatheodorou and Arvanitis, 2014, p.184). We can verify this statement through the Tourism and Travel Index Report, as the position of Greece fell dramatically during the crisis peak years:

Period	Position (Global)
2009	24
2011	29
2013	32
2015	31
2017	24
2019	25

Table 2. The position of Greece in the T&T Competitiveness Report: (Source: World Economic Forum).

Greece’s overall economy showed improvements after recession years, but a number of events imposed a downward trajectory on the steady rise of the economy’s as several international crises halted tourism’s steady rise in general:

- The pandemic led to a drop of 1 billion in international arrivals that translated into a loss of 1.3 trillion dollars (World Tourism Organization, 2021).
- The Ukrainian crisis of 2022 impacted tourism with an estimated loss around 14 billion dollars, (World Tourism Organization, 2022).
- Finally, climate change is a critical system of problems that keeps getting exacerbated due to the stalemate countries find themselves in, for lack of taking more drastic measures(One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme, n.d., no page).

For Greece:

- The institute of SETE-INSETE showcased in its pandemic report a decrease of 76,5% in arrivals and 76,8% in revenues, although resilience was shown by enterprises with only a 10% drop in employment during that particular period (INSETE, 2021).
- The Ukrainian invasion and the subsequent energy crisis led the domestic economy to a cycle of turbulence, with the inflation rate rising to levels (12,1% in July of 2022) unparalleled in the last 20 years (INSETE, 2022).
- Finally, for Mediterranean countries like Greece, the climate change is top priority, as the current course of action will severely impact the region’s livelihood systems and health/ safety conditions.

Eventually Greece recovered most of the losses in tourism with INSETE (2023) reporting a difference of 11,2% between 2019 and 2022 in arrivals and 3% in receipts. In 2023 things will be significantly better both in arrivals (+21,9%) and receipts (+20,2%) as post pandemic travelers made decisions affecting a big part of their trip based on hygiene/safety criteria relating to the pandemic(INSETE, 2023).

### *Greece and technology*

Tourism and technology have always been closely related, as various social economic and environmental factors led to innovations and changes that subsequently made an impact on tourism. This statement is underlined also by Sigala (2018) as technologies “are also a transformational driver of the industry structure and operations as well as the role and functions of its stakeholders” (p. 151).

Greece is a country exhibiting adequate technological progress compared to its competitors (Turkey, Croatia), but there’s still need for improvement on multiple levels. The Ministry of Digital Governance of Greece released the Digital Transformation Bible 2020-2025 in July of 2019, which presented the necessary guidelines to achieve the completion of project ‘Digital Greece’(Ministry of Digital Governance of Greece, 2021). Greece showed improvements proceeding into the digital age at last, but with lots to be still desired, as in 2022 Greece had a

similar position (25<sup>th</sup>) amongst EU countries to that of 2019 (26<sup>th</sup>) but, unlike according to the previous report, the European Commission Greece acknowledged the fact that Greece had covered a lot of the area in the digital field with notable progress (European Commission, 2022).

## METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is based on a survey, specifically that of semi-structured in-depth interviews of the survey participants grouped into categories according to their knowledge of the importance of new technologies in the tourism industry, specifically selected to complement each other for the purposes of our deriving a holistic view of Greek tourism's relation with new technologies. As for the data analysis, the study followed the procedure of data decodification and organization for purposes of analysis (thematic analysis), interpretation and extraction of conclusions into a number of themes that suited our overall purpose of investigating the interrelations between Greek tourism and the new technologies. It is the answers of the interviewees that we rely on for our primary data necessary for the investigation of our four research goals (as well as for the SWOT analysis), which are as follows:

- Why are the uses of new technologies (more generally and specifically in Greece) essential in the tourism industry?
- What are the positive and the negative impacts of the introduction of these new technologies in the Greek tourism sector so far and in which ways did they impact it if at all?
- What is the future outlook for the Greek tourism sector through this technological revolution?
- Which are the main issues or problems in the future implementation of these new technologies in the Greek tourism sector?

9 out of 12 invited participants responded to our request, 7 out of 9 conducted the interview via phone call and the rest through Zoom and Viber video calls. The interviews were conducted by the researcher himself in the period between 10<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2023 in Greece. An effort was made to select a diverse group of actors, as it was of great importance to us to tap into different perspectives on the tourist product.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the following part, we will present and analyze the survey participants' responses by interview question for every mentioned category in our questionnaire. Afterwards we will devote a section in order to make an assessment of these findings into a SWOT analysis based on the outlook of the implementation of new technologies in Greek tourism:

- According to your opinion, which technologies are essential for tourism and why?

Most of the interviewees, referred to social media and platforms (such as Booking.com and Free Now), as the current leading technologies in the tourism sector, with businesses using social media frequently for marketing purposes alongside platforms that also serve as reservation tools (especially in SMEs). Other collective opinions expressed by a smaller number mentioned the standalone rating sites or those ratings integrated on the platforms where the importance of keeping an adequate score is essential to sustaining a good image—accordingly, customers pay a significant amount of attention to them during their evaluation process.

- Have you noticed any trends or shifts in the global tourism industry that could affect Greece in the future?

Sustainability and climate change were the most mentioned themes as tourists begin to change their type and season of travel, adapting to more alternative ways of tourism, something that Greece could use as a solution to its seasonality problem. Other issues regarded the struggle that tour operators and transport experts are experiencing due to the increasing technological autonomy of tourists to book and reserve their own services. Finally, some interesting answers addressed the capitalization of the phenomenon of digital nomads and the rise of new competitors (Albania for example).

- Do you think the Greek tourism industry is keeping up with the latest technological advancements? Why or why not? What is the technological readiness level in Greece in comparison to other countries?

Opinions were split regarding Greece's technological level. The participants with positive viewpoints stated that Greece is active on search machines and social media, while tourism businesses and hotels of 3 stars and above are trying to keep up to date with the luxury accommodations that are already up to par with their international counterparts. On the other hand, negative answers centered around poor internet connection with installation difficulties, and the technological gap between businesses as most SMEs are struggling to progress due to a) absence of important governance backing b) subpar level of training/education in public tourism training schools that exports half-learned professionals and c) low technical readiness levels from both staff members and management in SMEs.

- In your opinion, how have new technologies (such as AI, IoT, VR, AR etc.) so far impacted Greek tourism?

Almost all participants agreed that new technologies had not been incorporated in their business or in Greek tourism in general (besides a mention on VR that represented the digital showcase for hotels). According to the answers received, most technologies are at early stages of planning for some businesses, and non-existent or irrelevant to other. Moreover, there was reluctance regarding AI by three of the participants as it was deemed 'unknown territory' and "a threat to the working force". At the same time, the use of Big Data was regarded as essential by one participant, who nonetheless asserted that not many tourism professionals utilize it properly.

- Do you think the Greek tourism industry is keeping up with the latest technological advancements? Why or why not? What is the technological readiness level in Greece in comparison to other countries?

Several participants agreed that the energy crisis and the economic recession doubled the cost of business operation and impacted their total revenues, while others attributed the problem to the quality and variety of the tourist product that Greece needs to offer. Additionally, concerns about Greece's competitors like Albania and Turkey were raised by some, as they have taken advantage of Greece's excessive pricing policies and practices and have offered cheaper solutions, while a participant attributed this course of events to the absence of good entrepreneurs that led to many unsuccessful businesses with serious debts. Conversely, one participant differed from the majority's negative point of view on the matter, as he did not see any negative aspects to Greece's price competitiveness and forecasted a gradual improvement that will see Greece succeeding at presenting a variety of experiences with corresponding prices.



- Which steps need (new laws, infrastructure, training, education) to be taken in the field of new technologies for Greece to become more prominent as a destination?

Better training and education in academia, public schools and in businesses (top-down) was almost universally agreed on by all participants for Greece to innovative towards new technologies. Contrary to the majority’s opinion, one participant stated that Greece’s overall tourism staff is well prepared, attributing the problem to the fact that entrepreneurs create an undesirable environment characterized by an uncompetitive payment/reward system. Wider and better promotion to expand seasonality in an effort to alleviate the unilateral focus on the 3S’s. Finally, the need of tax relief policies for SMEs to battle price raises and attract bigger agencies was also addressed by a questioned.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Greek brand is established worldwide with rich touristic &amp; cultural history.</li> <li>• Luxury hotels are up to date regarding technological features.</li> <li>• Loyal tourists who want to return multiple times ignoring factors such as weak infrastructures etc.</li> <li>• Effective use of branding via social media both for tourism enterprises and public organizations (NTOG).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uneven production on the regional level and strong geographical polarization/ inequalities in tourism development.</li> <li>• Overreliance of SMEs on third party platforms for reservations and marketing (Booking.com, Hotels.com, etc.).</li> <li>• Seasonality &amp; 3S’s market domination with no real alternatives.</li> <li>• Infrastructure deficiencies (transportation, fast internet).</li> <li>• Gap between big and small hotels in terms of resources &amp; opportunities.</li> <li>• Public tourism schools are not supporting their graduates with appropriate skills to be fully capable professionals (not enough State funding) and overall absence (number-wise) of professionals in the sector.</li> <li>• Difficulty in securing employment due to poor pay, bad working conditions &amp; seasonality.</li> <li>• Scepticism of the tourism-supply side around New Technologies &amp; AI hindering tourism growth.</li> </ul>

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rapid rise in New Technologies and increasingly integrated programs in multiple aspects of the touristic activity (cultural activities, hotels, transportation, sites).</li> <li>• Rising tourists' and locals' levels of technical readiness (especially among younger ages).</li> <li>• Use of tourism data (via NTOG) in tourist information databases (landmarks, hospitality, gastronomy etc.).</li> <li>• Augmented infrastructure possibilities for accessible and fast Internet, and safer, more regulated transportation.</li> <li>• Readiness of most stakeholders in handling existing technologies well willingness to explore more.</li> <li>• Take advantage of digital nomad market</li> <li>• New Technological applications in cultural goods' virtual representation and visitor interaction (AR and VR apps on cultural sites, etc.).</li> <li>• Diversification strategies for the Greek tourism product through promotion of alternative forms of tourism and recreational activities (VR presentations, awareness-raising campaigns on the seasonality effect with stats by IoT Technologies on social media and websites).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk of being overtaken by more advanced countries with better New Technologies' infrastructures.</li> <li>• Business and properties being bought by foreign funds, leaving local enterprises behind without many resources.</li> <li>• Centralized tourism governance, policies not leaving crucial issues to entrepreneur's individual resourcefulness with no significant State backing.</li> <li>• Risk of producing professionals with low technical capabilities due to ineffective tourism training programs.</li> <li>• Tour Operator dominance/ overrepresentation in tourism sector.</li> <li>• Slow rates of digital transformation in most areas of Greek economy, translating into lost opportunities in innovation, hospitality, and transportation services.</li> </ul>

Table 3. The outlook of the implementation of new technologies in Greek tourism: A SWOT analysis perspective).

Based on the analysis of our research findings, the main overall conclusions about the state and implications of the 4th Technological Revolution for Greek tourism, as derived from the participant's responses and the SWOT analysis, were the following:

- The affirmation of the poor state of technology in Greece, a take that reviews the current level of technology development in Greece's tourism sector.
- The complex context of Greece's tourism sector emerged through the survey as concerns in interviewees' opinions regarding the performance and future outlook of Greece's tourism sector.
- The urgency of infrastructure development for the implementation of new technologies constitutes a crucial point of interest, as it presents a link between the other two emerging themes, where the basic struggles of technology implementation in tourism are played out.

#### *The poor state of technology in Greece*

Although there was differentiation in our interviewee opinions, it became clear that the current level is sub-par and needs improvement in multiple aspects. From their perspective, the SMEs participants underlined the lack of sufficient governance and State backing, as most of the investing opportunities centred on big enterprises or the fact that the specific managerial technologies were not suited for their businesses. Both general managers stated that this issue boils down to low technical readiness and bad business implementation by SMEs owners who do not know how to properly run their day-to-day operations. Additionally, there was the stance of some participants that new technologies could either affect labour relations, replacing the human factor, or completely put their business at risk, especially in the case of tour operators who seemingly receive a direct hit.

#### *The complex context of Greece's tourism sector*

Greece is a strong tourism brand as revealed by our literature review whereby Greece showed resilience after the pandemic (INSETE, 2023): This fact was backed by our interviews. On the negative side, most of the interviewees across all categories depicted the economy of Greece as

heavily influenced by the recent energy crisis and subsequent economic recession (stemming from the Ukrainian invasion). Several of the survey participants noted that tourists are changing behavior in the way they select their trips and experiences, choosing fewer commercial sites and activities and also adjusting their stays. Finally, as already mentioned in our literature review, Greece's technology status is in a better place than that of its competitors like Turkey and Croatia (World Economic Forum, 2022), and taking advantage of these opportunities by progressing the implementation process of new technologies, can a) Create more tourism products and experiences b) Engage with new markets c) Diversify Greece's image around responsibility ethics and environmental consciousness.

#### *Urgency for infrastructure development for the implementation of new technologies*

The majority agreed that the absence of appropriately trained professionals was the most noticeable problem within Greek tourism. Also, the lack of well-structured tourism education in public schools, inadequately prepares graduates and exports low-level professionals. Another crucial issue that emerged from this research study was the slow internet and the problem of optical fiber installation, making things difficult especially for enterprises in faraway places to operate daily.

#### *Conclusion*

The main understanding that emerged from this study was that uses of well-established technologies like social media and reservation platforms (as Booking.com and Free Now) are commonly used by tourism entrepreneurs, intermediaries, and tourists alike, for marketing and reservation purposes. Most participants did not see any uses of new technologies in tourism besides the sporadic use of VR in hotels while no particular positive or negative impacts were reported on the implementation of new technologies in Greek tourism as most stated that they are on prototype business plan with no specific integration strategy. Additionally, our questions regarding new technologies integration in business practices (especially in the case of AI) created moral issues that often lead to technophobia surrounding the sector, as most of the answers elaborated on the negative side of things.

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## **LEVERAGING SOCIAL STREAMS AND KNOWLEDGE MINING FOR TOURISTIC DATA INSIGHTS AT ATTICA REGION**

**Konstantinos MICHALAKIS**

Department of Cultural Technology, University of Aegean, Genimata 2, Mytilene, Greece,  
(+30)6982501914, [kmichalak@aegean.gr](mailto:kmichalak@aegean.gr)

**Georgios ALEXANDRIDIS**

Department of Digital Industry Technologies, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens,  
[gealexandri@aegean.gr](mailto:gealexandri@aegean.gr)

**Vasileios BALLAS**

Department of Cultural Technology, University of Aegean, [cti22007@aegean.gr](mailto:cti22007@aegean.gr)



**George CARIDAKIS**

Department of Cultural Technology, University of Aegean, [gcari@aegean.gr](mailto:gcari@aegean.gr)

**Vasileios KARYOTIS**

Department of Informatics, Ionian University, [karyotis@ionio.gr](mailto:karyotis@ionio.gr)

**Symeon PAPAVASSILIOU**

School of Electrical & Computer Engineering, National Technical University of Athens, [papavass@mail.ntua.gr](mailto:papavass@mail.ntua.gr)

## **ABSTRACT**

The tourism industry has experienced notable growth and heightened competition, with various events highlighting the need for adaptable strategic approaches. Understanding tourists' needs from limited data is crucial for meeting their expectations and boosting customer loyalty. The Internet, especially online social media, plays a crucial role in generating tourism-related data, necessitating innovative research methods like netnography. User-generated content on review platforms offers valuable but fragmented information. To address this, we developed the Review platform through the Street Lines project. This information system collects and analyzes data from open platforms and social media to automatically generate recommendations for strategic actions and policies supporting tourist destinations. The platform integrates efficient data collection, functional representation and storage of multi-modal knowledge, innovative analysis algorithms, and recommendation generation. The resulting knowledge base helps identify visitor habits, preferences, and communication channels for targeted promotion strategies in tourism. It also analyzes emerging product trends, consumer interests, and concerns, enabling personalized product offerings in the tourism sector.

**Keywords:** data mining, touristic social data, sentiment analysis, recommender system

## **INTRODUCTION**

The growth and heightened competition among tourism destinations and products, witnessed in recent years, have been further amplified by the sudden and unforeseen changes brought about by the pandemic. This underscores the necessity for flexible strategic approaches that are continuously updated and possess the capacity to adapt dynamically. In this evolving landscape, understanding the expectations of travelers, their chosen destinations, and the requirements that service providers must meet to attract and retain customers becomes crucial. The accuracy of activity plans and the development of tourist products relies on reliable forecasts and a clear understanding of capabilities and limitations.

Currently, a substantial amount of data pertaining to tourist destinations and attractions, particularly the opinions of potential visitors, is generated on the Internet. This significantly impacts tourism management by introducing the new dimension of netnography, involving the

analysis of internet user behavior for market research purposes. This dimension opens up new opportunities in designing and developing tourism products through access to fresh data and communication channels. However, it also presents challenges in terms of methodology for exploitation and technologies for handling large volumes of data.

The internet, particularly on platforms offering tourist reviews, witnesses a daily influx of user-generated content about tourist destinations and attractions. This content is a decisive element in shaping a potential visitor's perception of a destination and, consequently, plays a crucial role in managing the tourist product. However, this information is scattered and relatively challenging to synthesize and analyze for generating new knowledge and conclusions that guide product strategy and interventions.

Addressing this need, the Street Lines project aims to develop an information system capable of collecting data from open platforms with tourism content and electronic social media. It analyzes the collected data and automatically generates recommendations for strategically designing interventions to better and more evenly support tourist destinations and services. The project incorporates efficient methodologies, including (a) data collection from websites and social media, (b) functional representation and storage of synthesized knowledge, (c) application of innovative knowledge analysis algorithms, and (d) the development of methods and algorithms for extracting recommendations in the planning and monitoring of actions to promote and strengthen a tourist product.

More specifically, two of the main services that store reviews of visitors and tourists in various locations around the world (including Attica) are TripAdvisor and Google Maps. Both social streams were utilized by a dedicated crawler which collects and stores appropriate touristic data including user comments and grades. The collected data, which covered hundreds of Points of Interest (POI) and included thousands of user comments were analysed using key-work extraction, semantic enrichment and disambiguation in order to achieve higher data representation. The enriched dataset was fed into a sentiment analysis component and a recommendation system, which can be utilized by POI manager and consumer respectively.

The resulting knowledge base can be utilized in various ways, such as identifying the current habits of the target user group, their preferred content and communication channels, and determining the most effective promotion strategy (advertising and promotions) for a tourist service or product. Additionally, it can be leveraged to analyze current and emerging product trends (across tourism, accommodation, diet, etc.), consumer interests and passions, and concerns, allowing for the definition and personalization of offered products accordingly.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows; In section 2, relevant literature is presented and distinguished from our work in various related fields such as data collection, sentiment analysis, and recommender systems applied to touristic data and platforms. Section 3 presents the methodology of the proposed platform, with each component analyzed in terms of technology and innovation. In section 4, results of the implementation are provided accompanied by a discussion on the evaluation of each component.

## **RELATED WORK**

### *Data Collection*

Data gathering and web scraping are essential for acquiring insights in travel, tourism, and culture. Web scraping automates data extraction from websites, enabling researchers to analyze vast amounts of information. For example, researchers have used web scraping to collect data on hotel prices, reviews, and availability, providing insights into the hospitality industry's dynamics [Tussyadiah et. al., 2018]. This method facilitates real-time data collection and trend tracking in the travel sector.

In cultural research, web scraping gathers data on cultural events, heritage sites, and visitor experiences. By extracting information from various cultural websites and online platforms,

researchers can study visitor preferences, engagement patterns, and the impact of cultural events on tourism. For instance, web scraping has been used to analyze online reviews and social media content related to cultural attractions, revealing visitor perceptions and sentiments [Xiang et al., 2015]. This approach helps understand how cultural institutions can enhance visitor experiences and engagement.

The combination of data collection and web scraping in travel, tourism, and culture research has opened new research avenues. Using big data obtained through web scraping, researchers can gain insights into consumer behavior, travel patterns, and cultural trends. This data-driven approach improves understanding of tourist behaviors and preferences, guiding decision-making for stakeholders in the travel and cultural sectors [Gretzel et al., 2008]. Ultimately, the synergy of these techniques provides researchers with powerful tools to explore the interplay between travel, tourism, and culture in the digital era.

### *Sentiment Analysis*

Currently, advanced deep learning models dominate sentiment analysis, particularly recurrent neural networks (RNNs) [Li et al., 2014] and convolutional neural networks (CNNs) [Kim, 2014]. These models outperform traditional machine learning approaches like support vector machines (SVMs) in sentiment analysis benchmarks. A significant breakthrough is the use of pre-trained language models (PLMs) such as BERT [Devlin et al., 2019], RoBERTa [Liu et al., 2019], and DistilBERT [Sanh et al., 2020]. Trained on extensive textual data, these models can be fine-tuned for specific domains, achieving state-of-the-art results in various Natural Language Processing (NLP) tasks, including sentiment analysis.

BERT, a deep neural network using the Transformer architecture, encodes text from both contextual directions, capturing intricate word and sentence meanings. Developed by Google in 2018, BERT has transformed NLP, excelling in tasks like sentiment analysis. Its ability to leverage vast unlabeled text data for general language representation reduces the need for task-specific data, enhancing performance across diverse domains and languages. BERT captures the overall context and sentiment of text, essential for understanding opinion polarity and intensity. Studies show BERT's superiority in cross-domain and cross-lingual sentiment analysis, such as Amazon reviews and Twitter data [Sun et al., 2019]. BERT effectively handles linguistic nuances like negation, sarcasm, and irony. For example, Yang et al. (2020) enhanced BERT's sentiment representation by incorporating a sentiment lexicon, demonstrating its adaptability and robustness in capturing diverse sentiment expressions.

### *Recommender Systems*

Recommender systems are crucial in the travel and tourism sector, providing personalized suggestions for Points of Interest (POIs) based on user preferences and historical data. These systems enhance user experiences by offering tailored recommendations that align with individual interests and past behaviors [Ricci et al., 2015]. By integrating user feedback and location-specific data, they increase user satisfaction and engagement with cultural attractions.

Recommender systems also foster cultural exchange and heritage preservation in tourism. They help travelers discover cultural sites and activities, encouraging immersion in local customs and traditions [Cantador et al., 2011]. Leveraging user-generated content and social media data, these systems highlight lesser-known cultural POIs, offering tourists unique experiences while supporting local heritage conservation.

Additionally, POI recommender systems provide valuable insights for travel businesses. They help cultivate customer engagement and loyalty by recommending relevant services and attractions [Liu et al., 2011]. Analyzing user behavior and preferences allows businesses to tailor their offerings, enhancing customer satisfaction and retention. Thus, recommender systems have the potential to transform customer interactions in the travel industry, fostering a more personalized and rewarding experience.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Data Collection*

Two primary platforms that compile reviews from visitors and tourists across global destinations, including Attica, are TripAdvisor [tripadvisor] and Google Maps [googlemaps]. Initially founded as a travel website in 2000, TripAdvisor has transformed into the largest travel-oriented social network. It operates in 40 countries, supports 20 languages, and hosts approximately 1 billion reviews covering around 8 million locations worldwide. Besides its website, TripAdvisor offers mobile applications for both Android and iOS, allowing users to register via Google accounts or email addresses. Registered users contribute personalized reviews, utilizing star ratings and textual feedback, on various tourist attractions and cultural sites. Interactions among users include liking reviews, following other users, and direct messaging. Additionally, certified Point of Interest (POI) owners, such as hotels and restaurants, can respond to user reviews. However, a notable drawback is the lack of verification for reviews, meaning it's uncertain whether reviewers have actually visited the places they critique.

Google Maps, introduced by Google Inc. in 2004, serves as a mapping and navigation tool with an integrated Places Service, displaying diverse POIs on maps, including cultural and tourist spots. Google Maps is widely used across desktop and mobile platforms by over 1 billion people globally. Similar to TripAdvisor, registered users on Google Maps provide personalized reviews with star ratings and written feedback. Business owners can respond to reviews, and users can engage through basic interactions like liking and following other users, forming a rudimentary social network. However, akin to TripAdvisor, the main drawback lies in the lack of review verification.

Both services offer Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) that retrieve reviews for specific POIs [googleapi; tripapi]. However, they typically limit results to either the five most recent (TripAdvisor, Places API) or the five most "relevant," as determined by the service itself. To ensure an adequate volume of data for analysis, we opted to extract reviews directly from the websites using web scraping techniques.

Web scraping involves extracting data from the web and storing it for later analysis [Zhao et al., 2017]. It's typically performed using software known as web crawlers. Due to the continuous generation of vast and varied data on the web, web scraping is recognized as an effective method for collecting large datasets [Bar-Ilan et al., 2001]. Modern web scraping tools can not only parse markup languages or JSON files but also employ visual analysis and natural language processing techniques to mimic human browsing behavior.

The process of web data harvesting involves acquiring web resources and extracting desired information. Initially, a harvester makes an HTTP request to obtain resources from the target website. The returned resource, which can be web pages, data streams, or multimedia files, is then analyzed, reformatted, and organized. There are two types of harvesters: those treating web content as text and multimedia and those recreating the Document Object Model (DOM) of web pages. The latter type, which includes tools like Selenium, is more complex but suitable for dynamically changing web pages, as it simulates user interaction with the website programmatically.

### *Sentiment Analysis*

Our approach involves utilizing a pre-trained BERT model that has been specifically fine-tuned for sentiment analysis on our dataset [Delvin et al., 2019]. Initially, we carefully choose a suitable pre-trained BERT model, such as BERT Base Uncased. Subsequently, we preprocess the text data by breaking down sentences into individual words or sub-word units (tokenization) and transforming them into numerical representations through pre-trained word embedding methods. Ultimately, we ensure that sequences are padded to a consistent length to align with the BERT model.



Additionally, we further refine the pre-trained BERT architecture by incorporating a final classification layer. This layer usually includes a single neuron with either a sigmoid activation function for binary sentiment classification or a softmax activation function for multi-class sentiment classification. The complete model is subsequently trained on our annotated sentiment analysis dataset. Throughout the training process, a loss function such as cross-entropy is utilized to assess the disparity between the model's predictions and the actual sentiment labels. An optimizer like Adam is then employed to iteratively adjust the model weights in order to minimize the loss function and enhance sentiment classification accuracy.

After the completion of training, we politely assess the performance of the fine-tuned BERT model by utilizing standard sentiment analysis metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score. Moreover, we conduct hyperparameter tuning to enhance the model's performance. This process may entail making adjustments to parameters like learning rate, batch size, and the number of training epochs in order to achieve optimal results on the validation set.

### *Recommender Systems*

Recommender Systems (RS) are software tools employed to suggest new and unseen items to users based on their preferences and requirements [Resnick & Varian, 1997]. These items can encompass a variety of forms, ranging from physical goods like products and books to intangible entities such as music and films. In the context of this study, the focus lies solely on Points of Interest (POIs), with users representing visitors to a particular area. The primary goal of the RS, therefore, is to recommend fresh and captivating POIs to visitors – locations they have yet to explore ("new") but are likely to resonate with their interests.

RS endeavors to capture visitor preferences by analyzing their past interactions, often employing machine learning (ML) methodologies for this purpose. ML techniques typically construct a "profile" for each user based on their "history" of visited POIs. Subsequently, using this profile, the algorithm generates new recommendations. User feedback can manifest in two forms: explicit feedback, such as rating a POI on a 5-star scale or expressing preferences through a binary rating (like/dislike), and implicit feedback, where no explicit ratings or reviews are provided, but visiting a POI implies an interest.

In this work, Bayesian Personalized Ranking (BPR) [Rendle et al., 2009] has been selected due to its compatibility with both explicit and implicit feedback types. Moreover, BPR has a successful track record in culture and tourism-related recommendations. BPR generates a prioritized list of recommended items, with each item's score derived from the maximization of the likelihood of observing the specific training data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Our platform integrates web crawling, keyword extraction, and sentiment analysis to extract valuable insights from user reviews. The results of these analyses are presented as charts and plots within a user-friendly web application, enhancing the interpretability of the results and allowing users to quickly understand trends and sentiments.

Despite fulfilling the requirements for comprehensive analysis and presentation of insights from online user reviews, our system has several limitations. Firstly, since the application is designed to crawl data from online platforms, it is vulnerable to changes in data format. Additionally, these platforms may detect and block automated data crawling (as experienced in our case), limiting the number of reviews that can be processed. For key phrase extraction, our model extracts phrases of up to four words, a choice made to balance efficiency and the quality of extracted knowledge. Finally, in terms of sentiment analysis, the final score provides an overall indication of user satisfaction (negative, neutral, or positive) without focusing on specific aspects.

To evaluate the sentiment analysis component of our system, we approached it as a supervised learning problem. However, a limitation arose due to the absence of ground-truth labels

for the extracted reviews. This lack of pre-known polarity and sentiment scores made it impossible to directly compare the model's results with true sentiment labels to derive performance metrics. Consequently, we employed two alternative evaluation methods.

First, we used an annotated dataset of TripAdvisor reviews to compute traditional supervised learning metrics. Given that our real data is also tourism-related and sourced from similar platforms, the model's performance on this dataset serves as a reliable proxy for its performance on actual data, providing a satisfactory overview of its generalization capability. F1-score for negative class was 0.77 and F1-score for positive class was 0.92.

The second evaluation method utilized the ratings from reviews as a benchmark to compare against our model's sentiment scores. Specifically, we used the average rating for each place of interest as the ground truth to assess the model's performance per location. We normalized the sentiment confidence scores (initially ranging from -1 to 1) to a scale of 0 to 5, matching the range of user ratings (stars). We then calculated the mean squared error (MSE) and mean absolute error (MAE) for each location and overall to gauge the model's effectiveness. The overall MAE and MSE scores are 0.5563 and 0.8390 respectively.

To conduct a more thorough evaluation, we analyzed the errors encountered during sentiment analysis. Our investigation identified two distinct types of errors, highlighting the complexities of sentiment prediction. The first type of error occurs when reviewers give positive star ratings, suggesting a favorable experience, but the review texts express negative sentiments. This discrepancy underscores the nuanced nature of sentiment in textual content.

The second type of error occurs when reviewers provide negative star ratings, indicating an unfavorable experience, while the sentiment analysis predicts positive sentiment based on the text. The results illustrate the prevalence and distribution of these errors for seven touristic locations from our dataset. This helps to elucidate the implications of sentiment analysis errors in the context of touristic reviews. It shows a tendency for reviewers to overrate their experiences in terms of stars, even if their text reviews highlight dislikes. Conversely, the incidence of underrating, where a negative star rating accompanies positive text, is minimal.

## CONCLUSION

This paper introduces the StreetLines platform, an innovative tool designed for analyzing and deriving insights from touristic data. By leveraging machine learning techniques, the platform extracts valuable information from popular social streams such as Tripadvisor and Google Places. The process begins with automatic data collection, followed by comprehensive data analysis that includes keyword extraction, semantic enrichment of entities, and sentiment analysis of the text. Additionally, the platform offers recommendations for touristic attractions.

StreetLines significantly supports the dynamic tourism sector by providing automated analysis of the vast amounts of touristic data generated online. Evaluation of the platform demonstrated high performance and precision of its underlying technologies, ensuring accurate information delivery. This allows organizations and institutions involved in tourism to identify emerging trends, consumer interests, and concerns, enabling them to offer personalized product recommendations. Future work includes extensions such as adding contextual personalization, which could enhance the platform's capabilities and add significant value to its offerings.

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**CITY BRANDING, RECREATION, AND CARE VIS-À-VIS CONSTANTINOS DOXIADIS'S ENTOPIA AND ADRIANO OLIVETTI'S CONCRETE UTOPIA: URBAN SCALE DIGITAL TWINS AND HEALTH, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS IN TOURISM AND HERITAGE STUDIES**

**Marianna CHARITONIDOU**

Athens School of Fine Arts, [m.charitonidou@icloud.com](mailto:m.charitonidou@icloud.com)

**ABSTRACT**

The paper explores how urban governance approaches of Constantinos A. Doxiadis's 'entopia' and Adriano Olivetti's 'concrete utopia' could enhance the current debates on urban scale digital twins, with a particular emphasis on urban analytics concerning health, environmental and social aspects of tourism and heritage. Urban-scale digital twins are virtual replicas of cities or parts of cities that are used in urban analytics to simulate scenarios during the decision-making phase of urban planning. Special attention is paid to the potential of utilizing urban-scale digital twins by policymakers while deciding on branding strategies for creating sites destined for recreation and care. At the paper's core is the analysis of how 'entopia' and 'concrete utopia' can be combined with the methods of predicting health, environmental and social aspects of tourism and heritage using urban-scale digital twins. Doxiadis defined 'entopia' as a place that is practicable. Informing regarding this term is its etymology: "εν" in Greek means "in", and "τόπος" in Greek means "place". Doxiadis presented the notion of 'entopia' during his Trinity College lectures in 1966, and he analyzed it further in his book *Between Dystopia and Utopia*, published that same year.

The paper also examines Doxiadis Associates’ “Human Community” research program, which was conducted in the 1960s and is related to the founding of the Doxiadis Associates Computer Center (DACC) and the use of a computer Univac 1107 for urban analytics.

**Keywords:** Constantinos A. Doxiadis, Adriano Olivetti, entopia, concrete utopia, sustainability, urban scale digital twins

## INTRODUCTION

The paper explores how urban governance approaches of Constantinos A. Doxiadis’s ‘entopia’ and Adriano Olivetti’s ‘concrete utopia’ could enhance the current debates on urban scale digital twins, with a particular emphasis on urban analytics concerning health, environmental and social aspects of tourism and heritage. Urban-scale digital twins are virtual replicas of cities or parts of cities that are often used in contemporary urban and spatial planning practices to simulate scenarios during the phase of decision-making in urban planning. Special attention is paid to the potential of policymakers utilizing urban-scale digital twins while deciding on branding strategies for creating sites destined for recreation and care. At the paper’s core is the analysis of how ‘entopia’ and ‘concrete utopia’ can be combined with the methods of predicting health, environmental and social aspects of tourism and heritage using urban-scale digital twins. Doxiadis defined ‘entopia’ as a place that is practicable that can exist. Informing regarding this term is its etymology: “εν” in Greek means “in”, and “τόπος” in Greek means “place”. Doxiadis first used the term ‘entopia’ during his Trinity College lectures in 1966. An analysis of this notion is included in his book *Between Dystopia and Utopia*, which was published that same year (Doxiadis 1966). Moreover, special attention is paid to Adriano Olivetti’s understanding of urban planning methods as concrete utopias (Olivetti 1945; 1960). At the paper’s core is the idea that sustainable environmental and regenerative design involves exploring how one can reconceive wealth, land, and power redistribution. The paper examines the role of care and recreation in re-thinking heritage and city branding and how urban-scale digital twins and other artificial intelligence applications can contribute to such endeavors. One of its main objectives is to show how urban-scale digital twins can contribute to combining smart tourism, sustainable environmental design, and using urban-scale digital twins in decision-making and urban analytics.

## ON THE ROLE OF URBAN SCALE DIGITAL TWINS IN SMART CITIES AND SMART TOURISM

Recently, within the field of smart cities, the notion of urban-scale digital twins has become central. The term ‘digital twin’ refers to the digital representation enabling comprehensive data exchange. It can contain models, simulations, and algorithms that describe their counterparts and their features and behavior in the real world (Charitonidou 2022a; 2024c; Loukissas 2019). A ‘digital twin’ is a digital representation of a physical process, person, place, system or device. The term ‘digital twin’ first emerged in manufacturing to refer to digital simulation models that run alongside real-time processes. ‘Digital twins’ are digital replicas of physical entities. Their creation uses advanced technological applications like sensing, processing, and data transmission. Digital twins are used in the field of urban analytics, as well as in the field of computational social sciences. Digital twins enhance evidence-based operational decisions and experimentation on urban policies. The current state of research concerning the role of digital twins in shaping urban policies is characterized by a dichotomy between scholars who focus on the technological

and sustainable benefits of using urban-scale digital twins and researchers who criticize ‘digital universalism’. Digital twins enhance evidence-based operational decisions and experimentation on urban policies.

The European Union has set the following goals regarding sustainable urban planning strategies: firstly, the empowerment of urban actors towards common goals; secondly, the development of people-oriented urban planning strategies that aim to contribute to the social equity of communities; thirdly, the development of digital platforms and other digital tools that intend to enhance interactive and proactive approaches in urban planning decision-making, and, fourthly, the establishment cohesive, accessible, and operational technology frameworks to create programs and deliver services and data-informed planning. Among existing urban scale digital twins that are either in operation or under development are the twins of the following cities or districts: Athens in Greece, Dublin Docklands in Ireland, Herrenberg in Germany, Vienna in Austria, Zurich in Switzerland, New York in the United States of America, London in the United Kingdom, and that of Helsinki in Finland. Other note-worthy urban-scale digital twins are those of Cambridge, Gothenburg, Munich, Newcastle, Paris, Rennes and Rotterdam (Charitonidou 2022a; 2023; 2024a; 2024b; 2024c; 2024d;). Two significant programs that shape sustainable urban planning methods are the European New Green Deal, the Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its Sustainable Development Goals, also known as SDGs. The former - the European Green Deal - is based on the intention to achieve zero net emissions by 2050. It emphasizes achieving a circular economy by 2050, creating a sustainable food system and protecting biodiversity.

The widespread use of digital technologies has transformed how businesses operate and has introduced new ideas like digital twin technology. This technology has the potential to predict system responses before they happen, making it an appealing choice for smart and sustainable tourism. A multidisciplinary approach involving political science, software engineering, tourism, and official statistics offers an opportunity for academic contributions and decision-making processes. Smart tourism is an emerging phenomenon that integrates information technologies into the tourism industry. This integration provides new opportunities for tourism businesses, destinations, and tourists (Rahmadian, Feitosa, Virantina 2023; Katsoni, Segarra-Oña 2019). This signifies a significant shift towards greater intelligence in the tourism industry, merging tourism's physical and governance aspects into the digital realm (Boes et al., 2016). The smart tourism ecosystem includes customers, tourists, businesses, enterprises, and destinations. When it comes to the involvement of customers in the tourism sector, the goal is to offer personalized, intelligent support with real-time and comprehensive insights into the tourist experience. In the tourism sector, businesses play a vital role by leveraging shared data to enhance collaboration and facilitate resource sharing among tourism enterprises (Xiang, Fesenmaier 2016). Smart tourism at destinations aims to strengthen competitiveness and improve residents' and visitors' overall quality of life (Boes et al. 2016). Big data integration is a crucial part of the IT infrastructure in smart destinations. This incorporation enables more sophisticated decision-making procedures, necessitating resilient technologies and state-of-the-art algorithms (Oussous et al. 2018). In addition, promoting sustainable practices in the tourism industry has become significantly important (Rahmadian et al. 2022; Xu et al., 2020). Sustainable tourism involves balancing economic goals with environmental and social factors in destination management. Sustainable tourism aims to reduce the adverse effects of tourism on society and the environment by minimizing its economic impact (Vázquez Loaiza et al., 2019). The concept of smart tourism is closely related to smart cities. Smart tourism is re-

lated to the endeavor of integrating advanced technologies and intelligence to explore the connections between tourism, mobility, living, people, governance, economy, and sustainability (Giffinger, Haindl 2009).

### **CONSTANTINOS A. DOXIADIS'S ENTOPIA, CONDICIPLINARY SCIENCE AND EKISTICS AND ADRIANO OLIVETTI'S CONCRETE UTOPIA**

Greek architect and urban planner Constantinos A. Doxiadis believed in the potential of 'entopia' instead of utopia or dystopia. Doxiadis defined 'entopia' as a place that is practicable that can exist. Informing regarding this term is its etymology: "ε ν" in Greek means "in", and "τ ό π ο ς" in Greek means "place". Doxiadis referred to the term 'entopia' during his Trinity College lectures delivered in 1966. An analysis of this notion is included in his book *Between Dystopia and Utopia*, which was published that same year (Doxiadis 1966). According to Doxiadis, architectural or urban design strategies could be characterized as 'entopian' if they consider environmental and physical limitations and the networks that concern the social aspects of architectural or urban projects. Moreover, Doxiadis pays special attention to the capacity of architectural or urban design strategies to respond to the dynamic parameters concerning the settlements. Within such a framework, Doxiadis conceptualized the so-called 'ekistic grid' as a tool aiming to provide architecture and urban planning solutions that promote 'entopia'. Doxiadis was convinced that 'entopian' architecture and urban planning projects should emphasize the following five elements and their interconnections: Nature, Man, Society, Shells and Networks. According to Doxiadis, 'ekistics' refers to the science of human settlements. He highlighted that he initially used this term during an ensemble of lectures he delivered at the National Technical University of Athens in 1942. His concept of 'ekistics' is essential for understanding the approach of Doxiadis, which he coined in his essay entitled "Ekistic Analysis" originally in 1946 (Doxiadis 1946; Charitonidou 2022b; 2024d). 'Ekistics' operates at three levels: firstly, general ekistics; secondly, urban planning; and thirdly, building design and construction.

At the center of Adriano Olivetti's vision was the search to elaborate new models of civil cohabitation. Of great significance for understanding Olivetti's political agenda is the way he conceived the relationship between democracy and community. Olivetti gave much importance to the relationship of citizens to institutions. Four seminal works for understanding Olivetti's vision are *The Political Order of Community*, *For Communitarian Economy and Politics*, *City of Man*, and *Society, State, Community* (Olivetti 1952a; 1952b; 1945; 1960). As Italian sociologist Franco Ferrarotti has underscored, Olivetti's utopian vision could be characterized as "concrete utopia" in the sense that his understanding of communities as concrete goes hand in hand with his conviction that communities are determined by geography and history (Ferrarotti 2013). Instead of framing their practice and theory within the frontiers of specific disciplines, Doxiadis and Olivetti tried to reflect on reconstruction strategies beyond conventional models. Their way of thinking at the intersection of different domains of practice explains why examining their activities is essential for understanding the role of urban planning in enhancing political emancipation. Holism and interdisciplinarity lie at the heart of Doxiadis's approach to understanding human progress. Doxiadis distinguished interdisciplinary and a condisciplinatory science. In "Ekistics, the Science of Human Settlements", published in *Science* in 1970, Doxiadis highlights: "To achieve the needed knowledge and develop the science of human settle-

ments, we must move from an interdisciplinary to a condisciplinary science” (Doxiadis 1970). Doxiadis’ s organization of reconstruction and the organizational and managerial approach during the post-war years could be related to his concept of ‘ekistics’ .

### **ON THE DELOS SYMPOSIA**

Greek architect and urban planner Constantinos A. Doxiadis and British urban planner Jaqueline Tyrwhitt organized the Delos Symposia between 1963 and 1975. Analyzing the history and legacy of the Delos Symposia is helpful for understanding how important interdisciplinary was for Doxiadis’s approach. Doxiadis died on 28 June 1975. Twelve Delos Symposia were organized in total. In “Network Fever”, Mark Wigley examines the debates around networks and urban dynamics in the Delos Symposia framework (Wigley 2001). The core theme of the first Delos Symposium was “The present crisis in human settlements”. Among the topics that were addressed during the first Delos symposium, which was held in July 1963, were “The present crisis”, “Objective causes of the crisis”, and “Subjective causes of the crisis”. Among the first Delos Symposium contributors were American Anthropologist Margaret Mead, Swiss Architecture Historian Sigfried Giedion, and Canadian Philosopher Herbert Marshall McLuhan (Mead et al. 1963). The “Declaration of Delos” refers to the document signed during the final meeting of the first Delos Symposium at the ancient theatre of Delos. This Declaration was signed on 12 July 1963 (Fig. 1). In the “Declaration of Delos”, the participants expressed their interest in exploring ways that would: - establish a new discipline of human settlements - initiate basic research of the most far-reaching kind - bring together specialists from other relevant disciplines to work together on projects in this field - work out new methods of training the men who could assume leadership and responsibility in the sphere of action - attract some of the best young minds into this new area of research, development and practice. Characteristically, Giedion highlighted the following concerning the importance of the development of interdisciplinary reflections during the discussion that accompanied the signing of the “Declaration of Delos”: “At present a lawyer cannot understand a physicist, but we need to create a new type of specialist, and this is something this gathering could help to bring about- of course with the help of the younger generation. It is only now that both generations can work together without one feeling frustrated or suppressed” (Matthew et al. 1963).





**Figure 1.** Final preparation before signing the First Declaration of Delos in July 1963; from left: Edmund Bacon, Jacqueline Tyrwitt and Constantinos Doxiadis. Constantinos A. Doxiadis Archives, Photographs, File 31252. © Constantinos and Emma Doxiadis Foundation.

The central topic of the second Delos Symposium was the exploration of “A Framework for a New Discipline of Human Settlements”. The third Delos Symposium was devoted to the theme “Problems of Living at High Density”. The fourth Delos Symposium, held in 1966, was centered on the topic “Nature and Human Settlements” and focused on issues related to urban mobility and transportation planning. The fifth Delos Symposium, held in 1967, was dedicated to the topic “Strategy for Human Settlements”. The sixth Delos Symposium, which took place in 1968, was devoted to the theme “Man and His Settlements: Need for A Policy”. The seventh Delos Symposium, which was held in 1969, was centered on the theme “Society and Human Settlements”. The eighth Delos Symposium, held in 1970, was devoted to the topic “Networks and Human Settlements”. The ninth Delos Symposium, held in 1971, was dedicated to the topic “Our Buildings (Shells) and Human Settlements”. At the core of the tenth Delos Symposium, which was centered on the theme “Synthesis of all issues discussed in previous symposia and specific proposals addressed to national and local governments and authorities”, were environmental concerns and the expansion of urban networks. The last two Delos Symposia of 1974 and 1975, which took place at the Athens Center of Ekistics and the Apollonion settlement at Porto Rafti, had the same theme: “Action for Human Settlements”. Some of the reflections on the role of ‘ekistics’ in offering citizens “equal chances in all aspects and expressions of the social system in space” that were presented by Doxiadis during the eleventh Delos Symposium are included in his article entitled “The twelve radical changes needed for action for human settlements” published in *Ekistics* in 1974 (Doxiadis1974). The last Delos Symposium, which was held in 1975, two weeks after Doxiadis’s death, placed particular

emphasis on the ideas that Doxiadis developed in the four books he published in conjunction with the first UN Habitat between 1974 and 1976: *Anthropopolis: City for Human Development* (Doxiadis 1975a), *Ecumenopolis: The Inevitable City of the Future* (Doxiadis, Papaioannou 1974), *Building Entopia* (Doxiadis 1975b), and *Action for Human Settlements* (Doxiadis 1976).

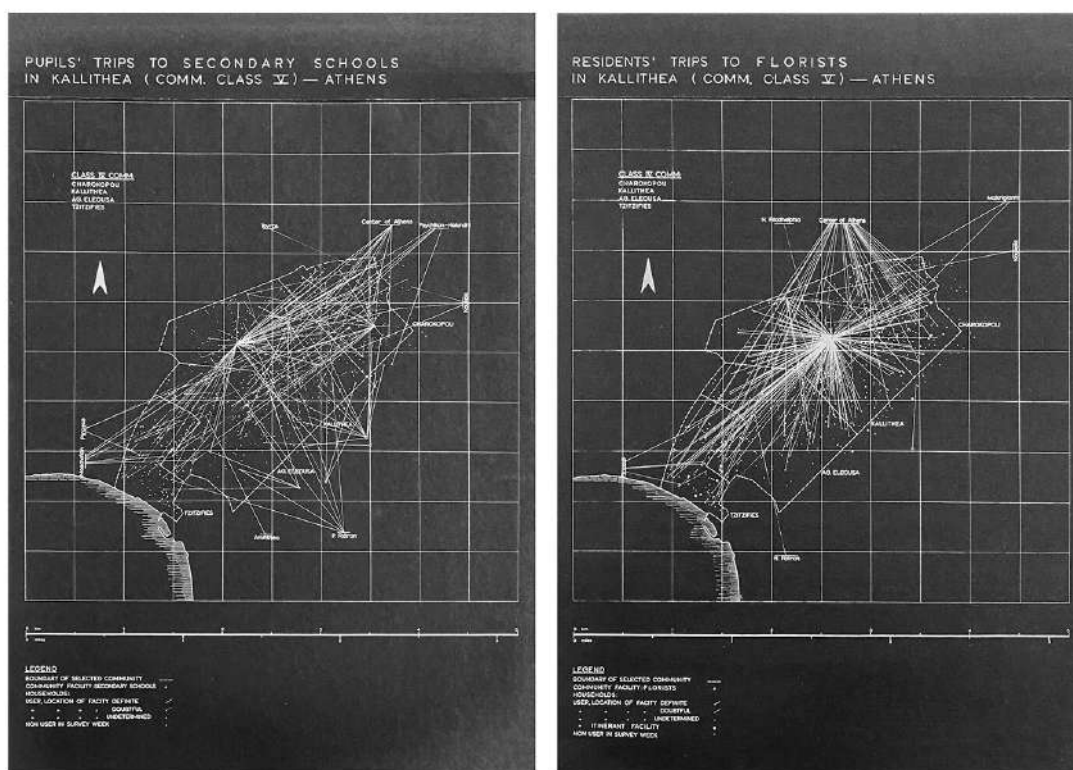
## **ON DOXIADIS ASSOCIATES COMPUTER CENTER (DACC) AND THE HUMAN COMMUNITY**

In the 1960s, Doxiadis Associates coordinated the “The Human Community” research program. Pivotal for this research program was the Doxiadis Associates Computer Center (DACC) (Fig. 2), established by Doxiadis Associates in 1964 (Athens Center for Ekistics 1965a; 1965b). The research program entitled “The Human Community” was centered on exploring the habits of the residents of Athens and aimed to explore their adaptation to the growth and pace of the postwar city (Fig. 3). “The Human Community” project used the rapidly expanding city of Athens as a laboratory, and its research team systematically analysed the communities within this urban framework. The “The Human Community” project included a time-allocation study and a study of residents’ satisfaction with their community. The findings could also be used for a subsequent launching of a comprehensive effort in order to determine the relationship between urban design policy-making and the satisfactoriness of community functioning.

A turning point for Doxiadis Associates was the purchase of a computer Univac 1107, which was among the best computers of that era (Papaioannou et al. 1970). This computer was placed in the courtyard of the building complex on the ring road of Lycabettus, under a sculpted owl symbol of wisdom created by Frosso Efthymiadi-Menegaki. It was protected by a bulletproof glass wall and illuminated at night. In 1969, Doxiadis installed the Univac 1107 in Doxiadis Associates’ premises at \$500,000 (\$3.3M in today’s prices). A computer center with air-conditioning and bulletproof windows was set up for the installation. The fact that at that time, only four similar computer systems existed in Europe, and around ten more were operating in the US underlies the project’s importance. The computer was presented to opinion leaders, including businessmen, journalists, and scientists, through a series of events and made available for third-party use. The way in which Doxiadis Associates Computer Center used Univac 1107 in the framework of the research project entitled “The Human Community” is pivotal for understanding the articulation of computational urbanism. For this reason, it would be interesting to compare these early moments of using computer technology for urban analytics to the current trends in the visual mapping of city parameters to make decisions concerning urban planning, with particular emphasis on social and environmental equity (Charitonidou 2022a; 2024c).



**Figure 2.** The cover of *UNIVAC Computers in Greece: The Program suggested by Doxiadis Associates Computer Center (DACC)*. Document C-DCC 2506 © Constantinos and Emma Doxiadis Foundation.



**Figure 3.** Athens Center of Ekistics, The Human Community, map of pupilstrips to secondary schools and maps to residents' trips to Florists in Kallithea © Constantinos and Emma Doxiadis Foundation

## CONSTANTINOS A. DOXIADIS'S THEORY OF EKISTICS, ECUMENOPOLIS AND ECOLOGY

According to Doxiadis' s theory of Ekistics, the Elements of ekistics are divided into five parts, namely nature (human), human (antrophos), society (society), reflection (shells) and networks (networks). An important book for understanding the role of sustainability in Doxiadis' s thought is his book *Ecology and Ekistics*. Doxiadis completed the first draft of *Ecology and Ekistics* in the summer of 1975, shortly before his death. Gerald Dix became its editor, and the final version was published in 1977 (Doxiadis 1977). At the core of the book *Ecology and Ekistics* is the argument that a condition of global ecologic balance is of pivotal importance for providing environments that can offer to man or 'anthropos' satisfactory conditions (Doxiadis 1977). The balance between the global ecosystem and human settlements is of great significance for achieving such balance. According to Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, Doxiadis believed that "the goal is for human settlements to live in balance with the conservation of natural resources" (Tyrwhitt 1978, 18). Doxiadis believed this would become possible by establishing a global ecological balance. Doxiadis was particularly interested in the environmental issues concerning architecture and urban planning. More specifically, as Panayota Pyla argues, "one can argue that Doxiadis was a pioneer in environmental thought from the 1940s, because the concept of ekistics, shaped during his early career as a coordinator of postwar reconstruction in Greece, sought to integrate people and environments in a comprehensive system" (Pyla 2009).

Doxiadis conceived 'ekistics' as a new way of understanding the science and art of human settlements. More specifically, he argues that "Ekistics aims to co-ordinate "economics, social sciences, political and administrative sciences, technology and aesthetics into a coherent whole", creating "a new type of human habitat" (Doxiadis 1963). Another term at the core of Doxiadis' s work is 'Ecumenopolis' . This concept departed from the hypothesis that urbanization, population growth, and the development of means of transport and human networks would lead to a fusion of urban areas and megalopolises, forming a continuous planetwide city. Doxiadis used different concepts to refer to different understandings of urban dynamics corresponding to different historical eras. For the city of the 20th century, he used the concept of 'megapolis' , arguing that its main characteristic was the perpetual intensification of mobility flows, which would break the limits of the cities, altering their structure and meaning. Doxiadis argued that the age of automobility demanded the founding of new urban types, which would be organized like beehives around multiple centers (Doxiadis 1968; 1962). Doxiadis' s "Towards Ecumenopolis" , a confidential report prepared in January 1961 in the framework of the Research Project "The City of the Future" , focused on how to devise a different approach concerning the city of the future. In this report, he understood infrastructure as a skeleton of a body covering the entire globe resulting from the balance between settlements, production and nature. We could relate the concept of 'Ecumenopolis' in Doxiadis' s work to exploring "strategies for the symbiosis of the global city with the natural world" (Pyla 2009). Through the concept of Ecumenopolis, Doxiadis aimed to turn ekistics into a strategy for global environmental protection. According to Doxiadis, "global ecological balance" would be achieved through the functional organization of the earth's land to accommodate the competing needs of production, settlement, recreation, and environmental protection. The ultimate goal was clear: "In the [future] we will have built the great, uni-

versal city and garden of man with water running in its arteries bringing life and guaranteeing its inner balance and peace.” (Doxiadis 1967)

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## **DIGITAL LEGACY OF MELANES, NAXOS: INTEGRATING DAILY LIFE, CULTURAL HERITAGE, AND TOURISM**

**Emmanouil ANEVLAVIS**

Department of Tourism Management, University of Patras, Meg. Alexandrou 1, Patra 26334,  
+306956424426, [emanolios@hotmail.com](mailto:emanolios@hotmail.com)

**Maria ARGYROPOULOU**

Department of Tourism Management, University of Patras, Meg. Alexandrou 1, Patra 26334,  
[margyrop@upatras.gr](mailto:margyrop@upatras.gr)

**Evi CHATZOPOULOU**

Department of Tourism Management, University of Patras, Meg. Alexandrou 1, Patra 26334,  
[echatzop@upatras.gr](mailto:echatzop@upatras.gr)

**Vasiliki ANEVLAVI**

Austrian Archaeological Institute/Austrian Academy of Sciences, Dominikanerbastei 16, 1010,  
Vienna, Austria, [vasiliki.anevlavi@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:vasiliki.anevlavi@oeaw.ac.at)

### **ABSTRACT**

Virtual and augmented reality advancements have opened new avenues for immersive  
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destination marketing. Virtual tours, interactive maps, and personalised travel recommendations powered by artificial intelligence contribute to a more personalised and engaging experience for prospective tourists. In addition, experience and authenticity play a crucial role in enhancing tourists' satisfaction when visiting a destination, revealing the pivot role of destination marketing. Creating websites for touristic purposes is pivotal in modern travel experiences by serving as a digital gateway for prospective travellers. These platforms provide a dynamic and visually appealing showcase of destinations, allowing visitors to explore and plan their itineraries remotely. Moreover, well-designed tourist websites contribute significantly to destination marketing, fostering a global reach that attracts diverse travellers and promotes economic growth through increased tourism revenue. The following case study attempts to follow the newest trends in cultural tourism by digitising the daily life and customs of a small but significant area. "The Digital Legacy of Melanes" aims to seamlessly integrate a small traditional village of Naxos, Greece, into the digital world, facilitating an intellectual transition towards enhanced engagement with the European and international communities. A deliberate emphasis on preserving and promoting Melanes' traditions is strategically designed to augment local identity on the global stage. Its primary objective is to digitise and disseminate the heritage of the village, encompassing traditions, history, archaeology, old and new photographs, geographical coordinates, and other pertinent facets. As a privately initiated endeavour, the project seeks to showcase the historical significance and aesthetic allure of Melanes to a global audience.

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage, ICH Tourism, Naxos Island, Website design

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism and its practices as a historically defined phenomenon evolve in conjunction with the development of the information society. As one of the critical sectors of the global economy, tourism is constantly being shaped by new digital practices. The rise of digital media and the internet has influenced how travellers choose their destinations and seek new experiences. Considering that almost half a century ago, people travelled with limited information about their destination - mainly from hard-to-find or fragmentary travel guides or a few photographs - it is clear how important the information that comes from digital media is. Today, most travellers search and judge their options through digital platforms before booking or visiting a destination. Social networks and websites act as virtual travel guides, offering a wealth of textual and virtual information (photos, videos, etc.). At the same time, tourism operators and the local communities of the host destinations have the opportunity to make the best use of digital media and promote their place and its specificities (Govers and Go 2009). Promoting the latter in alternative tourism settings is a key priority.

At the same time, culture is a decisive factor in the choice of a destination. Furthermore, within the spectrum of culture - tangible or intangible - visual culture emerges as a strong attraction for travellers (Du Cros 2012). Each place's visual culture manifests differently as it reflects its history, its manufactured and natural environment and, more generally, its identity. Thus, the image - with all its scholarly dimensions - plays a central role in any form of tourism (Bonarou 2012:3-6). The visual-centric nature of platforms and websites highlights each destination's unique attractions and experiences and contributes to the traveller's decision-making (Munar and Jacobsen 2014).

This paper concerns the presentation of digital cultural heritage through the website of Melanes of Naxos, which was created to promote the area's cultural heritage and the everyday life of the local community. Localism is one component that promotes sustainable destinations and destinations offering alternative tourism aspects.



## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *Cultural Heritage*

Cultural heritage, which includes tangible and intangible expressions of human creativity and identity, is a cornerstone of tourism (Timothy 2011; Panzera, de Graaff, and de Groot 2021). It attracts travellers seeking authentic experiences. Tourism uses each destination's cultural heritage to shape its products and, when operating sustainably, contributes to the preservation, conservation, and promotion of a destination's cultural identity (Richards 1996).

Cultural heritage has been considered in heritage sites (historical landmarks, archaeological sites, museums, traditional settlements, buildings, etc.), cultural routes, artifacts or other material remains of the past (Richards 2007). In recent years, there has been more emphasis on intangible cultural heritage, cultural landscapes and traditions (folklore, storytelling, religious worship practices and other forms of cultural aspects) (Du Cros and Mckercher 2023:109-110). As UNESCO (2003) refers, *Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. At the same time, it notes that intangible cultural heritage not only represents inherited traditions from the past but also contemporary rural and urban practices in which diverse cultural groups take part.*

### *Locality, Cultural Heritage, and Tourism*

The development of attractive, sustainable destinations requires a symbiotic relationship between localism, cultural heritage and tourism (Richards 2018; Boniface 2013). Locality is a component of the authenticity of a destination and the uniqueness of the experiences it can offer the traveller. Elements such as folklore, customs, worship, storytelling, dance, music, crafts, gastronomy, festivals, etc., define the community and, consequently, the experiences offered to tourists. Thus, communities act as living repositories of cultural identity (Richards and Munsters 2010), attracting the tourists who wish to engage with both the historical and contemporary aspects of a destination. Furthermore, adopting locally-centred approaches to tourism development, in addition to contributing to ensuring the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, also promotes sustainable development by mitigating the negative impacts of mass tourism (Ashworth and Larkham 2013). Nevertheless, beyond its cultural value, the whole cultural heritage plays a key role in economic development through tourism. Local communities gain income, and at the same time, jobs are created in sectors such as hospitality, transport, crafts, etc. (Su and Wall 2014; Timothy and Boyd 2003). Although tourism, localism, and cultural heritage work interconnectedly and interdependently, there is always the risk of overexploiting a destination and exceeding its carrying capacity. It is a one-way street to have a balanced relationship between them, always aiming for the healthy economic development of the region while providing authentic experiences for visitors (Graham and Howard 2008).

### *Digital technologies for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in tourism*

The imperatives of the post-modern era, as mentioned, put digital technologies at the service of the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, and these have become more imperative in

the context of tourism. The aim is for the tourist attraction (tangible or intangible) to be preserved through sustainable practices and promoted to the public. Digital technologies before, during, and after the visit make a decisive contribution to this. In the case of intangible cultural heritage, for example, the use of virtual or augmented reality can contribute to the recreation of traditional practices, ceremonies, performances, etc. (Smith 2019). Another example is digital storytelling platforms, where the cultural heritage of a destination is preserved and communicated through local narratives. Nevertheless, also the use of multimedia formats such as videos, podcasts, and interactive websites helps communities to preserve and promote their tradition. Finally, crowdsourcing platforms also play an important role in the direction of intercultural dialogue and the dissemination, preservation and interpretation of intangible cultural heritage. The latest ones allow visitors and locals to communicate (Kaldeli et al. 2021).

### *The Role of Websites*

The role of online platforms as a system for attracting and preserving a place's cultural heritage is a separate part of the study since the work aims to present a website for the village of Melanes on the Greek island of Naxos. This website functions as an online index in a tourism attraction system on the one hand and as an information repository on the other hand. In general, the indexes function to motivate visitors and often contain information or present a picture of what can be experienced at the sites in question (Clark 2009). Markers aim to motivate potential tourists to take action and contain much more than commercial and promotional material. Sometimes, the markers can be attractions in themselves. At the same time, they contribute to a better understanding of the place and thus help to protect elements of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Du Cros and Mckercher 2023:251-254). Websites have become essential tools in the tourism sector, reshaping how travellers plan, experience, and share their trips. At the same time, they offer unparalleled opportunities for destination marketing, community building and engagement. By responsibly harnessing the power of websites and digital technology in general, tourism industry stakeholders can cultivate sustainable, enriched travel experiences for all. The latter is increasingly understood nowadays, as travel is always preceded by web surfing.

## **CASE STUDY: MELANES NAXOS WEBSITE**

*The Website:* <https://melanesnaxos.gr>

The village of Melanes is located 8 km SE of Naxos Town and an altitude of 63 m. It is semi-mountainous and is among the oldest settlements of Naxos. Its name probably came from the black colour characterising the area's soil. This effort is focused on creating a website with the village of Melanes, Naxos Island, Greece, as a main topic, aiming to promote the village's legacy in a digital form (traditions, history, archaeology, photos, coordinates, etc.). The website is a significant achievement, not only because of the amount of information it collects but also due to the uniqueness of the efforts and the contributions it provides to the inhabitants of the village and the visitors.

### *Aims and Motivation*

The "Digital Legacy of Melanes" aims to integrate the small traditional village into the digital world and create an intellectual transition to the European and international community. The particular focus on the village's traditions is intended to promote local identity towards the international community. This project is a private initiative of a small group of young local people of the village, aiming to show the world the historical value and beauty of the place. This website records and presents material related to the whole range of the village in different categories.

The main motivation for creating this website is the unique traditions which take place in the village and cannot be found in other places. They are spectacular, and the website is the best way to inform local and international people about their existence and importance. The project includes a full-scale recording and documentation of the traditions of the village (presentation of old photos, old documents, videos during the customs, and interviews with older generations and participants).

The website's primary aim is to convey to visitors that comprehensive knowledge, preservation, and promotion of culture are essential components of all aspects of life. Through this website, our overarching aim is to enable visitors to readily recognise and appreciate the significance of the village and its cultural landmarks. By emphasising the interconnectedness of culture with our daily lives, we seek to foster a deeper appreciation for the rich heritage embodied within the village's cultural monuments. The website aims to raise public awareness about the value of monuments, and through it, we hope to encourage the combination of information and culture and the development of curiosity, exploration, and care for various other elements of our culture. The implementation of this site will seek the active participation and interaction of users with the village. In addition, a relationship will be established between the island's culture, exploration, and the search for other archaeological sites.

### *The sitemap*

The first category is the home page, where a short general description of the archaeological sites, customs, and traditions is given. The next category concerns details on various aspects of the village. Some subcategories record detailed information about the myths (concerning the name of the village, etc.), the history (events of recent history), the customs, the nature (the plants and trees of the area) and information about the village's cultural association. The next category is related to the village's monuments. Important monuments are the ancient marble quarries with the oversized kouroi in the locations of Flerio and Faraggi, the two aqueducts in the area, dated in the Archaic and Roman period, which transported water from the area of Flerio to Naxos Town, parts of which are visible at various points along the modern road. The list continues with the Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches of Agios Georgios, Panagia Kritommati, Agios Thalaleos, the building complex of Sanoudos in Kampones, the tower of Sanoudos in Kournochori, the watermills, the medieval stone-paved path of Fyroa, and the olive mill of Ntemari. To conclude, another important monument is the Jesuit Building Complex around Kalamitsia, a Venetian building of 1680. All these locations are unique monuments of historical and cultural heritage. In addition, the website visitor can find information about the surrounding villages of Melanes, as well as a large photo gallery and a contact form. Special remarks are given to the village's natural environment. Remarkable is the green valley of the village, an entire fragrant orchard, and a green area with terraces that are irrigated with water through natural flow from the spring of Flerio. Oranges, lemons, apricots, pears, and sour cherries predominate.

### *Methodology*

All the information was based on bibliographical references, oral testimonies, texts and  
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publications of elderly residents of the village. The search, organisation, and presentation of the information, writing, editing, and photo editing were carried out by a local team that took the initiative to implement the project<sup>1</sup>. A professional website developer did the construction of the website. The members of this team will carry out the moderation of the website. Currently, the Greek and English versions of the website are ready.

The construction of the website was given to a professional website developer<sup>2</sup>. The moderation of the website will be carried out by the members of this team. The platform used to create the website is WordPress. WordPress is an excellent and friendly platform for creating websites, and there are many reasons for this. The main reason why the WordPress platform was chosen is its ease of use. WordPress offers a user interface, making it easy for even beginners to create and manage a website without the need for special web design knowledge. In addition, there is a wide variety of themes and plugins that allow users to customise their websites to their needs. There is also an active community of users and developers that provides support, answers to questions and resources for solving problems. Even WordPress offers tools to optimise your website for search engines (SEO), helping your website appear high in search results. Finally, WordPress is free and open source, which means it can be installed and used at no cost. Even customisation through themes and add-ons can be very affordable compared to other platforms. For these reasons, WordPress is a reliable, flexible, and affordable choice for building a website. Also, an Instagram page was created to promote the village and the website. There was also an essential action in the field of promotion. Google hotspot points were created everywhere for all the monuments and places mentioned on the website and linked to the website. Thus, if a visitor locates the point on Google, they can visit the website to directly access detailed information about the monument.

### ***Future Steps***

Looking to the future, we are planning a series of initiatives that will enhance the multicultural experience and local tourism sustainability. Using brochures and cards enriched with QR codes, we lead visitors to discoveries that transcend language boundaries. By adding additional languages, such as French, German, Italian, Spanish, etc., to our materials, we broaden the audience that can discover the richness of the local cultural heritage. The QR-Codes Spots we will place at points of interest act as gateways to the past and future while preserving intangible cultural heritage and promoting local identity and sustainability. Through these initiatives, we highlight the rich diversity of cultural expressions and enhance tourism while preserving the gift of local heritage for future generations.

## **CONCLUSION**

The impetus behind creating this digital platform lies in the distinctive traditions unique to Melanes, differentiating it from other locales. The website serves as an optimal conduit for informing both local residents and a global audience about the existence and significance of these remarkable traditions. It serves as a comprehensive repository, categorising information across various sections, including the homepage, detailed aspects of the village, myths, history, customs, nature, sightseeing, and information on the cultural association of the village. The website is

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<sup>1</sup> Team members: Emmanouil Anevlavis, Vasiliki Anevlavi, Giannis Krassas, Stella Chorianopoulou.

<sup>2</sup> The financial support towards the professional website developer was given by the Melanes Cultural Association 'Kouros o Ellinas'.

notable not only for its extensive information but also for the distinctive efforts and contributions it extends to the village's residents and visitors alike. Aiming to a larger touristic audience, the extant bilingual website is poised for imminent expansion into additional languages, thereby broadening accessibility and fostering a deeper understanding of the village's history and multifaceted dimensions.

A primary objective of the program is to cultivate an awareness among visitors that the acquisition, preservation, and promotion of culture are integral aspects of our daily lives. The overarching goal of the entire initiative is to enable visitors to readily discern and appreciate the importance of Melanes and its cultural monuments. The considerable enthusiasm from the local community towards the project and its outcomes serves as a catalyst, motivating the team to persist in this commendable undertaking and to contemplate similar initiatives for surrounding villages and the broader region of Naxos, thereby elevating the island's recognition. The collation of information herein presented is underpinned by a foundation rooted in bibliographical references, oral testimonies, and texts derived from publications authored by elderly denizens of the village. The systematic exploration, organisation, and exposition of data were meticulously conducted alongside the textual content's composition and editorial refinement. Additionally, the manipulation and enhancement of photographic elements were diligently executed as part of the overall information curation process.

Integral to the marketing strategy is the emphasis placed on the village's natural environment. Descriptions of the lush green valley, fragrant orchards, and terraced landscapes irrigated by the natural flow from the spring of Flerio serve not only to promote the village's ecological charm but also appeal to eco-conscious travellers seeking sustainable and nature-centric tourism experiences. In conclusion, the seamless integration of cultural preservation, tourism promotion, and strategic marketing elements within this online platform positions the village as an enticing destination, inviting diverse visitors to explore its rich heritage and natural beauty.

The local community's great interest in the project and its results encourages the team to continue this great work and plan similar projects for the surrounding villages and the broader region of Naxos. This will help make the island better known in Europe and the world.

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**MAKE YOUR TRAVEL MEANINGFUL: AUTHENTIC TRAVEL EXPERIENCES  
THAT SURPASS TRAVELERS' EXPECTATIONS WHILST ALSO BENEFITING  
THE ENVIRONMENT AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES VISITED**

**Anastasia ZIAKA**

Hellenic Open University, [std140034@ac.eap.gr](mailto:std140034@ac.eap.gr)

**Alexios – Patapios KONTIS**

University of the Aegean, 8, Michalon str. 82100 Chios, Greece, (+30) 2271035343, [ap-kontis@aegean.gr](mailto:ap-kontis@aegean.gr)

**ABSTRACT**

Sustainability in all their dimensions (environment, society, economy, culture) appear at the forefront of national tourism policies and practices and are one of the main pillars of business activity in the entire range of tourism businesses as they are a key criterion for modern travelers in choosing their future trips. Tourism is estimated to contribute either

directly or indirectly to the achievement of the 17 Global Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, such as the fight against poverty, the reduction of inequalities, climate action, responsible consumption and production, the sustainable cities, and communities etc. Also, meaningful, and conscious travel experiences are the future for the Tourism Industry. At the same time, today's travelers desire active participation in activities, they are increasingly looking to experience unique authentic travel experiences, to get to know as much as possible the culture of a destination as well as to actively participate in the customs and the daily life of local communities. Recently, tourism research has turned its attention to the study of experiential activities as a potential means of gaining competitive advantage by fostering the sustainability of various destinations as well as travelers' perceived value of the experience.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the importance of authentic travel experiences in the context of sustainability and compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the degree of satisfaction of tourists who experience such activities. In the research findings, we found significant statistical differences according to the profile of consumers/participants.

