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Introduction

Welcome to the 4th Mediterranean Tourism Research Conference in Malta! It is our great pleasure to welcome you.

It is wonderful to see how far this conference has come and how our community continues to grow, bringing together colleagues, new voices and fresh ideas from across the world.

A conference is about much more than presenting papers. It is about building relationships, inspiring one another and creating opportunities for ideas to develop into meaningful research and real-world impact.

This year, we are welcoming an increasingly international community of scholars, with more research being presented from further afield and contributions attracting participants from across the world. This growing global engagement enriches our conversations, broadens our perspectives and strengthens the contribution of Mediterranean tourism research to the wider international agenda.

The diverse and international range of research being presented enhances our Mediterranean tourism research community, connecting with scholars worldwide and creating new opportunities for exchange, learning and collaboration.

An exciting development in this fourth edition is our commitment to investing in the next generation of tourism researchers. Alongside our established conference programme, we are introducing a dedicated writing retreat, a student research competition and a hackathon.

These initiatives reflect our commitment to investing in early-career researchers, giving new talent a platform and helping shape the future research agenda.

Equally important is our ambition to strengthen the dialogue between academia and industry. By bringing researchers and tourism practitioners together in dynamic discussions, we aim to foster meaningful collaboration and the co-creation of evidence-based knowledge and best practices that can make a real difference to tourism destinations, businesses and communities.

Thank you for being part of this growing community. We are grateful to the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation and to Andrew Muscat and his team for making this dream a reality.

We look forward to sharing ideas, making new connections and enjoying the discussions together.

A very warm welcome to the 4th Mediterranean Tourism Research Conference and Forum in Malta.

The conference Chair

Dimitrios Buhalis, Bournemouth University, UK

The conference Co-Chairs,

Filipa Brandão, University of Aveiro, Portugal

Leonidas Efthymiou, University of Nicosia, Cyprus

Marie-Louise Mangion, University of Malta

Malta, 14 November 2026

1. Digital Experiences, Smart Tourism and Innovation

Digital Transformation and Resilience of Tourism MSMEs in the Mediterranean: A Systematic Literature Review

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Keywords | Mediterranean tourism, tourism MSMEs, digital transformation, resilience, technology adoption, policy support.

Introduction | The Mediterranean tourism sector is confronting significant challenges arising from rapid technological change, shifting consumer expectations, and growing exposure to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) constitute more than 90% of tourism businesses in Europe (Diaz et al., 2025), so the sector's capacity to respond depends heavily on their strategic adaptation and organisational resilience. Yet a persistent gap separates the strategic recognition of digital transformation from the practical capacity to implement it. Senior managers in Greek tourism SMEs report low satisfaction with the implementation of new digital technologies and concern about the skills required to manage them.

Many firms lack a clear understanding of which tools add value (Mitroulis & Kitsios, 2019); resource limitations further constrain smaller firms (Diaz et al., 2025). This systematic literature review examines how digital transformation relates to resilience and recovery among Mediterranean tourism MSMEs. Five research questions address firm characteristics and resilience needs; the impacts of shocks on performance, operations and workforce outcomes; the capabilities and resources associated with recovery; the barriers, enablers and skills shaping technology adoption; and the technologies, implementation approaches and policy supports discussed in the literature.

Theoretical background | Within the Mediterranean tourism context, digital transformation serves a dual purpose. First, it operates as a strategic response to everyday competitiveness by integrating digital technologies and data into markets, production processes, and business ecosystems (Mitroulis & Kitsios, 2019). Mediterranean tourism SMEs, for instance, have adopted web applications and QR code-enabled digital totems within a "phygital" model that combines physical and digital resources to enrich visitor experiences (Baratta et al., 2022). Second, digitalisation contributes to crisis management and resilience-building by enabling firms to adapt their operations during disruption and to support broader social and economic recovery (Baratta et al., 2022). Adoption, however, is shaped by regional cultural norms, economic constraints and infrastructural conditions that distinguish this setting from broader global patterns. Mediterranean cultures often display collectivistic tendencies that encourage collaborative approaches to technology integration, and although European Union initiatives promote smart and sustainable tourism in line with green and digital agendas, resource-constrained MSMEs frequently encounter difficulties in translating these ambitions into practice (Diaz et al., 2025). The review therefore examines resilience in relation to the interaction of firm characteristics, shock exposure, internal resources, technology adoption processes, and the surrounding policy environment.

Methodology | The review follows the PRISMA 2020 framework (Page et al., 2021), using explicit eligibility criteria, transparent screening and standardised extraction and synthesis procedures. Scopus served as the sole information source. The Boolean query combined four concept groups: sectoral focus, business type, resilience-related terms, and digital or innovation-related terms. The Mediterranean dimension was applied during screening rather than in the search string, to avoid excluding relevant studies prematurely.

Eligible studies were peer-reviewed, English-language publications from 2015 onwards that examined tourism or hospitality MSMEs in Mediterranean contexts, using qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods or configurational designs, or structured reviews. The search returned 200 records, reduced to 194 by language, 170 by date range, and 147 by peer review; no duplicates were identified. Title and abstract screening yielded 22 studies for full-text assessment, of which 17 met the final criteria. The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT 2018) was used to assess confidence in the evidence rather than to exclude studies mechanically. Given the heterogeneity of contexts, designs and outcome measures, a narrative and thematic synthesis aligned with the five research questions was adopted, with quantitative findings interpreted as context-bound associations unless study designs supported stronger causal inference.

Findings | The 17 studies were published between 2019 and 2025, peaking in 2024 (29.4%). The evidence is concentrated in Greece (41.2%), Spain (23.5%), Italy (17.6%) and Cyprus (17.6%), and is dominated by journal articles (70.6%) and quantitative designs (41.2%). Digital transformation is the leading topic (41.2%), followed by crisis and resilience (23.5%), while limited generalisability is reported in 70.6% of studies. Tourism MSMEs emerge as economically significant yet structurally vulnerable, with limited financial reserves, restricted credit access, centralised decision-making and low digital literacy; financing difficulties are prominent in Greece and Cyprus (Toudas et al., 2024; Prodromou et al., 2024). Shocks had strong effects on revenues, operations, and employment: during the pandemic, sales in some tourism SMEs fell by around 50% in 2020 compared with 2019, approximately one quarter of firms closed, and around 60% experienced inactivity linked to mobility restrictions. The smallest firms suffered most, although some explored online channels and new niches (García-Santiago, 2022). Resilience and recovery are associated with financial flexibility, managerial capability, adaptability, digital competence, organisational learning and access to external networks and institutional support; greater digital maturity is associated with stronger crisis response (Doukidis et al., 2024). Technology adoption is constrained by cost, limited expertise, weak infrastructure and resistance to change, but enabled by leadership commitment, organisational readiness, training and supportive policy frameworks (Diaz et al., 2025; Dragotis & Karayanni, 2025). Implementation appears gradual, phased and non-linear, with government grants acting as catalysts (Chatzifoti et al., 2025).

Contributions and implications | The review contributes by integrating fragmented evidence across resilience, shocks, capabilities, technology adoption and policy support in Mediterranean tourism MSMEs. It suggests that resilience is best understood as a dynamic capability, and that digital transformation should be treated as a strategic and organisational process rather than a purely technical one, since digitalisation does not automatically generate resilience. For policymakers and destination stakeholders, the findings imply moving beyond narrow crisis relief towards integrated support, including accessible finance, targeted advisory services, digital and managerial training, innovation incentives and implementation pathways reflecting the realities of small firms (Sánchez-Bayón, 2023). Policy effectiveness depends on the visibility, accessibility and alignment of support with MSME realities. MSME managers should treat digitalisation as part of broader capability development, investing in skills, organisational learning and technologies that create clear operational and customer value.

