

TOURISM AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Heritage, Cultural Tourism, and Sustainability

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

27th and 28th February 2026



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DAY 1: Friday, 27th of February

FROM SHARED RESOURCES TO SHARED FUTURES: RECLAIMING CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH COMMONS-BASED TRANSITION IN THE LASSITHI PLATEAU

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable cultural heritage management in rural areas is widely recognized as a critical global priority. However, institutional approaches often fail to address the challenges of rural decline, local disempowerment, and the erosion of cultural identity. This research aims to develop a participatory model for transforming resources into commons, empowering local people to reclaim cultural heritage while building a resilient energy community. It argues against a top-down heritage management approach, instead emphasizing the commoning process which supports community autonomy and allows people to not only share resources but to build their shared future.

The Lassithi Plateau in Crete, Greece, serves as the case study. This region thrived with thousands of traditional windmills used for irrigation, sustained by a strong community bond. These windmills were more than just agricultural infrastructure. They symbolized the ingenuity of local farmers, who harnessed the abundant wind for irrigation through co-management and co-benefit systems. As part of Lassithi's cultural heritage, they reflect a deeper tradition of local cooperation and self-governance. In recent decades, because of new irrigation technology and rural out-migration, most of the traditional windmills in the Lassithi Plateau have fallen out of use, with only 150 restored as tourist attractions. This decline has coincided with a gradual weakening of the community's cultural identity and social fabric. More recently, plans to install 85 large-scale wind turbines on the Dikti mountain range sparked strong opposition from the local community. These wind turbines threaten to disrupt the natural landscape and ecological balance, while further excluding local people from decisions about their energy future. The real issue goes deeper than energy infrastructure, as the Lassithi Plateau, like many rural regions, is struggling with depopulation, economic decline, the erosion of agricultural heritage, and the weakening of community identity.

Facing these challenges, this research employs the lens of the commons, with particular attention to the dynamic process of commoning. It is argued that a commons-based energy transition is not a technological shift,

but rather a methodology for rebuilding the systems of shared stewardship, mutual care and self-governance that support local resilience. In this context, a commons is not defined simply as a shared resource, but as a socio-ecological system collectively managed by the community. The resource only becomes a commons through commoning: the active, negotiated, and self-organized practices by which communities create their own rules, traditions, and values to govern that resource. Applying this framework shifts the focus away from energy infrastructure as an isolated asset. Instead, it highlights how an energy community grounded in commoning practices can enable shared ownership and co-management of energy systems, while at the same time helping to reweave the social fabric of Lassithi as the intangible cultural heritage.

The research combines a mixed-media ethnographic approach with Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR), supported by prior literature review and case study analysis. It is designed to not only identify existing and potential commons within the local social-ecological system, but also to clarify the practical mechanisms required to build an energy community through the commoning process. Data collection involved multiple strands, including archival analysis to trace the historical evolution of Lassithi, in-depth interviews with diverse local actors to capture their sense of place and future concerns, and filmmaking employed as both a data collection tool and an action research intervention designed to inspire local reflection and mobilization. In alignment with the CPAR framework, the research group served as facilitators and catalysts rather than dominant planners. The methodology emphasized supporting the formation of a local “seed group” to initiate the commoning process, thus directly translating the theoretical framework into actionable, community-driven practice for building the energy community.

The research demonstrates a transformative model, showing how commons-based initiatives serve as a powerful vehicle for cultural heritage reclamation and local resilience. In Lassithi, inspired by the historic windmills, the small-scale, electricity-producing windmill was initiated by researchers from a local university in collaboration with local authorities and entrepreneurs. According to the initiator of the renovated windmills, around 2,000 such turbines could make the Plateau energy self-sufficient. While these electricity-producing windmills may be privately owned, they can be connected through a locally governed network that allows electricity to circulate as a shared resource. In this way, electricity can be seen as a commons, collectively managed and used by the community. The commoning process supports low-cost, short-distance transmission and creates the foundation for a more resilient and decentralized energy system. In response to the threat of wind turbines, this commoning practice shifts away from large, centralized, energy-intensive systems towards small, local, decentralized ones. The energy commons are also more environmentally sustainable because they focus on long-term care of resources instead of short-term profit. However, the commoning process does not only reclaim energy autonomy, but also restores the strong social connections and collective systems that form Lassithi’s essential cultural heritage. In this context, communities are reconnected through shared ownership, local governance, and mutual care.

The findings from Lassithi show the commons-based energy transition is not only a response to environmental or economic pressures. It represents a collective act of self-determination through which the community moves from shared resources of the past toward shared futures in the making. By reclaiming energy as a commons, the community reactivates cultural heritage not as a fixed legacy, but as a living practice which reconnects energy, land, food, and knowledge through commoning. In this sense, the transition does not only reorganize how resources are managed but also consolidates social cohesion that enables communities to imagine and sustain their futures together.

Keywords: commons, commoning process, cultural heritage, energy community, Lassithi Plateau

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REFRAMING MUSEUM PRACTICE THROUGH INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: RESILIENCE, SUSTAINABILITY, AND VISITOR ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The growing urgency of climate change has prompted museums worldwide to reconsider their role in fostering resilience and sustainable perspectives. While recent reports, such as *Les musées face aux effets du changement climatique* (SE Advisory Services, Les Augures 2025), primarily address material vulnerability and architectural adaptation, this perspective captures only a limited dimension of the museum's potential. More broadly, academic literature shows how museums can act not only as custodians of objects but also as unique public and transnational spaces where diverse stakeholders, at different levels, can gather and activate both individual and collective action. Museums increasingly emerge as key intellectual and civic resources to address inequalities, injustice, and environmental challenges (Cameron & Neilson, 2014; Janes & Sandell, 2019).

In particular, the renewed attention to Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in museum contexts underscores how practices, skills, and community-based knowledge systems may inspire more sustainable and participatory approaches within these institutions. As argued by Bortolotto (2025) in *Will Heritage Save Us?*, « the safeguarding of ICH is seen as a future-oriented responsibility: a way to proactively envision new possible destinies in terms of livelihoods, the relationship with nature, and interaction with the environment. »

This paper explores the potential synergies between museums and ICH as drivers of resilience and sustainable tourism experiences. Drawing on the outcomes of the Intangible Cultural Heritage & Museums Project (funded by the Creative Europe programme) and on a literature review on heritage-based resilience (Smith, 2006), this communication examines how museums can mobilize ICH to engage visitors in more sustainable and future-oriented reflection. Through the analysis of three case studies - the Museo della Seta di Valdobbiate, the Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil, and the Cité Internationale de la Tapisserie - the paper investigates how ICH in museums fosters narratives, practices, and experiences that contribute to sustainability, both within and beyond the museums themselves.

The methodology is based on interviews conducted with museum curators and on observations of how collections are presented and narratives are shaped for visitors. These reflections lead us to consider how museums, by embracing ICH, can shift from preservation-centered institutions to active laboratories of sustainable futures.

Keywords: museums, intangible cultural heritage, climate change, resilience, sustainability, community

WEAVING HERITAGE INTO THE FUTURE: TRADITIONAL CRAFTS AND TOURISM AWARENESS IN ANOGIA VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how traditional crafts can connect intangible cultural heritage with the development of cultural tourism, using the village of Anogia in Crete and its weaving tradition as a case study. We examine how traditional craftsmanship can empower local communities, enhance heritage awareness, and contribute to sustainable tourism and regional development.

Anogia has a long history of weaving once practiced in every household, supported by abundant local wool and distinctive techniques such as triopatitiro. Weaving also played a crucial role in the village's post-Second World War recovery. Today, however, the number of skilled craftswomen has significantly declined, and knowledge of wool processing is rapidly disappearing.

The local authorities of Anogia aim to integrate weaving into the overall tourism experience, allowing visitors to become directly involved in creative processes, while craft practices enrich their stay and foster meaningful connections between tourists, craftspeople, and the host community. To achieve this, the following actions have been undertaken:

During 2024–2025, Anogia participated in a pilot craft program implemented through a collaboration between the Center for Lifelong Learning of the University of West Attica and the Ministry of Culture across different regions of Greece. The aim of this program is to revive weaving traditions with a view to developing professional craft skills.

In parallel with the practical training, a video was produced featuring the elder craftswomen of Anogia. Through storytelling and reflective dialogue, they share memories of weaving practices and offer advice to younger weavers, thereby linking past experience with future creativity.

Furthermore, a dedicated center for the exhibition and sale of woven products has been established in the village. The center will present the video alongside a collection of photographs and both traditional and contemporary textiles produced locally. In addition, active weavers will work on site, enabling visitors to participate in the process by creating a small woven sample to take home.

Overall, the case of Anogia demonstrates how the revitalization of traditional weaving—supported by local branding, value chains based on regional raw materials, and initiatives aiming toward Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) products—can serve as a catalyst for sustainable tourism. This approach not only strengthens heritage preservation and community participation, but also offers visitors a meaningful encounter with both the historical and contemporary dimensions of Anogia’s weaving tradition.

Keywords: sustainable touristic development, weaving, value chains, vocational craft program.

UNVEILING GREECE'S POTENTIAL: TOUR OPERATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM IN GREECE

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ABSTRACT

Authenticity has emerged as one of the most desirable qualities sought by today's travellers. ICH holds significant importance in this context, as authentic experiences are typically found in the intangible and living cultural heritage of destinations. In the growing quest of travellers to experience authentic local cultures, tour operators, as product developers and suppliers within the industry, to remain relevant and by extension secure their position in the competitive global marketplace, align their offerings with these evolving preferences. It is only a quick search on travel agency websites to reveal that ICH assets now feature prominently in travel packages. Traditional ceremonies, cultural festivals, culinary classes and crafts workshops are just a few examples of the many ICH elements included.

However, for ICH assets to be effectively integrated into travel packages and to be accessible and consumable by tourists, they need to be reconstructed and transformed into commodities. The commodification of ICH raises critical concerns regarding its authenticity, and, by extension, its continuity as cultural commodification can jeopardize cultural authenticity. These concerns are further fuelled by the ephemeral and fragmented nature of ICH, which make it particularly fragile and vulnerable when commodified to meet tourism demands.

This is where the discussion about safeguarding and managing ICH comes into play. When ICH is treated as a tourism resource, the distinction between safeguarding and commercialization it becomes increasingly blurred. This ambiguity is particularly evident among tour operators, who are often driven by business and commercial motives, potentially lacking the necessary awareness regarding ICH management practices. Sustainability holds immense potential for achieving the balance between safeguarding ICH and satisfying tourists' needs. The principle of sustainability is particularly significant in the context of ICH, as it is not merely an external goal imposed upon it, but rather a principle fundamentally embedded within its very essence. This intrinsic connection is clearly articulated in various provisions of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

While acknowledging the crucial role of tour operators as product developers and suppliers within the tourism industry, the approach of tour operators to the sustainable management of ICH tourism in Greece seems relatively underexplored in the academic literature. The study qualitatively sheds light on the aforementioned scientific gap by setting the following objectives: 1) To assess the extent to which ICH is integrated into travel packages for tourist destinations in Greece and identify the specific ICH elements that are most commonly featured.; 2) To explore how do tour operators in Greece perceive the balance between commercial interests and the preservation of authenticity and continuity of ICH in their tourism offerings, and what strategies / attitudes do they employ to address this balance.; 3) To investigate the challenges faced by tour operators in Greece in implementing sustainable management practices for ICH tourism, and how do they navigate these challenges.

To achieve these objectives, an open-ended questionnaire was distributed to tour operators in Greece, and 20 fully anonymous responses were collected and thematically analysed.

The results of the study reveal that tour operators seem to recognize the need for a balance between profitability and cultural preservation. This recognition is not limited to theoretical level but extends to practical level and translates into tangible actions by being embedded in their business philosophy. Tour operators follow strategies and make efforts aimed at achieving this balance, with a focus that, in general context, aligns with sustainability principles. However, the effectiveness of their efforts and the depth of their engagement remain unclear requiring further investigation. However, when it comes to direct reveal their approach to sustainability in relation to ICH tourism, the dynamics become blurred. Tour operators' awareness and understanding of sustainability appear to be in an early stage. Of course, not all tour operators share the same level of comprehension; some seem to have developed a more profound understanding, others display only a superficial awareness, while some demonstrate no awareness at all. While their efforts and strategies reflect a willingness to sustainability in relation to ICH - whether they are approaching sustainability in the most effective and comprehensive manner is another discussion that requires further investigation - their understanding of sustainability and sustainable management in this context seems fragmented, limited and somewhat generic. Despite this limited understanding, the key point is that tour operators' actions demonstrate a shift in mindset. Although this may seem like a small step, it marks a crucial move forward. Even the mere recognition of sustainability as something positive and important lays the foundation for further progress. This acknowledgment, however modest, is paving the way for more meaningful, long-term commitments to the sustainable management of ICH tourism.

The study suggests that awareness of sustainability in ICH tourism among tour operators in Greece needs to be significantly advanced. This need is particularly pressing, given that the selection and inclusion of ICH elements in travel packages often depend heavily on market demand, which can pose several risks to ICH and its authenticity. Greece and its tourism policy could promote targeted initiatives, such as capacity-building programs, awareness-raising campaigns, and the sharing best practices from other countries, to enhance tour operators' understanding of sustainable ICH tourism practices.

Acknowledging that knowledge regarding the sustainable management of ICH tourism should not be limited to national boundaries but should extend internationally for the common good, the study suggests, also, that future research should investigate the approaches of tour operators to the sustainable management of ICH tourism in other countries to assess their level of awareness, as the findings of the present study are limited to Greece and may not be applicable elsewhere. A broader, more holistic approach can aid international organizations focused on tourism and ICH, such as the UNWTO and UNESCO, in developing targeted guidelines and strategies for sustainable ICH tourism management globally.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage, tourism, tour operators, sustainable management, Greece

BOUTIQUE HOTELS IN GREECE: DO THEY REFLECT HERITAGE, LOCAL IDENTITY AND SUSTAINABILITY?

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ABSTRACT

Boutique hotels appear to represent an important direction in hotel design and planning. The literature review reveals a growth trend in the development of boutique hotels from 2000 onwards. Boutique hotels are internationally associated with concepts such as sustainability, small scale, carefully considered architectural design, local identity, and the promotion of cultural and architectural heritage. As a form of accommodation, they are often presented as an alternative hospitality model that is integrated into its context and enhances the identity of the destination. However, the extent to which these characteristics are reflected in the case of Greek boutique hotels, and the degree to which they are expressed through architectural design and spatial distribution, remains an open question.

Within this context, the present study addresses the following research questions: what are the main structural, architectural, and geospatial characteristics of Greek boutique hotels; how are these establishments related to buildings of architectural heritage and architectural design practices; and how do these characteristics correlate with the tourism development areas in which they are located.

The methodology of the study is based on the analysis of archival and recorded material from competent authorities responsible for hotel licensing and supervision in Greece (Hellenic Chamber of Hotels and Greek National Tourism Organization). Initially, the structural characteristics of Greek boutique hotels are documented, including capacity, star classification, type of accommodation, and the age of the establishment. Subsequently, selected architectural characteristics are examined, such as whether the hotels are housed in buildings of architectural heritage, whether they have received awards or produced publications related to their architectural design, and whether an architect or designer is explicitly identified as part of the creative team. Finally, the geospatial distribution of the hotels is examined in relation to tourism development areas, while the data are statistically analyzed and mapped using the QGIS system.



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The findings of the research highlight the prevailing architectural and spatial patterns of Greek boutique hotels and document their relationship with the tourism and spatial development of the destinations in which they are located. The study aspires to constitute one of the first systematic references on Greek boutique hotels, contributing to the academic discourse on architectural design, spatial characteristics, and the sustainable development of this category of accommodation.

Keywords: boutique hotels, architectural heritage, cultural tourism, sustainability



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PRELIMINARY STUDY ON FOOD WASTE REDUCTION INTERVENTIONS IN GREEK HOSPITALITY SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Accommodation and food service sector is highly heterogenous and structurally fragmented, encompassing hotel kitchens, restaurants, contract and event catering services, etc. The sector is characterized by frequent menu changes, variable ingredients, small kitchens, and demand volatility. The sector is characterized by frequent menu changes, variable ingredient use, small-scale kitchen infrastructures, and fluctuating demand patterns. At the European Union level, approximately 2 million enterprises operate in this sector, while in Greece more than 82,000 enterprises employing approximately 384,000 workers. These structural features create significant challenges for the systematic food waste monitoring and prevention. Within this context, accurately estimating food waste volumes and implementing effective prevention strategies becomes particularly complex.

Food waste represents a critical sustainability issue for tourism systems, given its environmental, economic, and social implications. Globally, nearly one-third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted annually. In hospitality operations, literature suggests that hotels may generate 0.5 to 2.0 Kg food waste per guest per day, with buffet services and overproduction identified as primary contributors. Beyond environmental externalities, food waste reduction also presents substantial economic benefits. These findings reinforce the strategic relevance of food waste prevention within sustainable tourism management.

The present preliminary study investigates food waste generation and reduction interventions in the Greek hotel sector, with particular emphasis on food and beverage services. The research aims to examine the effectiveness of preventive interventions, as well as their impact on employee and guest behavior. The study situates food waste prevention within the broader framework of sustainable tourism, resource efficiency, and circular economy principles.

The research adopts a mixed-methodologies approach combining: (a) a structured literature review, (b) primary research through questionnaires addressed to employees in Greek hotels, and (c) metadata analysis based on publicly available sustainability information from hospitality companies' websites. The literature review

synthesizes findings of published studies on food waste generation points across the hospitality value chain, while examining structural, operational, and behavioral determinants. It further identifies and describes intervention strategies, including staff training, awareness-raising campaigns, portion size adjustments, menu redesign, business model innovation, supplier collaboration, consumer engagement, and digital monitoring systems.

Although the study is on-going, it suggests that there exists a notable level of awareness among hotel employees regarding the production and impacts of food waste, alongside a strong willingness to participate in preventive actions. Food waste was reported across the entire food service process, with higher concentrations during kitchen preparation and at the consumption stage, particularly in buffet contexts. These findings underscore the dual operational and behavioral dimensions of food waste production.

The review of 130 four- and five-star hotels in Greece indicates widespread implementation of environmental measures related to energy efficiency, water management, and solid waste handling. However, comparatively fewer establishments report structured food waste prevention practices, and even fewer provide measurable performance indicators or publicly documented outcomes.

The findings highlight that effective food waste reduction in hospitality requires multi-level, repeated, and systemic interventions. Priority areas include addressing knowledge gaps through awareness campaigns and staff training; reconsidering business models, portion sizes, and production planning; and strengthening interaction with suppliers and consumers to foster collaborative and behaviorally informed solutions. Cross-departmental coordination, standardized monitoring mechanisms, accountability tools, and the integration of digital and artificial intelligence applications for forecasting and real-time waste tracking emerge as critical enabling factors.

Overall, the study aligns with contemporary sustainable tourism literature advocating integrated approaches that combine organizational change, stakeholder engagement, and technological innovation. The Greek hospitality sector appears to be gradually advancing toward more responsible resource management practices; nevertheless, the measurement of food waste prevention requires further development. As a preliminary contribution, this research provides empirical insights and actionable recommendations to support the transition toward more circular, resource-efficient, and sustainability-oriented tourism systems.

Keywords: food waste prevention, hospitality management, circular economy, behavioral interventions, Greece

DIETARY RESTRICTIONS AND THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE: CELIAC DISEASE AND GLUTEN INTOLERANCE

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ABSTRACT

Dietary restrictions, whether due to a medical condition or personal choice, often add to the difficulties a person faces in everyday life. With travel becoming more accessible to an increasing number of people, it is essential to examine how and to what extent dietary restrictions affect the travel experience. More specifically, the purpose of this research is to highlight the experience of people suffering from autoimmune celiac disease or gluten intolerance in general, as their condition requires lifelong avoidance of gluten, and it can pose a concern for their health if the destination of their choice doesn't offer gluten-free options. It also aims to investigate the extent to which their dietary restrictions influence their travel experience and their travel planning decisions.

Food tourism is a great way for travelers to connect with and get familiar with their chosen destination by trying local cuisine and learning about the cooking traditions. This is why dietary restrictions are increasingly attracting the attention of the tourism industry. The need for accessibility and inclusion of all travelers, regardless of their dietary needs, becomes essential. Inclusive food tourism is about not only convenience during travel, but also safety, respect, dignity, and equality. It ensures that everyone can enjoy the gastronomic part of their trip without fear of feeling excluded.

Research to date, which highlighted the difficulties people with dietary restrictions face on trips, concluded that, for many, the challenge of finding safe food options and the emotional burden that comes with it are deterrents to travelling or choosing certain destinations. At the same time, participants in previous research mentioned that the anxiety from the possibility of exposing themselves to gluten and the constant need to organize everything beforehand robs them of the fun of being spontaneous during their travels and often imposes an obstacle in participating in various activities, leaving them with a feeling of loneliness and isolation. Adding to this, the fact that many workers in the food industry are not properly informed and either refuse to serve or do so in a way that jeopardizes the traveler's health, it is not surprising that many people prefer not to travel or remain conservative with their choices. For this reason, further research is considered necessary to provide relief to these people and to make travel an enjoyable experience rather than an anxious one.

The methodology of this research is based on structured questionnaires administered to individuals with gluten-related dietary restrictions or parents of underaged children with dietary restrictions. The distribution happened through internet and more specifically through Facebook groups of people suffering from celiac disease. Even though this work is still in progress, the conclusions thus far have confirmed previous research. More specifically a great number of the participants has reported that celiac disease and gluten intolerance plays a key

role in the early organization parts of the travel such as the type of accommodation or the destination they will choose, in their food related experience during their trips and in their emotions with the majority of them characterizing food as a source of anxiety rather than an enjoyable experience.

Further research is essential to shed light on these issues and raise awareness among tourism, hospitality, and catering professionals. It is vital for stakeholders to understand that offering safe food options is not only an additional service but also an essential part of welcoming all travelers equally, creating an environment where visitors feel safe, welcome, and dignified.

Keywords: food tourism, inclusive tourism, dietary restrictions, celiac disease, gluten intolerance, travel experience

FOOD WASTE REDUCTION PRACTICES AS A COMPONENT OF ESG POLICY AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT IN THE GREEK HOTEL SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

The global challenge of climate change and the growing need for sustainable tourism have made the prevention and reduction of food waste a central pillar of sustainable development. As a major consumer of resources and producer of waste, the tourism industry faces increasing pressure to adopt practices that go beyond mere compliance and aim for a “zero-impact” approach.

In Greece, a country with a population of about 10 million, tourism is a key economic activity, with annual tourist arrivals exceeding 35 million and contributing significantly to both GDP and employment. In particular, the concentration of large numbers of tourists in island destinations makes supply chain management a critical parameter for the effective operation of hotel and catering businesses. Consequently, the transition to a sustainable tourism development model is crucial not only for environmental protection, but also for the more efficient operation of F&B departments.

Despite recent legislative measures (Law 4819/2021) and strategic guidelines from research institutions, the need for monitoring and evaluating waste management, as well as the systematic integration of targets related to food waste management, remains an ongoing research issue.

This paper presents a qualitative analysis aimed at examining the level of awareness and the practices implemented in the Greek hotel sector. Using semi-structured interviews with high-ranking executives of major hotel groups, the research focuses on three key questions: (A) the existence and integration of a food waste strategy within ESG, CSR, or certification frameworks; (B) the documentation of specific prevention and management practices applied; and (C) the perceived impact of these practices on the hotel’s reputation and brand value. The findings provide empirical insights into operational challenges and strategic motivations, contributing to the development of actionable recommendations that can accelerate the transition towards sustainability.

Keywords: Food Waste, Hotel sector, ESG, Reputation, Sustainable tourism, Greece

CO-CREATION OF CHEESE TOURISM THROUGH INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM IN B2G AND B2B CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Recently, most tourists are consciously selecting destinations with rich gastronomic traditions, to learn about various cultures in depth. These places offer guests memorable authentic food experiences. The World Food Travel Association reports that travelers' spending on food and beverages accounts for 25% of their total travel expenses. In 2024, the global gastronomic tourism market reached \$1.2 trillion. Greek cheesemaking has a long history, producing several regional and distinctive cheeses that shape the country's food heritage. Twenty-three of these cheeses hold a geographical indication, which reveals their close connection to the local resources of their place of production. Cheese acts as a magnet for tourists, creating a special innovation type of gastronomic tourism, known as cheese tourism. This alternative tourism segment amounts to 200 billion dollars annually. Cooperation among agri-food and tourism stakeholders is considered critical to exploiting this market's potential. The provision of experiential food tourism experiences is a complex process that requires co-creation within business networks for the two sectors, aiming to facilitate knowledge transfer for innovation. In the business-to-government (B2G) context, partnerships between public and private entities in the examined sectors can contribute to the development of a regulatory framework that facilitates the provision of unique cheese tourism services tailored to each region. In business-to-business (B2B) relationships, companies within the collaborative ecosystem can share information, common resources and know-how to highlight the region's unique gastronomic identity, with the goal of creating mutual business benefits. Although some studies have been conducted on cheese tourism, none have examined it from the perspective of value co-creation for the integrated provision of its services through business ecosystems. This particular type of tourism is an innovation effort for Greece and has been almost completely unstudied. This gap is addressed by the present research, which seeks to develop an innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem through B2B and B2G relationships, focusing on the tourist exploitation of local cheeses of the Peloponnese. The region was chosen as a case study due to its strong cheesemaking tradition, but also because it lacks significant tourist flows like other regions, despite the substantial tourist infrastructure, great landscapes, rich history and vibrant culture.

Methods: To develop the innovation entrepreneurial ecosystem focused on local cheeses in Peloponnese, the ecosystem pie model was used as a strategic planning tool, utilizing both primary and secondary data. Primary qualitative and quantitative data were collected from June to December 2025, through the distribution of questionnaires to the main actors of the network. The research sample included 59 public and private entities, 35 dairies and 340 tourism businesses. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 22.0. Secondary data were collected through an extensive literature review.

Results and Discussion: The value proposition concerns the provision of authentic food and gastronomic experiences that highlight the local cultural heritage, through the tourist exploitation of traditional cheeses, shaping

a unique and differentiated tourist identity of the Peloponnese. The value proposition will be implemented by the following actors: local dairies, tourist accommodation business owners, private and public agri-food and tourism bodies. Analyzing the roles of stakeholders in the ecosystem, cheesemakers are the main shapers of the organoleptic properties of cheeses, leveraging their knowledge and expertise. These producers utilize traditional distribution channels and only 60% of them collaborate with hotels as a point of sale. Agri-food and tourism entities highlighted the importance of ensuring the quality and appropriate quantities of local cheeses traded, as main factors facilitating this specific collaboration. It was found that only 57,7 % of the bodies considered that dairy products are sufficiently integrated into the tourism services provided. Stakeholders emphasized that the high pricing of local cheeses may act as an obstacle to their effective integration. A similar view was expressed by one- and two-star hotels. Furthermore, only 40.7% of the organizations have participated two or more times a year in cheese tourism promotion activities. A significant majority of stakeholders indicated that the cultural identity of food has not been sufficiently exploited. Hotels located in the traditional cheese making regions, as well as four- and five-star hotels demonstrate a greater appreciation for local cheeses; they include them to a greater extent in their breakfast and menus compared to lower-rated hotels. The same hotel categories seem to be more receptive to organizing local cheese tastings and tours of cheese factories. High-star hotels believe more strongly than others that the tourist exploitation of cheeses can bring business benefits, such as enhancing reputation and increasing revenue. Actions such as the ‘Greek breakfast’ initiative, the establishment of cheese routes and the visitable cheese factory label can contribute a more effective collaboration between stakeholders in the two sectors, promoting the special identity of local cheeses more successfully. The creation of an innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem can generate added value, such as increasing tourist flows to the region, protecting local cheeses and maintaining the technical and environmental conditions that consistently ensure their unique organoleptic properties. The operation of this ecosystem involves various risks such as challenges in successful communication between actors, a lack of business knowledge, inappropriate skills of the human resources employed in the two sectors to effectively promote the tradition of local cheeses, and increased bureaucracy.

Conclusions: The development of gastronomic tourism, by attributing tourist value to cheese, can foster the creation of an innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem involving businesses and organizations from the agri-food and tourism sectors. Such collaborative networks contribute to the development of a distinct gastronomic identity for a region, bringing multiple benefits. However, ensuring the success of such a business venture, requires that participants are better informed about the benefits they can gain from such involvement and are motivated to overcome the various existing obstacles.

Keywords: cheese tourism, entrepreneurship, ecosystem pie model

THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF GASTRONOMY DEVELOPMENT IN REGIONAL GROWTH AND BUSINESS VALUE CREATION FOR MODERN TOURISM ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the strategic role of gastronomy development in fostering regional growth and creating entrepreneurial value within contemporary tourism organizations, with a focus on the Region of Western Greece. Drawing on primary research involving more than 140 hospitality and food-service enterprises, the analysis explores current practices, challenges, and opportunities linked to the integration of local gastronomy into the regional tourism product. Findings reveal that although professionals recognize the added value of local products and the increasing demand from visitors, particularly foreign, older, and higher-income tourists, gastronomic initiatives remain underutilized. Key obstacles include the cost of sourcing local products, limited knowledge, insufficient training, and the absence of a coherent long-term strategy. Moreover, actions promoting sustainability, digital tools, and innovative marketing practices are not yet widely adopted, while cooperation with institutional actors is perceived as inadequate. The results highlight the need for structured policies that enhance collaboration among tourism enterprises, local producers, and regional authorities. Recommendations include establishing quality agreements, strengthening branding efforts, promoting technological solutions, and developing educational programs that support sustainable practices and cultural preservation. The findings underline that gastronomy can serve as a powerful driver of regional differentiation, economic resilience, and extroversion, provided that a clear vision and coordinated strategic framework are implemented.

Keywords: Gastronomic tourism; Regional development; Tourism enterprises; Western Greece; Sustainable destination management.

“EATING THE LANDSCAPE”: FOOD, HERITAGE, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the natural landscape plays a central role in shaping food systems, cooking traditions, and the cultural identities of different communities. Instead of seeing the landscape as just a physical setting, the paper argues that it actively influences how people live and what they eat. The shape of the land, the type of soil, the climate, and the availability of natural resources determine what can be grown, how food is produced, and which cooking methods develop over time. As a result, each region forms its own unique flavours and long-standing food traditions that reflect the specific environment in which they emerged.

A key idea in this study is the connection between these landscape-based food traditions and what UNESCO defines as intangible cultural heritage. This heritage includes farming knowledge, cooking skills, traditional recipes, community food celebrations, and the way these practices are passed from one generation to the next. These elements are more than practical ways of adapting to local conditions—they are meaningful cultural expressions. Through everyday food habits, people maintain a relationship with their land, and this relationship becomes part of their collective identity. Food traditions tied to the landscape therefore act as symbols of belonging and continuity, reminding communities of their past while shaping their present.

The study also examines how these deep-rooted traditions influence modern gastronomic tourism. Today, many travelers seek “authentic” experiences when they visit a place. For them, tasting local dishes is not only about the food itself but also about the stories, skills, and emotions connected to it. Visitors want to learn where a product comes from, how it is prepared, and why it matters to the local community. Because of this, destinations increasingly promote their food heritage as a way to stand out and attract tourists. By highlighting their unique landscapes and the culinary practices that come from them, regions can strengthen their cultural presence and support sustainable development.

This process also reflects a broader negotiation with globalisation. As international markets and cultures become more interconnected, local communities feel the need to protect and showcase what makes them special. Food that is rooted in local landscapes and traditions becomes a powerful way to express identity in a global world. Gastronomic tourism, therefore, is not only an economic activity but also a cultural exchange through which destinations communicate their history, values, and sense of place.

By integrating perspectives from geography, anthropology, and tourism studies, the paper demonstrates that a comprehensive understanding of regional cuisine requires an examination of both the landscapes that shape food production and the cultural practices through which culinary meaning is constructed. Food does not exist separately from the environment or from tradition; instead, it is the result of a close and ongoing relationship between people and their landscape. The study argues that this relationship can be understood through a triad of concepts: landscape, taste, and heritage. Landscape shapes what is possible, taste captures the sensory expression of a place, and heritage preserves the knowledge and traditions that make those tastes meaningful. In conclusion, the paper suggests that looking at food through this combined lens helps explain how communities build, maintain, and share their cultural identities over time. It also highlights why regional cuisines continue to matter in the modern world: they carry stories of land, memory, and tradition that connect people both to their past and to each other.

Keywords: landscape, heritage, identity, gastronomic tourism, sense of place

BEYOND THE DINING TABLE: FOOD TOURISM & PLACE BRANDING FOR SUSTAINABLE PLACES

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ABSTRACT

Any location-based brand can commonly be reflected with a hexagon that embraces six dimensions, namely governance, immigration & investment, people, products, culture & heritage and tourism (Anholt, 2003). Relevant research explores the importance of each dimension for sustainable place brands in line with different place branding approaches (ranging, for instance, from the country-of-origin approach to destination branding or public diplomacy) depending on the study focus. Similarly, scholars commonly explore food and gastronomy in terms of their role for the destination brand, as a negotiation point to redefine place identity and sense of belonging among different residential groups of the same location, or in relation to their export value and contribution to balance of payments. Still, a more inclusive approach to holistically evaluate the contribution of gastronomy to place branding appears to be missing. Moreover, it is not clear whereas the degree of involvement with gastronomy is a necessary pre-requisite for food and gastronomy to influence user behavior and thus positively contribute to the place/ destination brand.

This study focuses on international visitors of Crete, Greece and employs a quantitative research design to contribute towards this direction. Regional stakeholders (e.g. the tourism department of the Region of Crete, the association of Hotel Managers of Crete) facilitated access to the population by forwarding the questionnaire to registered members and securing a non-probability sample of more than 2000 international tourists. The

questionnaire was available in English, German, Russian and French and, apart from demographics, included questions (1) generally on travel behavior and the importance of food and gastronomy when travelling, (2) on pre-existing associations in relation to Cretan food and gastronomy, travel motives and food experience(s) in Crete, satisfaction and post-travel behavior. SPSS was used to analyse the questionnaires.