**Keywords:** authentic travel experience, sustainability, UN Sustainable Development Goals, natural environment, local communities, motivation

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid increase in tourist flows and consequently the development of tourist activities creates pressure on the environment, infrastructure, local communities and other economic sectors of both developed and developing tourist destinations. It is now increasingly necessary to exchange knowledge and adopt sustainable practices by all stakeholders involved in tourism such as local communities, local authorities and national governments, tourism businesses as well as individual travelers. Sustainable tourism should not be characterized as a special form of tourism, on the contrary all different forms of tourism are required to adopt sustainable operating practices. UNWTO as the United Nations Development Program provides clear proposals – actions – guidelines (UNWTO, 2017) on the contribution of tourism to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One of these actions concerns participation in the global action program 10YFP (10 Year Framework of Programs on Sustainable Consumption and Production) with the aim of strengthening international cooperation and accelerating the shift towards sustainable consumption and production (SCP) standards in the tourism sector in both developed and developing countries. The framework supports capacity building and facilitates access to technical and financial assistance for developing countries for this shift. On the other hand, it is expected that the pressure on the tourism industry to promote sustainability and the social agenda will intensify, while products/experiences that have sustainability and viability at their core are expected to attract the interest of travelers as well as higher funding from governments/investors (WTTC, 2019).

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In recent years, the tourism industry has shown a shift towards experiential travel as consumers desire and choose to buy experiences rather than things. Thus, travelers are in-

creasingly seeking to participate in unique, authentic and more engaging travel experiences, to get to know as much as possible the culture of a destination, and to actively participate in the customs and traditions as well as the daily lives of local communities (WTTC, 2019). Although the first research on tourism experiences appeared in the 1960s (Thorne, 1963; Maslow, 1964), it is only recently that tourism research has turned its attention to sustainable experiences as a potential means of gaining competitive advantage while simultaneously fostering the sustainability of various destinations and the perceived value of the experience (Chen, Chen, & Lee, 2011; Liu, Horng, Chou, Chen, & Lin, 2016; Lu, Liu, & Lai, 2017; Poudel & Nyaupane, 2013).

Pine & Gilmore (1999) introduced the concept of experience in the economy, proposing 4 different experiential dimensions: a. education, b. entertainment, c. aesthetics and d. escape. Specifically, according to Pine & Gilmore (1999), when customers-visitors perceive that they will learn something, are entertained, are absorbed in what they are doing by actively participating in the experience, then the specific experience is considered substantial and acquires meaning. Therefore, meaningful experiences refer to those experiences that can be transformed and stimulate new and deeper meanings (Kotler, 1997) as well as those whose result brings about lasting change in the individual (Smit & Melissen, 2018). Therefore, meaningful and memorable experiences arise from people's active interactions with those around them, which are influenced by products in specific cultural, social, and physical contexts (Lindberg, Hansen, & Eide, 2014; Mossberg, 2007), as they also arise from people's active participation in the production of the experience (Assiouras et al., 2022; Alsos, Eide, & Madsen, 2014; Fynes & Lally, 2008).

According to O' Sullivan & Spangler (1998), the experience economy is based on three types of actors: a. companies or infusers that produce their products, b. service providers or enhancers that provide experiences with the aim of increasing the level of satisfaction of customers-consumers and c. experience creators that provide experiences as the main result of their activity. Schmitt (1999) characterizes experience as a complex process through which each consumer has the ability to think, feel, engage and interact with the consumer goods of the company.

In particular, regarding the dimensions of tourism experiences, Aho (2001) divides them into a. educational experiences that offer new knowledge to travelers, b. emotional experiences that influence and provoke various emotions in travelers, c. practical experiences that contribute either to the acquisition of new skills or to the improvement of existing ones and finally d. change experiences that concern experiences that affect the way travelers live or think in the long term or short term.

Several other researchers have examined and delved into the holistic nature of experience. Getz (2007) argues that the concept of tourism experience is described according to its various dimensions such as consciousness, knowledge, skills and emotions as well as referring to the multiple meanings of the verb experience under the prism of emotions, events and perceptions. In addition, Getz (2007) proposed 3 components/ingredients that make up the structure of an experience: a. the synthetic component which includes the actual behavior of individuals, b. the emotional component which concerns the feelings of individuals related to their experiences and c. the cognitive component which refers to the memory, understanding and evaluation of the various experiences that individuals acquire. Each of the above components is characterized by its own distinctive nature and consequently can be achieved in many different ways (Getz D., 2007).

Palmer (2010) argues that the tourist experience refers to its cognitive, emotional and behavioral nature, distinguishing its verbal meanings, namely the concept of experience as a



noun and the concept of “to experience” as a verb, as well as their different interpretation through the different languages (Palmer, 2010). According to Palmer, experience on the one hand is a learning outcome that has to do with predictable behaviors while on the other hand it is linked to processes whose innovation can result in the unpredictable response of travelers-customers. The discussion around the part of experience in the context of marketing has a long history. According to Abbott (1955) where he refers to Holbrook (2006, p. 40) it is noted that “experiences are acquired through activities. In order to realize these experiences, physical objects are usually required for the services of people. Therefore, people want products because they want the experience, they hope these products will provide” (Holbrook, 2006). Bagdare & Jain (2013) understand travel experiences as the sum of cognitive, sensory, emotional and behavioral reactions that are created throughout the tourism market process, which includes a comprehensive series of interactions with travelers-consumers, processes, objects and the environment (Bagdare & Jain, 2013).

Previous empirical research on experiences has highlighted the importance of storytelling, aesthetics, and authenticity for both visitor-consumer satisfaction and for creating a deeper emotional attachment that will stimulate their loyalty (Breiby, 2015; Prebensen, Woo, Chen, & Uysal, 2012). Furthermore, it is important to mention that the co-creation of an experience can involve many stakeholders beyond simple travelers-tourists and their creation of value, which contributes to the authenticity and uniqueness of a destination (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009). It is worth noting that different perceptions of tourism experiences have common elements, such as being related to situations and encounters that require the participation and attention of the individuals experiencing them and lead to some form of learning and/or memories combined with specific emotions (Breiby, Duedahl, Oian, & Ericsson, 2020).

According to the above, the definition of travel experiences is a complex process and although there are many researchers who have tried to create a general and universally accepted definition, there is no single prevailing theory to date (Volo, 2009). Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that experiences are a new valuable “product” that has created new prospects in tourism as it has brought additional income to businesses, while at the same time being an important incentive for the emergence of a new form of tourism in recent years, which is experiential tourism (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003).

It is now considered an indisputable fact that the pursuit of authentic experiences is one of the usual motivations of tourists. An authentic travel experience enables the individual to gain an in-depth understanding of the destination, to connect meaningfully with the local people, culture and environment of the destination while showing the necessary respect for the conservation of resources with their sustainable dimension. Several studies claim that the authentic travel experience is linked to the satisfaction of the visitor as well as to the long-term commitment to revisit the destination or to recommend it to their close and wider social circle. In this context, the awareness of travelers regarding the importance of the natural environment, wildlife as well as the preservation of natural resources, has led to the search for authentic experiences close to nature which will have a positive impact on the environment, wildlife, and society.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this research was to investigate the importance of authentic travel experiences from the perspective of sustainability and compliance with the Sustainable Development

opment Goals (SDGs) as well as the degree of tourists' satisfaction experiencing such activities. The purpose of this research and research questions led to the implementation of quantitative inquiry, using structured questionnaires and scope of tourist experiences with strong experiential elements related to the functions of the natural environment.

The population of the survey was incoming tourists who traveled to Greece through organized tourist packages, and which included unique tourism activities of a sustainable nature related to the primary production of local products and the operation of natural ecosystems falling under the Global Sustainable Development Goal 15: "Life on land". During the survey, 688 questionnaires were distributed, of which 409 were returned filled in. The majority of the participants in the research were women at a rate of 65.4%, while the age distribution of the participants belonged to the category of silver & senior tourism where 30.3% were over 65 years old, followed by the age groups from 55 to 64 years old (24.1%) and 45 to 54 years old (17.4%). Regarding the nationality of the respondents, the vast majority of them had American citizenship (66.9%), followed by Australians (14.1%) and Canadians (4.9%). Regarding their educational level, 38.2% had a master's degree, while 36.7% had a higher education degree and also most of the respondents were married at a rate of 56.8%.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding the results of the statistical analysis pertaining to authentic travel experiences, it showed that 93.1% of the participants stated that they consider authentic travel experiences important or very important. A Mann-Whitney test was performed to assess whether men and women's views on authentic travel experiences differed. The results showed that statistically significant differences were observed ( $z = -2.68$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ), with women considering these experiences more important than men. A Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to assess whether participants' views on authentic travel experiences differed according to their age. No statistically significant differences were found (Kruskal-Wallis = 2.50,  $p = 0.475$ ), as all respondents, regardless of age, considered authentic travel experiences to be very important.

Furthermore, the vast majority of respondents (87%) said they agree that authentic travel experiences are a key criterion for choosing their travel program or package. Regarding this statement, a Mann-Whitney test was performed to assess potential differences in the question "Authentic travel experiences are a key criterion for choosing your travel program/package." between men and women. Significant differences were found ( $z = -3.02$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ), with women agreeing more with this statement than male participants. Regarding age no statistically significant differences were observed (Kruskal-Wallis = 0.25,  $p = 0.970$ ), as all respondents, regardless of age, agree that authentic travel experiences are a key criterion for choosing their travel program.

In terms of preferred types of travel experiences, most participants expressed a strong interest in archaeological sites, historical and cultural attractions (28.1%), followed by local arts and culture (27.6%), nature activities (23.5%) and finally gastronomy (20.9%).

Furthermore, regarding their budget, 24.3% said they were willing to allocate 9 to 10% of their budget for authentic travel experiences on their future trips, while 15.5% said they were willing to allocate more than 10%. Thus, both gender and nationality were correlated with the extra money that tourists are willing to pay to add authentic experiences to their future trips. According to the results of the  $\chi^2$  test to find out if there are differences between men and women in the extra money, they would be willing to spend on authentic

experiences, no significant differences were found ( $\chi^2 = 0.11$ ,  $p = 0.944$ ) between the two genders. Regarding the results of the  $\chi^2$  test depending on their nationality, no significant differences were found ( $\chi^2 = 2.01$ ,  $p = 0.367$ ) as similar amounts were willing to be spent by participants of other nationalities as well as by Americans.

Regarding the main motivations for choosing a travel experience among education, entertainment, aesthetics and escapism according to the 4 different dimensions of Pine & Gilmore experiences, the respondents chose in higher percentages education (55.6%) and entertainment (43.8 %).

Regarding the general statement that "sustainable tourism and experiences that have a positive impact on the environment, local society and wildlife protection are key criteria for choosing your future trips", half of the participants, at 50.2%, stated they either strongly or very strongly agreed with this statement. A Mann-Whitney test was performed to assess potential differences in the above statement in relation to gender. No significant differences were found ( $z = -1.49$ ,  $p = 0.137$ ) in the opinions of the two genders, however it is observed that women consider sustainable tourism and experiences that have a positive impact on the environment to be a more important criterion for choosing trips compared to male participants. A Kruskal-Wallis test was also performed to assess possible differences in the above statement in relation to age and level of education. No significant differences were found in relation to age (Kruskal-Wallis = 4.81,  $p = 0.186$ ), however, it is observed that participants up to 34 years of age consider sustainable tourism and experiences that have a positive impact on the environment to be a more important criterion for choosing trips compared to those who were older. Regarding the level of education, the results of the test showed that no significant differences were found (Kruskal-Wallis = 5.12,  $p = 0.077$ ), however, it is observed that participants with university education consider sustainable tourism and experiences that have a positive impact on the environment to be a more important criterion for choosing trips. Finally, it was found, according to the Spearman correlation coefficient, that for participants who consider authentic travel experiences as the main criterion for choosing their travel program, they also consider the choice of sustainable tourism and experiences with a positive impact on the environment, the local community and the protection of wildlife to be a very important criterion for their future trips ( $r = 0.321$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The vast majority of participants consider the authentic travel experiences as important and a key criterion in choosing their future travel programs/trips as well as statistically significant differences were observed with women considering these specific experiences more important and agreeing more with the statement that "Authentic travel experiences are a key criterion for choosing your travel program/package." compared to men. This result is consistent with previous studies that showed that women and older people rated an authentic experience higher than other people. The most preferred types of authentic travel experiences of participants are the archaeological sites and local arts & culture. 40% of participants were willing to spend 9% or more of their budget for authentic experiences, a fact that shows the importance of authentic experiences in their trips, with no significant difference found in relation to gender and nationality of participants. The purpose of choosing authentic experiences: higher rates for educational purposes and entertainment followed by the aesthetics of the environment and escapism, however it has already been emphasized by previous research that an experience is not necessarily related exclusively to one of the four dimensions of Pine & Gilmore (1999) and that the experience often has elements from all four dimensions (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011). Sustainable tourism and experiences in line with the SDGs are key criteria for choosing future trips for about half

of the participants (50.2%) with women, participants up to 34 years old & those with a university education considering this statement more important. Finally, a very important conclusion is that authentic experience is related to sustainable experience which is a very important indication for the future of tourism.

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## **A BOTTOM UP POLICY CONSULTATION PROCESS CONTRIBUTING TO CRETE’S INNOVATION MILLIEU IN THE CULTURAL TOURISM COMPLEX**

**Markos KOURGIANTAKIS**

Department of Business Administration and Tourism, Hellenic Mediterranean University, Crete,  
PO Box 73004, Greece, E-mail: mkourg@hmu.gr

**Eirini PAPADAKI**

Department of Business Administration and Tourism, Hellenic Mediterranean University, Crete,  
PO Box 73004, Greece, E-mail: eirinipapadaki@hmu.gr

**Alexandros APOSTOLAKIS**

Department of Business Administration and Tourism, Hellenic Mediterranean University, Crete,  
PO Box 73004, Greece, E-mail: aapostolakis@hmu.gr

### **ABSTRACT**

The current work aims at revealing conceptual and practical pathways for policy makers and practitioners alike, in providing an innovative boost in cultural heritage tourism in Crete, by emphasizing on cultural and tourism resources as strong contributors in the regional tourism economic ecosystem. The regional innovation strategy of Crete (RIS3) for the upcoming programmatic period (2021-2027) is prioritizing the adoption of smart solutions in order to boost regional competitiveness. The cultural tourism complex is one of the key policy priorities selected by the regional authority as key priority areas for Crete. The regional authority has initiated a bottom – up consultation process through a number of focus – group discussions in order to identify areas of policy bottlenecks and subsequent improvements. The analysis of the empirical findings identified a number of barriers and came up with a number of policy recommendations

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for the cultural tourism complex in Crete. Starting from the barriers, the most prominent barriers were associated with cultural inertia, technologically induced cultural alienation and technological myopia. Following the identification of barriers and policy bottlenecks, researchers offered a number of policy solutions and recommendations. More specifically they focused upon solutions to cure the problem of 'flawed integrity' through the adoption of not only product and process innovations, but also managerial and institutional ones.

Keywords: Culture, Tourism, Crete, Regional innovation strategy, bottom – up consultation

## INTRODUCTION

The present research contribution builds around (Meyer *et al.* 2022) aims at revealing the increasing role of the cultural and tourism sector in regional policy design and implementation, illustrated through the regional (Region of Crete) smart specialization strategy (S3) within the regional innovation strategy (RIS). Following the extant literature in the field (Gustafsson and Lazzaro 2021), there is a gap in the literature linking cultural tourism and smart specialisation strategies (S3) at both national and international levels. This has provided a clear research direction for the research team.

At the same time, at a regional level, the significance of the cultural tourism sector/industries has been very well documented (Apostolakis and Jaffry, 2006). In particular, various studies emphasize the impact of the cultural tourism sector in terms of its social and economic contribution to the regional economy. Despite this heightened attention though, the regional authority's plans to infuse more innovativeness in culture and tourism have been met with limited success in the previous programmatic period (2014 - 2020). A natural question thus arises. How could the regional authority of Crete introduce greater levels of innovation in the cultural tourism ecosystem and what constitutes "smartness" in cultural tourism?

Accordingly, the aim of the paper is defined twofold. *On the one hand*, the paper aims to address the major shortcoming described in earlier parts of the paper. More particularly, the paper aims to deal with - explain the factors that lead towards the relatively low account of smart specialisation initiatives at the cultural tourism complex in Crete currently. *On the other hand*, the paper aims to inform decision makers and officials regarding the direction of policy making in the area, and more specifically, likely policy initiatives that need to be taken in order to strengthen technological innovation and smartness in the cultural tourism complex in Crete. In other words, identify ways to influence the competitiveness of the milieu under current conditions.

## NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

The fact that linkages between culture, tourism and S3 policies at a regional level are extremely difficult to come by (Biagi *et al.* 2021, Marasco *et al.* 2024) provides a good perspective for the current research undertaking. In fact, recent research in the field indicates that tourism centered policies are extremely underrepresented at RIS3 strategies at a European level (Marasco *et al.* 2024). Based on this observation, it is not surprising that the same type of problem is also to be met at a national (Greek) and regional (Crete) level as well. Based on anecdotal evidence, the proportion of culture and tourism related projects being funded during the previous programmatic period (2014 - 2020) under RIS Crete were extremely low. In fact, one of the main criticisms surrounding the impact of the previous smart specialization programmatic period (2014- 2020) revolved around the fact that it did not manage to stir innovative activity among the tourism entrepreneurial community on the island. As a result of the overhaul of the policy and decision making process that ensued, the regional authority of Crete decided to re-evaluate major aspects of its RIS for the upcoming programmatic period (2017-2021).

*Inter alia*, the regional authority of Crete decided to initiate a new consultation process in order to better prepare for the upcoming programmatic 2021 - 2027 period. Acknowledging the multifaceted, decentralized, and more targeted interventions that regional S3 require (Foray2014), the regional authority of Crete decided to re-appraise the consultation process used in order to inform the previous RIS. In particular, the previous consultation process to inform the RIS (2014 - 2020) was lengthy, bureaucratic, and rather superficial in its approach. In this respect, one major criticism of the previous approach is that it did not take into consideration the need to foster coordination and cooperation for what is a very complex service, at a regional level (Battaglia *et al.*2012).

Thus, in order for the regional authority of Crete to align with current practices in the literature (Bours *et al.* 2022, Foray 2014, Battaglia *et al.*2012), they have decided to embark on a bottom - up consultation process (Foray 2014), as a means of providing a more targeted and informed policy formulation outcome. According to Foray (2014), the bottom - up consultation process is based upon the notion of the entrepreneurial discovery process (Estensoro and Larrea 2023). Accordingly, stakeholders from all aspects of the quadruple helix engage in a consultation process in order to identify potential new initiatives and competitive advantages as well as challenges and policy priority areas.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to address this policy shortcoming, the regional authority has decided to introduce a novel consultation approach as far as the cultural tourism complex is concerned. In particular, the regional authority decided to undertake a bottom – up consultative approach before the actual call for funding for the 2021 – 2027 programmatic period commences. As part of this policy initiative, the regional authority of Crete decided to organize a number of focus – groups, one per smart specialization pillar. These focusgroups were tasked with identifying key priority areas, areas of policy bottlenecks, and areas that the previous programmatic period did not shed too much light on. Even though this issue has been identified long time ago (Nikolaidis and Bakouros 2009, Vourdoubas 2019),it has not been properly addressed so far in an organized fashion. From that perspective, the formulation and operation of these focus groups on smart culture and tourism complex represent a form of managerial innovation in the industry (Hjalager, 1997).

In addition, the focus group’s mandate revolved around the barriers and obstacles affecting the implementation of the RIS3 Crete in the culture and tourism fields. The regional authority of Crete adopted the focus group approach, which is a research methodological tool that is widely used internationally to investigate specific and topical thematic areas in order to draw conclusions, to form a framework for future processes and actions in the region.

A group of eleven stakeholders was selected, contacted upon and subsequently consented in participating at the focus group discussions. The focus group met three times in total, over a period of eight (8) months. During those three meetings, the composition of the focus group varied according to the topic under discussion. On top of that, during the three consultation meetings, additional participants were invited to the round table discussion, depending on their role and their expertise. So, overall, approximately 15 participants were invited at each round table discussion. During all three stages, the regional authority maintained a purely impartial role, trying to maintain a neutral position throughout the selection process.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Opportunities and Threats in Culture and Tourism in Crete

During the 1st meeting of the focus group, the discussion revolved around the opportunities and threats experiencing the cultural tourism complex in Crete. The *first*, to emerge from the



discussion was that there is potential opportunity for Crete to turn to an untapped pool of visitors that the sector is not targeting. Participants focused mainly on armed forces personnel (domestic and foreign), as well as migrant communities whose third generation members want to strengthen links with Crete, or Greece. What is more, these segments of latent tourism demand could bring their own perspectives in the foreground and enrich both cultural and tourism narrative with new information and material. In this respect, the comments made by focus participants align with the conclusions reached by Katiniotis and Botsis (n.d.).

*Second*, respondents argued very strongly in favor of a more targeted story-telling effort, making more use of AI and VR technologies. Through story-telling, local destinations and cultural tourist attractions could revive and re-invigorate their content and information provided to potential visitors. The only requirement is that the destination has clearly targeted the group of visitors that it wishes to focus upon. Additionally, policy makers and practitioners alike should not only focus on the relative familiar and well known information and messages from cultural resources, but instead aim to instrumentalize less well known and more current aspects of local cultural tradition. What was also of interest was the fact that participants argued that story - telling would be an innovative approach to mass tourist destinations such as Crete, considering the fact that it could support interest for multiple or repeated visits at a destination.

In terms of the actual threats that stakeholders were able to identify within the cultural tourism complex in the region, the discussion concentrated in three main areas of concern. First, it was widely recognized that *cultural inertia* (Ronchini 2019, Quezada *et al.* 2012) was one major inhibiting factor when attempting to introduce innovative business concepts in tourism. In this respect, the paper aligns with the evidence provided by Terkenli and Georgoula (2021) and Quezada *et al.* (2012) in the sense that local stakeholders tend to become very defensive with their cultural heritage (Ronchini, 2019). In other words, local stakeholders tend to become fixated over time with static perceptions associated with cultural heritage and cultural resources, and thus unwilling to consider new ways to expose and highlight it (Luo and Graburn, 2023).

In turn, the second threat put forward to account for the relatively low levels of innovative activity in the cultural tourism complex is the distance and partial ignorance of younger stakeholders to matters pertaining to culture and cultural resources. More specifically, the paradox that has been identified in this case associates culture and cultural resources with technological innovation. Thus, instead of technology having a positive effect on cultural expansion and cultural empowerment of the local population, it actually alienates them even more from local culture (Froner, 2017). In fact, participants to the focus group argued that local cultural identity wanes due to technological advances and the role of technology in the daily routine.

#### How to foster competitiveness in cultural tourism

During the focus group meetings, respondents highlighted three (3) broad areas in terms of ways to foster competitiveness in the cultural tourism complex in Crete. Indicatively, they mentioned the issue of *flawed integrity* and the issue of providing information in a unified way, the issue of supporting innovation in the cultural tourism sector within the existing framework and finally the need for a more supply side oriented perspective when thinking about innovation in Crete.

More specifically, participants argued that one way to advance innovation and smartness in a cultural tourism context in Crete would be through addressing the issue of *flawed integrity* (Bowman, 2013). In particular, they argued that firms and incumbents do not opt for smart and innovative solutions in the cultural tourism field out of fear that if things go pair-shaped at some stage, there would be difficult for them to carry on working as normal. Implicitly, this is also related to cost issues and the fact that it is a frequent business practice in Greece innovative and smart solutions to be discredited and fall into disuse whenever the funding from the central government runs out. Hence, in order to avoid the financial burden of maintaining any technologically innovative solution, they instead opt for conventional solutions that they know are reliable and relatively cheap to maintain, rather than supporting a new technological solution that

may be better now, but also costly to maintain in the long run. What all this implies is that local businesses and local stakeholders active in the field of culture and tourism have to be convinced about the operability of any new technological advancement in the field, as well as enhancing potential synergies that could emerge from joint business efforts to take up such smart solutions.

Second, focus group participants argued that in order to intensify the take up of smart and technological innovation in the cultural tourism complex - milieu, policy makers ought to convince suppliers and practitioners alike about the utility and advantages of these business initiatives and processes. In other words, business people, practitioners and managers alike need to be better informed about the business case behind the introduction of technologically advanced routines and tools into the cultural tourism complex. Essentially, focus group participants confirmed the theory of marketing myopia in the cultural and tourism complex with respect to smart initiatives (Villarino and Font 2015, Williams *et al.* 2020). At the macro level this smart marketing myopia implies that policy making and policy efforts at the regional and national level have to focus on the supply side, as opposed to the demand side only. Understanding how the supply side perceives and accepts innovative activity could provide valuable insights into market positioning and customer engagement (Gustafsson and Ghanbarpour, 2024). So far, the discussion around smartness and the promotion of technological innovation in culture and tourism were predominantly focused on tourists' preferences, and largely ignored suppliers, businesses and practitioners. What the existing empirical findings suggest is that policy and decision makers ought to adopt a more encompassing strategy when it comes to smart specialisation. Smart specialisation needs to be relevant for the business world as well in order to appreciate its significance and potential contribution. In addition, this also implies further training and educating professionals in the fields of culture and tourism in order to understand the full potential of such initiatives.

Extending this point further, one could add that on top of business owners and practitioners on the island, natives and residents on the island could also be part of this type of initiatives. Along with the business world, local residents also need to be educated about the benefits and advantages that greater technological innovation and smart solutions bring on the table. Educating them on the potential benefits of technological innovation in the cultural complex will offer the opportunity to get closer to local cultural heritage and cultural resources and become more appreciative overall. The argument is that more educated and more concerned stakeholders make more committed ambassadors of these resources. Hence, enhancing smart specialisation in the field does not entail better business prospects, but also entails wider social benefits for the region overall (Nogueira *et al.* 2017, Williams *et al.* 2020).

The third and final point regarding the facilitation of smartness in the cultural tourism sector concerns the fragmented nature of similar initiatives in the past. Participants to the focus group discussions argued that cultural tourism competitiveness in Crete could benefit tremendously from a policy initiative that would ensure the compatibility and interconnectedness of smart initiatives and technological applications that take place in oblivion to what is happening elsewhere. In particular, participants in the consultation process argued that contrary to popular belief, there are plenty of examples at the regional level, where various stakeholders introduce smart and technologically advanced solutions in the cultural tourism field. Instead, all these initiatives are usually done on a piece-meal, fragmented and case-by-case perspective. This policy outcome could be amended twofold. On the one hand, policy makers, when designing the next round of policy interventions in the field, should be placing specific assessment requirements regarding the interconnectivity and inter-operability of projects to be selected.

Additionally, policy makers and funding organizations ought to ensure, or support financially projects and ideas that would ensure an even greater focus on local stakeholders, as opposed to catering for visitors' and tourists preferences only. Thus, contrary to what is the case with the majority of applications of technological innovations in tourism and culture (where the focus is on the demand side), one policy recommendation could point towards a more encompassing and holistic approach to smart specialization strategies, and one that would include local stakeholders (business people and locals) as well. Hence, rather than focusing almost

exclusively on the technology readiness level of (TRL) of new and upcoming technological and smart solutions, we propose a model whereby TRL is combined with a social acceptance and readiness level (SARL). We argue that this may be a more appropriate and relevant approach to stimulate further technological innovation in the field.

## CONCLUSION

Crete's regional authority efforts have now started to focus on preparing the ground for the new programmatic period (2021 - 2027) in the regional innovation strategy (RIS3 Crete). As part of these preparations, the regional authority is setting up for the first time a bottom up process of business discovery process. One of the reasons and motivation for the regional authority to adopt a bottom - up consultation process, rather than aiming for a more straight forward and perhaps less cumbersome consultation procedure was the fact that the outcome of the previous programmatic period (2014 - 2020) produced limited success in terms of innovation and smart specialization tools in the cultural and tourism field at a regional level. Hence, the need to consider an alternative consultation process.

The consultation process was undertaken over a number of meetings with the participation from all aspects of the quadruple helix. The consultation process lasted for approximately eight (8) months and was carried over four (4) meetings. Overall, the meetings identified a number of barriers and came up with a number of policy recommendations for the cultural tourism complex in Crete. Starting from the barriers, the most prominent barriers were associated with cultural inertia, technologically induced cultural alienation and technological myopia. Following the identification of barriers and policy bottlenecks, researchers offered a number of policy solutions and recommendations. More specifically they focused upon solutions to cure the problem of 'flawed integrity' through the adoption of not only product and process innovations, but managerial and institutional ones. They argued in favor of more encompassing and holistic solutions to smart specialisation strategy, ones that would include local stakeholder and not only visitors. Finally, the recommendations focused on a policy overhaul whereby smart specialization and innovativeness in the field will not be measured exclusively through TRL but also through SARL model.

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## WELLNESS TOURISM RESEARCH: CULTURAL DIMENSIONS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

### **Vasiliki KARAGIANNI**

PhD Candidate, Department of Economics and Sustainable Development, School of Environment,  
Geography and Applied Economics, Harokopio University of Athens  
El. Venizelou 70 Ave, Kallithea 17676, Athens, Greece  
00 30 69 7664 1712  
[ykarayianni@hua.gr](mailto:ykarayianni@hua.gr)

### **Petros KALANTONIS**

Professor, Department of Tourism Management, School of Administrative, Economics and Social  
Sciences, University of West Attica  
[pkalant@uniwa.gr](mailto:pkalant@uniwa.gr)

### **Despina SDRALI**

Associate Professor, Department of Economics and Sustainable Development, School of  
Environment, Geography and Applied Economics, Harokopio University of Athens,  
[dsdrali@hua.gr](mailto:dsdrali@hua.gr)

### **ABSTRACT**

During the last two decades, wellness tourism has been one of the fastest growing market segments on a global scale. Nowadays, wellness tourism accounts for 11.6% of the global wellness expenditures and remains the fourth largest sector of the wellness economy. However, a confusion regarding the terms “health tourism”, “medical tourism” and “wellness tourism” is still being observed. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the exact conceptual framework of wellness tourism and to identify its components through a contemporary, holistic perspective, focusing -mainly- on its cultural dimension. In order to meet the wellness tourism products demand, wellness tourism must be viewed through a broad perspective, that takes into consideration all the dimensions of wellness. However, recent studies have demonstrated some links between wellness tourism and culture, showing that culture could be viewed as an emerging component of the wellness tourism offer system. The literature regarding the wellness tourists’ characteristics has revealed that they are, primarily, interested in achieving and maintaining a sense of well-being. Specifically, wellness tourists are currently being characterized as “active health seekers”, indicating that they are highly interested in their personal health, while, at the same time, they are determined to play an important role in its maintenance. Finally, the sustainable development of wellness tourism requires high quality, unique infrastructures and resources and must follow specific rules and prerequisites. In any case, wellness tourism must be connected to other special-interest forms of tourism, in order to lead to the sustainable development of the destinations.

**Keywords:** wellness, wellness tourism, wellness tourism offer systems, culture, intangible cultural heritage, sustainable development

## INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, wellness tourism has been one of the fastest growing market segments on a global scale, since more and more people choose to visit destinations and infrastructures that provide wellness services, such as sport facilities, spa and beauty treatments, rehabilitation programs, spiritual activities and occupational health therapies (Dini and Pencarelli, 2020; Kazakov and Oyner, 2021). This trend has been attributed to two major factors. The first one relates to the fact that the WHO has integrated the concepts of fitness and well-being into its global health policy, while the second relates to the people's increased awareness of personal health due to their increased overall education (Koncul, 2012). However, a confusion regarding the terms "health tourism", "medical tourism" and "wellness tourism" has been observed (Χατζηγεωργίου και Σιμέλη, 2021). Apart from that, since 1990, the term wellness has been used widely, in order to describe products and services that had little or no connection at all to health and well-being. To date, many hotels arbitrarily claim to offer wellness tourism services, due to the absence of explicit and strict standards regarding both the definition and the operation of wellness resorts (Dini and Pencarelli, 2020). In any case, wellness tourism development must follow specific rules and prerequisites in order to lead to the sustainable development of the destinations (Vasileiou, Tsartas and Stogiannidou, 2016). The purpose of the present study was to investigate the exact conceptual framework of wellness tourism and to identify its components through a contemporary, holistic perspective, focusing -mainly- on its cultural dimension. In addition, both the wellness tourists' characteristics and the components of a sustainable wellness destination have been examined.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to the Global Wellness Institute (2018), in 2017 the global wellness tourism economy reached 639.4 billion dollars, while, according to the 2024 Global Wellness Institute Report, in 2022 the global wellness tourism economy reached 651 billion dollars.

The term "wellness economy" is being used in order to describe the industries that allow consumers to integrate wellness activities into their daily lives. It encompasses the following sectors: personal care and beauty, healthy eating, nutrition and weight loss, physical activity, wellness tourism, public health, prevention and personalized medicine, traditional and complementary medicine, wellness real estate, mental wellness, spas, workplace wellness and springs (Global Wellness Institute, 2024).

Regarding the separate wellness economy sectors, wellness tourism has been the fastest-growing one, until 2020. However, it has been shown that the COVID-19 pandemic had the most negative impact on this sector. In particular, in 2019, wellness tourism expenditures reached 720.4 billion dollars, while, in 2020, they decreased to 350.6 billion dollars. Despite the fact that the wellness tourism expenditures still remain at 87-90% of the corresponding 2019 level (Global Wellness Institute, 2023), nowadays, wellness tourism accounts for 11.6% of the global wellness expenditures and remains the fourth largest sector of the wellness economy (Global Wellness Institute, 2024).

Furthermore, the confusion observed regarding the terms "health tourism", "medical tourism" and "wellness tourism", should also be mentioned. In Greece the relevant legislation framework was implemented in 2020. According to this, health tourism is defined as a special-interest form tourism, focusing on providing high level services, related to both illness prevention and the treatment or the improvement of the tourists' physical, mental and spiritual health. Furthermore,

according to the current legislation framework, health tourism encompasses medical tourism, dental tourism, thermalism tourism and wellness tourism. Regarding the separate forms of health tourism mentioned above, wellness tourism has been investigated to a lesser extent (Χατζηγεωργίου και Σιμέλη, 2021).

## **METHODOLOGY**

A critical review of the relevant literature published during the last two decades (2003-2023) was conducted for the purposes of the present study.

The main research themes that emerged regarding wellness tourism were divided into three main categories:

1. wellness conceptualization
2. tourist behavior in wellness tourism context and
3. sustainability and impact on destinations, local communities, businesses and tourists.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### *1. Wellness conceptualization*

The roots of wellness can be traced back into ancient history. However, wellness is considered a modern term and its conceptualization is subjective and directly depends on the context and the individual. In general, the current approach of the term tends to be holistic (Dillette, Douglas, and Andrzejewski, 2020).

Wellness is viewed as a lifestyle choice that leads to the balance of the body, the mind and the spirit. The term “body” is used to describe the physical wellness. On the other hand, the term “mind” refers to social wellness, intellectual wellness and emotional wellness. In particular, social wellness describes the ways in which people try to maintain satisfying relationships with both other people and the environment. Intellectual wellness refers to the persons’ ability to learn, while it also describes the ways in which people use the knowledge acquired. Emotional wellness refers to the persons’ ability to control and express their feelings, to accept stressful situations as part of life and to accept new ideas, while it involves feelings of self-esteem. Finally, the term “spirit” is used to describe spiritual wellness in the sense of the role of spiritual direction in life. In any case, wellness must be viewed as a multidimensional situation, highly affected by the environment (Meikassandra, Prabawa and Mertha, 2020).

Furthermore, some researchers have added to the dimensions of wellness mentioned above the environmental dimension and the occupational dimension (Smith and Kelly, 2006). According to the Global Wellness Institute (2024), wellness refers to the active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health.

After having defined the terms “health tourism” and “wellness” (Lee, Han and Ko, 2020), one can further define the terms “wellness tourism” and “medical tourism”. Wellness tourism refers to people who travel with the explicit aim or principal motivation of improving their physical, social, intellectual, emotional and spiritual well-being, while medical tourism refers to people who travel to receive treatment for a diagnosed disease or condition or to seek enhancement. They are motivated by lower cost of care, higher quality care, better access to care or access to care not available at home. In any case, the services provided are reactive to illnesses, medically necessary, invasive and overseen by medical staff (Χατζηγεωργίου και Σιμέλη, 2021). Further, regarding the

main difference observed between medical tourists and wellness tourists, the former travel to treat medical conditions, while the latter travel to maintain or improve their health (Peršić and Jancović, 2012).

In order to meet the wellness tourism products demand, wellness tourism must be viewed through a holistic, broad perspective, that takes into consideration all the dimensions of wellness. Having mentioned this, it becomes apparent that the wellness tourism offer systems include resources such as services related to the care of body and mind, spas, hot springs and the natural environment, as well as cultural elements of the destination, like enogastronomy, sports and events and other. In any case, the offered -within the framework of wellness tourism- products and services are certainly voluntary, non-medical and non-invasive (Dini and Pencarelli, 2020).

Recent studies have demonstrated some links between wellness tourism and culture, showing that culture could be viewed as an emerging component of the wellness tourism offer system. However, what should be stressed is that the relevant literature refers -mainly- to China, due to the fact that its cultural and natural resources consist the principal wellness tourism resources of the country (Heung and Kucukusta, 2012). As a matter of fact, China is the strongest wellness market in Asia (Global Wellness Institute, 2024). This observation has been attributed to the fact that, among all Asian destinations promoting wellness tourism, China has the most sophisticated relevant culture, as well as abundant natural and human resources (Kucukusta and Heung, 2012).

As long as it concerns the recent findings regarding the cultural dimensions of wellness tourism, the following are to be noted. First of all, in Chinese culture, the key to maintaining good health and achieving longevity is found in the maintenance of harmony and balance both in and between the social and the physical environment. Furthermore, wellness culture has always been a part of the Chinese culture, while the traditional Chinese medicine, as well as numerous traditional therapeutic and cultural resources are major components of the country's wellness tourism offer systems (Heung and Kucukusta, 2012). In summary, the country's culture and, in particular, the wellness culture derived from religious practices, like Taoism, the traditional Chinese medicine, its natural and human resources, the increasing number of bath houses, spa centers and spa brands, as well as the country's rapidly developing economy, consist the drivers of the wellness tourism sector development in China (Kucukusta and Heung, 2012).

In an effort to explain the impact of Chinese culture on the healing process, it should be noted that, in general, Chinese people turn to alternative Chinese traditional health practices very often. Furthermore, the Chinese culture indicates that, among all possible therapeutic elements, social contexts, certain symbolic landscapes of longevity and the natural environment have the greatest therapeutic impact. In any case, though, the Chinese culture defines how practices relates to health should be applied. Specifically, health related practices involve the natural environment, traditional physical exercises, the development of harmonic social relationships and the knowledge that healing is experienced (Huang and Xu, 2018; Huang and Xu, 2014).

Additionally, various events, pilgrimage and the local gastronomy could be viewed as cultural elements of the wellness tourism offer systems. In particular, regarding the events, the recent research findings show that the inclusion of festivals and events in the wellness tourism offer systems would expand the concept of well-being and enhance the sector's development, as the organization of regional events could facilitate wellness tourism promotion. On the other hand, it has been shown that health-related resources attract festival spectators (Hjalager and Flagestad, 2011; Yoo, Lee and Lee, 2015; Heung and Kucukusta, 2012). Recent research findings regarding pilgrimage as a cultural element of the wellness tourism offer system indicate an overlap among the sources of spiritual, religious and wellness tourism. In general, pilgrimage is defined as a journey undertaken for religious and spiritual purposes. In that sense, pilgrimage could directly be



linked to wellness tourism, since it often results in enhanced physical well-being and internal understanding, while it can be viewed as a chance for revitalization and a learning experience that could be integrated into everyday life (Devereux and Carnegie, 2006; McGettigan, 2016). Finally, it is well known that gastronomy is part of the cultural heritage. As such, gastronomy could also be viewed as a cultural element of the wellness tourism offer systems, since it has been shown that gastronomic experiences tend to enhance wellness tourists' holistic wellness. Furthermore, it has been shown that, during their travel, wellness tourists are interested in consuming nutritious, fresh and well-cooked food, that supports the local community (Andreu, Font-Barnet and Roca, 2021; Dillette, Douglas and Andrzejewski, 2020; Gálvez, *et al.*, 2017).

## *2. Tourist behavior in wellness tourism context*

The literature regarding the wellness tourists' characteristics has revealed that wellness tourists are, predominantly, female, aged 35 to 55 years old. Most of them have received middle or higher education and they belong to higher income groups. Additionally, most of them have increased professional responsibilities. Wellness tourists present higher expenditures. Finally, they are environmentally sensitive and, during their travel, they seek personal development through their emotional, spiritual and psychological connection to both other travelers and the residents of the places they visit.

Regarding the tourists' behavior in the wellness tourism context, both the wellness tourists' characteristics and the wellness tourism offer systems have been examined. The research examining the wellness tourists' characteristics focuses, mainly, on the motivation factors as well as the benefits sought. In general, wellness tourists are interested in achieving and maintaining a sense of well-being. Specifically, wellness tourists are currently being characterized as "active health seekers", indicating that they are highly interested in their personal health, while, at the same time, they are determined to play an important role in its maintenance (Smith and Kelly, 2006; Kelly, 2012; Backman *et al.*, 2023; Voigt, Brown and Howat, 2011).

In particular, it has been shown that security and safety are two very important criteria for the wellness tourists, since they seem to be very interested in hygiene at the places they visit. Furthermore, wellness tourists pay attention to the affordability of the services provided within the wellness tourism context, as well as the online reviews of the facilities they plan to use, while they do not seem to pay much attention to the hotel brand. Wellness tourists expect to use specialized services and facilities and they are interested in having meetings with healthcare professionals at the places they choose to visit (Aleksijevits, 2020). Finally, regarding the wellness tourists' motivation, it has been shown that the most important of them include relaxation, implication in various activities, recreation and nature enjoyment (Chen, Prebensen and Huan, 2008).

## *3. Sustainability and impact on destinations, local communities, businesses and tourists*

The relevant literature shows that wellness tourism development improves local economy, as well as the quality of the residents' life, since it enhances entrepreneurship and leads to job creation (Kazakov and Oyner, 2021; Sheldon and Park, 2008; Tabayashi, 2010). Furthermore, it has been shown that the residents' participation in the wellness tourism products development is necessary, since both the local community knowledge and the practices implied in the region must be seriously taken into consideration during this procedure (Kazakov and Oyner, 2021). Finally, the relevant research findings indicate that wellness tourists present high environmental sensitivity and they actively participate in the protection of the natural and cultural environment of the places they visit (Kazakov and Oyner, 2021; Sheldon and Park, 2008; Ilir, 2014).

Regarding the sustainable development of wellness tourism, certain measures need to be taken. First of all, it is important to define the stakeholders, as it has been shown that numerous participants, like the residents, the tourists, various tourism companies, as well as the government, play a crucial role in the sustainable development of wellness tourism. In particular, the implication of local communities in developing this special-interest form of tourism helps the residents obtain the benefits derived from the activities developed within it, while, at the same time it improves its contribution to the national development. Additionally, it has been shown that if the residents understand the concept of wellness tourism, its interrelations to other special forms of tourism and its impact on their lives, it is more likely that the latter will be more actively involved in their community in order to improve their lives' quality. All in all, it has been shown that the stakeholders' active participation in the sustainable wellness tourism development leads to the well-being of the local communities and the improvement of the residents' quality of life. Towards this direction, it is important to promote the collaboration between the academics and the tourism industry, since the well-informed stakeholders could even help the governments make appropriate decisions regarding the development of sustainable wellness tourism (Figueiredo, Abrantes and Costa, 2024; Driuset *et al.*, 2019; Giampiccoli and Saayman, 2018; Hens *et al.*, 2018).

Another factor that should be taken into consideration regarding the wellness tourism sustainable development relates to the impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic and the lessons learned from it. Specifically, it has been found that, regarding the wellness tourism sector, the implementation of recovery strategies is of great importance. Apart from that, the pandemic revealed the importance of investing in technology innovation, as well as in the development of health protocols and digital skills, in order to enhance the industry's resilience to relevant future situations (Figueiredo, Abrantes and Costa, 2024; Baloch *et al.*, 2022).

In general, wellness tourism needs to be managed in a sustainable manner, in order to be a beneficial and profitable industry. In this context, it has been found that the implementation of sustainable practices and the consideration of the tourists' motivations and perceptions are of great importance regarding the long-term success of the wellness tourism sector. Additionally, it has been shown that, in order to provide high quality and attractive services to wellness tourists, it is important to call attention to the tourist experience (Figueiredo, Abrantes and Costa, 2024; Ghosh and Mandal, 2019).

In any case, wellness tourism must be connected to other special-interest forms of tourism (like, for example, gastronomic tourism, religious tourism, pilgrimage tourism and event tourism), in order to lead to the sustainable development of the destinations (Vasileiou, Tsartas and Stogiannidou, 2016).

In conclusion, during the last two decades, wellness tourism has grown rapidly and has become more complex. As a result, the provided services and products still relate to rejuvenation, but they also involve additional leisure activities, relevant to the nature, the culture and other resources. As a result, wellness tourism development requires high quality, unique infrastructures and resources and must follow specific rules and prerequisites, while the available indigenous cultures and unique natural resources of each destination should be seriously taken into consideration during this procedure. In any case, wellness tourism must be connected to other special-interest forms of tourism, in order to lead to the sustainable development of the destinations. Finally, the lessons learned from the recent COVID-19 pandemic and the development of a highly differentiated tourism product could be used to facilitate the conversion of the comparative advantages of the destinations to their competitive advantage.

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## **MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL PRODUCTS AND TOURISM MARKETING ELEMENTS. THE CASE OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF ATHENS.**

**Vasiliki ARISTOGENI**

Philologist (UOA) - Professor in Secondary and Adult Education, MSc in Education and Culture,  
Harokopio University of Athens, MSc in Tourism Management, Hellenic Open University, Greece,  
e-mail: vassiaaristogeni@gmail.com

**Ourania VITOUHADITI**

Professor, Department of Tourism Management, University of West Attica, Greece, e-mail:  
ranivito@uniwa.gr

### **ABSTRACT**

This study deals with cultural heritage management in combination with tourism promotion through the creation of cultural products. Specifically, it identifies parameters of improving the management of four very important archaeological sites of Athens and the creation of cultural routes according to the visitors' opinion. Therefore, the objectives of this paper are: a) to identify visitors' satisfaction levels from various management parameters of four archaeological sites (including the degree of satisfaction with the existence of cultural routes) b) to highlight parameters of effective cultural heritage management (through the creation of cultural routes) and c) to guide towards long-term perspectives in cultural heritage management, tourism marketing and experiential education. The objectives of this paper were achieved through literature review and primary quantitative research. The findings of the primary research reveal the degree of satisfaction of visitors related with the parameters under study. The degree of satisfaction shows that there is a need for more effective management. At the same time, the findings highlight the need for planning cultural routes, as elements that would contribute to the management of cultural resources but also to the understanding of monuments. The work is completed with specific proposals for improving cultural management, but also with proposals for cultural routes within and between sites, elements that enrich the product, contribute to the creation of an enhanced tourism cultural product and lay "solid foundations" for an effective management and marketing of cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** management of cultural products, tourism marketing, cultural routes

### **INTRODUCTION**

The cultural heritage and archaeological sites of a country are studied over time because they constitute an important part of its cultural richness and concern both its past and its future. This paper focuses on the study of four archaeological sites of Athens (Acropolis of Athens, South Slope of Acropolis, Ancient Agora, Kerameikos) because they include monuments of high scientific, historical, national, symbolic, aesthetic, teaching, cultural, tourism value (<https://dpmsdiach.arch.uoa.gr/>) and have not been sufficiently "exploited". Therefore, the objectives of this paper are: a) to identify visitors' satisfaction levels from various management parameters of archaeological sites b) to highlight parameters of effective cultural heritage management (through the creation of cultural routes) and c) to guide towards long-term

perspectives in cultural heritage management, tourism marketing and experiential education. The achievement of the objectives of the study is particularly important because it will contribute to the correction of possible weaknesses, to the upgrading of sites and, also, to effective promotion, elements that will offer substantial experience and knowledge of the history of monuments by visitors (Aristogeni, 2022). Only through this approach cultural and tourism marketing objectives will be achieved in terms of attracting desired target markets, repeat visitors and planning of effective promotion.

Therefore, this study offers knowledge, contributes and guides on the following issues: management of cultural heritage and archaeological sites, effective promotion through an innovative approach (meaning an enriched product through the creation of cultural routes), satisfaction of travel agents' and tour operators' expressed demands as well as education, through didactic and educational cultural routes for students.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### *The importance of the management, protection and promotion of an archaeological site for the enrichment of the cultural tourism product of Athens.*

It has been realized that archaeological and cultural goods and products are characterized by economic-tourism values and can be exploited as wealth-producing resources. The tourism approach to archaeological sites should be done by implementing policy based on research findings, by defining the type of visitors, their expectations and the purpose of their visit.

In addition, cultural heritage concerns much more the present and the future than the past itself (Lowenthal, 1985). In this context, it is particularly important to protect, promote and manage an archaeological site in order to further enrich the tourism product. Furthermore, as Adorno rightly pointed out: Whoever talks about culture speaks at the same time about its management, whether he wants it or not (2000). Consequently, the role of the management and protection of cultural heritage as well as the creation of cultural tourism products that combine values and entertainment is extremely important.

In many cases, archaeological sites are not exploited and allowed to degrade or are not sufficiently exploited, according to the value, rarity and authenticity of the monuments they include. Also, through the interaction between human beings and monuments that represent the past, anthropogenic risks arise, i.e. risks caused by man directly or indirectly, intentionally or negligently, by his action or omission. At the same time, archaeological monuments are also at risk from exposure to environmental conditions, such as sunlight, temperature, humidity, biological attack, etc. but also from natural wear and ravages of time.

The benefit of tourism cultural management is multiple, since the disclosure of visitors' needs and their "translation" into desires add value to visitors. Furthermore, new cultural products, i.e. one of the main variables of marketing enrich further the cultural destination (Gounaris, 2002; Kotler & Keller, 2008; Middleton, 2009; Kotler, 2024). Also, the destination acquires potential for sustainable tourism development and offers tourism cultural products that will potentially differentiate it from competitive destinations.

### *Tourism marketing*

Regarding the field of sustainable tourism, cultural heritage is an integral part of a country's tourism product, but it can also function autonomously as a tourism product addressed to a range of target markets segments (Buttle, 1986; Hawkins, Mothersbaugh & Best., 2007; Kotler & Keller, 2008; Schiffman, Hansen & Kanuk, 2008; Solomon, 2009; Dolnicar, Grün & Leisch, 2018). However, effective management, protection, preservation and marketing are prerequisites for cultural heritage in order to function effectively as a tourism product. After all, an effective

promotion of archaeological sites and cultural heritage is not just about designing advertisements and other communication tools of tourism marketing. A more complex approach is required, that includes the possibility for the product to acquire added value, capable of “meeting” the needs and desires of multiple target markets and making it more attractive than competitive products. However, above all, these archaeological sites must be properly maintained, there must be a cultural management plan and they must offer to the potential tourists incentives to visit and to the visitors experiences and value. Added value can be sought and shaped by identifying a competitive advantage. The competitive advantage of Athens consists in the difference that emerges between the necessary elements of the core product and the sum of all the benefits and experiences associated with providing the product to the visitors. It can cover one or all stages i.e. from the first contact of the visitors with the product, to each contact that follows the provision and experience of the cultural product (Aristogeni, 2022).

### *Cultural routes and enrichment of tourism product*

A cultural route can express the idea of added value beyond the core product. It has both tangible and intangible elements and can be associated with the brand name of the city as a cultural destination. Each route constitutes a sustainable and effective tool of cultural tourism management and a multidimensional and branded cultural tourism “product”, including cultural and environmental appeals. Furthermore, they are provided all seasons throughout the year and consequently extending the tourism season. Offering the required printed and electronic information for every potential visitor, with their digital representation, cultural routes can also be shaped as digital cultural goods (Avgerinou - Kolonia, 1995 & 2009; Silberberg, 1995; Karavasili & Michelakis, 1999; Zirini, Sofikitou & Hatzinikolaou, 2015; Gonçalves, Dorsch, & Figueiredo, 2022; Vujadinović & Jaksic-Stojanovic, 2022).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The sample consisted of 206 people and was a non-probability sample, of 96 men and 110 women, of all ages, 62 civil servants, 67 private employees and 67 students as the main groups. The survey was conducted in March and April 2022. The analysis of the data was based on descriptive statistics (Aristogeni, 2022).

For the purposes of the research and for the further improvement and enrichment of the cultural tourism product of the archaeological sites, it is enlightening to capture the average degree of satisfaction for each of the examined parameters, as it emerged through the visitors' responses. This will identify which parameters need more attention in order to make the management of archaeological sites more efficient.

The degree of satisfaction, from several parameters (cleanliness, vegetation management, marking, explanatory signs, brochures, friendliness - staff guidance, cultural routes) (Aristogeni, 2022), was measured on a five-point scale, ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied, where 5 indicated the highest level of satisfaction and 1 the lowest level of satisfaction. Specifically, 5=Very satisfied, 4=Satisfied, 3=Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 2=Dissatisfied, 1=Very dissatisfied.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The research shows that the archaeological site of the Acropolis has a more efficient management and preservation of the monuments compared to the other three archaeological sites, “leaving” the visitors more satisfied from the parameters mentioned above, with an overall average of 3,38, i.e. from moderate to good. Next, the archaeological site of the Ancient Agora “leaves”

visitors moderately satisfied (overall average 3,01). Following is the archaeological site of the South Slope of the Acropolis with visitors stating that they are neither dissatisfied nor satisfied (overall average 2,86) with its management parameters. Finally, the perception formed by visitors about the archaeological site of Kerameikos regarding its management parameters seems not to be very positive (overall average 2,31) (Aristogeni, 2022).

The results revealed that cultural routes, as parameters for understanding and shaping the route that the visitors could follow (in and between the archaeological sites), record the lowest degree of satisfaction compared to the other parameters in all examined archaeological sites, i.e. 2,52 in Acropolis, 2,15 in Ancient Agora, 2,04 in South Slope of Acropolis, 1,79 in Kerameikos). Also, it should be noted that the term “cultural routes” in many cases had to be explained to the respondents, as it was not fully understood (Aristogeni, 2022).

The degree of satisfaction shows that there is a need for more effective management of cultural heritage in terms of various parameters related to the four archaeological sites. At the same time, the findings highlight the need for planning cultural routes, as elements that would contribute to the management of cultural resources but also to the understanding of monuments and to an enhanced tourism cultural product. All the above findings lead to the following proposals for cultural routes and more effective management of archaeological sites.

In particular, it is proposed to emphasize on cultural routes as strategies in the context of the enriched product, both in terms of their design and in relation to management parameters such as cleaning the archaeological site, explanatory signs, gathering places, educational programs, guided tours, visual material and interactive technological applications. All these will accompany cultural routes and are the prerequisites of their success, in order to systematically highlight the cultural resources of Athens.

### *Proposals*

The cultural routes within and between archaeological sites are elements that contribute to an enriched tourism cultural product, promote cultural heritage and can form the basis for autonomous tourism tours and contents of tourism packages of specialized travel agencies. More specifically, through the research findings that refer to the need for planning cultural routes, the following routes can be proposed: a) “Knowing the Athenian democracy of the time of Pericles” and b) “Following the footsteps of Socrates in Ancient Agora”.

#### *First Cultural Route Proposal: “Knowing the Athenian democracy of the time of Pericles”*

This route focuses on the birth and functioning of democracy that was a crowning moment for humanity, which it marked indelibly. This cultural route will enhance the “dialogue” of the visitors with the monuments and will help them understand their meaning and function, therefore contributing to a more effective management and promotion, as it enriches the cultural tourism product. During the period of democracy, and thanks to democracy, all this brilliant civilization was created, which has remained classic till nowadays. A cultural route that interconnects the archaeological sites of Kerameikos, Ancient Agora, South Slope of the Acropolis (Dionysus Theater) and Acropolis, i.e. the sites studied in the context of this paper and aims at a fuller understanding of their importance and function in antiquity. It is also educational, as it is based on the Funeral Oration of Pericles (Chapter 37), which is considered the most complete political oration in history. This leading political speech was delivered in 431 BC at the “Dimosio Sima” in the archaeological site of Kerameikos, where the prominent Athenians were buried, in order to honor the dead of the first year of the Peloponnesian War.

The four archaeological sites are connected as follows: democracy is the necessary and ideal condition in which theatre could be born and “flourish”, as a result of free expression. Moreover, in the 5th century, the “Ekklesiatou Demou”, the representative organ of the Republic, meaning the



Assembly of all eligible Athenian citizens «practiced» their Democracy at the Ancient Agora, at the Theater of Dionysus or at the Pnyx.

Initially, the participants visit the archaeological site of Kerameikos and locate the point where the “Dimosio Sima” (Public Sign, the most ceremonious road of Ancient Athens) started, near Dipylon. There takes place a revival of the Funeral Oration of Pericles and the basic concepts of Democracy, as he presents it in Chapter 37, i.e. originality - nativeness, majority, egalitarianism, meritocracy, freedom, trust, tolerance, obedience to written and unwritten law, obedience to law out of inner respect, freedom in moderation.

After the discussion on the fundamental principles of Athenian democracy, the route continues to the Ancient Agora, where the Assembly of all eligible citizens (“Ekklesiastou Demou”) gathered and where the visitors can see and discover the historical concept of democracy through the surviving buildings such as the Tholos, the Bouleuterion (Old and New) etc. that will be explained and presented. Specifically, it will be explained that the Council of 500 or Boule (the government of Ancient Athens, which also prepared legislation for the Assembly in the 5th c. BC) met at the Old Bouleuterion at the early 5th c. BC. and at the New Bouleuterion at the late 5th c. BC. Also, it will be described that Tholos or Skias (470 - 465 BC) was the head office of the 50 Prytaneis, who served as the administrative committee (presidents) of the Boule (Council of 500) for an intervening period of 35 or 36 days. After this period, Prytaneis from another tribe took their place, so that till the end of the year representatives of all ten tribes had a turn in the governance. Those in service dined in Tholos, with one-third (i.e. 17) of them staying all night in the building so that there were always available officials in charge (“Explanatory Signs of archaeological site of Ancient Agora”). Tholos was, as it turned out, an annex of Prytaneion (Miller, 2020), which is erroneously identified by many with the subsequent Tholos. In fact, Tholos and Prytaneion are two distinct buildings, but no building has “survived” in Athens that can be identified as the Prytaneion (Schmalz, 2006; Miller, 2020).

After emphasizing on the above, visitors can end up in the ancient theater of Dionysus through a long walk, where they will have the opportunity to admire the place where the birth of theater took place, which is, like democracy, a contribution of Greeks to world culture.

The route can continue with an ascent to the Sacred Rock of the Acropolis. There, emphasis can be placed on the Parthenon frieze and the fact that it depicts the ideology of Democracy, since all citizens participate in the Panathenaic procession, even women and children, who of course had no political rights and did not participate in the Assembly of the eligible citizens (“Ekklesiastou Demou”). For example, women are depicted with canisters (baskets) which contained offerings for the goddess Athena and carried them on the head (kanephoroi, basketbearers) and women or young girls are depicted with jars on the shoulder (hydriaphoroi) (Shear, 2021).

### *Second cultural route proposal: “Following the footsteps of Socrates in Ancient Agora”*

This cultural route is inspired from the great philosopher Socrates and emphasizes on the buildings in the Ancient Agora which, according to ancient texts, Socrates (470/469 - 399 BC) has visited for one or more times. In “Phaedrus” (230 c-d), the famous Platonic dialogue, Phaedrus teases Socrates that “he talks more like a tourist than a native”. Socrates spent most of his daily life in the Agora of Athens, which was the political and commercial center of the city. In the Ancient Agora, “material goods” as well as ideas were exchanged (Lang, 1978: 6). Besides, the market aspect of the agora was a “by-product” of gathering’s main function: “talk” (the greek verb is «ἀγορεύω»). Therefore, Socrates, as the most prominent “word merchant” (Lang, 1978: 5), suggested that “the unexamined life is not worth living” (Apology 38a).

Emphasis will be based on the following monuments: First stop will be the Altar of Zeus Agoraios and the participants will be informed about Socrates and the Gods. Socrates was

protected from Zeus Agoraios since he was still a child, as the oracle of Delphi gave this divine protection to his father (Plutarch, *de genio Socratis* 20). Although Socrates was indicted for impiety (and that he did not believe in the gods in whom the city believed), Xenophon asserts (*Memorabilia* 1.i.2) that he was frequently seen offering sacrifices on the public altars of Athens (Lang, 1978).

Next visit will be Stoa of Zeus Eleftherios, where Socrates met his student Ischomachus, according to Xenophon (*Oeconomicus*, 7.1 - 7.15). It was a place where Socrates frequently hanged out.

Following stop will be the New Bouleuterion, where the participants will learn about Socrates and his public office during Democracy. Socrates avoided public office and desired to practice his persuasion skills face to face. However, “he did serve a term on the Boule” (in 406/405 BC) (Lang, 1978: 8), the council in which, once a year, five hundred men (who were selected from eligible Athenian citizens) held office as members and, as well, took a turn as presidents (Prytaneis) (Plato, *Gorgias* 474a).

Next visit will be Tholos or Skias and the participants will learn about Socrates’ experience of public life under the Thirty Tyrants (*Triakonta Tyrannoi*), which was “as discouraging as that in the democracy” (Lang, 1978: 10).

The cultural route will continue to “Ipodimatopoieio”, the shoe shop of Simon Skitikos, nearby Tholos, where Socrates met his students. Simon, the shoemaker, “a master craftsman draws onlookers who come to marvel and stay to talk” (Lang, 1978: 17).

Following stop will be Iliaia, the court where Socrates was sentenced to death in 399 B.C. The lawsuit against Socrates was made by the poet Melitos, who requested the imposition of the death penalty on the philosopher for the crime of impiety. Melitos was framed as accusers by the politician and tanner Anytos and the orator Lykonas (Kelesidou, 2011).

The participants will also learn about the monumental “Water Clock” in front of Iliaia, which was constructed at the end of the 4th cent. B.C. The oratories at Iliaia and at courts generally should last 6 minutes, which were counted properly with the water clock.

The cultural route will end at “Desmotirio”, also known as “Porino Ktirio”, the prison of Socrates where he drank the Conium (Hemlock Poison) and died in 399 B.C. Socrates’ last words “The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our separate ways, I to die, and you to live. Which of these two is better only God knows” from Plato’s *Apology* seem prophetic for the future sufferings of Athenians.

## CONCLUSIONS

Through the approach of this paper, it emerges that effective cultural management and marketing can highlight cultural heritage and contribute to education (through educational and didactic cultural routes for students, schools and universities) and to development with economic, social and environmental benefits. In addition, this approach will attract visitors and investors, will create new jobs, expertise and ICT adoption through technology tools. Finally, the approach of this paper can be the basis for studying other areas with reference to the management and promotion of cultural heritage as well as for attracting additional target markets with cultural interests.

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## TOURISTIFICATION AND STAGED AUTHENTICITY: THE CASE OF SAFRANBOLU

**Nuray TURKER**

Karabuk University Safranbolu Faculty of Tourism, [nturker@karabuk.edu.tr](mailto:nturker@karabuk.edu.tr)

**Tolgahan TABAK**

Karabuk University Eflani Vocational School, [togahantabak@karabuk.edu.tr](mailto:togahantabak@karabuk.edu.tr)

### ABSTRACT

In this study, the phenomenon of staged authenticity that arises with touristification is discussed. For this purpose, qualitative research was carried out in Safranbolu, Turkey, an important cultural tourism destination that is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. The interview method was used in the research. In November 2023, ten participants were interviewed, including visitors, restaurant owners, hotel managers, travel agency partners, and the representatives of two NGOs. Participants were selected using the purposive sampling method. Results indicate that visitors experience staged authenticity as a result of cultural commodification and that cultural assets, local dishes, or traditions were transformed into marketable products in Safranbolu. Over the past thirty years, as tourism has grown significantly, the population in the old town where tourism has developed, has gradually declined; historically significant houses once inhabited by the locals have been restored and transformed into hotels, pensions, and restaurants; and traditional life has rapidly weakened. Food prepared even in restaurants that serve traditional dishes, deviates from the original structure and ingredients of the local cuisine. Souvenirs are another example of staged authenticity; house models that are cheap replicas of traditional Ottoman houses are often sold to tourists.

**Keywords:** Touristification, authenticity, staged authenticity, commodification, Safranbolu.

## INTRODUCTION

Today, different destinations around the world have experienced varying degrees of touristification, with some successfully managing the balance between tourism development and preserving local authenticity, while others struggle with the negative consequences. Although touristification can bring economic benefits to the destination and contribute to the preservation and restoration of heritage sites and cultural landmarks, it can also lead to the commercialization and commodification of culture, often resulting in a loss of authenticity or local character and creating a sanitized and artificial experience for visitors (Sequera and Nofre, 2018, Coşkun, 2021, Wen et al., 2023).

Touristification is the process by which a space is produced or reproduced for tourist lifestyles, often by creating attractions, services, and infrastructure that cater to visitors (Wen et al., 2023). Due to touristification, tangible and intangible assets have turned into commercialized commodities in some tourism destinations. Tourists are encountering staged authenticity on their trips; however, they assume that these attractions are authentic.

The term ‘staged authenticity’ refers to a cultural practice, event, or activity that is organized with the intention of drawing tourists. It often occurs in touristic or cultural contexts where certain activities, attractions, events, or settings are designed to appear authentic or traditional, even though they may be customized for touristic consumption. Much of today’s heritage tourism offerings rely on the staging or re-creation of ethnic or cultural traditions (Chhabra, Healy, and Sills, 2003). For example, Turkish nights organized in tourism destinations are one of the example of staged authenticity. Foreign guests are intended to be introduced to Turkish culture, dance, and music; however, tourists are offered oriental shows accompanied by Arabic music rather than Turkish folklore and culture. The authenticity that is staged for visitors is commodified and fake in some destinations. If a tourist product is made with commercial motives, it cannot be considered authentic. In this regard, the phenomenon of staged authenticity that arises with touristification is discussed in the context of Safranbolu, Turkey.

## STUDY LOCATION

Safranbolu, a world-famous UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a popular cultural tourism destination that attracts millions of local and foreign tourists. The city was inscribed in the Slow City organization in March 2024. The city hosts 1.2 million visitors annually. One million of them are day trippers, while overnight visitors are around 200 thousand on average (Safranbolu Directorate of Tourism, 2024). Safranbolu has cultural attractions, mainly the old wooden mansions (houses) belonging to the Ottoman period, which were constructed at the end of the 18th century or at the beginning of the 19th century (see Figure 1). The first tourism movement in Safranbolu started in the 1990s, and with the inclusion of the city on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1994, the tourism industry made significant progress. The majority of visitors are domestic tourists. Foreign tourists, who make up 15% of the total overnight visitors, are often citizens of Far Eastern countries, and the top three visitors in 2023 were Taiwanese, Thai, and Chinese tourists.

*Figure 1. Safranbolu*



## METHODOLOGY

This study aims to determine whether an authentic experience is offered to tourists in Safranbolu, Turkey. For this purpose, qualitative research was carried out with ten respondents. The on-site observation method is also used to examine the tourism practices. A semi-structured interview form was used to collect data from respondents in the research, which was designed by the researcher based on the literature. For the content validation, four experts in touristification were invited to assess the questions, and taking into account their feedback, the interview form was finalized. The interview questions were prepared within the framework of the following research question, and four questions were asked of the respondents in the study. Questions regarding the demographic information of the participants were also asked. The key research question was:

- Is an authentic experience offered to tourists in Safranbolu?

Ten participants, including visitors, hotel managers, restaurant owners, NGO's, souvenir shop owners, and travel agency partners were interviewed between November 14-28, 2023. Respondents were selected using purposeful snowball sampling. Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the respondents and transcribed, each lasting between 9 and 49 minutes. The data obtained from the interviews were summarized, grouped, and then reorganized in order to make meaningful interpretations. Using content analysis, two main themes were determined: (1) touristification; and (2) staged authenticity. Table 1 illustrates the themes and codes derived from the analysis.

*Table 1. Main themes and codes of the research*

<b>Main Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Touristification	-
Staged Authenticity	- The general atmosphere of the city - Hotels - Restaurants - Souvenirs

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Considering Table 2, eight of the respondents were males. The age range of the respondents was 38-75 years old. Nine of them had university diplomas. The length of residence in the area

was 35 years on average.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Respondent	Gender	Age	Education	Profession/Type of Business/Institution	Length of Residence	Time
R1	Female	42	University	NGO	25 years	23'50
R2	Male	65	University	NGO	65 years	9'58
R3	Male	75	University	Hotel owner/architect	23 years	49'39
R4	Male	42	University	Restaurant operator	42 years	12'25
R5	Male	38	University	Restaurant operator	4 years	11'44
R6	Male	47	University	Hotel manager	47 years	18'23
R7	Male	43	University	Turkish Delight maker	43 years	31'49
R8	Male	52	Secondary School	Souvenir shop owner/Saffron plant cultivator	52 years	19'41
R9	Male	70	University	Travel Agency partner	18 years	15'24
R10	Female	47	University	Tourist	-	10'31

### Theme 1: Touristification

The city has experienced touristification over the past thirty years, as tourism has grown significantly. The population in the old town where tourism has developed has gradually declined; historical houses once inhabited by the locals have been restored and transformed into hotels, pensions, and restaurants; and traditional life has rapidly weakened. As the locals and tourism enterprises modify the local traditions solely for tourist consumption, this weakens the cultural fabric of the community and dilutes its unique heritage. Tourism businesses exploit the cultural legacy of the town for financial gain. For example, the production of historical house models for souvenirs has turned handicrafts into a commercial commodity. A significant part of the old town is occupied by tourists and tourism activities.

The 2500 residents living in old town find it challenging to live here for a variety of reasons, including overcrowding, excessive traffic, parking issues, and increased garbage as a result of tourism. Respondents acknowledged that the city has become overly touristic. NGOs have concerns about the commercialization and destruction of local culture. They believe that in the pursuit of attracting tourists, the tourism industry modifies or exaggerates cultural aspects, resulting in a diluted or stereotypical representation. This commercialization of culture undermines the authenticity and integrity of local traditions.

### Theme 2: Staged Authenticity

Staged authenticity leads to the homogenization and oversimplification of the cultural identity of Safranbolu. Visitors' satisfaction is negatively influenced as their experiences do not align with their expectations and the perceived authenticity of the staged elements.

#### (1) The general atmosphere of the city

Residents expressed positive perceptions of authenticity regarding the city's general atmosphere. R10, who visited Safranbolu, stated that the city was an authentic place to visit. She loved exploring the city's streets. Nonetheless, many urban components also undermine authenticity. For instance, according to R2, the city's original structure was destroyed by

the solar radiation on its roofs and its tiles, which were key components that represented the city but were not original in terms of color (nearly red instead of terra-cotta) or shape.