Conclusion | The review indicates that digital transformation can strengthen tourism MSME resilience, but its effectiveness depends on the alignment of firm capabilities, implementation pathways and policy support within specific regional contexts. Because the evidence base is small, geographically concentrated and context-specific, the findings should be interpreted as patterns grounded in Mediterranean contexts rather than universal claims. Future research should pursue broader geographic coverage, longitudinal and comparative designs, and stronger conceptual integration of digital transformation, sustainability and resilience.

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Digital Crisis Communication and Coordination in Medical Tourism: Multi-Actor Perspectives from the Trakya Region

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Keywords | Medical tourism, digital crisis communication, reputation management, risk communication, governance capacity, Trakya

Introduction | Medical tourism actors may face safety concerns that disrupt planned travel and clinical complaints that circulate online, raising questions about patient information, coordination, and public response. Siddoo et al. (2024) identify communication, medical service planning, and stakeholder collaboration as core competencies of medical travel facilitators. Jong and Goossen (2025) call for clearer communication responsibilities across tourism actors and crisis phases. Yet how responsibility, information assessment, and joint action are distributed among medical tourism actors during digitally amplified crises remains underexplored. Linking crisis communication and governance perspectives, this study asks how providers, an intermediary, and a public authority describe digital communication and coordination when crises disrupt medical travel or threaten destination reputation. Trakya, on Türkiye's EU land border with Greece and Bulgaria, provides the regional setting.

Theoretical background | Reynolds and Seeger's (2005) Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) Model guides analysis of reassurance, changing information needs and uncertainty. Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) informs responsibility, reputational threat and stakeholder protection.

Moving from organisational response to inter-organisational governance, Christensen et al. (2016) distinguish coordination capacity from analytical capacity, while Poppo and Zenger's (2002) relational governance concept helps interpret trust-based coordination alongside formal arrangements. These complementary frameworks guide interpretation; the study does not test theory or communication effectiveness.

Methodology | This exploratory qualitative study included seven purposively selected participants from six organisations: two representatives of an authorised medical travel intermediary (P1–P2), representatives of three hospitals and one dental polyclinic (P3–P6), and one provincial public health authority representative (P7). The sampling frame combined the Ministry of Health's 2025 health tourism authorisation records (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Health, 2025) with the Trakya Development Agency's unpublished regional medical tourism administrative records for 2025. All eligible provider organisations were invited. Five hospitals and three oral and dental healthcare organisations met the criteria; three hospitals and one dental polyclinic participated. Representatives of the authorised intermediary and a purposively selected provincial public health authority in an area with substantial medical tourism activity were also invited and participated. According to the Agency's unpublished 2025 administrative records, each participating hospital served at least 50 international patients monthly on average and the dental polyclinic approximately 15. Consistent with information-power reasoning (Malterud et al., 2016), adequacy was assessed against the focused aim, participants' active international-patient experience, the theoretically informed design, and coverage of the three actor positions. The sample supports analytical comparison rather than statistical representation or full theoretical saturation.

Data collected in April–June 2026 comprised three recorded interviews (P1, P3, P7) and four single-round written responses (P2, P4–P6) using actor-specific semi-structured guides. As written responses allowed no follow-up probing, they were treated as less interactive accounts (Opdenakker, 2006). Data were collected and analysed in Turkish; reporting text and selected extracts were translated into English after analysis. P1 addressed a media-statement scenario; P2–P7 responded to actor-adapted versions of an international patient's online post about a postoperative complication. Scenario responses represented intended, not observed, actions.

Iterative thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases. Initial codes drew on the research question, guides and sensitising theoretical concepts; additional codes were generated inductively. The first author coded the complete Turkish dataset and developed the code list and candidate themes. The second author reviewed the code list, supporting extracts, theme definitions and findings; differences were resolved through discussion. Three themes emerged. These are disrupted medical travel and reassurance, rapid contact and uneven preparedness, and patient support, public statements and country reputation. Experiences, practices, evaluations and scenario-based intentions remained distinct and P1–P2 represented one organisation. Ethical approval was granted by Trakya University's Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee on 13 March 2026 (2026/03.34); written and verbal consent was obtained.

Findings | Disrupted medical travel and reassurance. P1 linked earthquake-related online coverage to safety concerns and cancellations. In separate accounts concerning conflict outside Türkiye, P1 and P6 associated online news with cancellations or postponements and described social-media or direct updates to reassure patients. **Rapid contact and uneven preparedness.** P1–P2 described rapid coordination through WhatsApp, personal relationships and longstanding collaboration despite no written crisis plan. P4 distinguished telephone/WhatsApp contact from email used for formal records. P5 reported difficulty tracing approvals across parallel WhatsApp groups, echoing record-keeping concerns (Morris et al., 2021). P7 described daily news scanning without rapid digital early warning; reporting responsibilities were clear, but clinical review could take weeks. **Patient support, public statements and country reputation.** P1 allocated clinical statements to providers and non-clinical arrangements to the intermediary. In the complication scenario, P2 proposed patient contact, clinical coordination and joint announcements; P3 prioritised resolving the patient's problem; P4 placed verification before a communication decision; P6 emphasised an authorised spokesperson and confidentiality; and P7 located public statement authority at ministry level. Across these accounts, several participants prioritised patient support, while views differed over whether, when and by whom public communication should occur. P1, P2 and P4 connected organisational crises with Türkiye's wider medical tourism reputation.

Contributions and implications | The findings connect crisis communication, coordination and anticipated reputational harm without treating them as stages of one crisis. CERC helps interpret reassurance under uncertainty, SCCT illuminates stakeholder protection and responsibility. Relational governance helps interpret reliance on trust and information exchange, while P7's account illustrates analytical capacity and the temporal constraints of reliable assessment. Practical priorities include linking monitoring to notification, defining contact and spokesperson roles, documenting inter-organisational decisions, protecting confidentiality and maintaining post-treatment communication. Digital crisis communication in medical tourism therefore extends beyond organisational messaging to coordination of patient support, information assessment and public response.

Conclusion | Digital crisis communication in medical tourism involves reassurance about travel, cross-border patient support, traceable inter-organisational decisions and choices about public communication. Findings reflect a small, purposively bounded regional sample; patients and foreign authorities were not interviewed, and scenario responses were intended rather than observed. Communication effectiveness, destination-image change and travel behaviour were not independently assessed. Future research should follow actual crises across organisational and national boundaries and include patients and foreign authorities.

AI use declaration | ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5.6 Sol) supported summaries of cited articles supplied by the authors, translation of manuscript text from Turkish into English, and language editing. The authors checked all AI-assisted content, verified the cited sources, and take responsibility for the final text.

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The AI-Ready Traveler: How AI Perceptions Shape Continuous Use and Word-of-Mouth in Independent Trip Planning

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Keywords | Artificial Intelligence (AI); Travel Planning; UTAUT; Performance Expectancy; Continuous Usage; Word of Mouth (WOM); Tourism Technology Adoption

Introduction | Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming the tourism industry and the way travellers plan their trips (Li et al., 2024; Topsakal, 2025). Whereas traditional travel planning relied on travel agents, guidebooks, search engines, and social media platforms, recent advances in generative AI have introduced intelligent systems capable of providing personalized recommendations, synthesizing information from multiple sources, and generating customized travel itineraries.

Despite the growing availability of AI technologies, travellers differ considerably in their willingness to adopt and continuously use these tools (Huy et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). While some integrate AI into multiple planning stages, others remain hesitant or use it occasionally. Understanding the factors that encourage continued use and recommendation behavior is particularly important because these outcomes reflect long-term engagement with AI technologies beyond initial adoption.

This study investigates the determinants of intentions to continue using AI and to recommend it to others in the context of independent travel planning. Building on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), the study extends the framework by distinguishing between general perceptions of AI and tourism-specific evaluations of AI performance. The research contributes to tourism technology literature by explaining how broad attitudes toward AI influence travel-related behavioral outcomes through perceived performance benefits.

Theoretical background | The study is grounded in the UTAUT model developed by Venkatesh et al. (2003). UTAUT identifies four primary determinants of technology adoption: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions. In the empirical model, effort expectancy and facilitating conditions were combined into a single construct (FCEE), reflecting users' perceived ease and capability of using AI across everyday contexts.