Findings reveal that the positive impact of gastronomy on the place brand is not necessarily an outcome of visitors' food motive or high involvement with gastronomy to pursue food experiences and appreciate food culture beyond their visit too. In fact, visitors who purchase gastronomic products on their vacation as souvenirs/gifts are half as likely to belong to the category of low-motivated gastrotourists, which highlights the potential of food tourism in promoting a destination's food products. In other words, food tourism can contribute significantly to achieving multiplier benefits in a destination's economy. Building on such potential, the study paves the ground for a more holistic appreciation of food products in place branding and invites stakeholders across different sectors (primarily agriculture and tourism) to explore the mutual benefit of a strong synergy.

Keywords: food tourism, place branding, exports, sustainability, Crete

ECO VOLT EXCHANGE: A SMART MARKETPLACE FOR BATTERY TRANSACTIONS & SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The transition towards sustainable energy solutions is imperative as the global demand for electric vehicles (EVs) continues to rise. However, the increasing adoption of EVs has led to a growing concern regarding the management of retired electric vehicle batteries (REVBs), which retain 70–80% of their original capacity but are no longer suitable for vehicular use. This paper proposes the EcoVolt Exchange Marketplace, an innovative blockchain-powered digital platform designed to repurpose, resell, and integrate second-life batteries into energy storage systems, microgrids, and renewable energy applications.

This study examines the technical, economic, and environmental viability of second-life battery applications while addressing key industry challenges such as regulatory compliance, quality assurance, and supply chain logistics. A comprehensive SWOT analysis and market validation identify key stakeholders, including renewable energy providers, microgrid developers, and commercial energy storage users, demonstrating significant demand for cost-effective and scalable battery solutions. The platform further incorporates blockchain-based certification systems to enhance battery traceability, ensuring safety and transparency in second-life applications.

The business model leverages multiple revenue streams, including direct battery sales, subscription-based analytics services, and grid support initiatives, aligning with the principles of a circular economy. The

implementation plan follows a structured three-phase approach—Development, Pilot Testing, and Full-Scale Deployment—ensuring a scalable, compliant, and technologically advanced platform.

By promoting affordable energy storage, reducing reliance on new battery production, and mitigating environmental waste, this platform contributes to global sustainability goals and carbon reduction efforts. The EcoVolt Exchange Marketplace positions itself as a pioneering initiative, bridging the gap between EV battery retirement and renewable energy integration, thereby fostering a greener and more efficient energy future.

Second-life battery systems can support energy demand that exists in various sectors of the economy and even enhance energy accessibility and economic growth of off-grid communities in various parts of the world. Also, tourism destinations, cultural and heritage sites and islands, strive to maintain their energy resilience, manage sustainable resources for maximum profitability and energy independence. The ultimate goal is to use second-life batteries to reduce carbon emissions, allowing the platform to be adapted and scaled across multiple destinations and countries with diverse energy and governance contexts.

Keywords: circular economy, second-life batteries, energy storage systems, energy resilience, secondary applications



UNDERSTANDING VISITOR EXPERIENCE IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR THROUGH TEXT ANALYTICS: EVIDENCE FROM RHODES

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital review platforms and social media has transformed how tourists evaluate hospitality services and how destinations manage their online reputation. User-generated content, particularly online reviews, has become a critical source of experiential data, offering valuable insights into visitor perceptions, satisfaction, and service quality. Within this context, this study examines how digital text analytics tools can be employed to systematically analyze visitor experience in the hospitality sector, using the island of Rhodes as a large-scale empirical case study. The primary objective of the research is to examine how sentiment analysis and topic modeling techniques can convert large volumes of unstructured textual reviews into actionable knowledge for hotel managers and destination stakeholders. Specifically, the study seeks to: i) identify the dominant experiential themes expressed by hotel guests, ii) assess the overall emotional tone of visitor evaluations, iii) explore variations in visitor sentiment across time, and iv) evaluate the methodological robustness of combining multiple sentiment analysis tools in hospitality research. By doing so, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on experience analytics, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and data-driven decision-making in tourism.

Methodologically, the study adopts a quantitative, data-driven approach based on big data analytics and natural language processing (NLP). A large set of English-language hotel reviews was collected from the TripAdvisor platform, covering 1,178 hotel units operating in Rhodes. The data collection process relied on automated web scraping techniques developed in Python and Go, enabling the large-scale extraction and preprocessing of review texts. The dataset spans the period from 2022 to 2025, allowing for longitudinal analysis of visitor sentiment and thematic emphasis over time. To analyze the emotional dimension of visitor experience, two established sentiment analysis tools were employed: VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner) and TextBlob. VADER, a lexicon- and rule-based model optimized for short evaluative texts, was used to calculate compound sentiment scores and classify reviews as positive, negative, or neutral. TextBlob was applied in parallel to compute polarity and subjectivity scores at sentence level, enabling cross-validation of results and

assessment of convergent validity between the two methods. The use of two sentiment tools strengthens the reliability of the findings and addresses common methodological concerns related to bias and tool dependency in respective research. In addition to sentiment analysis, the study applies Guided Latent Dirichlet Allocation (Guided LDA) for thematic modeling. Unlike fully unsupervised topic modeling approaches, Guided LDA allows the researcher to steer topic generation through predefined seed keywords aligned with hospitality service dimensions such as cleanliness, staff behavior, room quality, food and beverage, location, and value for money. This semi-supervised approach enhances interpretability and ensures theoretical alignment with established service quality and visitor experience frameworks. Each identified theme was subsequently associated with sentiment scores, enabling a fine-grained examination of how specific service attributes influence overall visitor evaluations.

The findings reveal a strongly positive overall sentiment toward hotels in Rhodes, with positive expressions significantly outweighing negative ones across the dataset. Both VADER and TextBlob produced consistent results, demonstrating high levels of agreement and strong convergent validity. Thematic analysis indicates that staff professionalism, cleanliness, and location are the most frequently mentioned and positively evaluated aspects of the visitor experience, while issues related to room facilities and pricing generate more mixed emotional responses. Longitudinal analysis further suggests relative stability in overall visitor satisfaction, with minor fluctuations across years that may reflect external factors such as post-pandemic recovery dynamics and demand normalization. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to hospitality and tourism research by empirically operationalizing visitor experience through large-scale textual data and by demonstrating the value of combining sentiment analysis with guided topic modeling. The proposed analytical framework bridges qualitative experience theory and quantitative data analytics, offering a replicable model for experience evaluation in tourism destinations. It also reinforces the role of eWOM as a multidimensional construct that captures not only satisfaction levels but also the experiential drivers underlying visitor perceptions. Practically, the results provide actionable insights for hotel managers and destination management organizations (DMOs). By identifying experience attributes that generate strong positive or negative emotions, stakeholders can prioritize targeted service improvements, refine quality management strategies, and enhance online reputation management practices. Overall, the study demonstrates how digital experience analytics can transform unstructured online reviews into strategic intelligence for the hospitality industry. By leveraging advanced NLP techniques and large-scale empirical data, the research highlights the growing importance of data-driven approaches in understanding visitor experience and sustaining destination competitiveness in an increasingly digital tourism ecosystem.

Keywords: visitor experience; tourism big data analytics; sentiment analysis; topic modeling; online reviews; electronic word-of-mouth

FORECASTING HOTEL RESERVATIONS USING NEURAL NETWORKS: A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a predictive model leveraging neural networks for forecasting hotel reservations using historical cumulative booking data from 2023 and 2024. This research demonstrates the transformative potential of machine learning in enhancing decision-making in the hospitality sector. Neural networks (NNs), using transfer learning, can outperform traditional time series models ARIMA by effectively capturing complex, nonlinear relationships and temporal dependencies in hotel booking data. The model identifies weekly booking patterns and forecasts future reservations for specific intervals, aiding hotel management in resource allocation and revenue optimization. Training data from weeks 51 to 12 were used to predict bookings for weeks 11 to week 0. The model delivered highly accurate predictions for 2023 data, further enhanced by transfer learning to achieve even more precise forecasts for 2024 data, demonstrating its robustness for real-world applications.

Keywords: hotel demand prediction, hospitality analytics, neural networks, transfer learning

APPLICATING TOPIC MODELLING TO REVIEW CONTEMPORARY PRICING ISSUES IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

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ABSTRACT

Pricing tools and policies are extremely valuable for managing demand and supply fluctuations while also considering capacity and sustainability issues (Krämer et al., 2018; Viglia & Abrate, 2020); in that sense, pricing can be also used as a tool to enhance sustainable tourism growth and pro-environmental behaviors (Dolnicar et al., 2017; Dolnicar et al., 2019; Diederich & Goeschl, 2017; Chenavaz et al., 2022; Dioba et al., 2024; Hassan & Saleh, 2024). In parallel, new challenges emerge for marketers due to radical changes brought by impactful technologies such as real time data analytics, machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI), including regulatory and ethical considerations (Seele et al., 2021; Buhalis et al., 2024; Chenavaz & Ivanov, 2025).

Given the importance of pricing decisions and research for the tourism sector at large, this study implements topic modeling as a complementary tool to map the complex landscape of pricing in tourism and hospitality research. With knowledge production in business research accelerating in tremendous speed, literature reviews are more important than ever in order to stay at the forefront (Snyder, 2019). Topic modelling is performed in the broader context of a systematic, domain-based literature review, where PRISMA protocol, Web of Science, Scopus and the ABS journal list (marketing and sector only journals) were used to identify and screen articles focusing on dynamic, personalized and algorithmic pricing.

Topic modelling can be a valuable method for the identification of uncovered abstract themes in large collections of documents and its use is expanding in tourism and business studies pursuing similar purposes (e.g. Kirilenko, Stepchenkova & Dai, 2021; Kurt et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2024; Gaston-Breton & De Stefano, 2025). Thus, to synthesize relevant literature, BERTopic, a neural embedding-based topic modeling technique, is applied to perform an unsupervised semantic analysis of 56 peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2008 to September 2025 and with a clear focus on contemporary pricing issues.

Unlike traditional methods, but powerful, like Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) (Blei et al., 2003), BERTopic (Grootendorst, 2022) is particularly highlighted for its ability to preserve contextual semantics and identify overlapping themes through its utilization of transformer embeddings and density-based clustering. BERTopic overcomes limitations by using transformer-based language models, like BERT (Devlin et al., 2018), to create high-dimensional document embeddings that retain contextual meaning. These embeddings are clustered with HDBSCAN, a non-parametric algorithm that adapts to varying topic densities. To enhance topic interpretability, BERTopic applies a class-based Term Frequency–Inverse Document Frequency (c-TF-IDF) technique to highlight representative keywords for each cluster.

A rigorous natural language processing (NLP) pipeline was employed to preprocess the articles prior to modeling. This involved text normalization, stopwords removal, lemmatization, and filtering of non-substantive content. Preprocessed documents were then embedded using a pre-trained transformer model capable of capturing semantic similarity beyond simple lexical overlap. BERTopic was configured to identify a compact number of topics, with parameters tuned to accommodate the relatively small yet conceptually rich corpus. The clustering algorithm dynamically adjusted to varying topic densities, allowing for the emergence of both dominant and niche themes. Importantly, outlier documents—those that did not semantically cohere with any identified topic—were flagged and excluded from the final interpretation.

Thus, BERTopic results unveiled seven coherent clusters, providing an objective overview of thematic trends in the context of dynamic, personalized and algorithmic pricing in the context of tourism and hospitality:

Dynamic Hotel Pricing: This dominant cluster reflects the ongoing relevance of dynamic pricing strategies within the hotel sector. It includes research on rate optimization, real-time pricing, capacity control, and digital booking behaviors.

Restaurant and Revenue Strategy Studies: This cluster captures conceptual and empirical work related to food and beverage pricing, particularly within restaurant and event contexts.

Strategic Market Segmentation and Pricing Techniques: This theme focuses on how prices are tailored for different customer segments based on actual behavior, preferences, and price sensitivity. The cluster reflects an evolution from static segmentation to algorithmic micro-targeting.

Algorithmic Pricing and Tourist Responses: This cluster intersects the fields of behavioral economics and machine learning, examining how consumers respond to AI-driven pricing systems. Key topics include willingness to pay, perceptions of fairness, and purchasing behavior in relation to personalized or dynamic pricing. BERTopic indicates a close semantic connection between this cluster and the previous two clusters, highlighting an increasing integration of consumer psychology with computational modeling.

Sharing Economy: This theme explores pricing in decentralized markets like Airbnb, focusing on host pricing strategies, platform constraints, listing optimization, and user trust. The research varies in methodology, including econometric analysis and qualitative case studies, highlighting how platform dynamics influence pricing in the tourism economy.

Airline Competition and Pricing: This niche cluster focuses on aviation and air travel pricing, including route-specific strategies, competitive pricing models, and revenue optimization through fare classes and ancillary fees. Although smaller in volume, it highlights the unique aspects of airline pricing within tourism studies.

Room Attributes and Consumer Valuation: Related to hedonic pricing, this cluster examines attribute-based pricing, focusing on how room features like breakfast and cancellation policies affect perceived value and consumer choice.

The identified thematic clusters are supporting and enhancing findings from a TCCM (Theory, Context, Characteristics, Methodology) approach implemented in parallel. This study illustrates an example of how advanced tools can effectively synthesize literature to track and map the evolution of fast expanding research topics. Additionally, it clarifies conceptual boundaries of dominant thematic clusters through semantic analysis and highlights neglected areas that merit deeper exploration (e.g. sustainability issues and ethical concerns in algorithmic pricing). Reflecting on its contribution, apart from presenting thematic clusters identified from the application of Machine Learning tools in reviewing contemporary pricing issues in tourism and hospitality, this study demonstrates the effectiveness of BERTopic for structuring academic corpora in a transparent, data-driven manner. Thus, combined with other approaches, the human lens can be significantly enhanced with Machine Learning analytical capabilities.

Keywords: dynamic pricing, algorithmic pricing, topic modeling, BERTopic, tourism research

CROWDSOURCING IN CITY BRAND MANAGEMENT FOR TOURISM DESTINATIONS: LOCAL GOVERNMENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BENEFITS AND BARRIERS

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ABSTRACT

One of the main challenges faced by contemporary cities is intelligent and digital transformation. Such transformation can significantly enhance urban management across various domains, including the management of the city's brand as a tourist destination. The dynamic development of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) - such as digital platforms, mobile applications, and social media - creates new opportunities for interaction between municipal authorities and local stakeholders. Digital participation tools, including crowdsourcing, have gained increasing importance in recent years as effective means of engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes and in the co-creation of place brands.

The essence of crowdsourcing lies in harnessing the collective knowledge, experience, and creativity of a broad and diverse group of participants to co-create value, content, or solutions, most often through digital tools. This concept assumes a shift away from closed, expert-driven models toward open processes based on participation, collaboration, and collective intelligence.

In the field of city and tourism destination brand management, crowdsourcing offers substantial opportunities to build an authentic and credible destination brand grounded in the knowledge, experience, and narratives of diverse stakeholder groups, including residents, local entrepreneurs, and tourism-related actors. Moreover, crowdsourcing can support the development of the tourism offer by facilitating the identification of unique local resources and innovative ways of their utilization. As a result, crowdsourcing contributes to strengthening the relational character of a destination brand, enhancing its recognition, coherence, and capacity to build long-term relationships with its audiences.

The academic literature emphasises that place branding should be co-created with local stakeholders. This is particularly important in the context of growing competition among tourist destinations, where effective brand management influences destination attractiveness, the quality of tourist experiences, and the competitive advantage

of cities. Despite rising interest in the use of digital technologies to strengthen participatory urban management and city branding, relatively few studies have examined how local governments perceive the potential and limitations of employing crowdsourcing in branding processes. Understanding the perspective of local governments is therefore essential for effectively leveraging the potential of crowdsourcing in managing tourism destination brands.

The aim of this article is to examine how representatives of local governance perceive the benefits and barriers associated with the use of crowdsourcing in city brand management. The empirical material was collected through quantitative research based on a diagnostic survey using the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) technique. The study was conducted between June and September 2023 and covered 151 urban municipalities in Poland. Participants were employees of municipal offices directly involved in cities' marketing and promotional activities. A standardised questionnaire was applied. Data obtained in the study were subjected to statistical analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics.

The findings indicate that crowdsourcing can serve as an important instrument in the city brand management process, enhancing its participatory character. The results show that, from the perspective of Polish municipal governments, the most strongly perceived benefits of crowdsourcing initiatives are image-related advantages - such as building a positive image of the city, strengthening stakeholders' sense of identification with the city, and increasing trust in local government - as well as benefits related to knowledge acquisition and co-creation, including the generation of information about the city, understanding stakeholder attitudes, access to valuable ideas, and rapid access to local knowledge. Organisational and financial benefits were perceived to the smallest extent. Conversely, the strongest barriers to implementing crowdsourcing initiatives were organisational and financial constraints, such as insufficient financial resources, employee work overload, and a lack of human resources.

The study contributes to broadening the theoretical perspective on participatory approaches to place and destination brand management by highlighting the role of stakeholder engagement through crowdsourcing. By framing crowdsourcing as a digital mechanism of stakeholder co-creation within destination branding, the article extends the collaborative place branding framework and demonstrates how local governments can operationalise stakeholder engagement through crowdsourcing initiatives. It also offers practical implications for local governments and entities involved in place branding.

By demonstrating the benefits and limitations of this emerging approach to place brand management, the findings support a deeper understanding of the role and importance of crowdsourcing in this process, as well as the challenges associated with its implementation. The results may assist these entities in designing strategies for involving local stakeholders in city brand management and in improving participatory management methods.

A limitation of the present study is the cross-sectional nature of the data and its focus on a single country. Future research could employ these findings for comparative analyses of cities in other countries, taking into account different cultural contexts.

Keywords: crowdsourcing, city brand management, place branding, local governance, tourism destination, stakeholder engagement

BETWEEN LIVING TRADITIONS AND DESTINATION BRANDING: NEGOTIATING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CORFU'S TOURISM DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

Intangible cultural heritage has been increasingly recognized in recent years as a key element of both cultural and tourism sustainability, especially in destinations that have a rich cultural stock. Culture most of the times has a significant distinctive separation between its tangible and intangible manifestation. Therefore, it is crucial to mention that ICH constitutes and is constituted by myths, legends, rituals, oral traditions, and embodied practices that can shape how places are remembered, narrated, and experienced. This paper examine how some important insights emerge about how cultural actors and tourism professionals and stakeholders of Corfu negotiate, discuss and, ultimately, construct the concept of local myths and legends – based intangible cultural heritage and how this concept influences the role that local myths and legends play in tourism development and destination marketing.

This study is adopting primarily grounded theory approaches to this research and interprets the findings accordingly with the aim of turning them into a theory. Subsequently, the present study adopts the theory of discourse regarding intangible cultural heritage, so that it can be considered and understood as a field of meaning process that is continuously produced and negotiated. From this perspective, intangible cultural heritage can be understood as a process that is “done”, rather than as an attraction that is displayed and preserved, like tangible heritage. Simultaneously, the paper deals with the theory of narrative branding and magical thinking theory that they are placing great importance on the role played by storytelling, fiction and symbolic content in the co-creation of imaginary places. These theories can be combined with the principles of cultural sustainability, highlighting the tensions that may exist between economic exploitation and the maintenance of living cultural practices in general.

The research is based on a qualitative approach to this topic and by extension a qualitative methodology. The primary data of this research were collected from semi-structured in-depth interviews with key stakeholders from both the tourism and cultural sectors. Participants include hotel executives, tourism and marketing professionals, representatives of cultural associations, dance teachers and local government officials. This dual focus that distinguish tourism suppliers from cultural actors allows the research to capture and understand how market-based and community-based logics meet, interact and/or even clash in discussions about intangible heritage and tourism development in Corfu.

Data analysis followed an inductive thematic coding logic, using NVivo. Rather than using pre-defined categories, codes were retrieved from the raw data through open coding. Subsequently, axial coding was used to create relationships between themes, followed by selective coding to identify dominant dialogic patterns. This process allowed for the identification of emerged narratives about authenticity, commercialization, storytelling, seasonality and policies, as well as the underlying values that shape stakeholder positions.

Two distinct yet overlapping discourses emerge from the findings. Tourism suppliers mostly frame myths and legends of Corfu Island as a narrative and experiential asset that is mostly presented – when is presented – to travelers “on the spot”. Taking this discourse into account, myths and legends associated with Corfu’s past, such as references to the Phaeacians, Nausicaa, maritime culture and historically recognizable personalities, are considered by them to be powerful storytelling tools, capable of enriching visitors’ experiences and differentiating the destination. However, these narratives are largely used – when used – in fragmented and non – typical ways, very often at the level of individual businesses, rather than through a coherent branding strategy across the destination.

In contrast, cultural actors believe in a discourse that focuses on lived heritage and cultural continuity. For them oral traditions, rituals and local myths and legends derive their value from participation, transmission and collective memory. This discourse is often imbued with concerns about cultural mutation and the transformation of myths and legends into spectacles for tourist consumption, at the expense of their authenticity. Iconic events, such as the rituals around Easter celebrations in Corfu, are cited as examples where increased tourist visibility has changed the meaning and spatial context of cultural practices, reinforcing the debates at the heart of heritage discourse theory about authenticity.

Despite these differences, both groups converge in recognizing structural limitations. The absence of long-term planning by a Development Citizens Organization (DMO) as well as the absence of the organization itself from the island of Corfu are repeatedly identified as the main obstacles to the sustainable use of intangible heritage (ICH) in tourism marketing. Seasonality seems to be the most crucial point of agreement between the two groups: while myths and legends – based ICH considered to have limited to non-existent influence on the peak of summer season, it is widely considered a crucial unutilized resource for attracting mostly culturally motivated visitors during the mid – season and low – season periods.

The paper argues that myths and legends – based ICH of Corfu currently functions as a lethargic narrative reservoir rather than a fully articulated branding resource. By interpreting myths and legends through the combination of heritage discourse, co – creation, narrative branding, magical thinking and cultural sustainability, the study highlights the need for governance frameworks and policies that respect the living nature of intangible cultural heritage, while simultaneously enabling meaningful and ethical storytelling of destination stories. As a result, the present paper contributes to broader discussions on how the discourse between and within these two interest groups shapes the possibilities and limits of heritage-based tourism development and the further integration of myths and legends – based ICH into the wider tourism product of Corfu.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Tourism – Culture Stakeholder Discourse, Narrative Branding, Myths and Legends – based ICH, Corfu – Greece.

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND PLACE BRANDING: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Culture and heritage are indisputably a cornerstone for place/destination branding and for sustainable (tourism) development alike. Thus, research across various disciplines has focused on different aspects of cultural heritage in an effort to safeguard it for future generations. Yet, most studies focus on specific case studies, cultural representations (e.g. museums) and, as such, offer fragmented conceptualizations. The area of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) appears to be particularly challenging, given its characteristics and intangible nature. As a result, this study sets off to provide a comprehensive, holistic framework that sheds light to (1) how intangible heritage can be treasured, preserved and communicated, (2) how ICH contributes to sustainable tourism development and (3) the relationship between place branding and ICH in the literature. This systematic literature review followed the assessment process based on the 27-item checklist of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Metaanalyses (PRISMA 2020). The multi-source search strategy of systematic review articles and articles from Google Scholar resulted in 179 records (05.10.2025), including 17 eligible peer-reviewed studies published between 2019-2025. Analysis present a theoretical framework that synthesized the development of ICH. ICH consists of all intangible manifestations of culture, representing a variety of living heritage of all humanity and the main vehicle of cultural diversity. Its advantages are measured in terms of social cohesion, engagement and as a means of bringing communities closer together, thereby supporting the sense of belonging and contributing to a sustainable, inclusive place brand.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage, place branding, sustainability, systematic literature review

VISUAL–KINETIC COUPLING IN THE RITUAL PERFORMANCE OF HUIZHOU FISH LANTERNS IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines Huizhou fish lanterns as a form of embodied visual culture, focusing on a comparative study of the fish lantern traditions of Zhanqi Village and Wangmantian Village in She County, Anhui Province. Rather than treating fish lanterns solely as symbolic images or intangible cultural heritage items, this research approaches them as performative visual structures whose forms are inseparable from bodily movement, ritual action, and spatial practice.

The central argument of this study is that the visual forms of Huizhou fish lanterns are not autonomous aesthetic designs, but the outcome of a long-term process of visual–kinetic coupling, in which lantern morphology, material construction, bodily techniques, and ritual movement mutually condition one another. Drawing on iconology, performance studies, material culture theory, and anthropology of the body, this dissertation proposes “visual–kinetic coupling” as an analytical framework to understand how folk-art images are generated, stabilized, and transformed through embodied practice.

Through sustained fieldwork in Zhanqi and Wangmantian, including participant observation, structural measurement of lanterns, video-based movement analysis, spatial mapping of ritual routes, and in-depth interviews with craftsmen and performers, the study identifies systematic differences between the two villages’ fish lantern traditions. Zhanqi fish lanterns tend to be compact, lightweight, and visually simplified, with large color blocks and centralized weight distribution. These visual and material features enable rapid rotation, vertical lifting, and flexible movement within narrow village lanes and household spaces. By contrast, Wangmantian fish lanterns are elongated, heavier, and structurally segmented, with pronounced heads and long tails. This morphology supports large-scale lateral swinging, synchronized group movements, and visually expansive performances suited to open roads and public squares.

The dissertation demonstrates that these differences are not merely stylistic variations but correspond to distinct movement repertoires, ritual sequences, and spatial configurations. Lantern form shapes bodily posture, balance, and range of motion, while repeated ritual actions, in turn, reinforce and normalize particular visual structures. In this sense, fish lantern images function as “scores” for bodily performance, encoding kinetic possibilities within their visual design.

The study further examines how this visual–kinetic coupling is being reconfigured in contemporary contexts. The introduction of new materials, electric lighting, heritage institutionalization, tourism performance, and short-video platforms has altered both the visual appearance of fish lanterns and the movement patterns associated with them. While some traditional couplings are weakened or disrupted, new forms of coupling emerge, driven by media visibility, audience expectations, and platform-oriented visual preferences.

By foregrounding the relationship between image and movement, this dissertation contributes to folk art studies, visual anthropology, and intangible cultural heritage research in three ways. First, it shifts the analytical focus from symbolic interpretation to embodied visual practice. Second, it provides a comparative, data-supported account of how local environments and bodily techniques generate distinct visual forms within a shared cultural tradition. Third, it offers a conceptual model for understanding folk art not as static imagery, but as a dynamic system of visualized bodily knowledge.





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Keywords: Huizhou fish lanterns; visual–kinetic coupling; iconology; ritual performance; embodied practice; folk art

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE, TOURISM AND SUSTAINABILITY: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF RESEARCH TRENDS, GAPS AND POLICY PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a comprehensive mapping of international literature on the relationship between Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), tourism and sustainable development. It highlights major trends, leading journals, authors and countries, as well as critical research gaps with direct implications for tourism destination governance. The aim is to systematically capture the state of the art, trace key research trajectories over time (thematically and across outlets/authors), identify dominant thematic axes and pinpoint areas where evidence remains weak or fragmented. Although international scholarship on ICH has expanded rapidly since 2002, research that explicitly examines the ICH–tourism–sustainability nexus remains scattered; it is precisely this gap that the present study addresses.

The analysis is guided by four research questions:

- (1) What are the predominant trends in international research on ICH in relation to tourism and sustainability?
- (2) Which journals, authors and countries exert the greatest influence in this field?
- (3) Which keywords and thematic strands dominate the discussion?
- (4) Which gaps emerge for future research, policy and destination governance?

The paper builds on a previous secondary mapping of the “Tourism–Cultural Heritage–Sustainable/Local Development” triad (January 2024), which identified 277 publications (49 in Scopus, 37 in Web of Science and 191 in Google Scholar). That synthesis revealed important themes – such as the use of tangible and intangible heritage, identity, sustainability planning and management, alternative forms of tourism, community participation and indicators – but also showed that explicit attention to the ICH–tourism–sustainability interface was limited and fragmented.

To address this shortcoming, a new systematic search was conducted in Scopus on 28 January 2025. The inclusion criteria were English-language journal articles that explicitly linked ICH, tourism and sustainability. After removing duplicates, titles and abstracts were screened and the full texts of potentially relevant studies were

assessed, resulting in a final corpus of 57 articles. Metadata were organised in Mendeley and analysed using Microsoft Excel and VOSviewer, focusing on trends by year and journal, keyword frequencies, main countries of publication and key authors.

The findings reveal five core thematic clusters:

Commercialisation and authenticity – studies examining commodification processes, staged authenticity and tensions between economic benefits and cultural integrity ;

Communities and participatory safeguarding – work emphasising community participation, co-creation, empowerment and safeguarding practices in ICH-based tourism;

Technologies and digital practices – research on digital documentation, promotion and transmission of ICH in tourism contexts;

Resilience in times of crisis – analyses of how ICH-related tourism responds to shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic; and

Sustainability indicators and governance – contributions that develop conceptual and empirical tools to assess ICH’s role in sustainable destination management.

Across these clusters there has been a marked increase in terms such as “authenticity”, “community participation”, “safeguarding”, “resilience” and “digital heritage”. A core group of authors focuses on participatory governance and indicators, and the overall discussion has shifted from asking whether ICH is linked to tourism to examining how it can enhance destination sustainability under specific governance conditions without undermining preservation. Evidence from the pandemic indicates that ICH practices with deep local roots and digital readiness (for example, smaller-scale community events and hybrid modes of transmission) display greater resilience.

At the same time, several important gaps remain. These include: (a) limited empirical documentation of the relationship between tourism and ICH; (b) fragmented and often ad hoc quantification of ICH’s contribution to destination sustainability and the lack of harmonised indicators; (c) a shortage of tools to capture how ICH shapes the attractiveness and quality of tourism experiences without eroding authenticity; and (d) scarce evidence on co-governance mechanisms that effectively link ICH stakeholders, local authorities and market actors.

Overall, ICH is emerging as a key driver of sustainable and resilient cultural tourism. Yet more precise governance arrangements and robust measurement tools are required if this comparative advantage is to be transformed into a tangible lever for the socio-cultural well-being and resilience of destinations.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage; Cultural Tourism; Sustainability; Authenticity; Systematic Review

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AS A TOURIST EXPERIENCE: THE CASE OF 'MOSTRA' IN CHIOS

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ABSTRACT

There is a fundamental shift from the traditional model of cultural tourism - focused primarily on tangible cultural heritage - toward a different approach. This is characterized by a shift toward intangible culture and the experiential participation of visitors in the daily life and culture of the host destination. Creativity is employed to revitalize cultural tourism, shifting interest away from monuments and museums and toward intangible heritage and participatory experiences (such as workshops, classes, everyday practices, neighborhood walks, festivals, and events). Visitors are no longer satisfied with the model of passive observation; instead, they seek deeper meaning, a substantial connection with the destination, and a holistic travel experience. Participatory cultural activities can serve as powerful mechanisms for safeguarding the culture of the local community. The community defines how its locality is promoted, preventing the transformation of a place into a hollow attraction and ensuring that tourism development aligns with respect for local heritage.

The paper examines how the 'Mostra' carnival event in Chios is co-created as a lived, experiential event. This cultural practice is deeply rooted in the local community's history and is recognized as part of the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Greece. A hallmark of the Carnival season, 'Mostra' has been celebrated for centuries in Thymiana and is now relaunched. It acts as a powerful expression of collective and historical memory, serving as a unifying force that fosters community dialogue, creativity, and popular inspiration.

The field research considers the preparation and celebration of the 'Mostra' carnival event in Chios. The event has been chosen because it perfectly combines island traditions, local history, and old rituals and also attracts cultural tourists – mostly from Turkey. This paper aims to describe the role of the organizing team and the organizational processes. It is crucial to examine how they make decisions, who is in charge, and how they plan everything from start to finish. Motivations, key values and how the event has changed over the years are discussed critically.



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A key objective is to examine whether locals and visitors organize and consume this event while preserving its original meaning and avoiding its transformation into a mere tourist spectacle. Since February is a low-tourism month, it provides an ideal opportunity for both groups to develop a shared sense of community. Furthermore, the paper explores whether visitors can actively engage in the event - specifically through the 'Talimi' pirate battle reenactment - or if they remain passive observers. Ultimately, the goal is to assess the contemporary appeal of the custom and understand how cultural tourists meaningfully connect with this living tradition.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage, community, co-creation, experiential tourism, Chios Island, 'Mostra' carnival custom



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EMBODIED CULTURAL EXPERIENCES - EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF TRADITIONAL DANCE PARTICIPATION ON TOURIST EXPERIENCE AND VISIT INTENTION TO TOURISM DESTINATIONS: THE CASE OF LEFKADA ISLAND

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ABSTRACT

Participation in experiential cultural and entertainment events is part of cultural tourism. It has been noted that people who engage in cultural tourism usually aim to actively participate in activities and events at their tourist destination in order to gain a better understanding of the locals and their customs. However, international literature has not focused on investigating the degree of influence that participation in traditional dances has on shaping the tourist experience and on shaping the intention to visit or revisit the tourist destination. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of the active/experiential experience of visitors to areas where traditional dance festivals take place in relation to their perception of the local culture, their connection with the local community, and their intention to visit the tourist destination.

A quantitative approach was chosen to conduct the research. The sample consisted of 220 visitors to the island of Lefkada during the 2025 tourist season. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire consisting of closed-ended questions. In order to highlight the trends and causal relationships of the sample with the basic variables of the survey, the data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

The results of the survey showed that the active participation of visitors in traditional dances significantly enhances the perception of authenticity of the local culture and is an experience that helps visitors interact with the locals and, by extension, connect with the island, as well as encourages them to return to the destination in the future. Based on gender, women feel a greater sense of integration with the community through their participation in traditional dances than male visitors. On the contrary, the age, level of education, and marital status of the

participants are not factors that influence their perceptions of the experiential experience in traditional dances and the sense of authenticity of the local culture.

Visitors to Lefkada perceive that participation in traditional dances is an important element of the tourist identity of the place, as they are directly and actively involved with the local cultural elements of the destination, and the visitor is not a passive observer of the culture, but experiences it through rhythm, movement, and collective experience. In addition, traditional dance serves as a means of social integration between locals and visitors. The findings of the study show that traditional dances can be an important tool not only for improving the tourist experience, but also for the further tourist development of a place.