With the development of the tourism industry, most of the old mansions have been converted into hotels, cafes, or restaurants, and they have installed solar energy on the roofs to provide hot water to their guests. One of the city's key structural components, the cobblestones, were taken out of the old town and replaced with more modern paving stones to make them easier to access. R2 described the ideal state of Safranbolu as a cultural tourism destination as follows:

*“Safranbolu actually gives tourists the impression that they are in an Ottoman city from the 17th or 18th century.”*

## (2) Hotels

Respondents generally stated that hotels offer authentic experiences. However, according to R1, 75% of hotels in Safranbolu were authentic in terms of design. A hotel owner and also an architect (R3) complained about the increase in the quantity of rooms in old buildings that have been turned into hotels. He commented:

*“I have recently visited a place that has been renovated and converted into a hotel. There are precisely twenty beds in eight rooms. It is not authentic to place a third or even a fourth bed in the rooms. I object to these hoteliers because they close off spaces like halls and iwans and convert them into rooms. Five or six rooms make up the old Safranbolu mansion. When you add rooms on all sides of the building, it becomes like a beehive. A hum, bursting noises—this is hardly the place to talk about authenticity here. .... Building owners employ small tricks to give it an old and authentic appearance. I know of a hotel owner who puts rusty nails in sacks and taps them against the new timber to give the impression that the place is old. So, is this authentic?”*

He also underlined that there must be a balance between authenticity and comfort of the guest. He stated:

*“..... We cannot use the outdated restroom infrastructure. This is uncomfortable for the guest. Therefore, we should provide a comfortable stay for guests while being authentic. For instance, the room has only one chair and one dressing table or a desk in our hotel. We put a desk in the room because the guest needs to use his laptop. I didn't fill the whole space with furniture. The beds are practically floor beds because they are so low. .... In some hotels, the sofas are quite high. The sofas' height remained unchanged in our hotel. .... An Ottoman residence was heated by a stove. Nowadays, it is not possible to warm the room up this way. We utilize heating systems. However, the room's heating system is hidden. .... The question is: How much authenticity will be maintained or how much comfort is acceptable?”*

Visitors' previous experiences and socio-cultural levels affect their perception of authenticity. R5 stated:

*“The visitor can make comparisons if she or he has previously experienced authentic atmospheres. Nonetheless, someone who has never been to Safranbolu before and is there for the first time, for instance, may describe his experience as authentic. .... Perceptions of authenticity may also be related to the guest's socio-cultural level, in my opinion. Perhaps*



*Safranbolu may be a fairly ordinary space for visitors who have encountered similar atmospheres and services before.”*

### (3) Restaurants

Staged authenticity was offered at restaurants in Safranbolu in terms of food, venue, and design. Restaurants that serve traditional dishes have deviated from the original recipe and ingredients. Visitors were served "local" dishes prepared with non-local ingredients. Restaurants generally use manufactured goods in food production. R4 claimed that, because of the challenging economic climate, they had to think commercially. According to R1, only 30% of restaurants provide an authentic experience. Traditionally, saffron spice was used to make Zerde, a Safranbolu-specific delicacy. Nonetheless, due to its lower cost compared to saffron, turmeric is currently used by a considerable number of restaurateurs.

R3 highlighted mistakes in food presentation. He commented:

*"In local dishes, the food plating—the term for plate decoration—is also flawed. Every meal is often served on a separate dish in Ottoman order. I visited a restaurant the other day that offers local tastes. On a sizable platter, there was meat, salad, spaghetti, and fries, along with a dash of parsley. This kind of presentation is not compatible with traditional culture."*

According to R9, even the presentation of centuries-old Turkish coffee is becoming touristic. He said:

*"In cafes, blueberry sherbet is served with coffee. There is no sherbet made with chemical aromas in our culture. Cranberry sherbet can be served with coffee if sherbet is required to go with it. Although the presentation seems authentic, but the content is definitely not."*

R9 also criticized the different tastes in local food and commented:

*"Some restaurants sell regional food, but their offerings—like peruhi, for instance—are not prepared in accordance with their authentic characteristics. Every restaurant has a distinct taste of peruhi."*

### (4) Souvenirs

Souvenirs were the least authentic items that Safranbolu offers visitors, as stated by respondents (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R10). The most popular souvenirs were house models, which were cheap replicas that did not capture the essence of the original culture. R10 underlined that goods manufactured in China and sold in the old town never convey the spirit and authenticity of the city. Furthermore, a lot of goods that were imported from China spoil the city's genuine character. Among the souvenirs, the ones that preserved their original features best were Turkish delight, Yemeni shoes, ironware, and copper goods. However, there was also the commercialization of Turkish delight. As stated by R7, the variety of Turkish delights produced in conjunction with the development of tourism is on the rise. He said:

*" ..... Our original, traditional Turkish delight, which dates back to the 1940s, is prepared with hazelnuts. But nowadays, the majority of tourists purchase Turkish delights with saffron*

*and pistachios. With the growth of the tourism industry, we began to produce Turkish delight with new flavors. .... There are significant differences between the genuine Turkish delight and those sold by some vendors in the old town. Three of them are sold for 100 TL, and they are manufactured in Ankara, not in Safranbolu. How can we describe them as genuine? These Turkish delight producers would not have appeared if tourism had not grown in the city. This is the outcome of the touristification."*

There was a loss of authenticity in terms of the saffron plant, which gives its name to the city. R8 highlighted:

*"Every year, over 500 kg of saffron spice are sold here. Only about 30 to 35 kg of them are produced in Safranbolu, though. Iranian and Afghan students from Karabük University bring saffron and sell it to shopkeepers. When these students return from their homeland, they can simply bring half a kilogram or one kilogram. Shopkeepers also buy saffron from Istanbul and sell it here. Of course, saffron from Iran and Afghanistan is less expensive than saffron from Safranbolu, but the two have the same selling price."*

Overall, visitors experienced staged authenticity as a result of cultural commodification in Safranbolu. Cultural assets, local dishes, or traditions were transformed into marketable products. Upper-class tourists believed that the staged authenticity did not accurately reflect the genuine culture of Safranbolu. Conversely, visitors from lower socioeconomic strata perceived the city as more authentic. R1 and R10 agreed with this inference. R10 clarified her assumption as follows:

*"Because members of the lower socioeconomic groups are not intellectuals, most of what they go through seems authentic to them. However, because members of the upper sociocultural group are more sophisticated, the experiences that are provided do not meet their expectations and satisfy them."*

On the other hand, R1 stated that some guests do not question too much whether the city is authentic or not. She claimed:

*"The lower socio-economic group enjoys popular culture, consumes products and services quickly, is only concerned with having a good time, and does not question the spirit of the city or the meaning of the experience. Some of them are happy to visit Safranbolu in order to snap selfies and share stories on their social media."*

R5 explained that:

*"Some guests do not have such a culture and bring a completely different interpretation. In the Ottoman Empire, spoliated building elements were used if they did not lose their natural structure. Even insect holes on it can be seen. We used the beam, which was previously used for another purpose, as a stair beam in our cafeteria during the restoration. A family came. They asked questions about the house. I explained and said, "Look, the cuts on the column you see indicate that this was a stair beam in the past. Then I noticed that he was distracted. When he said this, Mr. Ibrahim, I hope you have the money to replace it soon. So, it is important whether the guest perceives authenticity the same way you do."*

## CONCLUSION

As destinations become more tourist-focused, they may lose their unique cultural identity and become homogenized to cater to tourists. Authentic places turn into tourism hubs, locals' cultural products start to be developed in response to visitor demands; as a result, traditional customs, language, and practices are deteriorated, cultural sites and products lose their significance in the perspective of the local population and become commercial products

Although staged authenticity can be beneficial in terms of economic development, cultural preservation, and tourism promotion, but it can also be controversial and require careful management to ensure a sustainable and meaningful experience for tourists and local communities alike. According to MacCannel and Cohen, tourism is a contemporary form of authenticity seeking. MacCannel explains that western tourists are looking for a sense of authenticity that is missing in their daily lives, in other words, they travel to experience novel experiences that are unavailable to them where they live (Stainton, 2020). Staged authenticity can create a tension between preserving traditional customs and practices and catering to the demands of tourism and commercialization. Finding the right balance is key to maintaining the integrity of the destination or experience.

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## MUSEUMS & ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AS SIGN-SYSTEMS FOR PLACE BRANDING: THE CASE STUDY OF GREECE

**Stella Maria NIKITAKI**

Department of Business Administration and Tourism, School of Management Sciences and  
Economics, Hellenic Mediterranean University, IoanniAthitaki Str., Estavromenos, Heraklion  
Crete, [stenikitaki@hotmail.com](mailto:stenikitaki@hotmail.com)

**Alexandros APOSTOLAKIS**

Hellenic Mediterranean University, [a.apostolakis@hmu.gr](mailto:a.apostolakis@hmu.gr)

**Eirini PAPADAKI**

Hellenic Mediterranean University, [eirpapadaki@hmu.gr](mailto:eirpapadaki@hmu.gr)

### ABSTRACT

The paper studies the interconnection between the cultural heritage industry and tourism in Greece. Cultural heritage, as part of cultural tourists' motivation to visit a destination, can function as a communication vehicle, disseminating information on the history of the host place, its past traditions, main artefacts and cultural practices. Through the main institutional bodies in which cultural heritage unfolds its messages and myths—mostly archaeological museums and sites—certain signs and narratives are presented to potential audiences, including tourists. The archaeological museums and archaeological sites of Greece in particular, are important tourist spots, promoted as such through various mass and digital media. The paper examines the promotional mechanisms and communication strategies employed by the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) regarding Greek cultural heritage and specifically archaeological museums and archaeological sites.

The conclusions identify the role of the cultural industry's sign-system in regard to shaping a country's brand as a tourist destination, especially if such signs and narratives are promoted through the formal channels of national tourism organizations. The role of Greek cultural industry's messages in the framework of the GNTO's tourism campaigns is seen as crucial in the formation of the three main aspects of place branding: the character, the value and the identity of the place.

**Keywords:** archaeological museums, archaeological sites, Greek National Tourism Organization, cultural tourism

### INTRODUCTION

In many instances of human history, historians highlight a pronounced nostalgic eagerness for a distant untouched past, still idealized, unique, and, therefore, "authentic". In this framework, the field of cultural management was born in Western Europe, having as a main objective the

preservation of cultural heritage, against the hardships and the destruction caused by timely social processes (Jones, 2006). Concurrently, the touristic domain was born during the 16th century in Western Europe by the aristocratic excursionists, in the context of the fore mentioned romanticized consideration and the pursuit of the past (Poulios, 2015).

In view of the above, the connection between tourism and culture was considered inevitably close and remain unquestioned. Having emerged as a mass scale activity, tourism developed substantially by the legislation of free time and the rise of a broad middle class, as well as by the evolution of the means of travel during the 19th and the 20th century. In its recent form, tourism is seen by many researchers as a need to pursue and consume new, varied images and experiences. Culture, and especially cultural heritage, can offer these localized, “authentic”, different from the everyday experiences contemporary tourists search for.

During the last decades, a substantial number of tourists wish to abstain from predesigned touristic packages offered by the tourism industry and pursue more individually formed, alternative “adventures”, all part of a postmodern context. The lived experience, in contrast to the provided service, is a personalized and therefore unique, powerful notion, which is based on the produced feelings imprinted on one’s memory, sometimes following an interplay between a tourist enterprise and a tourist (Gilmore & Pine, 1999). Cultural tourism is a type of tourism that stems from the travelers’ cultural motivations, such as tours to study or take part in cultural, folklore or art activities, attend festivals, pilgrimages, etc., including the visits to cultural sights, monuments and landmarks of the visited place, the “must-see” attractions included in travel packages offered to mass tourists.

Images of cultural landmarks of many popular destinations worldwide are circulated through schoolbooks, travel guides, films and media images, forming internationally recognizable codes and signs of places, what Barthes (1981) calls the “language of travel”. Archaeological sites and museums are seen in a big part of the tourism industry’s iconography. According to Papadaki (2018), several theories have been developed about the importance and added value of adopting communication models and/or practices by organizations that deal with culture (e.g. Hooper-Greenhill, 1995; Hill et al, 2003; Holt, 2004; Massi and Harrison, 2009; Bernstein, 2011; Byrnes 2012). “From the first impression of the building, the predefined route in the exhibition, the souvenir shop, the texts on the museum walls and near the exhibits, all add up to the creation of the museum’s ‘story-telling’. With the use of audio guides, videos, catalogues and other media, archaeologists unfold history and suggest an explanation of cultural contexts set in front of the visitor’s eyes” (Papadaki, 2018:70). In this framework, museums and archaeological sites, their sign-systems and narrations, add important pieces to the puzzle of the destination’s national story and by extension, its brand image.

Cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, as well as contemporary culture, can be seen as fundamental pylons of every tourist destination and can be recognized as the place’s comparative advantages due to their contribution to the economic and social growth of the area. They are also the place’s special features, its distinguishing factors and for many tourists, testimonies of the authenticity and aura of the visited destination. Museums and archaeological sites invite tourist mobility and attract the tourist gazes worldwide (Urry, 2011), as part of the most valuable cultural resources of the destinations.

The archaeological museums and archaeological sites of Greece in particular, are important tourist spots, promoted as such through various mass and digital media. The paper examines the promotional mechanisms and communication strategies employed by the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) regarding Greek cultural heritage and specifically archaeological museums and archaeological sites. It seems that certain archaeological museums and archaeological sites of

Greece are selected and promoted through the formal communication channels of GNTO. More specifically, the archaeological museums and sites shown are: the Acropolis Museum, the National Archeological Museum of Athens, Heraklion Archeological Museum, as well as the archeological sites of Acropolis, Sounio, Delphi and Knossos Palace in Crete.

The created messages, designed for and addressed to international audiences and mostly potential future visitors in Greece, are seen as parts of a specific communication plan. All the messages distributed through the GNTO's formal digital channels are seen as pieces contributing to the country's brand-puzzle. Through the messages designed for the GNTO's digital semiosphere—e.g. search engines' results, websites and social media accounts—the role of Greek cultural heritage for the reinforcement and promotion of 'Greekness' is highlighted and analyzed.

The main research questions are concerned with:

- the reasons why specific archaeological museums and archaeological sites are preferred to be showcased in GNTO's messages as "representatives" of the country's cultural resources,
- the strategies designed in order to highlight their significance, as well as
- the percentage of the specific messages in the general GNTO's communication plan, which underlines its estimated significance for Greece's promotion as a tourist destination.

The methodological tools used for the analysis and interpretation of the research's data include: a. content analysis of the GNTO's messages in the website [www.visitgreece.gr](http://www.visitgreece.gr) and the relevant accounts in social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok, Pinterest), b. digital ethnography of the users' comments on these messages and c. interview with a GNTO's communication executive.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### *Creation and formation of a place brand*

The concept of country/nation/place branding revolves around the shaping of a country's/nation's/place's identity, as well as a specific iconography to connote and promote the formed identity, in a great extent to potential tourists, as well as investors and new residents. The perceived identity of a country by various audiences worldwide, the use of the country's attractive images to promote a specific identity of place and invite tourist flows (Mihalache and Vukman, 2005), the creation of a sense of "belonging" and national identity for local audiences and/or a representation of the country's culture, values and history (Kaneva, 2011), as well as the enhancement of a nation's political influence, social connectivity and power or credibility, are only some of the advantages of country/nation/place branding. The outmost goal of nation branding, regardless of the initial motive for its planning in a specific period, is the creation of a positive international reputation for the country (Fetscherin&Toncar, 2010). All these reasons justify the considerable efforts that countries put in this area, which intensify if the place is promoted as a tourist destination, as well.

### *Promotion*

For the creation and promotion of a nation's/country's/place's brand, official bodies use a variety of media, among which new and digital media. E-marketing, social media marketing, mobile marketing and digital apps, even video games and AI applications are among the main communication channels used by GNTOs. Such media has become a powerful tool for destination marketing and DMOs are increasingly experimenting on how to use it to promote their destinations (Kumar et al, 2015), as it is one of the main sources tourists use during the information search stage of the travel planning process. The messages distributed through such

media have a significant impact on how people view and experience traveling to a new place, how they participate in local decision-making, and how aware they are of particular career opportunities in foreign places, all of which are simultaneously creating a completely new reality (Urry, 2011).

*The role of cultural heritage, museums and archaeological sites in place branding*

Potential visitors can experience this “possibility of a difference” through cultural heritage and the places where its tangible remains are exhibited—such as archaeological museums and archaeological sites. If, as McCannell (1999) claims, tourism is “a ritual performed to the differentiations of society”, then distinctive landmarks and cultural practices specific to a place might serve to identify and characterize these differences. For example, the artifacts from classical antiquity are revered as holy objects (Hamilakis 2009), bearing witness to the past of the particular location; they tell the tale of the area, evoke the true spirit of the past, and create certain interpretations of the native populations and their environments. One way visitors can engage with the destination and co-produce meaning is by adding the missing pieces to these cultural puzzles (Papadaki 2004). This should be, in fact, the ultimate goal of tourism.

The reason behind the widespread dissemination of images of archaeological monuments is their public nature, aesthetic significance, function as historical narrative tools, and symbolic meanings derived from their close relationship with the land on which they are situated. Additionally, they can aid visitors in “making identifications, stress localities and shape identities” (Papadaki 2019: 134). They can, in extent, function as signs of Greekness. Travelers interpret culture through a set of signs (Culler 1981) and Greece is in many instances been connected to its historic past, which remains of great archaeological value and interest.

*“The classical ideal”*

The “classical ideal” forms the basis of the tourism policy planning and development model in Greece for years. This model stems from the prevailing ideology that upholds the preservation and promotion of Greece's cultural heritage as one of its main differentiating assets as a destination. Since the 16th-century Grand Tour of aristocratic excursionists, there has been a clear emphasis on the “classical ideal”, as the romanticization of the past led them to explore classical archaeological sites. In recent years, cultural heritage has again been promoted as one of the distinguishing factors of Greece, as through the wide circulation of its images, it has in fact become a recognizable code, a sign of Greekness, inviting not only gazes, but also tourist experiences on site.

**METHODOLOGY**

For the present research, a combination of methodological tools was employed to conduct a thorough analysis. Firstly, content analysis was carried out on the GNTTO posts available on their official website, [www.visitgreece.gr](http://www.visitgreece.gr), as well as across their social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest, over the period from March 1, 2022, to March 1, 2023. This involved a detailed examination of the themes, visuals and messages conveyed in the posts. The authors studied several parameters, such as the date of the post, the type of location (whether it was an archaeological site, museum, or other), the content of the post (e.g., close-up shots, bird's eye view, outdoor spaces, entrances, exhibits), the format of the post (video, photo, sketch), and the category of the post (new or republished). It also considered weather conditions depicted in the posts, the presence of human elements, the type of interaction (with links, polls, or

none), engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments, hashtags), and the type of comments (positive, gif, memory, or not relevant).

Additionally, digital ethnography was utilized to capture and analyze the comments made by users under these posts. This approach provided insights into public perception and engagement with the content. The analysis specifically focused on the comments related to archaeological museums and sites promoted by the GNTO as emblematic of Greece's rich cultural heritage. Through this methodology, the study aimed to understand how these cultural assets are perceived by the audience and the effectiveness of the GNTO's promotional strategies in portraying them as key signs of the country.

An interview with an experienced GNTO executive, Mrs. Eleftheria Fili, gave the authors insight into the selection process and the promotional mechanisms preferred regarding images of cultural heritage in Greece, with an emphasis on images of archaeological museums and sites.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The paper examines the promotional mechanisms and communication strategies employed by the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) to highlight Greek cultural heritage, focusing specifically on archaeological museums and sites. It appears that the GNTO selects certain prominent archaeological museums and sites for promotion through its formal communication channels. Notable among these are the National Archaeological Museum of Athens and the Heraklion Archaeological Museum. Prominent archaeological sites featured include the Acropolis, Sounio, Delphi, and Knossos Palace.

### *GNTO campaigns*

At least one of these archaeological museums and/or sites are visible in most of the official GNTO campaigns, promoting Greece. In the "Summer Campaign of 2022", for example, the GNTO aimed to reinforce Greece's brand positioning with the campaign entitled "You Will Want to Stay Forever". The message conveyed was, "Greece, You Will Want to Stay Forever". This campaign narrated the journey of a traveler who finds peace and beauty in Greece, emphasizing themes of tranquility, simplicity, spontaneity and natural beauty. The campaign focused on summer, the sun, islands, and the sea. Its communicational messages included a video that highlighted the essence of summer in Greece, showcasing its natural allure, but it also circulated a poster featuring an archaeological site to reflect Greece's rich historical heritage. Similarly, the "Spring Campaign of 2022" entitled "Greekend" aimed to showcase the vibrant and diverse weekend experiences in Athens and Thessaloniki. The message "End your week like this", invited potential tourists to explore the energetic vibe of Greek cities, including beaches, delicious cuisine, and cultural hotspots. This campaign emphasized leisurely strolls, vibrant nightlife and lively entertainment. The content included an immersive video portrayal of weekend adventures in Athens and Thessaloniki, featuring a visit to the Acropolis and a poster with a panoramic photograph of the Acropolis.

### *Social media content analysis*

The analysis of the official account of GNTO on Facebook, with 807,000 followers and 775,000 likes, showed that during the specified period 300 posts were made, 60 of which picturing museums and archaeological sites. Among these, 83.61% depicted archaeological sites, 11.48% featured museums and 4.92% other subjects. Most of the posts were photos (91.80%), with sketches (4.92%) and videos (3.28%) being less common. Interaction was primarily achieved



through links (93.44%), with polls (4.92%) and posts without interaction (1.64%) being less common. Comments on posts were mainly gifs (45.90%), positive content (31.15%), and memories (14.75%). The most common photo style was bird's eye view (51.43%), followed by close-up shots (25.71%), outdoor scenes (10%), entrances (4.29%), exhibits (2.86%), and indoor spaces (1.43%). Weather conditions in posts showed 42.62% sunny, 45.90% other conditions, and 11.48% cloudy. Human elements appeared in 19.67% of posts. The majority of posts were new (68.85%), with reposts making up 31.15%.

Regarding the official account of GNT0 on Instagram (677,000 followers/3,587 posts), the analysis showed that out of 302 posts during the specified period, 24 showcased museums and archaeological sites. Interaction was minimal, with 65.22% of posts having no interaction, 21.74% featuring questions, and 4.35% each for polls, links, and other interactions. Posts predominantly showcased archaeological sites (82.61%), with museums comprising 17.39%. Common photo styles were close-up shots (42.86%), bird's eye view (30.95%), outdoor spaces (16.67%), entrances (7.14%), and exhibits (2.38%). The form of the posts included photos (82.61%) and videos (17.39%). New posts accounted for 60.87% of the posts, while reposts were 39.13% of the total messages. Weather conditions depicted were 39.13% sunny, 34.78% other conditions, 17.39% cloudy, and 8.70% snowy. Human elements were present in 30.43% of the posts. Comments were overwhelmingly positive (89.96%), with 4.35% negative and 4.35% referring to memories.

Analyzing the results, archaeological sites were significantly more prominent than archaeological museums or other images of archaeological interest on both Facebook (83.61%) and Instagram (82.61%). Photos were the most common form of messages (91.80% on Facebook and 82.61% on Instagram). Interaction varied, with Facebook posts mostly including links (93.44%) while Instagram posts often lacked interaction (65.22%). Long-distance shots were prevalent on Facebook (51.43%), while close-up photos dominated Instagram (42.86%). User comments on Facebook were largely gifs (45.90%) and positive content (31.15%), whereas Instagram comments were overwhelmingly positive (90%). Both platforms predominantly featured sunny weather, reflecting Greece's reputation as a sunny destination. New post creation was high on both platforms (68.85% on Facebook and 60.81% on Instagram).

On TikTok, the GNT0 posted 12 videos, three of which focused on archaeological sites and museums, with the rest highlighting the "sun and sea" theme. On Pinterest, content was curated into saved folders, including "Museums in Greece" with 33 photos (7 of which were archaeological museums), "UNESCO World Heritage Sites" showcasing renowned archaeological sites such as Delphi and the Acropolis, and "Archaeological Sites" highlighting 20 sites including Santorini, Knossos, Epidaurus, and Delphi.

#### *Interview with GNT0 executive*

Ms. Eleftheria Fili, with 11 years of experience at GNT0, emphasized the importance of culture in promoting tourism. She noted that GNT0's strategy is to promote all sites equally, although archaeological sites like the Acropolis and Knossos gather more interest, as they are recognizable "markers" (MacCannell, 1999) of Greece as a destination. The challenges that GNT0 faces include limited cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and archaeological authorities and limited photographic material due to copyright issues.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The research highlights the significance of archaeological sites and museums in promoting cultural tourism in Greece and at the same time shaping the image of Greece, its brand. Being a popular tourist destination, Greece has circulated many images through various media aiming to

attract the tourist gaze. From schoolbooks and animation films to sitcoms and organized campaigns, certain “markers” or signs of Greekness have been distributed worldwide through various paths and vehicles. Cultural heritage—and especially archaeological sites and museums—are seen in a significant amount of these images. The communication of such images on digital media, as shown in this research, gives the GNT0 three advantages: 1. Potential tourists see recognizable Greek “sign-myths”, strong identity shapers and unmissable, authentic markers of Greekness. 2. These images attract both mass and romantic gazes (Urry, 2011)—that is both mass and cultural tourism and 3. Cultural heritage images are offered both for gazers and adventure seekers, for those interested in sightseeing important cultural monuments during their travels, but also to those that wish to be engaged in cultural experiences. This fact is evident if one examines the viewpoint chosen for the selected images; they are mostly bird-eye views of archaeological sites or close-up shots—images that tourists themselves cannot capture with their camera or mobile phone’s lens—, in order to encourage personalized interpretation and problem-solving or highlight uniqueness and aura. The interactivity fostered in these posts stress the above argument. Links that ask the users to unfold history, verbs in imperative that invite or drive to action, questions asked, all these techniques highlight the quest for tourist engagement. The research indicates that the strategy needs improvement, as the comments on social media posts are generally positive but often lack depth for further analysis. Interactive approaches, such as polls or videos, could initiate more engagement.

Despite GNT0's policy to promote all the archaeological sites and museums of Greece, the research indicates that a greater emphasis is placed on specific archaeological sites, the ones included in the familiar tourist Greek iconography. Future research could be conducted on a global scale and explore other cultural sectors, like festivals, local traditions and/or gastronomy.

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## **THE DROPPING RATES OF GREEK INTERNAL TOURISM TO THE ISLANDS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

**ARETI PARALAIMOU**

[geoma22002@geo.aegean.gr](mailto:geoma22002@geo.aegean.gr)

**THEANO S. TERKENLI**

[terkenli@aegean.gr](mailto:terkenli@aegean.gr)

### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of the study was to investigate the declining trends of Greek domestic tourism and their consequences, through a qualitative analysis of the perceptions and opinions of all parties involved, focusing on the islands of the southern Aegean (Cyclades and Dodecanese). This exploratory study aimed to identify and evaluate the existing trends of the period 2019-2023, during which there were significant changes in foreign tourism arrivals in Greece, combined with the increasing cost of travel mainly to the islands and the worsening economic situation of Greek society.

From the responses of the participants it is demonstrated that there is no overall picture of the trends of Greek domestic tourism during the last five years. Of course, the period under investigation is characterized by many peculiarities, as it includes two pandemic years, with their well-known subsequent consequences on tourism. Where there is a general agreement of the research participants, is that domestic tourism is gradually being cut off from the most developed and mature tourist destinations, as it cannot cope with the costs of vacations and as a result it turns to more economical options. This fact is related to the financial difficulty faced by domestic tourism to respond financially to tourist destinations that follow the pricing policies of the global tourist market, due to their increased demand. This seems to affect directly the place of destination. The most positive trend for some survey participants reportedly is that new destinations are emerging on the tourist map of Greece. It is an indisputable fact that the future of domestic tourism is directly related to the general image of the country's economy. In the opinion of the interviewees, the trends we have mentioned above, within the next five years, will strengthen and spread to more and more islands, with the result that economic conditions will become even more difficult for domestic tourists. The interviewees envisage a balanced scenario, in which there will be no

exclusions in terms of tourist markets, and Greek domestic tourism will enjoy holidays in the destinations of their choice, in a touristically developed country.

**Keywords:** Greek domestic tourism, tourist arrival trends, Greek islands, travel costs, qualitative research

## INTRODUCTION

This work is undertaken in the context of social sciences, specifically the sciences of Tourism and Human geography (social, economic, population, cultural geography) and aims to investigate the declining trends of Greek domestic tourism and their consequences, by capturing the views and the perceptions of the parties involved, in the islands of the South Aegean. The purpose of this study is to summarize and evaluate the existing trends that occurred in the period 2019-2023, during which major changes were observed in the arrivals of foreign tourism in Greece, but also in the cost of travel mainly to the islands (with a culmination in the most touristic destinations of southern Aegean), combined with the worsening economic situation of Greek society. In order to achieve the purpose of the work, primary data were collected on site, with the help of semi-structured in-depth interview questionnaires.

The study's scientific and research value is in its use to tourism scientists, researchers, educators and professionals dealing with tourism supply and demand issues. Furthermore, its innovative contribution is that it captures and explores a new trend in Greek domestic tourism, which has not yet been studied to the necessary extent. In addition, this kind of work is carried out through an in-depth survey, as broad as possible, in order to collect qualitative primary data from all the main groups of parties involved in this phenomenon (tourists who visited the Cyclades or the Dodecanese in the period 2019-2023, businessmen of the specific areas, people who work in local government or in bodies involved in tourism and tourism experts/academics). Finally, it is very useful and important to examine these trends at the beginning of the phenomenon, as well as in the course of their development, for purposes of strengthening or preventing this phenomenon based on the desired result, but also for purposes of drawing up a corresponding strategy policy.

The paper is structured in two parts: Part I constitutes of the theoretical framework and includes the first and second sections. Part B concerns the empirical research, which includes the third, fourth and fifth sections.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *Domestic tourism in Greece*

"For the Greek economy, tourism is a central pillar of development with a significant contribution to the Gross Domestic Product, employment and investments. The rich cultural heritage, the extensive coastline and the natural environment are some of the comparative advantages that make the country one of the most important tourist destinations worldwide" (Economic & Industrial Research Foundation, 2012, p.7).

Despite any peripheral observations, the fact that tourism is an important part of the Greek economy, with a measurable influence on GDP of the country, cannot be overlooked. In the table below, there are data showing this impact for the period 2019-2022.

Category of Expenditure 2019-2022	2019, € million	2021, € million	2022, € million	% D	% D
Expenditure of incoming tourist	17.679	10.328	17.462	-1,2%	69,1%
Expenditure of cruise tourists	500174	379	-24,1%	117,6%	
Expenditure of cruise companies	13848	105	-24,0%	117,6%	

Air transport	1.914	1.075	2.067	8,0%	92,4%
Shipping	96	80	122	27,2%	52,8%
Domestic tourism	1.599	1.720	2.038	27,5%	18,5%
Investments	1.178	1.584	1.741	47,7%	9,9%
<b>Direct impact on tourism</b>	<b>€23.104</b>	<b>€15.009</b>	<b>€23.914</b>	<b>3,5%</b>	<b>59,3%</b>
As a % of GDP	12,6%	8,3%	11,5%		

Table 1. The impact of tourism on the Greek economy, 2019-2022. Source: Ikkos & Koutsos, 2023

Even in 2021, when the pandemic was ongoing, the impact of tourism on the Greek economy was approaching 10% of GDP. In 2022, Greek tourism had surpassed the levels of 2019, demonstrating the dynamics of this sector.

Regarding specifically domestic tourism, the following tables contain data on basic travels, expenditures and overnight stays for the periods 2016-2021 and 2021-2022.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	% D 2021-19
Trips	4.590.484	5.296.499	5.523.673	4.941.550	4.331.856	4.705.479	-4,8%
Expense (€)	1.286.735.621	1.398.365.311	1.714.551.188	1.598.636.515	1.408.617.976	1.719.606.617	7,6%
Overnight stays	46.438.123	53.577.582	59.630.035	53.650.631	52.729.191	55.261.525	3,0%

Table 2. Domestic tourism in Greece, 2016-2021 (for trips with at least one overnight stay). Source: Ikkos & Koutsos, 2023

As can be seen, from 2016 to 2018, the three mentioned figures of Greek domestic tourism were continuously strengthened. In 2019, as in 2020, there is a decline, with a new recovery in 2021. Certainly the manifestation of the recent pandemic played a role in this decline. However, although between 2019 and 2021 domestic travel decreased by approximately 5%, spending and overnight stays increased by 7.6% and 3.0%, respectively. It must be underlined, however, that in 2008 the expenditure on domestic tourism amounted to 3,868,000, which was much higher than in 2019. That is, there was a reduction that exceeded 55% (Ikkos & Koutsos, 2023).

In thousands, expenses in thousands of euros

	People (1)			Trips			Overnight stays			Expenses		
	2021	2022	Change % 2022/2021	2021	2022	Change % 2022/2021	2021	2022	Change % 2022/2021	2021	2022	Change % 2022/2021
Total (all ages)	4.314	4.786	10,9	6.339	8.254	30,2	69.702	79.501	14,1	2.197.285	3.328.556	51,5
Total (ages 15 and over)	3.521	4.001	13,6	5.213	6.929	32,9	60.024	68.594	14,3	2.017.184	3.096.226	53,5
Professional reasons	105	193	83,5	159	277	73,6	1.002	1.374	37,1	89.514	162.759	81,8
Personal reasons	3.471	3.933	13,3	5.053	6.653	31,7	59.022	67.220	13,9	1.927.670	2.933.467	52,2
Rest, recreation, vacation	2.926	3.149	7,6	4.002	4.925	23,1	50.346	52.386	4,1	1.611.608	2.276.651	41,3
Visit to relatives and friends	600	905	51,0	818	1.372	67,7	6.703	12.484	86,2	235.198	498.232	111,8
Other personal reasons	165	281	70,1	233	355	52,4	1.973	2.351	19,2	80.865	158.583	96,1

Table 3. People (nationals), trips, overnight stays and expenses, mainly for travel, 2021 – 2022. Source: Survey of the Qualitative Characteristics of Domestic Tourists, ELSTAT, 2023

As for the year 2022, people of all ages who took at least one trip totaled 4.8 million and made 8.3 million trips, recording an increase of 10.9% and 30.2% respectively, compared to the year 2021. The number of overnight stays for the year 2022 in total amounted to 79.5 million, while the cost to 3,328.6 million euros, recording an increase of 14.1% and 51.5% respectively, in

relation to 2021. The people aged 15 and over, who traveled in the year 2022 amounted to 4.0 million, while the trips undertaken reached 6.9 million, registering an increase of 13.6% and 32.9% respectively, in relation to in 2021. The total overnight stays of these tourists in 2022 were 68.6 million, while their expenditure reached 3,096.2 million euros, recording an increase of 14.3% and 53.5% respectively, compared to 2021 (ELSTAT, 2022). In conclusion, we note that most trips were made by land means of transport and, secondarily, by sea (ELSTAT, 2022).

## EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

### *Research design and methodology*

The present research aims to investigate the declining trends of Greek domestic tourism and their consequences, by capturing the views and perceptions of the involved parties on the islands of the South Aegean. The purpose of this study is to identify and evaluate the existing trends during the period 2019-2023, a time which saw significant changes in international tourist arrivals to Greece, as well as in travel costs, particularly on the islands (with a peak in the more tourist-heavy destinations of the South Aegean), in conjunction with the deteriorating economic situation of Greek society. The individual research questions of the paper are formulated as follows:

1. How are the views and perceptions of the parties involved in Greek domestic tourism over the last five years?
2. What are their opinions and perceptions about these trends and why?
3. What do they think are the consequences of these trends a. in local tourism b. at the destination and why?
4. How do you see the future of Greek domestic tourism in the next five years and why?
5. How do the parties involved envision Greek domestic tourism in five years from today?

In order to fulfill the objectives and goals of this research, relevant perceptions and opinions of involved parties were investigated on site through primary data collection, carried out using semi-structured in-depth interview questionnaires (a combination of purposive sampling and snowballing).

For the collection of the research material, we addressed four categories of parties involved in tourism in terms of the research questions raised: a) tourists who visited the Cyclades or the Dodecanese in the period 2019-2023 (9), b) tourism entrepreneurs in the specific areas (5), c) people working in local government or organizations dealing with tourism (3) and finally d) tourism experts/academics (3). Based on all of the above, the following interview guide was compiled for the interview survey needs.

#### *Interview guide*

- 1) As far as you know or in your opinion (depends on the category of the interviewee) how are the trends in Greek domestic tourism over the last five years and why?
- 2) What is your opinion on these trends and why?
- 3) What might be the consequences of these trends in Greek domestic tourism and especially in the destination and why?
- 4) How do you see the future of Greek domestic tourism in the next five years and why?
- 5) How would you like to see Greek domestic tourism in five years from today?
- 6) Do you have anything specific to recommend about it?

## FINDINGS

### *1. Perceptions and opinions on Greek domestic tourism trends*

The thematic analysis of the responses of the participants showed that there is no single and unanimous opinion on the trends in Greek domestic tourism in the last five years. Local government representatives, half from the tourist category and most businessmen (Mykonos, Santorini, Amorgos) said there has been a decline in domestic tourism over the past two years and

the reasons are economic. From the category of tourism experts/academics, no unanimous answer was given for the description of Greek domestic tourism trends during the years 2019-2023.

Some of the participants referred to different trends depending on the destination: an inversely proportional relationship between foreign tourist demand and Greek tourist demand, the reason being the economic cost.

### *2. Reported repercussions of the drop in Greek domestic tourism*

The respondents on this point were unanimous, in their opinion these trends affect and will continue to affect the Greek tourism demand for the islands of the South Aegean. Greeks will seek to adapt and diversify their tourism/travel patterns accordingly and/or new Greek destinations will emerge.

In the opinion of most participants, the impact on South Aegean destinations will be mainly negative, in terms of economic revenue, unless inbound foreign tourism is favored instead.

Consequently, there is a change in the tourism product. The most serious result is that gradually the Greek element of the destinations is lost, which is also a blow to the tourist product "Greek island" for foreign tourism.

### *3. Foresights and recommendations for the future*

Most of the respondents expressed pessimism about the future of Greek domestic tourism, while some explicitly linked it to the state of the Greek economy. They mostly responded that they do not foresee any relief from these trends.

All of the interviewees wished for a future increase in Greek domestic tourism and that there are no economically prohibited destinations for Greeks. For these reasons they recommended:

Travel-related price reductions (i.e. on air and ferry tickets, on island accommodation, on catering services).

Improvement and checks on service quality, value for money, accessibility infrastructure.

State support and cooperation between tourism providers and institutions in terms of offering special/discount packages for Greek domestic tourists.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

As mentioned, the period under investigation is characterized by many peculiarities, as it includes two pandemic years (2020-2021), with their well-known consequences for tourism. However, the respondents agreed that Greek domestic tourism is gradually being cut off from the more developed and mature tourist destinations (mainly the South Aegean Islands) and towards more economical options. This fact is directly related to the financial difficulty faced by domestic tourism to cope financially in tourist destinations that follow the pricing policies of the global tourist market, due to their increased demand.

According to some interviewees, this seems to affect the destinations financially, while for others it does not directly affect them, since they are compensated financially by foreign tourist arrivals. However, over time, this fact will result in the Greek market not being the first choice for these islands, with unknown future impacts on Greek tourism and by extension the destinations. The other side of the coin, and the most positive trend for some of the respondents, is that new destinations are appearing on the tourism map of Greece.

It is an indisputable fact that the future of Greek domestic tourism is directly related to the general image of the country's economy.

In the opinion of the respondents, within the next five years, the aforementioned trends will intensify and spread to more and more islands, making it even more difficult for domestic tourists to afford the "Greek Summer".

However, the survey participants also envisioned a balanced scenario for the future, in which there would be no exclusions in terms of tourism markets and Greek domestic tourism. Would be able to enjoy holidays in the destinations of their choice, in a tourism-developed country.

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## **THE IMPACT OF HERITAGE-LED URBAN REGENERATION ON DESTINATION IDENTITY AND DESTINATION MARKETING; THE CASE OF THE TOBACCO WAREHOUSES IN KAVALA**

**Vasiliki (Vicky) FRAGKOUDI**

PhD Candidate in the field of “Destination Marketing”, Department of Tourism, Ionian University, Corfu, Greece  
vfragkoudi@ionio.gr

**Dr Alkmini GKRTZALI**

Assistant Professor (Area of expertise: Destination Marketing) Department of Tourism, Ionian University, Corfu, Greece

**Panagiotis MANOLITZAS**

Associate Professor, Department of Tourism, Ionian University, Corfu, Greece  
[pmanol@ionio.gr](mailto:pmanol@ionio.gr)

**Dr Efthymia SARANTAKOU**

Assistant Professor, Department tourism management, University of West Attica  
[esarantakou@uniwa.gr](mailto:esarantakou@uniwa.gr)

### **ABSTRACT**

In the last thirty years, a systematic effort of urban regeneration has been observed in all developing cities of the so-called Western world. The competition between these cities is

constantly increasing. Under these circumstances, governmental, regional and municipal authorities, as well as private investors, entrepreneurs, cultural organizations, stakeholders and ordinary citizens, are turning towards urban regeneration based on cultural heritage. This fact is not just a coincidence, as we locate strategic planning with the aim of highlighting the pre-existing cultural heritage in combination with cultural, social and above all, economic benefits, turning the cities into centers of creativity and economic development. The purpose of this research is to indicate the impact of heritage-led urban regeneration in destination identity. More specifically, we will focus on the case study of Kavala, a city in Northern Greece with huge architectural remnant of Tobacco warehouses. This project will examine how the Tobacco warehouse urban regeneration in Kavala can socially benefit the city, by reshaping the identity/image of internal (i.e. local entrepreneurs) and external (i.e. current and potential visitors) stakeholders, and help the city unveil and communicate its' unique identity to a wider audience. Furthermore, this research will also examine how the Tobacco warehouse regeneration will affect the destination image of current and potential visitors of Kavala. As a research objective this project aims to develop and provide a guide of marketing propositions on how heritage-led urban regeneration can help Kavala reshape its destination identity and create a differentiating advantage among other Greek cities.

**Key words:** heritage-led urban regeneration, industrial heritage, destination identity

## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the emergence of globalization, the Internet and social media usage, the facilitation of international transport and communications has resulted to the intensity of competition between destination cities. These cities struggle to stand out from one another to continually attract new visitors and tourists and increase their popularity and incomes. In this context, an attempt is made to strengthen and promote the identity of the destination to emphasize to those characteristics that make a city unique and therefore a life goal to visit. Highlighting and promoting cultural heritage contributes strongly to this effort, as it gives a unique character to the destination city, focusing on its special social, spatial, historical and political characteristics. The definition UNESCO provides for Cultural Heritage is: *'the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations'*. (Unesco).

Alongside, from the 1960s onwards, the phenomenon of de-industrialization is strongly observed. The development of technology and the appearance of new, innovative products, cause serious financial problems so that many industries fall into disuse. The consequence of this is that abandoned industrial buildings, as archetypical post-industrial landscapes, located in modern urban centers and metropolitan areas degrade central districts, considered as houses of contamination and delinquency while at the same time significantly degrading the quality of life of the residents. In some cases, as Raines (2011) proposes, they have also proved that economic catastrophe is not just an ending but also the chance for a new beginning. The architectural remnants of the former industries and rusty factories provide an excellent regeneration opportunity for spatial planners and governmental organizations or even private investors. As Sinmaz and Altanlar (2021) indicate, the departure of industry from cities is considered as a significant opportunity for the spatial improvement of cultural economics. Industrial heritage is only an integral part of cultural heritage and should be preserved and protected as a significant historical and social element.

Highlighting cultural heritage as an attraction for tourists and visitors is a common practice for European countries. Indeed, every major European city is inextricably linked to one or more Cultural Heritage monuments. In the last thirty years we locate a special focus on differentiating the destination identity by paying attention to industrial heritage. As Tweed & Sutherland insist, cultural heritage is also seen to play a vital role in societal and community well-being (2007).

Moreover, culture has been placed in the heart of urban development due to the emergence of a global service-based economy that highlighted the economic value of culture in this process (Banks and O'Connor, 2017). Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris also agree that “*investing in culture and improving the global competitiveness and image of cities through culture have become a common policy tool for both central and local authorities*” (2007:351-353).

Through the heritage-led urban regeneration process, arise some indisputable benefits. At a first level, these benefits concern the local community and subsequently the tourists and visitors of the destination. The resulting research question is the following:

1. How the type of entity (public or private) that initiates heritage-led urban regeneration affects its integration into the social web?

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As Tweed & Sutherland (2007) insist, cultural heritage is seen to play a vital role in societal and community well-being. Moreover, culture has been placed in the heart of urban development due to the emergence of a global service-based economy that highlighted the economic value of culture in this process (Banks & O'Connor, 2014). Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris (2007:351-350) also agree that “*investing in culture and improving the global competitiveness and image of cities through culture have become a common policy tool for both central and local authorities*”.

At the end of the 18th century, the ever-increasing introduction of machines is observed with the aim of automating most of the production process to increase the quantity of products while reducing the production time. Gradually, the so-called “*Industrial Revolution*” takes place. Industry is the economic activity that produces material goods after transformation and processing of raw materials (Repoussi, 1999). Since then, the developments in industry have been permanent and continuous, while building facilities, (factories and industrial production units, processing and storage areas), means of transport (railways and trains, road and aerial network) and engineering projects make the extent of the industrial revolution evident in large urban centers and the daily life of their inhabitants.

From the 1960s onward, the phenomenon of “*De-industrialization*” has been observed, which concerns the cessation of operation of industrial units for reasons that may be due to relocation or even economic collapse (Tsagkarakis 2010). This phenomenon has been especially intense since the middle of the 20th century, because of which many industrial units were abandoned or resold and completely changed their operation. As Bertacchini & Frontuto (2024) suggest, “*in this context, industrial brownfields have been increasingly considered a new form of heritage asset, recognizing industrial archeology as a distinct field in historical and heritage preservation*”. The remaining elements of these industrial units constitute the so-called Industrial heritage. According to the Charter of The International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage - TICCIH (2002), Industrial heritage consists of “*the remains of industrial culture which are of historical, technological, social, architectural or scientific value. These remains consist of buildings and machinery, workshops, mills and factories, mines and sites for processing and refining, warehouses and stores, places where energy is generated, transmitted and used, transport and all its infrastructure, as well as places used for social activities related to industry such as housing, religious worship or education*” (2003). In the case of industrial heritage facilities their technological/scientific value additionally and the

intangible dimensions of both of them (human memories, records etc) gain importance, as Cakir and Edis state (2022).

The values of industrial heritage go beyond the specificity that governs certain sectors. Its' maintenance and preservation are a very important presumption of know-how, commercial activity, daily life and social stratification and thus, initially, it has a historical value for the whole of society. In addition, it also has a social value since it is an element of identity: The industrial process significantly influenced and defined entire regions, shaping morals and customs as well as modern urban structures. Due to industrialization, many urban centers were shaped accordingly to serve industrial needs, while their inhabitants who were directly or indirectly involved in these processes adapted their lifestyles and habits such as the way of entertainment in the light of industrialization. As Slotta (1992) points out, the importance of industrial monuments lies less in the artistic intention of the architect or the founder of the installation and in its antiquity and more in their quality as evidence, that is, in the immediacy of their testimony about the level of development of production, of transportation and utility networks.

Furthermore, the preservation of the industrial heritage, referring to the architectural remnants also has an aesthetic value. Remnants of factories and industrial production units are exquisite examples of architecture that often adorn modern urban centers, changing their appearance. In recent years, the restoration and reuse of industrial shells has been strongly observed, either incorporating their previous use (industrial history museums) or with a different function: they are examples of former industrial buildings that are now used as restaurants, hotels and cultural spaces that host activities such as music concerts, theater performances but also as work or residence spaces. This fact also demonstrates the economic value contained in the preservation of industrial heritage. The highlighting and reuse of these spaces - either based on their prior function or by completely changing their use - is a very important economic incentive that brings funding and investments and attracts visitors and tourists.

The term "*Urban Regeneration*" refers to the urban revitalization of a, usually, degraded area, with the aim of re-capturing the urban landscape in a creative way. Adopting good practices such as the reuse of buildings, the creation of green and recreational areas, the promotion of cultural heritage is also a priority. As Leary & Mc Carthy (2013:12) propose, "*Urban Regeneration is area-based intervention which is public sector initiated, funded, supported, or inspired, aimed at producing significant sustainable improvements in the conditions of local people, communities and places suffering from aspects of deprivation, often multiple in nature.*" Konior and Pokojaska (2020) agree that revitalization is a long-term process aimed at rescuing an urban area out of a crisis, concerning both the material tissue—buildings, public spaces, green areas—and intangible elements in economic, social, or cultural spheres—the use of heritage. Since the mid-20th century, culture is being used as a statement of active intervention rather than just passive protection (Jansen et al, 2020). As Sinmaz & Altanlar (2021) state culture has been acknowledged as a significant theme in the urban transformation and revitalization programs aimed at protecting and reinforcing the character of cities, improving local economies, and ensuring a creative management.

In this context, urban planners create development strategies based on culture. In a services-based economy, the first and dominant priority is the attraction of investors, capital and so, visitors and tourists. These strategies can restructure urban economies confronting the city as a center of creativity and culture (2012:8, Grodach & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007:352). Urban regeneration functions as a tool that shapes a better political, cultural and economic environment. Thus, it immediately improves the quality of services provided by the city/region, creating a socio-political network of overlapping relationships. This requires considerable balances between adequate

interventions for improvements whilst bearing into consideration the existing socio-economic networks (Elnokaly, Wonk,2014).

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on original research conducted in 2022-2023 which addressed the research question above. Case studies were selected for the analysis based on certain criteria (*Diagram 1*). The most important selection criterion was the postindustrial and historic character of the area, mainly focusing on the regeneration of former tobacco factories and warehouses. Furthermore, the revitalization of the space had to start from 1992 up to 2022 to ensure that reuse examples are recent and up to date. Of course, this allowed us to analyze a strategic covering a longer period and observe the effects of the phase of the regeneration process. The case studies selected are not diverse in terms of type of industrial activity and all concern European cities or towns. As already mentioned before, Europe had rich industrial production perfectly adapted both to its population scale and to the specific production needs of each country. However, to a large extent, the industrial heritage of this continent remains marginalized and underutilized. Therefore, taking into consideration the good practices of highlighting and reusing the industrial heritage, we analyze the multiple impacts arise from the adoption of such practices and can be used as excellent examples of strategic planning.

Using the key-words *heritage-led urban regeneration, industrial heritage, destination identity*, we have collected scientific articles written in the past thirty years (1992-2022). Overall, we identified 15 case studies responding to the pre-referred criteria of selection (*Diagram 1*), mainly concerning the revitalization of Industrial heritage-former tobacco factories and warehouses- in the European continent. As we describe below, for each case study we conducted an analysis of the existing data (desk research). The analyzed documents regarded the revitalization areas were local revitalization programs, scientific studies and other sources such as press releases. During the next stage of the research, we analyzed official websites and social media profiles of the entities operating in these areas- mainly the “*About us*” tabs in order to examine how these entities present their rich history and their cultural heritage.

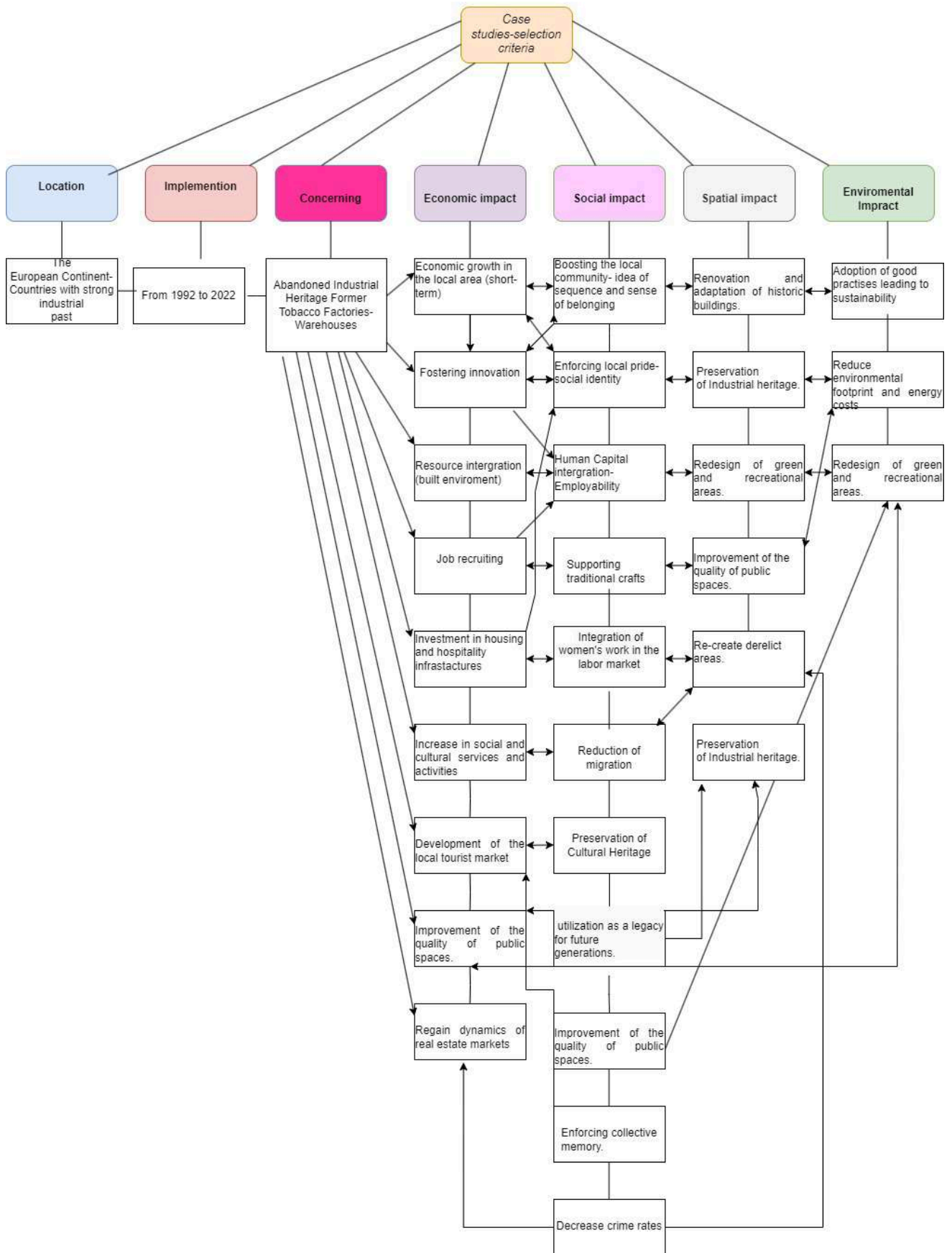


Diagram 1. Interrelations diagram based on selection criteria.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As already mentioned above, the purpose of this research is to indicate the impact of heritage-led urban regeneration in destination identity. To achieve this, we gathered 15 case studies of former tobacco factories and warehouses that had fallen into disuse all over the European continent, where heritage-led urban regeneration was implemented in the last thirty years. In this study, for the purposes of the synopsis, we will comprehensively examine 10 cases of reuse of industrial heritage: the cases are divided based on who provoked the regeneration to those who the regeneration was provoked by:

1. the public sector (*Altadis Tobacco Factory, Ciballi Tobacco Museum, Kavala Tobacco Museum, University of Thessaly*),
2. private investors (*Van Nelle Tobacco Factory, Yenidze Tobacco Factory, Former Public Athens Tobacco Factory, Hydrama Hotel*)
3. Citizens' initiative (*La Tabacalera de Lavapiés, Plovdiv tobacco*).

Altadis European Tobacco, Santander	Vertical garden	Public sector
Cibalitobaccofactory	Tobacco Museum	Public sector
VanNelle Tobacco Factory, Rotterdam	Officefacilities, eventsarea	Private investor
Yenidze Factory, Dresden	Officeand restaurant facilities	Private investor
PlovdivTobacco Industry	Plovdiv 2019 Fou/tion headquarters	Citizens' initiative
La tabacalera de Lavapiés, Madrid	Cultural center	Citizens' initiative
TobaccoMuseum, Kavala	Museum ofIndustrialheritage	Public sector
UniversityofThessaly, Volos	University	Public sector
Former TobaccoFactory, Athens	Benakeios Library	Private investor
HydramaHotel, Drama	Hotel	Private investor

Table 1. Examples of tobacco factories regeneration.

We thus locate the differences between the projects financed by private rather than public initiative (Table 2). Gathering the data collected from the desk research we find that in the case of private, rather than the case of public financing the construction time is less. The private investor accelerates the regeneration processes to reduce the cost as much as possible and to have completed the final construction as quickly as possible. In this way, he will possibly be able to pay off the money invested in the regeneration faster. On the contrary, in the case of public financing, as we see from the examples above, the regeneration processes move at a slower pace. This is initially due to bureaucratic procedures required for both the approval of funds and the licensing of redevelopment works.

In addition, both in the private and in the public initiative, even if the regeneration is designed to cover specific needs and functions (educational center, youth center, company offices, museum, etc.), we notice that in the case of private financing, the regeneration is directed to a smaller audience. For example, in the case of a public initiative such as Cibali Tobacco Factory, the Kadir Has Museum is open to all ages and all kinds of visitors. On the contrary, the regeneration of Hydrama Hotel in Drama is directed to visitors and tourists and people who can afford a stay in a five-star hotel. This fact leads us to another conclusion: in the cases of regeneration with private initiative, the emphasis is on the amortization of the investment while serving private interests. In contrast, in the case of publicly funded regeneration, it is more commonly aimed at the common good, imparting a public character.

Private initiate	Public initiate
less construction time	more time-consuming construction
addressed to a smaller audience	usually addressed to the general public (public character)
specific use meets certain functional needs	specific use meets certain functional needs
emphasis on private economic interests	emphasis on the general use-exploitation of public space

Table 2. Private and public initiate on regeneration process.

Analyzing the studies of the cases we saw above, we find that in the case of the financing of the regeneration by a private entity, the negotiations become faster. This happens as the individual treats the project as an investment and therefore aims to pay it off immediately.

Heritage-led urban regeneration is a way of exploiting and reusing the built environment while simultaneously integrating it into the modern urban fabric. However, according to the examples mentioned above, the phenomenon of faster integration of such a project is observed when it concerns a private funding initiative. This happens as the inhabitants of modern cities do not perceive public space as part of their identity. Thus, buildings went through regeneration and have a public character are not so easily integrated into the social fabric. Conversely, privately-owned buildings that serve private interests are more readily accepted by residents and visitors.

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## **THERMOPYLES: THE POSSIBILITIES OF A GLOBAL BRAND NAME PLACE IN FORMING A STRONG COMPETITIVE IDENTITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Vasileios KALOTAS**

Department of Planning and Regional Development,  
University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece, email: [vvasilios@gmail.com](mailto:vvasilios@gmail.com)

**Theodore METAXAS**

Department of Department of Economics,  
University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece, email: [metaxas@uth.gr](mailto:metaxas@uth.gr)

### **ABSTRACT**

The place of Thermopyles Battlefield is registered as one of the most famous and well-known sites of the ancient military history and introduced as a potential magnifying point of attracting visitors. Due to the historic magnitude of the event as a military tactic and the symbolic meaning of the strongly bravery sacrifice of King Leonidas, the 300 Spartans and the rest Greek warriors as an idealistic heritage aspect like the fight for freedom against tremendous barbaric forces, there is locally oriented ongoing stakeholder's discussion concerning the appropriate development steps of the specific place as an asset of sustainable economic procedure. Dark tourism and battlefield tourism formulate the general wider context of explaining the interest of stakeholders planning process and tourist visiting motivational factors. The aim of this research is to record the existing parameters and examine the possibilities and prospects for the development of Thermopyles as a site of competitive local identity and a branding place of the future sustainable tourism development. This is achieved through a qualitative method of face to face semi structured interviews with 23 local stakeholders, planners and professionals who actively participate in the local economic arena and struggle about the exploitation of a globally famous tourist point as a dark tourism multiplier. The highlighting of the site of the battle of Thermopyles has been recorded as well as the significant development perspective of the area but with the minimal to no contribution of the conditions of dark tourism and battlefield tourism.

**Keywords:** Thermopyles; Dark Tourism; Battlefield Tourism; Sustainable Development Prospects;  
Competitive Identity;

### **INTRODUCTION**

Visiting places of battlefields has been recently developed into a dynamic tourism prospect, as visitors seek information about the history and the cultural heritage of famous battle sites (Garcia-Madurca & Grillo-Mendez, 2023). However, a small number of battle sites managed to emerge in attractive and dynamic tourist destinations due to the fact that the lack of presentable exhibits and the absence of monuments at the battle sites fail to support the desire of interested visitors to 'read' the battle sites satisfactorily (Chylinska, 2013). The site of the Battle of Thermopyles (480BC) is recognized as one of the most famous sites of the historical battles as it is considered to have played a key role in saving Western civilization (Mathews, 2011). At the same

time, it is today an important point of attraction for visitors and tourists in the wider region (INSETE, 2022). The visitor can walk through the archaeological site of the battle of Thermopylae, visit the statue of Leonidas, the Kolonos Hill and as well as the Thermopylae Historical Information Center and the thermal spring of Thermopyles. The main purpose of this paper is to examine the potential and development prospects of the local bodies approach concerning the exploitation of the tourist interest in the battle of Thermopyles and the name Thermopyles in the light of dark tourism and battlefield tourism. The methodology is based on conducting qualitative research through 23 semi-structured interviews with the representatives of active local bodies and organizations in the wider local area of the empirical research. All the interviews were carried out between March 1, 2023 and May 31, 2023. The average duration of the interview was estimated at half an hour and due to the open process in some cases it was completed within an hour.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### *Competitive identity and place branding*

The highlighting of the distinct and special characteristics of a region, a place or a country is presented as an imperative object in order to exploit the special and valuable competitive advantages of a place and to build a competitive identity (UNWTO,2005). Govers (2011) argues that the creation of a brand should be part of a more general strategy and focus on competitive identity, as branding is related to identity and identity is significantly influenced by local population, culture, heritage, symbolism, leadership, collaborative sense of belonging and heterogeneity.

### *Dark Tourism and battlefield tourism*

The desire to visit places where events of loss of life or tragic incidents have occurred is not a modern and recent phenomenon but has also been recorded in the past as a choice of visiting for pilgrimage reasons. The concept of dark tourism covers all cases of visiting places where death, fear, or some unpleasant tragic events have taken place (Lennon & Foley, 2009) Fonseca et al (2015) state that research interest in examining dark tourism as part of tourism economic activity began in the early 1990s and various researchers turned their attention to tourism in places of death or suffering by including various concepts and approaches such as: ‘Black Spot’, ‘Thanatourism’, ‘Atrocity Tourism’, ‘Morbid Tourism’.

### *Visitors Engagement*

According to Stone (2012) the motives for visiting places of dark tourism concern the tourist’s desire to come into contact with the macabre.

### *Sustainable Development and Impacts of Visiting Places of Battlefield*

The tripartite of sustainable management economic efficiency, social justice and environmental protection ensures harmonious tourism development as sustainable and environmentally beneficial through a step-by-step process of approach followed by the interested and involved bodies intervention and evaluation. The attractiveness of a tourist destination is also systematically based on the reputation created by the local characteristics (uniqueness and quality of cultural and environmental resources, local tradition, customs, values, hospitality, etc). Therefore, sustainable tourism development requires the systematic preservation of the local advantage (cultural, environmental and folkloric wealth) with protection systems against the problems of mass tourism (Kokkosis & Tsartas, 2001) and the comprehensive coverage of the needs of tourists and places of hospitality while protecting the future resources and opportunities (Andriotis, 2008).

## METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the possibilities and development prospects of the Thermopyles brand name for the benefit of the local economy. To address the research question, and having in mind the lack of literature on the development of important dark tourism points of interest for the Greek context, primary research was carried out using interviews. The qualitative interview has positive points of reference as it not only helps in the in-depth exploration of perceptions, opinions and values but plays an important role in understanding the complexity of human experience and behavior and penetrates the phenomenon under investigation through an active and interactive perspective of the interviewees. The semi-structured in-depth interview is often used by new qualitative researchers and involves a set of predetermined research questions to comprehensively cover the research topics. It is noted that this particular type of interview presents degrees of flexibility concerning the content of the questions, the need to deepen individual aspects of the questions, the order of discussion as well as the addition and removal of questions (Isari & Pourkos, 2015).

One of the main aims of the interview is to provide the researcher with a wealth of data on people's perceptions, thoughts and impressions through an informal atmosphere of encouragement and dialogue (Bloor *et al.*, 2001). Richards (2005) (as referred in Anyan, 2013) states that qualitative data are records of observations, descriptions and narratives that display a degree of complexity. According to Kedraka (2008) interviews "enlight" the way others see things, their thoughts, attitudes and opinions behind their behavior meanwhile Paraskevopoulou - Kollia (2008) state that interview concentrates at the center of qualitative research and relies on direct communication between researcher and respondent. As Dunkley *et al* (2001) also attempted, for a better understanding of the interview elements, a more open and discrete approach was followed to record opinions and responses through open-ended questions and increased interactivity (Harris *et al*, 2007).

The research questions posted to the local bodies were the following:

RQ1 *What is your knowledge about the point and what is your valuation?* (Kennell & Powell, 2021)

RQ2 *What are the resources available to develop (dark) tourism services at the site?* (Kennell & Powell, 2021)

RQ3 *What are the current (dark) tourism offers on the site?* (Kennell & Powell, 2021)

RQ4 *What are the possible products or experiences offered regarding tourism (dark) at the point?* (Kennell & Powell, 2021)

RQ5 *Do you believe that a tourism market has been created for this point?* (Kennell & Powell, 2021)

RQ6 *What are the main strengths and weaknesses and the main opportunities and threats for the site?* (UNWTO,2005)

RQ7 *What are the kinds of tourism activities (other than dark tourism) that would be acceptable to develop locally?* (Kennell & Powell, 2021)

RQ8 *What was possible and desirable in terms of local tourism development?* (Kennell & Powell, 2021)

RQ9 *What is the connection between the point and historical and cultural heritage tourism?* (Franch, M. *et al*, 2017)

RQ10 *What are the actions of local authorities including to promote and communicate the*

*point in combination with cultural products?* (Franch, M. *et al*, 2017)

*RQ11 What is your opinion about the establishment of a specialized organization to promote the point as a destination?* (Proos & Hattingh, 2020).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the results of the interviews of the 23 representatives of local bodies that participated in the process.

*RQ1.* Thermopyles is recognized by all respondents as a site with significant level of historicity due to battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC between the Greeks and the Persians. The existence of thermal springs and geothermal potential is also a point of interest. The site is archaeological and is known for the statue of Leonidas, the hill of Kolonos, the Phokian wall as well as the Information Center. Nine of the twenty-three respondents mention the global recognition of the point, while 14 of the 23 respondents state that the site of Thermopyles is a pole of attraction for tourism with significant growth prospects.

*RQ2:* In this section, the listed answers focus on the question of resources availability concerning tourism development services at the point. LP10 refers to the existence of the available natural resources such as monument of Leonidas, Kolonos Hill, Information Center and in parallel points out the identification of a significant lack in the completeness of the information material. Several representatives note the availability of the financial resources of European and National funds.

*RQ3:* Answers regard the current tourism offers that exist in this period at the point. LP8 states that the current tourism offers concern the operation of the Thermopyles Historical Information Center which operates under the responsibility of the Municipality of Lamia. There is also a tour of the wider archaeological site as well as visits to buildings of the Ministry of Culture that host models with a thematic approach to the outcome of the battle and topography. LP22 underlines the fact that the Thermopylae Historical Information Center is located within the wider site of the Battle of Thermopylae and the exhibition spaces display the digital representation of the Battle of Thermopylae. Also noteworthy is the fact that 12 of the 23 participants stated that they are not aware of any current tourism offers in relation to the site of Thermopylae. Finally, representative LP18 underlines that the "dark tourism" approach mainly concerns individual cases of expression of interest as the dominant interest focuses on the mass tourism of the region and in particular on the historical/cultural sector. However, it could work with the help of private initiative.

*RQ4:* In this section, the answers are presented regarding the possible offered products or experiences related to tourism at the site of Thermopylae. The representative LP5 states that for this specific point there are many possible proposals for the future related to the fields of history, culture, naturalism, gastronomy, thermalism. The LP10 representative suggests the upgrading of the offered services by the introduction of new technologies and through the search and evaluation of best practices from successful approaches

*RQ5:* In this section we comment on the results of the question whether the representatives of the local bodies consider that a tourist market has been created for the site of Thermopylae. It is noteworthy that 16 of the 23 participants stated that no tourism

market has been created at the site, while only six representatives indicate that there is a small market with growth prospects. Representative LP11 points out that there is a lot of traffic to the site, which is expected to increase through the implementation of significant infrastructure and a network of trails.

*RQ6:* The main strengths are the natural environment, the recognition of the famous name as well as the individual elements of archaeological and historical interest. Also, a positive element is the symbolism. The main weak points are the underutilization of the point and the lack of an integrated development plan. Another weak point is referred the problematic image of the thermal springs and the lack of strategic promotion and promotion of the whole area. Some references concern the operation of the refugee accommodation spot in negative way regarding the contribution to the deterioration of the image and degradation of the area. The opportunities concern the future perspective of area development and the possible combination with other tourism activities as well as the supply of specialized products and services. The threats regard the non-utilization of the point, the absence of investment plans and interventions in general in conjunction with the discrediting of the site and environmental degradation.

*RQ7:* In this section, the recording of the opinions of local bodies on the existence of activities offered for local development is obtained. The representative LP10 underlines as an important activity the existence of thermal tourism as well as beach tourism in the wider area, mentioning Kammena Vourla and Raches Fthiotida as typical examples

*RQ8:* The main directions of local tourism development are the promotion of the wider region as an important pole of culture and tourism, recognizable at an international level as well as the utilization of the tripole Alamana-Thermopyles-Gorgopotamos and the dipole Delphi-Thermopyles. The majority of respondents (15 out of 23 participants) state that they do not know the direction and strategy of local tourism development. The representative LP7 reports: *“There is no complete plan. On the contrary, there are various fragmentary actions, but at some point, they will have to be combined with each other, as in some places even today they conflict with each other.”*

*RQ9:* In this section, 15 of the 23 participants state that there is some kind of connection of the site with cultural and historical heritage tourism; however they express some concerns regarding the scope, design and result. The existence of the Thermopylae Historical Information Center proves the connection of the point as it presents in digital form both the historical events of the battle and various historical elements. Some representatives argue that the wider area of Fthiotida has an abundance of valuable but underutilized historical sites that could arouse the interest of tourists.

*RQ10:* In this section, the majority of participants (13 out of 23) state that they do not know implemented actions in order to promote and communicate the point in combination with cultural products. LP3 states that promotional actions are minimal and without plan while LP4 refers that any movement is not targeted. LP23 adds that despite the existence of plans and studying reports, no significant action is undertaken to attract visitors and promote global visibility.

*RQ11:* The reaction of the representatives regarding the establishment of a

promotional organization is very positive, as 18 of the 23 converge positively in this direction. LP1 refers:

*“it would be a great advantage to have a legal entity under the supervision of the Municipality whose main job would be to promote Tourism and Culture in an area.”*

At a glance, it can be argued that the name Thermopyles is a globally recognized site with unique physical characteristics of the natural environment and historical incomparable elements from the battle of Thermopyles that guide the atmosphere of symbolism, ideals and values that make up the basic building blocks of modern Western civilization. The value of the historical name Thermopyles as a place of global influence gives unique prospects for the development of the wider region as a strategic geographical position and a rich history create conditions for the development of an important cultural, touristic and developmental pole of interest. The location is considered to be a magnet for both foreign and domestic visitors. It operates in addition to the Delphi-Thermopyles dipole and is located on the Athens-Meteora axis. The visitor can tour the site, the statue of Leonidas, the Hill of Colonos as well as visit the site of the thermal spring. Another point is the Thermopylae Historical Information Center of the Municipality of Lamia for information about the battle through interactive tables and video projection. The geographical area of the battle has been demarcated as an archaeological site and is subject to strict and specific legislative provisions. Most representatives consider that there is no market at the point despite the great interest from visitors. The existence of a small market is due to the fact of the anemic supply of specialized products and services. The current offers at the site concern the tour of the site, visit to the thermal springs and some periodical cultural and sports events in combination with student and educational interest, while the possible future offers could concern the introduction of new technologies and experiences for the visitor, the creation of tours and special events based on history and nature, new informational materials with a theme park and, in general, a qualitative upgrade.

The main strengths are the natural environment, the recognition of the famous name as well as the individual elements of archaeological and historical interest. Also, a positive element is the symbolism. The main weak points are the underutilization of the point and the lack of an integrated development plan. Another weak point is referred the problematic image of the thermal springs and the lack of strategic promotion and promotion of the whole area. Some references concern the operation of the refugee accommodation spot in negative way regarding the contribution to the deterioration of the image and degradation of the area. The opportunities concern the future perspective of area development and the possible combination with other tourism activities as well as the supply of specialized products and services. The threats regard the non-utilization of the point, the absence of investment plans and interventions in general in conjunction with the discrediting of the site and environmental degradation.