Previous studies have successfully applied UTAUT to explain AI adoption across multiple domains, including tourism (Budhathoki et al., 2024; Huy et al., 2024; Venkatesh, 2022). However, most tourism studies treat all UTAUT constructs as context-specific. This study proposes a different perspective by distinguishing between domain-general and domain-specific perceptions. Effort expectancy, facilitating conditions, and social influence are conceptualized as general perceptions developed through cumulative AI experiences across multiple contexts. In contrast, performance expectancy is treated as a tourism-specific evaluation reflecting the perceived usefulness of AI in travel planning tasks.

The conceptual model positions performance expectancy as a mediating mechanism linking general AI perceptions to tourism-specific behavioral outcomes. The model hypothesizes that effort expectancy, facilitating conditions, and social influence affect performance expectancy, which subsequently affects continuous usage intentions and WOM recommendations. In addition, the general perceptions of AI are expected to have direct effects on both outcomes. The model also incorporates a degree of self-planning as an individual behavioral characteristic that may shape AI usage patterns.

Methodology | The study employed a quantitative research design based on a self-administered online questionnaire distributed through a professional survey panel in Israel. Data were collected during December 2025, resulting in a final sample of 501 respondents. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents received incentive points through the survey company upon completion of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first collected demographic information. The second examined travel behavior. The third measured AI usage patterns and general AI perceptions, including effort expectancy, facilitating conditions, and social influence. The final section assessed tourism-related AI evaluations, including performance expectancy, continuous usage intention, and WOM recommendation intentions. All items were measured using five-point Likert scales.

Data analysis followed a two-step approach. First, measurement reliability and validity were assessed through confirmatory factor analysis. Second, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized relationships among the study constructs. s the study employs a cross-sectional design, continuance usage is examined through self-reported intentions rather than observed behavior over time.

Findings | The results provide strong support for the proposed model. The combined construct of effort expectancy and facilitating conditions (FCEE) was positively associated with performance expectancy ($\beta = 0.417$, $p < .001$), indicating that perceived ease of use and available resources jointly contribute to perceptions of AI usefulness in travel planning. Similarly, social influence significantly affected performance expectancy ($\beta = 0.382$, $p < .001$), indicating that encouragement from important others shape perceptions of AI effectiveness.

Performance expectancy emerged as the strongest predictor of continuous usage intention ($\beta = 0.745$, $p < .001$). Social influence also positively affected continuous usage ($\beta = 0.167$, $p < .001$). However, effort expectancy and facilitating conditions did not have a direct effect on continued AI use, suggesting that their influence operates primarily through performance expectancy.

Regarding WOM recommendation, performance expectancy again demonstrated the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.835$, $p < .001$), while social influence maintained a significant positive impact ($\beta = 0.178$, $p < .01$). Similar to the findings for continuous usage, effort expectancy and facilitating conditions did not directly influence recommendation intentions.

Degree of trip self-planning was negatively associated with continuous AI usage (β = -0.058, p < .001). Given the reverse coding of this variable, this finding indicates that travelers who plan their trips more independently report slightly stronger intentions to continue using AI for travel planning.

Contributions and implications | This study contributes to tourism and technology adoption research in several important ways. First, it extends the UTAUT framework by distinguishing between domain-general AI perceptions and domain-specific performance evaluations. This distinction offers a more nuanced explanation of how broad AI attitudes are translated into tourism-related behaviors.

Second, the findings establish performance expectancy as a central mediating mechanism connecting general AI perceptions to behavioral outcomes. This highlights the importance of perceived usefulness as the key driver of both continued usage and recommendation intentions.

From a practical perspective, tourism organizations, AI developers, and destination marketers should emphasize the tangible benefits of AI tools in improving travel planning efficiency, organization, and decision-making. Marketing strategies should leverage social influence through testimonials, and peer recommendations. Furthermore, ensuring intuitive design, accessibility, and supportive infrastructures remains important because these factors enhance performance perceptions that ultimately drive continued use and advocacy.

Conclusion | AI is becoming an increasingly important component of independent travel planning. The findings indicate that travelers' intentions to continue using and recommending AI tools are strongly associated with perceived performance benefits and social influence. While ease of use and facilitating conditions remain important, their effects operate indirectly through performance expectancy. By extending the UTAUT framework and distinguishing between general AI perceptions and tourism-specific evaluations, the study provides a deeper understanding of AI adoption in tourism. The findings offer valuable theoretical insights and practical guidance for the design, promotion, and implementation of AI-powered travel planning tools that encourage sustained engagement and positive user advocacy.

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Beyond Price Positioning: Uncovering Experiential Narratives in Marrakech Restaurant Reviews Using BERTopic

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Keywords| Restaurant price positioning, Gastronomic tourism, Online reviews, BERTopic, Experiential narrative salience, Marrakech

Introduction | Gastronomy has become an increasingly important component of destination experiences, extending beyond food consumption to encompass cultural discovery, authenticity, sensory engagement and social interaction (Kivela & Crotts, 2005; Richards, 2021). Restaurants therefore constitute more than places of consumption but they are spaces where culinary, cultural, atmospheric and relational dimensions of a destination are experienced and communicated. At the same time, restaurant price has traditionally been examined through perceived value, price fairness, quality evaluations, satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Konuk, 2019; Xia et al., 2004; Zeithaml, 1988). Less attention has been paid to how restaurant price positioning is associated with the experiential dimensions that tourists themselves choose to highlight in online reviews.

This gap is particularly relevant in Mediterranean destinations, where gastronomic offerings often combine local culinary heritage, cultural authenticity, contemporary experiences and differentiated price positions. The study explores experiential narratives in TripAdvisor reviews of Marrakech restaurants and considers how these narratives can be examined in relation to the price information available for a subset of establishments. It does not assume that price determines the experience. Instead, price information is treated as a potentially useful contextual descriptor, with the limitations of its coverage and categorisation explicitly acknowledged.

Theoretical background | The study builds on a multidimensional understanding of gastronomic experiences, in which culinary, cultural, atmospheric, relational and participatory dimensions coexist (Kivela & Crotts, 2005; Richards, 2021). It also draws on research showing that price influences consumer perceptions of value, quality and fairness, while recognising that price positioning can represent a broader contextual characteristic of the restaurant offering (Konuk, 2019; Rita et al., 2023). Online reviews make it possible to move beyond predefined evaluation dimensions and examine the themes that emerge directly from consumers' narratives. Recent advances in contextualised topic modelling, particularly BERTopic, provide an appropriate approach for identifying semantic clusters within large textual corpora (Grootendorst, 2022). The research gap lies at the intersection of these perspectives: although price and gastronomic experience have been widely studied separately, little is known about the distribution of experiential narratives according to restaurant price positioning. Accordingly, this study adopts an associative and exploratory perspective, treating price positioning as a contextual variable rather than as a causal determinant of the experience.

Methodology | The study uses a large-scale corpus of TripAdvisor reviews covering restaurants located in Marrakech. The dataset comprises 170,130 reviews from 1,711 restaurants, collected between 16 October 2005 and 7 December 2025. Language detection identified 168,975 English-language reviews, which constituted the corpus used for the in-depth textual analysis.

Price-range information was available for 588 restaurants, while 1,123 establishments did not provide usable price metadata. BERTopic was applied to the English-language corpus to identify recurring experiential themes. The model initially generated 15 topics, including an outlier topic (Topic -1), and 14 substantive thematic groups.

These included service and hospitality, Moroccan cuisine and authenticity, rooftop and riad atmosphere, international culinary diversity, cooking classes, distinctive culinary experiences, iconic restaurant settings, and social and ethical gastronomy. The automatically generated themes were subsequently subjected to human validation through examination of representative terms and reviews, assessment of semantic proximity and identification of thematic redundancies. The validated themes were then cross-referenced with the available restaurant price categories. The analysis remains descriptive and exploratory. The “Moderate” and “Expensive” labels refer to the same establishments and therefore cannot be interpreted as independent price segments. The analysis does not test differences in topic prevalence between independent groups and does not estimate a causal effect of price on the experience.