Keywords: traditional dance, local culture, social integration, consumer behaviour, tourist experience, visit intention

TOWARDS A CHILD-CENTERED MODEL OF TOURISM EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY: MAPPING GLOBAL TRENDS AND GREEK EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is currently one of the most dynamic socio-economic mechanisms worldwide, contributing approximately 10% to global GDP and supporting millions of jobs. The growing need to transition toward a sustainable tourism development model has expanded academic interest in tourism education and its connection with sustainability. Within this context, the present study focuses on the relatively unexplored research field of tourism education in early childhood (ages 5–12), placing it within the theoretical and methodological framework of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Through a systematic literature review and PRISMA analysis, this research aims to map international trends and research gaps, as well as to evaluate representative Greek tourism education programs that may serve as implementation models.

The study is based on 475 scientific publications from Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, covering the period 2010–2024. The findings indicate a surge in scientific interest after 2020, as the COVID-19 crisis highlighted the need to redesign the human–environment relationship and the notion of responsible tourism. However, the majority of studies continue to focus on older age groups (secondary and tertiary education), while the 5–12 age group remains underrepresented and insufficiently investigated.

The thematic analysis revealed that 38% of the publications focus on the environmental dimension of tourism, emphasizing experiential learning and the reduction of the ecological footprint. The cultural dimension accounts for 21% of the articles, often linked with cultural identity projects, intercultural dialogue, and virtual travel. Conversely, the social dimension corresponds to only 14% of the publications, despite the literature acknowledging the crucial role of the local community and active citizenship in cultivating tourism awareness. Additionally, gamification and digital applications are identified as important teaching methods in 17% of the studies.

Despite the positive evolution of the literature, several critical research gaps were identified, including the absence of longitudinal studies, the limited evaluation of learning outcomes, the lack of the “child’s voice” in the design and assessment of interventions, and the insufficient integration between school and community as a unified learning ecosystem. As evidenced by the PRISMA analysis and the case studies presented, the research field remains fragmented and lacks a clearly defined epistemological identity.

To empirically investigate the state of tourism education in Greece, representative primary education programs that incorporate sustainability principles and link schools with local communities were systematically examined:

- “My Hospitality” – a program that cultivates the concepts of hospitality, career orientation, and sustainable tourism development, based on Kolb’s experiential learning cycle.
- “The Little Tourist – A Suitcase Travels” – an educational intervention promoting child-centered learning and the emotional connection of students with their locality, using creative tools, role-playing, and virtual tours.
- “Network: Tourism & Environment” – a national thematic network operating for over 15 years, fostering collaboration among schools, educators, and local stakeholders through workshops, field activities, and the production of educational material.
- “Sustainable Tourism” – an educational framework for secondary students, aiming to enhance understanding of the social, ecological, and economic impacts of tourism.
 - “Iter Vitis – Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe” – the only European cultural route certified by the Council of Europe that highlights vine culture as a vehicle for sustainable development and cultural memory, linking environmental protection, cultural identity, and soft local tourism development.

All aforementioned programs were interpreted and analyzed through four central pedagogical theories:

- Experiential Learning (Kolb): cycle of experience → reflection → conceptualization → action.
- Social Constructivism: cooperative learning, multisensory activities, involvement of local stakeholders.
- Transformative Education (Mezirow): knowledge as a means for attitude change and social responsibility.
- Education for Active Citizenship (Farsari): students as agents of social change and representatives of local identity.

The categorization of the Greek programs demonstrated that they constitute coherent models of experiential and participatory education, in which sustainability is not treated as a theoretical concept but as a framework for action and decision-making. The school–community connection functions as an “educational ecosystem,” where students gradually perceive themselves as active citizens, tourists, and potential professionals in the tourism sector.

Based on these findings, a holistic model of child-centered tourism education is proposed—one that balances the three pillars of sustainability, connects theory–practice–community, transforms knowledge into an active stance (reflection-to-action), incorporates mixed evaluation methods (quantitative/qualitative) using ESD tools and thematic analysis of students’ work, and gives theoretical and research prominence to the “child’s voice” as a decisive element of learning.

The study concludes that tourism education in early childhood represents an ideal field for enhancing social, environmental, and cultural empathy, while serving as a strategic tool for shaping future generations of responsible visitors, residents, and tourism professionals. Establishing a clear epistemological identity for the field “tourism and sustainability in early childhood” is now a necessity for the international research community and for national education policies.

Keywords: tourism education, sustainability, experiential learning, childhood, tourism education programs, evaluation

SUSTAINABILITY LITERACY, LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND TOURISM: THE ROLE OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN GREEK HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Today, English is the most widely spoken language globally, with approximately 1.53 billion speakers, followed by Mandarin Chinese, with 1.18 billion. Hindi and Spanish rank third and fourth, respectively (Statista, 2025). The spread of the English language began in the 17th century from the British Isles and is now established as a lingua franca worldwide (Mauranen, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2011). English is the most predominant language across various domains, including business, information technology, media, the internet and tourism. Individuals originating from non-English-speaking nations often acquire fundamental English phrases to ease their navigation in foreign environments. Its pervasive use in these fields underscores the linguistic prominence of English as a bridge language in facilitating international communication and fostering cross-cultural exchanges. The uniqueness of the English language lies in that it “is different in fundamental ways: for the extent of its diffusion geographically; for the enormous cultural diversity of the speakers who use it; and for the infinitely varied domains in which it is found and purposes it serves” (Dewey, 2007: 333).

When the English language and learning are discussed, specific terms spring to mind: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). However, these are not to be confused. To avoid doing so, short definitions are provided. EFL is described as the process of an individual learning English as a foreign language to communicate with English-native speakers or with others in English-speaking geographical regions. ELF, on the other hand, is the learning of English as a common ground to bridge communication between individuals from different linguistic backgrounds (Hynninen, 2016; Sherman, 2018; Widdowson, 2018; Loor et al., 2024). Lastly, ESP refers to learning English in accordance with one’s communicative needs. It is a heavily ‘context-reduced’ language (Cummins, 1982) taught to address the learner’s needs in specific domains, intending to assist individuals in promoting their professional literacy (Hyland, 2022). In the case of this article, the teaching and learning of English refers to English for Specific Purposes.

Given that English serves as a fundamental facilitator of international tourism and that Greece is a prominent tourist destination, with tourism as one of its significant economic drivers, this article critically examines the extent to which Greek higher education institutions align their curricula with the communicative demands of the local tourism industry. Moreover, it aims to examine the effectiveness of these academic programs in meeting

students' educational needs and equipping them with the skills necessary to transition successfully into the workforce as competent professionals. To do so, interviews have been conducted with students from the Advanced School of Tourism Education of Crete.

The economic significance of travel and tourism in Greece is substantial. In 2023, these sectors contributed over 19 per cent to the country's GDP, marking the third-highest share of travel and tourism's total contribution to GDP among EU countries that year. Approximately 20.89% of Greece's total employment can be attributed to the tourism industry, which includes both direct and indirect positions. This equates to 963,000 individuals working in tourism-related jobs in terms of total employment contribution. Greece has long been a sought-after destination for tourists drawn to its sun, sea, cultural and historical heritage, and as such, 2023 saw international tourist arrivals surpassing 36 million, exceeding pre-pandemic figures. That year, Germany emerged as the top inbound travel market in Greece, followed by the United Kingdom, Italy, and France (Statista, 2024). It is safe to assume that as tourism increases, demand for services also increases, and therefore, new employment opportunities emerge. Despite the surge in work vacancies, in 2025, approximately 80,000 work positions remain unfilled due to a lack of experienced workers (with COVID-19 and the moving abroad of highly skilled professionals severely contributing to this phenomenon), and the seasonality characterising tourism-related work positions (Smith, 2025). In an attempt to address the workforce shortage, employers have turned to other countries to recruit staff. Meanwhile, the Greek government is considering labour mobility agreements with countries such as Egypt, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Georgia, India, and Moldova (Smith, 2025).

Based on the above, one would expect that higher education institutions are adapting to meet the evolving demands of the Greek tourism market. Due to its rich history, culture, geography, and natural beauty, Greece is considered a leading tourist destination. As a result, there is an emergence of work opportunities. However, according to a 2019 survey conducted by the Institute of Tourism Research and Forecasts, only 24% of those in the tourism sector hold formal qualifications from tourism schools (Simantiraki & Dimou, 2016). Some years later, things seem to have changed drastically; in a recent study conducted by Malagas et al. (2024) on Greek tourism education and training, it was noted that 42.2% of the participants hold a university degree in the tourism and hospitality sector. Nevertheless, when compared to the employment opportunities in tourism in Greece, this number is still relatively low. This highlights a considerable skills gap within the industry, underscoring the urgent need for improved vocational education and training to align with contemporary service standards (Simantiraki & Dimou, 2016). A lack of skills, coupled with insufficient knowledge and expertise, may also lead to underperformance in key positions, thereby adversely affecting both the operations of businesses in the tourism sector and the travel experience of visitors. In some cases, it may also ruin the image a visitor holds of a certain place and reduce tourist satisfaction. More specifically, Zein et al. (2024) note that tourist satisfaction relies heavily on the evaluation of the services provided and that “[t]he success of this interaction is largely dependent on the capabilities, knowledge, and skills of employees in the provision of services” (1691). Feng et al. (2014) add employees' behaviour and the execution of everyday tasks to the equation, suggesting that these factors may also affect guests' satisfaction. Mondok (2015) posits that the most crucial skill employees should have is the ability to communicate in a foreign language.

To this end, this article examines how English for Specific Purposes is taught in higher education, particularly in the tourism field of study. Furthermore, it endeavours to investigate whether ESP curricula are shaped by the changing landscape of the Greek tourism sector, including the integration of sustainability literacy in education and professional development. By incorporating sustainability literacy into ESP curricula, educators can equip students with the knowledge and skills required to transition into valuable contributors to the workforce and to meet the dynamic and evolving demands of the tourism sector.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, Tertiary Education, Tourism Sector, Greece

“PILGRIMAGE FOR YOUTH” (P4Y): A EUROPEAN PROJECT FOR TRANSFORMATIVE, INTERCULTURAL AND INCLUSIVE TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The “Pilgrimage for Youth” (P4Y) is an Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnership project (Project number – 2025-1-SE02-KA220-YOU-000352011) running from September 2025 to September 2027, aiming to use pilgrimage routes –and the broader experience of travelling– as educational and life-changing opportunities for young people, fostering skills such as reflection, resilience, self-confidence, and intercultural understanding. At the same time, the project will empower both youth and youth workers & educators in the use of digital technologies (AI, AR, VR, mobile learning) to create accessible and transformative learning experiences. The P4Y consortium consists of six partners from across Europe and neighboring countries: Elderberry AB (Sweden - Coordinator), Symplexis (Greece), Cooperative d’ Initiative Jeunes (Youth Initiative Cooperative - France), The Hub Nicosia Ltd (Cyprus), Sustainable Development Association (Turkey), and the Science Entrepreneurship Technology University (Ukraine).

The paper seeks to present the P4Y project at its initial stages in order to disseminate information, raise awareness, gather feedback, and foster collaboration among relevant stakeholders. The project responds to identified significant gaps in youth education and engagement, namely: a) Limited access to transformative cultural experiences for young people, especially those who face mobility or financial barriers; b) Digital literacy gaps, including unequal access to tools and lack of confidence in using AI and other emerging technologies; c) Social isolation and weakening community engagement, made worse by digital fragmentation; d) Lack of inclusive educational frameworks that accommodate diverse abilities and backgrounds and e) Insufficient opportunities for intercultural and transnational exchange, despite growing European mobility.

The P4Y project will address these identified needs through an integrated approach combining digital innovation, cultural experiences, and inclusive community engagement. Specifically, the project will develop three key outputs: a Methodology Handbook providing pedagogical frameworks and best practices for blended, inclusive, and culturally enriched learning; an AI-assisted toolkit for youth workers, supporting curriculum design, training



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and the use of emerging technologies; and a mobile-first platform for young people, offering interactive learning, digital-pilgrimage experiences, reflection tools, and AI-powered creative tasks to explore identity, heritage, and community. Young people will be asked to research, develop, and document a “local” pilgrimage, and a group from each country will complete the project by participating in a pilgrimage in Sweden - St Birgitta's Way. Participants will also prepare videos and journal documentation and digitally present the results of their experience.

The expected outcomes of this project include enhanced self-awareness, improved intercultural communication skills, enhanced social integration, digital literacy, and inclusive engagement among the participants. Additionally, the initiative intends to establish stronger transnational networks among youth organizations and cultural institutions.

Keywords: Erasmus+ project, cultural tourism, pilgrimage, youth, digital tools



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THE SKILLSCAPES OBSERVATORY: A DATA-DRIVEN, AI-ENHANCED INFRASTRUCTURE FOR MONITORING AND FORECASTING LABOUR MARKET TRANSFORMATIONS IN GREEK TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Tourism plays a central role in Greece's socioeconomic development, providing one of the highest employment contributions in Europe and generating substantial direct and indirect value across multiple value chains. However, the rapid digital transformation of tourism services, combined with demographic pressures, fluctuating visitor patterns, post-pandemic labour market disruptions, and the growing need for green skills, has intensified skills shortages and mismatches across occupations and regions. Conventional labour market monitoring systems remain slow to detect emerging needs and cannot always capture the evolving characteristics of jobs, digital skill demands, or localized workforce vulnerabilities. As a result, policymakers, employers, and training providers lack timely, granular, and actionable intelligence for strategic workforce planning.

To address these urgent gaps, the Skillsmap Observatory has been developed as a core component of the national research and innovation project "Skillsmap in Greek Tourism: A multi-level analysis Using Real-Time Labour Market Data, dynamic forecasting and AI-enabled mentoring". The Observatory constitutes a permanent, data-driven governance tool aiming to support evidence-based policy, strengthen social cohesion, and enhance the sector's competitiveness with a forward-looking perspective towards 2030.

The Observatory integrates multiple validated data sources that reflect both labour demand and labour supply. These include official national (Greek) and European statistics, administrative employment records, and new real-time data extracted from online job vacancies and related web platforms. Using state-of-the-art methods of artificial intelligence, natural language processing, and advanced spatial analysis, the Observatory augments existing data to produce real-time labour market intelligence that identifies urgent recruitment pressures, rapidly shifting job requirements, and spatially detailed indicators disaggregated to smaller territorial units than currently available. This reveals local skills ecosystems, hotspots of workforce shortage, disparities between tourism-dependent regions, and provides predictive analytics that combine forecasting and scenario modelling to anticipate future workforce needs under different trajectories of tourism development, seasonality changes, technological adoption, and sustainability transitions.

These outputs are visualized within an accessible, intuitive and user-oriented online web platform, featuring interactive maps, dynamic charts and interactive dashboards, that allow users to explore employment structures, trends in specific tourism and cultural occupations, skill characteristics associated with those occupations, and the geographical distribution of mismatches between supply and demand.

The Observatory is structured into several thematic components that provide a comprehensive policy intelligence environment. The "EU Economy" section compiles core macroeconomic indicators for all European countries, supporting comparative economic assessments. The "Greek Tourism" component offers detailed insights into destination performance, such as overnights in hotel and short-stay accommodation, average length of stay, bed capacity, tourism turnover, expenditure per overnight, and regionally disaggregated indicators on labour demand and skills requirements. A third component aggregates EU-wide data on arrivals and accommodation capacity, enabling cross-country benchmarking and long-term trend monitoring. Finally, an integrated section on labour and skills demand across the EU provides sectoral and occupational employment data, skill-level distributions of the workforce, and indicators of precarious labour, thereby situating Greek tourism labour dynamics within broader European transformations.



The Observatory's design is inherently aligned with European tourism policy frameworks, including the EU's transition pathway for tourism and the green-digital transformation agendas. Methodological priorities reflect key policy needs in Greece: a stronger focus on quality employment; improved monitoring of vulnerable groups such as youth and seasonal workers; recognition of cultural and heritage-related occupations within tourism ecosystems; and careful tracing of spatial imbalances between destinations with high-intensity tourism and regions aspiring to diversify their product offerings.

To capture emerging labour market signals that are not reflected in conventional statistics, the Observatory systematically collects and processes online job advertisements using automated data extraction techniques. Vacancy texts are analyzed to identify occupations, skill requirements, and contractual characteristics in near real time. Occupational titles and descriptions are harmonized using international classifications, allowing job postings to be consistently mapped to ISCO categories. Skill requirements extracted from vacancy content are subsequently linked to the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) framework, enabling standardized identification of skills demand across regions, sectors, and countries.

A distinctive conceptual innovation of the Observatory is its operationalization of the "skills landscape" approach. Labour markets are not treated merely as statistical aggregates but as spatially and socially embedded systems shaped by worker mobility, skills portability, local economic structure, and destination-specific development paths. This approach strengthens the policy relevance of the indicators produced: stakeholders can investigate not only how many workers are needed, but where, with what skillsets, under what working conditions, and how these needs are changing.

The Observatory promotes openness, technological diffusion, and long-term viability. All Observatory data are available through a public Application Programming Interface (API), so that public authorities, training institutions, technology providers, and researchers have the ability to access anonymized datasets and build added-value tools. This strategy expands the Observatory's role from a standalone platform into a national capability and knowledge commons that can support continuous monitoring and policy learning beyond the project's lifecycle.

Expected benefits of the Observatory's use include a) strengthened tourism resilience, through preparedness and adaptive workforce strategies in the face of shocks, b) reduction of skills mismatches and better matching between career aspirations, training provision, and market needs, c) improved policy targeting and impact assessment, particularly in regional skills planning and programs for upskilling and inclusion, d) higher value creation and competitiveness, enabled by a workforce equipped for digitalization, sustainability, and upgraded visitor experiences, as well as, e) contribution to balanced regional development, revealing new opportunities for labour mobility and diversification of tourism offerings.

In summary, the Skillscapes Observatory introduces a new generation of labour market intelligence for tourism: real-time, spatially sensitive, and analytically predictive. It responds directly to current governance challenges in Greece while offering a replicable model for other tourism-intensive economies seeking sustainable transformation. By grounding workforce strategies in empirical evidence and future-oriented scenarios, it supports the collective goal of achieving quality employment, inclusive development, and innovation-driven competitiveness in the Greek tourism sector by 2030 and beyond.

Keywords: tourism labour markets, real-time labour market intelligence, skills mismatches, predictive analytics, spatial labour dynamics

EMBEDDING EDUCATION AND TRAINING AS INFRASTRUCTURE FOR RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DESTINATION ECOSYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

Tourism destination ecosystems are increasingly exposed to interconnected and compounding disruptions, including climate change impacts, economic volatility, geopolitical instability, and public health crises. These pressures have highlighted structural vulnerabilities in tourism-dependent regions and intensified scholarly and policy interest in destination resilience and sustainability. While resilience is a central concept in tourism studies, existing approaches mainly emphasize governance arrangements, crisis management, or technological solutions, often treating education and training as supplementary capacity-building activities rather than as systemic enablers of long-term adaptability. As a result, actionable frameworks that operationalize learning as a core component of destination resilience remain limited. This study addresses this gap by proposing the EDUCATE framework, an integrative and learning-centered model designed to embed education and training as foundational infrastructure for resilience, flexibility, and sustainability in tourism destination ecosystems. The framework reconceptualizes resilience not as a static capability or reactive response to crises, but as a continuous, system-wide learning process that connects individuals, organizations, communities, and governance structures. By positioning education at the heart of destination management, the paper advances a holistic understanding of how adaptive capacity can be cultivated and sustained over time.

Methodologically, the study adopts a targeted scoping synthesis of multidisciplinary literature published between 2014 and 2025. The synthesis draws on research from tourism resilience and sustainability studies, destination governance, small enterprise (SME) development, community-based learning, and technology-enabled education. Academic sources were systematically reviewed to identify recurring themes, mechanisms, and stakeholder roles linking education and training to adaptive capacity and sustainable destination performance. Rather than aggregating empirical results, the synthesis focuses on mapping conceptual relationships and translating dispersed insights into an operational framework suitable for destination management organizations (DMOs), policymakers, and educational institutions. The EDUCATE framework consists of seven interrelated components that together form a cyclical learning system. “Engage stakeholders” emphasizes participatory co-design of learning initiatives involving residents, SMEs, DMOs, public agencies, and educational institutions. “Diagnose needs”

focuses on rapid assessments of skills gaps, risk exposure, and institutional capacity across the destination ecosystem. “Upskill pathways” promote tiered and flexible learning paths, including micro-credentials for frontline staff, continuous professional development for managers, and policy-oriented education for decision-makers. “Coherently govern” ensures alignment between education initiatives, destination resilience strategies, and governance mechanisms. “Apply technology” highlights the role of digital learning platforms, mobile micro-learning, simulations, and data dashboards in scaling and personalizing education. “Test and iterate” embeds scenario planning, simulations, and after-action reviews into learning cycles, fostering adaptive experimentation. Finally, “Evaluate impact” introduces an evidence-based monitoring scheme linking education and training inputs to measurable outcomes related to resilience, sustainability, and community wellbeing.

Beyond conceptual development, the paper proposes a practical implementation roadmap that illustrates how the framework can be operationalized at micro (individual and enterprise), meso (destination and community), and macro (policy and governance) levels. This multi-scalar approach recognizes the interdependencies within tourism ecosystems and the central role of SMEs, which often face resource constraints yet are critical carriers of local knowledge, innovation, and visitor experience. The framework also accounts for the seasonal nature of tourism, proposing adaptive training cycles that align learning priorities with peak and off-peak periods. To support accountability and continuous improvement, this study introduces a monitoring and evaluation scheme structured around five indicator domains: capacity development, operational performance, sustainability outcomes, community impacts, and learning effectiveness. This scheme enables destinations to move beyond ad hoc training evaluation and systematically assesses how education contributes to faster recovery, improved coordination, reduced resource intensity, and enhanced stakeholder collaboration.

The contribution of this study is threefold. First, it advances tourism resilience theory by reframing education and training as systemic infrastructure rather than peripheral interventions. Second, it provides destination managers and policymakers with a structured but adaptable framework for embedding continuous learning within governance and planning processes. Third, it aligns destination-level capacity-building with global sustainability agendas, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals related to education, decent work, sustainable communities, and climate action. By institutionalizing education and training through this framework, tourism destinations can strengthen their ability to absorb shocks, adapt to uncertainty, and transform development pathways toward long-term sustainability. The study concludes that resilience in tourism is not merely managed through policies or technologies, but learned collectively through continuous, inclusive, and evidence-driven education embedded within destination ecosystems.

Keywords: tourism destination resilience, education and training, continuous learning, sustainable tourism, destination governance, capacity building

ACADEMIC TOURISM ON THE SILK ROAD. INTERREGIONAL CORRIDORS OF EDUCATIONAL DIPLOMACY AND TOURISM FLOWS DEVELOPMENT WITH GREEK UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Academic tourism, as a micro-niche of educational travel encompassing higher education activities such as, student study abroad programs, staff exchange experiences, joint degrees, summer schools, conferences, and cultural heritage-based learning, has grown in significance worldwide in recent decades, as a result of rising international mobility of students and academic staff, gradually becoming a global phenomenon. Through international academic mobility programs, students and professors travel abroad to expand their perspectives, improve their learning and teaching experiences, discover new academic environments, learn about different educational systems, cultures and societies, enhance cultural understanding and foster personal development. Moreover, international mobility programs benefit tourism development in academic destinations, since visiting university students and academic staff can be considered as tourists for stays less than one year. Additionally, current and former visiting students and staff may act as an essential source of information for future university visitors, while the visiting experience often affects their willingness to return for leisure purposes. Thus, academic tourism plays a vital role in boosting local economies, fostering cultural exchange and lifelong learning, and contributing to global understanding and academic advancements. Furthermore, universities and other academic institutions worldwide have recognized the dynamics of internationalization initiatives in bridging cultural differences and academic perspectives, thus acquiring additional importance as tools of educational diplomacy and “soft power” policies.

This paper draws on frameworks from international higher education networking, to explore how structured academic mobility generates sustainable tourism flows, while strengthening geopolitical, cultural, and knowledge-based connectivity. The purpose of the study is to investigate the development of academic tourism along the modern Silk Road countries, with a focus on the role of Greek universities as interregional educational hubs connecting Europe, Asia, and the Eastern Mediterranean. The study adopts a mixed methodology, combining policy analysis and academic mobility data of partnerships between Greek universities and academic institutions in countries along the Silk Road. Thessaloniki, the academic, economic and transport hub of Northern Greece, is used as the case study to highlight the proposed methodology. The historical and symbolic role of the city as a cultural

bridge between East and West is examined, along with how this legacy is strategically exploited in the context of contemporary higher education internationalization programs, considered particularly important and generally conducive to tourism development. The findings of the research demonstrate that academic tourism constitutes a form of high-value, low-season tourism that contributes also to the strengthening of soft power, interregional cooperation and international academic networking. The study asserts that the enhancement of synergies among academic institutions, tourism authorities, and diplomatic entities is imperative for the expansion of academic tourism corridors with Silk Road countries. The study aims to add to the current discourse on academic tourism, the internationalization of higher education, and the expansion of the educational diplomacy role of universities in the context of global connectivity.

Keywords: Academic Tourism, Educational Diplomacy, Silk Road, Greece

MUSIC TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE PLACE-MAKING: THE CASE OF THREE “MUSIC VILLAGES” IN CRETE

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ABSTRACT

Music tourism, as a subset of cultural tourism, involves travel experiences driven by a desire to attend/visit music-dominated events and/or places: a music concert, a music festival, visit the home/ grave/ inspiration places of famous musicians, the studios where songs were recorded, or destinations that are related to a tour of one’s favourite music band or a loved film musical. For instance, Salzburg’s tourism has seen rapid growth after the destination’s connection with the musical film “The Sound of Music”, while the house where Mozart was born has recently taken a place near the most visited museums in the world, establishing Salzburg as a destination for classical music (Guachalla, 2023). Elvis Priesley’s and Bob Marley’s graves in Memphis, Tennessee, USA and Nine Miles, Jamaica, respectively, are included among the 10 most visited graves worldwide, while the Abbey Road Studios in London, where The Beatles recorded some of their well-known songs is included in The Abbey Road Tour, booked by thousands of tourists every year. Recent music events such as Coldplay’s Spheres Tour and Taylor Swift’s Era Tour have invited hundreds of thousands of people at the tours’ venues, causing significant increase in the destinations’ flights and hotel bookings, as a result of the artists’ global fame. Music festivals are among the music events that invite a big number of tourism flows in destinations (Perron-Brault et al, 2020; Kement, 2024), providing musical, but also extra-musical motives (Szmigin et al, 2017), such as socialization and the contemporary tourists’ need for local authenticity and extraordinary experiences (Skandalis et al, 2023).

This paper examines three traditional music festivals in three Cretan villages, as successful case studies of sustainable music tourism practices: Hamezi Festival (Lassithi Prefecture), Houdetsi Festival (Heraklion Prefecture) and Meronas Festival (Rethymno Prefecture). Houdetsi is the village where the “Labyrinth” musical workshop hosts music events for the last 43 years, creating specific soundscapes and a certain music identity for the village (Fahey, 2014), as well as a case of resilient destination development through music. The workshop organizes music seminars, mainly on modal musical traditions of the world, as well as concerts with free entry. Meronas is the home of “Meronas Music Workshops”, organized for the last 15 years. The Workshops gather musicians from around the world during the first week of August in order to take part to seminars of Cretan lyra, Cretan lute, Cretan wind instruments, Cretan mandolin, violin of western Crete, santouri, Cretan dance and Cretan song. Hamezi hosted the 3rd “Hamezi Festival” during the summer of 2025, where music seminars, as well as other art seminars—like loom and mosaic seminars—are offered.

The purpose of the paper is to examine the ways the specific villages’ local cultural agents have managed, by focusing on music tourism, to create a protected place of specific soundscapes and music education opportunities,

which in fact gave new dynamic to the villages themselves. All three villages have created a strong brand as “music villages”, as music is the first thing one brings in mind when referring to the specific places.

For the purposes of the study, the research team collected data through fieldwork research in the three villages the festivals take place, between October 2024 and May 2025. The research team made several visits to the selected villages and conducted semi-structured interviews with local residents, hotel owners and presidents of the villages’ Cultural Associations, as well as tourists present in the area during the visits. Additional data was collected through digital ethnography tools, as researchers recorded and studied the presence and visibility of the villages and the music festivals in the digital semiosphere, as well as the users’—both the villages’ residents and visitors—comments. The authors examine the ways the music workshops/festivals have branded the villages with a specific music identity.

Findings reveal that music can offer co-created experiences (Szmigin et al, 2017), highlighting notions of community and co-belonging that inspire repeating visits, and creating cultural and economic networks, even while prioritizing social and environmental, rather than merely economic sustainability pillars.

Music tourism is an understudied form of cultural tourism, especially when it comes to musicians’ traveling to attend seminars and/or other music events. The study highlights important aspects of music tourism and at the same time resilient practices in small villages inspired by local people and cultural actors.

Keywords: Music tourism; Cultural tourism; Traditional music festivals; Sustainable tourism

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AS A CHALLENGE FOR AIR TRANSPORT IN PERIPHERAL AREAS

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the research is to identify and assess the impact of air transport on the development of tourism in peripheral regions. The specific objective is to identify challenges and threats to sustainable tourism related to the development of aviation in the studied peripheral area. To achieve these objectives, research was conducted in a selected peripheral area – northeastern Poland. xxxThe following research methods were used: a diagnostic survey and comparative analysis. The diagnostic survey was conducted on a sample of 238 people, taking into account three strata: 90 students of tourism and recreation, 30 employees of tourism enterprises, and 118 residents of the region. As a result, the vast majority of respondents recognized the need for an airport, simultaneously emphasizing its significant impact on the development of the tourism sector. The recommendations concern the construction of a regional airport as a key investment necessary for the development of tourism in the studied area. On the other hand, most respondents (students and entrepreneurs) perceive a certain dissonance (conflict) between the recommended investment and the concept of sustainable tourism, particularly in terms of environmental impact.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, peripheral areas, air transport, environment, tourism development

IN SEARCH OF THE WELL-TRAVELLING: CAN PERCEPTIONS REGARDING WELLBEING GUIDE THE PATH TO RESPONSIBLE TOURISM?

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ABSTRACT

Even if well-being is an individual issue, it manifests only in congruence with the well-being of the surrounding environment and community (Hjalager & Flagestad, 2012; Dilette et al., 2021). In Greek, *evexia* and *evimeria* are used to describe the individual's and the social well-being accordingly. Based on Greek etymology, both words start with the prefix "ev" which means "well", "good", "pleasant", "happy" "right way". In line with the above, in an era when tourism is increasingly discussed in terms of its negative impacts on the global environment and the local communities, the present study aims to elucidate the notion of well-travelling («*ευ ταξιδεύειν*» in Greek), a means of travel that concurrently generates positive outcomes for both the traveler and the destination.

The aim of this study is to examine tourists' perceptions and attitudes on the concepts of well-being and sustainability and gain insights on how they reflect on their travelling behavior.

The methodology draws from the grounds of KAB theory which connects knowledge, attitudes and behavior in a linear pathway (Bettinghaus, E. P., 1986). The tool used was an online questionnaire which was activated in the Limesurvey platform for a 4-month period and convenience sampling was employed. A total of 420 tourists visiting the Greek islands participated in the study. Of these, 51% were between 36 and 50 years old, more respondents (63.6%) were women, and only 13.3% were foreign visitors. Crosstabs analysis was conducted and multiple Pearson chi-square tests were performed to reveal associations between the different variables and the sociodemographic factors. Statistical significance threshold was set at 5% ($p < 0.05$). For the purposes of the analysis, two new variables (scores) were created. The first one reflects tourists' level of environmental perceptions and is associated with environmental sensitivity (attitudes). The second variable represents the degree of sustainable principles adoption in the participant's daily life (responsible behavior).

Findings indicate that the well-being is broadly perceived as a balance between physical and emotional health, with a significant share of respondents—particularly women—emphasizing the superiority of the emotional dimension. Nature stands out as a fundamental element of well-being, closely bounded with low-intensity outdoor

recreation. Preferences related to wellness travel indicate a tendency toward slow tourism, framed by proximity to nature, extended time outdoors, off-season travel, and longer stays. This drift is reinforced by a strong lack of interest across all groups in the fame or popularity of the destination, as well as in luxury accommodation or resorts. Moreover, participants over 35 years old report higher engagement in nature-based activities, while international tourists show stronger interest in culture and local heritage, placing greater value on traditional cuisine, local products, and visits to cultural sites, as well as related experiential activities. Regarding participants' perceptions on sustainability, the majority supported the view that caring for oneself inherently involves caring for the environment, while also declared that the foundations of an ecological mindset and environmentally responsible behavior are principally established during childhood. Furthermore, the statistical analysis revealed a clear and progressive relationship between the level of environmental awareness, sensitivity, and action. Specifically, individuals who self-report being more informed also report higher levels of environmental awareness. In turn, greater awareness is correlated with higher performance on both scores – environmental perceptions (attitudes) and the degree of sustainable practices adopted (behavior). In addition, the results indicated that higher scores related to the sustainable practices adopted, was consistently associated with greater participation in both culture and nature-based activities, with high scorers engaging in a wider range of activities overall. Also, this score was significantly related to indoor recreation, with low scorers showing a stronger preference for indoor recreation in terms of serenity and/or amusement (nights out, staying up late, drinking, etc). In contrast, there appears to be a marginal association ($p < 0.049$) between the environmental perceptions and outdoor, low-intensity recreation, with high scorers more likely to link such activities to well-being. Finally, according to the participants, the main barrier to becoming a more conscious traveler was the perceived lack of sustainable options, followed by time, cost, and insufficient information. Financial constraints decreased with higher age and income, while age and gender influenced the prospect of becoming a more sustainable traveller. Gender also significantly affected the desire for financial incentives or rewards.

This study attempted to explore the associations between well-being perceptions and responsible tourism behavior. As concluded, the findings suggest that tourists who pursue wellness through nature and outdoor activities tend to adopt more sustainable principles, likely because their experiences are closely tied to the quality and integrity of both the natural and social environment. It is possible that travel choices may be shaped—consciously or subconsciously—by the perception that residents' lifestyles and the environmental condition of the destination constitute integral elements of the overall travel experience. Thus, well-being tourism may attract more conscious travelers who embrace a slow-living philosophy that respects the society and the environment while nurturing personal flourishing. This aligns with Aristotle's concept of eudemonic well-being, which emphasizes self fulfilment and contributes to improved living conditions. Overall, the current research serves as a foundation for further shaping the future of the emerging field of well-travelling a concept that prioritizes the balanced well-being of the residents, the tourists and the destination.