In fact, except the operation of the Innovative Information Center, the installation of the King Leonidas monument and the cultural event 'Thermopyleia', there has not been a systematic effort to manage the brand of the place and highlight the local advantages for the benefit of residents, the local economy and development. Agents evaluate positively the potential establishment of specialized organization for the place development with red flags regarding operational issues.

In summary, the local representatives wish to highlight the competitive advantages of the Thermopyles area through a coordinated effort of strategic planning of place branding with the participation of local economic stakeholders. However, this effort is undermined by the recorded long-term inactivity and the lack of corresponding soft intervention infrastructure based on the principles of sustainable development. Prospects are not positive regarding the achievement of visible and immediate results. However, the intention of future utilization is positively recorded. Finally, with regard to the approach of dark tourism and battlefield tourism, it is concluded that the conditions of dark tourism are not applied and the place marketing approach is based on the special characteristics of the location. Although there is a recorded belief in the future perspective of tourism development, this has not been specified with analytical characteristics and is at an early or initial stage without further indications of the development of dark tourism services.

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## **TOWARDS LOCAL MOBILIZATION FOR HERITAGE AND TOURISTIC DEVELOPMENT IN LEBANON**

**Marie-Claire ANDRAOS**

PhD Candidate, Ecole Doctorale des Sciences de l’Homme et la Société, Geography Department,  
 “Tourism and Cultural Development” Section, Saint-Joseph University of Beirut,  
 Rue de Damas, BP 17-5208, Mar Mikhaël Beirut, Lebanon.  
 Phone number: +961 78 91 86 85; email: [marieclaire.andraos@net.usj.edu.lb](mailto:marieclaire.andraos@net.usj.edu.lb)

**Liliane BUCCIANTI-BARAKAT**

Professor, Ecole Doctorale des Sciences de l’Homme et la Société, Geography Department,  
 “Tourism and Cultural Development” Section, Saint-Joseph University of Beirut,  
 Rue de Damas, BP 17-5208, Mar Mikhaël Beirut, Lebanon.  
 Phone number: +961 03 39 81 48; email: [liliane.barakat@usj.edu.lb](mailto:liliane.barakat@usj.edu.lb)

### **ABSTRACT**

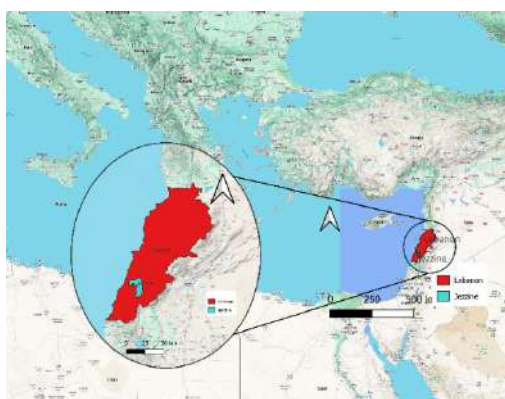
The heritagization process, as outlined by the World Heritage Convention (1972), aims to identify, protect, and transmit cultural, natural, and intangible heritage to future generations. It fosters tourism, economic development, and environmental preservation, ultimately leading to local sustainable development. In Lebanon, despite its rich heritage, political instability and economic crises have diverted attention from local assets, such as those in the Jezzine region, in southern Lebanon. Jezzine region is rich in heritage assets that need conservation and valorization, and lacks touristic development, because of past war effects. Since 2012, the Union of Jezzine Municipalities has collaborated with stakeholders to develop sustainable tourism but lacks a focus on heritage and community involvement. To address this gap, this research aimed to mobilize citizens to actively participate in the heritagization. That’s why a research question was posed:

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How can *Jezzini* Citizens be mobilized for positive tourism development linked to their heritage? A community-based methodology was used, combining a survey with residents, interviews with different stakeholders, and focus groups. The results were promising, because despite geopolitical challenges, local population and leaders recognize the potential of heritage-driven tourism for sustainable development. By fostering community involvement and awareness, bottom-up initiatives are shaping tourism and heritage efforts in Lebanon, highlighting the importance of citizen participation in local development.

**Keywords:** Lebanon, Union of Jezzine Municipalities, Heritagization Process, Bottom-up approach, Citizens' Mobilization, Touristic Development.

## INTRODUCTION



**Figure 1. Location of Lebanon**

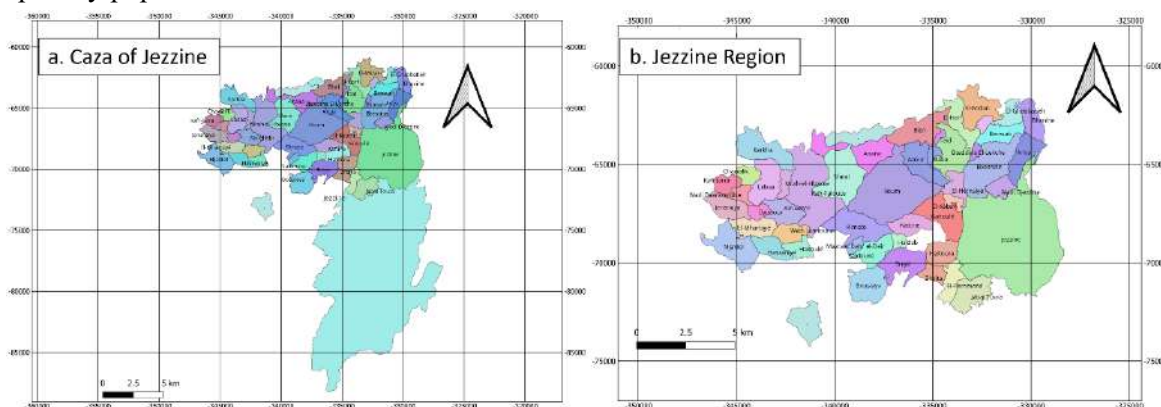
Source: Our elaboration using QGIS (2024)

In the heart of the eastern Mediterranean region lies Lebanon, a country spanning 10,452 Km<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1). Situated at a pivotal crossroads between East and West, it has served as a historical thoroughfare for millennia. Its strategic location has led to successive occupations by civilizations, with remnants of their presence still accessible today. Furthermore, Lebanon's mountains harbor unique and endangered species, making them hotspots for biodiversity (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, 2010).

Lebanon boasts numerous heritage treasures listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, such as *Baalbek*, the Valley of *Qadisha*, the *Becharri* cedar forest, *Tripoli International Fair*, a traditional poetry form known as "*Zajal*", and gastronomy through "*Man'ouche*", etc. Additionally, it is home to three UNESCO Biosphere reserves, and safeguards a multitude of natural and archaeological sites, alongside historic buildings.

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Our study area is located in southern Lebanon and called Jezzine region (see Figure 2). It occupies 130 Km<sup>2</sup>, composed of 45 villages including 33 municipalities administered by the Union of Jezzine Municipalities (UJM) since 2005. With around 20,000 inhabitants, Jezzine region is sparsely populated.



**Figure 2. Our Study Area: Jezzine Region**

Source: Our elaboration using QGIS (2024)

It is rich in both cultural and natural assets, including archaeological sites, ancient residences, traditional craftsmanship, notable figures, the largest pine forest in the Middle East, and the iconic waterfall of Jezzine (40 m high). Even though this region is rich in cultural heritage, it is forgotten by tour operators because of the long Israeli occupation from 1982 to 2000, and the displacement of its population. Since the liberation, apart from a few personal touristic initiatives, agriculture and local development implementation, the region remains as an undynamic and attracts few investors. Also, Lebanon is still facing government negligence, corruption, pollution, economic crises, and ongoing conflicts, notably the war taking place today with Israel on the southern borders of the country. Consequently, cultural heritage receives little attention in the present circumstances. Nonetheless, initiating the process of heritage conservation can lead to positive outcomes, such as boosting the region's economy through sustainable tourism and related services, heritage preservation, promoting the environment, and strengthening the population's fabric.

Since 2012, the UJM has a Strategic Development Plan (SDP) for the region. It proposes preserving and valorizing its heritage for sustainable tourism development. Despite efforts to foster tourism through collaboration with a Destination Management Organization (DMO) since 2022, these endeavors have often overlooked heritage and cultural considerations. Consequently, there is a shift towards prioritizing the heritagization process, with an added focus on social engagement and local participation at all stages. However, all these plans are top-down approaches, not involving the locals.

The success of any initiative to preserve heritage hinges on collaborative efforts among stakeholders, with active engagement of the local community at each stage, as per the Faro Convention (2005). Leveraging the skills and innovation of young artisans can fuel the advancement of heritage and ecotourism, aligning with the desires and necessities of the area. It's crucial for local involvement to shift perceptions toward heritage, viewing it as a shared asset benefiting everyone.

Hence, the research question emerges: How can Jezzini Citizens be more effectively mobilized to participate in a positive tourism development, in connection with their heritage, be it tangible or intangible, cultural, religious, or natural? Therefore, we set the following objective: **Mobilize the locals towards accepting and participating in the heritagization process in Jezzine region, resulting in touristic development.**

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### The heritagization process

The heritagization process takes place in a region or a village, during which objects, places, or practices are considered as cultural heritage. Their valorization gives them a new cultural significance and a sense of common belonging to the population (Gravari-Barbas et al., 2014). This process goes through several stages which are the identification, protection, conservation, presentation, and passing it onto future generations (*Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, 1972). The Faro Convention (2005) states the need to put people and human values at the center of an enlarged and cross-disciplinary concept of cultural heritage. That's why the current trend in the heritagization process aims to ensure the active participation of the local population, to involve them in the decision-making process.

The process initiates sustainable local development in the region. On the one hand, the protection of cultural and natural heritage is target 11.4 of the 11th SDG ("The 17 Goals," n.d.).

Thanks to the renovation of sites, tourist services, trade, etc. it is a job creator. It will thus make it possible to improve the living conditions of the region's inhabitants while stimulating an economic dynamic. This approach must be accompanied by education about heritage and the environment conservation among the population of all ages. This process ensures benefits on well-being and physical health through the gradual reduction of pollution emissions (Labadi et al., 2021).

### The Social Acceptability

Heritage is delicate and raises concerns, it must be addressed through social acceptability. The latter comes upstream a project. It is when the stakeholders and the population dialogue to build together the conditions to be put in place in a project according to their common preferences. It depends on many factors like the project scope, the governance, the legitimacy, the responsible institutions, ... (Coll, 2018; Service des relations de travail, 2016).

Acceptability has many steps: Prior research about the project >Information, consultation, and evaluation with the stakeholders >Realization of the planning >Operation of the project >Conclusion and after project. In addition to these steps, it has 3 complementary forms:

**Socio-Political Acceptability:** in a project affecting the general interest of a population. In this project, the politicians, the public, the NGOs, and the main stakeholders accept or not the technology used and the management policy of this project.

**Community Acceptability:** in projects on a local scale, residents and local actors can oppose the project under the slogan "not in my backyard" (NIMBY).

**Market Acceptability:** politicians, investors, and consumers accept financial risks occurring to support a project or policy (Conseil patronal de l'environnement du Québec, 2012).

## METHODOLOGY

In this research, we are testing the socio-political acceptability, while trying to implement the social acceptability steps. That's why, we began by prior research about the process, the basic concepts and the region's assets and projects, in addition to field visits to dress an inventory of the assets. For the consultation phase, community-based, and bottom-up approaches were utilized: surveys among local population, interviews with various stakeholders, and focus groups (FG).

The survey was conducted during the winter of 2021-2022, involving 392 individuals from the region, as per Confidence Level= 95% and a Precision Level=  $\pm 5\%$  for the 20,000<sup>3</sup> winter residents of the region (Israel, 2013). Individuals were selected through quota sampling to ensure representation across the area's 45 villages and gender distribution, with attention to age demographics. Data analysis was performed using IBM-SPSS software version 26. The questions were about the heritage definition, the advantages of the heritagization, the different stakeholders, and their readiness to engage in the process.

Interviews were conducted with 16 stakeholders, including 6 mayors and 4 deputies, and 6 researchers and NGO members, spanning the years 2022 to 2023. The interviews addressed similar questions as the survey, in addition to choosing the most significant heritage asset in the region and strategies for its valorization.

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<sup>3</sup> According to the UJM statistics for the year 2021

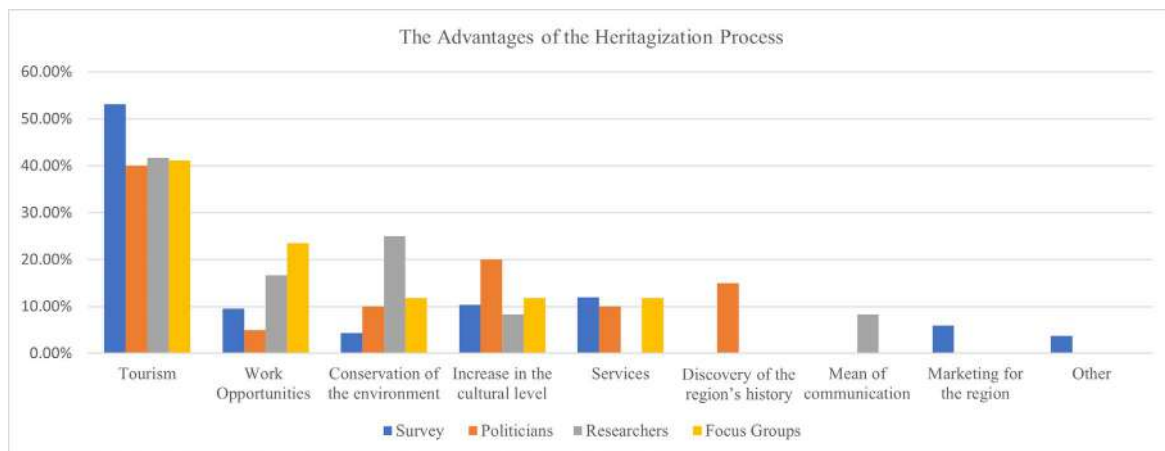
Additionally, in 2023, 10 Focus Groups (FG) were organized, with 130 local participants. Discussions centered on the role of the local population in the heritagization process, preferences regarding choosing the most important heritage asset, and planning its heritagization process.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Heritage Definition

The first step to social acceptability is to understand what the process is. That’s why we asked the locals to define the heritage. The answers were mainly “*heritage is an ancient good inherited from the past that we must conserve and transmit to future generations. This good has a historical, territorial and identity value*”. This means they theoretically know the heritage definition. To test their practical knowledge of heritage, when asked them to give us examples on heritage, they mainly gaveliving heritage and built heritage examples. Natural assets are rarely cited, even when asked about, which tells us that, for the *Jezzini* citizens, heritage is human made. Even though, it contradicts with the examples on important assets in the region where one third of the cited assets are natural. This definition was ultimately rectified in the FG.

### The Impacts of the Heritagization Process



**Figure 3. The Advantages of the Heritagization Process**

Source: The summary of our survey, interviews and FG results grouped on Excel (2024)

Figure 3 compiles the advantages of the heritagization process according to the locals consulted in the survey, focus groups and interviews: We can visualize the diversity of advantages associated with the process (>8 advantages). Tourism is the major advantage of the process, whether archaeological, religious, cultural, gastronomic, natural, ecotourism, ... all other frequencies are by far more minimal compared to the tourism sector. The tourism, work opportunities, and the services are economic advantages. The conservation of the heritage, and the discovery of the region’s history are environmental advantages. The increase in cultural level, the mean of communication and the marketing of the region are cultural benefits. Therefore, stakeholders are aware of the diversity of the process’ advantages (economic, cultural, and environmental).

For the disadvantages of the heritagization processthe local population in the survey and FG didn't see any major disadvantages of the process, a sign of social acceptability. That's why, we only included the interviews' results, where the main concern among stakeholders is mass tourism's negative impact on environmental and heritage conservation in the region. While tourism development is recognized as beneficial, stakeholders are aware of its drawbacks, highlighted by the ongoing DMO project in Jezzine. Researchers caution against indiscriminate conservation efforts, advocating for prioritization based on cultural significance. Politicians fear changes in local lifestyle due to tourism, potential conflicts, and the burden on municipalities to manage heritage protection.

In conclusion, the heritagization process has many impacts, the most important is tourism.It can be both a blessing and a curse, depending on the management.

### The Stakeholders of the Process

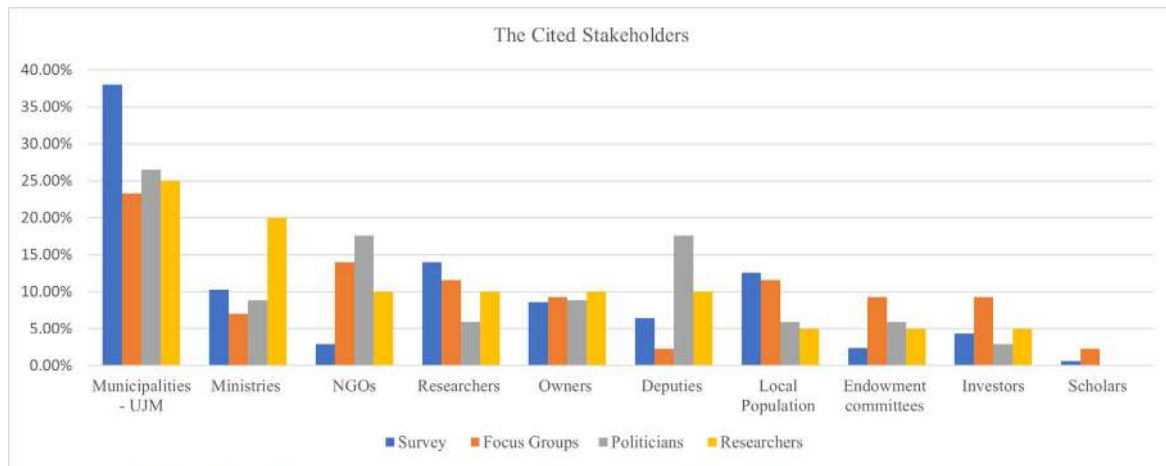


Figure 4. The Cited Stakeholders of the Process

Source: The summary of our survey, interviews and FG results grouped on Excel (2024)

In the different consultation frameworks, we asked who the stakeholders in the heritagization process are (see Figure 4). It shows around ten stakeholders involved in the heritagization process. This means that the population believes that heritage governance must be divided and equitable, and not a top-down approach.

The cited stakeholders are mainly the municipalities and the UJM as the main decision-makers, in addition to other decision-makers like the owners. The other stakeholders have very near frequencies and are to be consulted in the process: authorization from the ministries, planning and propositions from the NGOs, researchers, local population, ... Investors will be asked to finance the project. Here, what is interesting is that the population is rather cited in the survey and the FGs, but not among politicians and researchers. This means that the population knows that they have a role to play, but this is not the perspective of the politicians who are used to top-down approaches.

### The Local Participation

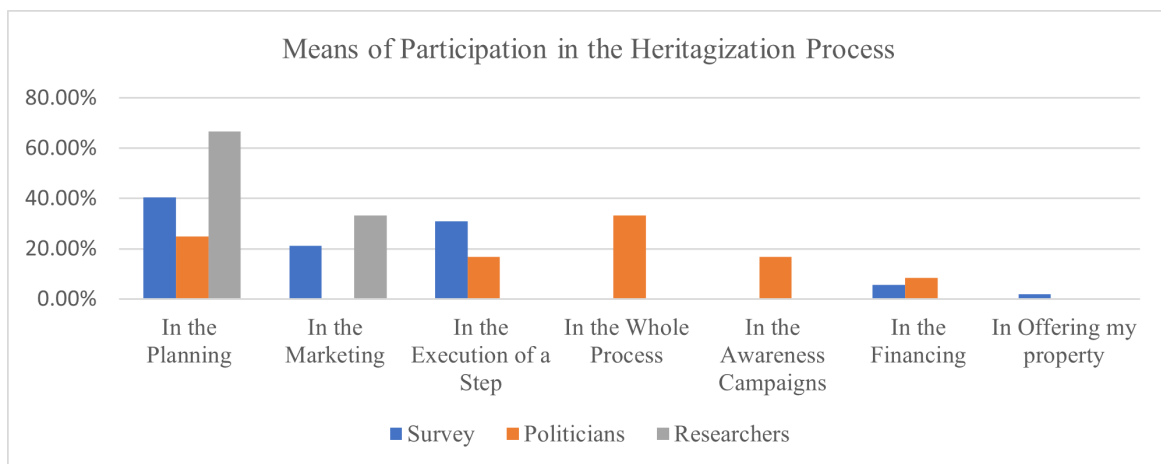
We asked the stakeholders if they were ready to participate in the heritagization and

calculated their rates:

- $R_{(participants)} = \left( \frac{F(participants_{survey})}{Total(survey)} + \frac{F(participants_{politicians})}{Total(politicians)} + \frac{F(participants_{researchers})}{Total(researchers)} \right) / 3$   
 $= \left( \frac{55}{392} + \frac{4}{10} + \frac{3}{6} \right) / 3 = \frac{1.0403}{3} = 0.3468$  or **34.68% of sure participants.**
- $R_{(potential)} = \left( \frac{F(potential_{survey})}{Total(survey)} + \frac{F(potential_{politicians})}{Total(politicians)} + \frac{F(potential_{researchers})}{Total(researchers)} \right) / 3 = \left( \frac{232}{392} + \frac{6}{10} + \frac{1}{6} \right) / 3 = \frac{1.3585}{3} = 0.4528$  or **45.28% of potential participants.**
- $R_{(non-participants)} = 100\% - [R_{(participants)} + R_{(potential)}] = 100\% - (34.68\% + 45.28\%) = 20.04\%$  of non-participants.

In a developing country like Lebanon, in the middle of a crisis, 34.68% of participants is good result. Because there is no common history book or civic raising targeting the culture, but only the politics. The different crises are shifting people's priorities to only ensure primary needs. Also, in rural areas, the economy consists mostly of agriculture not on tourism and culture, that are considered luxuries. As for the 45.28% of non-sure participants, they can be subject to awareness campaigns or negotiations. The total is  $34.68 + 45.28 = 79.96\%$  of positive answers, which means a socio-political acceptability.

Those 79.96% were asked how they would participate in the process. The answers are in Figure 5.



**Figure 5. Means of participation in the heritagization process**

Source: The summary of our survey, interviews and FG results grouped on Excel (2024)

The results show that participation is mainly established at the planning level. All it needs is ideas and collaboration. The same goes for the marketing approach, especially in the presence of social media, same goes for the awareness campaigns. The execution of one of the stages is mainly chosen by engineers, masons, hotel industry, etc. for whom the process offers work opportunities. A minority is willing to help finance. This not only highlights another time the economic impact the stakeholders see in the heritagization process, but the effect of the economic crisis and the inflation. Note that due to the economic crisis, few Lebanese now can spend vacations abroad; this situation has strengthened domestic tourism and now weekend excursions have developed considerably, which also explains the proliferation of guest houses across all territories: Thus, in Jezzine, since 2019, there have been the opening of more than 10 guesthouses.

Here, it is good to highlight that offering property is the least answer because almost everyone operates under the NIMBY principle. This means what we don't have a community acceptability yet. We must collaborate later with the landlords.

### **The Planning of the Heritagization Process**

The aim of the FocusGroups was to better target the choice of heritage assets to be retained, to raise awareness among the population about the role they can play, particularly in planning the process, and to think together about the stages and application of the heritagization process in the region. During the discussions, we explained the details of the heritagization process, its advantages, disadvantages, the different stakeholders, and their different roles. During the FG, the local population understood that the bottom-up approach can have an impact on decision-making. That led to the shift in the population's opinion towards the process and their gradual growing interest in its planning and implementation. They chose the most important heritage assets in their eyes (natural, immovable, and intangible) and planned its heritagization process. Some of them suggested potential donors to facilitate the process implementation.

The locals mostly chose the waterfall as the natural heritage asset (3/10 FG), the traditional know-how of the cutlery as the intangible cultural heritage (3/10 FG) but didn't choose any immovable heritage asset (but planned the process for several assets). These bottom-up made plans for the waterfall and the cutlery will be highly considered while writing the final PhD dissertation.

### **CONCLUSION**

Jezzine region is very rich in cultural heritage that needs preservation and sustainable exploitation. Also, due to geopolitical and state factors that persist through 2024, in this region tourism has seen minimal development. Despite being rich in diverse heritage assets, this aspect has been largely neglected and underappreciated. However, the mayors, united under the UJM, are a youthful group willing to initiate the heritagization process, recognizing its potential contribution to tourism and sustainable local development. Add to it, currently, the region is one of the least affected by the Lebanese economic crisis since its population works in agriculture. It still benefits from a calm environment, the population's openness to different backgrounds, and many assets. The heritagization process might be the easiest solution for the region's development in the times of crises. It responds to 15 of the 17 SDGs and the 4 directions of the Strategic Development Plan for the region (MORES, 2012).

The Lebanese laws related to heritage assets date from the French mandate and highlight the importance of heritage assets conservation, but never mentions the citizen participation in the process. This legislation aspect must be worked on later. That's why in our research, we wanted to mobilize *Jezzini* citizens through adopting community approaches that contribute to the co-creation of bottom-up initiatives in the tourism sector and familiarize residents with this unique heritage approach in Lebanon, while mobilizing and raising awareness of local communities about their cultural heritage.

In this paper, we analyzed the results of the survey conducted among the local population, FG, and interviews with different stakeholders. This work with various categories of actors and decision-makers aimed to test the ground regarding the socio-political acceptability of the heritagization process. The results showed the citizens' awareness of the process' positive effects on the local economy and culture. It also showed their awareness of their roles as stakeholders



benefitting from the process and contributing to it in different ways. The FG played an important role in all these.

So, we can confirm that the implementation of the heritagization process can be carried out in the Jezzine region based on a bottom-up approach. Especially that, right now, the UJM is implementing the DMO project that is boosting the cultural and eco-tourism in the region. We can collaborate and include this in the DMO. However, many other factors affect it like the insecurities that are shifting the population's priorities, especially the actual war in southern Lebanon against Israel. Obstacles to overcome are financing the process, the NIMBY principle, and the active local participation in the implementation, not only the planning phase.

This research was a living example on how local communities, especially in the rural areas of developing countries, can be empowered through heritage. This adopted bottom-up approach can be replicated in different fields of study related to sustainable development. However, in our case, the local authorities played an important role in encouraging the process, because it fits in the SDP of the region and its DMO. That might not be the case in other regions.

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# CONSTRUCTING TOURISM LANDSCAPES IN A UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF THREE LANDSCAPES IN BAGAN, MYANMAR

**Shengxi ZENG**

PhD Candidate in Geography  
L'IREST, PARIS 1 Panthéon Sorbonne University  
[djximai@gmail.com](mailto:djximai@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

The conversion of local cultural landscapes into tourism landscapes serves as a strategy for the preservation and strengthening of indigenous heritage identity. This transformation highlights the role of landscapes as geographical media, enabling the presentation of novel spatial experiences that emerge at the crossroads of heritage and tourism. Focusing on the Bagan World Heritage Site in Myanmar, this research explores how local stakeholders leverage heritage values to reshape community culture and construct tourism landscapes. A comparative analysis of three cases within Bagan elucidates this process. The first case, Minnanthu village, highlights the involvement of local residents in tourism by showcasing traditional textiles, food production, and residential architecture. The second case, Myinkabar village, renowned for its lacquer craftsmanship, transforms artisans' workspaces into stages for displaying ethnic craftsmanship. The third case, Bagan Golden Palace, reconstructed as a royal palace, which has been internationally criticized for its "Disneyfication" of the archaeological site. Despite this criticism, it has unexpectedly become a popular social venue for the country's middle class. This study utilizes theoretical frameworks like Goffman's "Theatrical Performance", MacCannell's "Staged Authenticity" and Cosgrove's approach to *landscape 'as a way of seeing'* to demonstrate that the conversion of Bagan's heritage spaces into tourist destinations is an ongoing experiment involving staging and representation. It highlights how local communities' informal narratives and practices integrate with formal thematic tourism operations. Ultimately, it argues that local communities should lead the transformation of their cultural heritage into tourism narratives, positioning them as the most capable custodians of their heritage.

**Keywords:** UNESCO heritage site, heritagization, heritage value, tourism landscape, community involved, Bagan

## INTRODUCTION

Commonly designated as the "City of Stupas," Bagan is geographically positioned in a strategic manner adjacent to the Ayeyarwaddy River, located within the arid central zone of Myanmar. This extensive locale is embellished with an impressive count of 3,595 extant monuments. These structures, in conjunction with seven dispersed villages that are interspersed in their vicinity, cumulatively constitute a comprehensive open-air museum. (Weise, 2019; UNESCO, 2018). Bagan's official recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2019 underscores its potential to transition from a Buddhist pilgrimage site and local settlement into a prominent tourism hub. The evolution of tourism in Bagan has become deeply intertwined with its rich cultural heritage. In addition to its iconic pagodas, the landscape includes agricultural areas that have undergone significant transformations as local families have shifted from farming to

engaging in tourism-related activities. This shift has led to the sale of land parcels to developers for resort construction, resulting in alterations to the area's traditional fabric (UNESCO, 2018).

Landscapes play a pivotal role in tourist destinations, serving both as resources and constraints for tourism development (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2015). This perspective underscores that landscapes are not merely passive backdrops but active agents in shaping the negotiation of space, identity, and power. This prompts a fundamental inquiry: who holds ownership in the context of newly created landscapes at tourism sites? This framework integrates the traditional geographic emphasis on landscapes into studies of heritage tourism. Through extensive ethnographic research and analysis of tourism development practices, this study merges the disciplines of anthropology of tourism and landscape methodology to examine the dynamics of landscape modification, presentation, and consumption in the heritage tourism development of Bagan. The investigation focuses on the crucial involvement of local communities in shaping tourism landscapes. It explores how their cultural practices, knowledge, and preferences contribute to the evolution of these landscapes and how they negotiate their participation in or opposition to tourism-driven transformations. Additionally, the study evaluates the impacts of tourism on these communities, highlighting both beneficial and detrimental effects, and considers the communities' agency in influencing these outcomes.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Landscape approaches have become en-vogue in the past couple of decades. Originating in nineteenth-century landscape geography, this renewed popularity since the 1980s is fueled by debates on—among others—nature conservation, landscape restoration, ecosystem services, competing claims on land and resources, sectorial land-use policies, sustainable development, and sense of place (Arts et al., 2017). Landscape has long been a key reference point in the construction of tourist imaginaries and, to this day, plays an important role in tourists' experience of travelling and their encounters with Otherness (Minca, 2007). Cosgrove (1998) redefines landscape in tourism studies as "*a way of seeing*" rather than simply a scene or image. This perspective emphasizes how landscapes are perceived and consumed visually, reflecting cultural identities and undergoing commodification within heritage tourism. Tourism often transforms landscapes into consumable products, resulting in the modification and commodification of original landscapes to align with tourist expectations.

Drawing on the theory of 'scape' developed by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996), the term '*tourismscapes*' has gained traction as a concept of interest among geographers. As Van der Duim (2007) contends, *tourismscapes* are performed. They denote complex processes of ordering and translation resulting in a convergence between people and things on the same activity: tourism. The created '*tourismscape*' has constitutive power to shape the landscape and the processes within it (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2015). Weise (2019) highlights that Bagan is one of the most important religious sites in Myanmar. Over the past decades, local communities have been excluded from participating in its management. However, changes in the political landscape are slowly enabling local communities to express their concerns about ongoing mismanagement and the lack of local governance. This shift indicates a potential change in how Bagan is managed, possibly allowing local communities to play a more active role in shaping site spaces and their involvement in developing '*tourismscapes*'—tourism landscapes.

In order to provide a theoretical foundation for this study, landscape theory and the concept of theatrical staging were employed as analytical lenses to examine the processes of production, representation and functioning of landscapes. The concepts of Goffman's *Theatrical Performance* (1959) and MacCannell's *Staged Authenticity* (1973) are instrumental in understanding how local communities craft and present landscapes for tourism purposes. These frameworks illuminate the

deliberate construction of landscapes to create authentic and appealing experiences for visitors, thereby shaping tourist perceptions and interactions with cultural heritage.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on three anthropological fieldwork studies conducted between 2017 and 2024, totaling seven months of cumulative research. The primary focus of our investigation centers on three tourism landscapes shaped by diverse participant groups, encompassing both tangible and intangible elements deeply intertwined with the livelihoods of local communities. Fieldwork methodologies included participant observation conducted across a variety of settings, informal dialogues with local residents and tourists, and semi-structured interviews with over 20 local participants engaged in tourism activities across two villages.

Case studies:

1. Dynamics of evolution of rural spaces: residents of Minnanthu village have increased their income by sharing their private space with tourists.
2. Artisanal practices illustrated by Myinkabar village: This village has ingeniously metamorphosed communal labor scenes into meticulously curated experiences for the visiting tourists.
3. Construction of the Bagan Golden Palace: this project has sparked discussions on the authenticity of heritage and the evolving function of the landscape.

Our study explores how these case examples integrate the values of local intangible cultural heritage into the development of tourist landscapes, examining the intricate balance between preserving traditional practices and embracing modernity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### ***(1) Transformation of living spaces : fitting into the idea of a "living heritage site"***

The fact that the inhabitants lived on the site is a key point worth studying. How was the architectural and spatial organization of the village adapted to these ancient structures? Is there a contradiction between the needs of the inhabitants and the conservation requirements? Based on the UNESCO Bagan Nomination Document, which highlights tourism as a potential threat to the landscape, we have delved into how the integration of tourism in Minnanthu village, located in the eastern part of the archaeological zone, has reshaped the agrarian village environment into a tourist destination. This transformation has facilitated interaction between locals and tourists, as well as increased awareness and preservation of traditional culture by the local community.

Minnanthu village, located in the eastern part of Bagan's archaeological zone, is home to hundreds of stupas spread over a two-kilometer area and a population of approximately 535 people (122 families). Several footpaths connect the village to the site, allowing multiple entry and exit points without fixed tourist routes. Western tourists first discovered the village in 2000. Initially, a

few villagers guided tourists through their homes. Over time, English-speaking villagers have developed a mapped route that showcases village life. The village tour features two main attractions: the traditional design of the houses and the daily life of the inhabitants. Visitors will see examples such as thatched cowsheds, bamboo living rooms, bathrooms, kitchens, and toilets. This carefully arranged area gives visitors the feeling of visiting a cozy museum within a restored house. Visitors are guided through the different architectural spaces to observe scenes of local people at work and to purchase textiles and art souvenirs.

Bagan villages can be likened to a 'stage' for everyday life, where the tourist experience resembles a well-coordinated drama in which everyone collaborates to present the authentic rural life of Bagan. Minnanthu, viewed as an extension of the Bagan Tourist Area, is designed to evoke a sense of authenticity, embodying MacCannell's (1973) concept of 'staged authenticity.' The village showcases all aspects of rural life, aligning with the idea of a 'living heritage site.' The villagers possess a unique ability to identify, interpret, and weave the richness of local culture into the narrative fabric of the tourism landscape. While farming and employment in local hotels and restaurants remain the main sources of income, some villagers have effectively assumed the role of cultural ambassadors. As performers of their own culture, these individuals enrich the tourist experience by offering an authentic window into the daily lives and cultural heritage of residents. This approach has been successful in enabling the local community to preserve the lifestyle and environment of traditional Burmese homes. In contrast, other villages have already witnessed the emergence of numerous residential edifices constructed from contemporary cement materials, signifying a transition from rural to urban life. In Minnanthu Village, oxen are still used to plow the land, and bullock carts remain a common mode of transportation. These fields, situated between clusters of monuments, create an idyllic landscape that continues to attract an increasing number of tourists.

## (2) *Conversion of workplaces into a stage for ethnic craft display*

The earliest lacquerware discovered in Bagan dates back to 1274, and Bagan has been a center of lacquerware production for centuries. This tradition, recognized as an intangible cultural heritage, has been meticulously preserved and transmitted across generations within collective production groups and family workshops. This heritage preservation practice extends beyond a small group to the wider community. Fieldwork interviews with four family workshop owners reveal that a dedicated family of lacquer artisans can produce approximately 300 to 400 pieces of lacquerware annually to sustain themselves. In the village of Myinkabar, there are 76 private workshops, involving nearly 5,000 residents in various lacquerware-related production activities, such as crafting hand-woven bamboo molds. These activities typically occur within their homes, sometimes converting living spaces into workspaces. Myinkabar functions as both an open-air factory, with at least one person in every household engaged in lacquer production.

Through fieldwork in several lacquerware workshops, we discovered the vibrant cultural landscape of the community behind them. Most workshop owners were very open and welcoming, willing to open the doors of their workrooms to visitors and allow outsiders to observe the lacquerware making process. The process of guiding visitors from observing lacquer products in the front store to entering the artisan's workshop is a well-defined and implemented strategy by local community stakeholders. The workshops transform into living exhibits, with each local participant, obliged to cooperate with the show, becoming an actor who realistically presents the status of their daily work in front of visitors. The excursion to a familial lacquer art workshop in the village (see Figure 1), has ascended to become the most esteemed tour of Bagan's archaeological remnants over the past decade, surpassed only by temple visitations.



Figure 1: Backstage performance of lacquerware making at the Myinkabar village workshop.  
Source : ZENG Shengxi, 2019

Goffman's concept of "*staged authenticity*" is particularly relevant to the tourism industry, where cultural practices are often deliberately presented in a manner that appears authentic to outsiders. This strategy has yielded numerous benefits, encouraging local community residents to interact with the outside world, re-recognize the value of artisans in passing on traditional skills, and preserve lacquer art as intangible cultural heritage. The perpetuation of traditional craft heritage hinges not solely on pertinent heritage policies, but also on quotidian experiences that bear relevance to individuals' lives. The younger demographic in the region has transcended their predecessors by amalgamating traditional techniques with design and stylistic novelties. They derive inspiration from ethnic motifs to fabricate lacquerware that caters to the anticipations of the tourist market and hotel adornment, has been showcased at international furniture expositions, and distributed globally (Theint Aung, 2021). According to MacCannell (1984), this phenomenon can be described as a 'reconstruction of ethnicity,' wherein local cultures strive to preserve and promote their traditional skills while being influenced by foreign cultures. Although modernization inevitably impacts these ancient crafts, local communities adapt by reconstructing aspects of their culture to meet marketplace demands.

### (3) *Disneyfication of built heritage: creating, reinventing and consuming place*

The third case under examination is the Bagan Golden Palace, a project characterized by imaginative reconstruction rather than historical restoration. Since its public opening, the Bagan Golden Palace has faced criticism from the international archaeological community on several

fronts. Firstly, the eviction and displacement of over 6,000 indigenous people from the site in 1990 to accommodate the palace sparked significant debate concerning social justice and the rights of local communities (Lubeigt, 1998; Taylor & Altenburg, 2006). Secondly, the Bagan Golden Palace faced criticism for its overt modernization and commercialization. Will the ancient Buddhist temples of Bagan turn into Disney World? Some scholars worry that Bagan will be turned into a kind of theme park (Brown, 2014). Lonely Planet's guidebook to Myanmar<sup>4</sup>, which mentions the palace, also clearly opposes and ridicules the tourist attraction.

In recent years, the Myanmar government's promotion of the Bagan Golden Palace in tourism campaigns has waned, indicating a perception that it is more of a private venture than a government-supported cultural initiative. Despite lacking recognition from international archaeological circles or endorsement in major tourist guides, the reconstructed Golden Palace has unexpectedly gained popularity among domestic tourists, particularly the middle class. Stakeholders have transformed it into a versatile cultural center, hosting events such as the grand Dandaree dance show<sup>5</sup> since 2015. In 2019, the palace's role expanded further, with its Burmese-styled royal architectural decor proving popular and respected among the country's populace. It has become a favored venue for social events among the elite, including weddings (see Figure 2).

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<sup>4</sup>"Following similar government-mandated palace reconstruction jobs in Bago, Mandalay and Shwebo, this towering concrete-and-steel-reinforced edifice was opened to much fanfare in 2008. Built opposite the excavated site of the actual palace just in from Tharabar Gate, it's unlikely to bear much resemblance to the original. Either way, it's a sign of the ongoing Disneyfication of Bagan." [Bagan Golden Palace | Bagan, Myanmar \(Burma\) | Attractions - Lonely Planet](#)

<sup>5</sup>Dandaree, Organized by Bagan Myanmar Entertainment Group: a visual masterpiece, features striking presentation styles, unmatched light and sound production, and multimedia techniques synchronized with stage performances by more than a hundred talented dancers, actors and performers who come together to tell the story of Myanmar's arts and cultural treasure. [Dandaree Myanmar Show in Bagan - YouTube](#)



Figure 2: Transformation of Bagan Golden Palace into a place of nostalgia for ethnic traditions.  
Source: Bagan Golden Palace, 2019; Zeng Shengxi, 2024

The construction of the Golden Palace in Bagan underscores the complex dynamics of heritage tourism and the differing evaluations of authenticity and utility. While the international community may prioritize historical accuracy and archaeological integrity, the national community often values the social and functional aspects of new constructions, driven by a need for traditional ethnic, irrespective of historical fidelity. From a visitor's perspective, the architecture of the Bagan Golden Palace differs from the traditional architecture of the Bagan temples, offering an opportunity for visitors to broaden their knowledge and understanding of Burmese palace architecture. One foreign visitor noted: "I very much liked that this reconstruction was not done on the site of the historical palace itself (it's on the other side of the road), but next to it. (In Bago, we have the reconstruction in parallel; in Mandalay, the reconstruction on the archaeological site itself.) This is much better than the reconstructed pagodas of Old Bagan." (Aethelred, 2020). Upon returning for field research in 2024, we observed that the primary visitors to the site were still national tourists, often participating in group outings organized by schools or families. The tourism



landscape exhibited a strong focus on the creation of royal-style environments, with the emergence of on-site services offering traditional dress rentals and photo shoots. In line with the popularity of such activities, props such as royal carriages, Burmese puppets, and handmade Burmese umbrellas were provided to complement the royal architecture.

The Bagan Golden Palace, the last new building constructed before the site's inscription, has been transformed into a tourism landscape, but this transformation came at the cost of displacing indigenous communities. Consequently, the palace is shunned by the local community and perceived by uninformed tourists as a place of national heritage distinct from Bagan's Buddhist heritage, emphasizing ethnic traditions. This case study of the Bagan Golden Palace underscores the complexities and potential pitfalls of constructing new structures on World Heritage sites. It highlights that even projects undertaken under the guise of preserving and reconstructing heritage can inadvertently lead to the destruction of the very heritage they aim to protect. Unlike the previous two village case studies, the Bagan Golden Palace has not become a popular attraction among international tourists. Instead, it primarily serves national tourists, gradually transforming into a site that represents Burmese traditional cultural heritage and a place of nostalgia.

### **Discussion: Integration of heritage values in tourism landscape construction**

This study sheds light on the innovative methods local communities use to display their intangible cultural heritage within the tourism landscapes they design. It highlights the significant impact that the area's ethnic crafts, along with the informal narratives and customs of the local populace, have on shaping these tourism environments. Through the analysis of three case studies, this research aims to provide insights into various strategies for integrating local heritage values into the tourism landscape. These landscapes are conceived as stages for the performance of cultural heritage, where every element—from local customs and crafts to architecture—contributes to the overall setting.

By transforming everyday locales into tourism landscapes, there is potential for significant development. Crucially, sustainable and respectful tourism landscapes are achieved by faithfully reproducing the cultural practices and traditions of local communities. Where heritage is an intrinsic part of daily life, integrating informal personal narratives and activities brings these connections to life. Thus, mundane activities of locals become distinctive experiences for tourists, providing them with authentic glimpses into the cultural lives of the communities. Contemporary heritage tourism often revolves around the staging or re-creation of ethnic and cultural traditions. Cultural heritage sites have been pre-eminent in the highly politicized construction of collective memory and national identity (Dietler, 1998).

Through an examination of two villages, distinct ethno-cultural landscapes emerge that offer visitors insights into local ways of life. Through a more comprehensive analysis of people, landscapes, and heritage, we argue that local people are not merely beneficiaries or participants in tourism and conservation efforts but also key stakeholders in the preservation of nature. Their intimate relationship with the environment, combined with their first-hand knowledge of local traditions and customs, positions them as the most effective guardians of heritage.

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## **THE CYCLADIC LANDSCAPE AS A CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCT, PRACTICE AND PROSPECT: AN ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE**

**Theano S. TERKENLI**

Department of Geography, University of the Aegean  
terkenli@aegean.gr

**Vasiliki GEORGOULA**

Department of Tourism Economics and Management, University of the Aegean  
v.georgoula@aegean.gr

### **ABSTRACT**

As all landscapes are essentially cultural, they constitute an irredeemable part of cultural heritage and context of Cycladic life. ‘Culture’ is vital to the competitive edge of Greek island tourism vis-à-vis other global destinations. These interrelationships are analyzed and discussed, in the emerging crisis-laden but very promising context of sustainable island development, in the post-pandemic era. The paper probes into the role of landscape in the culture-tourism relationship in the context of cultural tourism, in the case of Cyclades, Greece, which are becoming increasingly economically dependent on tourism. It engages in a critical assessment of the prospects, pitfalls and potential of landscape for cultural tourism development and vice versa, with the aid of a compound qualitative methodology and a SWOT analysis based on the input from local/ regional/ national stakeholders, in the context of the H2020 EU project SPOT. Research findings illustrate how appropriate planning and stewardship for ‘sustainability’, ‘authenticity’, ‘locality’ ‘democracy’ etc., cultural tourism may promote sustainable local/ regional (tourism) development in the Cyclades. The landscape may play a significant role as a planning and management instrument, in the current context of shifting cultural tourism trends, for spatial/ land and cultural tourism stewardship and decision-making.

**Keywords:** landscape, cultural tourism, stakeholders’ analysis, local sustainability, Cyclades.

### **INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT**

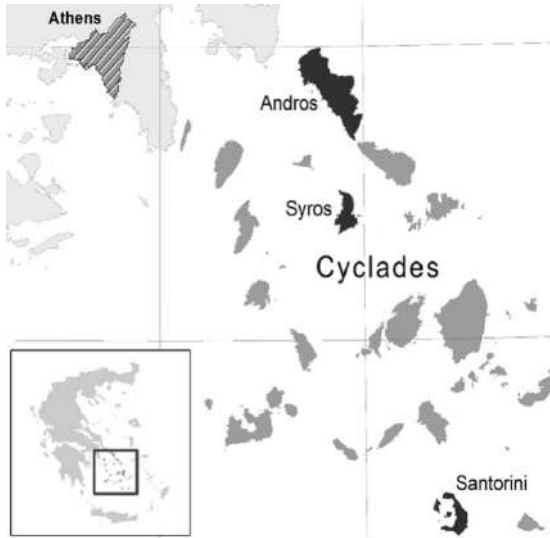
Contemporary, post-pandemic global tourism shifts have a strong bearing on the landscape. Furthermore, it is increasingly evident that, in this emerging era of change, the landscape stands to regain its place, role and purpose in spatial/ tourism stewardship and decision-making, due to shifts in the nature and characteristics of tourism, with significant future import on tourist destination practices (Terkenli et al., 2021).

This study probes into the role of landscape in the culture-tourism relationship in the context of cultural tourism, in the case of the Cyclades, Greece. For this purpose, it engages in a critical assessment of the prospects, pitfalls and potential of landscape for cultural tourism development and vice versa, with the aid of a compound qualitative methodology and a SWOT analysis based on the input from local/ regional/ national stakeholders, in the context of the H2020 EU project SPOT ([www.SPOTprojectH2020.eu](http://www.SPOTprojectH2020.eu)). Cultural tourism is deemed to infuse conventional 3Ss

tourism in the Greek islands, as culture, in its broader sense, represents a crucial, though unstated, motive that lies behind tourists' choice to visit Greece, vis-à-vis its competition.

The study was undertaken with the aid of a compound qualitative research survey, in the Cycladic Islands of Andros, Santorini and Syros (Map 1), following three consecutive methodological steps, during the years 2020-2022:

- a) a series of stakeholders' interviews, September 2020
- b) a round-table stakeholders' discussion, July 2021
- c) a small, targeted stakeholders' questionnaire, November 2022



Map 1. Case study area and survey location sites. Source: Cartography and Geoinformatics Laboratory, Department of Geography, University of the Aegean.



Figure 1. Cycladic landscape: Therassia (source: authors).

The significance of landscape to tourism demand, attraction, practices and experiences is well-established and considered paramount (Cartier & Lew, 2005, Terkenli, 2014). For tourism purposes, landscape may serve a) as a tourist attraction in itself; b) as a scenery and visual image of the destination; c) as a container and source of tourism resources and attractions; d) as a means of promoting/ marketing and managing tourism; e) as a spatial tool for studying tourism; f) as a medium for developing an understanding/ appreciation of the destination (Terkenli et al., 2021).

The landscape is employed here as a concept, as a physical entity and as a planning instrument, in order to analyze pandemic-induced changes to cultural tourism—in view also of new and evolving crises. Landscape was chosen as an analytical tool, for this study’s purposes, based on:

- a) its nature (a ready and direct way of human-space interrelating) (Terkenli,2005)
- b) its synthetic, holistic character (Council of Europe, 2000) and
- c) its scale, catering to community-led approaches to tourism development (Terkenli, 2005, Jones & Stenseke, 2011)

Significant qualitative shifts in global cultural tourism patterns, brought on by recent, emerging and ongoing crises, seem to be signaling a turn towards ‘milder’ and ‘greener’ tourism and more ‘authentic’, intangible, individualized, localized etc. experiences. Such new and developing forms of travel (Richards 2021, Jacobsen et al. 2023) may contribute actively to sustainable landscape management, through a revitalization of traditions and resource protection, while fostering bottom-up involvement and synergies in landscape stewardship, strengthening identity formation, participatory practices and social cohesion at the destination: i.e. through increasing demand for locally-sourced products or for alternative outdoors activities and individualized experiences, such as wine-making, fishing tourism, wellness retreats, glamping, etc.

Landscape and (cultural) tourism may, therefore, reciprocally strengthen each other, as well as social participation, identity construction and community building, inciting a benign cycle of both landscape preservation/ stewardship and (cultural) tourism growth.

## **THE STUDY CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY**

Another unstated fact differentiating the Cyclades from other global destinations is that the main tourism attraction of the Cycladic Islands is their landscape (often referred to with terms such as ‘beauties’ or ‘the environment’ etc.) (Figure 1), while also under serious threat by tourism. Culture is key and central to landscape, e.g. in the cultural definition and constitution of landscape (Council of Europe 2000), as it is broadly acknowledged and illustrated that (all) landscapes are essentially cultural (Council of Europe 2000, Terkenli & d’Hautesserre, 2006). Landscape is thus an irredeemable part of cultural heritage and context of Cycladic life (Figures 2 and 3), just as ‘culture’ is vital to the competitive edge of Greek island tourism vis-à-vis other global destinations (Terkenli & Georgoula, 2022a).



Figure 2. View of Oia, Santorini Island (source: authors)



Figure 3. View of Hora from Livadi, Serifos Island (source: authors).

Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly evident that the landscape seems poised to figure very prominently in the post-pandemic era of shifting values and tourism patterns and practices, as well as in spatial/ land and cultural tourism stewardship and decision-making, especially poignant from the points of view of preserving and enhancing local identity, while ensuring local/ regional sustainability. At present, however, the latter is precarious in the Cyclades, as these islands have

been extremely dependent on high and increasing tourism inflows for their economic survival (INSETE, 2020), to their social, environmental and cultural detriment. The growth and development of all other sectors of local/ regional economy tend to follow those of tourism, which the main source of income for the whole Southern Aegean region (Bank of Greece 2023, ITEP 2021, Coccosis, 2021).

In order to assess the prospects, pitfalls and potential of landscape for cultural tourism in the islands’ development and vice versa, in line with the poly-methodological approach of qualitative data collection presented above, input from the following local/ regional/ national (tourism- and culture-related) stakeholders was elicited in three consecutive steps (Table 1).

Interviews in late summer 2020	Roundtable discussion July 2021	Short questionnaire in fall 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deputy Mayor of Syros for tourism</li> <li>• Deputy Mayor of Syros for culture</li> <li>• Deputy Mayor of Santorini for culture</li> <li>• Head of culture/ heritage NGO, Syros Institute</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Tourism Organization of Greece (EOT) representative in Andros</li> <li>• Cyclades Chamber of Tourism representative</li> <li>• Cyclades Ephor of Antiquities (Ministry of Culture)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scientific Director of the Greek Tourism Confederation (SETE)</li> <li>• National Tourism Organization of Greece (EOT) representative in Andros</li> <li>• Deputy Mayor of Syros for tourism</li> </ul>

Table 1. Local/ regional/ national stakeholders participating in the three research steps.

The findings ensuing from these three methodological steps of data collection were in overall agreement with and support of each other and constituted the basis for the SWOT analysis on the potential role of landscape in Cycladic (cultural) tourism that followed. According to all of our study participants, although tourism had generally been thriving in most Cycladic destinations before the COVID-19 pandemic and continued to thrive afterwards, there have been a series of inefficiencies, handicaps and structural problems involved in it, many of which were exposed by the pandemic and most of which have been landscape-related (Terkenli & Georgoula, 2022). In brief, Greek, and most specifically Cycladic, (cultural) tourism suffers from a lack of organizational coordination, state-planning, bottom-up and top-down synergies, inadequate infrastructures and planning/ management for sustainability (INSETE 2020, Bank of Greece 2023, Coccosis, 2001, Prokopiou et al., 2018, Sarantakou and Terkenli, 2019).

### **Landscape and cultural tourism in the Cyclades: an analysis.**

#### *The current situation: landscape as product*

As is well known and established, besides their strong 3Ss (sea-sand-sun) allure, the Cyclades also boast valuable, diverse and striking landscapes of unique character and identity. At the same time, it has been acknowledged that Cycladic landscapes have been variably undergoing deterioration with unchecked out-of-plan construction, out-of-scale ‘development’ and the abandonment of primary economic production and the rural basis of local/ regional life (INSETE 2020, Bank of Greece 2023, Sarantakou& Terkenli, 2019). The outcome is overwhelming and uncontrolled tourism monoculture and economic dependency (Constantoglou&Klothaki, 2021, Berg &Edelheim, 2012).

Cycladic landscape ‘attractions’ encompass all natural and cultural, folk-historical-contemporary and bio-ecological wealth, as, for example, traditional Aegean architecture and townscapes, gastronomy and music, art and crafts, feasts and festivals, etc. Nonetheless, all such wealth, variety and uniqueness is fragile and vulnerable, because of the Cyclades’ insular character (e.g. smaller-scale destinations, resource limitations, remoteness and constrained accessibility, etc.), often resulting in traffic congestion, infrastructure overload, and problems in environmental quality and service satisfaction, with heavy impacts on the landscape and local wellbeing and quality of life.

Our research findings validate that cultural tourism differs from island to island but does not represent a conscious tourism motive for most Cyclades visitors, despite the fact that tangible and intangible culture, broadly defined (Throsby, 2008) remains the factor that underlies tourists' decision to visit these islands. Accordingly, our all of our study stakeholders expressed the desire for more, and more diverse, cultural attractions, sites and events, which ought, however, to be 'rooted in island life', in order to ascertain and preserve local and regional sustainability.

Although tourist satisfaction with locally provided cultural tourism aspects and attractions and apparent interest in all types and forms of cultural tourism was reaffirmed, several aspects of existing current Cycladic cultural tourism were reported to leave much to be desired (in terms of their number, diversity, pricing and quality of offered cultural activities). Landscape has admittedly been flagrantly missing from cultural tourism planning, management and practices. The importance of preserving local/ regional culture, heritage and traditions was highlighted as a living part of island life and the present way of living, and not just a stage for external consumption (for sale to tourists): "you either make it your reality or you lose it" ascertained the Cyclades Chamber of Commerce representative, raising the significance of landscape as practice.

The stakeholders also stressed the glaring absence of the State regarding the local environments as tourist destinations, their landscapes, and their overall sustainability: "there is no central planning for cultural tourism in the Cyclades. Many factors come into play as regards the development of cultural tourism here, but no pertinent tourism policy exists", as stated by all Deputy Mayors of the islands of Syros and Santorini.

Another top-down inflicted structural problem in Greece vis-à-vis culture is that it tends to be confounded with 'high culture', with overarching repercussions on the development, management, protection and promotion of all (other) cultural artifacts, sites, events and other assets for the Cyclades and for Greece—namely landscape identity and sustainability.

#### *The onset of change: landscape as practice*

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic ushered a change in tourist mindsets both in Greece and beyond: it brought new ways and technologies of looking at existing issues, situations, issues, problems etc. and a turn away from conventional 'mass' organized tourism towards more sustainable forms of tourism mobilities (INSETE 2020, Knezevic et al., 2021, Jacobsen et al., 2021). The landscape holds a crucial and promising role in these changes, e.g. through the return to 'the natural', the rural, the local/'organic', the sustainable etc. Our study findings show that a significant number of Cyclades visitors during and after the pandemic reported a similar or better tourist experience during the pandemic times, as compared to the crowd-laden pre-pandemic ones. These tourist interviewees quoted a fuller, more comfortable and enjoyable visiting experience, allowing for more opportunities for interactions with local and Greek tourists. (One more sentence on this point?).

The respite from rampant tourism growth and activity exposed long-standing structural problems vis-à-vis both tourism and the landscape. While this shift towards 'greener' and more sustainable tourism forms and practices favors the 'natural', the pandemic exposed the 'cultural' as perhaps the most fragile and crisis-susceptible sector in tourism, as many culture-related jobs and enterprises were lost to the pandemic forever. It also allowed for a period of recollection and re-evaluation of shortcomings in the sectors of culture and cultural tourism, towards more sustainable future solutions, involving all landscape dimensions of the island destinations.

#### *The future outlook: landscape as prospect*

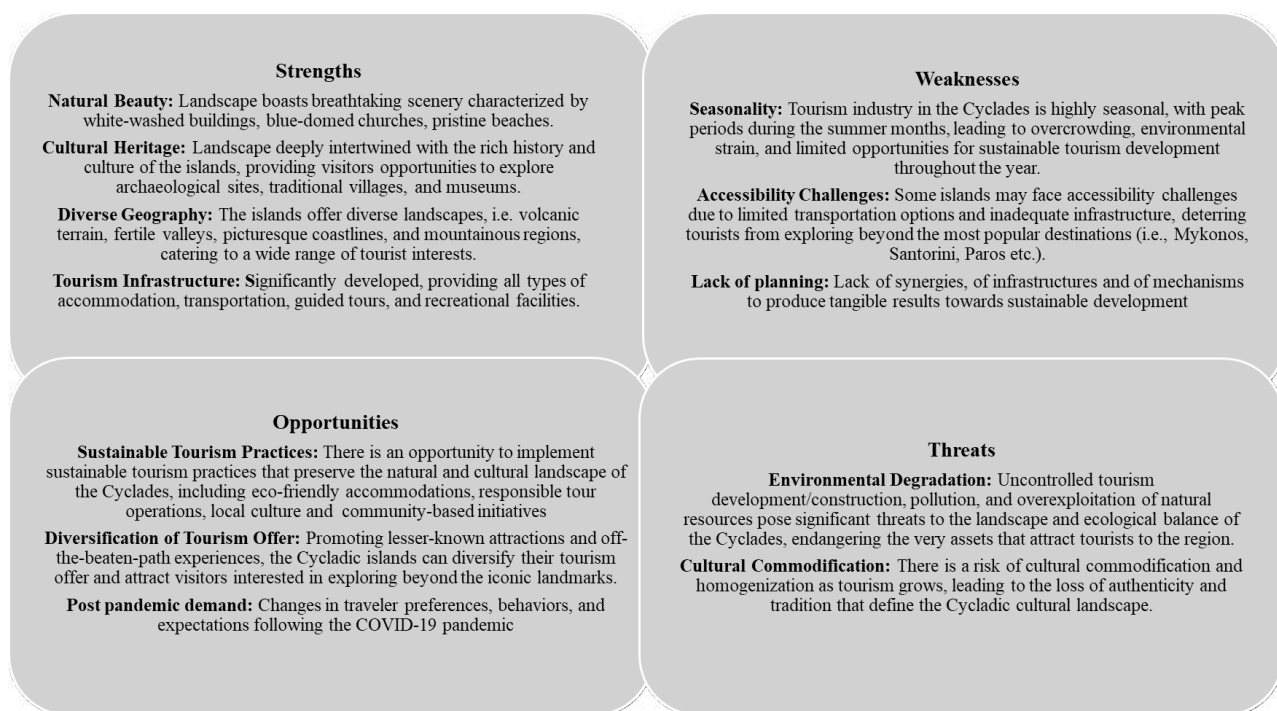
Our stakeholders overwhelmingly considered the pandemic as an opportunity to address old impediments to future tourism growth and development, through more 'green', sustainable and milder forms of tourism, which according to the Scientific Director of the Greek Tourism Confederation and a Senior Executive of the National Tourism Board "will become more and more



important in the future... as the best way to reconstitute the two major problems of the islands' tourism sector, seasonality and predominance of 'mass'/ organized tourism".

Landscape holds a central role to such a sustainable future for the islands, in the following regards. Concerning the islands' assets, the great internal cultural and landscape variability and diversity of the Cycladic Archipelago was considered to be a valuable basis and promising competitive edge for the future development and diversification of Cyclades (cultural) tourism. As emerged from our poly-methodological approach, shared future visions and goals among all levels and sectors of the islands' authorities, civil society and entrepreneurial world, point to "a different type of tourism that does not destroy the landscape (either built or not) and the tourism product itself (e.g. turn islands into 'tourism paradises'), but rather protects and promotes the intangible heritage of the islands, ways of life and activities in rural areas and in the sea: these are clearly deteriorating and in the process of being irrevocably lost", as stated by the Head of Development Department at the Cycladic Chamber of Commerce.

Widespread agreement also prevailed among our stakeholders, in terms of the acknowledged lack of planning, of synergies, of infrastructures and of mechanisms to materialize these visions and produce tangible results towards their future sustainable development, as regards both (cultural) tourism and Cycladic life, in general. There was a call for top-down integrated planning and management of both cultural tourism and cultural traditions and production, in collaboration with the local societies, toward future achievement of environmental, social and economic sustainability. Landscape was seen to occupy a key role to such prospects. These research findings combined in the delivery of a SWOT analysis on the role of landscape in Cycladic (cultural tourism) (Table 2).



significantly

Table 2. SWOT analysis: the role of landscape in Cycladic (cultural) tourism

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, the interrelationship landscape-culture-tourism-Cyclades was briefly analyzed and discussed, in the emerging crisis-laden but very promising context of sustainable island development, in the post-pandemic era. Our research findings indicate that, through appropriate,

restorative and collaborative (both top-down and bottom-up) planning and stewardship for ‘sustainability’, ‘authenticity’, ‘locality’, etc., (cultural) tourism may contribute to and promote sustainable local and regional (tourism) development in the Cyclades (Terkenli & Georgoula 2022b), processes in which landscape plays a pivotal role.

The establishment and development of synergies and partnerships in all sectors of economy and society were deemed essential for any sustainable future growth and development of (cultural) tourism in the Cyclades, towards local/ regional (tourism) development, cultural preservation and re-generation and societal well-being. Therein, and in the current context of shifting cultural tourism trends, the landscape was shown to play a significant role as a planning and management instrument for spatial/ land and cultural tourism stewardship and decision-making, especially as regards local identity development and promotion and overall local wellbeing and sustainable development.

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**THE ROLE OF THE LANDSCAPE-TOURISM RELATION IN THE  
TRANSFORMATION OF THE RURAL SPACE OF GREECE AND SPAIN INTO  
TOURIST DESTINATIONS FROM THE 1950 TO DATE.  
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

**Dimitris ANGELIS-DIMAKIS**

Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Crete and University of the Aegean,  
[dim.angelis@gmail.com](mailto:dim.angelis@gmail.com)

**Maria DOUMI**

Associate Professor, University of the Aegean, [mdoumi@aegean.gr](mailto:mdoumi@aegean.gr)

**ABSTRACT**

The paper presents the gradual transition of Greek and Spanish economies from the primary sector to the tertiary sector and more specifically to the tourism industry. The historical development of the two countries on the Mediterranean South is characterized by certain critical similarities. However, significant differentiations also exist which will be highlighted in this

overview of their transformation process. The study of both countries, but also their comparative analysis will focus on the relation between their cultural landscapes and their tourism development, as it has been established overtime, but also on the way it has contributed to their sustainability and resilience. Based on the quantitative data we will outline the historical evolution of this process and we will explore the way in which the urbanization trend and the post-war rural exodus had affected the shift to a new economic model

**Keywords:** urbanization, tourism, cultural landscape, Greece, Spain.

## INTRODUCTION

The paper presents the gradual transition of Greek and Spanish economies from agriculture to tourism and summarizes the findings of a working paper (Angelis-Dimakis & Doumi, 2024) prepared in the context of the author's postdoctoral research. Based on the quantitative data of the statistical services of the two countries, we will outline the historical evolution of this process. We will explore the way in which the urbanization trend and the post-war rural exodus had affected the passage to a new economic model. It is of particular interest to examine whether and to what extent the landscape has been used in the course of time as an entity or a material element contributing to the establishment of these countries or specific parts of them as tourist destinations. How did the interaction between landscape/environment/agricultural past and tourism develop throughout the decades? How the goal of preserving and highlighting the cultural heritage may be registered in this discussion? These are some of the questions we will answer shedding light on the historical development of this interconnection of rural environment and tourism, but also on the momentum it could gain over the following years.

## RURAL EXODUS AND URBANIZATION

Most post war European societies have undergone a transformation and modernization process following the prevailing development model which was characterized by fast urbanization and respective depopulation of the rural areas. These population shifts usually lead to subsequent changes in land use, economic activity and culture. Urban living has historically been linked with higher levels of literacy and education, better health, lower fertility and longer life expectancy, greater access to social services and enhanced opportunities for cultural and political participation (UNDESA, 2014). However, urbanization has also disadvantages caused by the rapid and unplanned urban growth resulting in poor and inadequate infrastructures regarding housing, water and sanitation, transport and health care services.

Spain and Greece were not exceptions to this rule as they have both gone through this process. Both countries had been relying on the agricultural sector until the middle of the twentieth century. In Greece, the percentage of the economically active population engaged in agriculture, livestock, fishing and forestry changed from 40,5% in 1910, to 48% in 1950 and 13,38% in 2001 while in Spain the respective percentages were 68% in 1910, 49,5% in 1950 and 6,34% in 2001. A steady downward trend in primary sector employment is observed from 1960 onwards in the case of Greece and for the whole period under study in the case of Spain

The pattern of rural exodus seems to be common in both cases. The high unemployment rate in the countryside and the low agricultural income were the main reasons for this outflow. The rural character of both Greece and Spain begins to change from the first post-war decade. A steady upward trend in the population movement towards the urban areas has been detected in both countries for the whole period under study. More specifically, in Greece, the urban population rose

from 38,1% of the total population in 1920, to 52,30% in 1950 and 80,04% in 2021, while in Spain the respective percentages were 38,7% in 1920, 52,08% in 1950 and 81,06% in 2021.

The growth of mass tourism in Spain and Greece was another facet of urbanization. The influx of foreign currency into rural areas eventually led many rural residents to engage in tourism. The change of traditional land uses in favor of the new activity, the reduction of agricultural land and a steadily escalating human intervention in the natural environment were aspects of this transformation of rural areas into tourist destinations.

## **INSTITUTIONAL MODELS AND DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN GREECE AND SPAIN**

As Angelos Vlachos (2016) mentions, tourism in Greece was a phenomenon planned from above. If we want to focus on its historical roots, we should underline the key role played by Eleftherios Venizelos. His presence was initially linked with the creation of the Office of Foreigners and Exhibitions. The latter aimed primarily at taking measures to attract foreigner travelers in Greece and prolong their stay as well as to support companies, committees or other legal entities dealing with organizations of events, landscape improvement and construction of hotels.

Venizelos' term in office from 1928 to 1932 was marked by an attempt to reconstruct the economy. During this period, the new institutional framework for tourism was formed. Law 4377 of 1929 provided for the establishment of the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO). The philosophy of the new organization and, at the same time, the nature of the tourism activity in Greece during this time were reflected in a letter from Konstantinos Melas, its General Director, to Venizelos. He initially emphasized "the moral and material benefits" that the development of tourism offered to the national economy of the country and consequently to "each one of us". At a second level, he focused on a comparative advantage of the country that made it a tourist destination. This was none other than classical civilization. The need to improve the infrastructure of the capital, but mainly of the provinces, was deemed necessary for the development of tourism. In this context, a second comparative advantage of the country emerged, that of the natural beauty of its regions. Melas characteristically stressed that "it is not an exaggeration to say that no other country like Greece with its shining sky, the deep blue sea, the green of the land and the mountains presents such harmonious and sweet combinations and such diverse landscapes".

After the imposition of the Metaxas dictatorship in August 1936, the institutional framework for tourism changed. The GNTO was replaced by the newly established Deputy Ministry of Press and Tourism, which took over the organization of tourism within the country and its promotion abroad. During the years of the German Occupation (1941-1944) and the Civil War (1946-1949) it was impossible to have any tourism activity. Immediately after the return to a rudimentary normality, the legislative framework for the organization of tourism was revised once more.

The compulsory Law 1565 of 1950 provided for the reconstitution of the GNTO. It constituted an independent legal entity under the supervision of the State, which was exercised by the Ministry of National Economy. From the 1950s onwards the development of tourism in Greece was rapid. The arrivals of foreign tourists and the revenue from tourism increased significantly during the subsequent decades. It is worth noting that in 1955, the number of foreign visitors was 196.000, while in 1975 it exceeded 3.000.000.

The rise in tourism could be connected with the broader efforts to reconstruct the Greek economy. The role of American financial aid, through the Marshall Plan, was decisive. American officials felt that, given the absence of a strong domestic industry, there should be a shift of the Greek economy from agriculture to tourism. Many infrastructure projects were carried out from the 1950s onwards, which certainly contributed to the increase of the tourism activity. The gradual construction of airports in various cities, the improvements and repairs of the road network, as

well as the ferry connection between Greece and Italy were key aspects of these development initiatives. Furthermore, the country's tourism growth during the post-war decades was inextricably linked with the construction of new hotels. We should certainly refer to the "Xenia" Tourism Program, a state program carried out largely by GNTO, with basic goal the creation of tourist infrastructure throughout the Greek territory. The Xenia program, which began in the early 1950s, was funded by Marshall Plan funds. Over the next few years, hotels and motels were established on a number of islands and provincial towns. The spread of tourist traffic in various, probably not so popular at that time, areas and the promotion of their natural environment were the main goals of this program.

Spain was one of the first countries in the world to create a regulatory framework for the organization of tourism. In 1905 the National Commission for the Promotion of Tourist Excursions was founded to enhance the profile of the country abroad. A few years later, in 1911, the Royal Commission for Tourism and Artistic Culture was established to cater for "the need to protect the art treasures that the country inherited from antiquity and which were admired by the foreigner travelers". The most ambitious plan was the creation of the Paradores de Turismo, a chain of state-run hotels. Addressing the lack of mountain refuges, facilitating access to such areas, providing safe accommodation on the roads of Spain, preserving the architectural heritage and landscape and spreading tourism throughout the territory were the main ideas behind the creation of the paradores.

The dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) changed the regulatory framework for the organization of tourism. In 1928 the Royal Commission for Tourism and Artistic Culture was replaced by the National Tourism Board (NTB). Its creation was linked, among other reasons, to the holding, in the following year, of the World Exhibition in Barcelona and the Ibero-American Exhibition in Seville. Since the late 1920s, various agents had been arguing about the necessity of changing the economic model of the country. The objectives of NTB were linked to the dissemination of Spain at all levels, the promotion of hospitality activities, the development of the tourism training sector and the support of tourism campaign abroad. Within this framework we should register the establishment of a network of regional organizations, as well as of the NTB information offices in seven countries abroad. The NTB was active until July 1936 and the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. During the subsequent decade we may observe a sharp decline in tourism activity.