Findings | The results identified fourteen substantive experiential themes in the review corpus. These themes reflect the multidimensional character of restaurant experiences in Marrakech, including service and hospitality, culinary authenticity, restaurant atmosphere, culinary diversity, participatory activities and other distinctive gastronomic experiences.

The thematic analysis indicates that multiple experiential dimensions are represented in tourists’ narratives. However, because price metadata are incomplete and the “Moderate” and “Expensive” labels overlap, the available evidence does not support a robust comparison of experiential profiles across distinct price segments. Any apparent convergence across these labels should therefore be interpreted as a feature of the available descriptive data, rather than proof that the underlying price segments have equivalent experiential profiles.

Cooking-class narratives emerged as a potentially distinctive theme in the corpus. Nevertheless, their apparent distribution across the available price labels should not be interpreted as evidence that cooking classes are systematically associated with either budget-friendly or premium positioning without a clearly defined unit of analysis and a verified comparison using non-overlapping categories. The present findings establish the presence of this experiential theme, but do not establish a systematic relationship between its prevalence and restaurant price positioning.

Overall, the strongest supported finding is the diversity of experiential narratives in the Marrakech review corpus. The association between those narratives and restaurant price positioning remains a question for further analysis using consistent price measures and better coverage of restaurant-level metadata.

Contributions and implications | The study makes three contributions. First, it extends restaurant pricing research beyond its dominant focus on fairness, perceived value, satisfaction and behavioural responses by considering price positioning as an analytical context for examining experiential narratives.

Second, it contributes to gastronomic tourism research by demonstrating how culinary, cultural, atmospheric, relational and participatory dimensions can coexist across price positions. The findings particularly challenge a simple opposition between affordable authenticity and premium exclusivity.

Third, the study contributes methodologically to user-generated content research by combining large-scale BERTopic analysis with human thematic validation and establishment-level price information.

For restaurant managers, the findings suggest that price positioning should be considered alongside the experiential value proposition communicated through cuisine, hospitality, atmosphere, cultural identity and participatory activities. The strong convergence around Moderate and Expensive positioning also indicates that price alone may not provide sufficient differentiation. Cooking classes, in contrast, illustrate how participatory experiences may support both accessible and premium positioning strategies.

For destination stakeholders, the findings highlight the diversity of gastronomic experiences available in Marrakech and suggest that destination promotion should recognise multiple configurations of culinary value rather than focusing exclusively on either haute cuisine or traditional authenticity.

Conclusion | This study demonstrates the value of examining restaurant price positioning through the experiential narratives generated by tourists themselves. Across a large corpus of Marrakech TripAdvisor reviews, BERTopic identifies fourteen substantive experiential themes whose distributions across available price labels reveal convergence rather than a straightforward price–experience hierarchy.

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted cautiously. Price information is available for only 588 of the 1,711 restaurants, the Moderate and Expensive categories overlap, and the analysis is limited to TripAdvisor reviews from Marrakech.

Future research could combine continuous pricing information with sentiment, emotion and qualitative analysis, as well as compare destinations and platforms. Overall, the study proposes an associative perspective in which price positioning provides a contextual lens for understanding what tourists choose to remember and recount about gastronomic experiences.

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Smart Tourism enabled consumer choice: A CGE analysis of Malta

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Keywords | Smart tourism, Computable General Equilibrium (CGE), Imperfect competition, Tourism firm, Hotel sector, Malta

Introduction | Smart tourism (ST) destinations use interconnected digital technologies, data, and platforms to improve destination processes and create stakeholder value (Buhalis, 2020). They operate as socio-technical systems in which digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence, institutional arrangements, and value co-creation reshape destination management and tourist experiences (Gursoy et al., 2024).

Traditional tourism distribution relied on travel agencies (TAs) and tour operators (TOs), which pre-negotiated bulk rates and room allotments and compared hotel offers before packaging accommodation for tourists. Smartness has altered this distribution structure. Online travel agencies (OTAs) and meta-search platforms reduce search frictions by allowing tourists to identify and compare accommodation providers within a common digital environment (Xie & Lee, 2020). Digital platforms and OTAs also operate as open, double-sided networks that move beyond static packaging by providing one-stop search access across a wider range of suppliers (Buhalis et al., 2023).

Physical market presence therefore does not necessarily imply equivalent visibility to tourists. Under imperfect competition greater discoverability can expand the effective competitive set and place downward pressure on market power and markups (Li et al., 2013).

ST research emphasises digital ecosystems, technology adoption, service transformation, and destination management (Buhalis et al., 2023). While economy-wide tourism models typically represent technological change through demand, productivity, or cost channels (Li et al., 2013). The role of digital visibility as a mechanism linking smart tourism to competitive exposure remains comparatively underdeveloped within economy-wide modelling.

This study develops a computable general equilibrium (CGE) framework that distinguishes the physical number of tourism firms from the effective competitive set visible to tourists. Malta provides the empirical setting because of tourism's macroeconomic importance and its strong intersectoral linkages (Kersan-Škabić, 2026).

Theoretical background | The analysis builds on an imperfect competition in which firms set prices as an endogenous markup over marginal cost. Markup revenues finance fixed production costs, while free entry imposes a zero-profit condition. Under the Cournot-type benchmark, market power depends on the effective number of competitors and perceived demand elasticity. A larger competitive set therefore reduces firms' ability to sustain high markups (Li et al., 2013).

Firms are represented as identical competitors facing common market demand conditions. This assumption becomes restrictive in digitally mediated markets because firms may differ substantially in consumer visibility. Digital platforms mediate access to information, distribution, and demand, while power imbalances within platform ecosystems may constrain smaller firms' access to these resources (Samadi et al., 2026).

ST extension introduces visibility, VIS, as a determinant of the effective competitive set. Digital information, distribution, and booking technologies can increase the discoverability and comparability of existing providers without requiring new hotel entry (Leung, 2019). Effective competition in the Hotels and Restaurants (HR) sector depends on benchmark number of effective competitors, endogenous entry/exit associated with sectoral output, and changes in VIS.

Effective competitive structure in the HR sector is represented as:

$$N_{HR}^{eff} = N_{HR}^{base}\left(\frac{Q_{HR}}{Q_{HR}^{base}}\right) VIS$$

where N_{HR}^{base} denotes the benchmark number of competitors and N_{HR}^{eff} denotes the effective competitive set after adjustments in firm entry and digital visibility. Under the free-entry assumption, the number of active firms change in proportion to industry-level output. $\frac{Q_{HR}}{Q_{HR}^{base}}$ captures the endogenous adjustment in firm numbers as HR output changes relative to its benchmark level. VIS captures changes in effective competitive exposure arising from improved information, search and discoverability.

At the benchmark, $\frac{Q_{HR}}{Q_{HR}^{base}}$ and VIS is set as 1. An increase in VIS expands the effective competitive set without requiring an equivalent increase in the physical number of accommodation establishments. Under the Cournot condition, this increase in effective competition places downward pressure on the endogenous markup. Changes in profitability can subsequently induce further entry/exit, allowing the number of firms to adjust endogenously through the free-entry mechanism.

Visibility enters the model as an information and market-structure mechanism rather than solely as a tourism-demand or productivity shock.

Methodology | A comparative-static CGE model of Malta is used to trace tourism-sector changes through production, factor markets, trade, and inter-industry linkages (Lofgren et al., 2002). The HR sector is first represented under a competitive benchmark and then extended to incorporate endogenous markups, fixed costs, and free entry. Smart-tourism scenarios vary VIS and examine resulting changes in competition, markups, firm entry, sectoral activity, and wider general-equilibrium outcomes. Visibility scenarios are also combined with tourism-demand and operating-cost mechanisms.