Keywords: well-being, perceptions, responsible tourist behavior, slow tourism, nature

THE ROLE OF MEDICAL WELLNESS SERVICES IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTH TOURISM: A THEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing expansion and transformation of the tourism phenomenon encompass multiple forms of special interest tourism, which reflect contemporary tourists' evolving needs and expectations. Health tourism, which is a rapidly growing sector of the tourism economy, is gaining growing prominence, addressing the global shift toward a healthier and more balanced lifestyle. Therefore, through the integration of hybrid and highly specialized medical wellness services, it evolves beyond the traditional forms of medical tourism, thermalism and wellness tourism. It represents services provided within the framework of both medical and wellness tourism, integrating medical interventions into wellness tourism experiences.

The literature regarding the use of medical wellness services is sparse and fragmented, despite the fact that they are being used increasingly in the implementation of synergies designed to enhance tourism entrepreneurship. The purpose of the present thematic review was to explore the role of medical wellness services in the sustainable development of health tourism. More specifically, the tourism product was conceptually approached and identified examining the tourists' motivation, satisfaction and loyalty, as well as the perceived value of the product. Furthermore, it also aimed to investigate the relationship between the tourism product and sustainability. Finally, governance, regulatory and ethical issues were also examined.

For the purpose of the study and, due to its multidisciplinary nature, a thematic review was conducted. The latter allowed the understanding of the role of medical wellness services in the shaping of the continuum of holistic healthcare within the framework of tourism and, therefore, in the sustainable development of health tourism. The relevant literature was identified through a systematic search of the Scopus database, using the terms "health tourism", "medical tourism", "wellness tourism", "medical wellness services" and "sustainability". Certain inclusion and exclusion criteria were implemented. Based on these criteria, articles published from 2015 onwards

were included, while papers in the field of medical tourism, focusing -for example- exclusively on surgical interventions were excluded. The selected studies were analyzed, in order to allow the identification of thematic areas, prevalent trends and conceptual connections.

The first thematic area identified referred to the conceptual approach and the definition of the tourism product identity. The literature review revealed inconsistencies regarding both the use and the meaning of the terms “health tourism”, “medical tourism” and “wellness tourism”. As a result, the terms are being approached either as synonymous or indiscriminately. This conceptual ambiguity impedes the clear positioning of medical wellness services within the context of health tourism.

The second thematic area identified was related to the tourists’ motivation, satisfaction and loyalty, as well as the perceived value of the product. The literature review revealed that both medical and wellness tourists seek to preserve and enhance their health, they demonstrate elevated expectations in relation to the quality and the safety of the services provided and they are interested in sustainability issues. Thus, it was found that medical wellness services demonstrate high perceived value and they target specific market segments. This finding relates to the economic sustainability, through the extension of the tourist season, the fostering of sustainable employment opportunities, as well as the increase in length of stay and travel expenditure.

The third thematic area addressed the link between medical wellness services offered within the framework of health tourism and sustainability, in particular the social and environmental dimensions of the latter. The literature review revealed that the use of medical wellness services within the framework of health tourism facilitates access to high quality, specialized treatments and preventive and restorative health services, supporting holistic health approaches. Additionally, the finding that environmental sensitivity relates to higher satisfaction in the context of wellness tourism facilitates the planning of public policies aiming to relate environmental protection to the improvement of citizens’ health and quality of life.

Finally, the fourth thematic area identified was related to governance, regulatory and ethical issues. In general, the integration of medical wellness services into tourism demonstrates complex challenges related to issues of quality, safety, certification and ethics. The literature review highlights the necessity of rigorous regulatory frameworks and coordinated governance mechanisms, in order to ensure the alignment of the objectives of this form of special interest tourism to public health priorities.

The findings of the present thematic review indicate that the integration of medical wellness services within health tourism framework may result in a sustainable, highly differentiated tourism product of high perceived value, which could be effectively used to promote holistic health destinations. Moreover, the integration of different forms of special interest tourism into clusters represents a widespread international practice and relates to sustainable development.

The potential identified in the present thematic review is limited by both conceptual ambiguities and inadequate integration of governance, regulatory and ethical issues.

In conclusion, the present thematic review highlights the role of medical wellness services in the sustainable development of health tourism. Furthermore, the findings offer direction to both tourism policy makers and health and tourism professionals, as they reveal opportunities for synergies, the creation of differentiated tourism products, as well as the holistic health destinations promotion.

Keywords: medical wellness services, medical tourism, wellness tourism, health tourism, sustainability

REPRODUCTIVE TOURISM IN GREECE: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

At the international level, reproductive tourism is growing rapidly, influenced by rising infertility rates, the trend toward delayed parenthood, and shifting social perceptions regarding technologically assisted reproduction. This study examines reproductive tourism as a phenomenon, with a particular focus on the Greek context. In Greece, reproductive tourism is based on three key laws regulating medically assisted reproduction, Acts 3089/2002, 3305/2005 and 4958/2022, which define the conditions for applying reproductive medical techniques, protect donor anonymity, and establish the framework for surrogacy. Greece has a flexible legislative framework that allows the development of reproductive tourism. It is also a country that offers more affordable yet equally high-quality services, while at the same time being an overall attractive destination worth visiting. In reproductive tourism, visits may be more frequent and of longer duration compared to other forms of medical tourism. For this reason, Greece's overall attractiveness as a destination function even more positively in this specific context.

However, weaknesses remain, such as the lack of recent official data, limited state inspections, and emerging competition from neighboring countries. For this reason, it is necessary to develop a national plan for the promotion of reproductive tourism, built upon three central pillars: the official documentation of the market landscape and its dynamic changes through relevant research; the strengthening of the country's brand image; and the further improvement of the legislative framework, particularly because technological developments, such as artificial intelligence, will redefine the ways in which reproductive medicine is practiced. It is essential for Greece to follow these directions, in order to diversify its tourism product, enhance market resilience, and improve the profitability of businesses in the sector.

In conclusion, Greece has not yet fully capitalized on the opportunities offered by reproductive tourism. What is needed is the development of a strategic national plan, which requires both government initiative and cooperation from healthcare professionals and businesses operating in the reproductive tourism sector. In this way, Greece will be able to maximize its potential in the field of reproductive tourism, contributing both to the provision of high-quality services for visitors and to the growth of the sector's revenue.

Keywords: Greece, IVF, law, medical tourism, reproductive tourism

TRACING THE ROOTS OF VOLUNTOURISM: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF ALTRUISM, DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Voluntourism has emerged as a topic of considerable interest within the academic community in recent years, as its popularity continues to grow worldwide (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011). It is frequently seen as a new, alternative form of tourism with principles of sustainability and based on reciprocity (Lough & Oppenheim, 2017). Travelers, regardless of age, social status or economic backgrounds, increasingly seek to integrate volunteer service into their leisure travel. What motivates voluntourists is usually their integration into the host community, experience the local culture, the feeling of “guilt-free” holidays, and giving something back to the host community. Consequently, voluntourism is often considered as a sustainable model that leaves a smaller ecological and cultural footprint than traditional mass tourism (Hammersley, 2013).

In contemporary times, voluntourism leaves the impression that it is a new phenomenon. However, the roots of voluntourism are much older than expected. In order to understand the evolution of this form of alternative tourism, it is essential to examine its origins and development over time. This study traces the historical roots of voluntourism to contextualize it as an established alternative form of tourism, rather than a fleeting trend. This historical analysis establishes a foundation for further investigation into the modeling of voluntourism, specifically regarding the future development and resilience within voluntourism programs. The methodology used is qualitative historical analysis of the existing literature. Through this research, we highlight the connection between voluntourism, international volunteering and international humanitarian aid actions. By situating voluntourism within broader socio-economic shifts such as postwar development projects, the rise of humanitarian aid and the sustainability policies, we identify key phases in the development of voluntourism.

The analysis begins by highlighting that journeys for altruistic charity are deeply rooted and often intertwined with ancient traditions such as pilgrimage. Evidence of such movements exists in ancient European and Asian civilizations, including the Eleusinian mysteries in Archaic Greece, where travel was linked to spiritual and communal obligation (Nielsen, 2017). Trips incorporating volunteer activities began to take shape in the modern era as early as the beginning of the 19th century. The first relevant records are linked to the Scouting movement (Johnston, 2015). The 20th century saw the formalization of these practices. The research examines the rise of Workcamping programs in the 1920s and state-sponsored initiatives like the Civilian Conservation Corps (1933–

1942) in the United States (Melzer, 2020). These programs utilized voluntary labor as a tool for combating youth unemployment and economic recovery during the Great Depression. In the post-war period following World War II, the reconstruction of devastated areas in Europe was a key objective of several initiatives that included voluntary assistance. The establishment of the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) in the UK (1958) and the Peace Corps in the USA (1961) set the foundations of long-term international voluntary service. During this era, volunteer travel was primarily organized by state or religion governance, focused on geopolitical stability, skills transfer and humanitarian ideologies (Baillie Smith et al., 2022; Burns & Howard, 2015; Smith, 2016). The era from the 1970s through the 1990s due to the reduction of state funding for humanitarian aid projects there is a shift towards the emergence of NGOs engaging with international volunteering programs (Lewis, 2014; Tomazos & Cooper, 2012; Vrasti, 2013). This period coincided with the cultural institutionalization of the "Gap Year" in the UK, Australia, and eventually the US (Simpson, 2004). Following the involvement of NGOs while traditional state funding of international volunteering significantly decreased, there was room for the emergence of modern voluntourism where travelers would be charged for the experience of helping.

The analysis of this research demonstrates how humanitarian aid became a keyword for a tourism product. This transition fundamentally in some cases altered dynamics between guest and host as well as prioritizing the volunteer's experience over the tangible development needs of the host community. By mapping this evolution from spiritual and communal traveling of the Eleusinian mysteries to the commercialized voluntourism programs of the 21st century, this research highlights the connection between voluntourism, international volunteering and humanitarian aid. It is argued that modern voluntourism is not an immaculate conception but rather inherits the legacies and structures of earlier eras. The paper concludes that it is important to acknowledge the historical origins of voluntourism to understand the sustainable heritage that comes with it.

Keywords: Voluntourism, Sustainability, Historical Analysis, Cultural Heritage, Commodification, Humanitarian Aid

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND WELLBEING IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Employee wellbeing has emerged as a critical concern within the global hotel industry, which is characterized by intense workloads, irregular working hours, high emotional labor, and constant interaction with guests. These conditions frequently expose hotel employees to elevated levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout, negatively affecting both individual performance and organizational outcomes, including service quality, employee retention, and customer satisfaction.

While previous studies have explored wellbeing through the lenses of job stress, emotional labor, and human resource practices, comparatively limited attention has been given to the role of organizational culture as a holistic and underlying mechanism shaping employees' wellbeing in hospitality contexts. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how organizational culture influences employee wellbeing in the hotel sector and how it can contribute to fostering supportive work environments that enhance both employee experience and organizational performance.

Employee wellbeing has also been increasingly recognized as a fundamental component of sustainable human resource management within the tourism and hospitality industry. In cultural tourism destinations, where hotels operate in close interaction with local communities, heritage assets, and culturally sensitive environments, employees' wellbeing not only constitutes a human resource concern but also significantly impacts service quality, customer satisfaction, and organizational reputation. Ensuring employees are psychologically and emotionally supported is therefore essential to achieving high-quality service delivery and maintaining long-term operational sustainability.

This study concerns a field-based research methodology to examine employees' perceptions of organizational culture and wellbeing. A field study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with hotel executives and employees in order to collect primary data and gain in-depth insights into their experiences and perspectives.

The findings indicate that organizational culture plays a decisive role in shaping employee wellbeing, either by fostering a supportive and empowering work environment or by intensifying stress and emotional strain. Organizational cultures characterized by inclusive leadership, mutual respect, open communication, and

collaborative team dynamics were associated with enhanced psychological safety, emotional resilience, job satisfaction, and commitment.

Employees in such environments reported feeling valued, heard, and supported, which positively influenced their motivation and engagement. Recognition practices, including both formal and informal acknowledgment of employees' efforts, were identified as crucial cultural elements that reinforce wellbeing. Opportunities for participation in decision-making, and supportive peer relationships were found to mitigate the effects of operational pressures, particularly during peak periods.

Conversely, the study highlights the negative consequences of dysfunctional organizational cultures. Hierarchical structures, top-down communication, rigid norms, and limited opportunities for employee voice were associated with feelings of powerlessness, emotional fatigue, disengagement, and reduced job satisfaction. Excessive workloads, long working hours, and inadequate work-life balance exacerbated stress and burnout, especially when organizational priorities emphasized performance outcomes over employee wellbeing. These findings underscore the importance of embedding wellbeing-oriented values, such as respect, fairness, empathy, and collaboration, into everyday organizational practices rather than treating wellbeing initiatives as isolated programs.

This research contributes to hospitality management literature by providing qualitative insights into the interplay between organizational culture and employee wellbeing. By foregrounding employees lived experiences, it illustrates how cultural dynamics at the operational level influence emotional and psychological outcomes, workplace engagement, and organizational performance. The findings have practical implications for human resource management and organizational development, suggesting that hotel managers should cultivate inclusive and participatory cultures, implement realistic workload management strategies, and recognize employee contributions consistently. Embedding these values within organizational culture promotes both employee wellbeing and organizational resilience.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that organizational culture constitutes a strategic resource that significantly shapes employee wellbeing in hospitality organizations. Hotels that actively foster supportive, inclusive, and recognition-oriented cultures can enhance employee satisfaction, reduce turnover, improve service quality, and ultimately contribute to sustainable organizational performance. Future research could explore cross-cultural comparisons, longitudinal assessments, and the broader relationship between organizational culture, employee wellbeing, and sustainable tourism practices to extend these findings.

Keywords: Employee Wellbeing, Organizational Culture, Hospitality Industry

FROM INTENTION TO IMPLEMENTATION: A DUAL-MODEL ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN HOTELS ON MATURE GREEK ISLAND DESTINATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the most dynamic socio-economic mechanisms worldwide, contributing around 10% to global GDP and supporting hundreds of millions of jobs. Its continued expansion has intensified concerns about the need to transition toward sustainable tourism development models that safeguard both the economic and socio-cultural well-being of destinations. Within this context, the hospitality sector occupies a pivotal position: it generates substantial tourism consumption and employment, yet simultaneously exerts strong pressure on local resources, particularly in fragile insular environments. These tensions are especially visible in island destinations across Southern Europe and the Mediterranean, where mass tourism, often driven by poorly planned development, has exceeded local carrying capacities and undermined long-term competitiveness. The COVID-19 crisis further exposed the vulnerability of these destinations, highlighting the urgency of adaptation and restructuring within the tourism and hospitality sector.

Greece is widely recognised as a quintessential island destination, with an extensive archipelago of roughly 6,000 islands and a tourism model strongly associated with sea-sun-sand experiences. The eight destinations examined in this study—Mykonos, Santorini, Skiathos, Kos, Corfu, Rhodes, Zakynthos and Crete—are classified as overdeveloped or developed according to tourism intensity in the Strategic Environmental Impact Study for Greek Tourism. They experienced rapid expansion from the late 1960s onwards, supported by public incentives,

charter flights and the dominant role of tour operators. During the subsequent maturity stage, these islands underwent further internationalisation, marked by increased foreign direct investment, the expansion of national and international hotel chains and a growing reliance on online booking platforms. Today, a substantial share of Greece's four- and five-star hotels is concentrated in these destinations, reflecting a structural shift from artisanal to industrial modes of organisation in the hospitality sector.

In the post-COVID era, Greece has repositioned itself as a safe and welcoming destination. Nonetheless, persistent structural challenges remain. The eight islands studied attract a large share of the country's international air arrivals and hotel capacity, with high spatial and temporal concentration of tourism activity. This concentration, coupled with mounting environmental pressures, has fueled growing concerns over overtourism among policymakers and industry stakeholders. At the same time, climate change, wildfires and water scarcity intensify the fragility of these mature destinations and underscore the urgency of transitioning to more sustainable tourism development models.

Against this backdrop, the core objective of the study is to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder the adoption and implementation of sustainability practices in hotels located in mature island destinations. Specifically, the research addresses the following questions: (RQ1) What are the main barriers and drivers influencing hotel managers' stated intention to adopt sustainability practices? (RQ2) What are the main barriers and drivers encountered by hotel managers during the implementation and maintenance of sustainability practices?

To answer these questions, the paper employs a dual-model logistic regression approach, based on survey data from 373 hotels in the eight island destinations. This approach distinguishes between two interrelated but analytically distinct processes. The first model examines the determinants that lead hotel managers to recognise the strategic value of sustainability and to declare their intention to adopt sustainable practices. It focuses on the precursors to action, highlighting both the drivers that encourage initial commitment and the barriers—such as perceived resource constraints or lack of expertise—that may prevent intentions from evolving into concrete steps. The second model concentrates on hotels that have already implemented sustainability practices or obtained relevant certifications. Here the analysis shifts from intention to execution, identifying the structural and contextual factors that enable hotels to overcome obstacles and achieve tangible outcomes. Together, the two models allow for a systematic comparison between the determinants of intention and those of implementation, thereby shedding light on the mechanisms that translate readiness into action.

The empirical results indicate that sustainability outcomes in the hotel sector are shaped by a combination of internal capacities and external enablers. Structural characteristics (such as hotel size, category and affiliation with chains), financial resources and human capital emerge as critical internal determinants. At the same time, the regulatory framework, local governance arrangements and stakeholder collaboration, particularly with destination management organisations, local authorities and professional associations, play a significant role as external enablers or constraints. Importantly, the analysis reveals that different combinations of these factors are associated with the intention to adopt sustainability practices versus their actual implementation and maintenance.

A central finding of the study is the existence of a pronounced “readiness–action gap”. While many hotel managers in mature Greek island destinations express a willingness to pursue sustainability and acknowledge its strategic importance, this intention frequently fails to materialise in practice. Key obstacles include insufficient liquidity to finance the necessary investments, staffing shortages that limit organisational capacity and gaps in knowledge and skills related to sustainable operations and certification processes. These barriers are particularly acute in smaller or family-run establishments, which often lack the economies of scale and professionalised management found in larger or chain-affiliated hotels.

The contribution of the paper lies in its nuanced, process-oriented analysis of sustainability adoption in the hospitality sector. By comparing the determinants of intention and implementation through a dual-model logistic regression, the research reveals where and why the transition from aspiration to practice breaks down. This, in turn, provides a more comprehensive understanding of how internal capacities and external structures interact across



different stages of the adoption process. The findings offer actionable insights for hotel managers, highlighting the importance of investing in staff training, securing financial tools tailored to sustainability upgrades and engaging in collaborative initiatives at the destination level. At the policy level, the results underline the need for supportive regulatory frameworks, targeted incentives and integrated destination management strategies that mitigate overtourism, strengthen resilience to environmental risks and promote the long-term sustainability of mature island tourism destinations such as Mykonos, Santorini, Skiathos, Rhodes, Kos, Corfu, Zakynthos and Crete.

Keywords: sustainable hotel practices; hospitality sector; tourism island destinations; barriers & drivers.



LEADERSHIP, MOTIVATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES PERFORMANCE: THE HERAKLION-CRETE HOTELS CASES

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ABSTRACT

The tourism business environment is changing, shifting from a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) to a BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, Incomprehensible) environment (Grant, 2023). This transition is due to the impact of a series of recent disruptive events, including economic, migration, and health crises; wars in Ukraine and the Middle East; and the rapid development of artificial intelligence (National Intelligence Council, 2021). Hotel businesses, in particular, are directly facing the consequences of this evolution, including increased operating costs, greater difficulty in attracting and retaining talented human resources (HR), and deterioration in labour relations, among others (Stavrinoudis et al., 2022). To maintain high performance, hotel businesses are called upon to adapt and reshape their operations during the transition from a VUCA to a BANI business environment (Kakaroukas, 2024).

The concept of “business performance” is defined as the set of behaviours and outcomes that are considered important for achieving organisational goals (Taouab & Issor, 2019). It is crucial to highlight the multidimensional nature of business performance, which extends beyond task performance (Wu et al., 2025) to include role behaviour (contextual performance). The latter includes non-standard behaviours, such as willingness, cooperation and assisting colleagues (Elsner Twesme et al., 2025). Particularly in the hospitality sector, this dimension becomes crucial for shaping a positive customer experience (Kóvári, 2025). Hall et al. (2017) argue that during periods of intense upheaval, such as the transition from a VUCA to a BANI business environment, the development of resilient Human Resources Management (HRM) policies is essential to help hotel businesses improve their performance at both the short-term operational and long-term strategic levels.

Fauji and Nurhadian (2024) argue that the key success factors for HRM policies to improve the short- and long-term performance of hotel businesses are effective leadership guidance and appropriate motivation. Wilson (2023) argues that effective leadership entails the ability to inspire and support a team in achieving a common,

clearly defined goal. Motivation in the context of business is a psychological process that stimulates, directs, and maintains employees' actions toward achieving a goal, shaped by individual, cultural, and social factors (Czerwińska-Lubszyk & Jankowiak, 2025).

The main objective of this paper is to investigate how leadership and motivation affect the performance of hotels' HR. To achieve the above objective, quantitative data were collected and analysed from a convenience sample (Golzar et al., 2022) of employees working in various departments of 4* and 5* hotels in the prefecture of Heraklion, Crete, from May to September 2025. A prototype questionnaire in Google Forms format was used as a data collection tool, which included closed-ended dichotomous questions as well as questions in the form of a five-point Likert scale (1=Not at all, 5=Very much), allowing for the systematic and measurable recording of the attitudes of the participants (Bryman, 2016). In total, 93 valid questionnaires were collected.

This research offers a twofold contribution. On a scientific level, it is original, as it highlights how leadership, motivation, and employee performance interact in hotels' work environments. Furthermore, the research validated dichotomous questions and Likert scales for future use. On a practical level, the research results identify key elements of leadership development and motivation policies that, if implemented, will support hotels in improving their performance in the context of the transition from a VUCA to a BANI business environment.

Keywords: leadership, motivation, performance, human resources, hotels, Crete. Greece

THE HRM–COMMUNITY CONNECTION: RECONNECTING THE SOCIAL FABRIC OF TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

In the past decade, sustainability became a central priority in global tourism. Destinations, organizations, and local communities now recognize that long-term development cannot depend only on environmental measures or strategic plans. What often determines whether sustainability succeeds or not, is something more subtle yet humane: the everyday relationships between employees, visitors, institutions, and residents. These interactions shape how policies are lived, how benefits are distributed, and how communities respond to tourism’s presence. Yet, compared with environmental or economic dimensions, the human and social side of sustainability remains relatively understudied.

A large part of the existing literature highlights the importance of Sustainable Human Resource Management. Scholars emphasize fair work conditions, ethical treatment, supportive leadership, opportunities for learning, and a sense of belonging within the workplace. In tourism and hospitality, where the “product” is mainly the interaction between people, these practices matter greatly. Research shows that when employees feel respected and supported, they are more motivated, more engaged, and more committed to delivering high-quality service. Still, many studies stop at the organizational level. Less is known about how these internal practices might affect things beyond the organization, influencing visitors’ experiences or contributing to the sustainability of the destination itself.

Research on talent development and innovation adds another layer. Tourism organizations that invest in skill-building, training, and empowerment are better equipped to adapt to changing market needs. Innovation in this sector is not only about technology; it includes new ways of designing experiences, solving problems creatively, or improving service interactions. These capabilities strengthen competitiveness and customer satisfaction. However, they are rarely examined through the sustainability lens. The question of how human-centered innovation influences the community well-being or destination development per se, still remains open.

Service quality has long been recognized as a fundamental element of tourism success. High-quality services enhance visitor satisfaction, encourage return visits, and contribute to a positive

reputation. But service quality is not a mechanical output; it emerges from human encounters such as how employees speak, listen, respond, and connect. This makes it a natural bridge between internal HRM practices and external destination outcomes. Yet, despite its importance, service quality is underexplored as a mediator between organizational behavior and long-term sustainability.

Another extensive body of research draws on Social Exchange Theory (SET) to understand how residents perceive tourism. Communities weigh expected benefits such as jobs, cultural vitality, improved infrastructure against perceived costs such as crowding, rising living expenses, or cultural dilution. Their willingness to support tourism depends on whether they perceive the exchange to be fair or not. Positive social exchanges foster trust and collaboration, while negative ones often lead to tension or resistance. Although SET is widely applied in resident studies, it rarely intersects with research on HRM, innovation, or service delivery. This disconnection leaves unanswered questions about how the experiences of employees and organizations influence community trust, and how community attitudes, in turn, shape the sustainability landscape.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria add an internationally recognized structure, emphasizing inclusion, participation, cultural heritage, transparency, and education. However, in academic literature these social criteria often remain more aspirational rather than operational. They are discussed in policy documents but less frequently explored in empirical research, particularly in relation to internal organizational dynamics or multi-stakeholder interaction.

When the literature is viewed as a whole, it offers many useful insights, but it also shows that several things are still missing. Sustainable HRM is well developed as an idea, but its real influence on destination sustainability is still uncertain. Research on innovation and talent development shows how people drive performance but rarely connects these processes to community well-being or sustainable development goals. Service quality is recognized as vital, but its deeper relational nature and its potential role in sustainability pathways remains underexamined. Meanwhile, SET provides depth in understanding community perspectives but is seldom integrated in organizational theories that might help explain how feelings of fairness and trust are built in the first place.

Another frequent limitation is the tendency of the literature to examine only a single stakeholder group. Employees, DMO practitioners and personnel, and community members are often studied separately, making it difficult to form a holistic understanding of how sustainability is experienced and co-created across groups. Yet tourism depends on collaboration: workers shape the visitor's experience, organizations guide development, and residents influence the social environment in which tourism takes place. Understanding sustainability therefore requires studying these stakeholders together rather than in isolation.

Overall, the literature points toward several areas in need of deeper exploration:

1. How Sustainable HRM links to destination-level sustainability, beyond organizational boundaries.
2. How talent development and innovation act as pathways between internal practices and external outcomes.
3. How service quality might mediate the relationship between HRM, innovation, and destination well-being.
4. How fairness, trust, and reciprocity influence the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives.

5. How GSTC social criteria connect with organizational and community processes.
6. How multiple stakeholder perspectives intersect in shaping sustainability.

These gaps collectively suggest that sustainability in tourism is not simply a matter of good policy or environmental responsibility. It is a human process rooted in relationships, shared expectations, and the capacity of organizations and communities to learn, adapt, and cooperate. More integrated and multi-layered research is needed to understand how sustainable HRM, innovation, service quality, and social exchange dynamics converge in shaping the long-term development of destinations.

Keywords: sustainability, human resource management, social exchange, destination management

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT AS AN INFLUENCE FACTOR IN IMPORTANT HUMAN RESOURCE ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the impact of Total Quality Management, as a management policy of the hotel business, on issues considered important for human resources, which is the most direct and decisive variable for the production of the hotel product and hotel service, in order to produce a high-value hotel good in the hotel market.

The method chosen in this qualitative research is the personal interview. The selected sample as informants consists of academics in the field of tourism and tourism business administration, public and professional bodies (chamber, federations, associations, clubs), of the hotel business sector.

The implementation of Total Quality Management in the modern hotel business is a critical strategic choice, as it substantially enhances the qualitative characteristics of human resources and contributes decisively to the production of quality hotel products and services. This effect is directly reflected in the level of service provided, positively affecting the overall experience of the hotel customer and the competitive position of the business. The hotel business is a complex and multifunctional organization, which integrates different production and service sectors, each of which is characterized by particular factors, processes, operational requirements and behaviors. The final configuration of the hotel product results from the combined and coordinated operation of these individual systems.

Therefore, each hotel business forms its own management model, which depends on a set of parameters, such as size, category, capacity, extent of business activity and the nature of the services provided. These parameters determine the type and applications of management adopted, with the aim of ensuring effective and efficient business operations. In this context, the administrative application emerges as a key mechanism for enhancing the quality of the services provided, given that tourism services and hotel products are inextricably linked to quality as a fundamental requirement of the production process.

Quality is a dominant characteristic of the final hotel product and constitutes a key factor of differentiation and added value. Its integration into administrative functions and procedures provides a high level of service to the customer, enhancing his satisfaction and his intention for repeated consumption. The management of tourism

enterprises must, therefore, systematically seek the continuous improvement of quality in the production of products and services, integrating quality characteristics into all stages of the administrative and operational process. Quality service must respond to the constantly changing needs and expectations of international tourists, who are shaping new demands regarding the content and form of the hotel offer.

The strategic choice of quality is, for the modern hotel business, the only way to maintain its competitive momentum and enhance its profitability, even in periods of economic uncertainty or crisis (Motwani, Kumar & Youssef, 1996). In an environment of increased challenges and intense competition, hotel businesses are called upon to adopt innovative and integrated management approaches. Total Quality Management is one of the most modern approaches, as it is applied in a holistic, systemic and continuous manner, aiming at improving competitiveness, operational efficiency and meeting the needs of the hotel customer, as well as achieving business excellence (Samson & Terziovski, 1999).

Total Quality Management is a modern philosophy of administrative practice, which focuses in a balanced way on both the internal customer, i.e. the human resources, and the external customer of the company, such as the customer-consumer, the supplier and the partner. The overall commitment of all those involved in quality is achieved through preventive treatment of problems, utilization of statistical and administrative tools and application of the principle of continuous improvement at the lowest possible cost, instead of repressive management of deviations (Psomas, 2008).

In the hotel industry, human resources are the most decisive factor in the production and distribution of products and services, as they participate directly and interactively in the service provision process. Quality service and the quality of hotel services depend to a large extent on the behavior, skills and attitude of the staff, provided that adequate and quality infrastructure, facilities and material resources have been ensured. The personal nature of hotel services makes the employee the main shaper of the quality perceived by the customer.

Total Quality Management is characterized by a strong human-centered orientation, as the successful implementation of its principles requires the active participation and commitment of human resources at all levels of the organizational hierarchy. The emphasis on learning, adaptation, teamwork and continuous improvement is a key axis of TQM, with the aim of achieving the desired quality results (Katsaitis & Papaefthimiou, 2018). The ultimate goal is the effective performance of the employee, which is inextricably linked to his personal satisfaction. Through the investigation and satisfaction of the needs of human resources, management can activate strong motivation mechanisms, directing the behavior of employees towards the achievement of the strategic and quality goals of the hotel business.

The results of the research demonstrate that they enhance the performance and participation of human resources in their qualitative characteristics, such as teamwork and shared responsibility, as well as their universal involvement. Also, in issues such as selection and recruitment of human resources, in training to enhance knowledge and develop skills, in satisfying their high-value qualitative needs, in decision-making, in participation to support the quality policy that is implemented. In addition, within the framework of Total Quality Management, a supportive and participatory work environment is formed. The administration systematically strengthens the involvement of human resources in the quality policy, making them the main body for shaping the quality characteristics of operations and services. At the same time, the implementation of clear evaluation standards strengthens the feeling of justice, security and professional perspective, recognition of one's work.

Keywords: Hotel Business, Quality Management, Human Resources.

ENHANCING SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY THROUGH EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION TRAINING: EVIDENCE FROM GREECE

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is significantly impacted by contemporary social, economic, and technological transformations, as well as successive crises, which pose major challenges to the sector. These developments are reshaping business models and generating an increasing demand for new skills that respond to the evolving needs of the tourism industry (Stavrinoudis & Kakaroukas, 2021). Recent developments have also had a profound impact on working conditions within the sector, highlighting the need for new professional roles and skill sets (INSETE, 2022).

Social sustainability in tourism relates, among other aspects, to issues of mutual understanding, ethical behaviour, and responsible interactions among tourism stakeholders (Kyriakaki et al., 2025). Within this framework, social sustainability is closely linked to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). These goals are increasingly integrated into tourism education and training as transversal skills, aiming to support the long-term sustainability of the sector.

A recent study conducted for the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (SETE) identified 99 key “knowledge and skills” relevant to tourism education and training, classified into five main categories: social, managerial, technical, organisational, and digital skills, all of which were found to have high significance and impact on the Greek tourism sector (INSETE, 2023). Furthermore, these core skills were mapped against three strategic axes, based on best practices, namely Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), sustainability, and digital transformation. The study also highlighted the growing importance of soft skills, understood as behavioural and interpersonal competences essential for effective teamwork and professional conduct, such as emotional intelligence, empathy, values related to equality and diversity, verbal and non-verbal communication, etc. (INSETE, 2023).

In this context, our presentation explores the current state and future training needs related to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in the tourism and hospitality sector in Greece. The research findings are based on a) a quantitative survey conducted with tourism and hospitality employees, the majority of whom were employed in the Accommodation subsector and a minority in Tour Operator/Travel Operator/Tour guide, as well as in Food

and Beverage, and b) a qualitative survey which concludes interviews with academic staff at Universities and trainers in tourism.

The results indicate that, over the past five years, EDI-related training has mainly focused on conflict management, fostering a culture of dignity and respect, cultural awareness, accessibility and disability awareness. However, the survey revealed a low level of training in seven key EDI skills. At the same time, employees expressed a strong demand for future training in mental health awareness, cultural awareness, and the promotion of a culture of dignity and respect.

Academic participants emphasized the need to strengthen EDI skills training across both vocational education and training and higher education. Although universities have begun to embed EDI-related topics, particularly within Human Resource Management and Hospitality Management programmes, as well as modules on social responsibility, ethics, and intercultural communication, significant barriers remain. These include prevailing societal perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours towards minorities, as well as changing demographic patterns within the sector. The study highlights the need for more systematic, targeted, and sustainable EDI training strategies in the Greek tourism and hospitality industry.

This research is conducted within the framework of the European project PANTOUR, a follow-up initiative of the Next Tourism Generation Skills Alliance (NTG). PANTOUR aims to design innovative and collaborative solutions to address current and future skills needs within the European tourism ecosystem. Key project outputs include the development of a Sectoral Skills Intelligence Monitor, a Skills Lab, resource books for trainers, the implementation of National Skills Roadmaps, and a Skills Strategy Plan for the period 2026–2036. Through the exploitation of these outputs, PANTOUR seeks to support job seekers, unemployed and employed workers, employers, and SMEs, with particular emphasis on reskilling and upskilling the tourism workforce in response to post-COVID-19 challenges.