The first signs of recovery appeared in the early 1950s. The encouragement of tourism in Francoist Spain should be related with the establishment of the Ministry of Tourism and Information in 1951, the introduction of the National Tourism Plan in 1952 and the beginning of a process of economic liberalization that reached its peak with the Economic Stability Plan in 1959. The success story of Spanish tourism must be also registered in the wider context of the efforts of the Francoist regime to strengthen its international contacts and relations. According to Rafael Vallejo Pousada (2002, 2013), the early 1950s marked the spread of mass tourism in Spain. During these years the number of foreign tourists was higher than that of the domestic ones. In 1955, Spain was in the tenth place among 41 countries, in terms of the number of tourists received, while in 1962 it had risen to the second place. Moreover, in the mid-1950s the country ranked eighth in tourism revenue, and by 1964 it was already third. Finally, tourism has played a decisive role in the economy of the country already from the mid-1950s, as the income from tourism covered a large part of the country's deficit. From the late 1950s until the fall of the Franco dictatorship in 1975, the country experienced the second "tourism boom", after that of the previous decade, or the "Spanish miracle", as it is referred to in the literature. The number of foreign tourists increased exponentially. The approximately 6.400.000 foreign tourists who arrived in the country in 1962 represented 21% of the country's population. During this period a protection framework for foreign investments was created, a step that encouraged the inflow of capital from international tour operators and hotel chains. The 1970s were therefore characterized by a steady increase of the tourism activity. The number of foreign tourists decreased slightly in the succeeding years, a development that could be attributed the oil crisis of 1973 and the social and political unrest that prevailed in the country shortly before the death of Franco and the fall of the regime. In the period

of the transition to democracy, and especially after 1978 and the passing of the new Constitution, the role of the autonomous regions was strengthened. Within this context, local and regional authorities played a decisive role in the planning and implementation of tourism policy. In any case, the years after 1975, characterized by Vallejo Pousada (2002a, 2002b, 2005), as a period of tourism consolidation and “high touristification”, marked the presence of Spain in the first places worldwide in terms of tourist arrivals in absolute numbers.

We conclude this section by presenting a graph (Figure 1) comparing the tourism activity in the two countries, expressed in number of tourists per inhabitant from 1950 to date. As we can see, despite the predominance of Spain in absolute numbers, Greece, from 1990 onwards, performs equally well, if not better, in relative terms.

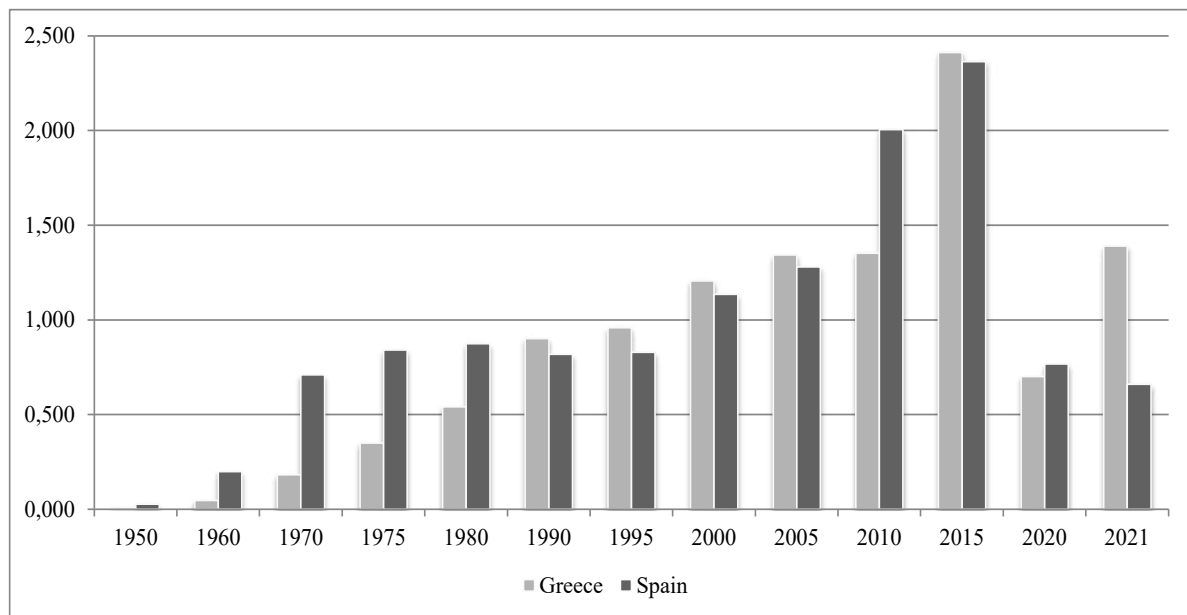


Figure 1. Number of tourists per inhabitant, Greece & Spain, 1950-2021  
Source: Angelis-Dimakis & Doumi 2024

## LANDSCAPE AND TOURISM

We continue by looking into the role of the landscape-tourism relationship in the transformation of the rural areas of the two countries into tourist destinations. Like most European countries, both Greece and Spain followed a rapid post-war transformation process with main characteristics the intense urbanization, the decline of the rural population and the desertification of the countryside. The European institutions, realizing the problems that had been created by the depopulation of the rural societies, tried to direct alternative activities to the countryside. Taking advantage of the rising power of tourism, they promoted the development of rural tourism so as to increase rural incomes, as a complement to agricultural and livestock production and not as a means of degrading it.

Greece was slow to adopt these measures. Rural tourism as a business activity started with a delay of at least 20 years in the 1980s, while until then it was directed, both by the State and by international tourist offices, to the islands. The rapid and mostly unplanned conversion of rural areas into tourist destinations burdened the already problematic relationship between landscape and tourism. This relationship was further aggravated by the lack of institutional support in terms of landscape policy, the very late ratification (2010) of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) and its slow and hesitant implementation. Since the mid-1980s and mostly as a consequence of

domestic tourism, the Greeks have started to show signs of gradually rediscovering the landscape and beginning to develop a landscape conscience, aligned with Western norms of landscape definition and stewardship. Nevertheless, despite these signs of slow recovery, recent studies have shown that very little progress has been made. Hence, any effort towards sustainable landscape management should start from the development of a Greek landscape culture and conscience, as well as the landscape education and awareness-raising of the population (Terkenli. 2011, 2021; Terkenli & Pavlis 2012, 2017; Terkenli et al., 2021).

Spain was faster in taking advantage of these opportunities and activated measures for the improvement of the rural landscape. Rural tourism has been considered one of the leading options for rural development, a priority in new policy guidelines. In this case too, the largely unregulated conversion of rural areas into tourist locations was soon followed by signs of adverse effects on the landscape of the country. In response to these failings, regional planning strategies of various scales have been undertaken, especially in highly rural areas which have undergone intense processes of economic, social and environmental change. The measures on the conservation of the landscape and its enhancement continued and were intensified after the European Convention on Landscape which was ratified in 2007. At the same time, the Atlas of the Landscapes of Spain was created and the progressive incorporation of the landscape into legislation was encouraged with legislative acts (Cruz & Caro 2021).

Despite the differences between the two countries regarding the time and the way of their reaction to the changing conditions the search for sustainable development and the efforts for its consolidation followed the current practices of all European countries and suffered their consequences. These practices were characterized by two basic features. First, the balance between tourism development and environmental protection was treated as a trade-off between them. However, the key for making the regions more sustainable and resilient is that of synergy between tourism and landscape. The concept of synergies refers to situations of mutual gains or in other words a move away from trade-offs and the pursuit of win-win outcomes. Second, the pursuit of sustainable development relied on three pillars of development, economic, social and environmental and seemed to ignore culture, a concept which has been gradually valorized a fundamental aspect of sustainability but its understanding within the framework of sustainable development remains vague. Hence a change of course is required. Regarding the first feature and in order to help facilitate synergies between tourism, development and nature protection, a set of steps may be taken. These steps include, inter alia, the understanding of the historical context of the region, the strive for integrated policy aimed at synergetic interactions, the gaining of an overview of all stakeholders, the involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making process, the development of a shared story, the co-creation of a clear vision for the future, the flexibility in local implementation and the willingness to experiment (Heslinga et al., 2018). Regarding the second feature a very interesting attempt to shed light on this issue has been made by Soini and Birkeland (2014) who approached culture as a vehicle to discuss, interpret and relate to change in the meaning and role of sustainable development.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it could be said that Spain and Greece are two southern Mediterranean countries based, until the middle of the twentieth century, on the agricultural sector. This trend began to change in the 1950s, when both of them experienced mass rural exodus and migration to the big cities. The emergence of mass tourism during this period and the revenue it generated led many rural residents to turn to tourism, abandoning their occupation in the land. Within this context, a gradual transformation of the landscape occurred. The historical evolution of the tourist traffic in Spain and Greece followed a similar trend but with significant deviations.

The tourism activity of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the setting up of the respective regulating frameworks was interrupted in both countries by the World Wars but also



their civil wars. The first signs of recovery emerged in the early 1950s. The main difference is that in Greece this recovery was, to a large extent, the result of American aid and post-civil war governments' efforts to modernize the country. In Spain, on the other hand, it was associated with the efforts of the Francoist regime to escape from international isolation redefining, at the same time, its image. Moreover, in Greece the tourism activity was closely linked with the classical antiquity while in Spain the emphasis was on the protection of the artistic and architectural heritage of the country.

During the succeeding decades, both countries introduced changes in their regulatory framework. In Spain, tourism has been incorporated into the Ministry of Industry and Tourism since the beginning of the post-civil war period, while in Greece the Ministry of Tourism was founded in 1989 but has undergone several organizational changes until today. Meanwhile, the tourist traffic kept increasing in both countries. It is worth noting that in absolute numbers Spain is one of the top countries in terms of the number of tourists. However, in proportion to their population, Greece shows, during the last decades, an even greater tourism activity than Spain and ultimately a stronger dependence of the economy on tourism.

Closing we could say that regarding the landscape-tourism interaction, the two countries, despite their differences, follow the prevailing trend in almost all the European countries during the period under study and suffer its consequences and drawbacks. Hence, they should reconsider their course of development in the context of all those mentioned in the previous sections.

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## **THE DELICATE LANDSCAPE-TOURISM BALANCE: THE CASE OF AOOS-VJOSA**

**Dimitris ANGELIS-DIMAKIS**

Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Crete and University of the Aegean,  
[dim.angelis@gmail.com](mailto:dim.angelis@gmail.com)

**Fjoralba BEGEJA**

MSc. Business Administration, University of Tirana, Economic Expert, [albabegeja@gmail.com](mailto:albabegeja@gmail.com)

**Maria DOUMI**

Associate Professor, University of the Aegean, [mdoumi@aegean.gr](mailto:mdoumi@aegean.gr)

**Dimitra SPATHARIDOU**

Sustainability Consultant, PlanBe, [dimitra@planbe.com.gr](mailto:dimitra@planbe.com.gr)

**George BITHAS**

Strategy Consultant, PlanBe, [george@planbe.com.gr](mailto:george@planbe.com.gr)

**Vasilis ANGELIS**

Emeritus Professor, University of the Aegean, [v.angelis@aegean.gr](mailto:v.angelis@aegean.gr)

## ABSTRACT

Cultural landscape is a term used to describe the symbiosis of human activity and environment. In the words of an eminent human geographer the cultural landscape is fashioned from natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium and the cultural landscape is the result. The active use of cultural landscape in tourism may have a positive influence on destination recognition and heritage revitalization thus improving the global competitiveness and sustainable development of a tourist site. Attention, however, should be given to the attitudes and behavior of the tourism industry and measures should be taken to prevent the marginalization of the “host” community, the privatization and commoditization of local culture and eventually the alteration of the local identity. The paper looks into the landscape – tourism relationship overtime, the major problems caused by the prevailing relationship model as well as the potential development of an alternative model which may overcome these problems. Moreover it examines the case of Aaos-Vjosa, a river crossing Greece and Albania and of the surrounding area in both sides of the border and discusses its potential development.

**Keywords:** cultural landscape, tourism, Greece, Albania, Aaos, Vjosa.

## INTRODUCTION

Cultural landscape is a term used to describe the symbiosis and the combined works of nature and human activity. There is no tourism without landscape and no landscape could be considered without its visitors. The delicate balance between landscape and tourism is an important consideration for both the preservation of natural environment and the sustainable growth of the tourism industry. This balance involves managing the impact of tourism on landscapes to ensure their long-term viability while also providing economic opportunities and cultural experiences for both tourists and local communities. The paper firstly looks into the landscape – tourism relationship overtime, the major drawbacks caused by the prevailing relationship model as well as the potential development of an alternative model which may overcome these problems. It then goes on to look into the case of Aaos-Vjosa, a river which flows 270 kilometers from the Pindus Mountains in Greece through narrow canyons, plains and forests in Albania to the Adriatic coast and of the surrounding area in both sides of the border and discusses their potential development along the lines described in the previous sections.

## LANDSCAPE AND TOURISM: A DELICATE BALANCE

The concept of "landscape" has undergone a profound evolution, transcending its geographical origins to become a comprehensive concept embraced by diverse disciplines such as sociology, psychology, ethnology, landscape ecology, and the philosophy of nature (Palang et al., 2007). Within this interdisciplinary tapestry, a prevailing dichotomy persists, often framed as the interplay between the natural and the anthropocentric (Wolski, 2016). It encapsulates the holistic relationship between humans and their natural and physical surroundings, emphasizing a systematic approach that prioritizes natural features (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2015; Stenseke, 2016). However, socio-economic and technical aspects often overshadow cultural and aesthetic considerations (Wolski, 2016). Beyond the mere physicality, landscapes intertwine with the cultural activities and social lives of the people who inhabit them (Cunningham, 2009; Daugstad, 2008). This holistic interrelation of humans with their natural and physical realm often implies a comprehensive blend of cultural traits with the natural environment, creating landscapes of unique character.

Alternatively, landscapes serve as symbolic environments fashioned by human endeavors to convey meaning to nature, resulting in the transformation of the physical environment aligned with cultural contexts (Greider & Garkovich, 1994). This intricate dance between human beings and nature gives rise to diverse visual, cultural, and ecological constructions (Atik et al., 2015).

Integral to the very fabric of tourist destinations, landscapes, with their scenic natural and cultural attributes, are fundamental aspects of how tourists experience these destinations (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2015; Terkenli, 2006). The landscape acts as a pivotal factor influencing tourism development, giving rise to various impacts from multiple perspectives (Palang et al., 2007; Perez Albert et al., 2021). Different forms of tourism exert varying degrees of influence on the environment, affecting characteristics, vegetation, conservation, and ecological equilibrium. The negative impacts of overtourism extend beyond environmental concerns to potentially tarnishing the destination's brand image associated with picturesque landscapes and virgin natural settings (Insch, 2020; Zawilinska, 2020).

As a global phenomenon, tourism significantly influences landscapes, shaping infrastructure, establishing conservation areas, and reconfiguring local practices, thereby integrating tourism into the daily lives of residents (Maksin & Milijic, 2010; da Costa Cristiano et al., 2020). Every destination must adhere to a social and environmental carrying capacity for sustainable development. Exceeding this capacity can adversely impact the well-being of the local population, the environment, and the unique characteristics defining the landscape (da Costa Cristiano et al., 2020). Consequently, tourism poses a potential threat to the distinctive character of territories (UNESCO, 2011).

In exploring the dynamic intersection of landscape and tourism, a delicate equilibrium emerges as a driving force for both preserving natural environments and fostering the sustainable growth of the tourism industry. This fragile balance entails astute management to mitigate the impact of tourism on landscapes, ensuring their enduring vitality while simultaneously offering economic opportunities and cultural experiences to both tourists and local communities.

Preserving the traditional and physical elements of the landscape while enhancing socio-economic benefits for inhabitants is imperative in tourism planning (Sidali et al., 2015). Achieving comprehensive and sustainable tourism development requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including government, businesses, and local residents. Policymakers focusing on sustainable tourism should adhere to principles such as local prosperity, social equity, visitor satisfaction, community well-being, and biodiversity (Insch, 2020). In this context, the discussions about the need to pursue sustainable tourism are already accepted by international organizations such as the World Tourism Organization and UNESCO (UNESCO, 2009; UNWTO, 2019).

## **TOWARD SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

Sustainable tourism, recognized as a key element in achieving this delicate balance between landscape and tourism, operates as a multifaceted and interdisciplinary field, contributing significantly to national socioeconomic development (Scheyvens & Hughes, 2019; Siakwah et al., 2020). In financial terms, the tourism sector stands as a formidable force globally, constituting 10.4% of the global gross domestic product in 2019, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2022). This economic success is further emphasized by its role as a prominent job generator, accounting for one in five jobs over the last five years (Streimikiene et al., 2020).

However, the crescendo of tourism's impacts at various scales has fueled a growing concern about sustainability and the limitations to its uncontrolled growth (Fodness, 2017; Hall, 2021; Saarinen, 2015). Despite being one of the world's largest industries, a consensus has emerged that tourism must confront sustainability issues directly (Butler, 1999; Jones et al., 2017; Mowforth & Munt, 2015). In recent decades, the call for a sustainable paradigm in tourism has gained momentum, at both international and local levels. A complex interplay of political, economic, and cultural currents has given rise to institutions, norms, and directives advocating for

sustainable development through tourism. The urgency of this shift is underscored by the systemic relationships identified by Pan et al. (2018), intertwining community, culture, environment, and the critical resources of energy, water, and food.

Acknowledging the globalized world's impact on pollution and tourism (Saint Akadiri et al., 2019; Mäntymaa et al., 2021), the need for sustainable tourism is more imperative than ever. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines sustainable tourism as a form of development that meets tourists' needs, enhances opportunities for the future, and ensures integrated resource management (UNWTO). It transcends environmental considerations, encompassing social, economic, cultural, ethical, and political dimensions (Moyle et al., 2021). In 2017, the UN declared it the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, stressing the global commitment to drive sustainability in the industry (Boluk & Rasoolimanesh, 2022). Since then, research on sustainable tourism has surged due to its critical contributions to the overall economy, society, and the environment (Hall, 2021). This increased attention highlights a collective effort to propel the tourism industry toward a future where sustainability is not just a concept but a guiding principle shaping every facet of its impact.

The big challenges of sustainable tourism unfold against the backdrop of global imperatives for sustainability, drawing attention to the transformative power embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the core of the SDGs lies a multifaceted approach encompassing 169 targets, directing efforts toward ending poverty, promoting prosperity and well-being, and protecting the planet. The SDGs act as a transformative agenda designed for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, advocating for sustainable development by following and controlling natural resource use, promoting conservation, creating employment opportunities, preserving local culture, and fostering sustainable marine resource use (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017). Within this paradigm, the role of tourism becomes pivotal, with the potential to directly or indirectly contribute to each of the 17 SDGs, notably influencing goals related to economic growth, sustainable consumption and production, and the responsible use of oceans and marine resources (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017).

## **THE LIMITATIONS OF THE SDGs AND THE ENHANCED ROLE OF CULTURE**

Amidst the acclaim for the SDGs' several, criticisms have also emerged focusing on the fact that they basically consider “three pillars” of development economic, social and environmental. Such an approach seems to ignore culture, a concept which has been gradually emerged as a fundamental aspect of sustainability. However, the understanding of culture within the framework of sustainable development still remains vague and needs further consideration. A very interesting attempt to shed light on this issue by analyzing the scientific discourse on “cultural sustainability” was made by Soini and Birkeland (2014). In this context they approached culture as an evolving concept in scientific discourse in society where culture is becoming a vehicle to discuss and interpret the meaning and role of sustainable development. Taking into account various considerations they organized and classified the uses of the concept of cultural sustainability into seven categories: heritage, vitality, economic viability, diversity, locality, eco-cultural resilience and eco-cultural civilization which are briefly outlined below (Soini and Birkeland, 2014).

The heritage and vitality, despite some differences, represent culture as tangible or intangible cultural capital to be preserved for future generations and to be used in the creation of collective identities and social and cultural inclusion. Hence, the continuity of culture is considered a main objective in culturally sustainable development. This implies that culture is seen as an object of development while providing some social benefits, such as social cohesion and well-being.

The economic viability views culture as a resource to be reproduced in various contexts and to be used to serve the economic viability of places and communities, particularly through

tourism and the creative economy. In other words, rather than seeing culture as something authentic to be preserved, culture is treated as something to be reconstructed, if needed. Sustainability is considered primarily in economic terms, and culture is seen as a means for economic development.

Both the diversity and locality face cultural sustainability not only in terms of the inclusion of various perceptions and values but also with regard to the cultural rights of cultural groups. Culture is considered broadly as a process and as a diversity of ways of life and values. Although community-based development is preferable, it is also understood that local communities cannot be treated as isolated from the external environment and the cultural development that takes place worldwide.

The eco-cultural resilience and eco-cultural civilization express a strong ecological emphasis and understanding of nature as an important part of the human system and as the ultimate limit for sustainable development seeking better integration of human and natural systems. Although the focus of eco-cultural system thinking is often local, it is also accepted that a better understanding of the human–nature relationship and a cultural change are required in order to facilitate a global transition toward a more sustainable society.

Based on the above analysis, we may argue that the heritage and vitality can be seen as a fourth, cultural pillar of sustainability along with ecological, social, and economic sustainability. They highlight the importance of preserving cultural capital for the next generations. When the sustainability of development is in question, cultural aspects in addition to economic, social, and economic aspects need to be taken into account.

The next categories seem to suggest that culture is an instrument to achieve economic, social, and ecological sustainability. The economic viability links culture with economic sustainability. Cultural sustainability defined in this way underscores the economic value that can be achieved through culture and may influence the social and ecological development as well. Cultural diversity and locality, on the other hand, recognize the variety of perceptions, values, and lifestyles linked to certain contexts or places that need to be taken into account in order to achieve the social and ecological dimensions of sustainability. Moreover, they have many similarities with social sustainability, emphasizing equity and well-being resulting from participation and social inclusion. Ecological sustainability is clearly a fundamental component of the eco-cultural resilience and eco-cultural civilization. Culture is considered as the way to achieve ecological sustainability by linking cultural values either with conservation policies or discourses. Furthermore, eco-cultural civilization can also be interpreted in a way that implies a third role of culture which must not be seen only as an instrument but also as a necessary foundation for meeting the overall aims of sustainable development. In this case, culture is considered in terms of a new, primary concern or even as a new paradigm in sustainable development thinking.

The preceding analysis reveals the fundamental role assigned to culture in sustainable development and provides different meanings for culture which are necessary and important to consider in sustainability studies. So the next step could be to define respective cultural sustainability goals which together with the 17 SDGs will provide an enhanced roadmap for the pursuit of an area's true sustainable development.

A very interesting approach in this direction may be found in a British Council's report entitled "*The Missing Pillar – Culture's Contribution to the UN sustainable Goals*". The report advocates for the value of culture as a fourth pillar of sustainable development and as a tool to increase the understanding of the link between arts and culture and sustainable development. Some indicative examples for selected SDGs from this report are given below:

*SDG1: No Poverty.* This goal calls for an end to poverty in all its manifestations by 2030. Culture has the potential to address the economic and social dimensions of poverty and fight against it. Arts and cultural engagement can expand the opportunities for vulnerable groups, enable citizen participation, community empowerment and intercultural dialogue and safeguard equal rights. The cultural and creative industries can greatly contribute to poverty reduction by creating employment, generating income and supporting marginalized individuals and groups with safe and

accessible creative spaces within which to contribute to the economic and social development of their societies.

*SDG3: Good health and well-being.* This goal drives for healthy lives and promote well-being. The benefit of arts for mental health and for wider aspects of well-being is clearly documented. The more comprehensive approach to health and well-being introduces, that this goal offers many opportunities for arts and cultural programs to be part of the global health agenda. The arts can be used to communicate important information in innovative and effective ways.

*SDG4: Quality Education.* This goal pursues inclusive access to quality education and training to promote lifelong learning and access to professional teaching qualifications. Incorporating culture into educational systems ensures that they are adapted to contemporary needs, preparing young people for life in a globalized and multicultural world. This approach can take different forms such as improving access and participation in culture within schools, promotion of artistic education, attainment and skills development and supporting cultural activities and educational curricula designed by artists and cultural institutions.

An extensive analysis of the interconnection between culture and the SDGs may be found in the British Council’s (2020) report.

## THE CASE OF AOS-VJOSA

Aoos in Greek, or Vjosa in Albanian, is a river in northwestern Greece and southwestern Albania. Its total length is about 272 kilometres, of which the first 80 kilometres are in Greece, and the remaining 192 kilometers in Albania.

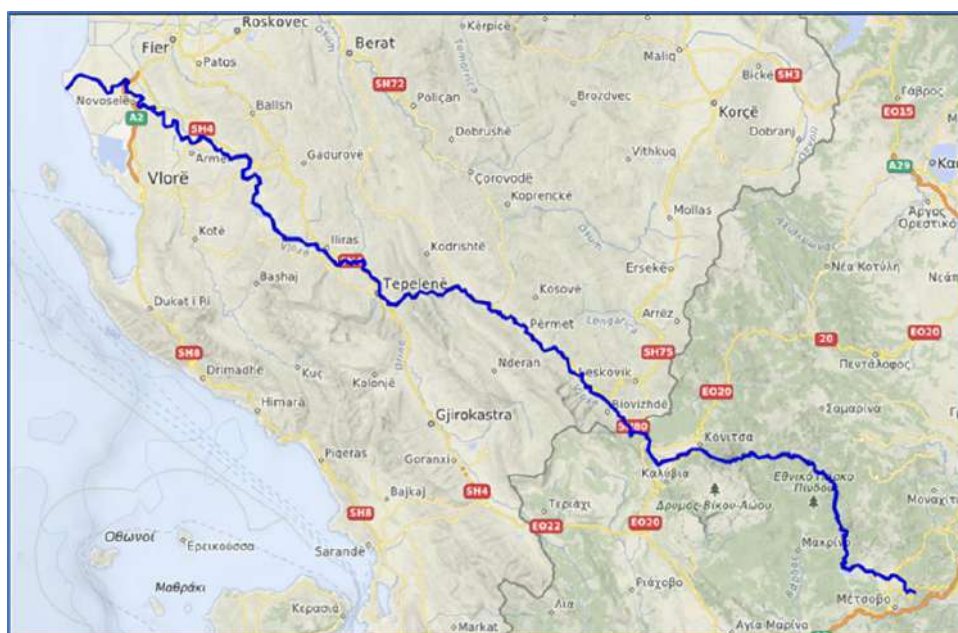


Figure 1. The river Aaos-Vjosa

The river arises in the Pindus mountains of Epirus, Greece. It flows through the canyons of Vikos–Aoös National Park, and then through the town of Konitsa. It enters Albania near Çarshovë, continues northwest through Përmet, Këlcyrë, and finally flows into the Adriatic Sea, northwest of Vlorë. On the Albanian side, the Vjosa River had been threatened over the last decades by projects aiming to harness its hydroelectric potential. However, after an almost decade-long campaign led by organizations and supported by scientists, environmental NGOs and local groups, the Albanian government declared on 15 March 2023 the protection of the Vjosa Wild River National Park. On the Greek side, the biggest part of Aaos River Basin is within the Northern Pindos National Park.

For many years, environmental NGOs and local actors have been campaigning for the extension of the boundaries of this Park. Finally, in November 2023 the Greek Ministry of Environment and Energy agreed and declared the protection of the whole area from the boundary of the Northern Pindos National Park to the Greek-Albanian border.

The situation is now at a crucial point. The governments of the two countries, Greece and Albania, need to start a joint process to create the Aaos-Vjosa transboundary park, aiming to protect the entire river across both countries. The transboundary authorities need to collaborate, dive deeply into the historical and cultural context of the communities across Aaos-Vjosa and develop a common framework for the sustainable development of the region. We propose the creation of a Governance Touristic Hub, which will play a pivotal role in facilitating collaboration among local stakeholders in the decision-making process. It will serve as a shared space where diverse perspectives converge, fostering a collaborative and inclusive approach to defining a common set of criteria and values. This collective effort will be instrumental in shaping the region's sustainable development trajectory and implementing it. By promoting the transparency, accountability, and a shared commitment to the enhanced set of sustainability goals the hub aims to establish a robust foundation for the tourism industry, aligning economic growth with environmental, social and cultural responsibility thus contributing to the long-term well-being of the region and its communities. Obviously the sustainability goals set depend on the policy makers' and stakeholders' views and perceptions regarding the contribution of culture to the overall sustainable development of the region.

We conclude this section by listing a set of indicative steps which should be taken in setting up the Government Touristic Hub (Heslinga et al., 2018).

- *Understanding the historical institutional context of the region.* Looking back into the course of the area's development over time makes policy makers aware of future potential obstacles and opportunities and helps them to identify path-dependencies that may obstruct policy options.
- *Stakeholders mapping.* The involvement of all stakeholders (local inhabitants, entrepreneurs and visitors) is essential to generate public support for the management of the tourism-landscape interactions. Moreover the carrying out of a stakeholders analysis will assist policy makers to make their contacts with the various groups of them more effective and efficient.
- *Consultation-synergetic interactions.* To balance the tourism development with the social and environmental aspects, policy makers should consult all the stakeholders and then develop integrated policies taking synergetic interactions between tourism and landscape into account.
- *Development of a clear vision.* Policy makers and other stakeholders should create a shared clear vision for the future. Clear rules and regulations are essential as they reduce confusion and uncertainty about future policy directions for stakeholders.
- *Definition of the strategic goals.* Based on the clear vision developed, the policy makers should set the long-term strategic goals and draw up the respective plan for their achievement.
- *Action Planning.* The strategic goals are prioritized and scheduled overtime and the respective action plans are drawn up.
- *Implementation-Follow up.* The action plans prepared are implemented, their progress is followed up and necessary amendments are made.

## CONCLUSIONS

The paper looked into the origins and evolution of the term landscape and focused on the delicate landscape-tourism balance. It then went on to introduce sustainable tourism and SDGs as the means to achieve this balance. On the other hand, it referred to the criticism addressed to them



for practically ignoring culture, elaborated on the meanings and roles of culture in a region's tourism development and suggested the set-up of cultural sustainability goals which, together with the SDGs, will provide an enhanced roadmap for the pursuit of an area's true sustainable development. Finally, it examined the case of Aooos-Vjosa a river crossing Greece and Albania and of the surrounding area and proposed ways for the area's development along the lines described above. However, the understanding of culture within the framework of sustainable development still remains vague and further research and consideration are needed.

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## **KALAMATA AS A FESTIVAL DESTINATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KALAMATA INTERNATIONAL PUPPET FESTIVAL AS A KEY ATTRACTION**

**Valérie PETIT**

Msc Cultural Management, [valeriepetitgr@gmail.com](mailto:valeriepetitgr@gmail.com)

**Nicholas KARACHALIS**

Assistant Professor, University of the Aegean, [nkarachalis@aegean.gr](mailto:nkarachalis@aegean.gr)

### **ABSTRACT**

The International Puppet Festival of the Experimental Stage of Kalamata, a regional non-profit cultural association in Southern Greece, will be celebrating its 8th edition in 2024, having gained a place on the national festival map and created added value for the city of Kalamata. The festival is supported both by public and private funds and by a group of creative volunteers. Its audience keeps growing and it proved to be resilient as it is the only puppet theater festival in Greece which took place during the pandemic, having led both the artists and the public on the way back to live puppet theater performances. The main research question addressed in this paper is how and under which conditions can a festival with a very specific character become part of the identity of a city, create a community around it and become linked to the visitors' economy. To answer this question, a reference to the particular aspects of Kalamata is made, followed by a discussion on the special conditions which led to the growth of the Kalamata International Puppet Festival. Key insights on the financial, artistic and organizational level will be explored, key proposals regarding the further development and sustainability of the festival will be discussed and, furthermore, the festival's role in enriching Kalamata's image as a constant cultural destination.

**Keywords:** Kalamata, destination, festival, Kalamata International Puppet Festival, volunteering, non-profit organization

### **INTRODUCTION**

Cities around the world are increasingly using events as a tool to generate a wide range of effects, such as tourism image improvement, increase of employment and social cohesion. The notion of "eventful" cities is central to this discussion, as well as the notion of participation and edutainment (Richards 2017, Skoultzos and Karachalis 2023). Kalamata, arguably, is recognized as one of the eventful "festival cities" of Greece: with its emblematic International Dance Festival, its events and its cultural infrastructure it attracts attention and visitors (Georgoula and Terkenli, 2018). The notion of a festival city or eventful city is part of a wider discussion on the role of events in urban development, the last two decades the literature on how festivals affect a city's

attractiveness has been discussed critically in the context of various approaches, often leading to detailed descriptions, typologies of approaches, criteria and theoretical models such as the “eventful city” (Richards and Palmer 2007, Herstein and Berger 2014, Karachalis 2021). Key success factors include various soft and hard factors from leadership, audience development and pricing to infrastructure and accessibility.

A first important factor for a place to attract festival tourists is the access by transport and, especially since travel shame has become important in decision making, easy train access is important (Jung et al, 2024). Cities in the periphery of the EU such as Kalamata that mostly depend on their airport have a disadvantage concerning this factor. The way destination branding also involves policies that address current issues of sustainability becomes one of the key factors for attraction and many cities invest in green transition (Koumara, Tsitsou and Karachalis, 2021). Kalamata being awarded the EU Mission Label for Climate - Neutral and Smart Cities in March 2024, certainly proves the city's achievements in that direction, planning to achieve climate-neutrality by 2030. The wider policy context on a local and national level also plays a role as funding, sponsorship tax reductions, etc. (Kolokytha, 2022). Tourism policy is also important as combining a festival with other attractions. Kalamata, for example, has strong attraction factors nearby and is already established as a tourism destination for its nearby advantages (Costa Navarino, Mani peninsula, Ancient Messini etc.). Finally, short visits and city breaks have been a key notion for festival tourism, as many visitors travel for one or two days to attend an event or festival – this is the case for Kalamata as well (Karachalis and Deffner, 2022). The above are also linked with internal characteristics of the festivals and their audiences: storytelling, commitment and volunteering are of key importance (Wyatt and Rosetti, 2024).

## **KALAMATA AS A FESTIVAL CITY AND A DESTINATION**

The city of Kalamata, located in Southern Greece, in Messinia, one of the four regional units of the Region of Peloponnese, counts 73.000 permanent inhabitants according to the 2021 census and is located at a distance of only 237 kilometers by road for the capital, Athens. The city is blessed by both sea and mountain, as well as special weather conditions almost all year long and counts several comparative advantages. Indeed, the city and region produce worldwide known quality local products, have remarkable ancient and contemporary history, dispose of an international airport, port and marina and comprise several key destinations, such as the Costa Navarino hotel complex in the area of Pylos, the region of Mani and many others. The particularity of Kalamata is that culture, cultural development and cultural events have become a key component of its narrative, resulting in the city being referred to in Greece as the City of Culture, the City of Dance, the City of Festivals.

The Municipality of Kalamata, since the 1980s and all the more after the 1986 catastrophic earthquakes which shook the city and the mentalities, has put its bet on the cultural growth of the city, which has turned out 40 years later to an eventful city presenting cultural events and festivals all year long. With incentive and funds from the central government, aiming to cultural decentralization, the Municipality of Kalamata founded in 1985 its Organization for Cultural Development (DEPAK), active initially in 4 sectors (music, dance, visual arts and theatre) and enriched in 1995 by a fifth sector, the Kalamata International Dance Centre, as part of the National Cultural Network of Greek Cities, organizing every year since the Kalamata Dance Festival. The course of this particular event has marked the city, culturally opening it on an international level, cultivating the knowhow as far as special events organization is concerned and offering to the city its main venue, the Kalamata Dance Megaron.

Today, the city counts an important number of cultural organizations, public and private, professional and amateur, presenting events and producing festivals which all together compose the rich in quantity and quality cultural agenda of the city. It is also important to observe the

cultural spaces the city disposes of, numerous and on walking distance from one to another, they form a net of indoor and outdoor venues ideal for the organization of festivals. These venues mainly belong to and are used by the Municipality of Kalamata, which also concedes or rents them for use to other public or private entities.

It is in this context that the Experimental Stage of Kalamata, a private non profit cultural organization, was founded in 1991 by active citizens aiming to serve the art of theatre, initially among children and teenagers. More than three decades later, its range of activities now includes all ages and social groups, promoting culture, education, as well as social cohesion and inclusion. Moreover, it has focused for the last 25 years on a more specific form of theatre, the puppet theatre, and has been especially for the last 8 years actively engaged in the promotion of this art. In 2017 the organization's boldest adventure started when the proposal of the city to become Cultural Capital for 2021 did not win and the project of a puppet festival, which had been included in the proposal, seemed to vanish as well. The members of the organization then decided to organize the 1st Panhellenic Puppet Festival of Southern Greece in May 2017 and further to make it international as from its 5th edition in 2021, amidst the covid pandemic period.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper partly draws on a research conducted in the framework of the Master's programme in Cultural Management of the Hellenic Open University. The main research question being, as explicitly mentioned previously, how and under which conditions can a festival with a very specific character become part of the identity of a city, create a community around it and become linked to the visitors' economy, the methodology of the research included the gathering of both quantitative and qualitative data. Regarding the former, an audience survey was conducted shortly after the 5th edition of the Festival and access to the data collected by the Festival from its beginning to this day was ensured by the organization. As far as the later is concerned, interviews with selected puppeteers participating in two editions of the Festival were conducted, an exclusive interview with the director of a large international festival (Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes / FMTM), as well as discussions with members of the organizing committee and volunteers of the Festival. The interviews with the Greek puppeteers revealed elements about the art of puppetry and its particularities, as well as past and current puppet festivals in Greece, and mainly the Kilkis Puppet and Mime Festival. In addition, participation in the Festival's activities and organization was granted throughout the research, instauring a close collaboration which generated the opportunity to provide direct feedback to the organization regarding the research findings. The research took place in the period from the preparation of the 4th Festival in May 2020 to the completion of the 7th Festival in October 2023.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### *Special conditions of creation and growth*

Examining the conditions under which the Kalamata Puppet Festival was founded, apart from the culturally fertile context established in the city of Kalamata, it is obvious that the almost three decades of experience of the Experimental Stage in the fields of theatre and puppet theatre, its inclusive multifaceted vision and its team of engaged volunteers, was an excellent foundation to build upon, one which proved to counterbalance the lack of financial resources and experience in festival organization. The enthusiasm and determination of the Organizing Committee, including the President of the Organization, Mrs Letta Petroulaki, who undoubtedly holds a big part of the Festival's launch and success, convinced the main public actors concerned to support the Festival from its first edition to this day, as well as private foundations, companies, local entrepreneurs and the educational community. Also, right from the start, the community of puppeteers valued the

preciousness of the birth of a puppet festival in Southern Greece, where none had ever been organized before, as well as the effort and risk taken by the organization, by supporting it in many ways, in word and in deed. An already extraverted organization, open to collaborations and having built the profile of a transparent and trustworthy entity, continued on that path on a larger basis with educational, cultural and social institutions on a local, regional, national and later international level. Last but not least, the target audience of the city is considered an experienced audience in arts and festivals, to whom was now introduced a new form of art. The main challenge in this case was not only to attract people to the Festival, but to convince them that it truly concerns all ages and backgrounds.

### *Achievements and financial resources*

In 7 editions, the Festival has presented 102 puppet troupes from 7 countries, 254 performances in Kalamata and 4 other cities. 48 workshops have been organized, as well as 13 events in open spaces and 10 puppet exhibitions. All this was made possible by the 11 members of the Organizing Committee and by a group of 40/50 active volunteers per edition. The Festival has been attended so far by approximately 25.000 spectators indoors and outdoors, and 700 people have so far participated in its educational activities. As far as the budget is concerned, for the latest edition, the Festival organizers disposed of only 47.000 euros for all activities. This number does not include all the resources provided to the Festival by volunteers, supporters and the city. The main source of income being the public sector for 70% of the budget, around 10% from sponsorship from the private sector and 20% of income coming from the activity itself, tickets, workshop fees and own income. Almost 60% of the expenses concern fees, travel and accommodation expenses for the invited artists, 16% for promotion and printed material, 13% for technical support and the rest for production and other expenses.

### *Strengths and weaknesses*

Overall, the research has pointed out the strengths and weaknesses of the Festival as it is today:

#### Strengths:

- the choice of the art of puppet theater, as it is in a very flourishing period in Greece
- the festival's international character
- the ideal location & time of the year
- the increasing support from public & private actors
- the dedicated volunteers
- the increasing audience
- the stable & new collaborations with educational & cultural actors
- the support & recognition by the community of puppeteers
- the creation of new puppet troupes in Kalamata due to the presence of the festival
- and the resilience the festival has shown, especially through the covid pandemic.

#### Weaknesses:

- the annual (and not pluriannual) & always uncertain funds from the public sector
- the limited percentage of income from sponsorship & own income
- the non specialized human resources, working exclusively on a volunteering basis
- the amateur human resources management, especially the management of volunteers
- the use of venues conceded by the Municipality, not always available when needed

- the insufficient marketing & use of media
- and the research for international programming, so far not including participation in festivals abroad and selection of performances attended live.

### *Suggestions for sustainability and further development*

The main suggestions for the sustainability and further development of the Festival emerging from the research concentrate on financial resources, human resources, marketing, extraversion and artistic choices.

The study conducted clearly points the importance of stable and long term establishment of financial resources from public and private actors, as well as the need for constant research of new partnerships and financial resources, combined with the ever challenging for such entities and specialized cultural events increase of own income. The lack of stable financial resources as a foundation upon which to build each festival edition as well as its future development, has a negative impact and can even prove fatal to the festival, as occurred in many cases of puppet festivals in the past on national and international level. The local and regional public actors have from their part steadily supported the Kalamata Puppet Festival through annual subsidy and free access to cultural infrastructure, but on the other side, the central government through its annual open call procedure for subsidies has not yet provided a stable context due to the strong fluctuation of the amount of subsidy granted and the uncertain time of announcement of the results. The Festival now claims a pluriannual subsidy contract equivalent to the one that has been granted to the Kilkis International Puppet and Mime Festival in order to enter its second decade on more solid terms.

Human resources play a key role in the Festival's creation and growth, from the organizing volunteers and the artists invited to the audience attending the performances, open air events and workshops. The Festival is entirely implemented by a group of dedicated volunteers, consisting the core team of the Festival, indefatigably led from the start by the President of the Experimental Stage of Kalamata, and enriched by seasonal volunteers at the period of the Festival. Now, the need for intensification and refreshment of the team with the participation of younger age active volunteers with new ideas and knowhow arose from the interviews and talks with volunteers and members of the organizing committee, as well as the need for specialised and in some cases remunerated human resources in key positions.

The puppet artists invited are granted a fee, transport, accommodation, meals, as well as the technical requirements needed. Given their general self sufficiency in terms of production and technical needs, the most important asset of the Festival the puppeteers pointed in their interviews is the human aspect of the organization, the warm welcoming, the care for people and for quality that have forged the image of a festival where the puppeteers are eager to present their work, to come again and also to stay if possible for its whole duration to attend other performances and interact with their peers. In their interviews artists also referred to the city's public as an attentive and well trained in arts audience with whom they feel easily connected. The audience being so far mostly composed of local inhabitants, while the public coming from other regions and abroad are mainly professionals, the main challenge pointed is the cultivation of awareness on the art itself among the public, the attraction of more adult audience to puppet performances, as well as to aim at a higher number of audience on a regional and national scale.

Cross comparing with the Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes (FMTM) also led to the conclusion that a medium-sized city can become the center of a specialized art on a regional, national and even international level, as long as all actors unite and activate their forces, achieving long-term stability in financial and human resources. Key elements combined to achieve the success of a specialized festival also seem to include continuous innovation and extraversion on multiple levels with the mobilisation of the local community, cooperation with parallel events and other arts institutions, as well as bold artistic choices, especially aimed at the adult audience. The

International Puppet Festival of Kalamata, being at an early stage of the long-term process of the establishment of a festival, can certainly hold the FMTM as a role model on many levels, including the challenges it keeps facing six decades after its foundation.

Finally, in the era of image, media, artificial intelligence and new technologies, priority must be given to designing and implementing the Festival's communication and marketing strategy, including the allocation of a larger part of the budget, the assignment of the task to professionals and the use of contemporary communication tools, all aiming to an international level communication and promotion of the event.

### *Conclusions*

The general conclusions reached show that the festivals create added value to a city's tourism operation and their support should become a policy priority. Regarding the city of interest, the festivals consist an important part of the destination brand of Kalamata and the tourism narrative of the city as an "eventful city". The Kalamata Puppet Festival is growingly attracting attention and has the potential to contribute to the city's visitor economy. The festival itself is also developing its managerial capacities, following the paradigm of other festivals that depend on a bottom-up and participatory approach (Magkou et al, 2023). Its resilience through the pandemic crisis and its steady growth dynamics are strong indicators for future success.

The growth and sustainability of the festival mainly depends on its financial sustainability which should be further supported by local and national funds. Another important factor is the increase of "in house" support and services that will make the festival less dependent on external providers. Communication and marketing should be upgraded and respond to the current circumstances of festival promotion. Balancing both volunteering and professionalism is a key success factor, keeping in mind that achieving positive results and audience development can only be done in the context of a long term commitment to a strategy. On a city level, further cooperation between cultural institutions and common marketing would add value to the image and identity of Kalamata as a "festival city".

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## **CRAFTS ACTIVITES AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DYNAMICS: A CASE STUDY OF PARIS**

**Francesca Cominelli**

Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, IREST/EIREST, [francesca.cominelli@univ-paris1.fr](mailto:francesca.cominelli@univ-paris1.fr)

**Clara Vecchio**

Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne IREST/EIREST, [clara.vecchio@univ-paris1.fr](mailto:clara.vecchio@univ-paris1.fr)

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines craft activities from a tourism perspective, taking into account the role they play in the dynamics of sustainable tourism. Using the city of Paris as a case study, we analyze the historical context linking crafts to the tourism sector. In particular, crafts have played a crucial role in the regeneration of several districts of Paris and increasingly in the areas around Paris, known as the *Grand Paris*. Certainly, the craft activities and specificities contribute to the attractiveness of the French capital and the surrounding departments, but their role goes beyond this. In fact, by encouraging new tourist experiences, where visitors are directly involved in the creative processes, craft practices enrich the visitor experience and, more interestingly, create links between tourists and craftspeople, as well as between tourists and the host communities. While these emerging practices have a role to play in developing the tourism offer, as an element of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) any tourism development needs to respond to the wishes of craftspeople and benefit them. Finally, again basing our research on the case of Paris, we highlight the link between crafts and sustainability by showing how crafts can lead to more sustainable tourism, which supports local production and economies, creates social links between craftspeople and visitors, in the broader logic of ICH safeguarding.

**Keywords:** Intangible Cultural Heritage, Art and Craft Activities, Sustainable Tourism, Local and Circular Economies.

## INTRODUCTION

Art and Craft activities occupy an emerging place in the development of tourism in France. They contribute to the development of historic centers, neighborhoods and urban peripheries, enriching them with new functions and making them more attractive to both residents and visitors. But their link to tourism goes beyond the interest crafts generate in these places. Indeed, craft workshops and activities themselves become places to visit, off-the-beaten-track (Condevaux, Djament-Tran and Gravari-Barbas 2016), as well as spaces for creative experiences.

The development of craft tourism may also respond to sustainability challenges. From the production perspective, craft activities provide solutions concerning the supply of raw materials and the design and manufacturing process, including issues like lifespan and recyclability. From an economic and social perspective, craft tourism involves local actors, generates revenues locally, and creates a favorable creative environment for both tourists and inhabitants. From a cultural perspective, craft tourism can become part of the safeguarding process, contributing to the transmission of skills and know-how and raising awareness of the importance of these practices.

In France, the craft sector has been deeply structured since the 1970s, and over time has become a strategic asset of the French economy and of the tourism sector. In 1976, Pierre Dehaye submitted a report to the President of the Republic on the difficulties facing the crafts sector. This report was followed by the creation of *SEMA* (*Société d'Encouragement aux Métiers d'Art*/Society for the Encouragement of Arts and Crafts), which was transformed 34 years later into *INMA* (*Institut National des Métiers d'Art*/National Institute of Arts and Crafts) and, since 2024, into the *Institut pour les Savoir-Faire Français*/Institute for French Craftership. While *SEMA*'s initial focus was on defining and recognising crafts and providing economic support for the sector, since 2006, with France's ratification of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003), the cultural dimension of crafts and the issue of their safeguarding have also been put forward. Craft trades are recognised for their economic, cultural and social role. In this perspective, in May 2023 the French Government adopted a National Strategy to promote crafts, supported by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Trade, Crafts and Tourism. The strategy focuses on five key objectives: raising the profile of crafts among young people; training and passing on excellence in crafts; anchoring crafts at the heart of local communities; supporting research, innovation and creation; and developing crafts internationally. Tourism is mentioned several times in the official document, in particular as a factor anchoring crafts in their regions, differentiating the local offer and fostering mobility programmes.

These initiatives highlight a gradual increasing interest for crafts because of their touristic potential, as well as their capacity to face sustainability challenges. Incorporating crafts into the tourism experience enriches the journey by combining cultural education and personal involvement, supports local economies based on sustainable production processes, and can contribute to a more sustainable tourism model.

Using the city of Paris as a case study, this paper looks at the stages and practices involving crafts in the tourism sector. On the one hand, we look at how crafts are promoted as a factor of attractiveness of Parisian neighborhoods, and as new tourist experiences off-the-beaten-track. On the other hand, we look at the development of craft activities as a way of designing a new sustainable tourism offer.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on long-term research conducted over the past 15 years in the field of Crafts and Intangible Cultural Heritage. A series of semi-structured interviews was conducted in 2023 as part of the European Union's Horizon 2022 research and innovation programme,

Tracks4Crafts<sup>6</sup>. In the framework of this project, we conducted interviews with European stakeholder, including French actors<sup>7</sup>, in order to deeply understand the Parisian and Grand Parisian craft environment. The data collected was completed by field visits and literature review enabling us to investigate public and private initiatives in the field of tourism and analyzing sustainability in the context of craft tourism. The qualitative approach presented in this article may contribute to a better understanding of how craft activities can be inscribed in sustainable tourism dynamics.

## CRAFTS IN PARIS, AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The city of Paris has always had close links with crafts. In the Middle Ages, the guild system organized craft life by defining distinct trades and a regulatory framework to ensure the transmission of knowledge and guarantee the quality of products. The *Compagnonnage*/Companionship represented, and still represents today, “a unique way of conveying knowledge and know-how linked to the trades that work with stone, wood, metal, leather, textiles and food. Its originality lies in its synthesis of varied methods and processes of transmitting knowledge” (UNESCO 2010). Under Louis XIV, Colbert encouraged the emergence of national manufactures by granting them advantageous monopolies: Saint-Gobain for mirrors, Alençon for lace, Gobelins and Aubusson for tapestries. Later on, in the 18th century, France saw a proliferation of factories and entrepreneurs contributing to make its culture and products known internationally (INMA 2016). The Revolution led to the abolition of the guilds, which were accused of creating an intermediary body between the citizens and the nation, and many trades found themselves in a vulnerable position. In this context, the Abbé Grégoire campaigned for the creation in Paris of a *Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers*/National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts, that was founded on October 10th, 1794 by a Decree of the Convention (Mercier 1994). Subsequently, Napoleon took up the tradition of his predecessors and encouraged national production and manufactures, which also played a crucial role at the Universal Exhibitions (Arbois 2014).

Although the social and economic transformations of the 20th century have considerably reduced the number of professionals and businesses in the sector, Paris remains a place of production, as well as a display, for French and international craftspeople. Here, arts and crafts have managed to endure, transforming themselves, and still represent an important part of French culture and the economy (INMA 2016). Nevertheless, it is difficult to measure the scale of this sector, since data is not updated regularly. The Ile-de-France region is a major center for crafts, with around 8,000 professionals, employees and craftspeople, and almost 5,200 companies, a quarter of the national workforce (Fernandes 2015). Paris therefore offers a rich and diverse panorama of craft creation, and is the venue for a number of initiatives aimed at supporting craft tourism, in a context of diversified and sustainable urban living.

## A FACTOR FOR URBAN REGENERATION AND ATTRACTIVENESS

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<sup>6</sup> Transforming crafts knowledge for a sustainable, inclusive and economically viable heritage in Europe.

<sup>7</sup>List of experts interviewed in Ile-de-France in 2023: Director of the Ateliers de Paris, Office of Design, Fashion and Art Professions; Head of the Office of Creative Industries, Art Professions, Design and Fashion, DGCA, Ministry of Culture; Head of Cultural and Scientific Development, Mobilier national; Operational Director of the Campus d'excellence des métiers d'art et du design; Director of JAD; Deputy Director of the Institut National des Métiers d'Arts; Head of Monitoring and Analysis, Institut National des Métiers d'Art; Project Manager for the Maîtres d'art-Elèves programme, Institut National des Métiers d'Art; International Partnerships Manager, La Fabrique Nomade; Cabinet and Institutional Communications Manager, Ateliers d'Art de France; Partnerships and Membership Project Manager, Ateliers d'Art de France; Project Manager, Explore Paris Val-de-Marne; Digital Advisor, Chambre des Métiers et de l'Artisanat 92; Deputy Director, Hauts-de-Seine Departmental Council.

The role of culture and creative activities in urban planning and regeneration has been widely discussed in the literature. Emphasis has been placed on the notion of creative cities and territories (Bianchini and Landry 1995; Pilati and Tremblay 2007), on the creative and knowledge economies and their intangible dimension (Scott 2000; Veltz 2014; Greffe 2015) or on the inhabitants of these places, such as the “creative class” studied by Florida (2002). More recently, work on the concept of *community hubs* (Piovesan 2020), as spaces that bring together people, ideas and energies in order to offer activities and services to and by the community, also opens up an interesting field of analysis.

Following this perspective, a number of regeneration projects in Paris have given a central place to crafts. The *Viaduc des Arts*, in the 12th arrondissement, is an emblematic example. In the early 1980s, the City of Paris decided to rehabilitate the old railway viaduct 1.5 km long by transforming it into a place to showcase, produce and sell crafts and contemporary creations in Paris. More recently, the *Caserne* project, designed as an accelerator of ecological and societal transition dedicated to fashion and luxury crafts, follows the same logic. The ancient Château-Landon fire station, located in the 10th arrondissement, has been transformed into a place of work, research and learning for 47 residents, including start-ups and ready-to-wear and leather goods brands. In addition to these urban development projects, which over the years have contributed to the creation of centers dedicated to crafts in the heart of the city, a policy to support more globally craftspeople has been implemented. The *Bureau du Design, de la Mode et des Métiers d'Art (BDMMA)*/Office of Design, Fashion and Crafts implements the City of Paris’ policy in favor of the creative professions and includes the *Ateliers de Paris/Paris Workshops* project. This is an incubator that hosts around 30 companies each year. Residents benefit from a workshop at an attractive rent, personalized services, and a professional network. For the city as a whole, craft businesses represent a challenge in terms of economic development and job creation, cultural and tourist vitality, neighborhood regeneration and international influence. That’s why since 2004, *Semaest*, which became the semi-public company *SEM Paris Commerces* in 2023, has been tasked with helping craftspeople to set up in neighborhoods affected by commercial vacancies or mono-activity, as well as in new neighborhoods or undergoing redevelopment. Thanks to the *Vital'Quartier* and *Contrat Paris Commerces* schemes, more than 800 commercial premises in Paris have been acquired, renovated and allocated to independent retailers and craftspeople.

This urban regeneration process contributed to transforming the image of several Parisian neighborhoods, nevertheless it is not limited to Paris but concerns, more and more, the scale of *Grand Paris*. For instance, the town of Pantin, in the North-East of Paris, has become a veritable center for fashion and artistic creation. “The New York Times refers to Pantin as a new Brooklyn, with the installation of the Thaddaeus Ropac gallery, the arrival of Hermès, part of the workshops under the aegis of Chanel and the training center for creative and artistic crafts<sup>8</sup>” (Bertrand 2015). Indeed, the town created the *Maison Revel*, an information and documentation center that hosts exhibitions and organizes events to promote the skills of crafts to the general public, while developing educational initiatives in collaboration with the French Ministry of Education. The project was then extended to the *Est Ensemble* agglomeration community. “Est Ensemble is convinced that arts and crafts, which are part of a manufacturing heritage synonymous with quality and humanity, can contribute to a new economic model based on cooperation and exchange, industrial ecology and short circuits<sup>9</sup>” (Est Ensemble 2013). The cluster now brings together more than 300 artisans and over 2,000 jobs in the luxury sector. Thanks to this process, the city of Pantin

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<sup>8</sup>Translation by the author of the original version: “Le New York Times parle de Pantin comme d’un nouveau Brooklyn, avec l’installation de la galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, la venue d’Hermès, une partie des ateliers sous l’égide de Chanel et le pôle de formation aux métiers de la création et d’artisans d’art”.

<sup>9</sup>Translation by the author of the original version: “Est Ensemble a la conviction que les métiers d’art, qui s’inscrivent dans un héritage manufacturier, synonyme de qualité et d’humanité, peuvent contribuer à un nouveau modèle économique, fondé sur les coopérations et les échanges, l’écologie industrielle et les circuits courts”.

and its urban community are promoting an economic model based on the creation of synergies between residents, craft companies and young people, enhancing the city's creative ecosystem.

Nearby Aubervilliers is following a similar path. In 2022, the Chanel group inaugurated the *19M*, a 25,500 m<sup>2</sup> complex designed by architect Rudy Ricciotti, which hosts 11 art studios belonging to the *Paraffection* group and around 700 craftspeople and employees. The creation of this center follows on from the *Paraffection* project, a branch of the Chanel fashion house set up in 1985 to acquire and group together the artistic crafts associated with *haute couture*, and preserving Made in France expertise. The vocation of the *19M* is to bring these workshops together in a place designed and dedicated to craftsmanship and creation, where embroiderers, leatherworkers, feather makers and florists retain their rare skills in a solid structure financed by the group, but are also encouraged to work for other customers and designers (Pavlovsky 2023). A further example is the *Jardin des métiers d'Art et du Design*/Garden of Craft and Design, launched in 2022 within the building of the former National School of Ceramics, and co-piloted by the Hauts-de-Seine department. This project shows the potential for interaction between the crafts and the public artistic and cultural institutions, in order to attract craft and design professionals in the region.

These examples illustrate howcrafts projects played a proactive contribution to urban development and to the attractiveness of Paris's arrondissements and, increasingly, the Grand Paris region, with large-scale initiatives accompanied by specific policies supporting the artisans. Through their links with the past, creativity and innovation, crafts influence the attractiveness of the districts where they are located, and help to create new imaginations.

## INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND NEW TOURISM EXPERIENCES

In France, a number of craft practices have been included in the National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and some of them on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This has given crafts a higher visibility and created new opportunities for tourism development. However, the relation between tourism and ICH is not obvious and is part of the international debate. The Operational Directives for the implementation of the 2003 Convention (UNESCO 2022) emphasize the need for tourism activities to respect, as a matter of priority, the requirements for safeguarding the ICH, as well as the rights, aspirations and wishes of the communities, groups and individuals concerned. In particular, Art. 187 encourages to anticipate potential impact before activities are initiated, to ensure that communities are the primary beneficiaries of any tourism activity associated with their practices and that the viability, social functions and cultural meanings of that heritage are in no way diminished or threatened by tourism. Despite the will of the Convention and the framework proposed by its Operational Guidelines, ICH constitutes an important territorial specificity in the promotion of tourism, and the elements of ICH can even become a flagship of tourist destinations and inspire their thematisation, in connection with territorial marketing strategies (Cominelli, Condevaux and Jacquot 2020). Craft practices, included in the sphere of the Convention as "traditional craftsmanship", are thus at the origin of new tourism developments. Crafts not only contribute to the attractiveness of a region, but also become a tourist attraction themselves. In Paris, the promotion of craft tourism is not a recent phenomenon. Historic sites such as the *Manufacture des Gobelins* and the reserves of the *Mobilier National* bear witness to this, offering guided tours of the collections and production workshops, as well as educational activities to raise awareness of the crafts among the very young. Similarly, in Sèvres, the *Manufacture Nationale* and the museum welcome around 60,000 visitors each year (Cité de la céramique - Sèvres and Limoges 2022). In addition to these emblematic sites, visits to small production workshop have become increasingly popular thanks to the *Journées Européennes des Métiers d'Art*/European Artistic Crafts Days, set up in 2002 and dedicated to discovering and meeting craft professionals in their places of creation.

This tendency to visit craft workshops is also confirmed by the emergence of specialized tourist guides. The *Guide des artisans d'art de Paris*/Guide to Parisian Craftspeople (2002) takes

visitors, through the images of the photographer Gilles Perin, on a tour of around sixty craft workshops. The *Guide Artisans et Métiers d'Art de Paris*/Guide to Craftspeople and Crafts in Paris (2007) features 270 portraits of professionals in the capital's 20th arrondissements, and invites visitors to take a behind-the-scenes look at artistic creation. The *Guide du Routard de la visite d'entreprise*/Guide du Routard of Company Visits (2016), although it covers the whole France, shows the current importance of industrial and craft tourism. Finally, more recently, the specialized edition Cartoville *Grand Paris* (2024) positions crafts as an alternative destination outside the major tourist flows.

Visits to production sites are also supported by labels that help to recognise craft businesses, their opening to the public and make it easier to market their products to tourists. For example, since its creation in 2005, the label *Entreprises du Patrimoine Vivant*/Living Heritage Companies has been awarded to craft activities that possess rare skills and a unique heritage, and that are firmly rooted in their local area.

In addition to visits, new immersive experiences incite craftspeople not only to open their workshops, but also offer creative workshops. This type of practices is clearly part of the field of creative tourism, which seeks to develop distinctive experiences at an individual level, involving reflexive interaction on the part of tourists (Richards and Raymond 2000, Richards and Wilson 2006, Wurzbürger, Aageson and Pattakos 2009). As a result, tourism practices in Paris are evolving to offer visitors more immersive and personalized experiences, showcasing crafts in innovative ways. In this respect, the *ExploreParis* platform is the fruit of a collaborative effort by actors in the tourism sector and carried out as part of the Destination Contract *Paris Ville augmentée*/Paris Augmented City, signed with the State in June 2016. *ExploreParis* contributes to renewing the destination image and to develop a new urban tourism involving the territory of the *Grand Paris*. Crafts visits and experiences are part of the alternative activities proposed by the platform. A similar proposition, but more focused on experiences, is the *WeCanDoo* platform, created in 2017, and bringing together a community of 2,000 craftspeople. The platform supports its members in creating workshops with the public, communication, training and organizing webinars.

All these initiatives show how Paris seeks to position itself as a creative capital. To this end, the association *Paris Capitale de la Création*/Paris Capital of Creativity, founded in 2021, brings together the creative actors and institutions working to make Paris a more attractive place to live.

## THE SUSTAINABLE DIMENSION

Crafts, which have traditionally been rooted at a local level, are now operating in increasingly international contexts, and tourism plays a part in this internationalization of craft workshops, by creating links between local workshops and international tourists. Besides this international visibility, it is the local and sustainable dimension of crafts that is fostered by Paris, as well as other French cities. In this perspective, in March 2021, the *Assises du tourisme durable*, a sustainable tourism forum involving inhabitants, tourism actors and institutions, was held in Paris. One of the priorities identified was the need to develop a more local and sustainable tourism. Consequently, the City of Paris initiated the project *ParisLocal*, an annual event launched in response to the recommendations of the 2021 sustainable tourism forum and designed to highlight the expertise of the craftspeople of the *Grand Paris* and to make it visible and accessible for tourists.

Another initiative that meets the dual challenge of sustainability and attractiveness for crafts is the creation of the label *Fabriqué à Paris*/Made in Paris, which recognises products that meet the criteria of quality, originality and that are manufactured in Paris. The label certifies the quality of the production processes and the objects created with locally sourced materials, promoting a circular economy. In fact, the handicraft products can also meet the criteria of sustainability and innovation (Micelli 2011). Since the label was created in November 2017, 2,200 products and 1,179 companies involved have been awarded the label.

These trends show how crafts can lead to a more sustainable tourism, that supports local productions and economies, that creates social links among craftspeople and visitors, that encourages the safeguarding of ICH.

## CONCLUSION

This analysis of the changing role of crafts in the development of tourism in Paris shows the full potential of these cultural and creative activities. These activities have an impact in terms of tourist attractiveness, but also contribute to the creation of experiences that are part of the wider context of experiential and creative tourism. These practices are connected to the territories and represent productive activities that have shaped landscapes and continue to transform them, but they also help to create social relationships. In fact, the experience of meeting in intimate places such as craft's workshops, sharing a manual practice and passing on know-how circulates ideas and can strengthen social ties. Thus, craft tourism allows visitors to discover a destination, immersing themselves more deeply in that destination and by entering places that are often inaccessible, and also encourages tourists to create a new attachment to places (Zhang et al. 2014). Integrating crafts into a regenerative tourism strategy on the scale of Grand Paris can thus help to rehabilitate places from an urban point of view, strengthen social links via participative workshops, and promote sustainable practices and circular economies, confirming the fact that crafts can represent an important mode of organization for postgrowth society (Rennstam and Paulsson 2024).

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## **LUXURY JOB DESIGN AND JOB CRAFTING IN THE URBAN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Christos KAKAROUGKAS**

Department of Tourism Economics and Management, iTED Lab, University of the Aegean,  
[ch.kakarouk@aegean.gr](mailto:ch.kakarouk@aegean.gr)

**Theodoros STAVRINOUDIS**

Department of Tourism Economics and Management, iTED Lab, University of the  
Aegean, [tsta@aegean.gr](mailto:tsta@aegean.gr)

**Nikolaos TRIHAS**

Department of Business Administration and Tourism, Hellenic Mediterranean University,  
[ntrahas@hmu.gr](mailto:ntrahas@hmu.gr)

### **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, the urban hospitality industry has experienced a remarkable increase. However, in parallel with this increase there has also been a significant number of skilled employees who resign and eventually left the tourism industry in general and the hospitality industry in particular. This fact creates a challenge for urban luxury hotels since they often find it difficult to attract and keep suitable Human Resources (HR) to provide luxury services. To respond to this challenge Human Resources Management (HRM) policies that will aim to facilitate the provision of luxury services and at the same time improve the employer image of the luxury urban hospitality industry should be implemented. Fundamental HRM policies to achieve this goal are Job Design and Job Crafting. The aim of this study is to identify the factors that determine the successful Job Design and Job Crafting in the urban luxury hospitality industry. To achieve this aim, the present study through content analysis of published studies will identify and record in a unified-coded way on the one hand the main characteristics of luxury urban hospitality services and on the other hand the characteristics that job positions should possess to motivate employees

to provide luxury urban hospitality services. The results of this study have elements of originality and utility, both scientific and practical, but also limitations which do not allow the generalization of the conclusions.

**Keywords:** Luxury, Job design, Job crafting, Urban hospitality industry

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years and especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, the demand for luxury tourism services has experienced a remarkable increase (Gavilan et al., 2022). The urban hospitality industry is also moving along the same wavelength, since in the past few years has experienced great development (Zhao et al., 2022). However, in parallel with this increase there has also been a significant number of skilled employees who resign and eventually left the tourism industry in general and the hospitality industry in particular (Liu-Lastres et al., 2023). This fact, scilicet the parallel escalation in demand for urban luxury hospitality services with the increase in employees' turnover in the industry, creates a challenge for urban hotels, since they often find it difficult to attract and keep suitable HR to provide luxury services (Karoubi et al., 2020; Floras & Stavrinoudis, 2016).

Urban hotels to respond to the challenge described above, must implement HRM policies that will aim to facilitate the provision of luxury services and at the same time improve the employer image of their industry (Belias et al., 2020). In other words, these policies should be balanced between the needs of a) guests who consume urban luxury services, b) businesses that provide urban luxury services in an efficient way and c) employees who want to meet their needs and aspirations through their work. Fundamental HRM policies to achieve this goal is Job Design (Gallagher & Einhorn, 1976; Wessels et al., 2019) and Job Crafting which is an evolution and variation of Job Design (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). El-Farr (2023) and Yadav & Dhar (2021) suggest that if Job Design and Job Crafting are implemented then it will improve: a) the effectiveness of employees both towards customers and the company but also b) the satisfaction employees receive from their work, since through it they will cover their needs and aspirations.

The aim of this study is to identify the factors that determine the successful Job Design and Job Crafting in the urban luxury hospitality industry. To achieve this aim, the present study through content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018) of published studies will identify and record in a unified-coded way on the one hand the main characteristics of luxury urban hospitality services and on the other hand the characteristics that job positions should possess to motivate employees to provide luxury urban hospitality services. The results of this study have elements of originality and utility, both scientific and practical, but also limitations which do not allow the generalization of the conclusions.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *Luxury Urban Hospitality*

Urban hospitality enterprises operate in urban areas, which are typically cities and mostly densely populated areas and areas of intermediate residential density, such as towns and city suburbs (Eurostat, 2023). The UNWTO (2018) argues that urban areas host more than 50% of the world's population and are responsible for generating more than 60% of global GDP. By 2030, urban areas will be home to two-thirds of the world's population, with their population in developing countries expected to double and the area they cover potentially triple. This results in the urban hospitality industry developing at a correspondingly fast pace (Zhao et al., 2022). Schmöcker (2021) argues that urban areas attract visitors due to the abundance of recreational, culinary, and cultural services they offer. Consequently, the upward trend in urban hospitality has brought about a corresponding increase in the luxury urban hospitality segment. For example, Luna-Cortés et al. (2022) argue that luxury hospitality is the third largest market in the global luxury industry, after automotive and personal goods.

Next, the elements that define the concept of luxury will be introduced. Lopes et al. (2022) argue that the concept of luxury is complex and changes over time. Luxury in the modern era, unlike in the past, does not simply include products made with expensive materials or provided in

luxurious environments (Lopes et al., 2022) but includes a set of experiences that evolve through time and space and they are characterized by authenticity, individuality and well-being (Atkinson & Kang, 2022). At the same time, luxury has moved away from the materialistic orientation of the past and includes experiences and expectations to satisfy more individual needs and less social imperatives (Lopes et al., 2022). In conclusion, people today, through the consumption of luxury products and services, seek to a) live authentic experiences, b) experience well-being, and c) engage in a wide range of precious moments. According to the above, a product or service to be considered luxurious must be of high quality, offer added value through desirable advantages, either functional (e.g. materials, ease of use) or emotional (e.g. authentic life experience), have a prestigious image in the market, based on qualities such as craftsmanship, manufacturing excellence, attention to detail, etc., justifies an increased price and inspires a deep human connection (Iloranta, 2022). Based on the above, Ko et al. (2019) conclude that the successful design of luxury products/services depends on three factors: a) the objective (material) related to the construction material, the skill of the professional, high performance, excellent functionality, etc., b) the subjective (individual) related to the personal hedonic value a person derives from consuming a luxury product/service and c) the collective (social) related to the value a luxury product/service signals to others as well as the individual himself (Ko et al., 2019).

### *Job Design - Job Crafting*

Job Design can be defined as the management driven process of defining job content, methods, and relationships between different jobs to meet the requirements of the organization and the employee's personal and social needs (Gallagher & Einhorn, 1976; Wessels et al., 2019). Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), argue that Job Crafting is an evolution and variation of Job Design since, it is carried out mainly with employee initiatives. Tims et al. (2012) and Wang et al. (2020) argue that the central characteristic of Job Crafting is that employees alter their tasks or other job characteristics (specifications, methods, relationships between different jobs) on their own initiative.

Successful implementation of Job Design and Job Crafting depends on five factors:

**Skills Variety:** Employees capability to use a significant part of their skills and knowledge results in their pleasure and motivation (Olukemi, 2022).

**Task Identity:** Employees' ability to participate in the entirety of a job results in their pleasure and motivation (Jiang et al., 2020).

**Task Significance:** Employees feel more pleasure and therefore motivated when working on a task that is considered important (Grant, 2008).

**Autonomy:** Employees who are free to plan and self-determine their work are more likely to feel pleasure and motivation (Jiang et al., 2020).

**Feedback:** Employees who are directly informed about their positive or negative performance in a task are more likely to feel motivated (Rasheed et al., 2015).

### *Human Motivation*

El-Farr (2023) and Yadav & Dhar (2021) argue that if Job Design and Job Crafting are applied successfully, then conditions will be created to motivate HR based on extrinsic and intrinsic motivations (Morris et al., 2022). Extrinsic motivations are based on extrinsic remuneration, i.e. remuneration that comes from outside the individual and does not originate from the nature of the work itself. Motivating factors are extrinsic and include reward/rewards such as money or grades. These rewards provide satisfaction and pleasure that the work itself cannot provide (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In conclusion, extrinsic motivation exists when employees can satisfy their needs indirectly, mainly through financial compensation and not directly, by performing the work itself (Emmanuel & Nwuzor, 2021).