Empirical calibration proceeds in two stages. First, establishment-level data from the Malta Tourism Authority will be used to estimate accommodation-market concentration (Malta Tourism Authority, 2026). Ownership-adjusted market shares will generate a Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) (Nababan et al., 2023), from which an equivalent number of symmetric competitors is derived as $N_{HR}^{base} = \frac{1}{HHI}$ (Solarin, 2025). Alternative ownership, operational, and activity classifications will provide robustness checks.

Second, where Malta-specific causal estimates are unavailable, structured expert elicitation will inform plausible changes in VIS and operating-cost efficiencies. The HHI calibrates the benchmark competitive structure and empirical/expert evidence informs smart-tourism parameters. Entry and exit remain endogenous within the CGE model.

Findings | Initial simulations indicate that increasing VIS expands the effective competitive set and reduces the endogenous HR-sector markup. These effects propagate beyond hotel pricing as changes in profitability, output, and entry interact with tourism demand, factor markets, and inter-industry linkages. The magnitude of these effects will depend on the Malta-specific benchmark concentration and empirically justified changes in VIS.

Contributions and implications | The study contributes by introducing effective competitive visibility into an economy-wide tourism model and linking smart-tourism analysis with industrial organisation. It distinguishes physical firm numbers from effective competitive exposure and combines micro-level market-concentration evidence with CGE modelling. This provides a framework for examining how smartness may influence tourism not only through demand or productivity, but also through competition and pricing behaviour.

Conclusion | Digital visibility and competitive exposure. Preliminary results suggest that greater visibility can influence markups, firm behaviour, and wider economic outcomes. Ongoing HHI calibration and structured expert elicitation will support empirically grounded scenarios for assessing these effects in Malta.

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Co-Planning with AI in Travel: Personalisation, Control, Trust and Algorithmic Visibility

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Keywords| Generative AI, Co-Planning, Personalization, User Control, Tourist Gaze, Algorithmic Visibility, Trust

Introduction| Travel planning is a time-consuming process that entails searching for information and comparing options. Generative AI facilitates the evaluation of route, transportation, accommodation, and pricing options by creating personalized plans based on user preferences and constraints (Shin et al., 2025). The integration of AI into travel decisions can also influence user control, autonomy, trust, and the visibility of options (Seyfi et al., 2025). While existing research focuses on AI adoption and acceptance (Ali et al., 2023), continued usage (Arora et al., 2025), overcoming language barriers (Kundan et al., 2025), and cognitive-utilitarian dimensions (Halibas et al., 2026), relational and resistance-based dimensions have received limited attention. This study employs a qualitative approach to examine how tourists experience control, trust, and algorithmic visibility in AI-assisted travel planning.

Theoretical background | In AI-assisted travel planning, personalization emerges as travel plans are shaped by users' information, preferences, and feedback (Ali et al., 2023). This process raises questions about how control is shared between users and AI systems. Users may resist AI recommendations when they perceive a loss of freedom, questioning, modifying, or rejecting unsuitable suggestions (Kim et al., 2027). AI may also broaden exploration by making new destinations visible while simultaneously reinforcing standard routes (Jia et al., 2026). Personalization, co-planning, control, trust, and algorithmic visibility are closely interconnected.

Methodology | A qualitative and inductive approach was adopted to examine AI-supported travel planning experiences in depth. Participants were recruited through criterion-based purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years old, to have travelled at least once within the previous six months, and to have prior experience using AI tools. A total of 15 participants were asked to create a travel itinerary for a destination of their choice using a custom GPT tool built on ChatGPT, followed by face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. The participants' demographic characteristics and travel planning contexts are presented in Table 1.

Before data collection, participants were informed about the study's purpose and procedures. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and their responses were used solely for research purposes. To protect their identities, participants were assigned codes (P1–P15), and personally identifiable information was excluded from the findings.

The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach, supported by MAXQDA software. The developed codes and themes were subsequently reviewed and critically evaluated by an independent researcher to support analytical reflexivity and strengthen the coherence and credibility of the findings.

Table 1. Participants' Characteristics

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	Travel destination	Interview duration
P1	25	Male	Master's	Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (4 days)	25:05 minutes
P2	37	Male	PhD	Sarajevo–Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina (3 days)	20:38 minutes
P3	24	Female	Master's	Afyonkarahisar, Türkiye (3 days)	20:23 minutes
P4	34	Male	PhD	Budapest, Hungary (3 days)	15:54 minutes
P5	29	Male	Master's	Japan (15 days)	21:07 minutes
P6	46	Female	Bachelor	Slovenia (7 days)	37:08 minutes
P7	29	Male	Master's	Southeastern Türkiye–Mediterranean road trip (15 days)	40:02 minutes
P8	18	Female	High school	Madeira, Portugal (14 days)	42:17 minutes
P9	23	Female	High school	Gaziantep, Türkiye (4 days)	41:00 minutes
P10	23	Male	High school	Eastern Black Sea region, Türkiye	22:00 minutes
P11	34	Male	Master's	Italy (7 days)	37:03 minutes
P12	46	Male	Postgraduate	Trabzon–Rize, Türkiye (2 days)	25:00 minutes
P13	40	Female	Postgraduate	Ireland (Dublin and Galway) 5 days	30:02 minutes
P14	47	Male	Bachelor's	Mardin, Türkiye (3 days)	40:07 minutes
P15	39	Female	Bachelor's	England (5 days)	35:01 minutes

Findings | Five main themes emerged from the thematic analysis (Table 2). User-guided personalization reflected how user preferences and constraints shaped AI recommendations, while co-planning showed that travel plans were co-developed through user and AI contributions. User control indicated that final decisions generally remained with the user. Algorithmic tourist gaze and visibility captured how AI made certain options more prominent, whereas conditional trust depended on the timeliness, realism, and verifiability of recommendations.

Table 2. Themes and Sub-themes

Main Theme	Sub-themes
User-Guided Personalization	Perceived personalization; User guidance; Reflection of preferences and constraints
Co-Planning	User–AI co-creation; AI's role as an advisor; Ease of planning
User Control	User control; AI's influence on decision-making; Preserving autonomy
Algorithmic Tourist Gaze and Visibility	Algorithmic visibility; Discovery of new options; Standardization and reduced spontaneity
Conditional Trust	The need for verification; contextual appropriateness; accuracy and timeliness of information.

Contributions and implications | This study conceptualizes AI-assisted travel planning as a collaborative process shaped by the interplay of personalization, user control, trust, and algorithmic visibility. The findings show that tourists retain control by questioning, modifying, or rejecting AI recommendations, while AI can influence decisions by making certain options more visible. In practice, AI travel-planning systems should support user control, offer diverse alternatives, and provide realistic, transparent, and context-sensitive recommendations. The timeliness of information, budget, transportation, and physical conditions also appear critical for building trust**.**

Conclusion | Generative AI facilitates personalized travel planning while also shaping the options tourists consider. The findings suggest that tourists perceive AI as a supportive planning partner rather than an autonomous decision-maker, retaining control by questioning, modifying, or rejecting recommendations. However, AI-generated suggestions may influence which destinations and experiences become more visible and worth considering. Trust remains conditional on the accuracy, relevance, and verifiability of these recommendations. Future research could examine how algorithmic visibility and user control interact in different travel planning contexts.

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Monitoring Resident Perceptions of Tourism Using Digital Content: The *Montanhas Mágicas* Pilot

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Keywords | Resident perceptions, Sustainable tourism observatory, Digital content, Destination monitoring, Resident well-being

Introduction | Resident well-being is an important consideration in tourism development and destination performance assessment (Dwyer, 2023). Understanding how residents perceive tourism's impacts can inform planning and management, but collecting and regularly updating this information through surveys requires time and resources. Local news, social media and municipal assembly minutes provide accounts of tourism's effects that may offer another source of evidence (e.g. Hao et al., 2020; Marchesani & Testa, 2026). This study examines this potential within the Sustainable Tourism Observatory of *Montanhas Mágicas*, a destination comprising several Portuguese municipalities. It investigates whether digital content can support indicators aligned with selected questions from the UN Tourism resident perception questionnaire.