The study directly contributes to the conference topic “Sustainability literacy in tourism education and professional development” by framing EDI competencies as a core dimension of sustainability literacy within tourism and hospitality education and workforce development. The findings highlight how inclusive practices, mental health awareness, cultural awareness, and a culture of dignity and respect are essential skills for building socially sustainable tourism organisations. To a lesser extent, the study also aligns with the topic “New ethics in sustainable tourism and culture/heritage”, as it addresses emerging ethical challenges related to diversity, inclusion, and changing demographic realities in the tourism workforce, reinforcing the role of education and training in shaping ethically responsible and inclusive tourism practices.

Keywords: social sustainability, equity, diversity, inclusion, tourism, hospitality, human resources, training

SUSTAINABLE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN HOTELS: A PILOT LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is twofold: a) to identify and highlight the factors that influence and shape Sustainable Human Resources Management (SHRM) practices in hotels, b) to present the broader results deriving from the implementation of practices from different types of SHRM in hotels. The research questions are the following:

- a) Which factors interact with applied SHRM practices in managing work-related challenges in hotels?
- b) How are hotel businesses benefited by SHRM practices?

In order to respond to these questions, systematic literature review is being conducted. The search criteria for collecting the suitable data - sources are the following:

Relevance: The sources include concepts related to the typology of SHRM and the application of SHRM in hotels.
Language: English.

Source types:

- a) scientific papers and publications in scientific journals,
- b) conference presentations,
- c) books or book chapters,
- d) organisations' reports, instructions etc.

Timeline: No chronological restrictions applied.

Databases: Emerald Insight, Taylor and Francis, Wiley online library, Science Direct, MDPI Open Access Journal, Google Scholar, ResearchGate.

Searched terms: Common Good HRM, Green HRM, Hospitality, Hotels, Hospitality industry, Hospitality HRM, Hotel employees, Hotel performance, Socially responsible HRM, Triple Bottom Line HRM.

A total of 179 sources were collected.

30 refer to SHRM trends and themes in general.

39 relate to the study of different types of SHRM. Specifically, 19 refer to Socially Responsible HRM, 6 to Green HRM, 5 to Triple Bottom Line HRM and 9 to Common Good HRM.

36 deal with issues related to SHRM and hotels. 6 of them refer to the application of Sustainable HRM practices in the hotel industry, while the rest are related to the study of different types of SHRM in the hotel industry. Specifically, 9 concern SR-HRM, 20 concern GHRM, 1 concern TBL HRM. For CG-HRM, no research has been identified so far that is related to hotels.

42 sources with low relevance to the research topic have been removed and 26, of moderate relevance, have been studied in broad outline.

The topics researched regarding SHRM in hotels have been categorized according to the “Inputs- Processes- Outputs” model that has been utilized by Dyllick and Muff (2016) and by Aust et al. (2020) to analyze the typology of SHRM.

Table 1: Issues related to SHRM in hotels – Classification by research question

A. Which factors interact with applied SHRM practices in managing work-related challenges in hotels?		B. How are hotel businesses benefited by SHRM practices?	
Inputs	Number of papers	Inputs	Number of papers
Casualization and Outsourcing	1	Corporate Social Responsibility	1
Labor turnover- employee turnover/ retention- turnover intention	5	COVID-19 event strength	1
Skills shortage	1	Unethical pro-organizational behavior	1
Work environment	1	Socially irresponsible HRM	1
Paradox of employee commitment	1	Processes	Number of papers
Meaningfulness of work	1	Contemporary HR strategies	1
Job strain	1	Innovation	1
Health- related outcomes	1	Cultural differences	1
Job satisfaction	3	Employer social responsibility orientation	1
Role conflict	1	Employee CSR engagement	1
Management philosophy	1	Prosocial behavior	1
Low/ high road approach	1	Perceived organizational support for the environment	1
Processes	Number of papers	Managerial environmental concern	1
Hospitality training	1	Outputs	Number of papers
Push and pull factors	1	SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth	1

Fairness of wage	1	Hospitality employees' happiness	1
Effective communication strategy	1	Volunteering	1
Authentic leadership	1	Environmental performance	2
Job crafting	1	Environmental commitment	1
Responsible leadership	2	Well- being	1
Outputs	Number of papers	Task related pro- environmental behavior	1
Customer satisfaction	1	Organizational citizenship behavior for the environment	2
Organizational resilience	1	Environmental outcomes	1
Quality management	1	Eco- friendly behavior	1
Sustainable performance	1	Green innovation	1
Organizational commitment	3	Green human capital	1
Organizational trust	1	Environmental knowledge	1
Organizational citizenship behavior	1		
Green knowledge sharing	1		
Hotel performance	1		
Work management	1		

The literature review revealed the following:

A. The factors that differentiate SHRM types are often confused while their boundaries are indistinct (Armutha and Geetha, 2020; Aust et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2019; Zhao and Zhou, 2021; Naz and Islam, 2022; Rubel et al., 2023; Zafar and Khan, 2024).

B. Research on Common Good HRM is scarce and relatively recent (Lu et al., 2023; Pham et al. 2023; Aust et al., 2024; Järnlström et al. 2024; Adhikari, 2024; Austen et al., 2025; Cooke, 2025; Lu et al., 2025).

C. Most research on SHRM is quantitative (Anlesinya & Susomrith, 2020; Omidi and Zotto, 2022; Sobhani et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2023). In this literature review on the hospitality industry, 28 out of the 36 collected sources used quantitative research methods, 2 are literature reviews, 3 applied qualitative methods and the remaining 3 applied mixed research methods.

D. The social and political conditions as well as the periods of crisis that shape the labor landscape of each country influence the decisions and actions of hotel businesses regarding the adoption, or not, of SHRM practices (Aust et al., 2020; Kira and Lifvergren, 2014; Shen and Zhu, 2011; Newman et al. 2016; Diaz-Carrion et al., 2018; Omidi and Zotto, 2022; Sellar and Lanjana, 2022; Cheruiyot and Maru, 2012; Zhao and Zhou, 2021), as well as the behaviors of employees (Cheruiyot and Maru, 2012; He et al., 2021; Jarkovska & Jarkovska, 2022; Walker and Nickson, 2024).

Keywords: Hospitality, Sustainable HRM, HRM Types

THE MAKING OF A ROMA HERITAGE COMMUNITY: PARTICIPATORY HERITAGE RESEARCH AT THE MARGINS AS A POTENTIAL TOOL FOR CULTURAL TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Although the Roma constitute the largest transnational minority in Europe – particularly concentrated in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries – their cultural presence, institutional visibility and civil initiatives related to cultural and historical representation or heritage-making remain markedly underrepresented. This persistent “invisibility” of Roma culture and heritage is embedded in multiple, intersecting layers of marginalization. Many Roma communities face severe socio-economic disadvantages, including limited access to quality education, stable employment, and formal qualifications, often resulting in poverty or extreme poverty (Breimo & Baciu, 2016; Kovács, 2015). These conditions are further compounded by residential patterns that situate Roma populations in underdeveloped rural regions with inadequate infrastructure, deteriorated housing or in segregated urban neighbourhoods. Beyond material deprivation, Roma communities also encounter ethnic exclusion and social stigma from majority populations, dynamics that intensify social conflicts and impede cultural recognition and representation.

Despite these structural disadvantages and the risks they pose to cultural continuity and identity preservation, Roma communities employ various mechanisms that demonstrate how cultural practices are adapted to changing environments. These strategies reveal considerable resilience in the face of assimilatory pressures and restrictive policies (Greenfields & Smith, 2018; György et al., 2024). Openness, hybridity, and flexibility in cultural expression have been shown to play central roles in this adaptive process (Silverman, 2014). The resilience of Roma groups thus emerges from an interplay between continuous adaptation and the preservation of a degree of cultural autonomy.

This paper forms part of a broader research initiative within the SECReTour project, which aims to demonstrate how cultural heritage can function as a catalyst for sustainable and equitable tourism development without compromising its preservation. Among several European case studies, the present research examines local practices of preserving and promoting Roma heritage in the village of Tomor, situated in a disadvantaged peripheral

region of northeastern Hungary. For more than two decades, the Romama Social Cooperative in Tomor has addressed the cultural and social concerns of the local Roma community through a wide range of activities. These include participatory filmmaking projects that engage with surrounding social issues, as well as gastronomic and musical events. With the involvement of the local youth, the collective discovery and presentation of these cultural activities serve as a tool for cultural tourism (Roma house restaurant, farmers' markets, concerts, film festivals).

Despite its innovative and community-driven character, this grassroots initiative operates without the typical prerequisites for becoming a tourist destination and receives no external institutional support. Roma culture remains largely underrepresented within Hungary's tourism landscape; the few existing initiatives are scattered, limited in scale, and tend to serve local residents rather than external visitors. Against this backdrop, Romama places strong emphasis on community-led development, foregrounding initiatives that emerge organically from within the community itself. Central to these efforts is the positive affirmation of Roma identity, for which the rediscovery, transmission, and preservation of cultural heritage serve as particularly powerful tools.

In collaboration with researchers and students from Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest, a participatory research programme was co-developed and implemented during the spring semester of 2025 with Romama. The outcomes of this collaboration reveal that, despite substantial differences in age, socio-cultural background and life experience of the participants, the joint work with Tomor's youth not only uncovered previously obscured or marginalized cultural practices, but also generated a vivid, emotionally rich form of cooperation. The participatory approach to researching and discussing their own heritage, speaking with, rather than not about, the community, can provide an important path of empowerment and a starting point for sustainable cultural tourism initiatives. By synthesizing the methodology and result of this co-developed participatory research, the paper interrogates community strategies and opportunities for sustaining Roma heritage, particularly within peripheral, socio-economically disadvantaged and ethno-culturally marginalized contexts.

Keywords: Roma heritage, participatory heritage research, peripheral tourism initiatives

DRIVING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN RURAL HERITAGE COMMUNITIES THROUGH BOTTOM-UP PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE: A CASE OF THE GRAND CANAL WORLD HERITAGE SITE

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of the deep integration of global cultural heritage conservation and rural revitalization strategies, rural heritage sites, as living cultural landscapes, face a core paradox in their sustainable tourism development: how to achieve tourism-driven economic growth and cultural inheritance without compromising the authenticity of the heritage and the socio-cultural fabric of the community. The essence of this challenge lies in the imbalance of governance models—traditional, top-down management approaches often overlook the agency and rights of local residents, who are both the core subjects of the heritage and the primary bearers of tourism impacts. This neglect leads to inequitable resource distribution, fractured cultural identity, and a lack of benefit-sharing mechanisms, ultimately eroding the social foundation for the sustainable development of the heritage.

This study focuses on China's Grand Canal—a linear, living, mega-scale World Heritage site—selecting Shaobo Ancient Town in Yangzhou as a representative case of rural heritage tourism. It features attractions such as ancient docks, ancient street, and Shaobo Lake, attracting millions of tourists annually. The study delves into how to construct a resident-centric participatory governance model to drive fair and inclusive sustainable tourism development in rural heritage sites, within the context of the "core-periphery" structural divide. The research is grounded in a "people-centered" heritage perspective and sustainable tourism concept, employing Cultural Ecosystem Services (CES) theory as its core analytical framework. CES emphasizes the non-material well-being provided by cultural heritage to humans—such as cultural identity, aesthetic experiences, recreation, and social cohesion—serving as a crucial link connecting the heritage, ecosystem, and community development. The flow and distribution patterns of CES directly reflect the socio-spatial equity within a heritage site.

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach. Firstly, participatory mapping and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 378 residents from different communities (core and peripheral zones) to collect qualitative data on their perceptions, including locations, frequency, and value recognition of four types of CES (Heritage & Cultural, Aesthetic, Recreational, Social). Secondly, ArcGIS was used for spatial visualization of these points. Innovatively, a spatial gravity model was introduced to quantitatively analyze the cross-community spatial

attraction and flow patterns of different CES from supply points to demand points (residents' dwellings), thereby objectively revealing the intensity, direction, and imbalance of service flows. Additionally, the study utilized semi-structured interviews to survey 40 different stakeholders (managers, residents, business owners, etc.) regarding their opinions and suggestions on local heritage tourism development.

Empirical findings reveal significant imbalances in CES flows and a pronounced "core-periphery" structure within the Shaobo heritage area. Heritage & Cultural and Social Services are highly concentrated in the core ancient town, creating a one-way "siphon effect" that leaves peripheral residents with low recognition and sense of gain. Aesthetic Services show a "multi-nuclei clustering" pattern, with the peripheral Luyang Lake Ecological Park as a secondary center, though other rural landscapes have limited influence. Recreational Services are relatively balanced and localized, meeting daily needs but having low tourism relevance. Gravity model analysis confirms long-distance flows of high-level services point to the core, while peripheral flows are fragmented and weakly connected. This spatial pattern marginalizes peripheral communities economically and in terms of cultural value recognition and community cohesion. Interviews indicate peripheral residents have lower support and willingness to participate in tourism and express dissatisfaction with its welfare effects and fairness, constituting a profound social obstacle to sustainable development.

Based on the above diagnosis, this study argues that the key to resolving the sustainable tourism dilemma in rural heritage sites lies in a fundamental transformation of the governance model—shifting from a government-led control model to a multi-stakeholder co-governance model that particularly strengthens resident agency, i.e., a participatory governance model. To this end, we construct an integrated governance framework comprising three synergistic dimensions aimed at promoting fair tourism revenue and cultural value regeneration:

(1) Institutional Construction and Empowerment Platform : This strategy proposes establishing formal multi-stakeholder platforms, such as a "Pan-Community Heritage Governance Committee," to integrate diverse voices into decision-making. A key focus is leveraging digital tools—like dedicated mobile applications and QR code systems—to create seamless, low-barrier channels for resident participation. This ensures community input is embedded throughout the entire process, from initial heritage planning and tourism design to benefit-sharing agreements and post-project monitoring, effectively bridging top-down governance with bottom-up agency.

(2) Value Flow and Capacity Building : This dimension aims to correct the one-way flow of Cultural Ecosystem Services (CES) by enhancing the cultural capital of peripheral communities. Initiatives include using digital interpretation (e.g., VR/AR) to vitalize local heritage and fostering community-based micro-tourism and cultural workshops. Concurrently, targeted education and skill training empower residents, particularly in peripheral areas, to evolve from passive observers into skilled cultural interpreters and tourism entrepreneurs. This dual approach rebuilds cultural identity and stimulates endogenous development.

(3) Benefit Sharing and Flexible Mechanisms : This component focuses on creating equitable models for community involvement in the tourism economy. It explores innovative mechanisms, such as community resource shareholding or cultural asset equity, allowing residents to contribute assets like heritage, land, or labor for long-term revenue. Furthermore, it advocates for establishing dynamic impact monitoring and conflict mediation systems. These ensure tourism development remains aligned with local cultural sensitivity and social carrying capacity, safeguarding community well-being and social stability.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in integrating spatial flow analysis of Cultural Ecosystem Services with participatory governance theory. From a socio-spatial equity perspective, it reveals how the "core-periphery" structure in rural heritage tourism is produced and sustained, proposing targeted governance strategies. Its practical value offers an actionable framework for managing the Grand Canal and similar sites globally. Sustainable heritage tourism cannot be reduced to visitor management or infrastructure; its foundation requires



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building a governance ecosystem that safeguards community rights, revitalizes cultural agency, and fosters positive multi-stakeholder interaction. Only then can it become a force for rural revitalization, cultural continuity, and human-nature harmony.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism; Bottom-up; Participatory Governance; Rural Heritage Communities; Cultural Heritage Management



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MAPPING STAKEHOLDER DYNAMICS IN SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT: EVIDENCE FROM BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable destination management is increasingly discussed as a multistakeholder process. However, the way stakeholder involvement has been conceptualised, structurally positioned, and thematically organised within the academic literature remains fragmented. This study provides a systematic bibliometric mapping of stakeholder-related research within sustainable destination management, aiming to clarify its conceptual evolution, structural integration, and thematic configuration over time.

Drawing on a dataset of 472 peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus and selected through a PRISMA-based process, the study applies science-mapping techniques, including thematic evolution analysis, co-word network analysis, frequency analysis, and thematic mapping. To capture research development more clearly, the analysis is structured across distinct time periods, allowing for a longitudinal examination of changes in conceptual framing and structural positioning. The results reveal a clear temporal shift from predominantly managerial and actor-centred interpretations of stakeholders toward more relational and governance-oriented perspectives. At the structural level, stakeholder-related concepts demonstrate increased integration and denser interconnections within the sustainable tourism knowledge network. Thematic mapping further indicates that stakeholder involvement constitutes a consolidated -yet still evolving- research domain, primarily embedded within development- and governance-oriented clusters rather than fully established motor themes.

By offering a longitudinal and structured overview of stakeholder involvement in sustainable destination management research, this study contributes to a clearer understanding of how stakeholder-related knowledge has evolved and how it is currently positioned within the field. The findings provide a foundation for future research seeking to move from descriptive mapping toward more explanatory and governance-focused approaches.

Keywords: Tourism stakeholders, sustainable destination development, destination management, tourism sustainability, bibliometric analysis

LINKING SPORT, PEACE TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF “FREE MOVEMENT SKATEBOARDING”, GREECE

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ABSTRACT

Sport is not just a physical activity governed by rules. Sport is a powerful global language that transcends geographical borders and social classes, overcoming discrimination based on race, religion, language, and age. Beyond its purely athletic dimension, sport is recognized as an important travel activity that has the power to promote intercultural dialogue, solidarity, understanding, and social interaction through sporting events and programs. Sport is an important activity in the tourism sector, while tourism and travel are essentially linked to sporting events. In this context, sport can serve as a vehicle for peacebuilding and, at the same time, as a catalyst for sustainable tourism development.

The role of sport in promoting peace has not been systematically examined in academic research, particularly in relation to tourism. Despite the growing importance of sports tourism, community sports initiatives, and the legacy of events, many sports organizations underestimate their potential for peacebuilding, often resulting in social tensions, exclusion, and violence. This gap highlights the need to explore sport as a mechanism for promoting positive relations between visitors and hosts and developing inclusive destinations.

This paper addresses this gap by examining sport as a means for peace tourism, both conceptually and empirically. Based on the distinction between the "negative" and "positive" dimensions of peace, the study places sport in the context of positive peace, which is understood as the creation of inclusive societies based on social justice, equal opportunities, cultural understanding, and mutual respect.

The article pursues two main objectives:

a) To explore the links between sport, peace, and tourism in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sport is directly linked to SDG 16 ("Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development"), while, from the perspective of positive peace, it also contributes to other goals related to tourism development, such as SDGs 3, 4, 5, 8, and 11. Within this framework, sports-based initiatives are seen as meeting places that promote meaningful relationships between visitors and hosts, community cohesion, and alternative forms of tourism that align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 3, 4, 5, 8, 11, and 16. Special mention is made of the historical development of the Olympic Games and the Olympic Truce as early examples of the relationship between sport, peace, mobility, and intercultural encounter.

b) To examine good practices in sports-related peace initiatives that have an impact on tourism and local development. Selected international examples are described, while the document focuses on the case of the Greek NGO Free Movement Skateboarding, which uses skateboarding as a tool for youth empowerment, social inclusion, and community building in urban neighborhoods of Athens. Primary data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with a key member of the organization's management team. The structure of the questions, in line with the research objectives and based on the literature, focused on the following six thematic areas: (i) establishment and development, (ii) values, (iii) management structure, (iv) strategic objectives, (v) actions, and (vi) challenges, opportunities, and next steps. The findings demonstrate how the organization's evolution from humanitarian interventions in refugee camps to community-based urban practices reflects a transition from negative to positive peace. The international dimension of the organization is further enhanced through its collaboration with Skateistan, a globally recognized NGO active in post-conflict and vulnerable environments and widely recognized for its contribution to education, social inclusion, gender equality, and peacebuilding through skateboarding. This collaboration integrates the Greek case into a transnational network of initiatives for peace through sport, which create intercultural encounters and are part of the key characteristics of peace tourism.

The ultimate goal of the article is to provide sports and tourism stakeholders—including sports clubs, destination management organizations, public authorities, NGOs, and cultural and educational institutions—a conceptual framework and specific examples of how sport can serve as a driving force for peace, social cohesion, prosperity, and sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: sports, peace, sustainable development, peace tourism, NGO “Free Movement Skateboarding”, NGO “Skateistan”.

SHAPING SUSTAINABLE IONIAN ISLANDS THROUGH PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

Participatory processes constitute a core element of contemporary governance approaches to sustainable development, as they enhance collective decision-making, transparency, and social legitimacy. Within this context, the quadruple helix model—bringing together public authorities, the private sector, civil society, and the academic and research community—offers an integrated framework for addressing complex territorial challenges. Island regions, characterized by environmental sensitivity and strong dependence on tourism, represent a particularly relevant setting in which participatory governance can support balanced and resilient development pathways.

The study aims to explore stakeholders' perceptions and priorities and to contribute to the formulation of a sustainability-oriented tourism strategy for the Ionian Islands, grounded in the principles of participatory governance.

Primary research was conducted in selected islands of the Ionian region (Zakynthos, Kefalonia, Ithaki, Lefkada, and Kerkyra). Data collection was based on a structured questionnaire administered to 111 tourism stakeholders through face-to-face meetings and focus groups between January and February 2024. The research examined stakeholders' views on the current condition of the islands under increased tourism pressure, the factors leading to this situation, their priorities for sustainable tourism development, and the actions required to address existing challenges.

The findings indicate a strong collective intention to shift away from a predominantly growth-oriented tourism model toward a more sustainable and community-centered approach. Stakeholders emphasize improving residents' quality of life and strengthening local capacities as central objectives. Proposed actions include the enhancement of public spaces, the implementation of sustainable mobility programs, greater emphasis on culture and environmental assets to reduce tourism seasonality, the provision of training and retraining opportunities for employers and employees, and the establishment of Destination Management and Marketing Organizations (DMMOs).

The study highlights the need for policies that actively support participatory governance and foster collaboration among actors of the quadruple helix. Such policies should prioritize institutionalized participation mechanisms, integrated strategic planning, investment in human capital, and continuous stakeholder dialogue. These measures are essential for enabling a meaningful transition toward sustainable tourism development and for enhancing the long-term prosperity and well-being of the Ionian Islands' communities.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, participatory governance, quadruple helix model, Ionian islands, stakeholder engagement

GOVERNING THE DESTINATION AS A SYSTEM: COLLABORATION FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Destinations face a “polycrisis” of climate instability, resource stress, economic and geopolitical uncertainty, pressure on resident quality of life, and rapidly changing visitor expectations. In this environment, governance for sustainability based on isolated policies or single-issue interventions is no longer sufficient. The performance and resilience of destinations increasingly depend on their ability to manage tourism as an interconnected system.

The future of destinations will therefore be shaped not only by rules and plans, but by how well stakeholders can collaborate across key relationships: residents and visitors, nature and infrastructure, local identity and global demand, seasonality and livelihoods, quality and volume, digital platforms and local businesses. In this way, sustainability becomes a shared practice rather than a stated value, reflecting a deeper need for destinations to prioritise balance over volume and pace over acceleration.

This paper proposes a systemic-thinking lens that treats the destination as a living tourism ecosystem – and translates that lens into practical, visible collaboration projects that destinations can deliver now.

Rather than focusing primarily on regulation or investment instruments, the paper proposes a programmatic approach to system stewardship. It introduces system mapping as a collaborative practice that brings together DMOs, public authorities, tourism businesses, cultural institutions, transport providers, academic bodies, and local communities.

What travellers increasingly value - care, meaning, responsibility - is exactly what destinations must protect to remain healthy and alive. In this context, mapping enables stakeholders to move from siloed interventions to a portfolio of mutually reinforcing projects in which joint action produces outsized benefits.

The goal is to create an indicative collaboration portfolio, organized in four program clusters that are easy to communicate and translate into a presentation with real examples:

1.Coordinated marketing for sustainable demand : Destination marketing as a demand-shaping tool, not just a promotion tool, to steer when, where and how visitors engage with a destination in ways that support environmental limits, local economies and community wellbeing. A system of coordinated narratives and campaigns to include joint content calendars, thematic routes, responsible visitor messaging, and partner campaigns that connect brand, product, and community.

2. Local capacity building and skills alliances: workshops and training cycles for tourism workers and SMEs on service quality, digital skills, accessibility, sustainability operations, storytelling, crisis readiness, and cross-selling with local producers. A “train-the-trainer” model and micro-credential pathways that help scale impact across regions. The aim is to ensure that, quality, consistency and resilience are embedded in daily operations regarding sustainability – not just in strategy documents.

3. Experience and Product co-design labs: structured collaborative spaces that bring together locals, guides, hoteliers, municipalities, and creatives to jointly design, test, and refine tourism experiences that protect sensitive assets, enhance authenticity, and increase spend retention (e.g., gastronomy, culture, nature-based, and off-peak products). Rather than scaling existing products, the focus is on developing the right experiences, in the right places and seasons, with shared ownership from the outset.

4. Community partnership and visitor stewardship projects: resident–business–visitor initiatives such as codes of conduct, volunteer and cultural exchange formats, local ambassadors, visitor orientation toolkits, and feedback loops that deepen social foundations and improve quality of life. In this way, rather than community support being seen as a passive outcome, it positions social licence as something that must be continuously earned and maintained through structured, visible action.

By emphasizing stewardship of relationships through tangible programs – marketing coordination, training alliances, co-design labs, and community partnerships – this paper offers a systemic governance approach that is actionable, measurable, and transferable. It equips destinations to respond to multiple challenges with collaboration that strengthens resilience, improves visitor experiences, and safeguards the natural and social foundations of tourism and the long-term health of place.

Keywords: destination stewardship, participatory governance, coordinated marketing

CO-CREATED CULTURAL ART MUSEUM MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Experiential and alternative forms of tourism increasingly offer visitors opportunities to engage with local culture. At the same time, there is a group of visitors who are particularly interested in art and cultural expression while travelling. Art is closely connected to the cultural heritage of a place and reflects how people experience and understand local identity. However, within tourism and hospitality studies, there is still a lack of clear conceptual models that connect artistic expression with cultural heritage as an active and participatory visitor experience.

This study aims to propose and conceptually examine a participatory model that connects tourism, cultural heritage and artistic creation within hospitality settings. The research adopts a conceptual approach, using the cultural context of the island of Crete as a framework for discussion. Crete's rich history, traditions and everyday cultural practices provide a meaningful setting in which the proposed model can be explored and illustrated.

The model focuses on visitors who wish not only to observe cultural heritage but also to engage creatively by producing their own artistic expressions inspired by the place they visit. These visitor-created artworks remain within the hosting space and gradually form a co-created art museum shaped by the contributions of different visitors over time. Participation is open and flexible, allowing engagement from experienced artists, non-professionals and families, while visitors who choose not to create can still experience the evolving collection.

By encouraging creative participation, the approach aims to move visitors beyond passive observation. Art lovers are expected to form personal cultural connections within the Cretan environment. These connections may continue after the visit, as visitors feel that they have not only experienced the destination but have also left a personal cultural trace, allowing their relationship with the hosting destination to grow over time. The sustainability of the model is based on continuous visitor involvement. Visitors gradually create an evolving collection of artworks within a museum that renews itself through participation. Additional support may emerge through symbolic purchases of artworks, small-scale cultural events, or artistic contributions and donations. These activities are expected to strengthen the identity and attractiveness of the hospitality setting, resulting in repeated and off-season visitation and adding value to an existing hospitality structure.

Keywords: cultural tourism, cultural heritage, artistic expression, hospitality, co-creation, art museum

BEYOND THE WALLS: HOW MODERN ART MUSEUMS IN GREECE AND GERMANY COMMUNICATE SUSTAINABILITY AND SHAPE CULTURAL TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Modern art museums play a crucial role in addressing global sustainability challenges by integrating environmental, social and economic sustainability practices, while at the same time serving as catalysts for sustainable cultural tourism development. From an environmental perspective, numerous studies have highlighted the implementation of eco-friendly measures, such as the use of biodegradable materials in artwork conservation, energy-efficient lighting systems, and the adoption of sustainable architecture (Yuqin 2008, Demos et al. 2021, Hassanzadeh & Noorzai 2020, Zhang et al. 2024). Research on green building projects demonstrates that achieving LEED certification requires strategic team leadership and coordinated sustainability practices (Senaratne & Hewamanage, 2015). Furthermore, museums are implementing circular economy principles through waste reduction programs, water conservation systems, and carbon footprint monitoring initiatives (Garthe, 2022).

Socially, museums shape the socio-cultural dynamics of modern societies by promoting values such as empathy, equality, and social justice. They also raise public awareness on sustainability issues through educational programs (Coffee, 2023). Modern art museums function as "third spaces" that facilitate community engagement and social cohesion, particularly through participatory programming that addresses local sustainability challenges (Simon, 2010). Additionally, contemporary museums are increasingly embracing inclusive practices, ensuring accessibility for diverse audiences, fostering intergenerational dialogue on environmental stewardship (Sandell, 2003).

Economic sustainability represents a fundamental factor for long-term museum success, supporting both social and environmental initiatives while contributing to regional tourism development and local economy growth (Larkin 2016, Badia et al. 2024). Museums generate significant economic multiplier effects in their local communities, with visitor spending extending beyond admission fees to accommodate dining, accommodation, and retail sectors (Plaza, 2010). Sustainable tourism practices in cultural institutions have been shown to enhance destination competitiveness while preserving cultural assets for future generations (Richards, 2018).

However, a critical gap exists between museums' sustainability practices and their digital communication strategies (Carbonell-Curralló & Viñarás Abad, 2021, Lukáč et al., 2021). This gap is also evident in recent studies

on cultural organizations in Greece and Germany, where digital communication strategies often remain informative rather than strategic (Tsavdaridou & Papadaki, 2024; Tsavdaridou et al., 2025). While contemporary art museums implement comprehensive sustainability initiatives, their digital presence—particularly on social media platforms like Facebook—often fails to effectively communicate all three sustainability dimensions to potential visitors and the broader public. This disconnect may be understood through the concept of "frame alignment" in digital communication. According to Snow et al. (1986), frame alignment refers to the process through which organizations link their interpretive frameworks with those of their audiences to achieve shared understanding and mobilize engagement. In the context of sustainability, Carrosio (2024) argues that the concept operates as a boundary object—flexible enough to be adapted across different social worlds yet stable enough to maintain a recognizable identity. Furthermore, while CCIs can function as trustworthy communicators of sustainability messages, reaching diverse audiences through their digital presence, the synergy between tourism promotion and cultural sustainability communication remains underexplored (Papadaki, et. al., 2024).

This fluidity demands that institutions, such as contemporary art museums, carefully frame and translate their sustainability initiatives in ways that resonate with diverse public interpretations. Modern art museums must clearly articulate the context, purpose, and value of their sustainability initiatives to achieve meaningful engagement with online audiences (Kidd, 2011). Without proper framing of sustainability messaging, museums risk reducing their social media presence to mere "lip-service," where being seen as active online becomes the end goal rather than fostering genuine dialogue about their environmental, social, and economic responsibility. The challenge lies not simply in the ease of launching social media initiatives, but in strategically framing sustainability narratives in ways that align institutional practices with audience expectations and values. Studies have shown that museums underutilize social media's potential for storytelling around sustainability. Hence, missing opportunities to engage younger, more diverse and environmentally conscious audiences (Capriotti & Losada-Díaz, 2018). Recent research on Greek cultural organizations demonstrates that while digital marketing via websites and social media is recognized as crucial for two-way communication with audiences, many institutions still struggle with strategic integration and consistent messaging around sustainability themes (Avlonitou et.al. 2025; Papadaki, 2024). This communication gap represents a missed opportunity for museums to position themselves as leaders in sustainable cultural tourism and maximize their impact as drivers of regional development.

This study examines contemporary art museums in Greece and Germany, documenting and analyzing both their sustainability initiatives and digital communication strategies. Through comprehensive mapping of sustainability actions and systematic analysis of Facebook communication patterns, we investigate how these institutions present themselves as sustainable development actors and assess their potential as cultural tourism catalysts. The research focuses on the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki in Greece, and Museum Ludwig in Cologne and Museum Brandhorst in Munich in Germany. The selection of Greek and German institutions allows for comparative analysis across different European contexts, considering variations in sustainability policy frameworks, tourism infrastructure, and digital engagement practices. This study provides one of the first comparative analyses of how sustainability communication and sustainability practices diverge in contemporary art museums across two European countries.

The study employs a mixed-methods approach combining: (1) comprehensive documentation and categorization of sustainability initiatives across environmental, social, and economic dimensions; (2) digital content analysis of Facebook communications to identify which sustainability dimensions are most prominently featured in public discourse; and (3) assessment of the alignment between actual practices and digital communication strategies.

Preliminary findings suggest that while modern art museums implement diverse sustainability practices, their digital communication predominantly emphasizes social sustainability aspects, with limited promotion of environmental and economic dimensions. This represents a significant underutilization of their potential as

sustainable tourism destinations and regional development drivers. Museums appear unaware of their capacity to serve as anchors for sustainable cultural tourism, missing opportunities to attract environmentally conscious visitors and contribute to local economic development through responsible tourism practices. The findings also indicate a perceptual gap between institutional sustainability actions and public awareness, suggesting that audiences may not fully recognize the scope of museums' environmental and economic initiatives. This underrepresentation may limit audience engagement and reduce the perceived relevance of museums' broader sustainability efforts within the community.

The study's findings will contribute to understanding how cultural institutions can better align their sustainability practices with strategic communication to maximize their impact on both cultural preservation and sustainable tourism development, ultimately positioning museums as exemplary sustainable organizations and key players in the cultural tourism economy.

Keywords: Cultural Sustainability, Modern Art Museums, Digital Communication, Sustainable Cultural Tourism, Social Media Strategy

A UNIQUE FORM OF CULTURE SHOCK: UNDERSTANDING THE PATHWAYS OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN CHINESE MUSEUM SPACES

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ABSTRACT

With the growing popularity of “museum tourism”, museums have become pivotal sites for cross-cultural communication and the sustainable transmission of cultural heritage, providing visitors with opportunities to encounter cultures different from their own. In 2024, for instance, Chinese museums welcomed 1.49 billion visitors, including a growing number of international tourists. International visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds often experience culture shock within museum spaces, which occurs when they encounter unfamiliar collections, exhibitions and historical narratives. These observations raise a central question: how do cross-cultural audiences receive, process, and transform information and knowledge within museum spaces?