Intrinsic motivation refers to the motivation that comes from within a person and is based on intrinsic reward, that is, the satisfaction/pleasure that the performance of a task provides to the person by its nature without relying on extrinsic motivation (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022). Intrinsic

motivation exists when a person's behaviour is oriented towards satisfying an innate (internal) psychological need and not acquiring material rewards (Legault, 2020). Intrinsic motivations are divided into Normative and Hedonic (Tang et al., 2020). Normative intrinsic motivation is related to the individual's intention to comply with personal and social norms, which at the organizational level are reflected in a company's accepted values, while at the individual level are reflected in the individual's identification with the social groups to which he/she belongs.

The degree to which an individual acts or does not act on Normative intrinsic motivation depends on the importance he/she places on adherence to a particular framework and on the external reaction in case of non-compliance (Nguyen et al., 2020). Hedonic intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, derives from the individual's engagement in “self-determined” activities that enhance competence and pleasurable activity (Tyrväinen et al., 2020). This is achieved through the individual's physical and mental improvement. Hedonic motivation has been shown to be an important driver of creativity and innovation. It also induces cognitive seeking behaviour and increases cognitive effort (Nikolopoulou et al., 2021).

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted in four stages and followed the content analysis method (Kleinheksel et al., 2020) of previous scientific research findings in luxury design, job design - job crafting, human extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The concept of luxury design in urban hospitality enterprises was analyzed in the first stage. The central factors determining the successful implementation of job design and job crafting were explored in the second stage. In the third stage were analyzed the extrinsic and intrinsic motivations that will be developed if the job design and job crafting are successfully carried out. In the fourth stage, the findings of the first stage were integrated and semantically synthesized with the findings of the second and third stages in a distinctive manner that led to the creation of Figure 1: The Modeling of Luxury Job Design and Job Crafting Factors in the Urban Hospitality Industry.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study aims to identify the factors that determine successful Job Design and Job Crafting in the urban luxury hospitality industry. These factors are presented in a structured way in Figure 1 below.

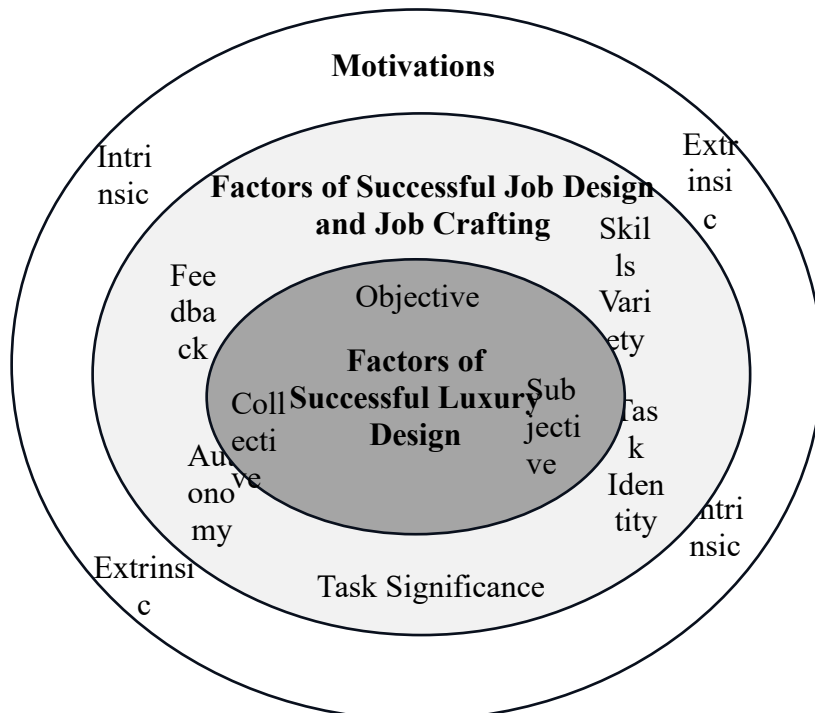


Figure 1. The Modeling of Luxury Job Design and Job Crafting Factors in the Urban Hospitality Industry

From the literature review, it appears that Job Design and Job Crafting in the urban luxury hospitality industry has as its central goal to satisfy, in a balanced way, the needs of a) guests who consume urban luxury services, b) businesses that provide urban luxury services in an efficient way and c) employees who want to meet their needs and aspirations through their work. To achieve this goal, according to Figure 1, jobs should be designed based on the factors of Successful Luxury Design: Objective, Subjective and Collective, combined with the Factors of Successful Job Design and Job Crafting: Skills Variety, Task Identity, Task Significance, Autonomy and Feedback, so that a workplace motivates through extrinsic and intrinsic motives the behaviour of employees in the luxury urban hospitality industry.

Starting with the factors of Successful Luxury Design, employees, based on the Objective factor, should have available material luxury resources (tools, work uniform, etc.) while performing their duties. Also, based on the Subjective factor, employees, during their work, should receive professional pleasure and fulfilment resulting from the luxury services their work offers to the guests of a luxury hotel (intrinsic normative and hedonic motivation). Based on the Collective factor, employees work should be recognized as important by the company's management (immaterial or material motivation), guests (recognition of good work - extrinsic immaterial or material motivation), and the employees themselves (intrinsic normative and hedonic motivation). According to the Factors of successful job design and job crafting, employees should be able to use the maximum amount of knowledge and skills they have when providing luxury services, in an autonomous way that is to act freely to satisfy the needs of customers/guest. Also, their work should have a task identity, i.e. he/she completes it himself/herself so that he/she can, on the one hand, feel responsible for this work (intrinsic normative and hedonic motivation) and, on the other hand, receive direct Feedback from the guests and their supervisor (extrinsic tangible and intangible motivation). Finally, the work of employees who provide luxury services and products in the urban hospitality industry should be recognized as valuable by all stakeholders: guests, employees, and management of the hotels (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation).

In conclusion, if a job is designed based on the Factors of successful luxury design and the Factors of successful job design and job crafting, then the probability that employees in luxury urban hotels are extrinsically and intrinsically motivated will be enhanced. This will lead to

improved: a) effectiveness of employees towards the guests and the company and b) satisfaction of employees, since through their work they will fulfil their needs and aspirations.

*Scientific and Practical Contribution and Future Research*

The results of this study have elements of originality and utility, both scientific and practical. Scientific because few studies have been carried out worldwide in the field of job design and job crafting for job positions in the urban luxury hospitality industry. Therefore, this study can be a basis for future research. Practical because a series of factors have emerged that can assist the managers of urban luxury hospitality enterprises, in collaboration with HR, to design job positions in a way that will allow the satisfaction of guests, employees, and the hotel manager/owner. The results of this study should not be generalized due to the lack of field research. Similar research should be carried out in the future based on an extensive literature review and primary research.

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## **HERITAGE HOTELS OF GREECE: ROLE, CHARACTERISTICS AND IMPACT ON THE GREEK TOURISM PRODUCT**

**Agni CHRISTIDOU**

Department of Tourism Management, Hellenic Open University, Patras, Greece  
[agni@grhotels.gr](mailto:agni@grhotels.gr)

**George TSAMOS**

Department of Tourism Management, Hellenic Open University, Patras, Greece  
[tsamos.georgios@ac.eap.gr](mailto:tsamos.georgios@ac.eap.gr)

**Efthymia SARANTAKOU**

Department of Tourism Management, University of West Attica, Athens, Greece  
[esarantakou@uniwa.gr](mailto:esarantakou@uniwa.gr)

**Aimilia VLAMI**

Department of Regional & Economic Development, Agricultural University of Athens, Greece.  
[avlami@aua.gr](mailto:avlami@aua.gr)

### **ABSTRACT**

Staying in a heritage hotel and the ensuing tourist-cultural experience represent a consumer product that cannot be adequately appraised through quantitative calculations alone. This experience extends beyond mere accommodation and the dissemination of cultural identity; it unveils deeper meanings, provides entertainment, and ultimately establishes the conditions for a qualitative and singular tourist-cultural encounter.

This paper specifically examines the role of a particular type of accommodation, the heritage hotel, in the various phases of the Greek hotel industry's transition. It traces the evolution from the initial efforts in the 1970s to link architectural heritage with hotel services, through the recent crisis years, and into the current period of recovery amidst international instability and geopolitical upheavals in our region and beyond.

In the 21st century heritage hotels (historical or heritage buildings, Xie and Shi, 2020) have become popular places to stay and generate significant tourist demand, as noted by many authors (Dincer and Ertugral 2003, Timothy and Teye 2009). In this context, heritage management, organization and the redevelopment of tourist areas are crucial for the successful integration of heritage hotels into the contemporary tourism and for addressing future challenges. Through the



restoration and adaptive re-use of buildings and building complexes for conversion into tourist accommodation, heritage hotels enhance the value of tourists-consumers' experiences.

**Keywords:** Heritage Hotels, restoration of buildings, tourist accommodation, tourism use of historic buildings, cultural heritage, cultural tourism

## INTRODUCTION

Heritage is now recognized as a valuable anthropogenic tourism resource, necessitating sustainable management that balances protection with active participation in tourism development. Numerous tourist destinations and tourism businesses leverage their unique heritage and cultural resources to enhance their competitive advantage (Munar & Ooi, 2012). Heritage hotels have emerged as key promoters of diverse heritage traditions globally. Moreover, the introduction of tourism uses in heritage buildings serves multiple sustainable development objectives, including the preservation of local heritage and the rational spatial and temporal distribution of tourism development (Chhabra, 2015).

Heritage hotels represent perhaps one of the most challenging types of tourist accommodation as they must comply with heritage preservation requirements while delivering quality tourist experiences within an integrated heritage tourism product (Timothy & Teye, 2009; Chittipolu et al., 2021). Consequently, policies are being developed at both international and national levels to promote this type of accommodation. However, despite their significance in tourism activity, the literature on heritage accommodation and historic hotels is limited and lacks a systematic approach, even though these entities are quintessential tourism businesses (Yabancı O., 2021; Henderson, 2013; Lee & Chhabra, 2015; Xie & Shi, 2019, 2020).

This paper aims to contribute to the discussion on this particular form of accommodation by exploring the evolution of heritage hotels in Greece. It examines the role of the institutional framework for heritage hotels across successive phases of the Greek hotel industry's transition from the 1970s to the present. Furthermore, it assesses the impact of this framework on the quality, form and spatial distribution of heritage hotels.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 1. *Evolution of the concept of architectural heritage and its modern connection with tourism activity*

The concept of architectural heritage has evolved significantly since the Second World War, driven by international principles, declarations and conventions that advocate for the conservation and protection of historicity. In the first post-war period, the Santiago de Compostella Conference (1961) and the International Charter of Venice (1964) underscored the value of monuments as socially and urbanistically useful elements. The UNESCO Convention (1972) on World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the European Heritage Year (1975) and the Amsterdam Declaration established the principle of 'integrated protection', promoting heritage as an active economic unit (Tsartas & Sarantakou, 2022). The Granada Convention (1985), under the auspices of the Council of Europe, provided clear definitions of the immovable properties of European architectural heritage, including monuments, architectural groups and sites. Since the 1990s, the architectural heritage has been increasingly recognized as an important tourist resource, with its proper protection and utilization being critical for sustainable tourism development.

In the 21st century, architectural heritage significantly contributes to the cultural and economic development of destinations through its connection with tourism (Gospodini et al., 2007). Heritage offers differentiated and individualized interpretations, aligning with the

postmodern 'traveller' spirit, (see - the spirit of 'flaneur' - Bauman, 1993). Furthermore, cultural internationalization processes are weakening the emphasis on national identity, making 'localness' increasingly important. Thus, architectural heritage accentuates the unique identity of the destination, enhancing their appeal and distinctiveness in the global tourism market (Jamal & Stronza, 2008).

## 2. *Heritage hotels as a tool for sustainable tourism development and competitive advantage*

A heritage hotel is an accommodation establishment intrinsically linked to the cultural, historical or architectural heritage of a region. Such hotels may occupy old buildings that have been repurposed as accommodation, while preserving their cultural and historical character, or they may be housed in structures originally designed as hotels that have since acquired historical value over the years (Xie & Shi, 2020).

The tourism development of heritage buildings can achieve multiple strategic objectives of sustainable tourism development such as cultural and economic sustainability (Ong et al., 2015), regional development, and enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of a tourist destination. Cultural sustainability is recognized by many scholars as the fourth pillar of sustainable tourism development (Soini & Birkeland, 2014). It supports the preservation of cultural heritage buildings and sites and their integration into the economic system through new uses such as tourism (Lee & Chhabra, 2015). Economic sustainability leverages heritage as a tourism resource (Chhabra, 2010; Farsani et al., 2011) by fostering local-scale production-consumption linkages (Soine & Birkeland, 2014). Heritage hotels are often used by governments as tools for regional development. These hotels have the potential to showcase distinctive elements of local heritage around the world (Chang, 1997; Timothy & Teye, 2009), thereby enhancing the image and 'branding' of destinations. Additionally, they promote local community pride and enjoy community support which further enhances the cultural attractiveness of destinations (Dincer & Ertugral, 2003).

As numerous authors (Xie and Shi, 2020; Dincer and Ertugral 2003; Timothy and Teye 2009; Yabanci, 2021) have highlighted, the popularity of heritage hotels has been increasing in the 21st century, attracting high tourist demand. Heritage hotels exemplify post-Fordist tourism by emphasizing individuality and uniqueness (Chhabra, 2015). However, merely having an old building is insufficient to provide quality experiences. In heritage hotels, architectural interventions, management, services and marketing must harmonize with the historical identity (du Cros & Mckercher, 2023). Heritage creates new forms of tourism accommodation and experiences through heritage hotels, thereby enforcing their position in an ever-changing environment.

Within the context discussed above, the integration of heritage hotels into contemporary tourism is becoming increasingly important on the agendas of tourism policies formulated by both public and private actors.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Tourism as a specific socio-economic activity is dynamically evolving, diversifying and increasingly associated with products of a "cultural" nature. These range from visiting museums and monuments, to experiencing different lifestyles such as the cultural experience of staying in a heritage hotel. In this context this paper explores the following:

- The evolution of the institutional framework for heritage hotels and the role of the official classification system including the integration of heritage hotels
- The existing institutional framework, noting the central government's significant role in developing heritage hotels. There has been a long-term state support for this type of accommodation, even during periods when funding for tourist accommodation was excluded due to a saturation regime

- The characteristics of heritage hotels, including their spatial and qualitative distribution, diversification, and functional services.

To investigate these aspects, the methodology included archival research and statistical analysis of hotel accommodation and heritage hotels focusing on their structural characteristics. Although the research is ongoing, a multi-criteria system of classification and analysis has been developed. This system highlights the mechanisms and conditions for the establishment and transformation of the Greek Heritage Hotels from the post-war period to the present.

## RESULTS

### 1. *Institutional framework in force*

The protection of cultural heritage in Greek law originates from the 1930s, beginning with Law 5351/1932 "On Antiquities", followed by Law 3028/2002, and subsequently codified by Law 4858/2021. This legal framework has been gradually supplemented from the 1970s onwards, with provisions of urban planning legislation, achieving the highest level of protection through the Constitution of 1975.

The 1975 Constitution marked a breakthrough in the protection of the cultural environment. For the first time, Article 24 established provisions for the protection of both the natural and the cultural environment, making it an obligation of the State. This constitutional mandate is notably comprehensive, encompassing not only individual buildings or structures designated as monuments or listed buildings, but also broader areas.

It is noteworthy that international conventions, ratified by law, alongside European law and the extensive case law of the Council of State, have played a pivotal role in the development of the institutional protection of the cultural environment in our country.

The Greek state, specifically the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) established for the first time a special framework for the establishment and operation of tourist accommodation in traditional buildings with Presidential Decree (P.D.) 33/1979. The experience gained by the GNTO in planning projects within traditional settlements or on individual buildings of traditional character since 1976 was a catalyst for the adoption of specific legislation.

P.D.33/1979 established a series of terms and conditions for the granting of the relevant operating license by the GNTO and the inclusion of such accommodation in the functional categories of a hotel, guest house, furnished apartments or several forms simultaneously. Contrary to the technical specifications of the GNTO for hotel establishments at that time, P.D. 33/1979 did not prescribe any specific technical specifications, but required only the presence of basic modern amenities and necessary fire protection facilities to minimize potential damage to the building.

The provisions of the said P.D. allowed companies considerable freedom to utilize the traditional buildings as tourist accommodation, while granting the competent GNTO services the discretion to approve their suitability for tourist use. This approval was contingent upon ensuring that the architectural character of the building and the general environment were not altered.

This legislation was considered extremely successful, as it served as the foundation for the development of the special category of traditional tourist accommodation for approximately 30 years until 2018. It resulted in the creation of a unique array of accommodation across the country, reflecting architectural heritage and significantly contributing to their preservation and revival as essential elements of the cultural identity of tourist destinations.

However, 2018 marked a significant shift in the legislative framework governing traditional tourist accommodation with the adoption of regulatory interventions under article 39 of Law 4531/2018 which amended article 1 paragraph 2 of the basic Tourist Law 4276/2014. The changes included:

Renaming this accommodation to "tourist accommodation within architectural heritage buildings"

Creating a distinct category of tourist accommodation which can be classified as either main or non-main hotel accommodation

Specifying the architectural heritage buildings, eligible for operating as tourist accommodation categorized into the following three subcategories:

Buildings designated as listed by the Ministry of Environment and Energy.

Buildings designated as modern monuments by the Ministry of Culture

Buildings existing prior to 1955, for which the relevant Architecture Council, as per article 7 of Law 4495/2017, determines their traditional architectural and morphological character.

Following the regulatory intervention in Law 4276/2014, the inclusion of main hotel accommodation within architectural heritage buildings into the classification scheme of hotels ensued. This led to amendments in the relevant Ministerial Decision that sets forth the technical and functional specifications of hotels and the criteria for their classification in star categories (Decision of the Minister of Tourism No.17352/2018 Government Gazette B'4822). Additionally, provisions were made for the temporary automatic classification into star categories for those accommodations that were licensed until the entry into force of Law 4276/2014 (Article 67 of Law 4582/2018 as amended). This provisional classification has been extended until October 31, 2024, by which date the reclassification of all hotels must be completed (Article 10 of Law 5061/2023).

This regulatory initiative by the Ministry of Tourism to include heritage hotels in the star classification system imposes a mandatory framework for interior adaptations of the buildings. This requirement may potentially undermine the preservation of the authenticity of the designated buildings as a listed or modern monuments. Given that, from 2018 to the present, only 118 heritage hotels out of a total of 739 hotels in operation have received a star classification certificate from the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels (HCH), it remains to be seen whether this regulation is the most appropriate for this important category of tourist accommodation.

## *2. The Structural Characteristics of Heritage hotels*

This section analyzes the structural characteristics of heritage hotels in Greece, based on the comprehensive examination of the total population of heritage hotels (739 hotels), listed in the register of the HCH until April 2024. Specifically, this section delves into the following characteristics of heritage hotels: (a) their size, (b) their quality categories in terms of star ratings and (c) the typology of heritage hotels according to their location.

Heritage hotels in Greece are typically very small, independent units, averaging 12 rooms (or 23 beds). The owner or manager, often the same person, is primarily responsible for organizing and managing the accommodation. The development of heritage hotels is closely linked to a long-standing policy of diversifying and upgrading the quality of the country's hotel stock. Notably, the period 1990-2010 saw accelerated growth rates in the three upper categories (3 - 5 stars) of heritage hotels. Hotels that began operations between 1930-1969 were not initially classified as heritage hotels. However, from the 1990s onwards, efforts to convert architectural heritage buildings into hotel accommodation have been associated with policies aimed at enhancing the country's hotel offer. These conversions are permitted even in areas with restrictions on new tourist beds, such as Athens, Mykonos, Santorini, North Rhodes. Since the start of the 21st century, heritage hotels in Greece have embraced the trend of creating luxury, lifestyle, boutique hotels aiming at providing a unique accommodation experience.

Heritage hotels in Greece, based on their location and altitude, are primarily found in coastal and lowland areas. Analyzing their regional distribution, both in percentage terms and density, (the proportion of heritage hotels compared to the total number of hotels at the regional and local government level), allow us to categorize heritage hotels into two main types: heritage resort hotels and heritage city hotels. Given Greece's, heliotropical tourism model, heritage resort hotels are more prevalent. These can be further classified as follows:

(a1) Heritage resort hotels (Island): These comprise the largest group of heritage hotels, predominately developed in the South Aegean region, accounting for 20% of such units nationwide. A correlation between heritage hotels and the total hotel capacity per island reveals a significant concentration of heritage hotels in several areas of the region such as Santorini, Rhodes, Syros, Andros, with proportions ranging from 8% to 25% of their total hotel capacity. In this region, heritage hotels are primarily seasonal (68%). Other island regions, including the islands of the Attica region (Hydra, Spetses, Poros), also fall into this category, where the density of heritage hotels reaches 21% of their total capacity.

(a2) Heritage resort hotels (Inland): located mainly in developing areas of inbound tourism and popular domestic tourism destinations, these hotels are predominately found in the following regions:

- Peloponnese: This region accounts for 15% of all heritage hotels in the country. Notably, the units in Laconia and Arcadia have a very high density relative to their hotel potential is very high, reaching 32% and 29% respectively.

- Thessaly: This region holds 11% of the total heritage hotels in Greece, with the Magnesia region having the highest rate of hotel occupancy in the country, reaching 37%.

- Epirus: This region accounts for 10% of all heritage hotels in the country, particularly in the Ioannina region, where the hotel density is 32%.

Heritage resort hotels inland operate year-round, with over 90% of these hotels in the regions of Epirus and Thessaly offering continuous 12-month service. Heritage city hotels also operate continuously, situated in urban centers such as Athens and Thessaloniki, which together host 6% of the nation's heritage hotels. These city hotels are also found and in the urban areas of tourist regions like Ioannina, Nafplio and Rhodes etc. The region of Crete accounts for 15% of all heritage hotels in Greece, with notable concentrations in the cities of Chania and Rethimno. In these cities heritage hotels constitute 8% and 6% of the total number of hotels respectively, with their density exceeding 11% compared to the overall hotel count.

## CONCLUDING AND DISCUSSION

Our research on the Greek case indicates that heritage hotels underscore the interrelationship between heritage conservation, the legal framework and tourism development strategies with a focus on sustainability.

Since the 1970s, the institutional recognition of architectural heritage and the pioneering initiatives of the GNTTO have established heritage hotels as a distinct tourism product in Greece. Financial and spatial incentives have significantly boosted the creation of heritage hotels, leading to high growth rates during the period from 1990 to 2010. However, this trend has reversed in recent years, and it may be linked to changes in the certification process for heritage hotels under Law 4276/2014, which included them in the standard hotel classification scheme. This type of certification may fail to account for the specific characteristics and unique aspects of heritage building, suggesting a need to reconsider the certification process.

Regarding the structural characteristics of Greek heritage hotels, it appears that very small units dominate, with an average size of 12 rooms. This is expected, given the average size of a typical Greek hotel (47 rooms) and the dimensions of the architectural heritage buildings. In terms of quality, the vast majority of heritage hotels are rated 3 to 4 stars, although the number of 5-star units has been increasing over the last 14 years. Since 2000, heritage hotels have followed the trend of developing luxury, lifestyle, and boutique hotels in Greece.

We distinguished the Greek heritage hotels based on their altitude and location into two main types: heritage city hotels and heritage resort hotels. In Greece, where the heliotropic model of tourism development prevails, heritage hotel resorts are predominant. This can be further divided into heritage resort hotels island and heritage resort hotels inland. Compared to typical hotels which follow demand and are spatially distributed 77% in coastal and island spatial units

(Tsartas&Sarantakou 2022), the spatial dispersion of Greek heritage hotels is more rational, with a significant presence in inland and mountainous settlements, developing inbound tourism areas, and popular inland tourism destinations. Inland regional units, such as the Peloponnese, Thessaly and Epirus, have a notable concentration of traditional settlements and heritage hotels.

Our research identified two factors influencing the spatial dispersion of heritage hotels. The first is related to the geographical location and density of architectural heritage elements, such as traditional settlements and listed buildings in the country. The second factor pertains to the national institutional framework. The State protects heritage buildings by designating them as listed buildings or modern monuments and, since the 1980s, has introduced strong regional development incentives and spatial privileges, encouraging their conversion into tourist accommodation throughout the national territory.

As the present research shows, tourism has successfully mobilized social forces and economic resources, overcoming even endogenous obstacles. It has achieved the creation of a favorable climate and the enrichment of the tourism product, particularly in the domain of accommodation. The development of a unique hotel product, such as heritage hotels, highlights the critical role that Greek tourism can play in preserving architectural heritage. It also aligns with the objectives and principles of sustainability, focusing on producing and creating authentic tourism products and services, ultimately aiming at the holistic destination sustainability.

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## **EXPLORING TOURISM AND CULTURAL EDUCATION WITHIN ERASMUS+ PROJECTS**

### **Konstantinos KOSTALIS**

MSc, Ionian University, 4 VrailaArmenistr, "Kalipso" Building, 49100 Corfu island, Greece, telephone:+30 2661087953, e-mail: k.kostalis@gmail.com

### **Sofia KARAMPELA**

Assistant Professor, Ionian University, 4 VrailaArmenistr, "Kalipso" Building, 49100 Corfu island, Greece, telephone:+30 2661087953, e-mail: skarampela@ionio.gr

### **Aigli KOLIOTASI**

PhD Student, Ionian University, 4 VrailaArmenistr, "Kalipso" Building, 49100 Corfu island, Greece, telephone:+30 2661087953, e-mail: aspkiotasi@ionio.gr

## **ABSTRACT**

This article examines the European Erasmus+ Programs as a form of educational tourism and their role in enhancing tourism literacy among participants. Educational tourism involves travel for the primary or secondary purpose of education, leading to various cognitive, affective, and

behavioral outcomes (Ritchie, Carr, and Cooper, 2003); McGladdery and Lubbe, 2017). The concept dates back to the Grand Tours of the 17th and 18th centuries and encompasses a range of activities from academic research to skill acquisition. Erasmus+, named after the Dutch scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam, builds on over 25 years of European educational initiatives, fostering international collaboration and cultural exchange. Programs such as Erasmus Mundus and Youth in Action support student and teacher exchanges, professional development, and cross-cultural understanding.

Methodologically, this study employed semi-structured interviews with 30 Greek and foreign secondary education teachers between May and October 2022. The findings indicate that tourism literacy is cultivated through the exchange of cultural experiences, improved language skills, respect for diversity, and the breakdown of stereotypes. Participants reported increased confidence, autonomy, and a desire for further travel.

Comparative studies corroborate these findings, highlighting enhanced IT and language skills, improved cooperation within schools, and the fostering of international friendships. Educational tourism not only contributes to economic and social development but also promotes world peace and mutual understanding among diverse groups.

**Keywords:** educational tourism, Erasmus+ projects, cultural and tourism education, primary research

## INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on the European Erasmus+ Programs as a form of educational tourism and their potential to enhance tourism literacy among participants. Ritchie, Carr, and Cooper, (2003) describe educational tourism as “a tourism activity in which those who visit a destination for one or more days for the primary or secondary purpose of education or learning participate”. McGladdery and Lubbe(2017) described educational tourism as a transformational process that combines elements of experiential learning and education and the delivery of various measurable outcomes, categorized as cognitive (acquired knowledge), affective (attitudes or ways of thinking) and behavioral (skill development).

The beginning of educational tourism dates back to the 17th and 18th centuries. It began with the educational-entertainment tours of Europe known as “The Grand tour” which became very popular in the circles of the aristocracy and were a basic resource for future leaders. It is a specific type of tourism whose market segment is significantly smaller compared to segments of mass tourism, but by no means negligible. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2017), educational tourism is a type of tourism that includes various types of tourism related to the motivation of tourists to travel, participate in various processes of education, self-improvement, spiritual development and acquisition of various and diverse skills. These are a variety of products and services including but not limited to academic research, holidays, skills acquisition, school trips, sports training, career development courses and language courses.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The program is named after the Dutch itinerant scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam (1465-1536) who worked and lived in many European countries to expand his own knowledge and broaden his horizons with different experiences. At the same time, the term Erasmus is an acronym meaning European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (European Commission, 2003). Erasmus+ builds on the successes of more than 25 years of European programs in the fields of education, training and youth, which include both an intra-European and international cooperation dimension. There are many Erasmus+ programs such as Erasmus Mundus, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig, Youth in Action, Jean Monnet. Specifically; these are student and teacher



exchanges between schools in different countries, collaborations between schools to create common programs and activities, and professional development for teachers. They also strengthen the multicultural and international dimension of education, encourage the exchange of good practices and help students and teachers to develop their skills and knowledge at an international level.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology followed in this study was the semi-structured interview with the condition that there was a set of questions that were somehow predetermined and at the same time there was flexibility as the content was modified-adjusted depending on the participant. The final sample of the research was 30 Greek and foreign Secondary Education teachers. Interviews took place from mid-May 2022 to mid-October 2022.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

According to the findings of the research, tourism literacy is cultivated in the following ways:

- Both travelers and hosts exchange experiences and share information about their cities and countries. Customs, traditions, dances and recipes are also presented. Through these actions, the tourism literacy of the participants is improved.
- Understanding different cultures and respecting customs and traditions helps to cultivate the tourism literacy of all involved.
- Learning the value of meeting other cultures and adopting elements of hospitality.
- In the Erasmus programs by making a trip you come into contact and interaction with many more peoples and cultures depending on the participating countries.
- By improving language and communication skills.
- Participants learn to coexist together regardless of diversity and to respect the social norms and customs of the host institution.
- It strengthens their desire to visit other countries and other trips, but also the feeling of hospitality.
- Breaking down stereotypes and building relationships.
- Alleviates racism and consolidates peace.
- Traveling to Turkey and hosting Turks, we realized that borders are for maps and not for people.
- Strengthening self-confidence, autonomy and self-preservation (away from family).

Similar research had the following results: according to the findings of a survey conducted on a sample of 240 teachers who were involved in Erasmus+ programs (KakarasandGkouna, 2022) it was found that their participation positively affected the improvement of their skills in terms of IT and Communication Technologies and foreign languages, while at the same time promoting cooperation and strengthening relationships in the internal school environment. Finally, individual progress was found to be higher among the youngest under 30 and those with less than 5 years of experience. In the research of ZevgitisandEmvalotis (2016) it is stated that after such partnerships friendly relations were cultivated between the participants. Even that these relationships were a springboard for new collaborations. Also, in the CMEPIUS survey (Lenc et al., 2016) the existence of such programs is considered positive for the school at a rate of 96%.

Besides, educational tourism has the potential to involve tourism and non-tourism sectors and contribute to world peace. (McGladderyand Lubbe, 2017). The importance of educational tourism is not limited to the economic development of a region, but it contributes to social development in a broader sense, since it is basically a learning process that does not focus on economic benefits, but is a mutually beneficial activity for learners, teachers and society at large (Sharma, 2015).

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## OPEN SCHOOLING ON HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABILITY:

### CASE STUDIES FROM THE ISLANDS OF TINOS AND CORFU, GREECE

#### **Evangelos PAVLIS**

Assistant Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics & Rural Development, Agricultural University of Athens, 75 Iera Odos, 118 55 Votanikos, Athens, Greece, telephone: +30 210 5294718, e-mail: epavlis@aua.gr

#### **Sofia KARAMPELA**

Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism, Ionian University, 4 Vraila Armeni str, "Kalipso" Building, 49100 Corfu island, Greece, telephone: +30 2661087953, e-mail: skarampela@ionio.gr

#### **Konstantinos KOSTALIS**

MSc, Department of Tourism, Ionian University, 4 Vraila Armeni str, "Kalipso" Building, 49100 Corfu island, Greece, telephone: +30 2661087953, e-mail: k.kostalis@gmail.com

#### **Aigli KOLIOTASI**

PhD Student, Department of Tourism, Ionian University, 4 Vraila Armeni str, "Kalipso"  
1st INTOCUS International Conference 2024

Building, 49100 Corfu island, Greece, telephone: +30 2661087953,  
e-mail: [aspkoliotasi@ionio.gr](mailto:aspkoliotasi@ionio.gr),

## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this paper is to introduce case studies of open schooling educational approach on heritage and sustainability, which could lay the foundations of active citizenry and human wellbeing. Open schooling embodies a dynamic educational approach that goes beyond traditional classroom confines. It emphasizes flexibility, adaptability, and inclusivity, drawing on a diverse array of resources to engage learners in real-world issues. Rooted in the 'Care-Know-Do' pedagogical framework, it fosters problem-solving skills and encourages action. This approach sees education as integral to local community development, a concept supported by various scholars and organizations. Open schooling functions as a collaborative effort, involving schools, universities, businesses, experts, and civil society. Through participatory methods, it facilitates the co-creation of knowledge and skills, which are then applied to address societal challenges. This approach not only cultivates active citizenship but also contributes to human well-being. Two projects took place: one in Tinos and the other in Corfu. Both involved discussion on selected issues and the research methods included learning, creative and practical-experiential parts. Results highlight the importance of cooperation among institutions, associations, scientists, citizens, producers, and entrepreneurs and the need to adopt a new development model to protect and preserve local resources, which should be passed on to future generations to ensure their needs and well-being.*

**Keywords:** open schooling, collaboration, sustainability, Tinos, Corfu, Greece

## INTRODUCTION

Open schooling is a flexible, adaptable and inclusive approach to education, accessing a variety of resources beyond those available to a traditional classroom, training next generations to *care* about real-world issues, to *learn* about them and *act* to solve them. It is based on 'Care-Know-Do' pedagogical framework, supporting problem-solving challenges (Okada and Gray, 2023; Panselinas, 2023) and promotes education as part of local community development (Phillips, 2006). Open schooling brings together schools, universities, enterprises, expert professionals and civil society, by employing participatory methods, co-creating different types of knowledge and skills, and apply them to societal issues (Okada and Gray, 2023) and could lay the foundations of active citizenry and human wellbeing (Scarlat and Smith, 2022). It is encouraged by the EU and has to do with supporting schools to adopt bottom-up participatory approaches and become active agents of community well-being (EU, 2015).

The main objectives of these project are to enable students to recognize the value and interrelation of natural and cultural resources and the need for their rational management; to understand the concept of sustainable development based on a balanced relationship between social needs, economic activity, culture and the environment; to cultivate attitudes towards the environment and sustainable development; to practice experiential and research-based learning methods and become familiar with the ways and stages of conducting research; and become familiar with techniques of searching,

evaluating and presenting information through a variety of sources, empowering an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach to various issues.

## METHODOLOGY

The actions of open schooling took place during the school period 2022-2023 a. at the Gymnasium (High School) of Tinos island with the participation of twenty-eight (28) students of the second year of high school, aged 14 years old (on average), b. at the Lyceum (High School) of Skripero, at Corfu island with the participation of twenty-five (25) students of the second year of high school, aged 17 years old (on average). Tinos Project<sup>10</sup> regarded prospects of local sustainable development, whereas the Corfu Project “Erimitis” regarded planning and management of a sustainable tourism destination.

The main teaching techniques used during the environmental education were group collaboration, brainstorming and project based learning (mixed methods approach). For students, field research and experiential open door education were significant incentives to participate in this project. The educational framework was student-centered and the approach was interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, crossing various areas of the formal school curriculum.

The method included presentations, discussions and research on the concepts of sustainability, sustainable tourism destinations, local development, natural and cultural assets, circular economy, recycling and cooperation. The meetings were based on discussion on selected issues and gave the students the chance to make questions and to develop their thoughts and ideas. The research methods included:

- a. learning part (discussions with experts and specialists),
- b. creative part (primary and secondary research, skills workshops and simulation game),
- c. practical-experiential part (learning walk and role-playing game, action plans).

### *Tinos project (photo 1)*

It started in November 2022 and the learning part included discussions with experts and specialists about the following subjects:

- Sustainability, eco-friendliness, local development
- Circular economy and recycling
- Cooperativism and local products

Some key concepts were: eco-friendliness, circular economy, local products, cooperativism, sustainability, teamworking, local development, quality, locality, natural and cultural common resources, landscape collectivity, community, social economy.

The creative part included research and recording of natural and cultural assets of the island, team and class conversations regarding their connection/ value to sustainable local development. The practical-experiential part included hiking, briefing, observing, photographing, exploring and taking part in outdoor activities especially in the case of Tinos island(see photo 1).

The actions continued in the ‘Skills Workshops’ classes. Students, divided into

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<sup>10</sup> Tinos Project was part of CONNECT Program (three-years) funded under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 programme within the Science with and for Society (SwafS). The program supported the secondary schools integrate open schooling into their core curriculum. This involved incorporating science-action projects and engaging in participatory science with the community, including families, universities, and businesses.

groups, conducted primary (interviews with parents and key individuals) and secondary research (from books, magazines, newspapers, photos, etc., mostly based on the internet). They were called to identify, record and present (PowerPoint) the natural and cultural resources of Tinos, correlating them with sustainable local development<sup>11</sup>.

The practical-experiential part involved in a learning walk that took place along the Exombourgo-Koumaros-Volax trail of which the action plan included collaborative field work research, recording of landmarks and intangible heritage, promotion of circular economy and care about landscape issues.

**Photo 1**

*Tinos case study: prospects of local sustainable development*



*Corfu Project (photo 2)*

Erimitis is the area covering almost the entire NE peninsula of Corfu island, deeply cherished by the locals. Visitors (alternative tourists such as hikers, birdwatchers, ecotourists, sailors, etc.) have consistently valued the aesthetic and experiential dimension of the landscape.

In this project students faced a specific real-world problem. On one side, an American fund is preparing to implement an investment plan for luxury villas and a large hotel unit, amounting to 120 million euros. There are promises for thousand job positions, boosting of the local economy, insisting that 93% of the area will remain green. On the

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<sup>11</sup> The students of the Connect Program processed the results.

other side, there are complaints by various stakeholders (local authorities, ecologists and activists). They claim that the investment would destroy one of the few remaining virgin landscapes of Corfu and that it would lead to the rise of mass tourism or overtourism.

The aims of this workshop were to:

- help students understand the three dimensions of sustainability
- encourage them to discuss and express their opinions on the impacts of tourist investments
- critically explore the positive effects of sustainability and the negative consequences of tourism monoculture
- enhance their skills in critical thinking, teamwork, communication, and presentation, as well as empathy.

The discussions with experts and specialists included key-concepts such as job opportunities, sustainable development goals, natural common resources, touristification, team-working, cooperation, community, locals-residents, participation, eco-friendliness, landscape, impacts of economic activities, income, protests, etc.

The creative part included gathering primary and secondary information (articles, videos, photos) so they could argue during the workshop and a digital simulation game of the coastal zone which involved digital development of investments taking into account the impacts on society, economy and the environment.

The practical-experiential part involved a role-playing game where the students were divided into five (5) groups: residents, investors, tourism entrepreneurs, local government and an environmental NGO. The students argued in favour of each group. The action plan involved simulation of reality, participatory planning, policy and management of the coastal zone and eco-friendly investment.

## **Photo 2**

*Corfu case study: Tourism sustainability workshop: “Erimitis”  
Planning and Management of a sustainable tourism destination*



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the findings of the projects, students identified several critical needs for sustainable development and community well-being. Firstly, they emphasized the necessity to record, protect, and enhance the value of local natural and cultural resources and heritage. This step is vital to preserve the identity and uniqueness of the area for future generations. Secondly, the students highlighted the importance of networking schools, institutions, local authorities, associations, and businesses. This collaboration would facilitate coordinated actions and initiatives that can have a more significant impact than isolated efforts. Additionally, there is a need to highlight the locality by promoting local products, services, people, and places. This approach not only supports local economies but also fosters a sense of pride and identity among residents. Engaging local communities and promoting cooperativism is another crucial aspect. By involving community members and encouraging cooperative efforts, there can be more inclusive and sustainable development. Strengthening participation and the sense of community was also identified as essential. When people feel connected and involved, they are more likely to contribute positively to their surroundings. Incorporating new technologies is seen as a way to modernize and enhance various aspects of community life and economic activity. Technology can provide innovative solutions to existing problems and open up new opportunities. Cultivating environmental and landscape awareness is critical to ensure that development does not come at the expense of the natural environment. Educating people about the importance of their surroundings can lead to more sustainable practices. Protecting, managing, and planning the landscape of the islands are necessary actions to

maintain their ecological, aesthetic and cultural value. Proper landscape management can prevent degradation and promote biodiversity. Lastly, promoting alternative forms of tourism, such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, agrotourism, and gastronomic tourism, can attract visitors interested in unique and sustainable experiences. This diversification can reduce the environmental impact of tourism and distribute economic benefits more broadly. The students' findings suggest a comprehensive approach to development that balances economic growth, community well-being, and environmental sustainability.

The students concluded that all the above mean cooperation of institutions, associations, scientists, participation of citizens, producers, entrepreneurs, etc, and the need to adopt a new development model so as not to degrade or even destroy common local resources, which are the heritage it should be passed on to future generations ensuring their needs and well-being.

The open schooling projects on heritage and sustainability combined thematic knowledge and applied it in the field by helping the students to identify, assess the natural and cultural “wealth” of their area and make some conservation, management and planning proposals. It co-created knowledge and practice, and science capital (Archer et al., 2015), by bringing together students, scientists, technologies, resources and communities (NGOs, societies, cooperatives, families, local government, etc.). Open schooling approach contributed to a deeper learning/understanding of environmental, societal and sustainability issues, turning students into "little researchers" by raising their environmental/ landscape awareness and constructing some of the foundations for them to be “responsible active citizens” and future agents of change (Lim and Cacciafoco, 2021; Okada and Sherborne, 2018). The projects highlighted the relationship between society-economy-culture-environment, the significance of collaborative work (among the students) and the real-world process of obtaining shared goals and visions for addressing local issues.

Such practices promote innovative pedagogies and flexible learning environments for the schools willing to embrace such educational approaches and adapt accordingly. Innovative pedagogies are based on flexible learning environments putting an emphasis on problem-solving processes and on the embodiment of scientists, institutions, organizations, associations, citizens, producers, entrepreneurs, etc. (is everyone's concern) in the educational process. In our case, innovative pedagogies included learning, creative, practical-experiential parts based on the ‘Care-Know-Do’ approach.

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## SUSTAINABILITY IMPLEMENTATION IN TOURISM HIGHER EDUCATION IN GREECE

**Maria XENAKI**

Department of Business Administration and Tourism, Hellenic Mediterranean University,  
xenakimaria@hmu.gr

**Irini DIMOU**

Department of Business Administration and Tourism, Hellenic Mediterranean University,  
irdimou@hmu.gr

### ABSTRACT

The tourism industry has recently faced challenges necessitating sustainable recovery paths (Orindaru et al., 2021) Towards this direction, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are integrating sustainability into various operational levels (Franco et al., 2019) and often utilise Sustainability Assessment Tools (SATs) to measure progress and guide future improvements (Caeiro et al., 2020; Lambrechts, 2015). Higher education in tourism is no exception to this development (Minguez et al., 2021). This study investigates the extent to which sustainability is integrated into tourism-oriented higher education institutions in Greece. The study adopts an innovative approach, involving the development of a specialized SAT. What sets this SAT apart is its components and

the data collection method. The SAT's indicators and criteria were compared to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the Hellenic Authority of Higher Education guidelines. The research involved information gathering from the official websites of the universities. Desk research was conducted, and the SAT was utilized to evaluate the eight universities offering tourism-related studies in Greece from December 2023 to February 2024. The findings reveal limited evidence of sustainability integration in curriculum components despite a growing interest in research and the high involvement of academic staff in sustainability matters. A notable limitation of the research was the challenges faced due to the website layouts and comparability. One potential outcome of this study is to urge HEIs to utilise this concise, straightforward SAT for self-assessment and to improve sustainability integration.

**Keywords:** sustainability, higher education, tourism, Greece, SAT.

## INTRODUCTION

The global impact of tourism cannot be overstated, as evidenced by international tourism receipts reaching USD 1.4 trillion in 2023 and international arrivals at 1.3 billion (UNWTO, 2024). However, recent transformative events have had a profound impact on the tourism industry (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Addressing economic, social, and environmental concerns holistically, sustainability is increasingly viewed as a viable solution (Ordinaru et al., 2021). Therefore, integrating sustainability into the tourism industry through education (Pizzutilo & Venezia, 2021; Son-Turan & Lambrechts, 2019) can yield significant benefits. Consequently, tourism universities play a critical role in equipping future tourism professionals to embrace sustainable behaviors and practices. In light of this, this paper explores how tourism-related universities in Greece are heeding the call to integrate sustainability.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Lozano (2006) was one of the pioneers in integrating effective sustainable development (SD) into university policies and operations, advocating for its incorporation as a radical innovation process (Pizzutilo & Venezia, 2021). Sustainability assessment tools (SATs), developed since the 1990s, were designed to assess the integration of sustainability across various institutional dimensions such as education, research, campus operations, and community engagement (Shriberg, 2002; Ceulemans et al., 2015; Stough et al., 2021). SATs have the potential to build capacity and improve future processes through reflective evaluation (Mader et al., 2013) and are increasingly seen as necessary for reporting on sustainability implementation.

### *Sustainability Assessment Tools: use and significance*

Shriberg (2002) defined Sustainable Assessment Tools (SATs) as a systematic framework for measuring higher education institutions' (HEIs) efforts in integrating sustainability. Another definition describes SATs as instruments that provide HEIs with a systematic set of procedures and methods to measure, audit, benchmark, and communicate their sustainable development (SD) efforts (Findler et al., 2019, 3). Most academics agree that SATs can function as benchmark tools for HEIs, using specific metrics to communicate their performance to the world and to specific stakeholders (Deda et al., 2023; Caeiro et al., 2020; Armstrong, 2021; Alghamdi, 2020; Ceulemans et al., 2015). SATs enable the description of a HEI's current status and provide clear guidelines for future directions in aligning with sustainability implementation. In essence, SATs answer the question of how well a HEI is performing now and how well it aims to perform in the future. Significantly, the gaps to bridge and the room for improvement become evident in the context of unaccomplished indicators when using SATs. SATs can therefore be the starting point for addressing sustainability matter.

### *Sustainability Assessment Tools: criticism and recommendations*

The various advantages associated with Sustainability Assessment Tools (SATs) are juxtaposed by several recognized drawbacks. Despite the fact that the initial development of assessment tools dates back thirty years, recent research suggests that they are still in their early stages of development (Son-Turan & Lambrechts, 2019; Caeiro et al., 2020), necessitating improvements to their implementation (Singh et al., 2023). While they have contributed to the advancement of knowledge regarding the implementation of sustainability in higher education institutions (HEIs), their efficacy in facilitating this process has been questioned. Ceulemans et al. (2020) argue that SATs primarily focus on "what" HEIs can do, rather than "how" they can integrate sustainability, a sentiment echoed by Stough et al. (2021) and Omazic & Zunk (2021), who note that the reporting results for interpretation are often vague despite the presence of a wide variety of SATs with specific indicators included. Moreover, the predominant emphasis of SATs on environmental issues, such as campus operations or climate change elements in curricula, overlooks the economic and social aspects of sustainability (Stough et al., 2021; Filho et al., 2019). Various scholars have proposed strategies to enhance the effectiveness of SATs. Ceulemans et al. (2015, 2020) stress the importance of linking reporting indicators to existing management standards to increase efficacy. Mapar et al. (2022) and Maragakis & Dobbelsteen (2015) emphasize the necessity of acquiring a comprehensive understanding of SAT components, similarities, and differences to foster effective application. They argue that unifying and comparing SATs, rather than subjecting HEIs to a ranking or competition format, would facilitate the identification of essential themes and the involvement of critical stakeholders (Caeiro et al., 2020). However, they caution against an excessive number of indicators, as this could lead to complexity and application challenges (Cioimni et al., 2017, as cited in Mapar et al., 2022). Consequently, there is a call for SATs to produce comprehensive reports that are evidently linked to practical application, offering clear guidance for action and incorporating all three dimensions of sustainability. This would involve delineating and incorporating key thematic areas, as well as utilizing a carefully selected few questions to ensure usability, transparency, and comparability.

#### *SATs nowadays*

For this research, the most suitable Sustainability Assessment Tool (SAT) was sought to accurately depict the current situation in Greece. It quickly became evident that there are numerous tools with diverse methodologies, each reporting on different countries and scientific origins and adopting a wide range of approaches. According to Kutty et al. (2021) and Maragakis & Dobbelsteen (2015), there is a multitude of sustainability assessment methodologies available. Mapar et al. (2022) reviewed 27 tools, emphasizing how this increasing variety can contribute to more tailored and structured development processes in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Regardless of the approach a SAT employs, Lambrechts and Ceulemans (2013) identified the three most significant thematic areas as policy development, assessment for higher education mainstreaming, and transparency and communication contributions. Given these points, it is clear that developing a tailor-made SAT for this study is necessary.

#### *Tourism Higher Education in Greece*

The tourism sector in Greece has seen significant growth in recent years, with international arrivals reaching 32.7 million in 2023, accounting for a resident to tourist ratio of 1:3 (ELSTAT, 2021; INSETE, 2024). Moreover, the employment in the tourism sector peaked at 703 thousand in 2022, constituting 16.4% of the total employment. With the application of the multiplier effect, an average calculation of 40% employment in the sector is noted (INSETE, 2024). This demonstrates the substantial impact of tourism on the country's economy.

In the realm of higher education, eight public universities in Greece offer undergraduate programs tailored to sustain the tourism industry. Notably, the legislative and regulatory changes implemented in the country from 2013 to 2019 greatly impacted the higher education landscape (Ministry of Education, 2019; National Exams Organisation, 2016), leading to the closure or merger of Technological Education Institutes (TEI). As a result, only Higher Educational Institutions (AEI) currently operate, with the establishment of newly-founded tourism-related programs. Consequently, tourism schools or departments of the HEIs evaluated in this study count approximately five years of operation in the current state.

Furthermore, the country's authority for quality assurance in higher education underwent a transformative procedure. Succeeding The Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency (HQA) in 2020, the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE/ EΘAEE) was established, aligned with Europe's guidelines. This organisation evaluates and accredits HEIs study programs through a systematic, structured framework of specific indicators, factors, and benchmarks that comply with certain quality, effectiveness, and transparency standards. A significant contribution is also credited to HAHE regarding HEIs overall operations, as communicated in the 'Quality Assurance Policy' as a part of their strategic planning (HAHE, 2024). Finally, it is crucial for this study to note that HAHE requires institutions to publish information about their teaching and academic activities in an up-to-date, transparent and objective manner on the institution's website (HAHE, 2021).

### *Article Specifics*

This article aims to assess the current state of higher education in Greece with respect to aligning the tourism industry with sustainability. It focuses on the extent to which Greek tourism universities are effectively preparing future professionals with sustainability principles. To achieve this, we searched for a suitable assessment tool to systematically measure, compare, and benchmark the implementation of sustainability in the country's higher education institutions (HEIs). It was determined that a customized tool tailored to the specific research requirements would be preferable. The article unfolds in two phases: the first phase focuses on creating a new Sustainable Assessment Tool (SAT) and the methodology employed, while the second phase involves applying the SAT to Greek tourism HEIs and discussing the results. This process is designed to address key research questions effectively:

RQ1: To what extent do Greek Tourism Higher Educational Institutes implement sustainability practices?.

RQ2: Which thematic area scores the highest, expressed as criteria or indicators in the new SAT?

RQ3: Which thematic area scores the lowest, expressed as criteria or indicators in the new SAT?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Phase One: Creating a new SAT*

It is important to recognize that the concept of sustainability can vary greatly between organizations, influenced by cultural, political, social, and economic factors. Therefore, it is essential for each sustainability assessment tool to be tailored to specific contexts and reflect the unique conditions of each case study (Mapar et al., 2017). The authors of the article have conducted prior research resulting in a database of prominent criteria and indicators for SATs through a systematic literature review. With this foundation, the new SAT comprises three broad groups of questions, referred to as 'indicators'—curriculum, research, and identity. Each indicator includes multiple 'criteria' that assess specific types of detailed information, totaling fourteen criteria in all. These indicators and criteria have been carefully selected based on their significance

and widespread recognition in previous research. Furthermore, to ensure rigor and validity of results, the fourteen criteria were compared to HEHA criteria and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Acknowledging the significant shortcomings of existing SATs highlighted in the literature review (list of SATs overviewed), the new SAT is designed to be concise, user-friendly in data collection, conducive to comparability, transparent in function, and adaptable in terms of content or depth of data investigated—through the ability to modify or add criteria. The structure of the new SAT is as follows:

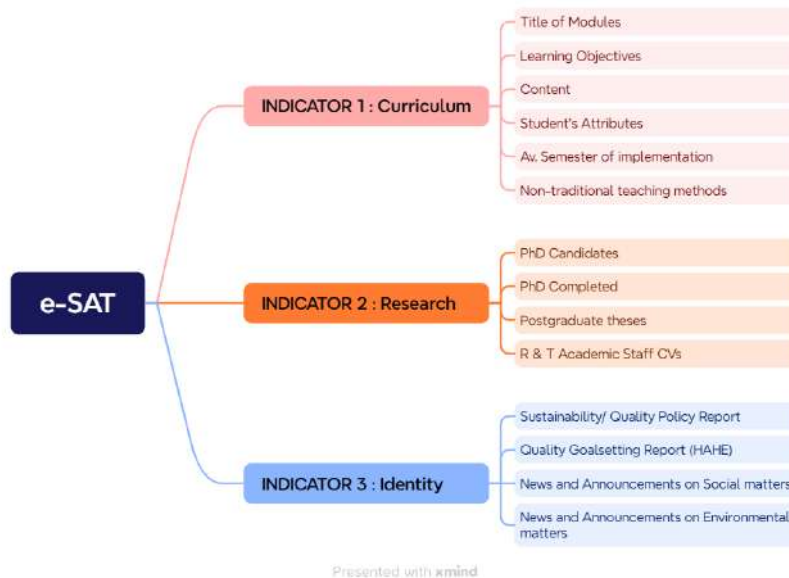


Figure 1. New SAT

*Phase Two: Applying the new SAT*

The initial approach to collecting the requested data involved conducting interviews with multiple administrative personnel per institution due to the broad nature of the questions. However, this method was deemed to be time-consuming and might yield uncertain results. Since HAHE requires Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to communicate their activities online in an up-to-date and objective manner, we adjusted the new SAT to gather information from the universities' websites. From December 2023 to February 2024, we conducted desk research, evaluating the eight public universities that offer tourism-related studies. This involved reviewing 518 undergraduate modules, 103 research and teaching academic staff CVs, 132 PhD candidates' and 58 PhD graduates' research topics, 2021 Master's thesis titles, and numerous 'News and Announcement' articles. We retrieved relevant documents from the websites, imported them into MAXQDA, a qualitative analysis software, and performed a keyword search for the term sustainability in English and Greek (αειφορ, βιωσιμ) and their derivatives. The results were manually checked and imported into Excel tables for comparison and graphic illustration. In cases where the documents were not available online, such as in the 'News and Announcements' criteria, manual retrieval was performed. The inclusion criteria required the consideration of three-dimensional sustainability, the evaluation of theses from 2018 to the present, and articles from September 2022 to the present. Furthermore, the data should have been available on the official websites. The limitations of the research include the possibility of restricted and outdated data if the official websites were not revised. Additionally, the non-standardized design and layout of universities' websites may pose comparability issues.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the main findings per indicator, namely curriculum, research, and identity, followed by the conclusions, suggestions, and recommendations for future research.

### *Results of Indicator One: Curriculum*

This assessment evaluates the incorporation of sustainability principles and practices into curricula. More specifically, we examined the presence of sustainability in module titles, learning objectives, module content, intended student attributes, non-traditional teaching methods, and the average semester in which sustainability was evident. Across the eight universities, sustainability was found in module titles 1.42% of the time, in learning objectives 12.99% of the time, in module content 13.48% of the time, and in student attributes 20.45% of the time. On average, each university included sustainability in 21 modules using non-traditional teaching methods, and sustainability integration was evident by the sixth semester.

### *Results of Indicator Two: Research*

The set of criteria examined the comprehensiveness and depth of research in the field of sustainability. This included research conducted by students as well as by academic staff engaged in research and teaching. We reviewed all postgraduate theses available in the library repositories, completed PhD research titles, and ongoing PhD research by candidates. Furthermore, we evaluated the academic staff's involvement in sustainability-related activities through their Curriculum Vitae, including conference participation, publications, and other relevant activities. The findings revealed that approximately 1.93% of postgraduate theses included sustainability-related terminology in their titles, 8.3% of completed PhD theses had sustainability-related content, and 19.09% of ongoing PhD theses were focused on sustainability. Additionally, out of the 103 academic staff CVs assessed, 63.93% demonstrated some form of sustainability involvement.

### *Results of Indicator Three: Identity*

The previous two indicators focused primarily on academic matters, while this one is more comprehensive. It encompasses aspects related to the governance and identity of the institute as defined by HAHE. Specifically, it examines the incorporation of sustainability-related language and concepts in the Quality Policy Report and the Quality Goalsetting Report of the department or institute, depending on which is available online. Three universities made explicit references to sustainability in their Quality Policy Report, while five did not. In contrast, the majority of universities mentioned sustainability multiple times in their Quality Goalsetting Report, with an average of five references per report. Another aspect of this indicator was the existence of a Sustainability Report, which was found in only one university at the time. Additionally, the criteria included non-academic activities with an environmental and social focus, examined within the 'News and Announcements' section of the website. Any initiatives related to the environment and addressing social issues among university stakeholders (students, academic, research, and administrative staff) and the wider society were considered. The social aspects of sustainability implementation received more attention, with an average of 14.5 news/announcement pieces over approximately one and a half years, while environmental activities averaged 5.12 news/announcement pieces during the same period.

### *Conclusions & Suggestions*

A summary with additional information on the abovementioned results is concluded in the following table, indicating the lowest, highest, and average scores per indicator and criteria.

		SUSTAINABILITY IMPLEMENTED IN			
		Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Mean Value	Unit of Measurement
INDICATOR 1: Curriculum	1.1 <b>Title of Modules</b>	0	1,94	1,42	%
	1.2 <b>Learning Objectives</b>	7,76	20,34	12,99	%
	1.3 <b>Content</b>	5,82	32,14	13,48	%
	1.4 <b>Student Attributes</b>	0	35,92	20,45	%
	1.5 <b>Av.Semester of Implementation</b>	4,5	6,2	5,46	Semester
	1.6 <b>Non-Traditional Teaching Methods</b>	0	66	21,5	Times / University
INDICATOR 2: Research	2.1 <b>PhD Candidates</b>	0	36,36	19,09	%
	2.2 <b>PhD Completed</b>	0	50	8,1	%
	2.3 <b>Postgraduate theses</b>	0	6,19	1,93	%
	2.4 <b>R &amp; T Academic Staff CVs</b>	23,52	100	63,93	%
INDICATOR 3: Identity	3.1a <b>Sustainability Report</b>	1 out of 8 Universities			University
	3.2b <b>Quality Policy Report</b>	3 out of 8 Universities (4 references in total)			References to keywords
	3.2 <b>Quality Goalsetting (HAHE)</b>	0	15	5,12	References to keywords
	3.3 <b>News and Announcements on SocialMatters</b>	2	38	14,5	News or Announcement text
	3.4 <b>News and Announcements on EnvironmentalMatters</b>	0	5	2	News or Announcement text

Table 1. Results summary

The study aims to document the presence of sustainability practices within the higher education system of Greece, particularly within tourism-related studies. A specific Sustainability Assessment Tool (SAT) was developed and applied to the eight universities in Greece offering tourism-related programs. While the SAT was relatively brief and simple, it yielded insightful findings. The results showed limited evidence of sustainability integration across curriculum components, with the lowest scores observed in the "Title of Modules" at 1.42% and the highest in "Student Attributes" at 20.45%. Sustainability implementation was noted to be most prevalent around the 6th semester of study. In terms of research, there was a trend of greater emphasis on sustainability in PhD-level studies compared to postgraduate theses. Academic staff engaged significantly with sustainability, scoring an average of 64%. However, there remained a scarcity of sustainability reports and direct implementation within the Quality Policy and Goalsetting, often being undertaken on an optional basis. The study also highlighted a skew towards social rather than environmental extracurricular activities. Drawing from these findings, recommendations to enhance sustainability in Greek tourism Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) include improving curriculum components and reports to clearly outline sustainability indicators. Additionally, it is suggested that the existing Higher Education Accreditation Board (HAHE) framework could explicitly encompass sustainability implementation indicators in the future. Promotion of postgraduate sustainability-related research is encouraged, given the existing high association of academic staff with sustainability. Finally, the organization of extracurricular activities under the overarching theme of "Sustainability" could foster greater student involvement in social and environmental initiatives. Ultimately, aligning with both SAT indicators and UN Tourism

directives may foster the adoption of best practices for sustainability in Greek tourism higher education.

### *Future Research*

Suggestions for future research are derived from the limitations and potential capabilities of the new SAT. If the test maintains a straightforward structure and retrieves data from official sources, it could evolve into a transformative SAT adaptable to various disciplines, countries, and educational levels. It has the potential to effectively assess an institution's current sustainability practices and establish essential guidelines for future initiatives. In an effort to effectively tackle global challenges and to meet the demand for highly skilled human resources in the tourism industry, it is recommended that Greece's tourism universities consider the adoption of SATs, to assess and strive for the highest standards in sustainability implementation practices. While not a comprehensive analysis, it would certainly align with the idea that "the beginning is the most important part of the work," as espoused by Plato (427 – 348 BC).

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# SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND DISABLED TOURISM. THE CONTRIBUTION OF NEW TECHNOLOGY TO THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE CULTURAL TOURISM ECOSYSTEM

**Anna KYRIAKAKI**

University of the Aegean, Department of Tourism, Economics and Management, Chios, Greece,  
a.kyriakaki@aegean.gr

**Evgenia FRONIMAKI**

University of the Aegean, Department of Business Administration, Chios, Greece,  
efronimaki@fme.aegean.gr

## ABSTRACT

Tourism for people with disabilities has become an important topic in the tourism literature. The increasing interest reflects society's shift towards accessibility and inclusion for all people, regardless of their physical or mental condition or the artificial barriers they may face (Kastenholz, Eusébio and Figueiredo, 2015). This need for inclusion become a major goal of social sustainability and a priority for the tourism industry. Several destinations, organizations, and companies promote initiatives in this direction (Eichhorn, 2014). New technologies, including virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and assistive devices, etc., have revolutionized the accessibility and preservation of cultural resources, transforming the tourism landscape. In this context, this paper aims to explore, through a bibliometric analysis, the innovative applications of new technologies in cultural resources, with a particular focus on their impact on tourism for people with disabilities. The research results highlight the transformative potential of new technology in promoting inclusivity and empowering disabled travelers to engage with cultural resources in meaningful and enriching ways.

**Keywords:** social sustainability, accessible tourism, disabled tourism, cultural tourism ecosystem, new technologies.

## INTRODUCTION

16% of the world's population (about 1.3 billion people) currently have a significant disability (WHO, 2023). Accessibility to all tourism activities should be a key aspect of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy. At the same time, it is estimated that by 2050 the number of people with disabilities who will need specific access structures will reach around 1.2 billion (WHO and the World Bank, 2011). Regarding the issues of accessible tourism, an essential part is also related to the ageing of the world population, which according to the WHO is increasing dramatically as it is expected that between 2000 and 2050 the population of people over 60 years old in the earth will double from 11% to 22% (WHO, 2023).

In recent years, tourism stakeholders (tourism businesses, tour operators, local authorities, etc.) have put more emphasis on the ever-increasing demand for accessibility to tourism facilities, destinations, and services however, they still face many challenges, as the lack of a strategy and methodical ways of providing integrated tourism experiences to people with disabilities prevents

them from actively and extensively participating in tourism activities (Karadimitriou, Kyriakaki & Michopoulou, 2021).

An important issue for people with disabilities is access to culture, which concerns both the physical access to cultural spaces such as libraries, museums, dance halls concert halls, and archaeological sites, etc., as well as access to cultural programs, artworks, cultural events, and artistic events (Darcy & Buchalis, 2011). News technologies have managed to provide the means to overcome to a significant extent physical or mental disabilities through a multitude of applications (virtual tours, simulation, 3D printing, video, etc.) and assistive devices that reduce or even eliminate accessibility issues to information and cultural resources and places/sites (Beck, Rainoldi, & Egger, 2019; Eichhorn et al., 2008; Iftikhar, Khan & Pasanchay, 2023; Lam et al., 2020).

According to Polishchuk et al. (2023), new technologies offer opportunities to improve destination management, enhance the visitor experience, and promote sustainable tourism development. Digital technologies also increase the effectiveness of marketing communications, minimize costs and enable more focus targets of niche markets through personalized marketing (El Archi et al., 2023). The adoption of new technologies enhances sustainable tourism practices both by reducing emissions and waste and improving the operational efficiency of tourism businesses, as well as by enriching the tourist experience (Pan et al., 2018). Furthermore, digital technologies such as a virtual tour of cultural sites or monuments or a 3D-printed cultural monument or artifact/object give access to a world free of inclusions.

In the context of the above discussion, the present paper aims to identify how new technologies (digital media, 3D printing, virtual reality, Artificial Intelligence, etc.) can contribute to reducing or eliminating the difficulties faced by people with disabilities in participating in tourism activities and in their contact with intangible and material culture, as well as to improving accessibility in tourism resources. The study's methodology includes analysis of existing literature and reliable secondary research data on the main topics: accessibility in tourism, people with disabilities, the application of new technologies in education, and the familiarization of people with disabilities with the cultural elements of a destination.

## **DISABLED TOURISM – ACCESSIBILITY AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

“Accessibility” as a concept, refers to the relationship that a person has with his/her physical and social environment. It refers to the right that every citizen has, regardless of whether they have a kind of disability, to the safe access, choice, use, and enjoyment of the provided infrastructure, services, and goods in their daily life (Karadimiriou & Kyriakaki, 2022; Koutantos, 2000). In addition to physical access, the term "accessibility" refers to the functionality and the ability to communicate and inform, but also to the degree of autonomy and safety of a person concerning the environment (Kwai-sang Yau et al., 2004).

All persons with or without disabilities have the right of access to tourism. One of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is 'Reduce inequality', which indicates that by 2030, countries must empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, regardless of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or another status (UN, 2015). Accessibility is not only about human rights but also an opportunity for destinations and businesses to include all visitors without discrimination and increase their revenues (UNWTO, 2023). However, people with disabilities' access to tourism activities is difficult or even impossible (Domínguez, Darcy, & Gonzalez, 2015). An important reason for the non-participation of people with disabilities in tourism is the lack of accessible transport, attractions, recreational facilities and buildings, accommodation, service

infrastructure, etc. (Bauer, 2018). Buildings, infrastructure, and attractions in many areas are not accessible because of their physical characteristics and human intervention (Porto et al., 2019).

Accessible tourism refers to enabling people with access needs and requirements, including physical or mental disabilities (e.g. mobility problems, visual, hearing, and cognitive dimensions of access), to function independently, with equality and dignity, through the global availability of appropriately designed products, services and environments (Darcy and Dickson, 2009, p. 39). This definition concerns people with permanent or temporary disabilities, people who travel with children or infants in strollers, and older people (Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011).

Through tourism, people with disabilities have the opportunity to take a break from everyday life and the problems they face for a while (Darcy, McKercher & Schweinsberg, 2020). According to research conducted internationally, people with disabilities have a greater need than any other social group for holidays and relaxation as the benefits of tourism are multi-dimensional (Buhalis & Darcy, 2010; Karadimitriou Kyriakaki & Michopoulou 2021).

The demand for tailored solutions to sensitive accessibility issues has led beyond the provision of specific facilities, to the creation of a more conscious culture that takes into account the diversity and specificities of all travelers. Social sustainability is central to the promotion of social equality and inclusion that gives the right to all people with and without disabilities to enjoy the benefits of tourism. The psychological difficulties faced by a disabled person are at multiple levels, such as the struggle with the acceptance of his/her disability, the views of his/her family, and the reactions of society. In tourism people with disabilities will be frequently confronted with issues such as (Poria, Reichel, and Brandt, 2010):

- Untrained staff
- Non-adapted internet websites and booking programs
- Lack of accessibility to transport
- Lack of dedicated hotel rooms, toilets, and public toilets
- Lack of accessibility in public spaces
- Rough roads
- Lack of information on accessible tourist attractions (cultural resources, animation parks, public buildings, etc.)

All these barriers contribute to the isolation and introversion of people with disabilities (Buhalis and Darcy, 2010). In the same context, it is understood that their participation in tourism activities has a positive impact on their integration as the experiences they gain during a trip become an excellent opportunity to improve their self-image and self-confidence (Pagan, 2020).

In addition, the accessibility of each location/place/interest should be seen as a competitive advantage of the asset rather than a threat. The type of tourist studied attaches great importance to the accessibility of a place and often develops loyalty behavior towards destinations that meet their needs. It should be noted that funding to renovate places in order to make them more accessible to each tourist should not be seen as an expense, but as an investment that will bring many benefits to each destination concerning occupancy and profitability (Devile, Eusébio and Moura, 2023; Moura, Eusébio and Devile, 2023; Singh, et al., 2021). The development of a destination is highly based on what facilities and services are available for the tourists, what needs it can meet, and what tourism experiences it can offer that will make it a desirable destination for all categories of tourists (Singh, et al., 2021). Improve infrastructure and facilities, as well as the awareness and training of the tourism workforce, will contribute to the sustainable development of the destination, the enhancement of its value and competitive advantages, and the expansion of the various tourism models (Singh, et al., 2021; Terashima and Clark, 2021).

## NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN TOURISM

Information technology has rapidly changed our lives. The development of technologies and their integration into everyday life have affected interaction among people both in professional and social life. The case of smartphones is an example of how these devices have become a necessary and integral part of everyday life since they first launched in the mobile industry.

Developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can have an impact also on different tourism areas. Customers in the tourism industry use the Internet for searching travel information while at the same time, tourism businesses and organizations advertise on-line their services (Guttentag, 2010) and use ICTs as a toolkit for managing booking, offering personalized services, etc. ICTs can reduce any cultural, geographical, or communication gap between tourists and tourism businesses (Buhalis, 2003).

The use of social media, mobile applications, or big data analytics has changed the way that tourism destinations operate and interact with consumers in the tourism industry (El Archi et al., 2023). Emerging ICTs are changing the way tourism products and services are offered or promoted in the tourism market, and as a result, travelers will change their "behavior" from the first steps of planning or booking their trip to how they experience the concept of traveling. Augmented reality, which blends reality and virtual reality, has recently attracted more attention than any other technology (Beck et al., 2019).

Virtual reality is a simulated 3D environment that allows users to enjoy a new real-world environment that simulates existing places and events (Guttentag, 2010). From local governments to tourism businesses, they all use virtual reality in order to test new tourist routes, evaluate the efficiency of existing ones or even, predict possible problems at tourist destinations and propose possible solutions (Bishop and Gimblett, 2000; Prideaux, 2002; Refsland et al., 2000; Sussmann et al., 2000).

Virtual tourism represents an innovative integration of advanced technologies in the tourism sector, with the use of the Internet and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Polishchuk et al. (2023) claim that the most prevalent type of virtual tourism can be a 360-degree panoramic video due to its affordability, ease of use, and mild impact. Virtual reality can offer an authentic user experience in the tourism sector.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector of various countries has been seriously affected. The forbiddance of traveling created a new type of tourism, called "cloud tourism" (Pan and Yu, 2020). "Cloud tourism" allows people to sightsee all over the world with the convenience of their homes without missing out on any experience. This new type of travel via home easiness has offered new vitality in the tourism sector development. "Cloud tourism" is public welfare, through network technology and enables people to have the full experience from their device, with no extra cost but with a lot of fun (Yu, 2020). Many tourism platform organizations provide "cloud tourism" without charge and promote this new type of tourism (Pan and Yu, 2020). Through realistic AR technology, tourists can have customized information and specialized services without limits (Wu, 2020).

## NEW TECHNOLOGY AND ACCESSIBILITY IN CULTURAL TOURISM

According to McKercher & du Cros (2002), cultural tourism can be regarded as a high-profile, mass-market activity. United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defined cultural tourism as "tangible and intangible attractions and products that represent material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society" (2018). Cultural tourism can be divided

into heritage tourism, arts tourism, creative tourism, urban cultural tourism, rural cultural tourism, indigenous cultural tourism, and experiential cultural tourism (Smith, 2009).