Theoretical background | The study draws on Dwyer's perspective on destination competitiveness, which places tourism's contribution to resident well-being within the assessment of destination performance (Dwyer, 2026). In this perspective, competitiveness involves more than attracting visitors or generating economic activity, and

its assessment should also consider the outcomes of tourism for host communities. Dwyer's argument, therefore, provides the conceptual basis for including residents' experiences of benefits and pressures in the observatory's indicators. The UN Tourism Model Questionnaire for Measuring Residents' Perceptions Towards Tourism provides the analytical framework for examining this concern (UN Tourism, 2026). Its questions translate aspects of the relationship between tourism and community life into dimensions that guide evidence collection.

Methodology | The pilot uses deductive content analysis, drawing on selected questionnaire items to develop the initial coding categories (Costa & Amado, 2018). It begins with the core question of tourism's overall impact and its follow-up question about the reasons for it. Data are collected from local news sources via MediaSource and from social media using search terms that combine tourism with municipalities associated with *Montanhas Mágicas*. Minutes of municipal assemblies from municipal websites are also collected. Only data from 2023 to 2025 is considered. Extraction is followed by duplicate removal, relevance screening and coding. An initial examination of the material informs adjustments to the search terms and category definitions. Then, a sentiment analysis will code assessments as positive, negative, neutral or mixed when supported by the statement. Reasons may concern economic activity, employment, investment, quality of life, municipal image or other selected dimensions.

Findings | The ongoing analysis will examine whether local news, social media, and municipal assembly minutes contain evidence relevant to selected questions from the UN Tourism resident perception questionnaire. Attention will focus on assessments of tourism's overall impact and the reasons expressed, including references to economic, environmental and social effects. It will consider which questions can be addressed through the available material and where the content is insufficient. Differences between sources will also be examined, particularly whether statements express residents' own views or report the positions of other actors. This assessment will inform the discussion of whether digital content could reduce reliance on conventional data collection for selected indicators.

Contributions and implications | The study aims to assess the potential of local news, social media and municipal assembly minutes as sources for selected resident perception indicators. Using the UN Tourism questionnaire as a common framework, this study will examine how these sources can inform destination monitoring while accounting for differences among residents' views, media accounts, and institutional positions. For the Sustainable Tourism Observatory of *Montanhas Mágicas*, the approach could offer a less resource-intensive way to monitor perceived impacts of tourism across municipalities. The analysis will help identify which indicators may be supported by digital content and which require direct information from residents. Its intended contribution is to clarify the scope for reducing conventional data collection and the limits that must be considered before replacing selected aspects of resident surveys.

Conclusion | The *Montanhas Mágicas* pilot will explore whether digital content can support the monitoring of residents' perceptions. Dwyer's perspective on resident well-being provides the conceptual basis, while selected questions from the UN Tourism questionnaire guide the analysis. The study will examine the relevance of the available digital content to these questions and consider its potential to reduce reliance on conventional resident surveys. However, the study is limited to digital sources, may not represent the overall population, and should be understood as complementary evidence and a potential alternative when survey administration is not feasible. The results should be benchmarked against resident surveys in future research to assess their validity.

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AI Literacy Profiles among Tourism and MICE Professionals: A Cluster-Based Analysis of Self-Efficacy, Work Efficiency, and Continuance Intention

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Keywords| AI Literacy, AI Competency Profiles, Tourism and MICE Professionals, Self-Efficacy, Work Efficiency, AI Continuance Intention

Introduction | Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly embedded in tourism and MICE work, supporting information search, content production, customer service, event planning, and operational decision making. Recent tourism and MICE studies suggest that generative AI can improve work efficiency while raising concerns about the quality and responsible use of AI outputs (Kang & Kim, 2024; Lee & Kim, 2024; Cha, 2024). As AI use expands, employees differ not only in whether they use AI but also in how well they understand, operate, apply, evaluate, and ethically manage it. Such differences may be overlooked when AI literacy is represented only by an overall average score. This study identifies AI literacy profiles among tourism and MICE professionals and examines whether the resulting groups differ in self-efficacy, work efficiency, AI continuance intention, and AI use frequency.

Theoretical background | AI literacy is a multidimensional competency extending beyond basic technical use. It includes understanding AI, using it appropriately, critically evaluating outputs, and recognising ethical and social implications (Long & Magerko, 2020; Ng et al., 2021). Recent Korean studies likewise emphasise multidimensional structures that include understanding, utilisation, critical judgement, and ethical awareness (Choi, 2022; Hwang et al., 2024). Building on these perspectives, this study distinguishes five dimensions: understanding, use, application, judgement, and ethics.

A profile-based approach can complement variable-centred analysis by identifying employees who share similar patterns of AI competency. Recent studies further suggest that AI literacy is associated with self-efficacy and that AI-related capabilities can shape continued use and work-related outcomes (Ko, 2022; Lee & Oh, 2024). In MICE settings, generative AI use characteristics have also been linked to work efficiency and continuance intention (Cha, 2024). Accordingly, this study examines whether AI literacy profiles correspond to systematic differences in psychological confidence, perceived work efficiency, continuance intention, and use frequency.

Methodology | The analysis used data from 192 tourism and MICE professionals with prior AI experience. AI literacy was measured across understanding (five items), use (five), application (four), judgement (four), and ethics (five), with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .804 to .887. Self-efficacy, work efficiency, and AI continuance intention showed alpha values of .928, .946, and .929, respectively.

A two-stage clustering procedure was applied. Standardised scores were first entered into hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method and squared Euclidean distance. Although the two-cluster solution had a higher silhouette value than the three-cluster solution (k = 2: .402; k = 3: .342), the three-cluster solution provided greater interpretive differentiation. It was therefore retained and refined using k-means clustering. Group differences were tested using MANOVA and Tukey post hoc comparisons, while AI use frequency was examined through chi-square and correspondence analyses.

Findings | Three AI literacy profiles emerged. The low-competency passive group (n = 39, 20.3%) scored lowest across all five dimensions, the moderate-competency balanced group (n = 94, 49.0%) showed intermediate scores, and the high-competency integrated group (n = 59, 30.7%) reported the highest levels. ANOVA confirmed significant differences across all five dimensions, with scores consistently highest in the high-competency group, followed by the moderate- and low-competency groups. Thus, the profiles primarily reflected differences in overall competency level rather than sharply contrasting patterns across individual dimensions.

The profiles also differed significantly in self-efficacy, work efficiency, and continuance intention, Wilks' $\lambda = .332$, $F(6, 374) = 45.90$, $p < .001$. Self-efficacy means were 2.98, 3.63, and 4.43 across the low-, moderate-, and high-competency groups, respectively. Work efficiency means were 3.27, 4.05, and 4.64, while continuance intention means were 3.47, 4.12, and 4.64. AI use frequency was also associated with profile membership, $\chi^2 = 30.572$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .282$. High-frequency users accounted for 23.1%, 51.1%, and 74.6% of the three groups, respectively. Correspondence analysis supported this pattern, with the first dimension explaining 86.3% of inertia.

Contributions and implications | This study provides both theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, it extends AI literacy research by applying a person-centred approach to tourism and MICE professionals. Rather than treating AI literacy only as a continuous composite score, the study identifies interpretable competency profiles based on five dimensions. These profiles were systematically associated with self-efficacy, work efficiency, continuance intention, and use frequency, linking AI competency differences to psychological and work-related outcomes. The profiles primarily differed in overall competency level, highlighting the relevance of considering capabilities across multiple dimensions. The study therefore complements multidimensional AI literacy research by showing how such capabilities are distributed across identifiable employee groups.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that AI training should be tailored to employees' existing competency levels. The low-competency passive group may require foundational education in AI concepts and basic use, supported by guided practice. The moderate-competency balanced group may benefit from advanced application, critical judgement, output verification, and task-specific problem solving.