This study takes Chinese museums as research cases and adopts a grounded theory approach to investigate the logic and effectiveness of cross-cultural communication within museum spaces. TripAdvisor, a globally recognised travel review platform, was chosen as the primary source for authentic visitor feedback. Five major Chinese museums were selected based on public popularity, geographic distribution, and museum type: the Palace Museum, Emperor Qinshihuang’s Mausoleum Site Museum, Shanghai Museum, National Museum of China, and Sanxingdui Museum. By the end of October 2024, a total of 22,464 English-language reviews were obtained. Considering text quality and representativeness, the top 100 reviews were initially selected from each museum’s page based on popularity rankings. After repeated reading, analysis, and sentence-by-sentence coding, 500 reviews were summarised and compared.

We find that the artifacts, exhibitions, interactive elements, and services collectively shape the spatial representation of a museum. First, visitors’ physical spatial experiences influence their perception of the museum’s value, including environmental experience, exhibition experience, service experience and consumption experience. Second, through various perceptible and embodied actions within the museum space, the transmission of symbols, representations and meanings occurs within the individual’s mental space, constituting a second pathway for the museum’s cross-cultural communication. This pathway also unlocks the cultural significance embedded within museums and artefacts, and reveals the profound educational, aesthetic and recreational value inherent in tourism activities. Finally, the third pathway emphasizes the construction of stable experiential space, facilitating knowledge transmission and value creation through individual engagement, and providing international visitors with opportunities to transform their cognition, emotions, and memories. Collectively, these findings illustrate Lefebvre’s theory of spatial production, which integrates the physical, abstract and experiential dimensions of space.



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The study also provides practical insights on how museums can transform culture shock from a challenge into an opportunity, such as employing immersive technologies and scene reconstructions. By understanding the spatial production of museum spaces, museums can create meaningful interactions and enhance intercultural communication. Through cross-cultural connections, visitors can develop emotionally reciprocal understandings of other cultures, thereby promoting sustainable “museum tourism”.

Keywords: museum, space, spatial production, communication, cross-cultural



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UNDERSTANDING VISITOR DYNAMICS AT ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE SITES / INSIGHTS INTO VISITOR NEEDS AND SATISFACTION AT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN IRELAND

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the critical role of understanding visitor experiences to effectively manage archaeological heritage sites within the rapidly expanding field of cultural heritage tourism. While the motivation to explore archaeological sites drives tourist interest, poor visitor management presents significant threats to both tangible and intangible resources. Uncontrolled visitor numbers can damage archaeological sites, diminish site value, threaten the sustainability of the tourism industry, and negatively impact local communities. These issues highlight the urgent need to develop and apply sustainable management strategies that incorporate efficient visitor management. Therefore, this research aims to understand visitor needs and satisfaction at archaeological sites.

A multiple-case study approach offers insights into key issues across six case study archaeological sites along Ireland's west coast. An online questionnaire gathered responses from over 400 visitors to these sites. Consequently, the findings are interpreted within the context of each case as well as collectively across all sites.

The findings reveal valuable insights into visitor motivations, levels of satisfaction, and perceptions of conservation efforts at these sites. Notably, findings underscore how visitor characteristics influence motivations that extend beyond the sites themselves, incorporating the surrounding landscape to enhance emotional experiences and overall satisfaction. Additionally, the findings demonstrate a clear link between the availability of onsite interpretive information, visitor satisfaction, and site conservation.

This paper emphasises the crucial role of an informed, visitor-centred approach in the strategic management of archaeological sites and the ongoing necessity to conserve such sites. As a new contribution, these insights from the Irish context broaden the existing body of knowledge in this field and assist in developing effective visitor management strategies for heritage tourism sites.

Keywords: Archaeotourism, Archaeological Site, Heritage Tourism, Sustainable Management, Visitor Experience, Visitor Management

CULTURE-DRIVEN TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES IN URBAN TOURISM: REFLECTIONS ON THE OPEN EVENTS OF THE MARIA CALLAS MUSEUM IN ATHENS

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is intrinsically linked to the dynamics of urban development, while simultaneously influencing the quality of life and experiential prosperity of both visitors and local community. New forms of tourism in urban areas have social, political, cultural, architectural, and economic impacts. Urban tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors of tourism worldwide and emerges as a critical factor for the economic, social, and spatial reconfiguration of cities. This article aims to investigate the links between experience and tourism, focusing specifically on the concept of transformative experience, as well as the role of culture in shaping transformative experiences and urban tourism. Drawing on relevant literature, the article examines urban tourism and transformative experiences, through culture, participatory planning and co-creative initiatives, which act as levers of change, transforming both the urban space and the experiences of visitors and local community.

Urban tourism concerns cities as tourist destinations, where tourism coexists with residential areas, businesses, culture, and entertainment. The transformation of cities into “multifunctional spaces” (tourist-historic city, mixed uses) is a defining feature of urban tourism. New Urban Tourism is characterized by an experience-oriented approach, as visitors seek authentic, immersive experiences connected to the daily life of the city, local culture, architecture, and social practices (Richards, 2011). There is a strong interconnection with culture and creativity, historic centers, cultural festivals, and creative neighborhoods, which serve as significant points of attraction. Furthermore, local communities are engaged, as visitors’ presence extends beyond traditional monuments to neighborhoods, local markets, cafés, and public spaces, creating new social and economic networks (Novy & Colomb, 2019). Culture serves as a tool for urban regeneration, enhancing place identity while promoting active participation and collaboration.

This article presents the concept of transformative experience, which originates from the transformative learning theory in adult education and its application in tourism. Many scholars have emphasized the significant role of experiences in adult learning. Theoretical approaches converge on the importance of experience as a core component that leads to adult learning, critical thinking, and reflection, providing the most effective means for adults to process their experiences to reach critical awareness of both experience and learning. The most recent and detailed definition of transformative experience describe it as a process of profound change. This change involves the restructuring of values and attitudes, increased self-awareness, broadened perspectives, enhanced social and environmental sensitivity, and the adoption of new behaviors in daily life. A transformative experience is characterized by three main elements: an experience that evokes strong emotions, a period of reflection and

processing, and a change in behavior or worldview after the trip. Transformative experience in tourism has now been established as a multidimensional, dynamic, and immersive phenomenon, developing in successive stages and not limited to the time of the visit. Tourism has the potential to provoke lifelong changes through transformative experiences, influencing individuals through co-creation and transformation. Culture is one of the most significant factors shaping transformative experiences in tourism, particularly in urban tourism. The concept of transformative experience is linked to personal development, changes in attitudes, values, or behaviors as a result of interaction with the cultural and social environment of the destination (Mezirow, 1991; Pritchard, Morgan & Ateljevic, 2011). Culture acts as the framework of meaning through which visitors interpret their experiences. Cultural representations such as architecture, arts, traditions, local festivals, concerts, museums, and everyday life form the basis for the visitor's emotional and cognitive engagement. Interaction with the local community is a central component in shaping transformative experiences. Through participation in authentic cultural activities, visitors gain a deeper understanding of local values, identities, and social relationships (Richards, 2011, Taylor, 2017). Cultural experiences can empower local communities by fostering participation, collaboration, and a sense of pride in place. The shift from mere consumption of culture to co-creation of experiences marks a turning point in tourism theory and practice. The modern cultural experiences arise through interpersonal relationships, participatory processes, and shared narratives between visitors and residents. These interactions strengthen social sustainability and make culture a lever for transformation.

Contemporary cultural organizations and museums that prioritize co-creation, participation planning and inclusive programming facilitate deeper engagement between visitors and local community. The case study presented is based on field research at the Maria Callas Museum and focuses on participatory planning and creative initiatives centered on culture and community engagement, both within the museum and in public space through open events. By analyzing qualitative data — including visitor narratives, participatory event archives, and community feedback — it is demonstrated how such cultural participation triggers transformations on multiple levels: emotional (sense of belonging, community engagement), cognitive (reinterpretation of heritage and identity), social (enhanced social cohesion, community participation), and spatial (reevaluation of urban public space). Finally, the article discusses the implications for sustainable urban tourism, highlighting that participatory cultural institutions and initiatives can act as catalysts for urban regeneration, social inclusion, and long-term community well-being. The findings underscore the potential to bridge cultural heritage and transformative experiences through co-creation and inclusive cultural participation.

Keywords: transformative experiences, new urban tourism, cultural tourism, participatory models, Maria Callas Museum

THE CONTRIBUTION OF MUSIC FESTIVALS TO BOTTOM-UP APPROACHES IN TOURISM PLANNING: META-ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The landscape of tourism planning can be shaped by two distinct approaches: the top-down and the bottom-up. The top-down approaches are “where policies are defined by the government or central administrations” (Chiabai, A., Paskaleva, K., & Lombardi, P., 2013). The bottom-up practices, on the other hand, emphasize local community involvement and provide local residents and stakeholders influence over decision-making and tourism planning. At present, sustainability in tourism contexts, whether that concerns environmental protection or socio-cultural preservation, has stirred changes in tourism planning (Rahmafitria F., Pearce P. L., Oktadiana H., Putro H., 2020). Currently, a turn toward co-creation policies and bottom-up approaches has been observed (Duxbury, N., Bakas, F. E., Vinagre de Castro, T., & Silva, S., 2021) for a more balanced tourism development model. A model that ensures tourism community engagement and sustainable livelihoods (Matiku, S. M., Zuwarimwe, J., & Tshipala, N. 2021) since in today’s context, an effective tourism model requires the active engagement of the community.

Music festivals are part of music tourism. Music tourism has experienced significant growth in recent years (Price-Howard, K., Crossley, J.C., and Holdnak, A., 2019), as travellers seek authentic experiences that extend

beyond mass-tourism. Since music tourism, as part of cultural tourism, is shaped and represented by local communities and is fundamentally people-centered, a bottom-up approach that places the needs of the local community at the forefront is considered more functional (Agrusa, J., Coats, W., & Donlon, J., 2003). Musical traditions are inextricably linked with the communities that host music festivals. The community-based approach seems to occupy a significant part of literature as well, and is a theme that scholars have dealt extensively with, (Chim-Miki et al., 2023) (da Costa R.A , Almeida L. F.L., Adriana F. Chim-Miki, Brandão F. , 2025) , an issue that has become more prominent especially after Covid 19 (Runghirun, M., & Intarot, W., 2023)

However, it has been reported that changes in music industry, emerging music trends, demographic challenges and rural-to-urban migration led to the decline of community-based festivals (Teixeira M. et al, 2025). Currently, as tourism is taking a creative turn, following the new sustainability guidelines, this serves as an opportunity for the revival of community-based music festivals and CBT (community-based tourism). That includes active community engagement, with residents becoming more involved in the organization and decision-making processes. This ensures that in both urban and rural settings an opportunity is presented for transformation and conservation alike. (Kwiatkowski, G., Oklevik, O., Hjalager, A. M., & Maristuen, H. (2020). Specifically, transformation includes the reinvention of a destination and conservation refers to the preservation of local culture and a destination's identity. This co-creation policy is reported to have both economic and cultural benefits for the communities such as the preservation of traditions. (Teixeira M. et al, 2025) (Chiya, A. 2025) Co-creation in music and place branding can guide destinations to become resilient. (Papadaki, E., & Kladou, S. (2025)

To explore that phenomenon, a systematic literature review (SLR) has been conducted , following SPIDER guidelines. Recently published bibliography with a time range between 2020 and 2025 was studied, related to the themes of bottom-up approaches in tourism planning and the role of music tourism in that. This paper's objective is to provide, through critical analysis, the latest insights and a qualitative meta-analysis of the role of music festivals in bottom-up approaches. The SPIDER tool enabled the refinement of search terms, thereby improving the accuracy of literature retrieval. (Methley, Campbell, Chew-Graham, McNally and Cheraghi-Sohi, 2014). The results will be synthesised and reported in a PRISMA flow diagram for a clear presentation. The keywords ranged from core terms like “music festival” to broader concepts with practical implications like “bottom-up approaches” and “community-led tourism” , all combined with Boolean operators so that the results are refined.

This paper presents the current state of knowledge on how music festivals contribute to bottom-up approaches, aiming to inform both academic discourse and tourism industry practice. Its objective is to offer useful insights for researchers, tourism planning specialists, local authorities, and other stakeholders involved in music festival organization. Initial analysis of data, showed that music festivals, especially when they follow bottom-up approaches, place a high value on social inclusion and preservation of culture and local identity (Dewi, 2025). Additionally, they integrate environmental responsibility (Hazel D, Mason C. 2020), promote an authentic narrative for a destination, invigorate local economies, empower local stakeholders and showcase local music traditions.

Keywords: music festival, tourism planning, community-led tourism, bottom-up approaches, co-creation, music tourism

DAY 2: Saturday, 28th of February

THE SCHOLARLY INFLUENCE OF PROFESSOR THEANO S. TERKENLI IN CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY, LANDSCAPE THEORY AND TOURISM: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The academic trajectory of Professor Theano S. Terkenli, a distinguished figure in the fields of Geography and Landscape provides a crucial, culturally grounded framework for understanding complex human-environment interactions. As a founding member of the Department of Geography at the University of the Aegean, her work has been instrumental in bridging geographical theory with landscape-focused approaches applied to cultural and tourism studies, particularly within the sensitive Mediterranean context. Drawing on her interdisciplinary background—PhD in Geography (University of Minnesota) and Master's in Landscape Architecture (University of Wisconsin)—Terkenli has significantly influenced landscape conceptualization, assessment, and policy, especially in Greece.

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive literature review of T.S. Terkenli's work, synthesizing her major publications and intellectual contributions across three interrelated thematic fields: Cultural Geography, Landscape Theory, and Tourism Studies. The central purpose is to map how her research has redefined core geographical concepts, such as landscape and cultural identity, and applied these concepts to practical challenges, including sustainable development, tourism policy, and educational methodology, focusing specifically on how her findings have shaped disciplinary discussions across her primary research domains, and applied impact on modern geographical thought.

Terkenli's active participation in major international and EU-funded research projects (including VOLANTE, SPOT-H2020, COST, LIFE, and MEDSCAPES) further reflects her commitment to rigorous, comparative, and policy-relevant research addressing transnational challenges, with particular emphasis on the Mediterranean Basin. Her impact is discernible through several critical findings that advance theory, methodology, and policy application across the following core themes:

From Scenic Ideal to Common Good: Rethinking Landscape Perception in Greece

Professor Theano S. Terkenli has critically examined Greece’s exceptional landscape diversity -coastal, island, and inland environments rich in ecological, aesthetic, and historical value- and its central role in shaping Greek identity. She highlights the mounting pressures these landscapes face, including unplanned urbanization, agricultural intensification, mass tourism, land abandonment, erosion, and weakening of local identities. Despite nominal environmental legislation, Greece still lacks a coherent landscape policy, and research remains fragmented and poorly linked to planning practice. Through her work, Terkenli illustrates how the Aegean landscape functions simultaneously as a material environment and a symbolic construct, shaped by history, mythology, tourism imaginaries, and uneven modernization. For Greeks, it represents a cultural hearth; for visitors, an idealized paradise; and for local communities, a lived space marked by insularity. She argues that implementing the European Landscape Convention requires cultivating a “landscape conscience” to bridge the gap between top-down scenic policies and bottom-up customary practices. Her research advocates participatory planning, stronger legal frameworks, interdisciplinary collaboration, and sustained public engagement as essential tools for preserving Greece’s landscapes as cultural and ecological assets leading to sustainable development.

Reading the New Cultural Economy of Space Through the Landscape

Professor Terkenli conceptualizes the contemporary “new cultural economy of space,” arguing that under globalization, time-space compression, digital technologies, and intensified cultural flows, landscapes are no longer neutral backdrops but dynamic outcomes of economic, political, and symbolic negotiation. Landscape emerges as the most visible expression of these processes, functioning simultaneously as material environment, cultural text, and consumable image. While global forces often produce homogenized or themed landscapes, local identities and memories persist or re-emerge selectively. To capture these dynamics, she introduces the concepts of enworldment, unworldment, deworldment, transworldment, and reworldment. Her interdisciplinary framework analyzes landscapes across visual (form and appearance), cognitive (symbols and meanings), and experiential (practices and functions) dimensions, drawing on methods ranging from GIS and visual analysis to semiotics, ethnography, and phenomenology, with careful attention to scale and context. Central to her work is the role of education and public participation in safeguarding the cultural meaning and functional integrity of landscapes under global pressures.

Tourism and Landscape: Interdependencies, Challenges, and Pathways for Sustainability

Professor Terkenli stresses the inseparability of tourism and landscape, arguing that landscapes are active and meaning-laden spaces through which tourism is experienced, represented, and marketed. Landscapes function simultaneously as visual spectacles, relational environments, and cultural texts, producing identities, emotions, and meanings. This relationship is reciprocal: tourism depends on landscape, while landscape acquires meaning through viewers, making their interplay central to tourism management and sustainability. She examines the visual dimension through the concept of the “tourist gaze”, highlighting how landscapes are staged and consumed via media and imagery, while also emphasizing embodied, multisensory engagement in which landscapes become sites of identity formation and cultural negotiation. Under globalization, tourism landscapes increasingly reflect homogenization and “tropicalization”, blurring boundaries between “authentic” and staged, local and global, and embedding them within a global cultural economy of space exposed to climate, economic, and social crises. Focusing on Greece, Terkenli reveals the paradox of tourism success achieved amid weak planning and structural deficiencies, and argues for adaptive, place-specific regulation, participatory governance, and sustainability grounded in local cultural values to ensure landscape protection, cultural continuity, and long-term socio-ecological resilience.



Landscape Education: Building a Landscape-Conscious Generation

A key contribution of Terkenli's work lies in geographical pedagogy and landscape education. Recognizing that landscape awareness develops early, she has designed and tested educational approaches for preschool and primary school students in Greece, addressing gaps in environmental education while fostering a broader "landscape conscience". Her pedagogical approach is student-centered, collaborative, and experiential, integrating audiovisual tools and children's lived experiences to promote cooperation, landscape awareness, and responsible attitudes toward protection and sustainable management, in line with the European Landscape Convention. While short-term programs enhance cognitive understanding, Terkenli demonstrates that lasting cultural and emotional change requires long-term, systematic curricular integration supported by families and society. Her work offers a structured yet adaptable model for cultivating future generations capable of valuing, protecting, and managing Greece's diverse landscapes.

Scholarly excellence

Terkenli's scholarly excellence and international standing are reflected in numerous awards and distinctions, notably the Roy Wolfe Award from the American Association of Geographers (AAG) Tourism, Recreation and Sports Specialty Group (2017), recognizing her outstanding contribution to the field. Her involvement in major international and EU-funded projects further demonstrates her commitment to rigorous, comparative research addressing transnational geographical challenges, particularly in the Mediterranean. Equally notable is her lifelong dedication to teaching and mentoring. For decades, she has guided undergraduate and postgraduate students, supervised a substantial number of master's theses and doctoral dissertations, and contributed to international graduate programs. Former students frequently emphasize her nurturing pedagogical style, which balances intellectual rigor with empathy and respect. Through her teaching, she has helped shape a new generation of geographers who approach landscape, culture and tourism with critical insight, ethical awareness and a strong sense of interdisciplinary purpose. Her academic legacy is thus a continuing effort to build a critical, relational geography relevant to contemporary global challenges.

Professor Theano S. Terkenli's work demonstrates a profound and enduring influence on cultural geography, landscape theory, and tourism studies. Through her theoretical innovations, educational initiatives, and sustained efforts to institutionalize landscape thinking, she has charted a path for future scholars, practitioners, and policymakers. Crucially, Professor Terkenli's body of work has laid the intellectual and methodological foundations for the emergence of a distinct Greek school of landscape studies. Her academic legacy continues to inspire research, policy, and education aimed at recognizing, valuing, and protecting landscapes as shared cultural and ecological commons.

Keywords: Landscape, Cultural Geography, Tourism Studies, Cultural Identity, Landscape Education, Greece

50 YEARS OF TOURISM MILESTONES: AN ANALYSIS FROM THE EMBLEMATIC TOURISM MAGAZINE “GREEK TRAVEL PAGES”

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ABSTRACT

Greek Travel Pages (GTP) is an emblematic Tourism Magazine which began its journey in 1975, maintaining its presence in both digital and print formats to this day. It has a vast number of readers (Tourism Professionals, Tourists) featuring advertisements from across the Tourism and Leisure sectors. Distributed nationwide to all tourism organizations and enterprises, GTP provides essential travel information and policy commentary. It tracks the sector’s evolution through a constantly expanding range of thematic and geographical sub-sectors, which collectively form the multidimensional Greek tourism product.

This multidimensional and multi facade -regarding its characteristics- 50 years of archives is at the same time a tribute and “a Journey of Journeys” which captures memories, events, key personalities, business decisions and innovative political initiatives while also recording persistent delays, missed opportunities, and significant successes.

A comprehensive thematic content analysis was conducted, organizing GTP’s rich and often controversial material into four primary pillars:

1. Governance and Strategy (policy, institutions, data),
2. Sectoral Development (accommodation, aviation, transportation, travel companies),
3. Product Diversification (MICE, gastronomy, culture, special interest tourism), and
4. Cross-cutting Issues (sustainability, technology, education).

This categorization allows for a longitudinal evaluation of how the Greek Tourism Identity was shaped and communicated over five decades. The goal of this research is to highlight the elements that marked the Sector's remarkable success within this relatively short historical period. This was furthermore interesting and difficult as a research issue taking into account a critical contradiction regarding the Greek Tourism Sector’s evolution: on one hand, the resilient and internationally recognized success of the sector, and on the other, its treatment -socially and politically- for many decades as the “outsider” of the national economy.

Keywords: Greek Travel Pages, Research Analysis, Tourism Policy, Tourism Milestones

THE GREEK NATION BRAND: BETWEEN NOSTALGIA AND REINVENTION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Greek nation brand in 2025 through three critical dimensions: the impact of social and cultural differences on brand management, strategic approaches within national marketing efforts, and the role of brand elements in building brand equity. Drawing exclusively from recent academic sources, the research explores how Greece navigates the complex challenge of balancing its rich cultural heritage with contemporary brand positioning requirements. The analysis reveals persistent tensions between heritage nostalgia and modern reinvention, cultural homogeneity and regional diversity, and centralized messaging and localized authenticity. Findings indicate that Greece is transitioning from historically nostalgic imagery toward integrated branding frameworks that emphasize experiential storytelling, stakeholder participation, and digital fluency. The study examines how sensory-rich experiences, regional narratives, evolving verbal identities, and participatory digital platforms collectively form the foundation of brand equity. Research highlights the importance of multicultural representation, strategic coherence across government agencies, and the integration of sustainability and innovation themes into national identity narratives. The paper concludes that successful Greek nation branding requires moving beyond static symbols to embrace dynamic, inclusive, and strategically aligned identity construction that positions Greece as both a timeless destination and a resilient, globally relevant modern nation.

Keywords: Nation Branding, Greece, Brand Equity, Cultural Heritage, Brand Management, Tourism Marketing

(RE) CONSTRUCTING VISUAL AND MUSICAL NARRATIVES INSPIRED BY ABORIGINAL ART

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ABSTRACT

Aboriginal art had already been officially established during the 70s in Australian schools, galleries and collections. Although not fully comprehensible by non-Aboriginals, the Aboriginal paintings produce narratives from elemental forms: dots, circles, lines etc. These forms appear not only on canvas and eucalyptus bark, but also on human bodies (body painting), tools and musical instruments pertaining to the production of meaning through visual storytelling further than mere decoration. The present research draws on the narrative aspect of Aboriginal art through a series of visual arts and music activities in Higher education in Greece. It is hereby important to mention that Aboriginal art is little-known in the Greek context, so the activities intended to raise awareness and interest for aboriginal civilisation and general curiosity about civilisations which are situated and developed in remote places, i. e. far from Greece. The power of education and cultural tourism for achieving decolonisation in art and cultural heritage narratives was stressed. Likewise, the possibilities for future initiatives of exhibitions of Aboriginal art in Greece, webinars, workshops, further activities and collaborations were also discussed. By (re) constructing visual and musical narratives triggered by aboriginal art the overall experience reaffirmed the importance of social and cultural relevance of aesthetics. Participants broadened their horizons and were very much interested, inspired and influenced by Aboriginal art, while their written, artistic and creative responses remained relevant to their own sociocultural context and perspective.

Keywords: Aboriginal art, visual narratives, visual arts, music, art in education, sociocultural perspective.

BETWEEN NARRATIVE AND REALITY: AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT WITH REAL-WORLD LOCATION IN CONTEMPORARY GREEK TELEVISION FICTION

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, Greek television fiction has increasingly integrated real-world locations into its narratives, ranging from historic urban centers to rural villages and coastal landscapes. These settings go not merely as backdrops, but as active elements of storytelling, infusing cultural and historical sites with emotional and symbolic significance. This paper examines how five contemporary series – IQ 160 (Comedy, Crime), The Other Me (Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller), Remember When (Comedy, Family), Maestro (Crime, Drama, Mystery, Romance), and Life (Comedy, Drama, Sci-Fi) – shape audience engagement with heritage sites and influence how viewers imagine, interpret, and relate to these locations.

The study adopts a multi-layered approach. First, selected episodes from each series are analysed to identify how locations are framed visually and narratively, focusing on the interplay between character experience, plot development, and spatial representation. Particular attention is given to scenes featuring culturally or historically significant sites, exploring how narrative cinematography conveys meaning. Second, the research situates these locations within their real

world cultural, historical, and architectural contexts, highlighting the ways in which series' portrayals align with, expand upon, or reinterpret heritage value. Third, audience engagement is explored through social media content, online comments, and fan-generated material referencing these locations revealing patterns in perception, emotional attachment, and interest in visiting the sites.

Findings indicate that Greek television series actively construct emotionally and culturally resonant imaginaries of place. Urban, rural, and coastal settings are frequently perceived by audiences as embodiments of identity, memory, and community, with some viewers expressing a desire to experience the location firsthand. The study demonstrates that screen narratives act as powerful mediators shaping the interrelations between storytelling and heritage perception, shaping not only what viewers see on screen but also how they understand and value the places depicted. These insights underline the significance of narrative media in shaping public engagement with cultural heritage in Greece and offer a framework for examining the relationship between contemporary television, audience perception, and the lived experience of the place.

Keywords: Greek series, tourism, cultural heritage, social media, screen culture

TELLING THE STORY: CULTURAL ELEMENTS FOR TOURIST WEBSITES

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ABSTRACT

This paper theorises tourism and hospitality as narrative systems through which cultural heritage is selectively inherited, reinterpreted, and mobilised for contemporary innovation. Drawing on Cultural Inheritance-Based Innovation (CIBI), the study examines how culturally embedded stories, symbols, and practices are transformed into experiential tourism offerings that sustain competitiveness while preserving symbolic continuity. The analysis foregrounds storytelling as a central mechanism through which destinations translate inherited cultural meanings into market-relevant narratives, shaping how tourists engage with place, identity, and authenticity. Longitudinal empirical insights illustrate how national cultural values, when narratively curated rather than commodified, contribute to enduring competitiveness in the travel and tourism sector. Emerging digital technologies, including virtual experiences and AI-enabled services, are conceptualised as narrative mediators that extend cultural storytelling through enhanced presence, personalisation, and experiential depth. Rather than positioning technology as disruptive, the paper argues that its strategic value lies in reinforcing culturally grounded narratives that support sustainable and meaningful tourism development.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Cultural Inheritance-Based Innovation, Storytelling, Narrative Tourism, Digital Mediation, Sustainable Tourism

CRAFTING A COMPELLING WINE ROUTE EXPERIENCE: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS, TRENDS AND APPLICATION CONSIDERATION FOR GREECE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the critical factors in crafting compelling wine route experiences, with particular application to Greek wine regions. The research analyzes stakeholder perceptions from both local communities and tourists, exploring how wine routes serve as experiential platforms within the broader wine tourism industry. Through examination of current trends including sustainability, digitalization and technology integration, and experience-centric approaches, the study identifies strategic opportunities for enhancing wine route offerings. Findings reveal that local stakeholders perceive wine tourism through economic, sociocultural, and environmental impact dimensions, while tourists seek diverse sensory and emotional benefits centered around wine consumption experiences. The research demonstrates that successful wine route experiences require high tourist involvement across multiple stimulating activities that extend beyond core wine-related offerings. Emerging technologies including Geographic Information Systems, Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality, and Virtual Reality present significant opportunities for creating immersive and memorable experiences. The study specifically addresses the Greek context, examining notable wine routes across Macedonia, Thrace, Santorini, Peloponnese, Naoussa, and Crete, while recognizing that personalized approaches are essential given the diversity of regional characteristics. The research concludes that innovation adoption among Greek wine professionals, potentially facilitated by state or European Union support, represents a critical factor in evolving traditional wine route experiences to meet contemporary tourist expectations.



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Keywords: Wine Tourism, Experiential Tourism, Greece, Sustainability, Tourist Experience, Destination Management

NARRATING TRADITION: DIGITAL STORIES AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCE IN THE NAXOS CARNIVAL

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Storytelling represents an essential paradigm within which cultural experiences are communicated, interpreted, and reappraised within communal settings. In relation to intangible cultural heritage, it becomes an instrument with dual functionality as a form of communal memory and a tool for preservation and cohesion, making it possible to connect people from the past with people from the present through carefully designed narratives (UNESCO, 2003). Theoretical interpretations also explain that digital stories make an important contribution towards acts of identity and understanding cultural practices and, more specifically, make it possible to communicate intricate meanings among larger groups of people (Rizvic, 2017). Within the cultural management society, storytelling makes an imperative contribution towards acts of communication and participation, making it possible to interpret and share intangible heritage within and outside the geographical and temporal margins of people within the hosting society.

Digital storytelling, which uses multimedia components like images, sound, and videos, and modern technologies, greatly extends the possibilities for representation and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage (Sylaiou et al., 2010). The inclusion of artificial intelligence technologies within it helps in organizing, reconstructing, and better representation of information, which would be hard to access and present via conventional approaches. It does not replace living traditions but complements them and creates new paths and ways for interpretation and understanding, thus assisting within cultural sustainability (Nocca, 2017).

This theoretical background establishes the context within which the current case study will be conducted, as it focuses on the use of digital storytelling as a method for addressing a specific case of intangible cultural heritage, namely the carnival of Naxos. The carnival, as it develops through actions and activities covering different settlements on the island, is a dynamic and intricate phenomenon of cultural life with high levels of participation and multiple levels of meaning. It will not be treated as a subject for an analytical and folkloric cataloging but as a field of application, wherein concepts of storytelling and digital practices may be explored.

The methodological approach consists of accumulating and digitally incorporating various sources: resident and participant interviews, images, audios, videos of performances, as well as accompanying historical and folklore

sources. These sources are systematized within a digital database on intangible heritage; this constitutes a basis for new storytelling. Using digital processing procedures as well as artificial intelligence tools, it is possible for the research to develop short-format thematic stories, videos, audios, and audio-visual modules that combine verbal and pictorial components. Digital storytelling focuses on people's experiences with tradition and assigning meaning to it, as opposed to a descriptive representation of certain practices.

At the same time, an adaptive questionnaire is incorporated as an instrument for personalized access. By answering short questions, it determines an interest and knowledge profile and recommends adapted stories and online content. Thus, everyone develops an individual path for interpretation and exploration regarding intangible cultural heritage with a focus on matters most significant for each user. This tool works as an *intermezzo* between traditional knowledge and modern demands for access and interpretation (Gretzel et al. 2015).

When applying the framework on Naxos Carnival, it becomes clear that digital storytelling could be a very useful tool for promoting and preserving IPLCs. The use of AV media and AI technology makes it possible to emphasize aspects that would normally be invisible and hard to gain access to, and personalized access helps raise awareness and understanding among visitors. Frameworks like this have implications not only for the efficient preservation and conservation of culture but also for improving winter cultural tourism. Overall, the project represents an all-around model for a digital storytelling approach to intangible cultural heritage and might be adapted for usage within different cultures. The combination of theoretical approaches, technological capabilities, and practice confirms the abilities of modern technologies for preserving and promoting cultural memory.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Digital Preservation, AI-Assisted Storytelling, Adaptive Digital Experiences

EVALUATING ALTERNATIVE CULTURAL ROUTES IN URBAN AREAS IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The 15-minute city concept has emerged as one of the most popular city models in recent years due to its ability to cope effectively with sustainability issues that may arise in an urban environment. One of the issues appearing in this context- following the growing importance of tourism for the local economies- is the issue of cultural heritage management and protection.

This calls for a thorough integration of the cultural heritage management patterns into the urban ‘milieu’, so that sustainability objectives to be pursued. The 15-minute city model, in this respect, provides a promising tool for a thorough reorganization of land use and activity patterns, in a specific city, but also an inspiring mean for effective decision making in urban planning interventions.

The focus of the present paper is on the study of synergies that the 15-minute city model concept is introducing, in a cultural heritage management context, which enable the prevalence of a sustainable city environment. The city case used for the application of the model is the ancient city of Athens

In the first part of the paper, a brief introduction to the importance of the 15-minute city concept for cultural heritage management and preservation is presented. In the second part the boundaries of ancient Athens, the Themistoclean Wall, are used as explanatory application of ‘the 15-minute concept’ revealing the natural trend of communities to pursue sustainability principles far beyond contemporary societies introduced sustainability goals as corrective mechanisms. In the third part a cultural management scheme will be presented, for a number of archeological sites, following the principles of ‘the 15-minute model’

Finally, certain conclusions are drawn on how citizens perceive the benefits of the 15-minute approach for cultural heritage management.

Keywords: 15-minutes city, cultural heritage management, multicriteria approaches, participatory methods.

A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW IN SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL ROUTES

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ABSTRACT

Culture and tourism are major drivers of economic growth around the world (Richards, 2018). Routes existed many years before tourism. The last decade there is a growing interest on the strategic role of cultural routes. This paper investigates the cross-disciplinary relationship of cultural routes and sustainable development (social, cultural, economic and environmental). Despite their popularity in the literature, research on cultural routes also faces one particular challenge. More particularly, the majority of studies on cultural routes have adopted a rather uniform methodological approach, focusing almost exclusively on qualitative case studies (Rosalina et al. 2021, Timothy and Boyd 2015). This scarcity of quantitative empirical evidence imposes constraints regarding the advancement of knowledge regarding the management and sustainable development of cultural routes (Timothy and Boyd 2015). In the same vein, (Loulanski and Loulanski 2011) argue that the absence of strong quantitative evidence could jeopardize the theoretical foundations and relevance of cultural routes. This fragmentation restricts the advancement and understanding of a highly dynamic field.