The previous meaning of a “historical monument” is now used with a broader concept, the meaning of “heritage”. UNESCO (2003) has defined digital heritage as the “cultural, educational, scientific and administrative resources as well as technical, medical and other kinds of information created digitally or converted into digital form existing analogue resources” and contains “texts, databases, still and moving images, audio, graphics, software, and web pages”. **Digital heritage** can include information or facts like architectural designs, digital images, 3D models, 3D scans of heritage artifacts, etc.), fiction and interpretations (digital re-creations of people, buildings, etc.) with interpretive narratives of the past (Krol, 2020; Thwaites, 2013).

Garbelli et al. (2017) claim that cultural heritage can play a crucial role both in social and economic development at local and regional levels. Cultural heritage is used to attract tourists but in a way that is protected and conserved by cities, regions, and nation-states. According to Krol (2020), heritage includes “tangible assets that involve the natural and cultural environment, landscapes, historical sites, buildings, and monuments”. On the other hand, cultural heritage includes both tangible and intangible achievements like food and music.

Nevertheless, constraints in using technology in the concept of sustainable (including accessible) tourism can arise from a sort of reasons, including lack of experience or training of tourism personnel; or unwillingness to change, established practices among tourism staff, citizens, or even tourists. Sustainable tourism can balance economic development with environmental protection and cultural preservation (El Archi et al., 2023).

In the tourism sector, in order to manage and preserve cultural and heritage supplies, UNWTO (2011) defined four objectives more specifically, easiness of market access, promotion of special types of tourism offers, providing incentives for sustainable products, and influence on visitors’ behavior.

The cultural and heritage tourism fields are diversified. For example, some popular cultural locations may have highly organized management structures and high financial or human resources. Less popular attractions may have to operate with fewer employees or a limited budget. Also, there may be differences in ICTs usage between cultural and heritage sites, which may have an impact on business processes. Simple information no longer satisfies the customers during their visit to a tourist attraction. New technologies can help cultural and heritage organizations to increase visitors’ experience (Maurer, 2015).

Bartak (2007) claims that museums have an increasing online presence, with interactive marketing and the use of social media applications like podcasts and blogs. These applications ease better interaction among visitors with disabilities. Mobile devices ease new types of interpretation of cultural attractions (e.g. virtual and augmented reality, location-based services) (Maurer, 2015). Mobile tagging through QR codes makes it easier to combine physical and virtual information. This technology can be applied for tour guides via mobile devices, increasing interactivity and making easier the organization of travel for disabled people.

As virtual reality technology continues to evolve, the number and significance of new useful applications in tourism will increase. Guttentag (2010) points out the six areas of tourism in which virtual reality may prove notably valuable. These are planning and management, marketing, entertainment, education, accessibility, and heritage preservation. Moreover, with virtual reality, we can have a virtual visit as a substitute to a real visit to a threatened location. Nevertheless, the adoption of such kinds of substitutes activities will be defined by tourists’ attitudes toward

authenticity and any other limitations. As virtual reality is incorporated into the tourism sector, new challenges will arise (Guttentag, 2010).

## CONCLUSIONS

Accessible tourism for people with disabilities is a topic that has been studied with particular interest by the academic world in recent years. The challenges faced by people with disabilities, their motivations and the factors that attract and motivate them seem to have been clarified through research and studies. However, at a practical level, there is a large gap in meeting the tourism needs of this market segment in terms of infrastructure, facilities, transport, accessibility of accommodation and public spaces, difficulties in finding information, and lack of knowledge among tourism professionals.

Recent advancements in technology, including virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and assistive devices, are reshaping the landscape of accessible tourism by providing tailored experiences for individuals with disabilities. Through the utilization of VR and AR, cultural sites and museums can now offer immersive, multi-sensory experiences that cater to diverse needs and abilities. Additionally, the development of assistive technologies such as smart navigation systems and mobile applications facilitates seamless navigation and access to cultural attractions for individuals with mobility, visual or hearing, and cognitive disabilities. Furthermore, digitization efforts are ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage while simultaneously enhancing accessibility through online exhibitions and virtual tours.

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## **A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA FOR CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM**

**Maria KROUSANIOTAKI**

Harokopio University of Athens, mkrousaniotaki@gmail.com

**Sofoklis SKOULTSOS**

Harokopio University of Athens, sofoklis.skoultos@gmail.com

### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to conduct a systematic literature review on sustainability in tourism sector through circular economy (CE) to identify potential focus areas as well as knowledge gaps for additional field research. By using Scopus database, a thorough review of the literature has been carried out. For this review, a final sample of 63 articles was applied. The current search took place at the end of January 2024, and the keywords used relate to the tourism industry, CE and sustainability. The sample, which consists of 63 articles, only includes publications in English. After analyzing each contribution the paper identifies each of the tourism-related knowledge areas covered by the research effort as well as the knowledge gaps. The findings indicate that further investigation into the relationship between tourism and CE is necessary to develop potential solutions for a more sustainable tourism sector.

Keywords: circular economy; sustainability; tourism;

### **INTRODUCTION**

In an era when environmental issues and resource depletion are pressing concerns, the debate over sustainable development has taken on new significance. The idea of a circular economy is fundamental to this discussion because it signifies a shift from the traditional "take-make-dispose" paradigm and aims to change traditional consumption patterns (Ghisellini et al., 2016). Additionally, the vast and diverse global tourism sector finds it difficult to achieve a balance between the need to protect the environment and its rapid expansion (Scott et al., 2019). With the goal of combining these linked areas, this systematic literature review aims to investigate

thoroughly how the concepts of sustainability, circular economy practices and the complex dynamics of the tourism sector interact.

The traditional 'take-make-dispose' approach is being replaced by the circular economy concept. Actually, it promotes a system that effectively regenerates resources, minimizes waste, and extends the life of products (Centobelli et al., 2020). The circular economy, which is based on the principles of reducing, recycling, and reuse, offers a tactical framework for separating resource depletion from economic growth (Velenturf & Purnell, 2021). We need to think carefully about how adopting circular practices will affect the tourism industry as a whole. The implications for the tourism industry require careful investigation given its reliance on resources and substantial waste generation (Baloch et al., 2023).

As the global tourist industry expands, concerns about its environmental and socioeconomic implications are growing, demanding a change in perspective toward sustainability (Capocchi et al., 2019). Even though the industry promotes economic expansion and cross-cultural interaction, it frequently has a long-lasting negative influence on the environment. It is difficult to strike a balance between the economic advantages of tourism and the protection of natural and cultural resources (Comerio & Strozzi, 2019). Promoting sustainable tourism is now essential, with a focus on ethical behavior to reduce the negative effects on the environment, stimulate community involvement, and ensure long-term viability (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2017).

This analytical literature review outlines how the circular economy's practices and sustainable tourism principles interact. By gathering a database of information acquired from various academic and operational sources, this study offers helpful insights regarding sustainable tourism's current state in the context of the circular economy. Through a comprehensive analysis of the current research, this study seeks to reveal trends, identify limitations, while improving an in-depth knowledge of how circular economy frameworks can be utilized to promote sustainability objectives in the constantly evolving tourism sector.

*This study attempts to answer the following research question:*

*Q1: What is the current state of research on the integration of circular economy principles in the context of sustainable tourism?*

*Q2: What is the structure of the scientific community in the field of circular economy and sustainable tourism?*

This paper's subsequent sections provide a thorough analysis of academic contributions at the intersection of the circular economy, sustainability, and tourism. Methodically is examined the variety of information that already exists, evaluate approaches, and combine findings in an effort to ultimately offer a guide for further investigation and useful application. With this investigation, we hope to shed light on the ways in which the tourism sector can move toward a more circular and sustainable future. The remaining section of this article is organized as follows: The earlier scientific publications regarding CE and SD in regards on tourism are covered in the literature review section. The procedures applied to carry out this investigation are detailed in the methodology section, and the results section presents the different conclusions drawn from the bibliometric analysis. The future scope of research section, which offers research directions for future studies, comes after the discussions section, which presents the main findings from the clusters found through co-citation analysis. Finally, the study's limitations, closing thoughts, and implications are discussed in the conclusion section.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Sustainability in Tourism*

The impact of tourism on society and the environment is receiving unprecedented attention. Literature underscores the growing importance of sustainable tourism practices to safeguard

destinations' long-term viability, highlighting issues such as carbon emissions and biodiversity loss (Buhalis, 2019; Koens et al., 2018; Lacoste et al., 2019; Park et al., 2019). Sustainable tourism practices are recommended to mitigate these effects (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023; Ruhanen et al., 2015).

**Studies focus on the dual role of tourism—as an engine of economic growth and a potential threat to local communities (Richards, 2018). To ensure social sustainability, Hall (2008) suggests that economic benefits should be distributed equitably among communities. Models of community-based tourism are proposed as empowering solutions for locals (Hall, 2008). Preserving cultural heritage emerges as a crucial aspect of sustainable tourism (Partarakis et al., 2021). Research underscores the importance of cultural conservation, emphasizing the need for tourism to respect and support the traditions of host communities for long-term cultural sustainability (Fadaei Nezhad et al., 2015; Xiao et al., 2018).**

Understanding tourist behavior is crucial for promoting sustainability. Factors influencing tourists' sustainable practices include awareness, environmental values, and destination attributes (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011). Governments and global organizations play a key role in shaping sustainable tourism policies, which should balance economic, environmental, and social considerations (Carmignani, 2012; Demirović Bajrami et al., 2020).

Challenges such as overtourism, inadequate regulations, and the need for industry collaboration persist (Gössling & Scott, 2012). Integrated strategies involving all stakeholders are necessary to overcome these issues (Calle-Vaquero et al., 2020; Capocchi et al., 2019).

### *Circular Economy in Tourism*

Interest in the circular economy (CE) has grown, signifying a shift from "take-make-dispose" to waste reduction, resource optimization, and sustainable business practices (Kennedy & Linnenluecke, 2022; Kristensen & Mosgaard, 2020; Velenturf & Purnell, 2021). The Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2013) emphasizes designing out waste, keeping materials in use, and regenerating natural systems, advocating for CE to promote employment and innovation.

Practical applications of CE include product-life extension, sharing platforms, and closed-loop systems (Lüdeke-Freund et al., 2019; Ghisellini et al., 2016). Internal stakeholders have more influence on CE than external ones (Chiappetta Jabbour et al., 2020). Implementing CE globally presents challenges and opportunities, necessitating policy implications and international collaboration (Korhonen et al., 2018).

CE can reduce environmental impacts through greenhouse gas reduction, resource conservation, and overall sustainability (Benachio et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2021; Neves & Marques, 2022). Monitoring CE transition from multiple perspectives is crucial (Haupt & Hellweg, 2019).

Innovation is key in CE transition, linking CE with disruptive technologies and resource circularity in business models (Sehnm et al., 2022; Rodríguez-Espíndola et al., 2022). Metrics and indicators for measuring CE performance are essential for comprehensive assessment, considering economic, environmental, and social aspects (Corona et al., 2019; Kennedy & Linnenluecke, 2022; Kravchenko et al., 2020; Kristensen & Mosgaard, 2020; Vinante et al., 2021).

The literature provides a solid foundation for understanding CE, but further research is needed to address industry-specific nuances, policy implications, and practical implementation of CE principles.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Bibliometric analysis and co-citation analysis are the methods employed in this systematic literature review to form clusters. To evaluate the existing literature and eliminate researcher bias, systematic literature reviews employ bibliometric methods. Performance analysis and science

mapping are the two primary applications of bibliometric methods. Performance analysis searches at how effectively people and organizations perform in terms of research and publications. The goal of science mapping is to make the dynamics and organization of scientific fields visible. The main bibliometric techniques are citation analysis, co-citation analysis, and bibliographical, co-author analysis and co-word analysis. The first three build measures of influence and similarity using citation data. Co-author analysis measures their collaboration and co-word analysis identifies relationships between ideas that display together in abstracts, keywords, or document titles (Zupic & Čater, 2015). A great deal of research articles can be understood by using this method of analysis. Bibliometric approaches are not new, but since easily accessible online databases containing citation data became available, they have attracted the interest of researchers (Kieser et al., 2015). In order to determine the intellectual and conceptual structures of scientific research in CE and SD, this study uses bibliometric analysis.

Citation analyses are the most popular types of analyses in bibliometric. To estimate how similar documents, authors, and journals are to one another, it uses citation counts but this method lacks the ability to recognize academic networks of connections. There are two ways to break down citation analysis: co-citation analysis and bibliographic coupling (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Co-citation analysis is known as frequency at which two units are cited together (Small, 1973) and operates under the fundamental premise that the bigger the frequency, the more probable it is that their content is related. These units could be documents, authors and journals. Co-citation analysis is a useful tool for determining the connections between individual studies that help form clusters. The clusters are well understood in order to identify new themes and methods for further research (Sharma et al., 2023). Bibliographic coupling is similar to co-citation analysis but the latter is most commonly used because it is more dynamic.

By combining existing literature into fields and sub-fields, systematic literature reviews synthesize existing knowledge and provide collective insights (Tranfield et al., 2003). However, they frequently lack the rigor and structure necessary to produce an intellectual mapping of large research areas (Snyder, 2019).

#### *Data Collection methods*

The database that was used on this article's literature review is "Scopus" by Elsevier Publishing. The initial search was conducted using the keywords "Circular Economy", "Sustainability" and "Tourism" and 72 documents were found. Additionally, other filters were applied like the English language, the 3 keywords on filters, the type of document was articles only and the subject area was limited to "Social Science", "Environmental Science", "Business, Management and Accounting", "Energy" and "Economics, Econometrics and Finance". This search resulted on 63 documents and no references were found. The limitations on the search area were that no references were found thus no local impact for authors and sources could proceed.

#### *Bibliometric analysis*

Using RStudio and the Biblioshiny tool—a modified interface for RStudio's "bibliometrix package"—bibliometric analysis was carried out (Kemeç & Altınay, 2023). Biblioshiny was used to gather descriptive statistics such as the yearly production of scientific publications, journal publishing activity, and the nations that publish the greatest number of research articles. In addition, there is also a map made that displays the quantity of scientific publications on CE and Sustainability by nation globally.

#### *Co-citation analysis*

To identify topic clusters, co-citation analysis was carried out using co-cited documents (Small, 1973; Suban, 2023).

R-studio was used for the analysis, and publications with a minimum of **5 co-citations** were included (Cavalcante et al., 2021; Kemeç & Altınay, 2023). Four groups were formed out of the clusters of articles. The articles within each cluster were carefully read to identify the central idea before these clusters were examined in greater detail.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Descriptive analysis*

The time span of this study is from 2016 to 2024 and the documents are 63 all of them are articles. The annual growth rate is 9.05% and the average age of documents is 2.9. Additionally the average citation per doc is 31.7. On documents contents there are 350 findings as keyword plus and 226 as author's keywords. Keywords plus are identified by authors as well as publishers and contains a bit more information grouped together according to certain categories. The authors are 204 and the author's collaboration is 7 for single-authored docs and 30.16% for international co-authorships.

On Figure 1 we can visualize the annual trend of research publications on the subject of interest. Over time, the quantity of research articles in the fields of CE and Sustainability over tourism grows rapidly. Although the first paper on this subject was published in 2016, interest in this domain really began to grow in 2020 with 11 publications and as in the year 2023 were 14 articles; we see a consistent increasing trend. Since only articles published up until that point were included in the study (February 2024), the data extraction for the year 2024 resulted in a drop in the graph for that year. Interestingly, 50 of the 63 articles that had been published up until last year had been released in the previous four years.

The 63 research publications that were selected for the study were published in 40 journals. The top 10 most relevant journals are displayed in Figure 2, with these publications being ranked according to the amount of research articles about CE and Sustainability that have been published. 22.2% of the papers in the CE and Sustainability fields were published in the Sustainability (Switzerland). Only 12 articles of the total 63 journals that we found had sources linked to tourism like Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Annals of Tourism Research etc.

The most relevant affiliations of these publications are Qatar University and University of Salento among 127 universities, as are shown on Figure 3.

The countries with the most research papers published in CE and Sustainability are displayed in Figure 4 on a heat map of the nations with the highest scientific output. The majority of papers published have come from Italy with 19 articles, and next 14 are from Spain and Portugal.

The top 10 most cited countries are shown on Figure 5 where there UK is listed as second place mostly because includes organizations that advocate for CE and Sustainability, such as the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and Finland came in first because of its commitment to issues like sustainability and the circular economy, which is noticeable in a number of areas including research, industry, education, and policymaking.

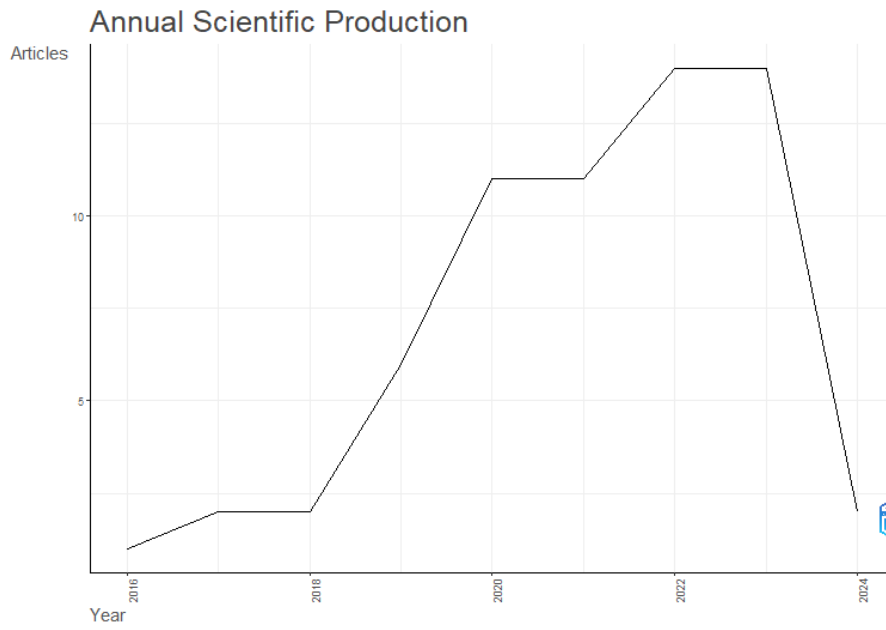


Figure 6 - Annual Scientific Production



Figure 7 - Most relevant Sources



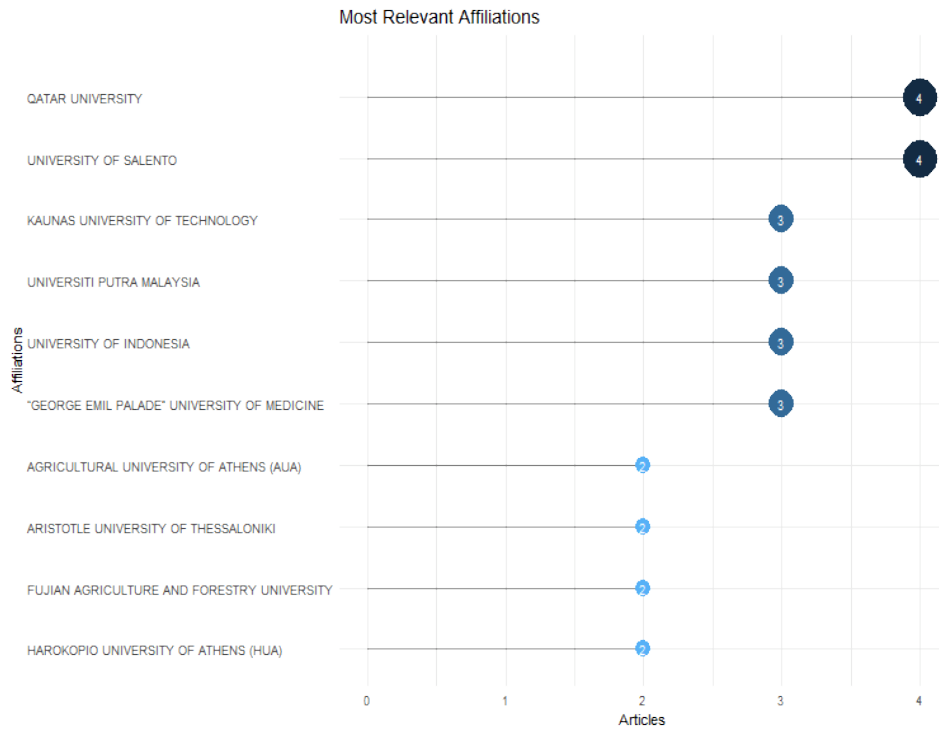


Figure 8 - Most relevant affiliation

### Country Scientific Production

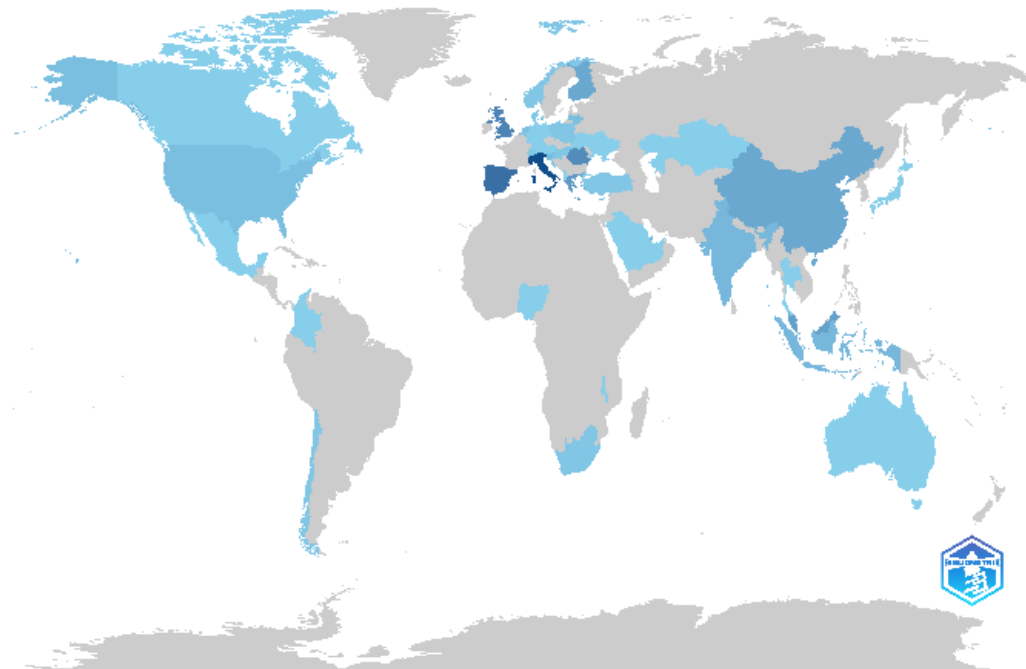


Figure 9 - Country scientific production

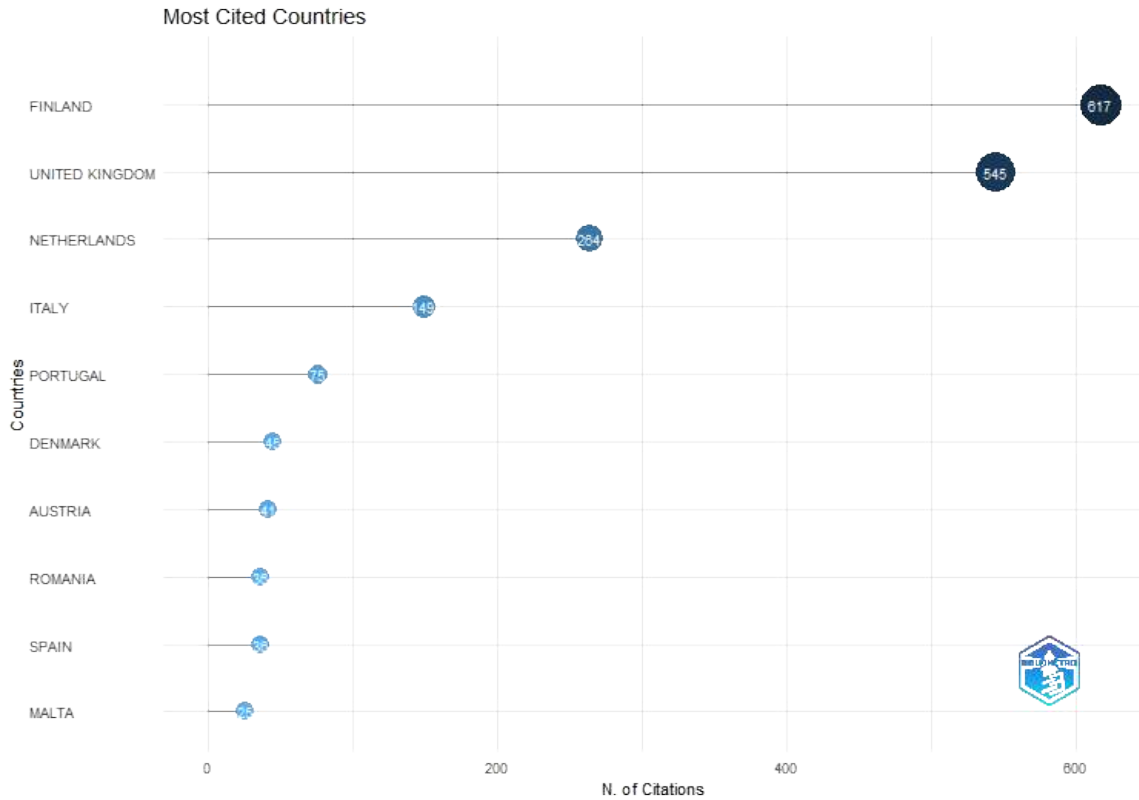


Figure 10 - Most cited countries

### Co-citation analysis

One technique for finding important literature for cross-disciplinary concepts is co-citation analysis (Trujillo & Long, 2018). Based on the supposition that every citing article has a similar viewpoint, it's utilized to comprehend the scientific specialty structure (Jeong et al., 2022). Author co-citation approach can be used to map the evolutionary structure of scientific disciplines and monitor connections between works of intellectual literature (Surwase et al., n.d.).

Co-citation analysis was done on research papers with a minimum of 5 citations using R-studio. According to Surwase et al., a paper's popularity and significance are indicated by the number of citations it receives. As a result, of the 63 papers, this criterion provides us with the most significant papers. This criterion was met by 29 articles, which were then used for analysis. Four clusters were produced and the papers were categorized based on their citations as well as their centrality and impact. Afterwards the clusters were themed.

Table 1 lists the clusters and the quantity of articles within each cluster. The names of the research papers that fall under each cluster are listed in detail in the Appendix, along with the total number of global citations and DOI of each paper.

Cluster	Themes	Number of articles in cluster
1	Advancing Circular Economy in Tourism: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Implications	10
2	Sustainable Tourism Through Circular Economy Integration	10
3	Waste Management Practices and Challenges	5
4	Sustainable Tourism: Innovations for Global Resilience and Heritage Preservation	4

Table 1 - Themes and Clusters

## DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE ANALYSIS

To effectively address sustainability issues and build resilience in the tourism sector, the adoption of circular economy principles is increasingly important. This study focuses on policy frameworks, stakeholder engagement, and longitudinal analyses to explore the integration of circular economy in tourism. Future research should monitor the long-term application and efficacy of circular economy concepts in tourism by examining sustainability practices, resource utilization trends, and environmental impacts over time. Researchers can evaluate progress and identify areas needing improvement, providing valuable insights into the evolution of circular economy practices. Additionally, analyzing various circular economy models implemented in different tourist destinations can reveal strengths and weaknesses related to stakeholder engagement, economic feasibility, and sustainability promotion. By investigating these areas, we aim to enhance sustainability and resilience in tourism and pave the way for innovative approaches that support sustainable development.

## CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

***For Q1: What is the current state of research on the integration of circular economy principles in the context of sustainable tourism?***

Through a systematic review of the body of existing literature in CE and Sustainability in tourism, this paper identified the most relevant nations and journals in the field. It was discovered that research in this area has grown rapidly over the past four years. In this field of study, the Italy published most articles, followed by Portugal and Spain. The most popular publication in this field of study is Sustainability (Switzerland), the most relevant affiliations were Qatar University and University of Salento, and most cited countries were Finland and UK.

***For Q2: What is the structure of the scientific community in the field of circular economy and sustainable tourism?***

The co-citation analysis revealed various themes that came up in the research on CE and Sustainability in tourism. Four themes were found: the concept of CE over tourism, sustainability in tourism, waste management practices and challenges, and innovating frameworks over heritage preservation. In-depth analysis of these themes was done to determine each cluster's central idea and to determine the direction of future study.

Tourism professionals are increasingly adopting circular economy principles to reduce waste, enhance resource efficiency, and support environmental sustainability, integrating digital technologies to streamline operations and emphasize stakeholder collaboration for sustainable tourism experiences. Research and development prioritize innovative solutions, while policymakers are encouraged to promote knowledge sharing, policy coherence, and incentives for sustainable practices, complemented by certification programs and educational campaigns for responsible tourism. Researchers are urged to advance research, develop measurement tools, bridge the theory-practice gap, and foster knowledge sharing, aiming to create a resilient tourism sector balancing social justice, economic growth, and environmental conservation. The study's primary limitation is its reliance on a single database, potentially omitting broader insights from other sources and unpublished documents. Additionally, the focus on specific subject areas and inclusion of only highly cited papers in the co-citation analysis may exclude recent or less-cited contributions. Future research should consider bibliographic coupling and other bibliometric tools to enhance findings, with the study's clusters further divided to uncover subconcepts, aiding the systematic application of circular economy and sustainability principles in tourism.

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## A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO MUSEUM EXPERIENCE AT THE ACROPOLIS MUSEUM OF ATHENS

**Effimia PAPAETHYMIU**

Harokopio, [epapaefthimiou@hua.gr](mailto:epapaefthimiou@hua.gr)

**Paris TSARTAS**

Harokopio, [tsartas@hua.gr](mailto:tsartas@hua.gr)

### ABSTRACT

The paper explores the essential structures of the experience at the Acropolis Museum using a phenomenological paradigm, according to the Husserlian philosophy and Giorgi's contemporary method, mainly the phenomenological reduction. The phenomenological approach through the process of the so called "epoché" helps the constitutive structures of the experience to emerge. These structures have inter-subjective features, common to the experience of all people. The research was conducted by interviewing 17 participants who have visited the museum. After traditional thematic analysis, phenomenological reduction occurred, revealing five (5) essential structures that describe the phenomenon of experiencing the Acropolis Museum: The movement in space, the symbolic movement in time, the activation of Imagination, the "real" objects, and the excess of the limitations of self. The results revealed that museum experiences may have a wide range of meanings for their visitors and provide extra tools and directions that may be useful in Tourism planning, in creating quality tourism experiences, advanced museological approaches and ways of administering museum entities. Museums are important for tourism development and tourists choose destination because of their cultural heritage sites and monuments (Huo & Miller, 2007). If the main museum "product" is the experience offered (Goodall, 1993), the future of museums depends on that (McLean, 1993). Museums will survive, if they create valuable experiences for their visitors (Middleton, 1990; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Bigné & Andreu, 2004; del Bosque & Martin, 2008; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012; Yuksel, Yuksel & Bilim, 2010; Wirtz *et al.*, 2003).

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## INTRODUCTION

What museums offer at their very essence, is an embodied experience (Roppola, 2012, p.4). Visitors work in spaces between the concrete and metaphoric, heart and mind, poetics and politics of display (Roppola, 2012, p.5). Pekarik, Doering & Karns (1999, pp.155-156), categorized the experiences of Museum visitors into object, cognitive, introspective, and social experiences. Pekarik & Mogel (2010) defined the visiting experience as an IPO (Ideas-People-Objects) experience, characterized as “edutainment”, meaning a synthesis of a learning experience and a meaningful entertainment (Combs, 1999; Perry 1989, 1993; Packer, 2008). The range of expected benefits from visiting a museum is broadened and extend to areas such as skill development, self-actualization, finding new meanings, formatting identity (Packer, 2008). Visitors use museums for "self-work", meaning processes through which the individual constructs and adapts a sense of personal identity (Rounds, 2006, pp.133-150).

The contribution of museums to the acquisition of quality of life (Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) has been particularly emphasized. Ryan & Deci (2001) understand the concept of well-being, through two approaches: the hedonic approach, which concerns the pursuit and acquisition of pleasure and happiness, and the eudaimonic approach, which concerns the acquisition of self-realization and personal development. Museums seem to contribute to that eudaimonic approach. This second approach also refers semantically to “habitus”, as described by Husserl (2001, p.104) and to more substantial and lasting changes.

Psychological well-being has been linked to faster healing of patients in hospitals, as well as increased levels of mental resilience and the development of individual coping strategies for various life adversities (Keyes, Shmotkin & Ryff, 2002; Pressman & Cohen, 2005). According to Ryff & Keyes (1995), psychological well-being consists of six parameters: autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relationships, and self-acceptance. Packer (2008) identified three types of benefits from the museum experience: psychological well-being, subjective well-being, and restoration. The museum experience has characteristics of revitalization and this is mainly due to the lack of rush and pressure during the museum visit (Packer, 2008, p.11; Packer & Ballantyne, 2002). Packer & Bond (2010, p.422) investigated the qualitative characteristics of revitalization, most of them may be experienced in museums.

Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson (1990, pp.19-25) identified four dimensions of experience: perceptual, emotional, intellectual, and communicative. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) was particularly concerned with the aesthetic experience in a museum and defined it as "Flow experience" which is a self-contained experience with high awareness, in which the person is fully and deeply involved in an activity. Latham (2007) approached this type of experience phenomenologically and called it “Transcendental” experience.

Visitors nowadays are seeking for holistic and time-resistant personal experiences that combine emotions, sensations and meaning (Hosany & Witham, 2010). Museums traditionally have functioned as custodians of culture and as a source of knowledge and research for experts (Radder & Han, 2015). However, museum visitors are gradually asking for experiences enable them to feel, to learn, to interact, rather than just “being there” (Mehmetoglou & Engen, 2011). The demand for a deeper experience of "there" is constantly growing (Trinh & Ryan, 2013, p.241), making it clear that museums’ administration needs to embrace a new management focusing to interactive experiences for visitors (Arnould & Price, 1993; Rentschler, 2007) expecting to obtain visual, aesthetic, recreational, educational, social, joyful, fascinating aspects (Kelly, 2004).

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The philosophical movement that deals with experience is Phenomenology. The phenomenological reduction that Husserl proposed in the beginning of the 20th century seeks to



reach, beyond the emotions and other psychological states and beliefs, the realm of pure consciousness, where phenomena take place and find out the essential structures of experience, which make it " what it is" (Pelegrinis, 2005, p.322; Husserl, 2012, p.116; Zahavi, 2010, p.92).

Phenomena reduced in their essence acquire an inter-subjective character, which means that features of catholic value are emerged, common to the experience of all people. Phenomenology is therefore the theory of substances, of the universal structures of pure phenomena (Husserl, 2012; Zahavi, 2010; Husserl, 2020).

Cogito is based on philosophical views. In other words, epistemological issues referring to how new knowledge is produced, have ontological basis, which means certain philosophical points of view (Kamal, 2019; Kivunja & Kujini, 2017; Hughes, 2010; Fraser & Robinson, 2004; Guba, 1990). Phenomenological research focuses on the experiencing subject and knowledge derives from this study (Crotty, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). This form of research explores and describes how all kinds of phenomena are "offered" to the subject's consciousness and how a person perceives them (Moustakas, 1994; Roberts, 2013). Phenomenology is a process of letting go (bracketing the elements of "natural attitude") and permitting the essence to appear (Schmidt, 2016).

According to Hummel (1990), phenomenology nowadays has become a significant research paradigm to every field of management. Thus, phenomenological research allows the holistic understanding of the experience within the various organizations, museums as well and the evaluation of the management practices that are applied (Anosike, *et al.*, 2012).

## **METHODOLOGY**

For the data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted to 17 participants who had the experience of visiting the Acropolis Museum. The questions of the interview were about the strengths and weaknesses of the experience at the Acropolis Museum, about what changes the informants would suggest for the experience to be more fascinating and what were the sources of satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction regarding their experience of the Museum. Finally, they were asked about the features of a quality and memorable experience in a museum. After traditional thematic analysis, phenomenological reduction has occurred to define the essentials structures of the phenomenon.

Since the end of the 20th century, modern phenomenological methodologies constitute a new research paradigm, having in common the following principles: 1. Phenomenology as their philosophical foundation, 2. The understanding of experience from the point of view of the subject, 3. Thematic analysis with creativity and "fresh" look, after phenomenological reduction, 5. The ability to generalize conclusions based on inter-subjectivity (Gill, 2014; Giorgi, 1985, 2008; van Manen, 1989; Moustakas, 1994). Traditional methods are no longer satisfactory and a constantly increasing body of researchers calling for innovative approaches to Tourism, is more than apparent (Hollinshead, 2006).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

After the phenomenological reduction and reflection on thematic categories, the essential structures of the experience at Acropolis Museum were figured out as subsequently:

### *1. The movement in space*

The first structural element of the visiting experience is the proximity of the Museum to the rock of the Acropolis, giving visitors the ability to have access to the rock and move easily in the wider area of the ancient monuments. It was also stressed the importance of keeping constant visual contact with Acropolis and Parthenon Temple, through the large glass surfaces of the museum.

Inside the museum, thanks to certain architectural choices, visitors move in ways that bear resemblances to the movements made by citizens of ancient Athens in the adjacent monuments and

the rock of Acropolis, as they had to ascend the marble stairs up to Propylaia (enter gates), to reach Acropolis. The large-scale ascent leading to the first floor of the Acropolis Museum resembles that ascent to Acropolis.

Already from the ground floor, in the foundations of the building, visitors have the opportunity to see the remains of an archaic neighborhood of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C, in an open excavation pit. Participants joyfully stressed the chance to walk on metal bridges that stretch over the ruins, as if they were the inhabitants of this ancient area. It has also been referred by the key-informants, the significance of “dialogue” between the upper floor of the Museum with the temple of Parthenon, through the parallelism of the axes of the two entities. A participant has mentioned that he felt like “entering to history”.

On the first level of the museum, the sculptures are spread out having different directions, the way authentically were posed on the rock of Acropolis. Visitors can move between the sculptures and see them all around. The interior of the museum, thanks to the wide use of glass on floors and walls that replace solid surfaces, is illuminated by natural sunlight, “giving” the objects to the visitors’ perception, in the same light that surrounded them in their position in ancient temples.

The body and the movement in the museum space are essential for the perception of the experience. Every object “gives” itself to the perception of embodied beings - the visitors-, that move in the space. The body constitutes the necessary condition for perception and interaction with the objects in space, but also every -in the world- experience is mediated and made possible by the physicality of the perceiver (Zahavi, 2010, p.199). Perception constructs its experiences with the mobility of the body as a pre-condition. Also, the gaze of visitors is not static, but moving and rotating, making kinesthetic consciousness necessary for a satisfying perception of the objects (Zahavi, 2010, p.200). In a different and smaller space, with another distribution of the exhibits, with another lighting, the experience would not be the same. Acropolis Museum does not only house the exhibits; it becomes part of experiencing them.

## *2. The symbolic movement in time*

At the Acropolis Museum visitors have the experience of different historical periods at the same time. The participants mentioned that they are in the present, looking to the past and perhaps envisioning the future. They are in a modern architecture building, overlooking the ancient temples on the opposite rock and that has been mentioned like “a shock” by a participant because of the huge chronological gap between these periods. Some of the visitors were led to thoughts about the origin of many elements of their own culture, such as the neoclassical architecture in the large public and state buildings of the western world, meaning a movement back to time, to their origins.

However, several participants expressed the view, that there should be references to the history of the monument after the ancient period, e.g. in the Byzantine period and the modern historical times. Questions were raised about the “before” and “after” of the monuments and their cultural context. It would also be interesting, according to the informants, to be explored what cultural elements have survived through the centuries and are “alive” or can be found transformed in modern Greek culture. It was stressed the quest for cultural continuity of the museum narratives and the need to perceive time as a three dimensional, past-present-future, concept.

Phenomenological concept of time, make it easier to understand the tendency of visitors to perceive temporality as a continuum that starts from the past, reaches the present and “opens a window” to the future, as time sequence is an essential structure of consciousness of inner time, where everything is experienced, as a “flow” of sequential time moments. According to that, visitors seek for continuity and need to understand the evolutionary path cultural expressions have followed because their consciousness is structured this way. Time “jumps” or gaps, have even physical symptoms to the visitors, as in the case of the participant who mentioned that he “felt dizzy”, seeing so many ancient objects inside such a modern building, precisely because the time between the museum objects and the building hosting them, expands over several centuries. It has

been mentioned by other scholars that museums pull distant pasts and other presents or futures indeed, into the “now” of their buildings and their visitors (Walklate, 2023).

### 3. *The activation of imagination*

The movement of visitors inside the museum in a way that resembles to the way that ancient Greeks moved when climbing the rock of the Acropolis, aims to activate the imagination of visitors, through a kinesthetic perception. The assistance of the imagination is a prerequisite for the evaluation of architectural and other planning, aiming at a more substantial experience, with kinesthetic consciousness (Zahavi, 2010, p.199).

Participants emphasized the privilege to see the objects *in vivo* without the interposition of showcases or other dividers and to move around them in most cases. At the same time, they use their imagination to deal with the absences, the missing whole, either because the ancient sculptures are damaged, - sometimes whole pieces are missing or the colors once the marbles had, are totally worn-, or because large parts of the frieze of Parthenon, have been replaced by molds.

According to Husserl, even when supervising the object, some aspects remain invisible or are absent and for this reason, any perception implies an over-interpretation and goes beyond the obvious (Zahavi, 2010, p.193). One of the intentional doings of consciousness is the imagination that allows a kind of perception of the whole, despite the obstacle of the missing parts.

In K. Latham’s research (2014) about what made a painting "authentic" and "true", according to a participant it was his ability to imagine that he was climbing the mountain depicted in the painting, using his imagination. These formulations contain important information revealing that sometimes it is not only the “realness” of a museum object that makes it “real”, but also the different imaginative approaches by the viewers. These approaches reveal the formation of personal experiences that contain emotions, meaning and value. The object acquires its truth, through the psycho-spiritual approach of its viewer and therefore the meanings are not embedded in the objects but are projections of the intentionality of consciousness of the person perceiving them.

Imagination is the conscious energy that enables visitor to transcend the momentary "now" so that he/she can perceive what is happening here and now, but can also imagine what is not happening now, or has not yet happened (Zahavi, 2010, p.167).

### 4. *The "real" objects*

An essential feature of the Acropolis Museum experience is the "real objects". Almost all the participants mentioned the great importance of the authenticity of the exhibits, the possibility of close contact with very famous works of art, such as the Caryatids. One participant found that the position where the Caryatids have been placed is disproportionate to the importance of the exhibit and the space around them is narrow. Many of the exhibits are very popular and visitors experience the joy of seeing them naturally, because until that very moment they knew the objects, only through the various representations of them. In the museum experience, the objects are given directly, authentically and optimally, because they allow the visitor to supervise. Supervision is the one that adds the purposeful fullness to the object and the one that makes the visitor possess new knowledge (Zahavi, 2010, p.70). When the object is offered supervisingly, its essential “truth” is revealed (Zahavi, 2010, p.73).

In research conducted by K. Latham (2015) following a phenomenological methodology and having as unique question: “How people experience the contact with “real” objects in the museum space and what impact does this contact have on people's perception of the role and purpose of museums in society”, it has been defined how important “real” objects are (Latham, 2015, p.2). People relate more easily to what they already know and what made objects “real” to the research participants was their ability to “relate” with them in some way, as for example through their childhood memories (Latham 2015, p.7). Little empirical research has been done on what visitors perceive as “true” in museums and even less on the phenomenological aspects of the museum experience (Latham & Wood, 2009).

### 5. Exceeding the limitations of self

Finally, essential element of the experience at the Acropolis Museum, is the feeling, most of the participants experienced, that they belong to “something bigger”, something that contains them and make them feel they are stretching out in time, transcending their limited existence. Thus, the transcendence of the individual and concrete towards something higher, lasting, ecstatic, and universal is evident again. The surprise is about living something, that one “does not expect and yet it happens”, according to participants testimony. The appropriation of elements of experience, at the time of the visit, helps to give meaning to the experience itself and a sense of meaning in life, despite the human mortality. Many participants mentioned that they felt as if they were part of a “larger whole”, something that helped them to feel part of humanity.

The results are in agreement with other studies that, regardless national origin, persons participate in ecstatic experiences that are liberating, precisely because they transcend ego and help visitors to go beyond their bounded lifeworld (Roberts, 2013). Tourism as a phenomenon, enables the various populations to “re-imagine” and realize themselves, findings that reveal the wide range of interpretive possibilities that Tourism studies need to meet (Hollinshead, 2004c, p.34; Budd & Velasquez, 2014). As Roberts (2013, p.98) has mentioned: “Museums offer connection with the human yearning to stretch beyond the edges of one’s own life and to extend the world of possibilities”. In Latham’s research (2015), many participants mentioned that they experienced this feeling of enlargement and expansion in time and space.

In conclusion, the experience of the Acropolis Museum, due to the location of the Museum, the architectural choices adopted, the manner of exhibition and the uniqueness of the objects, offers visitors a revealing approach to many aspects of the ancient Greek world. Experience is a combination of sensory intake and mental processing, and the sensory side should not be underestimated. The sunlight, the landscape colors, as well as the ability to move inside the museum and outside to the wider ancient area, consist essential structures of the experience.

The museum responds to the heightened expectations of visitors that are not limited to mere knowledge and entertainment but extend to achieving deeper self-awareness and existential pursuits. As museums become the places that hold the question of “being” in the world (Roberts, 2013) the phenomenological approaches can provide valuable guidance for museum directors in developing the experience they offer to visitors (Smith, 2004; Budd & Velasquez, 2014). The conclusions may improve the effectiveness of the promotion of Greek culture, which requires strategic planning and the ability to evaluate the specific characteristics of each sector involved in Tourism and the experiences that are offered to visitors.

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**CREATIVE INDUSTRIES, CREATIVE TOURISM  
& SUSTAINABILITY PERSPECTIVES:  
THE CASE STUDY OF TRADITIONAL POTTERY-MAKING IN CRETE**

**Eirini PAPADAKI**

Department of Business Administration and Tourism, School of Management Sciences and Economics, Hellenic Mediterranean University, IoanniAthitaki Str., Estavromenos, Heraklion Crete, [eirpapadaki@hmu.gr](mailto:eirpapadaki@hmu.gr)

**Alexandros APOSTOLAKIS**

Hellenic Mediterranean University, [a.apostolakis@hmu.gr](mailto:a.apostolakis@hmu.gr)

**Efthymia Nefeli KONSTANTINIDOU**

Hellenic Mediterranean University, [dt20465@edu.hmu.gr](mailto:dt20465@edu.hmu.gr)

**Paraskevi PAPADOPOULOU**

Hellenic Mediterranean University, [dt20104@edu.hmu.gr](mailto:dt20104@edu.hmu.gr)

**Georgios GOURNIS**

Hellenic Mediterranean University, [dt20395@edu.hmu.gr](mailto:dt20395@edu.hmu.gr)

**Charilaos PLAKOU**

Hellenic Mediterranean University, [dt20090@edu.hmu.gr](mailto:dt20090@edu.hmu.gr)

**ABSTRACT**

The paper examines the case study of traditional pottery-making in Crete as an example of creative tourism that can offer differentiated experiences to tourists. Crete is a Greek island broadly known for its history, tourism infrastructure and services, a famous and well-promoted destination that attracts sea-side mass tourism from many European countries and worldwide. Pottery making is one of the traditional hand crafting activities in Crete, finding its roots back to the Minoan civilization. It will be studied in this paper as an opportunity to encourage creative tourism in the island, inspire tourist creative routes and networks and offer the notion of “creative villages” as an alternative to over-crowded Cretan resorts and as one path towards more sustainable tourism. There were many ceramic centers in Crete, but the biggest remaining centers with a long-lasting tradition in the art of pottery are Thrapsano in Heraklion prefecture, Margarites in Rethimno, Nohia in Chania and Kentri in Agios Nikolaos prefecture.

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The value of the specific research is two-dimensional. For the tourism market, it highlights the tourists' increasing demand for creativity initiatives and showcases the need for networking and coordination between local authorities, tourist businesses and the artists, in order to satisfy such demand and at the same time find a way towards sustainable tourism in the island. For the scientific community, it provides some interesting data on creativity practices at a well-known mass tourism destination and underlines that such practices—if embraced by a well-designed strategy—may be the answer to the tourists' contemporary needs granted by the tourism genre.

**Keywords:** Creative Industries, pottery-making, Cretan villages, traditional handcrafting, creative tourism, sustainable tourism

## INTRODUCTION

We use the term “creative village” to indicate a village that hosts one or more creative industries or where one or more cultural events are organized. In this framework, we see the Cretan “potters’ villages” Thrapsano and Margarites as characteristic examples of “creative villages”. The notion of “creative villages” is used in this paper as an alternative to over-crowded Cretan resorts, an opportunity for the development of creative tourism in small traditional villages and as one path towards more sustainable tourism.

Crete as an archetypal mass tourist destination is experiencing serious environmental problems, all associated with heightened tourism activity (water shortages, waste management etc.). Easing up tourism pressure away from coastal tourism hotspots could alleviate such pressures. At the same time, pottery-making activities are not energy and resource demanding, so they are less damaging to the natural environment both during their production and their use. The jars made in Thrapsano are made by water and earth from the village, fired at a furnace and are used mainly as flower pots, instead of the plastic mass-produced planters and window-boxes.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *Creative tourism*

As a new genre in tourism or rather a more participatory form of cultural tourism, creative tourism has inspired contemporary scientific writings and has been the subject of sessions or even themes of scientific conferences and journals worldwide. Its nature and economic dimensions have been examined in various frameworks, geographical areas and differentiated communities, with or without established bonds to the tourism industry. The potential of creative tourism for the growth of the local communities that host cultural and creative industries or creative associations has started to be researched and/or strategically designed and communicated.

Creative industries, associations and actors in traditional handcrafting are among the bodies that have been connected to creative tourism and have been given a significant place in the tourism ecosystem. The authors argue that such bodies/actors seem to satisfy travelers' three contemporary needs: the need to participate and interact with the visited community, the desire to discover the local tradition and differentiating aspects of the destination—the so-called “authenticity” of the visited places—and the need to show their concern and care for sustainability issues in the tourism sector and the world in general.

The personalized tourism experiences offered by creative bodies are one of contemporary tourists' motives, as they search for participatory experiences in the destination. The opportunities offered to visitors “to develop their creative potential through an engaged experience in the destination visited” (Qiang and Kovacs, 2023: 1) guarantees tourists' increased level of involvement, making them “active” in the visited community. “Tourists develop their creativities

through participation and engagement in the learning experience that is characteristic of local destinations” (Li and Gareth, 2022: 199). According to Malisiova and Kostopoulou (2023), cultural associations can be seen as “authentic associations” related to local culture and tradition. This makes them crucial elements of the uniqueness and identity of the destination and can be seen—as the paper will highlight—as local hidden treasures discovered almost by chance or by thorough research by the visitors. Lastly, creative tourism can be seen as an alternative path towards more sustainable tourism (Korez-Vide, 2013; Lim 2016; Duxbury et al, 2021; Remoaldo et al, 2022).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *The methodological tools*

The methodological tools used for the collection of the research data included field work research and structured observation in two of the currently most prominent centers of pottery on the island, namely the villages of Thrapsano and Margarites. Data was collected through interviews with pottery artists and presidents of ceramic associations, as well as hotel owners, local people and tourists in the area at the time of our visit.

Additional data was collected by digital ethnography tools, as the research team recorded and studied the presence and visibility of the villages, the pottery workshops and the hotels of the area in the digital semiosphere. Specific websites and accounts in social media were studied and visitors’ comments in these accounts, as well as in big tourists’ platforms such as TripAdvisor were recorded, in an attempt to find information on the way the tourists perceive the pottery-making experiences offered by the villages of our study. In addition, the villages’ hashtags and pottery workshops’ names guided the research team into shaping the digital image of the pottery villages in Crete. All the data collected were examined by discourse and content analysis tools in order to find the main patterns and schemata communicated.

### *The villages of Thrapsano & Margarites*

Thrapsano is a well-known village in Crete, especially among older people, because of the “vendema” tradition, which was the seasonal movement of potters from Thrapsano to nearby cities and villages in order to create and sell jars. The village is directly linked to pottery, as the Thrapsianians are to this day known for their jars, which are said to be made following the Minoan techniques. Pottery making in Greece is estimated to be a craft around 8000 years old, developed by the Minoans and faithfully continued by the Thrapsianians. Since the “vendemas” ’s stop during the 1960s, pottery in Crete is created in ceramic workshops. Most of the residents in the village of Thrapsano are engaged in pottery making. The Thrapsanian jars are nowadays used for decoration, mainly as flower pots. Margarites is a village rich in clay soil and water, which explains the long-lasting occupation of the inhabitants with clay. The streets of the village are filled with colorful clay decorations hanging out of windows or placed on the outer walls of the houses. There is a Ceramics Museum at the central square of the village, with a large collection of traditional ceramic items. There are 19 pottery workshops—many of which also function as exhibition spaces and/or shops—working in the village nowadays and 23 potters who continue to create clay objects for everyday use, as well as decorative items.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table 1 illustrates the numerous distinctions and parallelschemata found in the production and marketing strategies of the two villages of the study. Potters in Thrapsano are interested in preserving the traditional craft that dates back to the Minoan period, while potters in Margarites

wish to expand their art, adhere to contemporary ceramic artforms, and draw attention from tourists and passersby by creating not only functional but also eye-catching, colorful decorative items, even if their creations are not made following the traditional techniques and practices. This distinction can be seen starting from the fact that potters in Thrapsano define themselves as “technicians”, while potters in Margarites consider themselves as “artists”. All the practices chosen, either by the potters themselves, local residents and tourists alike, are influenced and shaped in relation to this distinction. Art looks towards the future, it should be creative, innovative, even pioneering, sometimes breaking the ground. Tradition, on the other hand, holds strong to the past, while it dynamically adjusts to the needs and values of contemporary society.

When it comes to internet communication, for example, Thrapsanian potters appear to be more organized, as they use digital channels—mostly websites—to get orders from enterprises housed abroad, while many Margarites’ potters believe that such communication flows are unneeded and even detrimental because they believe it could commercialize their artworks. The research highlighted that the two villages’ online presence on the websites of government entities is similarly shaped. Margarites village is also advertised by numerous travel agencies. Despite taking distinct digital routes, a large number of images are shared in both villages’ digital environments. For example, foreign pottery shops and visiting professional potters promote Thrapsanian pottery through social media posts. Margarites’ pottery images are digitally distributed by tourists through selfies posted on social media. These are usually images that show tourists either in front of the village’s pottery-decorated walls or participating in the process of making pottery. These posts—made by tourists in what seems to be a spontaneous act of sharing their experiences in the visited place with their online friends/followers—are considered as strong communication messages, as are received as filter-less, innocent representations of past instances. The emojis and textual messages written underneath such images usually state the destination and highlight the tourists’ appreciation for the place, as well as their feelings while being there. Social media users have the opportunity to review their friends’ travelogues (Forouzandeh, Rostami & Berahmand, 2022). According to Sotiriadis, M. D. (2017), social media has developed into a potent social instrument for online communications since it allows travelers to express their opinions and remark on their travel experiences. Travelers can now access virtually infinite travel information provided by other travelers by leveraging technology (Amaro, S., P. Duarte and C. Henriques 2016) as social media is an important information source that influences tourists’ travel choices (Liu, Mehraliyev, Liu, & Schuckert, 2019).

Every pottery studio in the two villages has long-term customers, who keep re-visiting the villages—physically or digitally—to buy pottery. Margarites’ potters mostly sell directly to consumers—tourists, passersby and people traveling to the village to buy ceramic items—whereas Thrapsanian potters use a business-to-business approach. Thrapsanian creations are usually purchased by businesses that sell pottery abroad or hotels and restaurants in Crete that wish to have jars as traditional decorations in the outer spaces of their properties.

In terms of the relationship to tourism, the findings indicate that visitors prefer Margarites as a travel destination. The causes are clearly not communicational, or effective marketing techniques, as was previously mentioned. The primary factors influencing the tourists’ decision-making appear to be the villages’ geographic location, the size of pottery objects produced in each village, the availability of tourist facilities and services, as well as the relationships and patterns of cooperation established between the potters in each village and the official local authorities. Placing the hamlet in a tourism cultural route, as the Margarites case illustrates, appears to boost the number of visitors to the community. Being close to an archaeological site (Ancient Eleftherna) and an important historic landmark of Crete (Arcadi Monastery), Margarites village has turned into a place where cultural tourists that wish to see the two above-mentioned sights make a short stop. In addition to that, the size, attractiveness and small cost of the ceramic goods created by

potters in Margarites make them ideal mementos or souvenirs for visitors. These objects can be used in everyday activities or function as decoration items in one's home. One can find miniatures of traditional Cretan jars, small or larger kitchen utensils, objects in the shape of the island of Crete and even ceramic souvenir classics, like magnets or keyrings. They are cheap, colorful and beautifully crafted objects that can fit in any suitcase and go anywhere, reminding one of his/her trip to Crete. Such small objects can travel back to the tourist's country of residence, conveying the genuineness and "aura" of Crete.

The amenities and services provided by Margarites entice visitors to extend their stay. The research team also had conversations with visitors who came to Margarites for lunch or a quick weekend getaway in the mountains and purchased ceramics as a souvenir of their journey. The potters' collaboration and synergy appear to be essential to the village's effective marketing. If a potter cannot help a tourist, if, for example, he/she does not make items such as they one requested, he/she suggests another potter that does, or has storage of the requested items. The most important factor for promoting creative tourism, however, is the possibilities for tourists' engagement with the creative process, generously offered in Margarites. Pottery workshops in Margarites village are always open to the public and many potters work on spot, letting passersby gaze at them and watch the procedure of making a ceramic object. Many pottery workshops offer classes to tourists.

	<b>Thrapsano</b>	<b>Margarites</b>
<b>No of workshops</b>	16 pottery workshops	19 pottery workshops/shops/exhibition spaces
<b>Workers</b>	50 "technicians"	23 "artists"
<b>Techniques</b>	mostly traditional techniques	traditional & contemporary techniques
<b>Creations</b>	jars, flower pots, fountains, small vases	kitchen & decoration items
<b>Size</b>	large traditional items	small items to fit in suitcases, adjusted to tourists' needs & contemporary art movements
<b>Customers</b>	sell abroad (80%)	sell to tourists & some shops in Crete
<b>Target audiences</b>	permanent clients, businesses (b2b)	permanent clients & passersby (b2c)
<b>Competitors</b>	mass produced plastic items	mass produced decorative items
<b>Succession</b>	new technicians when needed, small number of young people wish to learn	art passes from generation to generation, sons & daughters bring new techniques & creative ideas to the industry
<b>Tourism</b>	no tourism	overcrowded during summer
<b>Infrastructure</b>	no tourism infrastructure & services	many accommodation properties, restaurants, shops
<b>Properties</b>	2 abnb properties, few customers (mostly families)	many accommodation properties (families & groups)
<b>Synergies</b>	lack of synergies & cooperation schemes	many synergies, all work together
<b>Organized tourist packages</b>	wish for development with the new airport & school	organized tours (lunch stop in Margarites)
<b>Open workshops</b>	for organized visits (e.g., schools)	engage tourists with the creation process
<b>Seal/signature</b>	seal on jars	handmade signature
<b>Digital presence</b>	all have digital presence, digital visibility in official bodies' websites	50% on line, the others don't want or feel that they need to, digital visibility in official bodies' & many tourist agencies websites
<b>Interaction</b>	a few comments, no mention of pottery	many comments, only a few mention pottery
<b>Circulation of images</b>	big circulation of digital images, mostly from businesses and foreign potters	big circulation of digital images, mostly selfies from tourists in the village, some picturing engagement practices
<b>Income</b>	pottery as main income	many potters have second jobs
<b>Cultural Association</b>	cultural events & festivals as promotion mechanisms	concern for sustainability issues, due to overcrowded periods
<b>UNESCO</b>	UNESCO Index of Intangible Cultural	in the process of being added to the UNESCO

Index	Heritage	Index
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Thrapsanian pottery creations are also related to tourism in Crete, as they have started to be promoted as an inseparable object of the Cretan traditional identity image. Seen in the outer space of almost every traditional Cretan house in every village and recently in many luxurious hotels and restaurants on the island, the Thrapsanian jars remind tourists of the inseparable bond of Crete with the Minoan civilization and prove cultural sustainability in practice. In order to be placed on the tourist map of Crete, however, Thrapsano should embrace certain creative strategies: the potters and the Cultural Association should cooperate with official local authorities, propose cultural routes, create infrastructure and offer tourist services. Most importantly, potters in Thrapsano should develop initiatives for tourists' engagement; open their workshops, accept guests and create pottery with them. This strategy would help their pottery survive and simultaneously redirect tourist flows in Crete, resulting in both sustainable culture and sustainable tourism in the island.

## CONCLUSION

The value of the specific research is two-dimensional. For the tourism market, it highlights the tourists' increasing demand for creativity initiatives and showcases the need for networking and coordination between local authorities, tourist businesses and the artists, in order to satisfy such demand and at the same time find a way towards sustainable tourism in the island. For the scientific community, it provides some interesting data on creativity practices at a well-known mass tourism destination and underlines that such practices—if embraced by a well-designed strategy—may be the answer to the tourists' contemporary needs granted by the tourism genre.

Furthermore, the paper aims to operate as a blueprint for improving sustainable production practices among local cultural and creative industry stakeholders. In particular, the paper maintains that in order for local producers and other stakeholders to cope with both increased levels of competition, as well as the ever-evolving tourists' preferences, they have to find ways to network, and coordinate their actions. Tourists are driven by highly authentic, unique and tailor-made experiences. This means that local stakeholders would have to identify ways to bolster the “glo-cal” nature of their offerings to the demanding tourist. Doing so, the paper also contributes towards supporting local entrepreneurship practices and initiatives and in the long term the sustainability of a century-long cultural production mechanism and the Minoan evolved Cretan jars.

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## **OPEN SCHOOLING IN HERITAGE, TOURISM AND SUSTAINABILITY: STAR PATHS TO MYTHOLOGY: ASTROTURISM, A NEW FORM OF TOURISM**

### **CHRYSOULA SAMAKA**

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki,  
[chrysamaka@gmail.com](mailto:chrysamaka@gmail.com)  
 +30 6936774738

### **ELENI MAVRAGANI**

Assistant Professor, University of Macedonia,  
 Egnatias 156, Thessaloniki, 54636, Greece  
[mavragani@uom.edu.gr](mailto:mavragani@uom.edu.gr)  
 +30 2310891625

### **ABSTRACT**

During the last years, there has been growing interest in Green tourism, due to its direct connection to the rapidly developing sustainable tourism. New kinds of tourism are arising, with an orientation towards the awareness of the need to care for nature. The main focus of this paper is on a new form of tourism, namely astrotourism. Astrotourism is closely linked to our respect for nature and its sustainability. It constitutes a subcategory of nature or ecotourism since it focuses on the night sky as a resource, as well as the active rural tourism with a variety of combined activities.

The occurrence of tourist products related to astrotourism could provide an opportunity for new solutions towards the deseasonalization of the tourist sector while linking the development of sustainable tourism to science. This paper aims to examine astrotourism as a form of tourism of special interest, its presence and availability in Greece, its potential in demand and prospects, as well as the possible ways that can enhance its development, by suggesting a pioneering developmental idea. Secondary research has been conducted in bibliography, mainly through online sources and official websites of national and international organizations. Within the context of the primary research, the chosen methodology was to conduct semi structured interviews for the elicitation of responses to the research questions and the collection of information about the proposed idea. One limitation of the research, was the lack of information for the clarification of the definition of astrotourism, due to the absence of relevant in-depth research conducted by academics, despite the continuous development and increase in popularity of astrotourism in different countries around the world. In addition, during data collection, it was found that only few relevant publications are available in Greek literature and that there has been no reference on behalf of the Ministry of Tourism about the official applied institutional framework.

**Keywords:** astrotourism, stargazing, , astrology, alternative forms of tourism.

## INTRODUCTION

According to Akoglanis (2011), touristic behavior is shaped by various factors, such as personal, social, political, financial, and physical characteristics as well as traveling experience . This can lead to the development of new forms of tourism. Special interest tourism was developed to offer tourists a personalized experience by breaking new ground in areas of special interest and offering specialized infrastructure (Patterson 2004 & Rodriguez 2004 Douglas & Derrett 2001).

The preoccupation with the night sky and the observation of stellar objects and phenomena, constitutes a cornerstone of our heritage, which is also closely linked with the environment. This kind of observation has always been at the center of our attention, coming from our need to explore the unknown or to understand the laws of physics that rule the universe. Ptolemy and Heiberg (1898) claimed that astronomy is a science with a positive effect on people, and can bring them closer to their personality and the concept of kindness . According to Sagan (1994), before we invented civilization, our ancestors lived mainly outdoors, under the open sky Before we devised artificial lights, atmospheric pollution, and modern forms of nocturnal entertainment, we watched the stars. There were practical reasons, such as creating calendars, but there was more to it than that. This interest in astronomy has had profound implications for science, philosophy, religion, culture, and our general conception of the universe (UNESCO 2005).

Although astrotourism is a relatively new concept in Greece, some businesses and groups have developed it professionally or voluntarily. Apart from education and knowledge, astrotourism can also offer experiences with powerful emotions and a great impact on our personality. A touristic business can ensure its development and availability, and reduce its cost by employing cooperations and original applications. Astrotourism can boost the local economy if applied entrepreneurially (Cole 2015). According to John Barentine (2020) of the International Dark-Sky Association, astrotourism is the touristic activity, which includes the observation of the night sky, the interaction with nature in a broader context and ecotourism, or visiting facilities related to astronomy (<https://darksky.org/>).

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Many researchers have pointed out a shift in the preference of travelers toward a more sustainable form of tourism (Andriotis 2003). The form of gentle and sustainable tourism referred to as alternative tourism, is starting to attract more and more interest from customers, businesses, and investors (Apostolopoulos & Sdrali 2009). The development of such forms of tourism, is mentioned as a counteract against the negative impact of the massive arrival of tourists, some examples of which would be the excessive environmental burden and the loss of cultural authenticity (Andriotis 2002). To sum up, alternative tourism is characterized by respect for the environment and the connection with the local populations (Smith 2011). Travelers are in search of experiences that offer added value and original memories. The recognition of the value of experiences created new opportunities in the tourism sector and can contribute to its financial growth.

Additionally, it promotes the development of experiential tourism (Stamboulis & Skayannis 2003). Specifically, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), astrotourism provides stellar observation activities, in areas with clear skies and minimal artificial lighting, thus contributing to the discovery and appreciation of the beauty of the universe as well as our knowledge of the astronomical world. Another important explanatory is, that it is perfectly reasonable to associate celestial objects with the heritage and development of culture (Fayos-Solá et al 2014).

The above-mentioned definitions of astrotourism, mainly focus on the observation of the constellation by utilizing the clear night sky as the main resource, and by incorporating scientific, environmental, and cultural activities (Fayos Solá et al 2014). It focuses on the observation and evaluation of stellar bodies and phenomena (Weaver 2011), and brings visitors closer to nature (Fayos-Solá et al 2014), by offering a form of ecotourism (Weaver 2011 · Najafabadi 2012).

The definition of astrotourism remains unclear and has not been defined in detail yet by other researchers. Nevertheless, this paper attempts to approach the definition that demonstrates astrotourism as "a special form of tourism, that includes a wide range of activities providing life-changing experience through stargazing, knowledge, and history of celestial objects and phenomena " (Samaka 2023, p30).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research aims to study a form of alternative tourism, the astrotourism, to explore its potential for development and its possible demand, and to define the requirements in infrastructure. In addition, a model for new initiatives/activities for its further domestic development will be presented.

The research methodology tool chosen was to conduct secondary research with a systematic investigation of bibliography at reputable sources (academic articles, theses, papers, books) by online search, using keywords and without any date restrictions, as well as research and statistical data coming from domestic and international organizations. In addition, to have an holistic approach to the matter, primary qualitative research was also carried out, using semi-structured interviews that included closed and open questions for an in-depth and better understanding of interviewee views and experiences.

The table below shows the thematic angles and research questions included, to provide a targeted approach for the data collection and analysis.

### Thematic aims

- Views and attitudes relevant to astrotourism developmental



- Astrotourism in Greece – availability and demand
- Methods and areas for its development – Natural resources – Suitability of climatic changes
- Development practices
- Target groups – motivation and special interest
- Stargazing
- Combination of forms of tourism of special interest

#### Research questions

- a. Is the development of the form of tourism under discussion observed?
- b. Is the demand for the form of tourism under discussion observed?
- c. Is Greece suitable for the development of astrotourism?
- d. Is there a variety of natural resources, required for its development?
- e. What are some possible methods to develop astrotourism in Greece?

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before the presentation of the outcome of the interviews, it would be useful to provide specific examples of the development of astrotourism at an international level, coming from information collected through research.

North Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia, Siberia, Canada, and Alaska, in the north, and New Zealand and Antarctica in the south, are some of the areas that attract visitors wishing to enjoy views of the Aurora Borealis, a remarkable stellar phenomenon that can be observed near and at the poles of Earth. Kasbah Hotel in Morocco, near the Sahara desert, offers its visitors the possibility to use amateur telescopes for astrophotography and observation from the roof of the hotel SaharaSky, in the absence of light pollution (<http://www.saharasky.net/hotel>). In America, the World Astrotourism Index for 2022, which was posted on Go-Astronomy.com, (<https://www.go-astronomy.com/astrotourism.htm>) promotes astrotourism by providing a full list of planetariums, observatories, space technology factories, and dark-sky parks throughout all states of America. Specifically, in Arizona, the community of Starizona, holds stargazing events and star parties for the audience, promoting not only the science of astronomy but also astrotourism. (<https://starizona.com/>).

In Europe, Małopolska district in southeastern Poland, promotes astrotourism on their website, by listing all observatories in the country. ([https://visitmalopolska.pl/en\\_GB/-/skad-najblizej-do-kosmosu-astroturystyka-w-malopolsce](https://visitmalopolska.pl/en_GB/-/skad-najblizej-do-kosmosu-astroturystyka-w-malopolsce)). At the same time, in Cyprus, a project by the name "Astrotourism" was launched, with the aim to create and optimize an innovative product in Cyprus (<https://astrotourismcyprus.com/>). Through this project, a schedule is set up for the tracking of the ideal places for stargazing, certified by the International Dark Sky Organization (IDA). (<https://darksky.org/>). This project also involves the creation of astrotouristic parks, the certification of different areas with the DarkSky certificate, and the creation of touristic packages that aim to promote the cultivation of environmental responsibility, under the umbrella of sustainable tourism.

As far as the primary research is concerned, the sample chosen initially consisted of specialists in tourism and stargazing. The goal of these interviews was to retrieve information about their views and experiences on the research queries, as well as their approach to the matter. With regards to the first query, about the presence of astrotourism in Greece, most of the participants replied that it constitutes a new form of tourism at the primary stage of development

without any institutional context. When asked about the presence of prospects all respondents replied positively. However, this wasn't the case when asked about the demand for astrotourism which was estimated as limited, and their responses were explained because the audience of this form of tourism is highly specialized and limited to scientific communities.

All interviewees agreed with the idea of approaching younger people by introducing the subjects of astronomy and astrophysics at schools and their systematic education on these subjects. More specifically, interviewee no. 1 underlined that the knowledge and enthusiasm for science would bring about a new, considerable audience. Interviewee no. 2 also supports the introduction of optional courses pointing out that greek history and astronomy can be combined to benefit touristic development. Similarly, interviewee No. 3 underlined that astrotourism should mainly target young people. Similarly, a positive response was given when asked about the possibility of developing astrotourism in Greece under the assumption of strategic planning and the organization of infrastructure.