For the high-competency integrated group, organisations may emphasise sophisticated applications, ethical leadership, peer mentoring, and the sharing of effective practices. These proposed strategies are consistent with research highlighting relationships between AI-related capabilities, work efficiency, and continued use (Cha, 2024; Lee & Oh, 2024). Organisations should assess employees' existing competency levels before designing AI development programmes and evaluate progress through both competency growth and concrete work outcomes.

Conclusion | Three AI literacy profiles—low-competency passive, moderate-competency balanced, and high-competency integrated—were identified among tourism and MICE professionals. Higher-competency profiles consistently showed stronger self-efficacy, greater work efficiency, stronger continuance intention, and more frequent AI use. These findings suggest that continued workplace use of generative AI is associated with higher competency across multiple dimensions of AI literacy. Future research should validate the profiles in larger samples and examine whether profile membership changes as AI technologies and workplace practices evolve.

However, self-reported measures from the same respondents may introduce shared-method bias and affect the observed differences between profiles (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Future research should validate the profiles in larger samples and incorporate independent measures of work performance and AI use.

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Willing but not equipped: digital maturity of tourism micro and small enterprises in an emerging Mediterranean air gateway

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Keywords| digital maturity, micro and small enterprises, tourism destinations, airport accessibility, absorptive capacity, Southern Italy

Introduction | New airports are routinely presented as catalysts for destination development, yet how accessibility translates into business value at the firm level remains underexplored. Digital transformation is increasingly understood as an organisational process rather than technology adoption (Vial, 2019), tourism included (Pencarelli, 2020). The Salerno Costa d'Amalfi and Cilento Airport, operational since July 2024, serves a province whose tourism economy rests almost entirely on micro and small enterprises. Whether such firms can digitally intercept newly accessible international demand is a question of direct policy relevance. This exploratory study, funded by the Salerno Chamber of Commerce, measures their digital maturity, examines regional and size variations, tests whether the perceived impact of the airport is associated with it, and asks what happens when a two-component maturity model is applied at a scale for which it was not designed.

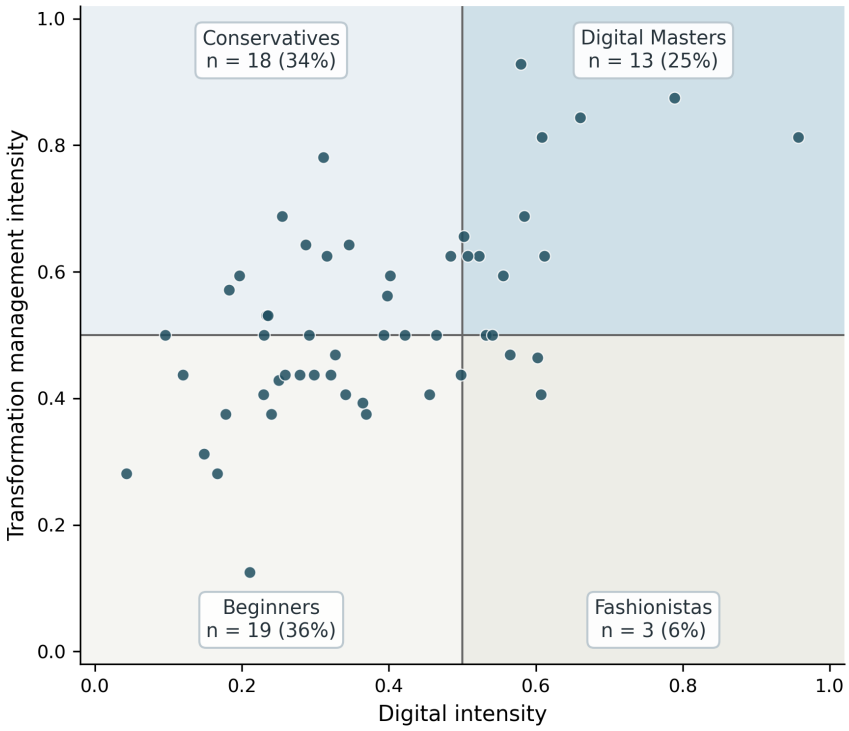
Theoretical background | Digital maturity is commonly conceptualised as the joint outcome of two distinct capabilities. Westerman et al. (2014) distinguish digital intensity, how far technology is embedded in processes and customer interaction, from transformation management intensity, the capability to direct change. Treated as independent, they generate a four-quadrant typology: firms may be equipped without direction, or directed without equipment. Developed on large multinationals, the model has rarely been tested on micro enterprises. The technology, organisation and environment framework (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990; Zhu & Kraemer, 2005) situates adoption in context, while absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990) explains why exposure to an opportunity does not produce its exploitation. Smart tourism destination frameworks presuppose digitally capable firms at their base (Gretzel et al., 2015). Transport economics reaches the same conclusion from the infrastructure side: investment generates development only when economic, investment and institutional conditions occur jointly (Banister & Berechman, 2001). Accessibility therefore sets a ceiling on opportunity, not a floor on performance, and even within the air transport sector, digital change depends on organisational readiness rather than on size or ownership (Halpern et al., 2021).

Methodology | Since April 2026, a self-assessment questionnaire has been administered via SurveyMonkey, online and in person, to tourism enterprises in the province of Salerno; collection is ongoing. Respondents were recruited mainly through PIDMed, the digitalisation programme of the Salerno Chamber of Commerce and a public innovation intermediary. Preliminary results are based on the 61 returns received by 21 July 2026, of which 53 were retained after removing test entries, duplicates and out-of-scope organisations; two-thirds are micro enterprises. Of the 53, 32 (60%) had applied for the programme's 2025 vouchers, about half of all applicants. Self-selection through such a channel favours engaged firms (Bethlehem, 2010): small and medium enterprises make up 34% of the sample, against fewer than 4% of service enterprises nationally (Istat, 2025), and applicants are both larger (odds ratio = 9.5, $p = .003$) and more mature (3.00 against 2.56, $p = .024$). The area and size effects reported below nonetheless persist when application is controlled for ($p = .019$ and $.005$); the applicant effect then disappears ($p = .27$), and the airport result holds in both groups. Digital intensity comprises thirteen indicators: technological breadth, channel breadth and eleven process maturity scales spanning back-office, guest-facing and distribution activities. Transformation management intensity comprises eight: decision-making, market intelligence, skills,

workforce management, resources and digital leadership. Both components are formative, since their indicators are distinct facets of capability that need not covary (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001): a firm may digitise bookings without analysing market data. Internal consistency is therefore not taken as evidence of validity. Content validity rests on mapping each indicator onto the domains defined by Westerman et al. (2014); collinearity is acceptable (maximum VIF = 4.10, below the critical value of 5; Hair et al., 2019); nomological validity is supported by the expected association with firm size, an organisational antecedent in the technology, organisation and environment framework. Indicators were rescaled to zero to one, averaged with equal weights, and reported on a one-to-five scale. The index proved robust to dropping each indicator in turn (minimum rho with the full index = .974), and 79% of firms keep their type when the sample median replaces the .5 midpoint. Non-parametric tests were used throughout.

Findings | Mean digital maturity is 2.83 on a five-point scale. Managerial intensity (.530) exceeds technological intensity (.384) in 83% of firms. Classified by the typology of Westerman et al. (2014), the sample splits into 36% Beginners, 34% Conservatives, managerially oriented but under-equipped, 6% Fashionistas, and 25% Digital Masters (Figure 1). Within the managerial component, declared readiness averages .75 against .37 for organisational practice, a gap present in 94% of firms that narrows only as size increases (rho = -.39, p = .004). As the component is formative, the gap is read as a pattern within it rather than as a separate dimension. It appears in every non-applicant firm, and removing the three readiness items reclassifies 28% of firms, reducing Conservatives from 18 to 7. Maturity varies with size (rho = .51, p < .001) and between the Amalfi Coast and the rest of the province (3.25 against 2.67, p = .010), while perceptions of the destination as smart are uniform across areas. Perceived airport impact is unrelated to maturity (p = .73). No digital action addressed to airport-related flows is reported by 64% of firms, yet 49% name the airport as a desired partner, with demand concentrated in the least mature areas.