Based on the abovementioned observation, the paper aims to perform a systematic quantitative literature review in order to identify, synthesize and analyze existing knowledge on cultural routes through a scientific, structured and reliable process (Rosalina et al. 2021). An extensive literature review analysis of 461 studies reviewed through the protocol of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The meta-synthesis approach revealed 6 key themes of cultural route management in relation to sustainable development. These are sustainable mobility, cultural heritage management, attitudes towards waste, information and guidance for the cultural routes, geographical length of the route and route management. The authors suggest that these factors are the key constituents of a theoretical-based framework policy of sustainable cultural routes. Overall, the paper quantifies for the first time the discussion around cultural route management and sustainability. The combination of quantitative information alongside an in-depth examination of the literature provides interesting insights regarding future areas of research in the field.



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Keywords: sustainable cultural routes, sustainable route management, sustainable tourism, meta-analyses, PRISMA



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CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ROUTES AS TOOLS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF SYROS ISLAND

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism development increasingly prioritizes experience-based approaches that enhance visitors' engagement with local culture and the natural environment. Within this framework, cultural and environmental walking routes have emerged as effective tools for promoting meaningful tourist experiences while supporting sustainability objectives. This paper explores the contribution of guided cultural and environmental routes to tourists' experiences and the formation of a sense of place, using **Syros Island** as a case study.

The research is based on an empirical study involving a group of twenty-five tourists who participated in two organized walking routes on the island. Each route was designed to emphasize a different experiential focus. The first route highlighted cultural elements, including historical landmarks, architectural features, and narratives related to the island's urban and industrial heritage. The second route focused on environmental characteristics, such as natural landscapes, coastal and inland ecosystems, and themes of environmental awareness and sustainability. Both routes were delivered as guided experiences and incorporated structured cultural and environmental interpretation.

Data were collected after participants completed the routes in order to capture their perceptions, experiential outcomes, and overall evaluation of the activities. The analysis focuses on key dimensions of the tourist experience, including learning, emotional engagement, perceived authenticity, satisfaction, and the development of a sense of place. A comparative perspective was adopted to explore how cultural and environmental interpretations contribute differently to tourists' understanding and emotional connection with the destination.

The findings suggest that both routes significantly enhanced the quality of the tourist experience, albeit in different ways. The culturally oriented route strengthened participants' understanding of local identity and heritage, while the environmentally oriented route fostered reflection, relaxation, and increased environmental awareness. Overall, guided interpretation played a crucial role in transforming walking activities into meaningful experiential processes that support sustainable tourism development and reinforce tourists' sense of place.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism; Cultural routes; Environmental routes; Tourist experience; Walking tourism; Syros Island

MEMORY TOURISM IN ATHENS: MANAGING TRAUMA HERITAGE AND DESIGNING EXPERIENTIAL ROUTES

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how sites of traumatic memory in Athens can be included in a contemporary, ethically grounded tourism narrative that highlights historical experience without trivializing it. The research starts with the assumption that dark tourism, when it is not treated as a "spectacle of horror" or a commercial exploitation of suffering, can serve as a tool for cultural management, for strengthening historical awareness, and for promoting a critical understanding of the past. In this context, the creation of a Network of Sites of Historical Memory in Athens is proposed, linking emblematic places of martyrdom, such as the Kommandantur dungeon (Korai 4), Block 15 in Haidari, the Kaisariani Shooting Range, and others, into a single, multi-layered memory experience.

The research is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that combines the literature on dark tourism, cultural heritage management techniques, and approaches from museology, new technologies, and cultural policy. In particular, it examines the tensions between memory and commodification, authenticity and the tourist "package," and respect for victims versus the creation of visitor experiences. Athens is treated as a complex urban landscape of memory, where sites of torture, execution, and resistance often remain invisible or undervalued within the city's dominant tourist narrative.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach using Athens as a case study. It combines: (a) a review of international and Greek literature on dark tourism and the management of sites of traumatic memory; (b) mapping and analysis of selected sites (Korai 4, Block 15, the Kaisariani Shooting Range, the EAT-ESA Museum, the Mandra of Kokkinia) with respect to their historical depth, protection status, existing interpretive tools, and their inclusion or exclusion from tourist routes; (c) qualitative analysis of intangible cultural heritage materials (oral testimonies, memorial ceremonies, survivors' and relatives' narratives, local associations, collective actions); and (d) comparative reference to international practices for managing similar sites, aiming to draw guiding principles for the Greek context. The methodology is complemented by critical in situ observation and analysis of how visitors experience these places, as reflected in interpretive materials, guided tours, and public discourse.

The central research questions explore how a place associated with pain, torture, and traumatic historical memory can function as a point of tourist interest without falling into the commodification of suffering. They also address the best practices and the main ethical and operational challenges in the cultural management of such sites, as well as the ways in which these places can be integrated into a broader memory narrative for Athens that preserves historical awareness and contributes to shaping the identity of the city and its residents. At the same time, the study



examines the role of intangible cultural heritage (oral testimonies, narratives, memorial rituals) in interpreting and highlighting these sites, and how the visitor's experience varies depending on their cultural background, historical references, and level of familiarity with this past.

The research findings show that Athenian sites of martyrdom remain largely fragmentarily integrated into the city's tourism offer and are often treated as marginal or specialized options rather than as central components of a mature historical and democratic identity. At the same time, it becomes clear that authenticity and respect for victims do not stem solely from the material fabric such as buildings, cells and monuments, but from the way the narrative is constructed: the language employed, the presence or absence of humor and spectacle, the management of emotional burdens, the active involvement of memory communities, and the educational orientation of the routes.

The proposed Network of Sites of Historical Memory in Athens is presented as a policy proposal for applied cultural governance and as a tool for sustainable tourism development. It is based on a multidimensional approach that integrates technology (digital maps, augmented reality applications, archival material accessible via QR codes), education (design of school and university programs, partnerships with schools and higher education institutions), social participation (co-creation of narratives with local communities, associations, historians, survivors and descendants), and the contribution of the arts and gastronomy. Through theatrical and performative practices, readings, in situ activities and culinary experiences drawn from local memory and everyday life stories, the sites of memory are activated as living spaces of dialogue. The proposed routes are not treated as visit packages but as experiential journeys through the city's hidden places, aiming to stimulate critical reflection and an embodied understanding of historical violence and repression, as well as of resistance, solidarity and everyday forms of survival.

The contribution of this work is threefold. First, at a theoretical level, it strengthens the understanding of dark tourism not as a peripheral or "exotic" phenomenon but as a dynamic field of cultural management, closely linked to public history and the formation of collective memory. Second, at a practical level, it proposes a set of guiding principles and tools for designing ethically aligned and socially responsible tourism interventions in urban environments with heavy historical burdens, such as Athens. Third, at the level of cultural policy, it highlights the need for institutional recognition and networking of sites of traumatic memory so that memory can be transformed from a silent burden or occasional commemoration into an active, critical, and participatory tool of democratic awareness.

Ultimately, the Network of Sites of Historical Memory does not aim at the touristic exploitation of historical suffering but at a conscious engagement with the past through documentation, interpretation, and respect. It is addressed especially to younger generations, inviting them to reread their city through the places where democracy was wounded, to grasp more deeply its cost. Through this process, memory is proposed to be transformed from trauma into knowledge and from silence into a public, living dialogue about the past, the present, and the future of democracy.

Keywords: Dark tourism, Heritage Management, Cultural heritage tourism, Strategic Planning, Sites of Martyrdom, Athens

CO-CREATING VIRTUAL ATTRACTIONS: COMPARING AI-GENERATED AND HUMAN-DESIGNED VISUALS IN DESTINATION MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of virtual destinations, immersive digital attractions, and AI-enabled visual production is transforming how tourists encounter places long before physical travel occurs. In contemporary tourism, destination engagement increasingly begins through screens, interfaces, and digitally mediated representations. Within this evolving landscape, visual communication plays a decisive role in shaping destination image, emotional engagement, and behavioural intention. Tourism research has long established that destination images are formed through mediated representations rather than direct experience alone, particularly at the anticipatory stage of travel decision-making.

Recent advances in generative artificial intelligence (AI) have enabled destination marketing organisations (DMOs) and tourism firms to produce high-quality visual content at unprecedented speed and scale. AI-generated imagery is increasingly deployed in promotional campaigns, virtual previews, and emerging virtual attractions. While these technologies promise efficiency and creative expansion, they also raise fundamental questions regarding authenticity, interpretation, and aesthetic value. Despite growing interest in AI applications in tourism, empirical research examining how tourists perceive AI-generated visuals compared with visuals created by professional human designers remains limited, particularly in relation to virtual attractions and destination storytelling.

This study addresses this gap by empirically examining how AI-generated versus human-designed destination visuals influence tourist interpretation, perceived authenticity, emotional response, and behavioural intention. The research is grounded in four complementary theoretical streams. First, destination image formation theory highlights the role of visual stimuli in shaping cognitive and affective evaluations of destinations, particularly among potential tourists who rely on mediated information sources. Second, authenticity research emphasises that tourists evaluate not only what is depicted but also the perceived credibility, intentionality, and cultural grounding of representations. Third, research on immersive and virtual tourism experiences demonstrates that digitally mediated encounters can meaningfully influence emotional engagement and pre-visit attitudes. Finally, emerging work in computational creativity and AI-assisted art shows that generative AI both introduces novel aesthetic qualities and disrupts

traditional assumptions about authorship, creativity, and authenticity, influencing how audiences evaluate visual outputs.

The study adopts a controlled experimental design comparing viewer responses to two sets of images derived from identical short textual descriptions of distinctive destination types (e.g., Cycladic architectural landscapes, medieval harbour towns, monastic or natural heritage settings). One visual set is produced using generative AI platforms (e.g., DALL·E, Midjourney), while the second set is created by professional graphic designers applying established principles of visual composition, colour theory, and culturally informed semiotics. By holding the textual prompt constant across conditions, the design isolates differences arising from the mode of visual production rather than from content variation.

Participants ($N \approx 100$) are recruited from a general tourism consumer population. Prior visitation to the featured destinations is not required, and this choice is theoretically and methodologically grounded. Foundational destination image theory conceptualises destination image as the outcome of multiple “image formation agents” operating before visitation, including marketing communication and symbolic representations. Empirical models further demonstrate that destination images are shaped by stimulus factors and individual characteristics rather than by direct experience alone. Moreover, research explicitly examining destination images held by non-visitors shows that coherent and meaningful perceptions can exist without firsthand experience. As virtual attractions and AI-generated visuals primarily target potential tourists at the anticipatory stage of decision-making, focusing on participants without mandatory prior visitation allows the study to accurately reflect real-world destination marketing conditions.

Participants evaluate the images using validated measurement scales capturing multiple dimensions of perception and response: interpretation accuracy, reflecting the ability to infer the intended place or theme; perceived authenticity, measured through object-based and existential dimensions; aesthetic evaluation, assessed using established measures of perceived visual aesthetics; emotional response, operationalised through the Pleasure–Arousal–Dominance framework and behavioural intention, including intention to visit or seek additional information.

To strengthen internal validity and address potential reviewer concerns, the study incorporates an optional robustness check distinguishing between participants who report prior visitation to similar destinations and those who do not. Visitation status is recorded and included as a control variable and potential moderator in the analysis. This enables testing whether familiarity moderates responses to AI-generated versus human-designed visuals, without altering the core experimental logic.

Drawing on authenticity theory and research on AI-assisted creativity, the study anticipates that AI-generated visuals may be perceived as more novel or visually striking, while simultaneously being evaluated as less authentic or culturally grounded than human-designed visuals. This dual effect reflects the disruptive nature of generative AI, which challenges conventional design logics and assumptions about creative authorship. Human-designed visuals, by contrast, are expected to perform more strongly in terms of narrative coherence and perceived authenticity, particularly in a destination context where cultural specificity is salient.

The study contributes to both theoretical advancement and managerial practice. Theoretically, it extends destination image formation research by integrating perspectives from visual communication, design studies, and AI-mediated creativity. Practically, it provides evidence-based guidance for DMOs, designers, and tourism marketers regarding when AI imagery may enhance destination communication, when human design expertise remains essential, and how hybrid human–AI co-creation models can be strategically deployed in virtual attractions and digital destination storytelling.



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As tourism engagement increasingly begins in virtual and digitally mediated environments, understanding how different visual production logics influence perception, emotion, and intention is essential. This research offers a robust, empirically grounded framework for evaluating AI-generated versus human-designed visuals in tourism, supporting more intentional, ethical, and culturally informed approaches to virtual destination

Keywords: Virtual attractions, Destination image formation, Generative artificial intelligence, Visual communication in tourism, Authenticity and aesthetics, Human–AI co-creation, Digital destination storytelling



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THE USE OF HISTORICAL HERITAGE IN VIDEO GAMES AS A FACTOR STIMULATING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

People tend to be attracted to places featured in the media, especially popular TV series and movies (Connell, 2012; Beeton, 2016). The form of tourism in which travellers visit places known from films is referred to in the literature as set-jetting. The growing popularity of set-jetting has led many destination marketers to seek opportunities for placing destinations in films, much like product placement (Guo et al., 2019). The use of this tool by spatial entities is labelled as city placement (Zawadzki, 2012; Oh, 2014) and has become one of the most successful destination marketing techniques. Often, the success of New Zealand, based on the Lord of the Rings series (Croy, 2004; Jones & Smith, 2005), and of Dubrovnik and other destinations featured in the Game of Thrones series (Tkalec et al., 2017), is presented as a convincing example. However, TV and movie productions, which are usually based on traditional film techniques, are limited in what they present. More sophisticated marketing campaigns are required when a place “plays” a different territory in a film, which was the case in both examples mentioned above. Much easier to achieve was, for instance, the success of Kazimierz, the Jewish quarter in Krakow, which was derived from its portrayal in the Schindler’s List movie (Kolasińska, 2020).

Lately, high competition, coupled with attempts to utilise city placement and the growing popularity of the video game sector, has prompted destination marketers and researchers to closely examine the possibility of

promoting destinations through their representation in games (Ramirez Moreno, 2019; Dubois et al., 2021; Rainoldi et al., 2022). The reason is not only the search for new media for promotional activities, but also new opportunities brought by the technology used in video games (Dubois & Gibbs, 2018). The plot of video games is often illustrated through animated pictures rather than filmed footage, and is widely supported by virtual and augmented reality. In video games, you can find places that are presented accurately, but also imagined places that are developed with some similarities to the existing ones. Additionally, existing places are often presented as altered, especially when depicted in a manner that game developers envision them to look in the future or in the past (Dubois & Gibbs, 2018). The diverse ways in which particular destinations are represented in video games make set-jetting and city placement more complex and challenging, but also full of new opportunities.

The success pathway for film-induced tourism has been established; however, similar examples of video game-induced tourism have been rare, if not nonexistent, and have not been discussed in the literature to date. The paper examines the example of the Kingdom Come: Deliverance II game and how it stimulated tourism development in several destinations in the Czech Republic. The case study utilises statistical data gathered and presented by CzechTourism (Czech National Tourism Organisation) and by operators of local cultural attractions such as Trosky Castle. Promotional materials and webpages presenting products dedicated to video game tourists were also studied. Additionally, findings were confirmed through interviews with several stakeholders involved in developing this video game-induced tourism product. The paper presents explanatory results of the project, which is in its initial phase.

This example brings to life previous experiences of film-induced tourism and demonstrates the effectiveness of these solutions. The story of this success is the result of close cooperation between the game developer (Warhorse Studio), the Czech national tourism authorities (CzechTourism), regional and local tourism authorities, and operators of local attractions and tourism services. The cooperation led to the development of new local tourism products and coordinated promotional actions that aligned with the game launch. The case study enabled us to identify the key success factors in creating tourism products tailored to visitors motivated by the video game, which are based on the innovative use of the Czech Republic's historical heritage. The theoretical output of the study is the presentation of a detailed framework for building successful products for video game-induced tourism. This includes the strong embeddedness of the game's plot in Czech medieval history and specific real locations, which fostered a sense of common patriotic values and pride among all stakeholders, including the game developer, which is also a Czech company. Places such as Trosky Castle, due to its role in the game's plot, experienced not only remarkable growth in the number of visitors and a change in the age structure of these visitors, but also gained a new perception, as demonstrated in tourists' behaviour and expectations during the visit. An interesting part of the conclusions is the comparison of different places portrayed in the game, as some of them (such as Kutná Hora) were among the most important hotspots of the whole country, some others (such as Trosky Castle) were popular destinations, and while others (such as Maršov) were hardly visited before the launch of the game. Also, it is worth noting that a part of the historic buildings portrayed in the game survived to the present day almost unchanged, and their image in the game is very similar to the real one. In contrast, the others, such as Trosky Castle, exist today as ruins, and in the game, they were “rebuilt”.

Keywords: video game-induced tourism, Kingdom Come: Deliverance 2, The Czech Republic, historic heritage, stakeholder cooperation

SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is a dynamic and complex socio-economic phenomenon based on the growing needs of modern society for recreation and leisure. Tourism contributes in many ways to the development of places acquiring in many respects a strategic importance at a national, regional and local level contributing to economy, society as well as cultural and natural heritage enhancement and protection. However, the growth of tourism has beyond positive, negative social, economic and environmental impacts as well, sometimes ultimately affecting tourism prospects.

However, as tourism is growing globally it is also undergoing dynamic challenges as a consequence of broader socio-economic changes and technological innovation. These affect and set the framework for seeking contemporary approaches for tourism planning and management incorporating resilience within a sustainable development perspective, seeking safeguarding development in accordance with the principles of socially just, inclusive, balanced, sustainable development.

There is a growing concern that there should be limits on tourism development (size, intensity, etc.) often expressed as crowding or the maximum number of people who can use a site without causing an unacceptable alteration to the physical environment (natural and man-made) and without an unacceptable decline in the quality of the experience gained by visitors. Overtourism describes the situation in which the impact of tourism, at certain times and in certain locations, exceeds physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological, and/or political capacity thresholds. Especially in protected areas and historic settlements and towns the number of tourists and visitor flows may affect tourism assets as well as the quality of experience of visitors. Of particular concern, however, is the spatial over-concentration in historical sites concerning problems in the operation and management of historic areas often affecting the local community. When applied to a large geographical area (i.e. an island, a historic settlement or town, a region, etc.) the concept may acquire a broader significance so as to express a maximum acceptable tourist development (number of beds, hotels, mooring places, etc.).

In this context it is important to intervene and manage tourism growth sometimes directly (i.e. restricting arrivals or even entry in controlled areas) as well as indirectly (i.e. diffusing pressures and flows and controlling tourist development). There is need for a strategy, rules and priorities, to be taken into consideration at an operational/regulatory level, in regional and local development plans. Such rules are effectuated often with delineation of future development areas in local master plans as well as with building density and size restrictions. In historical settlements there are initiatives to impose severe restrictions on potential new residence transformation to tourism accommodation. Monitoring and evaluation are critical aspects in such policies, requiring operationalization in many respects.



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Keywords: resilience, sustainability, carrying capacity

DECLINE IN REPORTING OF CLIMATE THREATS TO UNESCO WORLD CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

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ABSTRACT

Climate change poses unprecedented threats to cultural heritage sites worldwide, yet little is known about how these sites report such risks over time. Several empirical studies document serious impacts of various climate-related stressors such as heavy rainfall, floods, erosion, sea level rise, heat, drought, corrosion-biodegradation, fire, among others. In addition, multiple review studies have synthesised the state-of-the-art knowledge on the intersection of climate change and heritage showing that Global south remain under-represented in current literature while limited research exists on managerial aspect such as capacity of heritage managers to prepare for and deal with climate change. Consequently, despite growing evidence of physical risks, we know little about how heritage managers recognise and report climate threats over time. This study addresses this gap and investigates temporal changes in the reporting of climate-related threats among UNESCO World Cultural Heritage sites in developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Using data from two recent periodic reporting cycles (2010 and 2020), a balanced dataset of 212 threat observations from 106 sites across 23 countries is analysed with two pooled logistic regression models with cluster-robust standard errors at the site level. The first model estimates the likelihood of increased or decreased reporting of climate threats over time, while the second assesses whether reporting patterns vary across national contexts after adjusting for site-specific characteristics. The model specifications are:

$$\text{Logit} (P (\text{Climate_change_reporting}_{jt} = 1)) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{Cyclet} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{Area}_{j} + \beta_3 \cdot \text{Country}_{j} + \beta_4 \cdot \text{Age}_{j} + \beta_5 \cdot \text{Selection_criteria}_{j} + \mu_j \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Logit} (P (\text{Climate_change_reporting}_{jt} = 1)) = \delta_0 + \delta_1 \cdot \text{Cyclet} + \delta_2 \cdot \text{Area}_{j} + \delta_3 \cdot \text{Country}_{j} + \delta_4 \cdot \text{Age}_{j} + \delta_5 \cdot \text{Selection_criteria}_{j} + \delta_6 \cdot (\text{Cyclet} \times \text{Country}) + \mu_j \quad (2)$$

Here, Climate_change_reporting is a binary indicator (1 if climate change is reported as a threat at site j, 0 otherwise pooled for both cycles); 'Cycle' denotes the reporting period (0 = cycle II, 1 = cycle III); Area represents the site's area category; Country is a vector of dummy variables for the host country; Age indicates the age category since the inscription; Selection_criteria represents the UNESCO selection criteria for inscription; $\beta_1 - \beta_5$ and $\delta_1 - \delta_6$ are regression coefficients, and μ is the error term.

Among all reported primary threats in the analysis, climate change and severe weather events account for 73.1% (n=155) of observations. Regression results reveal a significant decline in climate threat reporting. In the baseline model, on average the sites in Cycle III have 12 percentage points lower probability to identify climate change as a threat compared to Cycle II ($p < 0.01$) when other variables are held constant. Larger sites (>1,000 ha)

have 24 percentage points lower probability of reporting climate change ($p < 0.05$) relative to the smallest sites, whereas sites inscribed for their exceptional cultural traditions (UNESCO selection criterion iii) have 16 percentage points more probability to report such threats ($p < 0.1$). Country-level variations are pronounced. When compared with other countries in the region categorised as the reference group, Indian sites ($dy/dx = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$) and Iranian sites ($dy/dx = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$) have 39 and 25 percentage points lower probability to report climate threats. In the interaction model (model 2), none of the interaction terms between reporting cycles and host countries are statistically significant. However, the predicted probabilities indicate variation in country-wide reporting over time with Indian sites showing a sharper decline and Iranian sites showing improvement relative to previous cycle.

The robustness of the main results is assessed by re-estimating the models using full unbalanced panel that includes all available site-cycle observations encompassing 259 observations across 153 sites. The coefficients for key variables like Cycle, Area, Country, and Selection criteria maintain consistent direction and significance while the interaction terms remain non-significant.

These findings suggest a gap between actual risks and the institutional reporting of climate risks. Although recent literature document escalating physical risks for cultural heritage sites, the study finds a negative and significant association of reporting cycle with likelihood of reporting climate threats. While sites in both India and Iran have lower probability of reporting the risks compared to others, Indian sites have further reduced the probability, while Iranian sites have improved the probability of reporting climate threats in the most recent reporting cycle. This suggests that climate reporting is influenced by national and site-specific factors beyond physical exposure to climate hazards. The under-reporting of climate threats is deeply concerning, especially for the highly vulnerable South Asia region. The discrepancy between rising actual climate risks and declining reported threats indicates a structural weakness in current international monitoring and reporting systems. This highlights the need for stronger integration of climate change in heritage management frameworks in developing countries.

Keywords: UNESCO World Heritage, climate change, cultural heritage, periodic reporting, vulnerability

LOCAL COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF TOURISM AND MANAGEMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between tourism and the natural environment is complex and dynamic. On the one hand tourism relies heavily on nature but on the other it can cause significant damage, such as pollution, resource depletion, habitat degradation and ecosystem damage. These negative impacts are much more evident in those areas considered “sensitive”, such as coastal areas, forests, wetlands, etc. The emergence of environmental problems as top priority issues has led to the activation of local community and tourism bodies to address these problems and the adoption of sustainable practices to balance economic benefits with environmental protection. The implementation of area protection policies leads to the management of their resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs are met while, at the same time, cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems are maintained. However, the precious value and the necessity of highlighting the natural wealth that distinguishes them require the adoption and implementation of a multi-level strategy, consisting of specialized projects, measures and actions, with the aim of more systematically ensuring and managing their tourism development.

In this context, the aim of this paper is to highlight the serious negative impacts that tourism can cause on the natural environment (especially in the case where tourism development is carried out without a plan and control), to demonstrate the immediate need to protect areas from these impacts, to highlight the crucial role of planning and management of tourist areas based on a sustainable development strategy, and to propose specific solutions for areas with severe problems from tourism activity. Focusing on Chrissi Island in Crete as a case study, the perceptions of local residents regarding the management of the island are being investigated. Chrissi Island is a sensitive ecosystem protected by the Natura 2000 network and at the same time a popular tourist destination due to its unique natural beauty. Uncontrolled tourist activity has led to irreparable damage to its natural environment, leading the state in 2021 to decide to subject the island to a strict protection regime, with a ban on disembarking

visitors from ships (day boats, pleasure boats), as well as restrictions on access, in order to protect its unique natural environment (cedar forest), a decision that continues to this day.

In order to achieve the purpose of the research, a primary quantitative research was carried out using a structured questionnaire on a sample of the residents of Ierapetra. Specifically, the behavior and activities that the residents themselves carried out on the island, their level of knowledge about the impacts of tourism activity on the island, the attitudes and perceptions about the management of the island in recent years, and finally the degree of participation and involvement of the local community in the decision-making process for the island were examined. The collection of the questionnaires was carried out through face-to-face interviews from April to June 2025. Ultimately, 267 fully completed questionnaires were collected. The statistical analysis of the questionnaires was carried out with the SPSS 26.

The results showed that the largest percentage of participants had visited the island multiple times, where they developed various activities, some of which are prohibited (e.g. camping, barbecue) even though most of them know that Chrissi Island is part of the Natura 2000 network and thus a protected area. They express specific views in relation to the body that should manage the island, largely disagreeing with the current management regime. They recognize that human activity on the island was uncontrolled for many years, leading its natural environment to irreparable damage. They largely agree that focusing exclusively on the economic benefits from the exploitation of Chrissi brought about the ecological destruction of the island. They disagree, however, with the measure of prohibiting access to the island, as they argue that this decision will reduce tourist traffic in Ierapetra and will negatively affect the economy of the region. At the same time, they argue that this measure will not have the desired results for the revival of the environment on the island. They argue that a solution could be found to allow limited access to Chrissi under conditions. They believe that the management of Chrissi Island has failed over time, while they emphasize that the opinions of the locals must be taken into account in future decisions about Chrissi. They believe that when Chrissi reopens to visitors, strict restrictions should be placed on the number of visitors and the activities allowed on the island. They agree that Chrissi could become a sustainable tourist destination with proper management, while they believe that the tourism development of Chrissi should be based on alternative forms of tourism (e.g. ecotourism). Other suggestions made include environmental awareness and education of locals and visitors to Chrissi island, the creation of a permanent management body, and the imposition of a ticket fee on visitors to Chrissi so that the money can be allocated to the protection of the island's natural environment.

The paper contributes to the ongoing debate on the management of sensitive ecosystems that are popular tourist destinations. The findings and discussion of this study are useful to the tourism bodies of Ierapetra and other regions with ecological value, to industry practitioners, and academic researchers interested in the negative impacts of tourism on natural environment and sustainable development.

Keywords: environmental impacts, protected areas, tourism development, Natura 2000, local communities, Crete

MULTI-USE GOVERNANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE MARINE TOURISM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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ABSTRACT

Marine tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the Blue Economy, playing a crucial role in the socio-economic development of Mediterranean island and coastal regions. However, increasing pressure on marine space, user conflicts, and governance gaps highlight the need for integrated spatial management tools. In this context, Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and the concept of Multi-Use (MU) emerge as complementary instruments that enable coexistence and synergies between marine tourism and other activities, such as offshore renewable energy, fisheries, aquaculture and underwater cultural heritage.

This paper employs a multi-step methodology, combining: (i) a literature review on MSP, MU, and marine tourism, (ii) analysis of European programs implementing MU in tourism-related contexts (including MUSES, UNITED and MULTI-FRAME), and (iii) systematic review and comparison of the MSP strategies of Mediterranean countries. This approach allows the identification of trends, challenges, and opportunities for integrating tourism into multifunctional marine spaces. The comparative analysis reveals that the most frequently referenced MU combination in the Mediterranean involves tourism, underwater cultural heritage (UCH), and environmental protection, highlighting the strategic importance of cultural resources for sustainable and innovative tourism development.

Findings indicate that MSP can serve as a critical framework for multi-level governance, supporting the transition toward more collaborative and multifunctional marine space management. Overall, integrating marine tourism into MU policies can act as a driver for innovation, social cohesion, and resilience, contributing substantially to the sustainable development of the Blue Economy in the Mediterranean and across Europe.



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Keywords: Marine Tourism, Maritime Spatial Planning, Multi Uses, Governance, Underwater Cultural Heritage



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GEOPHYSICAL RISK IN A TOURIST DESTINATION: A PERSPECTIVE FROM MEDIA AND TOURIST ARRIVALS IN SANTORINI FOR 2025

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ABSTRACT

Santorini, a globally renowned tourist destination with a unique landscape and cultural heritage, is inherently defined by its active volcano, which presents significant geophysical risks, including earthquakes, tsunamis, and landslides. This study investigates the interplay between mass media narratives, risk perception, and tourist behavior during a period of heightened seismic activity in 2025.

This research analyzes how Greek and international mass media, along with official tourism bodies like the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO), framed the elevated risk. The narratives at play have two different outcomes, a catastrophic narrative that highlights danger and the destination's vulnerability, versus a reassuring perspective that emphasizes on scientific monitoring, resilience, and a swift return to normalcy.

By correlating the content analysis of media coverage with tourist arrival trends in Santorini during the same year, the study assesses the direct impact of these communication strategies on traveler decision-making. It is explored whether media framing influenced tourist behavior and how the public's perception of risk diverged from or aligned with the presented narratives.

The findings underscore the pivotal role of effective risk communication in shaping a destination's image and managing its carrying capacity during a potential crisis.

Keywords: Santorini, Geophysical Risk, Tourism, Risk Perception, Mass Media.

TOURISM ECONOMIES UNDER ENERGY STRESS: RENEWABLES AS A PATH TO ENERGY SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy with rapid expansion over the last decade despite geopolitical turmoil and global economic activity shut down caused by COVID19. While becoming one of the most important sources of income and foreign exchange for many countries, at the same time overtourism imposes a significant cost on the environment, putting pressure on natural resources and local infrastructure. The increasing intensity of tourism activity ultimately undermines the very resources that generate tourism revenue. In particular, it contributes to rising energy consumption during a period of heightened environmental sensitivity and concern. As energy becomes an increasingly expensive commodity, continued reliance on conventional energy sources, namely fossil fuels such as oil, coal, and natural gas, raises critical sustainability challenges due to their environmental impact, price volatility, and contribution to import dependence. These challenges pose a direct threat to energy security, defined as the ability of an economy to ensure a stable, reliable, and affordable energy supply while minimizing exposure to external shocks and supply disruptions. In this context, the role of renewable energy sources, becomes increasingly important. The expansion of renewable energy can mitigate the adverse effects of tourism-induced energy demand by diversifying the energy mix, reducing dependence on fossil fuels, and enhancing long-term sustainability. This study examines the long-term relationship between tourism, energy consumption and the impact of renewable energy as a countermeasure for enhancing energy security by utilizing several panel data estimators (GLS, robust LS, and OLS combined with a forward-selection approach) within the EU27 states.

Keywords: tourism, renewable energy, energy security, panel data

ISLAND BRANDING BEYOND THE PARADISE-HELL DICHOTOMY: EVIDENCE FROM GREEK ISLANDS

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ABSTRACT

Island destinations have long been portrayed through dichotomous imaginaries: as paradises of leisure, authenticity, and escape, or as marginal peripheries dependent on external forces and vulnerable to decline. These binary representations – widespread in tourism and destination marketing, media, and policy discourses – not only simplify the complexity of island life but also shape how islands are governed, branded, and experienced. They cover the daily reality of insularity, where fragility, resilience, and innovation coexist, and where sustainability cannot be simplified to a formula of managing tourism pressure and environmental conservation.

Drawing on doctoral research conducted in the Greek insular areas, this proposal reflects upon the relationship between islandness, place branding, and sustainability through an interpretive and empirically grounded lens. It argues that moving beyond the dominant “paradise/hell” narrative allows for a more plural and context-sensitive understanding and approach to island development, one that recognizes the interdependence between people, place, and policy.

Conceptual framework

This study builds upon theoretical perspectives from island studies, sustainable development, and place branding, seeking to bridge the gap between symbolic representations and lived experiences. Islandness is approached not merely as a geographical condition, but as a relational and evolving construct that encompasses cultural identity, belonging, and the sense of continuity and constraint that characterise insular life. In this light, islands are conceptualised as lived, permanently inhabited spaces - not seasonal landscapes of private investment and consumption, but environments where everyday practices, memories, and identities co-produce the meanings of place and sustainability.

At the same time, sustainability is interpreted as a multidimensional process balancing ecological integrity, social cohesion, and local agency rather than as a static state. Within this perspective, place branding is perceived as a potential tool—or a process—through which narratives of islandness are conveyed, contested, and reinterpreted, so rendering it more unique in the context of island branding. This multi-layered perspective allows for a reading

of islands as both geographical entities and constructs of the mind, constantly reimagined through social, cultural, and economic interactions.

Methodological approach

The study is based on a mixed methods approach that employs both quantitative and qualitative tools to improve analytical depth and interpretive clarity. The first and crucial step was a thorough and critical review of the relevant literature that continued throughout the research procedure. Then, quantitative data were obtained via a comprehensive large-scale survey assessing perceptions of sustainability, tourism impact, and broader development goals among residents of both island and mainland areas in Greece. Complementary qualitative data were obtained through focus groups – one with island residents and one with mainland residents, allowing for a more to-the-point exploration of place meanings and identity narratives.