In specific, almost all interviewees, no. 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6, pointed out the strong competitive advantage of Greece in the market of astrotourism coming from: the origin and naming of constellations, the ideal geographical locations for stargazing and the favorable climatic conditions. Additionally, the "storytelling" occurring from the ancient history of Greece and the country being the place of birth of astronomy can greatly contribute to the development and promotion of astrotourism.

Interviewee No. 5 stressed that astrotourism is the only way out against the fact that massive tourism has exhausted the potential of many touristic destinations. Interviewee No. 1 thinks that by promoting, informing, and cooperating with fans of astronomy, it is possible to establish astrotourism as an alternative form of tourism. Interviewee no. 7 supports the development of astrotourism, through collaborations with hotel units and people who have possession of suitable equipment, as its uniqueness would attract interest. Interviewees No. 8 and 9, underlined the significance of the coordination of professionals in tourism and their education on astrotourism, while No. 6 believes that there is plenty of room for development, based on the fact that travelers are in search of original and more interesting proposals.

All interviewees shared the same views around the presence of natural resources for the development of astrotourism, due to the suitability of locations, the clear skies, and the consequent visibility of celestial phenomena thanks to low light pollution, as well as the presence of underdeveloped areas that have not been affected by massive tourism. The diversification of landscape in Greece offers plenty of opportunities as there are areas even close to urban centers that would be ideal for stargazing. There has also been an agreement among them, with regards to the need for protection of underutilized and growing rural areas, by employing protection measures for the environment, or possibly by their characterization as UNESCO world heritage sites or by placing them under the supervision of the Ministry of Tourism.

There was also a positive response to the fifth research query, with regards to the combination of astrotourism with other forms of tourism, within the framework of diverse tourism. Some possible suggestions for utilization would be communication with professionals to promote and enhance astrotourism as an attractive product, the organization of events and activities outside indoor and artificial venues, and last but not least the connection of astrotourism with ancient greek history. However, it is evident that astrotourism has not been developed yet as an official form of tourism of special interest in Greece, and that, its growth is still at an initial stage. The object of interest is the academic scientific aspect, while all initiatives are mainly related to stargazing and take place in observatories, astronomical stations, and organized events by clubs and groups.

In conclusion, it is observed that there is a need for further development of astrotourism in Greece, including the professional approach and the creation of new opportunities for tourists. With the collaboration between private and public organizations and institutions, and by combining stargazing with other forms of tourism, such as archaeological and wine-tasting tourism, it is possible to provide a comprehensive travel experience to visitors. On top of that, training and educating young people is essential to the creation and development of the industry of sustainable astrotourism in our country.

This aims to take advantage of our natural and cultural heritage and to reinforce the position of Greece, on the global map of alternative tourism. Astrotourism can trigger the imagination and creativity of tourists, creating unique experiences. In combination with the importance of astronomy and mythology, astrotourism merges as a growing form of tourism enhancing touristic attraction. It is also evident that unless possible approaches are explored and outlined, further development and the establishment of astrotourism as an alternative form of tourism will not be possible.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

The present paper is the development of an innovative tourist form. The goal is to utilize the present demand by adding value to it, as well as to create a new demand for authentic and original traveling experiences.

It would certainly provide a unique touristic experience through the observation of celestial bodies and from a unique aspect. The visitor would be able to wander on paths where the constellations have left their traces under the guidance of experienced professionals in order to enjoy authentic personal experiences. They would be able to listen to stories, explore areas, and admire magical landscapes. Another interesting possibility would be to actively participate in common activities of the local populations, and enjoy meals originating from ancient Greece. Lectures, seminars, or conferences would enrich the experience, together with celestial maps, souvenirs and memorabilia from the corresponding area.

In the occurrence of unfavorable weather conditions, when the planned, outdoor activities aren't possible, adjustments can be made with the incorporation of lectures, video presentations on astronomy and stargazing, classes and workshops on the subject, seminars for alternative treatments and well-being, theater plays and theme parties and lastly with time of relaxation enjoying a variety of hotel amenities, such as spa, massage, etc. Ideally, this kind of activity should be addressed to the global market of alternative tourism, aiming at corporations such as tours operators, travel agencies, hotels, other types of accommodation, and companies that offer seminar organization services.

The purpose of a trip varies and can be pleasure, business, or even consumption/shopping. At the same time, there is also the purpose of unique experiences that are related to the culture and nature of the destination. The value suggestion focuses on the offer of personalized, hands-on experiences, and an innovative form of service that ensures customer satisfaction and leads to repetitive visits with a positive effect on the social context. The employment of specialized staff and the availability of tailor-made packages, can contribute to the prestige of a corporation or business and raise the offered value for money.

Another interesting approach would be to encourage the collaboration between the businesses involved and observatories, university schools, and space research centers, thus contributing to the development of astrotourism, which in effect would attract travelers and would

create new markets and profits. The positive impact on local economies would also create new jobs and income. Astrotourism promotes sustainable tourism since stargazing does not require environmental interventions. This way it can contribute to the preservation of nature and the beauty of the night sky.

With the possible limitations related mainly to current weather conditions, it is essential that the packages could be designed with the required flexibility, offering alternatives and troubleshooting when necessary. All main limitations are related to the high cost of development, and the need for initial scientific or academic studies by experts for every topic. These factors combined with the cost of accommodation, food, and transportation, may considerably increase the retail price of the packages. Stargazing requires clear skies and at times there might be additional issues with the access to the specific locations of the activities. Furthermore, the groups of participants would have to be limited to 10 – 15 people, to ensure customer satisfaction. The recruitment of specialized staff and the access to the required equipment might also be challenging.

Greece offers ideal natural resources for astrotourism, because of the clear sky and the perfect weather conditions. This places Greece at a top position when it comes to the development of this form of tourism. Astrotourism will also favor the protection of the natural environment and offer new business opportunities, with the support of subsidies and collaborations. Additionally, it can be combined with other forms of tourism such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, or conference tourism, providing growth opportunities and interesting traveling experiences. Specific weather conditions and light pollution are threatening to the experience of astrotourism. Also, the competition among tourist sectors, the absence of a systematic approach on behalf of the public sector, and the inefficient infrastructure are challenges.

To summarize, astrotourism offers a unique opportunity for the discovery of and education on astronomy. Both strategic collaborations and innovation are key to the creation of memorable experiences for visitors. It is high time we promote our education, our sustainable development, and the protection of our heritage. Based on the results and the analysis presented, we hope to encourage further initiatives towards astrotourism, thus contributing to the exploration of the universe and the emergence of Greece as a unique destination for astrotourism. Let's continue our exploration and our dreams for our place in the universe and let's invite more people who will share this exciting adventure with us.

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## INNOVATION PROCESSES AND THE ROLE OF STORYTELLING IN CULTURAL TOURISM: THE CASE OF SAN PELLEGRINO IN ALPE IN THE INCULTUM PROJECT

**Adele COGNO**

University of Pisa, [adele.cogno@gmail.com](mailto:adele.cogno@gmail.com)  
Address: Via Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli 2, Pisa, 56123, Italy  
tel. number: +39 3381526639

**Andrea PEDRI**

University of Pisa, [guiscardo1025@gmail.com](mailto:guiscardo1025@gmail.com) / [andrea.pedri@sp.unipi.it](mailto:andrea.pedri@sp.unipi.it)

**Martina PIRRONE**

University of Pisa, [martinapirrone369@gmail.com](mailto:martinapirrone369@gmail.com) / [martina.pirrone@sp.unipi.it](mailto:martina.pirrone@sp.unipi.it)

**Enrica LEMMI**

University of Pisa, [enrica.lemmi@unipi.it](mailto:enrica.lemmi@unipi.it)

### ABSTRACT

The tourism industry is evolving rapidly, with a growing emphasis on sustainable tourism and the promotion of cultural heritage. Innovative narrative dynamics in cultural tourism, driven by both technology and storytelling, offer immersive experiences for visitors. These approaches are seen as vital for revitalising peripheral areas, as demonstrated by the INCULTUM project's focus on marginalised destinations. San Pellegrino in Alpe, a small village in Italy, serves as a pilot case for testing an alternative tourism strategy. Integrating new technologies and interactive storytelling, the project aims to create an immersive visitor experience and foster a deeper connection with the destination's heritage. Through live theatrical performances and multimedia installations in the local museum, visitors engage with the area's history and customs. Scalability is considered in the project's development, aiming to extend its impact beyond its initial context and potentially transform tourism in marginalised regions.

**Keywords:** cultural tourism, museum, authenticity, digitalisation, storytelling, INCULTUM

### INTRODUCTION

In a world characterised by rapid change and evolution, tourism is experiencing profound transformations. Over a short span of time, societal shifts and the increasing of technology in daily life have significantly increased the interest regarding the historical, cultural, and social heritage of regions and people are actively seeking out sustainable and responsible destinations. As a particular expression of broader sustainable tourism, cultural tourism has gained increasing significance over the years as an industry capable of generating significant revenue, supporting national identity and safeguarding cultural heritage (Abouebeid, 2019). One of the highest expressions has been found in the concept of experiential tourism, which is driven by the search for authentic and meaningful experiences that go beyond a simple visit.

In this framework, the research analyses the case of San Pellegrino in Alpe, a small village located on the border between Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna. The objective is the implementation of innovative models to relaunch this peripheral destination in order to promote a cultural tourism able to involve residents, tourists and local actors. The village has used the powerful tool of storytelling to create and renew the link between visitors and the territory, local culture and rural life of the last century.

The case of San Pellegrino in Alpe, and in particular the ‘Don Luigi Pellegrini’ Provincial Ethnographic Museum located there, has been the protagonist of a series of innovations throughout the European project INCULTUM. These innovations regarded storytelling processes and technological modernisation, which have allowed the village to express its hidden potential at tourist, social and cultural levels.

### *San Pellegrino in Alpe and the INCULTUM project*

The case study discussed in this paper focuses on possible strategies for the social and economic progress of the Apennine village of San Pellegrino in Alpe, with particular emphasis on the development of a structural revitalisation plan for the ethnographic museum on the site.

The village of San Pellegrino in Alpe represents the highest settlement in the entire Apennine mountain range, with an altitude of 1.525 metres (Trezzini, 2009).

With an average total population that fluctuates between 7 and 11 inhabitants, at administrative level it is controlled by both the municipality of Castiglione di Garfagnana - in the Province of Lucca, Tuscany - and the municipality of Frassinoro - in the Province of Modena, Emilia-Romagna.

Despite its small size, San Pellegrino in Alpe is home to numerous historical, natural, cultural and religious attractions. In particular, the focus of the project was the ‘Don Luigi Pellegrini’ Provincial Ethnographic Museum, inaugurated in 1980 by the parish priest after whom it is named and dedicated to the preservation of the memory and customs of the peasant culture of the two valleys of Garfagnana and Modenese Apennines.

The museum exhibition, consisting of fourteen thematic areas, represents the result of a collection that Don Pellegrini himself, together with the other inhabitants of the village, carried out between the 1960s and the 1980s (Moreno, 1987; Biagioni, 1990).

Due to its characteristics, the village of San Pellegrino in Alpe has been chosen as one of the main research fields of the INCULTUM project, a programme developed and financed within the broader complex of European Union investments known as ‘Horizon2020’ and focused on the development of projects and actions aimed at the social and economic requalification of marginalised and peripheral territories.

### *Marginalisation and depopulation: the biggest challenges of San Pellegrino in Alpe*

The major criticalities found on the site can be grouped into two macro-areas: one pertaining to the geographical-climatic context and another linked to the socio-demographic sphere. Firstly, due to its height and geographical position, San Pellegrino is difficult to visit during wintertime, especially because of the cold temperatures and frequent atmospheric phenomena<sup>12</sup>.

The demographic component is in fact important to understand the context: the village is facing a critical process of depopulation, a phenomenon also present in the surrounding areas and in general in the entire regions of north-west Tuscany and southern Emilia<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Between November and April, the average minimum temperature never exceeds 0° celsius, while the average maximum temperature is between 4 and 1 degrees (source: National Centres for Environmental Information - NOAA).

<sup>13</sup> Data on the steady demographic decline of north-western Tuscany are available on the website <https://www.ucgarfagnana.lu.it/strategia-nazionale-aree-interne/>.

The consequences listed above have also had a definite impact on the resonance of the Ethnographic Museum - open to the public only from June the 1st to September the 30th - which has seen a steady and continuous annual decrease in visitors.

In fact, ticket sales dropped from 7795 in 2008 to only 2331 in 2018<sup>14</sup>, the last season before a three-year closure that pushed the museum exhibition away from the tourist routes and the interest of the local population.

Prior to the start of the INCULTUM Project, only a few information panels had been installed and the museum's exhibition became progressively less attractive. Given these premises, what can be the useful strategies to develop a new model of synergy between local customs and traditions and the demands of contemporary tourism? Is it possible to transform the Ethnographic Museum 'Don Luigi Pellegrini' into a social, economic and symbolic space useful for a revaluation and redevelopment of the entire village?

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *Storytelling as element of social and cultural relaunch*

This study stems from the desire to investigate the potential of cultural tourism when combined with storytelling. Adopting a narrative approach to destination allows for the development of synergy and multidisciplinary collaboration between the tourism sector and creative writing, ultimately creating a rich and immersive experience for visitors.

The challenge of the INCULTUM project is to ensure that the riches of the San Pellegrino in Alpe area do not lose interest for the new generations and continue to authentically narrate local history and culture despite the many changes taking place.

To attain this objective, a narrative-based strategy was adopted, recognizing that stories have historically fostered a deeper and more genuine connection between the audience and the subject of the narrative. Additionally, narratives facilitate the formation of enduring memories that last far beyond the duration of the visit. Today, tourism should leverage diverse opportunities within the local economy and be seamlessly integrated into its structure. This integration ensures that tourism offerings enhance the quality of life for residents and have a positive impact on socio-cultural identity.

Establishing a connection between museum visitors and the exhibited objects presents an opportunity to transform the museum visit into a genuinely distinctive experience.

The second aim of the project is to bring the younger generations, who are naturally used to living in a highly digitalised environment, closer to museum contents. To bridge the gap between the traditional ways of enjoying the museum collection and the habits of the new generations, numerous technological modernisation actions were also carried out.

### *Review of literature*

The topic of experience has always been a subject of study and, over the years, many definitions of it have been given (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Holyfield, 1999; Kotler et al., 2001). Experience arises as something intrinsically personal, as it exists only in the mind of an individual who has been involved on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). It is within this framework that the definition of the tourist experience was born, i.e. the experience an individual has while travelling or at a destination.

According to Selstad (2007), the tourist experience embraces a mix of novelty and familiarity, intertwined with the individual search for identity and self-discovery.

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<sup>14</sup> Data on ticket sales can be found on the Regione Toscana website <https://www.regione.toscana.it/-/musei-della-toscana-rapporti-annuali>



One of the strategies for bringing an experience to life is through storytelling, a fundamental element of the human condition that plays a crucial role in shaping our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Moscardo (2018) states that narratives play a crucial role in fostering positive outcomes during tourism experiences.

By telling a specific place in the form of a fictional story or using storytelling to present a place, one can infuse entertainment and local knowledge with originality and authenticity. This approach can lead to positive results such as an increased and lasting attachment to a place.

Moreover, this process is likely to strengthen and consolidate the bond between the local population and its cultural and identity background (Kneafsey, 1998; McIntosh et al., 2002), developing a virtuous circle capable of stimulating the enhancement and preservation of the area's specific authenticity and consequently an increasing interest on the part of the tourism sector and individual travellers in general, who are increasingly directed, in their choice of destination, towards 'authentic' experiences that are useful for gaining new visions and keys to understanding the world and contemporary society (Clavè, 2010; Shouten, 2011).

In recent years, museums and cultural institutions have embraced technological innovations to enhance visitor experiences, educational outreach, and preservation efforts. In parallel, studies in the field of digital technologies within the museum context have also progressed, investigating specific subjects. In the museum context, as evidenced by research (Giannini & Bowen, 2019), the theme of digitalisation was initially perceived as a disruption, whereas today, the use of smartphones and digital tools is increasingly embraced. If over time an increasing number of individuals acquired digital skills, it is also true that the needs and expectations of those comprising a museum's audience vary in the realm of digital innovations. Indeed, according to Mason (2020) digital technologies are nowadays undergoing a process characterised by the fusion of the digital realm with the physical space and the integration of various media forms and mixed reality. Museums can contribute today to the 'recreation' of realities and context that no longer exist. Indeed, as research shows multimedia and virtual reality technologies excel in conveying such content by engaging sensory-motor processes and interpretative faculties, facilitating immersive simulations that stimulate imaginative capacity (Pietroni, 2019). In conclusion, the literature highlights how museum digitalisation can also contribute to the sustainability of cultural institutions.

## METHODOLOGY

### *The narrative approach applied to the destination*

#### *a. The theatrical play*

One of the pivotal actions involving San Pellegrino in Alpe was the creation of a theatrical performance to tell the story behind the objects in the collection. The choice of the actress fell on Elisabetta Salvatori, who took care of all the phases preceding the staging of the performance. Her research focused on written and oral sources, interviews with local inhabitants and operators and lasted over six months, from November 2021 until the staging of the inaugural performance in July 2022.

The show conceived by Elisabetta stages the stories of the inhabitants of San Pellegrino in Alpe who lived in the area in the last century and who used and collected the objects currently housed in the museum. Specifically, the story recounts the life of the priest Don Luigi Pellegrini, from his childhood to his death, and his role as the first creator and designer of the Ethnographic Museum. Around this main plot, revolves a kaleidoscope of subplots that tell the stories of the village's inhabitants and all the phases of the birth and development of the museum as it is today.

For the first year, it was preferred to schedule the performances during the peak summer season, in July and August.

In the second year, the choice was made to schedule the performances on dates historically characterised by lower attendance, and the months of June and September were also included.

*b. The technological implementation*

The project that involves the digitalisation of the San Pellegrino in Alpe museum exhibition aims to enhance visitor engagement primarily through storytelling, enriching the museum with new technologies to support the narrative information transmission process. Consequently, the museum experience is expected to become more immersive, dynamic, and engaging for visitors, especially for younger generations, who will hopefully experience a deeper connection with the exhibited objects, as they are placed in a context that renders them ‘alive’. Through modern communication technologies it is possible to explain the museum context and exhibition, enabling the visitor to interact with them in a personalised manner, according to his or her experience, intentions and capacity for understanding. Regarding the context of San Pellegrino in Alpe, the following solutions are included in the process of digital innovation:

*b.1 - Augmented Reality:*

Augmented Reality (AR) allows the visualisation of virtual 3D objects and characters overlaid on real-world images. This technology offers various applications, allowing us to perceive the real space around us in new ways. In the specific case of San Pellegrino in Alpe, the adopted solution involves the creation of a simple paper support, such as a postcard, equipped with a QR code. When scanned with a smartphone, this code will grant access to a dedicated link. Once opened, the visitor can view, through their phone, a human figure welcoming them into the museum. This solution presents several positive aspects: firstly, the use of a QR code allows for the alteration of digital content where necessary, should it be deemed appropriate to include alternative or thematic content; secondly, it becomes a kind of ‘souvenir’, reminding visitors of an innovative visiting experience.

*b.2 - Holograms:*

Holograms are three-dimensional representations of objects or people, created by projecting light onto a two-dimensional space to generate the illusion of depth and three-dimensionality. This technology exploits optical principles to create images that appear to float in space without any physical support. In the museum context, holograms can also be integrated in various ways to enrich visitors’ experiences; however, in the case of the San Pellegrino in Alpe Museum, solutions called holoboxes have been chosen. These ‘boxes’ can be life-sized, where the holographic person has real dimensions, or they can be smaller. However, the result remains the same, as the visitor experiencing them will engage in an interactive narrative.

*b.3 - Interactive Audio-Visual Stations:*

The installation of multimedia stations equipped with audio and video support within the San Pellegrino museum was the first of the technological solutions that this exhibition space was able to provide, thanks to an initial prototype placed in the museum’s opening room. The installation consists of a small wooden containment structure, an audio playback device (speakers), a video playback device (screen), and a reading system designed for scanning tags that can be simply ‘placed’ on the structure. Accompanying the main installation will be small ‘framed’ prints depicting the museum’s rooms or an archival image of a “historical” figure from the town. By placing the small frame on the appropriate support, the tag reader will immediately start playing an audio-video file lasting 1-2 minutes related to the chosen theme.

*b.4 - QR Codes:*

The latest technological innovation included in the project is the creation of QR codes, to be printed and placed in the museum's physical spaces. Once scanned by the visitor, they will link to pages on the museum's website, following two narrative lines: the historical path and the object path. Both will be available in Italian and English. The first path, divided into 7 sections, will provide historical information on the museum's development, starting from its founder, Don Luigi Pellegrini. The object path, instead, has seen the selection of some of the most curious or requested objects, on which descriptive texts have been developed. Indeed, not all objects, especially large work tools, are immediately understandable to a young audience or one belonging to a cultural background different from that of Garfagnana, where the museum is located.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The narrative approach and audience perception*

The decision to employ a narrative approach through digital tools at the San Pellegrino in Alpe museum was grounded in the design, dissemination, and analysis of a visitor questionnaire. The questionnaires employed a mixed-methods approach, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative elements, to gather statistical data on visitors as well as solicit open-ended responses regarding opinions and ideas, particularly concerning the theatrical performance developed by the research team. Distributed during the museum's operational period from early June to late September 2023, the printed surveys, available in both Italian and English, were made accessible within the museum premises. By the conclusion of the season, a total of 361 questionnaires had been completed. Structured with three primary objectives, the questionnaires sought to ascertain the demographic profile of museum visitors, evaluate their perceptions of the exhibition and museum facilities, and assess whether the theatrical performance enhanced their visitation experience and comprehension of the exhibits. The results were later analysed and gave the following outcomes: the majority of visitors expressed satisfaction, with approximately 86% indicating appreciation for the arrangement of the pieces within the various museum rooms, which evoked associations with their historical usage. Nonetheless, a significant portion of visitors identified the absence of audio-visual aids as a limitation, hindering their ability to further engage with particularly intriguing objects. Notably, among attendees of the theatrical performance, feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with over 93% expressing high levels of enjoyment and more than 89% attributing significant importance to its role in facilitating comprehension of the museum exhibition.

### *Conclusion: community revitalisation and scalability*

The project proposed is envisaged as a possible model for socio-economic revitalisation, foreseeing in fact an increasing interest in the destination on the part of tourists and, in parallel, a rediscovery of its culture and past on the part of local residents. Tourism, in this context, was able to offer an opportunity to a marginalised territory, a peripheral one when considering the main centres of economy and culture. The redevelopment of a social space with a strong identity value such as the Provincial Ethnographic Museum of San Pellegrino in Alpe, may in fact represent an element in support of a renewed resistance and awareness of the social fabric, spurred on by external interest towards ever greater innovation and reinterpretation of its material and immaterial heritage. By weaving together a narrative path enriched with local values and cultural heritage, alongside the advancement of technological and digital platforms, museums can undergo a rejuvenation that bridges tradition with modernity. The prospect of eternalizing narratives through digital means ensures continuous accessibility for future generations, catering to the expectations of contemporary visitors who are accustomed to digital experiences.

Moreover, this dynamic approach to museum design, while initially tailored to the unique context of San Pellegrino in Alpe, holds promise for replication in other territories facing similar challenges of marginality. The synergy between narrative-driven approaches and technological development presents a scalable model capable of addressing the diverse needs and characteristics of peripheral areas in search of renewed identity.

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## **RESPONSIVENESS AS AN APPROACH TO IMPROVE RESILIENCE OF URBAN TOURISM DESTINATIONS THROUGH STRATEGIC SPATIAL PLANNING**

**David KLEPEJ**

University of Ljubljana, Biotechnical Faculty, Department of Landscape Architecture  
 Jamnikarjeva 101, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
 david.klepej@bf.uni-lj.si

### **ABSTRACT**

Due to high complexity of modern societies as well as increasing numbers of occurring shocks and crises, the need to build resilience is ever more evident. The needs of inhabitants and various stakeholders, socio-economic shocks, environmental pressures, and both locally-specific and global challenges must all be addressed in urban settings. In some cases, disturbances and shocks require an immediate reaction due to the high emergency and visibility of a problem (e.g. a pandemic or an earthquake). However, some changes in the complex urban systems result from constant or momentary disruptive pressures. As such we can also view tourism, which is increasingly present in cities, representing an essential factor in contemporary use of urban space.

To ensure societal and economic resilience of cities, tourism should be strategically addressed through appropriate (spatial) management and adaptive measures. This paper examines the responsiveness of strategic spatial planning towards tourism development on case of four cities, representing different types of spatial planning and tourism development trajectories in Europe. Firstly, the recent tourism growth trends of the case study cities are presented. Secondly, a model for evaluating the responsiveness of strategic spatial plans towards urban tourism is built to analyse two documents of each case study city. Thirdly, responsiveness of various stakeholder groups is evaluated based on interviews with stakeholders in urban governance, spatial planning, tourism, and hotel industry. Together, an insight into responsiveness of strategic spatial planning is presented.

**Keywords:** urban tourism, spatial planning, responsiveness, resilience, strategic, case study

### **INTRODUCTION**

Recently, urban development has become increasingly intertwined with tourism. Phenomena like the rise of short-term rentals, low-cost flights, active promotion, shared economy, and a shift toward cultural tourism have contributed to urban tourism becoming one of the fastest-growing

types of tourism. Cities have been promoting tourism development, especially for its multiplicative positive economic impacts. However, its development comes with specific issues and challenges. Tourism causes various (positive and negative) environmental, societal, and economic impacts. Unregulated growth of this phenomenon can escalate to the appearance of overtourism, gentrification, touristification, or airbnbisation. These and other pressures on the urban space can have strong impacts on housing, service provision, mobility, infrastructure development, culture, heritage, social life, and other. Furthermore, tourism is highly volatile to shocks and crises, e.g. pandemics, terrorism, financial crises.

In this paper, responsiveness of strategic spatial planning in four case study cities is examined. Selected cities represent different spatial planning cultures as well as tourism development stages or types. Bratislava (Slovakia) and Ljubljana (Slovenia) are both small (under half a million people) capital cities, that were previously under communist or socialist political order, while Hamburg (Germany) and Turin (Italy) are bigger cities by population though not being capital cities. Development of the city of Hamburg (also in terms of tourism) is closely connected with its harbour. Similarly, Bratislava has a river port, and both cities have significant numbers of cruise ship tourists. Industry has also played an important role in tourism development of these cities, and in particular the car manufacturing is seen as an important factor in tourism development of Bratislava and Turin. As part of post-industrial economic transition, all case study cities are trying to develop themselves also as tourist destinations.

Looking at recent tourism growth trends, we see all case study cities experienced growth in tourism arrivals in the 2010s (Figure 1). Between 2011 and 2019, arrivals grew by 142% in Ljubljana, 93% in Bratislava, 49% in Hamburg and 40% in Turin in the eight years. A comparison of tourist arrivals per capita shows the density of tourism activity in the city. In 2019, Hamburg recorded 4.1 tourist arrivals per capita, closely followed by Ljubljana (3.8). This value was considerably low in Turin (2.2) and Bratislava (1.8). The capital cities of Ljubljana and Bratislava also have a considerably higher share of foreign tourists, as these in year 2018 accounted for 95% of all registered bednights in Ljubljana, 60% in Bratislava, and 25% in Hamburg and Turin (ECM, 2019).

This trend was sharply disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused an exceptional drop in tourist arrivals. Compared to the year before, the number of arrivals in 2020 dropped by 58% in Hamburg, 66% in Turin, 73% in Bratislava, and 74% in Ljubljana. This indicates that the cities with higher growth rates and higher share of foreign visitors tend to be more vulnerable to tourism crises. Since the gradual normalisation of the travel industry, in 2022, Bratislava and Turin already surpassed the previous record annual tourist visits (22% higher in Bratislava, and 3% higher in Turin), while Hamburg and Ljubljana seem to be following shortly (Hamburg recorded 90%, and Ljubljana 82% of its 2019 record arrivals). The pandemic not only showed that cities remain unprepared for events of crises, but also that cities should develop more strategic approaches towards guiding tourism development and increase their resilience to tourism growth and related challenges.

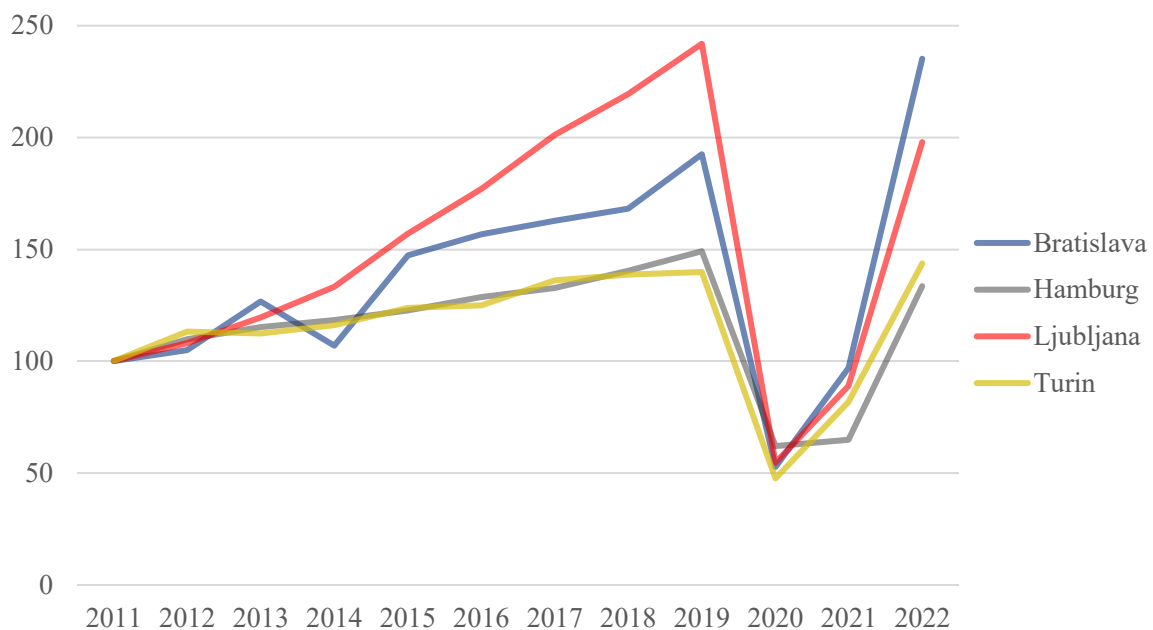


Figure 1. Index of tourism arrivals in case study cities from 2011 (index value 100) until 2022. (Data sources: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, Statistik Nord, Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Metropolitan City of Turin).

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The literature review explores the evolution and application of the concept of responsiveness in spatial planning and tourism research. Responsiveness, as Allen (1997) notes, is rooted in complex systems theory, blending predictable development phases with random disturbances. This idea extends into various fields but lacks a unified theory, being notably present in political studies and democratic theory as observed by Degner and Leuffen (2020). In the context of cities and the built environment, responsiveness is linked to resilience, the capacity of urban systems to handle shocks and stresses (da Silva, Kernaghan and Luque, 2012). This involves adjusting to disturbances and maintaining functionality (Allan and Bryant, 2014; Francis and Bekera, 2014). Researchers like Vranić et al. (2018) emphasize a multisectoral approach to build responsiveness, which is essential in spatial planning. Spatial planning literature calls for adaptive, flexible approaches to better respond to changing circumstances and stakeholder needs (Rauws and De Roo, 2016; Nadin et al., 2018). Practical applications include strategic plans like Hong Kong 2030+ and New Zealand's National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020.

Tourism research also advocates for a shift from ensuring stability to improved responsiveness and resilience. Farrell and Twining-Ward (2004) highlight the need for adaptive management at the destination level, while others, like Hardy and Pearson (2018), apply stakeholder theory to address diverse interests. Responsiveness in tourism often relates to adapting to tourist demands and managing disruptive events, particularly seen during the COVID-19 crisis (Sigala, 2020; Kuščer et al., 2022). Public institutions' responsiveness to tourism is less frequently discussed. De Oliveira (2003) categorizes governmental responses to tourism investments into capacity building, environmental projects, development control, and protected areas. Evaluations by Tun et al. (2021) and Vranić et al. (2018) assess policy responsiveness in addressing public service needs and climate change, respectively. Klepej and Marot (2023) report missing responses of strategic spatial planning towards tourism growth and call for better integration of these sectors to enhance both responsiveness and resilience of cities.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology utilizes responsiveness theory to analyse how resilient and responsive are cities to tourism growth through their strategic spatial planning. It applies two methods, namely policy analysis and stakeholder analysis, on the casestudy of four cities. To perform the policy analysis of strategic spatial planning documents, sourced from official city websites and municipal departments, an evaluation model was developed based on the literature review of responsiveness theory and previous policy assessment tools. This model assesses the extent to which spatial planning in the selected cities responds to tourism development. This model considers urban tourism's unique characteristics and its complex relationship with urban environments and planning, focusing on two major areas: perception and reaction, each with four subcategories.

The documents' perception of urban tourism is assessed by its ability to:

- a) address the views and needs of inhabitants and stakeholders towards tourism;
- b) include tourism as a development topic and an undergoing activity in the urban space;
- c) address the changing scope of tourism presence in the city;
- d) acknowledge the potential negative impacts tourism can have on the city.

The documents' reaction to urban tourism is assessed by its ability to:

- a) provide tourism development measures, objectives or goals;
- b) apply the multisectoral approach to tourism development;
- c) provide measures addressing tourism development risks;
- d) provide flexible development goals or a regular policy review process.

Each subcategory is evaluated by a value of 0 (not responsive), 0.5 (limitedly responsive) or 1 (responsive). Limitedly responsive documents have broadly mentioned an assessment area, and responsive ones provided at least one specific mention or measure addressing an assessment area. Responsiveness is evaluated by the sum of values the analysed strategic spatial planning document scored in the categories of perception and reaction to the tourism development in the city, which further enables a graphical presentation and comparison of results in the form of a chart.

In addition to the analysis of strategic spatial planning documents, interviews of stakeholders in tourism development in case study cities were conducted. Stakeholders were, among other questions, asked to evaluate the responsiveness of seven stakeholder groups to tourism growth in their specific case study city, as well as to their own needs as a stakeholder in the city. To provide a similar understanding of responsiveness, the interviewed stakeholders were provided with the following definition: Responsiveness represents the ability of public policies or actors to perceive and adapt to changes in the views and needs of residents and other stakeholders. The stakeholder groups in question were: state government, local government, tourism management, spatial planning, hotels, investors, and residents. Each stakeholder group was evaluated regarding their responsiveness between 1 (not responsive) and 5 (very responsive). In the discussion, some of the insights provided by the interviewed stakeholders on the role and issues strategic spatial planning has in regard to urban tourism are presented.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis results of eight strategic spatial planning documents of four case study cities shows considerable differences in the levels of tourism perception and measure provision among them. Policy analysis of all of the presented strategic spatial planning documents has been performed in line with the criteria presented in the methodology. Documents have been screened for their capability of perception and reaction to tourism in line with the proposed evaluation subcategories. Value 0 (not responsive) represents no mention of the topic of the subcategory, and the value 0.5 (limitedly responsive) represents a minor mention of it. The value 1 (responsive) means the topic is addressed with at least one measure or specific indication of the issue but does



not mean the provided measures comprehensively address it. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluation of responsiveness of strategic spatial planning documents of case study cities by criteria of perception and reaction to urban tourism development.

Document or strategy	Views and needs of stakeholders	Addressing urban tourism state	Tourism growth and development trends	Potential negative impacts of tourism	PERCEPTION	Tourism development goals and measures	Multisectoral approach	Measures for potential risks	Flexibility and review	REACTION	RESPONSIVENESS
Bratislava 2020, 2010	0.5	1	1	1	3.5	1	1	0.5	1	3.5	7.0
Bratislava 2030, 2022	1	1	0.5	1	3.5	1	1	1	1	4.0	7.5
Hamburg 2030, 2014	0.5	0.5	0	0	1.0	0	0	0	0.5	0.5	1.5
Hamburg HafenCity, 2006	0	1	0	0	1.0	0.5	1	0	1	2.5	3.5
Ljubljana Strategic Spatial Plan, 2010	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	2.0	1	1	0	1	3.0	5.0
Ljubljana Strategic Spatial Plan, 2018	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	2.5	1	1	0	1	3.0	5.5
Turin strategic plan, 2006	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	1.5	1	0.5	0.5	1	3.0	4.5
Metropolitan Turin 2025, 2015	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.5	0	1	2.0	3.5

Despite tourism's pervasive growth in case study cities, spatial strategies inadequately address its presence and influence on urban development. Evaluations show that most strategic spatial documents perform better in their level of reaction to tourism growth as in their level of perception of this phenomenon. However, documents excelling in one category also tend to perform well in the other. Results are graphically presented in Figure 2. Perception subcategories often cover the current state of city tourism, growth trends, and stakeholders' views, while potential negative impacts are less addressed. Reaction subcategories typically include periodic reviews, flexibility, a multisectoral approach, and tourism development measures, but often neglect risks of unregulated growth. While case study cities do aim to grow their tourism sectors sustainably, the approaches to this question vary, and impact analyses on urban environments are rare. Furthermore, comparative analysis shows responsiveness to tourism does not consistently improve over time. For instance, Bratislava and Ljubljana improved responsiveness in their recent strategic documents, whereas Turin's strategy declined, and Hamburg's strategy is too general to provide considerate responses and guidelines to tourism development. High tourism growth rates, as seen in Ljubljana and Bratislava, correlate with greater responsiveness. These differences also relate to varying European spatial policy approaches and planning systems, reflecting diverse planning cultures (Rivolin, 2012; Nadin et al., 2018).

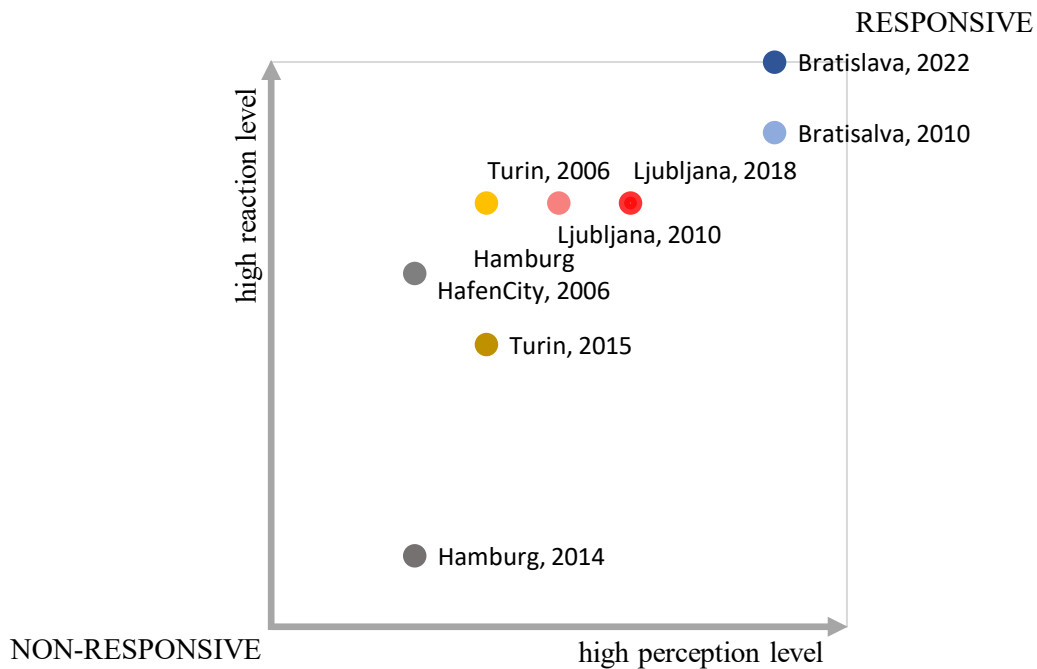


Figure 2. Responsiveness of analysed strategic documents assessed by their level of perception (horizontal) and reaction (vertical) to urban tourism development.

Limited responsiveness of spatial planning to tourism growth has also been confirmed through interviews of various stakeholders in tourism and urban development of case study cities. The number of interviews is not equal among case study cities; therefore, results are only compared among the groups of stakeholders and further interviews are needed to gain more detail insights in individual case study cities. The results of the perceived responsiveness are presented in Table 3. Among all interviewed stakeholders, the state government and spatial planning indeed scored the lowest level of responsiveness (looking at the average score of each stakeholder group). While there is a reasoning, that urban tourism is not too be of a specific interest to the national level of government and should be approached on the local level, this also indicates that cities should improve their approaches to utilizing spatial planning as a tool to guide tourism development. Most responsive towards tourism growth tend to be the tourism management and investors, followed by the local government. Considering the responsiveness of stakeholder groups to the needs of the interviewed stakeholders, spatial planning is perceived as more responsive. Its average score is only behind those of local government and tourism management, and only some stakeholders from Bratislava perceive it as not responsive. In general, stakeholders seem to have the most challenges addressing state government and the local residents.

Table 3. Responsiveness of stakeholder groups towards tourism growth and towards needs of the interviewed stakeholders on the scale from 1 (not responsive) to 5 (responsive). Each column represent an evaluation of one interviewed stakeholder.

Responsiveness towards tourism growth in your city?																	
State government	3	2	4	1	3	3	1	1	1	4	3	2	1	2	2	3	1
Local government	4	3	1	4	1	3	3	4	3	3	3	5	4	4	4	5	5
Tourism management	4	5	5	3	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	3	5	3	3	5
Spatial planning	1	2	4	4	1	1	4	1	2	2	3	4	3	5	4	1	3
Hotels	4	3	5	1	4	4	4	3	4	5	5	4	4	5	2	1	5
Investors	4	3	5	2	4	4	4	5	3	5	5	4	4	4	2	5	3
Residents	2	2	1	3	4	3	3	3	2	2	3	5	5	4	5	5	3
Responsiveness towards your needs as a stakeholder?																	
State government	3	1	4	2	5	2	1	2	1	3	4	3	4	2	1	1	1
Local government	3	3	5	4	1	2	4	4	4	3	5	5	5	5	2	4	5
Tourism management	4	3	5	2	4	3	5	4	3	5	5	5	2	5	3	3	3
Spatial planning	1	4	5	5	1	1	4	2	4	5	5	3	4	3	3	4	2
Hotels	4	4	1	3	5	3	2	4	4	4	3	5	3	3	2	1	3
Investors	4	4	1	3	3	3	2	5	3	4	4	3	3	4	2	2	3
Residents	1	3	3	3	3	1	3	1	3	2	3	4	4	3	3	4	2
City of the stakeholder	Bratislava						Hamburg			Ljubljana					Turin		

The interviewed stakeholders provided some insightful opinions on the roles of different actors. They mostly view tourism as a complex social phenomenon that is highly dependent on investors and capital. According to them, the local governments are aware of the topic, but are not really responsive towards it. Cities do not have clear strategic consideration of spatial development of tourism. They tend to leave the decisions to the market and the relationship between supply and demand. In this sense, the role of spatial planning is merely to allow tourism development and not to guide it. However, there are calls for more proactive role of spatial planning towards engaging investors and developers to ensure tourism will enhance the quality of the urban spaces. Furthermore, cities should apply more efforts to address the question of short-term rentals (e.g. Airbnb), also through approaches of spatial planning. Slow or missing responses of cities to Airbnb is a clear example of their lacking responsiveness. In this regard, stakeholders from Bratislava and Ljubljana also pointed out that there is a lack of respect towards rules already put in place. It was also pointed out, that cities lack sufficient efforts towards implementation of goals laid-out in their strategies.

In times when cities need to build its resilience, they could try to better utilise spatial planning as a discipline negotiating a balance between different human activities. However, spatial planning is often lagging in adapting and guiding development in light of increasing changes and complexity. And despite tourism being ubiquitous and growing phenomenon in cities, spatial strategies under-address its presence and influence on the urban (spatial) development. Increased responsiveness towards tourism is also important, as tourism is highly volatile to (global) shocks and crises. An evaluation of responsiveness of strategic planning policies could therefore help to develop more adaptive public policies and ensure more resilient cities. This analysis shows that cities are lacking appropriate responsiveness towards tourism, indicating the situation is similar when it comes to other changes facing them. Development of tourism and other activities should better address local spatial characteristics, as this could help prevent negative impacts and enable distribution of positive impacts throughout the city. Alongside improving responsiveness of spatial planning, cities should also utilise the knowledge and benefits of strategic spatial planning more in its tourism development approaches.

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## WELLNESS, WELLBEING, AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

**Eleni ALEXIOU**

Aegean University, [elalexiou@env.aegean.gr](mailto:elalexiou@env.aegean.gr)  
70, Athanasiou Diakou str., 52100 Kastoria, Greece

**Sofia KARAMPELA**

Ionian University, [skarampela@ionio.gr](mailto:skarampela@ionio.gr)  
4, Vraila Armeni str., "Kalipso" Building, 49100 Corfu Island, Greece, tel: +30 2661087953

**Ioannis SPILANIS**

Aegean University, [ispil@aegean.gr](mailto:ispil@aegean.gr)  
Xenia A Building – Room 302, Mytilene, Lesvos Island, Greece, tel: +3022510 36229

**Thanasis KIZOS**

Aegean University, [akizos@aegean.gr](mailto:akizos@aegean.gr)  
Geography Building - ground floor, Mytilene, Lesvos Island, Greece, tel: +3022510 36447

### ABSTRACT

During the pandemic, levels of anxiety, stress and depression increased and striving for a better quality of life became hugely important. As a result, a tendency has been observed from various companies, to develop diversified products within the realm of wellness as well as to create new travel experiences embedding the mindset of a sustainable lifestyle. This study aims to explore wellness and sustainable tourism research trends over the past 15 years, focusing on the frequency of terms used and identifying key countries of study. By mapping out the emerging research directions in this field, we intend to provide a comprehensive understanding of this important intersection. The methodology is based on a bibliometric analysis conducted, using the Scopus database and the search involved specific keywords. The analysis was carried out in two phases, resulting in a total of 331 documents in the first stage and 55 documents thoroughly studied in the second stage. Results indicate a significant increase in publications related to sustainability over the years. Studies highlight the importance of community and resident wellbeing in relation to tourism, as well as the significance of the connection between wellbeing-enhancing experiences, self-transformation, and pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors. However, even though wellbeing is relevant to the society, the bibliometric analysis didn't match to a higher number of keywords, compared to the results obtained for the economy related keywords. Also, the factors which contribute to a successful wellness tourism destination requires further and consistent investigation. Overall, findings reveal a rising trend in publications in this area, capturing the potential of wellbeing tourism in contributing to sustainable development and individual wellbeing.

**Keywords:** wellness, wellbeing, sustainable tourism, bibliometrics.

## INTRODUCTION

During the pandemic, levels of anxiety, stress and depression increased and striving for a better quality of life became hugely important. As a result, among other things, companies are increasingly focusing on creating a range of wellness products and sustainable travel experiences embedding the mindset of a sustainable lifestyle. “Well-being” and “wellness”, are interrelated, nevertheless defining these terms is emphatically difficult. Wide confusion in the literature is evident as the concepts vary significantly between countries with different words being used in distinct languages, while their meaning and interpretation also diverge among cultures and degree of attachment with the notion of health and healthy lifestyle. In addition, the lack of coherent definitions can be partly explained by the fact that they are applied in various contexts while they are both studied within the literature from different scientific areas and disciplines (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Furthermore, wellness and well-being reflect on the personality’s perspective which means that the interpretation is made from specific aspects or dimensions. As expected, the use of the terms in tourism is respectively ambiguous. They both revolve around health tourism, but are not synonyms (Težak Damijanić, 2019), yet they work in tandem with each other. Dilette et al. (2021) argue that “health is considered the goal”, while wellness is the pathway to achieving it; wellbeing maybe the destination.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *Background*

According to the executive summary of the European Travel Commission (ETC) & the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2018), wellness tourism is defined as a type of tourism activity which aims to improve and balance all of the main domains of human life (physical, mental, emotional, occupational, intellectual and spiritual). Based on the latest Annual Report by the ETC (2021), there is a 24.3% of leisure trips directly associated with nature, outdoors, wellness and relaxation. There is also a 3.8% that refers to which can be also indirectly related to wellness and healthy lifestyle. Furthermore, in the most recent report by the Global Wellness Institute (2022), the wellness economy represented 5.6% of global economic output in 2022. In addition, it was estimated that the Global Wellness Tourism accounted for 651 billion dollars in 2022, which makes wellness tourism industry a potential challenge for the growth of a destination.

Nowadays, sustainability in tourism is considered a core trend, with its principles applied at all levels of an ever-growing industry (Niñerola, Sánchez-Rebull, and Hernández-Lara, 2019; Ruhanen, et al., 2015; Garrigos-Simon, Narangajavana-Kaosiri, and Lengua-Lengua, 2018). More and more travelers look for sustainable products and services, becoming more aware and concerned about their impact on the local community and economy as well as their environmental footprint. There are many different words describing sustainability in tourism and lately responsible tourism is being used more frequently, perhaps due to the rise of people following ecological practices. In essence, sustainable tourism is a broad concept referring to a type of tourism activity and tourist behavior that benefits the environment, economy and society of the visiting destination.

### *Aim*

Our study aims to shed light on the scientific research and development paths revolving around the concepts of wellness or wellbeing in combination with sustainable tourism. By exploring the literature, the researchers intend to gain an overview of the scientific progress observed in the field, over the last 15 years. Furthermore, we examine whether one of the two terms (wellness or wellbeing) is being used more frequently in relation to tourism and if certain

types of tourism are more connected to these concepts. The ultimate goal is for the analysis to lead to a mapping, by highlighting the different places and/or main countries most of the related studies are carried out. Finally, we attempt to reveal trends as well as to identify emerging research directions related to the field of sustainable tourism and wellness.

## METHODOLOGY

Bibliometrics is a popular method for exploring and analyzing scientific data and can be accessed across various disciplines (Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015). The techniques applied are quantitative by nature, but they are considered useful guides for qualitative features (Wallin, J.A., 2005). According to Donthu, et al. (2021), the bibliometric analysis toolbox consists of two main techniques: performance analysis and science mapping. In this study, to conduct the bibliometric analysis, researchers relied on the Scopus database and counted, reviewed and analyzed articles, and data were processed in two phases.

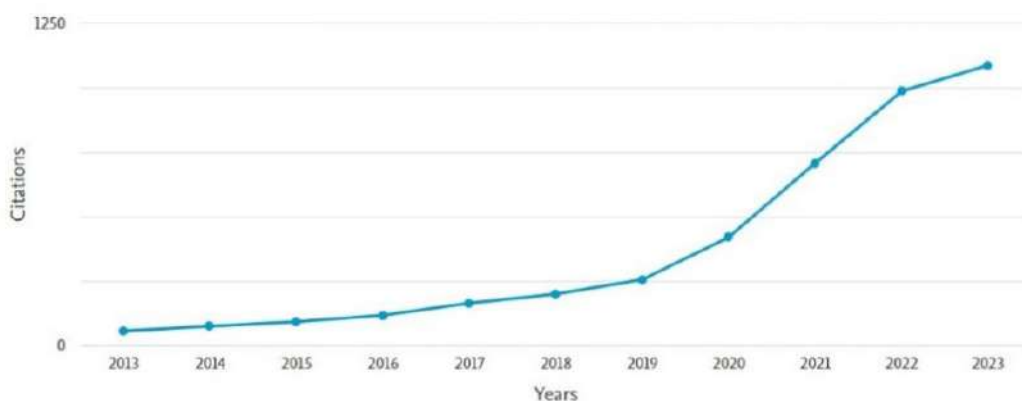
The first stage of our methodology approach involves the actual search; it was undertaken in November 2023 and resulted in 331 documents including publications from 1997 to 2023. The exact typing search performed was: wellness OR wellbeing AND sustainable AND tourism. Results were limited to English language (314). Terms were looked up in the titles, abstracts, and keywords of scientific articles, reviews, books and book chapters, and conference papers registered within the Scopus database.

In the second stage of our methodology, we limited the articles to the following keywords:

Wellbeing, Well-being, Human Wellbeing, Community Wellbeing, Wellness, Health and Wellness, Wellness Tourism, Health and Wellness Tourism, Sustainable Tourism. Thus, we resulted in 113 documents; after reading the abstracts we ended up in 55 documents that we thoroughly studied.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first article in the field appeared in 1997, then two more documents were found in 2002, and a steady rise of publications was observed from 2007 up to 2020. Documents published in 2020, dropped from 42 to 36 in 2021 (COVID-19 outbreak), and almost doubled in 2022 (59 docs). In 2023 up to the day of the search, 52 documents were retrieved. The number of citations also show increasing rates over the years (please view the following diagram).



**Figure 1.** Citations overview for the selected 311 documents. (Source: Scopus database, last accessed 25 November 2023)

Three are the prominent academic disciplines: 1) Social Sciences, 2) Business, Management and Accounting, and 3) Environmental Science, denoting in a clear way the importance of each pillar of sustainability. It is worth noting that Environmental science, Energy, Earth and Planetary

Sciences and Agricultural and Biological Sciences make up for more than 1/3 of the documents found per subject area, which may be attributed to the fact that sustainability is still principally associated with its environmental pillar; climate change could further explain the large share.

Most of the publications are sourced from affiliated Universities in the UK, Australia, Spain, USA, Portugal, China and Italy, all making up almost 2/3 of the total sample. The top journal selected for publishing is the Journal of Sustainable Tourism (with the highest number of articles, i.e. 18), closely followed by the Sustainability Switzerland (17). Third in the row comes the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health (11).

Keywords were concentrated and divided in 8 categories (Table 1). Based on the analysis, ecotourism is the type of tourism mentioned more often in the sample of publications. Moreover, wellbeing is used as a keyword or part of a keyword in 65 documents while wellness is only reported in 11, out of the 311 publications.

Keyword Category	Frequency (Number of results)
Tourism/ Travel	289
Sustainability related	197
Wellness, Wellbeing, Health	136
Environment	230
Society	45
Economy	67
Development, Management	80
Other	309
<b>Total</b>	<b>1254</b>

**Table 1.** Categories of the keywords found in abstracts. (Source: Results by the Scopus database, processed by the authors)

Tourism, travel	Freq.289	Sustainability related	Freq.197	Wellness, Wellbeing, Health	Freq.136
Tourism	85	Sustainable Development	80	<b>Wellbeing</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Ecotourism</b>	<b>44</b>	Sustainability	53	Health	11
<b>Wellness Tourism</b>	<b>12</b>	Sustainable Tourism	40	Well-being	10
Health Tourism	12	Sustainable Tourism Development	7	Public Health	10
Medical Tourism	13	Sustainable Development Goal	6	Mental Health	9
Rural Tourism	5	Environmental Sustainability	6	<b>Wellness</b>	<b>8</b>
Heritage Tourism	5	Sustainable Development Goals	5	Human Wellbeing	6
Nature-based Tourism	4			Community Wellbeing	5
Health And Wellness Tourism	4			Health Care	5
Cultural Tourism	3			Health Impact	3
Geotourism	3			Health And Wellness	3
Community-based Tourism	3			Quality Of Life	18
Adventure Tourism	3			Recreation	4
Tourism Development	37				
Tourism Management	19				
Tourist Destination	15				
Tourist Behavior	10				
Tourism Market	8				
Travel Behavior	6				
Travel	5				
Tourism Industry	5				

**Table 2.** Keywords for the categories of interest. (Source: Results by the Scopus database)



According to Table 2, wellbeing (44) is used more frequently as a keyword in comparison to wellness (8). Thus, we can assume that it may be more or better related with sustainable tourism. Interestingly, ecotourism is the type of tourism mentioned more often (44) in the sample of publications, while wellness tourism (12) is not so popular as a keyword. Moreover, sustainability related keywords have a large share (197 frequency) in the total keywords, with the most frequently mentioned: sustainable development, sustainability and sustainable tourism.

As mentioned earlier, in the second stage we thoroughly studied 55 papers related to the keywords of interest for the current study. One of the main issues raised is the community's or resident's wellbeing; tourism may lead to the individual's wellbeing but it should also support and/or maintain the wellbeing of the hosts/ locals. In addition, a number of studies investigate the connection between well-being-enhancing experiences, self-transformation and pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, several studies explore the types of wellness tourists according to their motivation while other aim to identify factors which contribute to establishing a well-being or wellness tourism destination.

In conclusion, this paper contributes to the literature by providing insights on the evolution of academic interest in the field of sustainable tourism in conjunction with wellness or wellbeing; findings indicate a continuous rise of publications over the years making sustainable wellness tourism a promising field of research. It is worth noting that environmental sciences accounts for about 25 % of the documents found per subject area, which may be attributed to the fact that sustainability is still principally associated with its environmental pillar; climate change could further explain the large share. Additionally, even though wellbeing is relevant to the society, the bibliometric analysis didn't match to a higher number of keywords, compared to the results obtained for the economy related keywords. To sum up, this study outlines the potential for growth and advancement of an emerging debate that has captured the attention of scholars in recent years and holds the promise of uncovering new prospects in the coming future.

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## **MANAGEMENT AS AN ADDED VALUE FACTOR IN THE HOTEL PRODUCT THROUGH THE ACTIVATION OF HIGH VALUE MOTIVATIONS OF HUMAN RESOURCES**

**Aristides KATSAITIS**

**Department of Economics & Sustainable Development, Harokopio University, El. 70 Venizelou, 176 71 Athens, Greece , [akatsaitis@hua.gr](mailto:akatsaitis@hua.gr)**

**Constantine YANNOPOULOS**

**Department of Economics & Sustainable Development, Harokopio University, El. 70 Venizelou, 176 71 Athens, Greece , [giannopoulosk@hua . Gr](mailto:giannopoulosk@hua.gr)**

### **Abstract**

This paper investigates the added value of the hotel product that total quality management can provide through the activation of high value incentives of human resources.

The method chosen in this qualitative research is the personal interview ( personal interview ). This particular interview is semi-structured with set questions. The selected sample of 7 (seven) informants and specifically from academics in the field of tourism and tourism business administration, from public and professional bodies (chambers, federations, associations, associations), of the hotel industry.

The total quality management ensures, through the standard procedures, a clearly better quality hotel product with a reduction in errors and this leads to a constantly better quality hotel product, produced through the internal customer (the employee), with guaranteed hotel customer satisfaction. In this, specific approaches and actions that mainly concern the standardization of functions and processes in hotel product production and customer satisfaction have an important contribution, therefore, a quality product in the training and certification of partners (suppliers of primary materials) clear quality procedures potential competitive advantage , the satisfied internal customer (employee), ( Katsaitis V. Aristeidis , 2024: 724).

The application of the principles of total quality management in the hotel business will enhance the characteristics of quality service for the hotel customer and consequently enhance the hotel product itself.

**Keywords:** Hotel Business, Total Quality Management, Human Resources, Needs, Motivation.

**JEL Classification Z300 Tourism Economics: General**

## 1. Introduction

What is investigated in the present research is related to the activation of the high value motivation of human resources by the application of total quality management as an added value factor in the hotel product. The main question is whether the high-value factors are activated in human resources due to the application of total quality management that gives added value to the hotel product. The human resources, through their own actions with the application of total quality management, add value to the hotel services produced.

Human resources are considered one of the most important factors for the production and distribution of hotel goods. The degree of importance is determined by the degree of direct involvement and contact of human resources in the production process of hotel products and services. Human resource management ( HRM ) aims to encourage the activation of human resources to achieve the strategic goals of the hotel business, through the satisfaction of their human and personal needs.

The human resources through its involvement in the production of excellent quality hotel goods (products - services) will satisfy those needs that are therefore of high value.

## 2. Literature Review

The hotel business is made up of a number of different productive branches with peculiarities to the coefficients, factors and characteristics in terms of functions and processes that are developed for the final formation of a complex overall hotel good. The hotel product is heterogeneous in terms of the products and services it produces. Also, human resources are characterized by heterogeneity due to their different education and specialization, their educational level and their socio-economic group of origin, which give it the mentality and culture for their professional consciousness and behavior, ( Katsaitis V. Aristeidis , 2024: 167).

The operation of the hotel business presents particularities such as its intense personal character with constant interactions of the human resources with the hotel customers, in order for the latter to consume the services of their stay in it and to experience and assimilate the elements of hospitality as a unique experience. This requires the direct involvement of the management of the hotel business and its human resources.

Orientation to the quality production and provision of hotel services will provide enhanced competitiveness and business success (Samson D. and Terziovski M., 1999: 393-409). Specifically, Motwani J., Kuman A. and Youssef MA, state that for the hotel business, the choice of quality at a strategic level is the only way to achieve continuous improvement of its offered services, to maintain its dynamic competitiveness and increase its of its profitability even in economic crises, (Motwani J., Kuman A. and Youssef MA, 1996: 4-16). Also, researchers report that the application of total quality management alone is a strategy (Theodoros Stavrinoudis & Christina El Chanoun,

2013). The strategic importance of quality contributes to a more efficient investment to increase productivity and improve competitiveness", (Sotiriadis M., 2000: 94).

The application of the principles of total quality management in the hotel business will enhance the characteristics of quality service for the hotel customer and consequently enhance the hotel product itself. Quality service is required to follow the constantly changing needs of international tourists – customers of the hotel business. Quality in the hotel business has nothing to do with characteristics such as "the best", "the most expensive", "the excellent", etc., but mainly with how well it can serve the hotel customer in its consumer hotels needs and expectations. Therefore, the hotel customer sets the features and the hotel business should adopt them to produce and make available to the hotel customer.

The application of total quality management is a philosophy that gives equal importance to both the internal customer (human resources) and the external customer (hotel customer, and not only). Today the hotel business faces an extremely special competitive and challenging environment and is called upon to deal with it with sustainable management practices and "sustainable" features in the management of its productive resources and especially its human resources. The continuous challenges faced by the hotel business can be addressed by the total quality management approach, applied in a holistic, continuous and consistent manner to improve its competitiveness and the satisfaction of the needs of the hotel customer, as well as business excellence, (Samson D., Tevziovski M., 1999: 393-409). Total quality management should be the dynamic choice for hospitality businesses to improve their services, (Motwani J., Kumar A., Youssef MA, 1996: 4-16). Total Quality Management is a quality-based management strategy that promotes it in all 190 business functions through a strong customer and environmental orientation, (Mechra S., Hoffman J. and Sirias D.: 2001, 871).

The most important differences between the traditional way of management and Total Quality Management are listed below (table: 1.1.), (Kefis Vassilis, 2005: 49-50):

**Table 1.1: Differences between traditional management and TQM**

<b>Traditional management style</b>	<b>Total quality Management</b>
<b>1. Quality comes at a high cost.</b>	<b>1. Quality costs in the short term but brings high profits to the organization in the medium/long term.</b>
<b>2. Control is the final process of production.</b>	<b>2. The control is continuous and step by step ). From the design of the product to its sale to the final consumer.</b>
<b>3. Emphasis on mass production and low product price.</b>	<b>3. Emphasis on quality (albeit at a higher price).</b>
<b>4. If something goes wrong, the responsibility lies with the workers.</b>	<b>4. If something goes wrong, the responsibility lies with the executives. Executives make the decisions. Employees are executive bodies.</b>
<b>5. Training programs incur costs. However, if necessary, they should be addressed only to senior management.</b>	<b>5. Education is a necessity. It concerns executives and employees. Educational programs mean knowledge, motivation. Knowledge is power and this can be seen both at the individual level and at the business level.</b>

**Edited and adapted by the author**  
**Source: Kefis Vasilis, 2005: 49.**

The total quality management ensures, through the standard procedures, a clearly better quality hotel product with a reduction in errors and this leads to a constantly better quality hotel product, produced through the internal customer (the employee), with guaranteed hotel customer satisfaction. In this, specific approaches and actions that mainly concern the standardization of functions and processes in hotel product production and customer satisfaction have an important contribution, therefore, a quality product in the training and certification of partners (suppliers of primary materials) clear quality procedures potential competitive advantage, the satisfied internal customer (employee), ( Katsaitis V. Aristeidis , 2024: 724).

The benefits for the hotel business from total quality management are long-term when it is supported by the hotel management itself and applied consistently and continuously. This will give the hotel business the dynamic improvement of its services, ( Motwani J. , Kumar A ., Youssef M. A ., 1996: 4-16). Hotel products must be supported by the leadership of the hotel business to effectively face its competition and its performance. Also, a necessary condition is mainly the support of human resources with new IT technologies and specialized educational programs, ( Katsaitis V. Aristeidis , 2024: 213).

Human resources are considered one of the most important factors for the production and distribution of hotel goods. The degree of importance is determined by the degree of direct involvement and contact of human resources in the production process of hotel products and services. Human resource management ( HRM ) aims to encourage the activation of human resources to achieve the strategic goals of the hotel business, through the satisfaction of their human and personal needs. The support of human resources in the implementation of the principles of total quality management is essential and decisive, and through this involvement, human resources will have the possibility to further develop their abilities and skills, due to the favorable conditions presented by the company itself. philosophy of "total quality management", (Vouzias Fotis, 2008: 2-3).

Total quality management is governed by human-centered characteristics. In hotel businesses, the human factor co-shapes the hotel product or service through the personal nature of human resources with the hotel customer. Human resources and customer interact and co-shape each time the qualitative change to the next level. The effective performance of human resources is inextricably linked to the satisfaction of their human needs. Total quality management can influence and bring about significant results in the direction of satisfying human needs - motivations, satisfying those needs that will be the driving force in human resources, so that it performs at any given time or condition.

Total quality management is a network of human resource relationships from all administrative levels, with participation and cooperation in a framework of democratic values, in order to improve and utilize human resources, (Kefis Vassilis, 2005: 48). Various scholars have recorded in their studies the important and determining factors concerning human resources and the successful management of total quality management, such as employee relations, teamwork, training, employee satisfaction and communication, ( Saraph J. V ., Benosn P. G. , Schroeder R. G ., 1989), ( Al - Dhaafri H. S ., Al - Swidi A ., 2016), ( Amin M ., Aldakhil A. M. , Wu C ., Razaei S. , Cobanoglu C. , 2017) .

The human resources of the hotel business should be empowered in the cognitive and experiential field, in order to take initiatives, make decisions and assume responsibilities, in order to acquire abilities to operate at a level of self-management and self-management. Deming states

that all obstacles should be set aside for seamless intercommunication between departments but also for the employee to feel proud of his work (Kefis Vassilis, 2005: 78-79). The above, mentioned for human resources, are motivations, both for their qualitative effectiveness, and for strengthening the link with the hotel business, ( Katsaitis V. Aristeidis , 2024: 219).

The behavior of human resources to the hotel customer is mutually influenced by identification of the production and consumption of the hotel products. Thus, the behavior of one affects the other and vice versa at the same time. The emotional and psychological state of the employee is of decisive importance because his behavior is affected and this is transmitted to the customer, determining the quality of the service he provides ( Schneider & Bowen , 1985). In the hotel business, human resources provide services to the hotel customer with direct contact, this contact activates factors of various forms of pressure and intensifies stress. These psychological conditions affect human resources with reduced morale, with an increase in fatigue and reinforces frustration resulting in low quality provision and an increase in operational costs in the hotel business, ( Johnston , Clark & Shulver , 2012), ( Goleman , Boyatzis , 2008).

Research has shown that "it becomes clear to hotel executives that employees are recognized as an extremely important factor for the company's sustainability, while no corporate goal can be achieved if the company's vision has not been communicated to the employees", (Stavrinoudis Theodoros, Livadioti Georgia, 2001: 19). The hotel business should focus on its human resources and should consider them as its most important factor of production and treat them as its separate "customers". The hotel business should meet his needs and motivate them, ( Katsaitis Aristides , Papaefthimiou Efi , 2018: 213). Employees with encouragement become more active and increase their performance in production, expecting to be utilized and promoted in the company, (Stavrinoudis Theodoros, Livadioti Georgia, 2001: 9).

### **3. Methodology**

The method chosen in this qualitative research is the personal interview ( personal interview ). The personal interview provides us with the characteristics of flexibility and direct contact when it is conducted (King, 1999). Also, it is possible to capture the perceptions and opinions that guide us in the investigation of the causes and behaviors in the phenomenon under consideration, (Zafeiropoulos K., 2005:169). This particular interview is semi-structured with set questions, which guide the discussion on the important topics they seek to cover. The selected sample as informants consists of academics in the field of tourism and management of tourism businesses, who have specialized scientific knowledge, public and professional bodies (chamber, federations, associations, associations), who provide a large amount of information, of the industry of hotel businesses.

The sample includes 7 (seven) informants who answered a semi-structured questionnaire with a personal interview via the Internet, the interviews were recorded, after the consent of the informants for the recording was requested, with my commitment to their anonymity. Information saturation was reached and no additional informants needed to be added.

In the questions "how can total quality management give added value to the hotel product - services?" and "Impacts on human resources (on the satisfaction of human resources needs)" the following codes emerged for the creation of the thematic categories, in order to conduct the results and conclusions, ( Katsaitis V. Aristeidis , 2024: 724):

#### **Coding of informants' responses**

- Standardization of functions and processes in the production of a hotel product and in the satisfaction of the customer, therefore, a quality product
- Training and certified partners (primary material suppliers)

- Clear quality procedures
- Potential competitive advantage
- The satisfied internal customer (employee)
- Participation - teamwork
- Pride in work, job satisfaction, living conditions, communication, interpersonal relationships, education
- Education (developing knowledge skills)
- Satisfying the needs of the human resources through the DOP implemented by the human resources department
- By satisfying the needs of the employee

#### **4. Results**

The way total quality management adds value to the hotel product and activates high-value motivational factors in human resources, according to the informants, are, ( Katsaitis V. Aristeidis , 2024: 738-740):

- The motivational factors related to the implementation of total quality management that human resources actively participate and shape an enhanced hotel product. These factors are participation, teamwork, decision-making, taking responsibility and above all for meeting the needs of human resources.
- The result of the added value in the hotel product is that there are corresponding services provided by the hotel business to its internal customers, the employees, related to living conditions, meals provided, uniforms, cleanliness, communication with supervisors, interpersonal relationships and more generally what we would call working conditions in the hotel business environment, which are the conditions for satisfying the basic, and not only, needs of people - employees.
- The added value to the hotel product is created by human resources through the satisfaction of high-value incentives, but it is sufficient that there is acceptance by human resources in order to be able to operate and perform in terms of total quality, the culture of total quality management.
- The very application of total quality management "leads" to a better product, which inevitably adds value to the final hotel product through the participation of human resources.

#### **5. Conclusions**

The conclusions drawn from the results of the qualitative research on added value to the hotel product from the implementation of total quality management and the activation of highly motivated factors in human resources are, ( Katsaitis V. Aristeidis , 2024: 747-749):

- By implementing total quality management, human resources are more efficient with high employee participation and ownership. Co-responsibility, cooperation, team building and universal involvement of the employees of the hotel unit are developed.
- The research shows that in the total quality environment the employee experiences a pleasant environment, which is suitable for the employee who is motivated, participates in work groups, takes responsibility and participates in decision-making in matters related to their duties and responsibilities .
- The application of total quality management goes first and foremost through the human resources which, since they are satisfied to a high degree by the motivation factors of high value, then this contributes to a high degree to the added value of the

hotel product and vice versa, i.e. the production of increased value hotel product is the result of satisfied needs of high value.

- Total quality management affects the operations and processes of the hotel business in the production of quality products and increasing the value of the hotel product, because the application of total quality management alone creates a better product, since it has primarily satisfied the customers themselves to a high degree. its employees who produce and offer services to the hotel customer.
- The positive effect created on human resources by the implementation of total quality management, which is transferred to the hotel product itself, which significantly increases its value. This effect mainly concerns the high satisfaction of human needs expectations and as a result is transferred to the production and provision of excellent hotel services.
- Also, our research shows that the added value of the hotel product is related to the added customer satisfaction. This is a result of satisfying the high value motivations of human resources since this has a decisive role in providing an excellent service offering.
- Also, the requirement of the production of an increased quality hotel product requires the strengthening of the specialized training of the human resources, which strengthens their working position within the business environment of the hotel.
- In order to achieve the added value of the hotel product, those conditions are required that will satisfy the needs of human resources, the research demonstrates the motivating factors related to participation, teamwork, responsibility and decision-making, the achievement of hotel goals business, the living conditions of the employees (meals, uniforms, cleanliness, communication, interpersonal relations), i.e. the working conditions in the hotel business environment, which will satisfy a set of basic needs, and not only, of the people - employees.

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