Insights from these two datasets were iteratively compared and interpreted to identify both convergences and tensions between imagined and lived understandings of sustainability. This triangulated approach made it possible to detect discursive and experiential differences in how people conceive development, particularly in relation to tourism dependency, landscape transformation, and quality of life.

Key findings

Findings indicate that the imagined and lived dimensions of islandness often diverge. While external representations continue to frame islands as leisure utopias or fragile peripheries, residents express a more balanced view of their territories as both enabling and constraining environments. The perspectives expose the inadequacy of the paradise/hell dichotomy. The empirical evidence supports the need for an interpretive shift toward plural narratives of sustainability, grounded in local realities, sense of belonging, and identity continuity. Such narratives challenge the conventional tourism-centric logic and encourage integrated approaches to policy, planning, and communication.

Discussion

By shifting the discussion towards the meaning of insularity, not only from a theoretical perspective but also bearing in mind its practical dimension, the research aims to contribute to ongoing debates in island studies and sustainability transitions, given that this matter is a quite challenging issue to mitigate. It suggests that the cultural and symbolic dimensions of islands are not peripheral but constitutive of their development trajectories. Acknowledging multiple and sometimes contradictory island narratives allows for a richer understanding of how sustainability is imagined and enacted by different actors.

This rethinking also has implications for destination management and place branding. Rather than reproducing homogenizing “sun-sea-sand” imagery, place communication strategies can draw upon endogenous narratives of care, adaptability, and belonging. The study hereby links theoretical insights to practical considerations for policymakers, planners, and branding practitioners working with island destinations.

This discussion is highly relevant to the conference themes, as it foregrounds the cultural and symbolic dimensions of islands and highlights how alternative narratives can inform more sustainable forms of heritage-sensitive tourism planning. By shifting attention from promotional stereotypes to lived island realities, the paper contributes to ongoing debates on how destinations can develop in ways that respect local identity, cultural continuity, and environmental limits. This paper aligns closely with the conference’s focus on the interlinkages between culture, heritage, tourism, and sustainability, showing how governance, branding practices, and tourism development can better reflect the cultural specificity, vulnerabilities, and resilience of insular communities.

Conclusion

Moving beyond the paradise/hell dichotomy opens conceptual and practical pathways for a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of island development. Islands are not merely sites of environmental fragility or leisure consumption, but lived, permanently inhabited spaces where identity, resilience, and sustainability intersect.



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By bringing residents' and their perspectives into the spotlight, this research proposes that sustainability on islands should be interpreted as a process of maintaining continuity amid change – balancing local identity, respect for places in terms of scenery and environmental protection, along with adaptive capacity. This work concludes that reimagining island narratives through this multidimensional lens offers valuable insights for rethinking tourism planning, sustainable development strategies, and cultural heritage management across island regions in the Mediterranean and beyond.

Keywords: islandness, local community, sustainability, place branding, narratives, island identity, Greek islands



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MARKETING OF URBAN TOURISM DESTINATIONS, SUSTAINABILITY AND THE ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS. THE CASE OF PIRAEUS.

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ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on the marketing of urban tourism destinations with an emphasis on sustainability, examining the city of Piraeus as a case study. More specifically, it investigates the relationship between urban tourism destination marketing strategies and sustainable tourism development, the role of involved stakeholders in shaping sustainable strategies, as well as the importance of stakeholder collaboration for the effective management of the destination.

The contribution of the present study lies in the exploration of the ways in which the individual elements of destination tourism marketing are connected and interact with the principles of sustainability, as well as in the analysis of the role and synergies of stakeholders in the formulation of integrated and effective marketing strategies. At the same time, it highlights the importance of these synergies and the necessary prerequisites required for their achievement. Therefore, it creates a complex framework whose variables (based on previous research) have not been studied in combination. At the same time, beyond the theoretical examination of this framework, its application is carried out in a destination that tends to emerge as an interesting and rising urban tourism destination, such as Piraeus, which until recently had been established as a major Mediterranean port and an industrial city. In addition, for destinations of this type, no relevant studies were identified.

More specifically, the present study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) How is urban destination marketing connected to sustainability, and how can sustainable tourism development of a city be achieved? (2) What is the role of stakeholders in shaping the marketing strategies of an urban destination, and how decisive is their influence in shaping the overall tourism profile of the city? (3) How important are synergies among stakeholders for the more efficient management of urban destination marketing, and what are the main prerequisites for their achievement?

From the review of the relevant literature, the following variables emerged, which concern issues related to a holistic approach to destination marketing, focusing on the role of stakeholders, the importance of sustainability and synergies, as well as the overall destination marketing management:

Destination Marketing and Sustainability: (a) The promotion of sustainability constitutes one of the most decisive trends influencing the present and future of tourism. (b) The creation and promotion of sustainable forms of tourism function as a powerful destination promotion tool, while simultaneously aligning with mild tourism development. (c) The differentiation of the tourism product through sustainable development and the upgrading of infrastructure significantly enhance the socio-economic development of destinations.

Role of Stakeholders: (a) Stakeholders play a critical role in shaping marketing strategies, strengthening identity, and promoting the sustainable development of the destination.

Synergies and Destination Marketing Management: (a) Cooperation among stakeholders enhances destination awareness and facilitates the utilization of available funding resources. (b) Partnerships and synergies significantly strengthen the destination brand and contribute to the achievement of a “collaborative advantage”.

The present study was based on qualitative research and includes sixteen semi-structured interviews with representatives of local government, professional and commercial bodies, cultural organizations, and tourism enterprises. These respondents numerically represent the majority of the city’s stakeholders. Consequently, the results of the present study were based on the views of almost the entire population under study. For data collection, the method of purposive sampling was applied. Data analysis was based on the method of thematic analysis, following a systematic six-stage process: transcription, in-depth examination, coding, grouping of responses, identification of key themes, and interpretation of findings in relation to the research questions.

Regarding the findings, three main thematic axes emerged from the analysis: integrated information and infrastructure upgrading, marketing and sustainability and stakeholder collaboration.

With regard to the research question related to marketing and the importance of sustainability for urban destinations, the study confirmed the relevant literature by highlighting that the promotion of mild tourism experiences can substantially contribute to the sustainability of a destination while simultaneously enhancing its attractiveness. Moreover, the strengthening of existing infrastructure constitutes an important parameter for enhancing destination sustainability, a variable that is also confirmed in the relevant literature. At the same time, the integration of sustainability principles into the culture of all involved stakeholders of the city, as well as more comprehensive information provision to visitors regarding the opportunities offered by the destination, constitute key prerequisites for the incorporation of sustainability into the development strategies of an urban destination—findings that are also confirmed by the relevant literature.

However, the conducted research also revealed new variables, such as the development of new facilities/infrastructure—such as an organized food market in Piraeus—which can function as an important attraction for visitors, offering a more comprehensive tourism experience.

Regarding the research questions concerning the marketing management of urban tourism destinations, the role of stakeholders, and the importance of synergies among them, the study confirmed the relevant literature, emphasizing the decisive role of stakeholders in shaping urban destination marketing. Fundamental prerequisites for achieving optimal effectiveness in destination marketing management include constructive synergies facilitated through multilateral participation, sincere dialogue and consultation, shared objectives, and a unified communication strategy. Nevertheless, a new variable that emerged from the findings concerns the need for central planning and centralized management by a designated body, which will assume overall responsibility for destination management, with the ultimate goal of achieving the maximum possible benefit for all involved parties as well as for the destination itself.



Based on the findings, the study concludes that Piraeus has the potential to emerge as a competitive and autonomous urban tourism destination by combining its unique tourism advantages with strategic stakeholder collaboration and destination marketing oriented toward sustainability and digital transformation. The main proposals include the establishment of a multi-stakeholder DMO, the development of a digital platform and applications for tourism information, as well as the integration of ESG principles and slow tourism practices. These measures are expected to enhance the competitiveness of the city's tourism sector, promote its distinct identity, and attract high-quality and environmentally conscious visitors.

Keywords: urban tourism destination marketing, sustainability, stakeholders, destination management, Piraeus, ESG

BOUTIQUE HOTELS AS CULTURAL AND SUSTAINABLE LUXURY EXPERIENCES IN CONTEMPORARY HOSPITALITY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of boutique hotels in the contemporary hospitality industry, focusing on their contribution to the creation of culturally meaningful, experiential, and sustainable forms of luxury accommodation. The analysis is grounded in the theoretical framework of the experience economy and the evolving conceptualisation of luxury as a human-centred and emotionally driven experience. Rather than being defined solely through tangible attributes such as size, facilities, or star classification, luxury in hospitality is increasingly understood as a relational and subjective construct shaped by guests' expectations, experiences, and cultural backgrounds.

The methodology of the present study is based on a systematic review of the relevant academic literature. More specifically, sixty-one (61) scholarly articles, published between 1994 and 2025, were examined. The selection of these articles was guided by their thematic relevance to boutique hotels, luxury hospitality, the experience economy, the cultural dimension of hospitality, and sustainability. Through a comparative analysis of key arguments and findings, the study seeks to identify dominant theoretical trends, conceptual shifts, and critical issues concerning the role of boutique hotels in the contemporary hospitality landscape.

Within this context, boutique hotels emerge as a distinctive expression of this transformation. The study highlights that boutique hotels are not characterised merely by their limited scale or unique design, but by a holistic hospitality philosophy that prioritises authenticity, aesthetic coherence, personalised service, and strong narrative identity. Their small scale and emphasis on human interaction allow them to function as experiential spaces rather than conventional accommodation providers, offering guests emotionally engaging and culturally embedded experiences.

Particular emphasis is placed on the relationship between boutique hotels, culture, and the arts. Through practices such as adaptive reuse of historic or architecturally significant buildings, integration of local history, and strategic incorporation of art, boutique hotels often act as platforms of cultural storytelling and cultural tourism. In this sense, guests do not simply consume hospitality services but actively participate in culturally charged experiences that foster a deeper connection with place and generate emotional value.

At the same time, the study critically addresses the risks associated with the commodification of culture. When cultural elements are employed solely as branding tools, authenticity may be reduced to aesthetic spectacle, detached from its social and historical context. Authenticity is therefore approached not as an inherent attribute of boutique hotels, but as an outcome of conscious

managerial choices, ethical sensitivity, and meaningful engagement with local communities.

Finally, the paper examines the convergence between luxury and sustainability in boutique hospitality. While traditionally viewed as contradictory, recent research suggests that luxury and sustainability can align around shared values such as quality, care, resilience, and long-term value creation. Boutique hotels, through practices such as adaptive reuse, local sourcing, and cultural integration, are well positioned to promote sustainable and culturally sensitive hospitality models. The study concludes that boutique hotels represent a critical intermediary space where luxury, culture, and sustainability intersect, offering experiences with depth, meaning, and emotional resonance.

Keywords: Boutique hotels; luxury hospitality; cultural experience; sustainability; experience economy; authenticity

IDENTIFYING AND COMPARING REGIONAL POLICY RESPONSES TO TACKLE TOURISM SEASONALITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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ABSTRACT

Tourism seasonality is one of the most significant challenges for coastal destinations, requiring coordinated action from tourism stakeholders. In EU, regional authorities seem to play a critical role in shaping strategic responses and coordinated actions to influence the temporal and spatial distribution of tourism demand. The effective design and implementation of regional policies become essential for strengthening competitiveness and long-term sustainability. Despite extensive research on the impacts of seasonality, there is a notable absence of studies examining the mix of policies adopted at the regional level – an essential perspective for understanding how different strategic approaches emerge, interact and potentially succeed in addressing the issue. Without systematic comparative evidence on the composition of these policies, it becomes difficult to identify which interventions are most effective in managing seasonality.

The analysis investigates how regions structure their policies across programming periods and what these differences reveal about evolving strategies in tourism governance. Based on qualitative assessment of policy documents, the study analyzes and compares the Regional Operational Programs of the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 programming periods across nine Mediterranean countries (Greece, Spain, Italy, France, Portugal, Slovenia, Croatia, Cyprus, and Malta). In this context, a total of 90 regions affected by tourism seasonality were examined to investigate changes in the number and approach of policy measures across the two periods. The study aims to identify the dynamics of policy adoption and the emerging trends in regional tourism development, while also investigating the extent to which regional specifics shape the range of policy interventions and whether they lead to homogeneous or differentiated policy patterns across regions within each country.

The empirical findings confirm the absence of uniform policy distribution among regions in both programming periods. The variation in the number and nature of adopted policies reflects the specific needs and priorities of each region. Consequently, the study underscores the necessity and value of regional-level analysis, as the management of tourism seasonality varies across spatial and administrative terms.

Keywords: Tourism seasonality, NUTS II regions, Mediterranean, policies

CULTURAL PERFORMANCE OF SPANISH REGIONS: A COMPOSITE INDICATOR VIA GOAL PROGRAMMING

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ABSTRACT

This work develops a methodology for assessing cultural performance at the Spanish regional level based on a composite indicator, applied to a total of 24 indicators related to cultural activity, grouped into five key dimensions: Cultural Economy; Cultural Education and Training; Cultural Heritage; Cultural Participation and Access; and Cultural Infrastructure.

In a first phase, a dimension-by-dimension analysis is performed using the net goal programming index for each Autonomous Community. The results reveal significant disparities among regions. Communities such as Galicia and Aragon stand out in education and training, while the Balearic Islands and Navarre excel in heritage, and Extremadura or Castile–La Mancha in cultural infrastructure. By contrast, Andalusia, Aragon, and Castile and León obtain very negative results in key dimensions such as cultural economy, and the Canary Islands, the Balearic Islands, and the Region of Murcia show low participation levels. The Region of Murcia achieves positive results in cultural heritage, but negative values in the rest of the dimensions—especially participation and economy—which affect its overall positioning.

In the second phase, an overall indicator was constructed by aggregating the results by dimension under different weightings (scenarios). In a scenario with equitable weighting, the Region of Murcia ranks 15th of 17 Autonomous Communities, with Navarre, Castile–La Mancha, and Extremadura showing the best indicator values, and Murcia, Andalusia, and the Canary Islands occupying the last positions. In subsequent scenarios, different weights were applied to observe the effect on each Community's relative position under varying parameters. However, the ordering of the ranking does not change, highlighting that, beyond the different weightings considered, there is a fairly stable structure of strengths and weaknesses.

The results of this study could serve as a foundation for decision-making, providing a useful, replicable cultural diagnostic tool based on the Goal Programming (GPI) methodology. Through a synthetic analysis of indicators structured across five dimensions—economy, education, heritage, participation, and cultural infrastructure—it has been possible to quantify and compare the degree of cultural development across Spain’s Autonomous Communities. Unlike other classifications based on perceptions or partial criteria, this proposal offers a flexible evaluation, capable of adapting to different priorities or decision scenarios by assigning differentiated weightings. It also has the advantage of straightforward implementation and easy interpretation.

Among the imitations to consider, the analysis relied on data available in CULTURABase (the system used by the Spanish Ministry of Culture for the storage and dissemination of statistical results related to the cultural sector on the Internet), which implies not having delved into whether all selected indicators were the most suitable or whether others should have been included. Likewise, the analysis focused on the regional scale, limiting knowledge of local or municipal realities—especially relevant in Communities with significant internal heterogeneity. Such a study would in turn be limited by local-level data availability.

This work used only the cultural expenditure of the Autonomous Communities, even though statistics also exist for municipal spending. Including local expenditure is a potential improvement, as it would provide a more complete picture of the public effort in cultural matters in each territory. Finally, no temporal perspective was incorporated to observe each Community’s cultural evolution over time, which would be especially useful for evaluating public policies.

A potential methodological extension would consist of incorporating approaches like that used by the European Commission’s Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor (2019), which employs normalization and standardization by percentiles, equal weights for all pillars, and cluster analysis to group cities with similar profiles. This approach would allow Autonomous Communities to be classified according to cultural typologies, identifying territorial patterns more complex than those derived from a simple ordering by global score. Similarly, exploring different scenarios would open new avenues for analyzing the sensitivity and robustness of the proposed model. In any case, the results presented here should not be interpreted as a definitive, indisputable ranking of cultural performance across the Autonomous Communities of Spain. Furthermore, differences between Communities are often minimal, suggesting the ranking should be interpreted with caution.

In this respect, another possible improvement would be to incorporate expert input into the design and weighting of cultural indicators. The present study is limited to a quantitative approach, with homogeneous goals applied to all Autonomous Communities, which allows for objective comparison but also generates certain divergences with more qualitative classifications. These differences are particularly visible in dimensions such as infrastructure or cultural economy, where Communities like Madrid or Catalonia appear in lower positions than might be suggested by general perception or the international recognition of their cultural facilities (for example, the Prado Museum or the Gabriel García Márquez Library in Barcelona). In this vein, including a panel of experts—comprising cultural managers, academics, institutional officials, and sector professionals—would make it possible to assign weights more closely aligned with symbolic relevance, qualitative value, and international prestige.

The usefulness of the approach lies not only in the classification obtained, but in the analysis process itself. Compared with other methods of measuring culture through composite indicators, this indicator has the advantage of not requiring data normalization, since it works directly with original values relative to a common target. This makes it simpler to apply and interpret, avoids complex statistical transformations, and maintains transparency in reading results. In a context where culture requires clear criteria for management and promotion, such tools are especially valuable.



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Keywords: cultural activities, composite indicators,

IS IT POSSIBLE SPATIAL PLANNING TO QUIDE TOURISM ACTIVITY? ROLES, RESILIENCE AND COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDICATIVE GREEK ISLAND DESTINATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between tourism planning and spatial planning through the examination of indicative island and coastal destinations in Greece: Andros, Hydra, Kea, Mykonos, Spetses, Thira (Santorini), Tinos, Poros and the Municipality of Ermionida. The study assesses the effectiveness of the emerging local spatial planning framework in fulfilling four critical planning roles—regulatory, promotional, creative, and participatory—with the overarching objective of promoting sustainable development and enhancing destination resilience.

The methodological approach combines:

- (a) a systematic review of the institutional framework governing local spatial planning.
- (b) the analysis of formal questions and responses exchanged between the consultants responsible for the preparation of Local and Special Spatial Plans (TPS/EPS) and the Ministry of Environment and Energy; and
- (c) a comparative content analysis of the proposed spatial development scenarios for the seven destinations, as published on the official platform of the Ministry (<https://polsxedia.ypen.gov.gr/>).

The aim is to examine how the four planning roles embedded in Greek spatial legislation are operationalised in practice within the ongoing planning proposals.

In addition, recognising that effective spatial planning and programming require a robust and scientifically grounded population baseline, the paper critically discusses—based on established scientific criteria—the methods used to estimate baseline and planning populations within the technical specifications of TPS/EPS, with particular emphasis on the assessment of carrying capacity.

Overall, the findings indicate that the new planning instruments (TPS/EPS) seek to strengthen the regulatory role of spatial planning by significantly restricting out-of-plan tourism development, which since the 1980s has constituted the dominant spatial model of endogenous, small-scale, “craft-based” tourism and second-home development in Greek island destinations. At the same time, Organised Tourism Development Areas (OTDAs), often promoted as Strategic Tourism Investments, are introduced as a central strategic option for attracting an exogenous capital approach that has so far been limited in island contexts and has generated strong criticism from local communities.

The creative role of spatial planning is primarily expressed through the promotion of alternative and special-interest forms of tourism, linked to incentives for the conservation of natural, cultural, and social assets and the reinforcement of local identity. However, the success of spatial planning ultimately depends on its participatory role, which requires structured and meaningful engagement with local communities to secure social acceptance and to identify non-institutionalised elements of place-based identity.

All the above must be grounded in a scientifically robust approach to the estimation and projection of baseline and planning populations, upon which spatial planning decisions are ultimately based. Such an integrated approach is essential for achieving spatial justice and for fostering sustainable demographic and economic trajectories in Greek island destinations.

Keywords: Spatial (Urban) Planning; Destination Planning; Demographic Change, Resilience, Carrying Capacity

THE GREEK STARTUPS ECOSYSTEM AND THE INTERSECTION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP. A PESTEL ANALYSIS.

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ABSTRACT

In Greece, tourism stands out as one of the cornerstones of the national economy. Regarding startup companies worldwide, a fact that is a need to investigate is what is happening in Greece with start-ups and especially with startups in the field of Greek Tourism, Culture and Leisure. PESTEL analysis is a well-established strategic tool for macro-environmental analysis, used to systematically examine the political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors that influence an organization's operations and strategic direction. Through PESTEL analysis, a comprehensive understanding of the external conditions shaping opportunities and risks is achieved, thereby supporting strategic decision-making processes and long-term organizational sustainability (Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2017; Yüksel, 2012). The following article analyses and examines through PESTEL analysis the current situation regarding startups in Greece, the actions taken by the state and government regarding the above businesses, as well as the incentives that arise. Also attempts to record and analyze the latest developments regarding the startup sector in Greece, their connection with sustainable development and Tourism, which is one of the most important industries in the country, the actions to strengthen the Greek ecosystem and the prospects for the development and establishment of Greece as a country attracting startup businesses from all over the world.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, Innovation, Startup, Entrepreneurship.

CHANIA AS A DESTINATION FOR DIGITAL NOMADS: SYMBIOSIS OR THREAT FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES?

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ABSTRACT

For tourist dependent countries, transnational mobilities that are exemplified by digital nomads, hold the promise of growth and speedy economic recovery through tourism and consumption (Alexandri & Janoschka, 2020). The city of Athens as well as major touristic destinations in the country are undergoing a massive redevelopment by these new actors which uphold the promise of attracting high – spending tourists and affluent (short-term) residents (Pettas et al., 2024). The paper addresses Chania as a well-established destination for digital nomads and analyses the ways such subjectivities formulate their relationship with the city and the local surroundings. First, it traces the phenomenon of remote working arrangements and its mainstreaming after the pandemic by exploring the drivers and motivations of becoming nomadic. Then, it turns its focus on analyzing the particularities of Chania (Georgoula et al., 2019; Zaimakis & Papadaki, 2025) as a destination community and questions whether these flows of tourists-workers initiate a symbiotic relationship or represent a threat to local social fabric. Our contribution unpacks these layered dynamics and situates them within the broader transformation of Athens into a year-round city break destination and Greek periphery as a relatively affordable place for those that come from the Global North (Papageorgiou et al., forthcoming). While tourism withholds the promise of a (short-term) relief for the Greek economy, it simultaneously generates socio-economic challenges — such as pressure on housing prices, spread of seasonal and precarious employment (Gourzis et al., 2022; Gourzis & Gialis, 2025), and the growth of the gig economy as local economies are being transformed to cater the needs of a ‘flat white economy’ on the go.

Keywords: digital nomads, leisure oriented mobilities, Chania

SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS THROUGH VISUAL NUDGES: RESIDENTS' VIEWS ON TECHNOLOGY IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN CHANIA, CRETE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Chania residents' perceptions regarding the role of technology in the local tourism industry. In particular, the paper focuses on the effect of a nudge (visual information) on the decision-making process. The reason for the nudge to be used, was to explore how targeted information can influence perceptions and attitudes towards the integration of technology in tourism industry and to gain a nuanced understanding of the role of technology in tourism from the perspective of local residents.

Through an open qualitative approach, the study explores how the provision of information through visual stimuli (nudge), affects the perceptions of residents of the Chania prefecture, regarding the benefits and challenges associated with the integration of technology in tourism. The research attempts to highlight the differences and similarities in their perceptions, before and after, the use of the "nudge." The "nudge" is a psychological intervention technique that involves making subtle changes to the environment in order to guide people's behavior toward a desired behavior (Weijers et al., 2025). Thaler & Sunstein (2018), in turn, define "nudge" as the characteristics of choice architecture, that influence the decisions people make without changing either the objective benefits or the incentives. By examining the initial perceptions before the nudge, researchers can gain insights into residents' pre-existing beliefs, values and technology regarding technology in tourism. This provides a baseline for understanding how the nudge interacts with these pre-existing factors. It also helps to assess its advantages and disadvantages in its ability to influence people and helps the study to suggest a theoretical approach.

In the research process, the use of nudges can help to better understand the factors that influence people's attitudes and behaviors. Researchers use nudges to examine how different presentations of information (advertisements, messages) influence participants' decisions. In the context of tourism studies, the nudge technique can be used to investigate how the provision of specific information, influences tourists' choices and their willingness to adopt sustainable practices (Yachin et al. 2024).

Methodology

Under this framework, a qualitative research was conducted in the Chania prefecture, which included thirty (30) semi-structured personal interviews with residents from areas at different stages of tourism development (mountainous, coastal, urban center, mountainous mainland). The heterogeneous and uneven pace of tourism development was considered to contribute to the heterogeneity of the sample and lead to more representative empirical findings. During the first part of the interview, respondents were asked to state their understanding of the

concept of technology and its wider use in the tourism industry. At the next stage, respondents were introduced to the "nudge", where visual information was presented in the form of photos showing different technologies and their application in the tourism industry, such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, the Internet of Things, and biometrics. The majority of participants revised their views, allowing the researcher to record the effect of the nudge on their perceptions after the visual information was presented.

Empirical results

The thirty interviews were indexed by the researcher, and then double and independently coded the researcher and another person. Responses were coded into themes according to the questions (benefits, risks, factors). The responses showed both similarities and differences before and after the visual information nudge.

Participants in the qualitative research demonstrated a wide range of perceptions regarding the potential benefits of technology in the tourism industry. Based on participants' responses before the visual information (nudge), the benefits mentioned were related to multiple recipients in the local tourism industry of the Chania region. For example, tourism businesses, visitors, residents, and the host community. More specifically, residents emphasize that technology improves the tourist services provided, contributes to increasing the local community's income, boosts visitor numbers, allows for more effective management of human resources and time, and promotes the tourist image of the destination (Gruescu, Nanu & Tanasie, 2009).

It is worth noting that residents refer to the development of alternative forms of tourism and the promotion of local identity in this particular regional unit. In addition, it was recognized that technological development and digital transformation could serve as tools to enhance competitiveness and sustainability in the tourism industry (Buhalis, 1997). Finally, it is worth noting that the ideas presented focused on the local and human dimensions of tourism, such as strengthening interaction with visitors, spreading income more widely across multiple social strata, strengthening social ties, and promoting cultural extroversion (Buhalis, 2000).

Conversely, after the nudge was introduced, a shift on participants' perceptions towards benefits focusing on the technical impact of technology was observed. The value of technology in automating processes, increasing efficiency, enhancing data security, and managing tourist flows more effectively was demonstrated. The ability of technology to improve resource management and facilitate the processing of large volumes of data was recognized (Gössling, 2020). In addition, a countervailing trend was noted regarding the human-centered dimension of digital transformation, as participants recognized the possibility of weakening human interaction and communication. Key parameters – variables for the different responses given were the participant's level of education, degree of familiarity with the technology in question, personal view of things, and relationship with the tourism industry.

Conclusion

In summary, this study investigated residents' perceptions in the prefecture of Chania, regarding the role of technology in the local tourism industry, noting significant differences before and after the provision of visual information (nudge). Before the nudge was presented, participants focused on benefits that concerned multiple recipients and reinforced the human and local dimension of tourism. In contrast, after the nudge, perceptions shifted towards benefits associated with the technical impact of technology, such as automation, efficiency, and flow management. The practical insights derived from this study, underscore the critical importance of several key issues for effective and sustainable tourism development: the adoption of a human centered approach to tourism planning, the active participation and engagement of the local community, the prioritization of digital literacy initiatives for tourism stakeholders and the provision of robust support mechanisms for local businesses to facilitate their adoption and adaptation to new technologies.

Keywords: Nudge, residents, technology, Crete, perceptions, qualitative research

POLISH TOURISM POLICY TOWARDS CIRCULAR ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

The dynamic development of the tourism in Poland contributes to the fact that the environment is becoming increasingly important as a key resource and tourist attraction, particularly at the regional level. The transformation of tourism towards a more sustainable and more circular pattern is reflected in international documents and initiatives such as the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative and the Global Roadmap for Food Waste Reduction in the Tourism Sector. At the European Union level, guidelines for tourism in line with the principles of the circular economy are included in the European Green Deal and the Circular Economy Action Plan.

In Poland, despite the importance of sustainable development being declared in strategic policy documents, the current tourism policy framework only partially refers to the principles of the sustainability, including those of the circular economy (CE).

The aim of this article is to assess the extent to which circular economy principles formulated in European policies are reflected in national and regional tourism policy documents in Poland. We analyse the national tourism strategy and 16 regional tourism strategies or programs that were in force at the end of December 2025. Using content analysis, we examined the extent to which these documents refer to the circular economy in terms of diagnosis, objectives and measures.

The study identifies gaps in the implementation of circular economy principles in the tourism policy in Poland and formulates proposals for: (1) objectives that should be included in tourism policy, (2) measures to support the transition to circular tourism, and (3) indicators to measure circularity in the tourism sector. The analysis aims to identify actions that could strengthen the resilience, resource efficiency, and long-term sustainability of tourism development in Poland. The results will be further verified in the context of solutions adopted by selected European Union countries.

Keywords: circular economy, tourism policy, sustainable tourism, circularity indicators

DIGITAL NOMADS AS A CATALYST FOR REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN GREECE

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ABSTRACT

Following the COVID-19 pandemic and shifts in international geopolitics, it is now widely accepted that the global labor market has undergone significant transformations. These changes have prompted states, employers, and employees alike to adapt their operational and lifestyle strategies, leading to the emergence of a new category of mobile professionals: digital nomads. By utilizing rapid technological advancements, these individuals are able to work remotely from almost anywhere in the world, often seeking a holistic balance between work and leisure.

Greece has emerged as a prime candidate for this trend, offering several comparative advantages such as a temperate climate, cultural richness, and improving digital infrastructure. Recognizing this shift, the Greek government introduced the Digital Nomad Visa in 2021. Notably, this study moves beyond metropolitan centers like Athens and Thessaloniki, focusing instead on regional units and the catalytic role digital nomads can play in regional development.

Digital nomads differ significantly from traditional tourists as their employment often links to the global gig economy. Primarily, their stay in a single location typically extends from one to six months, and their consumption patterns are more consistent—resembling those of permanent residents rather than seasonal visitors. This creates year-round demand and supply, rather than focusing solely on peak seasons. Such decentralization introduces new sources of capital to regions that often face economic stagnation. However, existing literature warns of potential risks, such as “digital gentrification” and the pressures of the neoliberal order. For the successful integration of nomads into a community, certain prerequisites ought to be met, most notably the availability and reliability of high-speed broadband across all parts of Greece.

This research employs a quantitative approach using a structured questionnaire distributed via online platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn, and Reddit) between March and April 2025. The final sample consisted of 40 participants who either intend to live as digital nomads in Greece or are already settled here. While the sample size is modest, the study provides insightful qualitative and quantitative data regarding trends in spending, challenges, geographic distribution, and overall satisfaction.

The survey was structured into six sections: i). demographics: creating general profiles of the participants, ii). accommodation and experience: categorizing individuals based on their choice between regional areas and metropolitan centers. iii). satisfaction and enjoyment: evaluating Greece’s perceived strengths, iv). challenges of residency: identifying the country’s shortcomings and bureaucratic hurdles, v). economic behavior: analyzing

spending habits, vi). policy proposals: direct feedback on the Digital Nomad Visa and suggestions for improving conditions in Greece.

The findings highlight that while Greece occupies a favorable position, it is essential to transition from a “passive reception” model to an “active attractiveness” strategy. The data suggest four pillars of intervention: a. digital infrastructure: immediate enhancement of connectivity (5G/fiber optics) in all regions (especially in islands and mountainous) is required, b. institutional simplification: digitization and streamlining of bureaucratic procedures needs to be prioritized, c. hospitality infrastructure: enhancing existing co-working spaces and facilitating long-term housing solutions is necessary, d. social inclusion: encouraging communities to create initiatives that promote interaction between digital nomads and local residents should be a primary goal.

In conclusion, digital nomads represent more than just an alternative form of tourism; they are a promising driver of capital movement and cultural exchange. Their presence in less-developed regions can extend the tourist season and transform seasonal resorts into vibrant, year-round hubs. However, for this to succeed, the state needs to address structural issues regarding infrastructure and bureaucracy. By leveraging its natural advantages through targeted political interventions, Greece can become a premier global destination for the digital nomad community.

Keywords: digital nomads, regional economic development, local economy, sustainable tourism, Greece



ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE EXERTED BY GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS (GI) PROTECTION FOR CRAFT AND INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS ON THE ADVANCEMENT AND LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF CULTURAL TOURISM.

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ABSTRACT

Regulation (EU) 2023/2411 of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe was approved, referring to the protection of geographical indications for craft and industrial products with a specific quality, reputation, or other characteristic linked to their Geographical Origin. (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2023/2411/oj/eng>)

The main objectives of the regulation are:

- . To define the necessary rights and obligations of producers with regard to the management of geographical indications,
- . the simple and effective registration of geographical indications in conjunction with the appropriate protection of intellectual property rights,
- . the creation of added value for the products of a region,
- . reliable information and guarantees for products identified by a geographical indication,
- . facilitating effective controls and enforcement of the legislation in force on geographical indications for handicraft and industrial products throughout the European Union, and
- . local development that contributes to the protection of traditional local know-how and cultural heritage.

This last objective is, in fact, linked to the creation of a set of local values and traditions that together form a holistic brand for each region. As local handicraft products document historical use by producers in a community

over periods of time that require the transmission of knowledge and skills between generations, they embody authenticity, local creativity, and timeless values that largely constitute the identity of the wider local ecosystem. Given that this local identity is located and shaped at the center of the triangle "geodiversity-biodiversity-cultural diversity" triangle, it is directly linked to the concept of sustainability of the entire region and the social, cultural, and economic structures that characterize it.

The establishment of geographical indications for artisanal and industrial products can trigger processes of sustainable cultural tourism development in a region only if value chains are created between agri-food, manufacturing, and tourism services that will be shared by each business's customer networks and offer visitors/consumers a holistic experience based on the unified brand of each place. This, of course, requires the development of strong values of cooperation, extroversion, and collective responsibility for the preservation and promotion of the tangible and intangible local cultural heritage.

The establishment of a geographical indication label for handicrafts and industrial products adds another weapon (along with PDO and PGI agricultural and food products) for the creation of solid and attractive brand destinations, as well as for the creation of productive/business clusters in specific places with a focus on cultural heritage and cultural tourism. This paper presents and analyzes specific case studies of good and bad practices in the creation and exploitation of specific local brands for the sustainable development of cultural tourism.

Keywords: Geographical Indications, craftsmanship, branding, cultural tourism