Figure 1. Digital maturity of tourism micro and small enterprises in the province of Salerno



Note: (n = 53. Both components are scaled from 0 to 1; the .5 midpoint is adopted as the threshold for the four maturity types defined by Westerman et al. (2014).

Contributions and implications | The study specifies where the two-component model holds and where it needs qualification. At the micro scale, its managerial axis measures intention rather than capability, because the governance structures it presumes do not exist in firms of three employees. The typology still classifies meaningfully, but the second axis must be read as readiness. This matters for policy. Technology vouchers assume firms can absorb what they buy, yet reach firms that want to change but lack the organisation to do so: declared readiness is high among applicants and non-applicants alike (.77 and .72), while organisational practice stays low in both (.41 and .31); firms that ask for vouchers report more favourable attitudes than the rest (p = .006) but no better practice. The pattern is consistent with evidence that SME digitalisation depends on skills and strategy rather than on technology purchase alone (Eller et al., 2020). What is missing is not funding but capability, and capability is built through diagnosis, guided implementation and brokered networks, services that a public innovation intermediary can deliver to firms it already reaches (Howells, 2006). Accessibility and absorption must be treated separately.

A gateway increases exposure to international demand, but being exposed to it is not the same as intercepting it: 64% of firms have taken no digital step towards the new flows, and those already serving foreign markets no more than the rest. The null association is informative rather than merely negative: the constraint lies inside the firm, not in the infrastructure.

Conclusion | Digital maturity in this destination is constrained by organisational capability rather than by willingness, and the constraint is sharpest where accessibility has newly improved. Infrastructure has opened a window that firms are not yet equipped to use. Limitations include a preliminary non-probability sample skewed towards scheme applicants, single-respondent measurement, and the absence of performance data. Because recruitment favours engaged firms, maturity levels are best read as upper bounds, which reinforces rather than weakens the conclusion that capability is the binding constraint. The completed dataset, extended beyond the PIDMed channel and weighted by firm size against Istat business register data, will allow the territorial comparison to be tested with greater statistical power, while a second wave two years after the airport opening would allow the absorption mechanism to be observed over time rather than inferred.

Declaration of AI use | The authors used Claude (Anthropic, Opus 5) at three stages: recoding the SurveyMonkey export into analytical variables, running the statistical procedures reported in the Methodology, and editing the language of the manuscript. The measurement model, the inclusion criteria, the interpretation of results and all conclusions were determined by the authors, who independently verified the analytical outputs and take full responsibility for the content.

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From Online Visibility to Booking and Service Use: Digitalisation in Latvian Rural Tourism

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Keywords| Rural Tourism, Digitalisation, Digital Touchpoints, Tourism SMEs, Customer Journey

Introduction | Being visible online does not necessarily mean that a rural tourism service is easy to access digitally. A business may have a website, social media presence or appear on online platforms, while booking, payment or other customer-facing functions still depend on manual communication. This is particularly relevant in rural tourism, where many enterprises are small and the tourism product remains closely tied to place and personal interaction.

The aim of this study is to examine patterns of digitalisation in Latvian rural tourism by integrating consumer evaluations, enterprise digital practices and expert explanations, with particular attention to digital solutions supporting access to tourism services. The research question is what patterns emerge across consumer evaluations, enterprise digital practices and expert explanations regarding the role of digital solutions in access to rural tourism services.

Theoretical background | Lemon and Verhoef (2016) conceptualise customer experience across pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase stages shaped by multiple touchpoints. In tourism, information sources change in relevance across stages of the travel experience (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2020), while ICT has altered how tourism services are accessed and consumed (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2017). For small and rural businesses, technology adoption is also shaped by organisational and contextual conditions. Premkumar and Roberts (1999) identify organisational size, management support and external pressures among factors affecting technology adoption in rural small businesses, while Falter and Jóhannesson (2023) show that rural tourism entrepreneurs do not necessarily perceive digitalisation and digital innovation as interconnected. Digital touchpoints are therefore treated here as functions supporting access to the service, not as stages of digital maturity.

Methodology | This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating a national CATI survey of Latvian residents conducted from February to April 2025 (N = 1,004), an online survey of rural tourism enterprises conducted from February to April 2026 (N = 105), and qualitative expert interviews with eight experts (N = 8) representing rural tourism businesses, digitalisation support, regional and municipal tourism development, and national tourism export. Of the 1,004 consumers, 772 (76.9%) used rural tourism services in the preceding year. This abstract uses the full sample; visitation-frequency associations were examined in the broader research. The enterprise survey examined five functional areas: digital visibility, marketing and reputation management; booking, sales and payments; data analytics, CRM and personalisation; artificial intelligence, automation and cloud solutions; and digital customer experience and smart solutions. The enterprise survey was distributed via municipal tourism information centres and tourism support specialists, who were asked to approach rural tourism enterprises. Recruitment sought coverage across Latvia, with respondents from all five surveyed regions. Participation was voluntary and self-selected. As dissemination involved intermediary organisations, the number of enterprises reached and the response rate could not be established.

For this analysis, customer-related functions were considered alongside cross-cutting functions such as data analytics, CRM, personalisation, artificial intelligence and automation. The three empirical sources were integrated through triangulation, focusing on convergence, complementarity and divergence. Consumer and enterprise percentages were not treated as direct measurements of the same constructs.

Selected consumer findings have been reported previously (Kindzule-Millere & Zēverte-Rivža, 2026; Rivza et al., 2026); here they are combined with enterprise data and previously unpublished expert evidence.

Findings | Among the surveyed enterprises, the most widely used functions directly related to customer access were those concerning online visibility and initial evaluation. The average breadth of use was 39.4% for digital visibility, marketing and reputation management, compared with 21.7% for booking, sales and payment solutions and 11.6% for digital customer experience and smart solutions. Data analytics, CRM and personalisation (28.4%) and artificial intelligence and automation (18.3%) were treated as cross-cutting functions rather than as separate customer-journey stages. Basic digital presence and visibility were significantly more broadly adopted than the combined breadth across the other four functional areas (Wilcoxon signed-rank test, $p < .001$; rank-biserial $r = .927$).

A notable difference was observed between online visibility and booking-related functions. In the consumer survey, 69.5% rated online booking and digital payments as highly important. Among enterprises, 41.9% used external booking platforms and 21.9% offered online booking through their own website, while telephone or e-mail remained the main booking or enquiry channel for 62.9%. These measures are not directly comparable, but together they indicate a potential mismatch between consumer emphasis on convenient digital transactions and common enterprise booking practices.

Digital support during the tourism experience was also less widespread. Around 60% of consumers rated digital guides and maps as highly important, while 14.3% of enterprises used digital guides or mobile routes, 11.4% digital maps or routes, and 21.9% QR codes.

The interviews provide additional context for these results. Experts repeatedly emphasised that customers should be able to find an enterprise, understand its offer, communicate, book and pay without unnecessary difficulty. At the same time, they did not regard a larger number of digital tools as inherently better. The relevance of a particular solution depends on the service, business model and customers. They also emphasised that digitalisation should respond to a specific business or customer need rather than a technology trend. In micro and family businesses, limited time, skills and implementation capacity affect what can realistically be maintained. Digital tools were therefore seen as a way to make services easier to access and use while preserving personal interaction, hospitality and the place-based qualities of rural tourism.

Contributions and implications | Read together, the three sources suggest that the relevant question is not only how many digital tools an enterprise uses, but whether they correspond to customer and business needs. The findings indicate wider use of digital solutions for online visibility than for booking, purchase and service use. Suitable solutions may nevertheless differ between rural tourism businesses.

Conclusion | Among the surveyed enterprises, digital solutions were more widely used for online visibility and information provision than for booking, transactions and service use. Expert evidence further suggests that their relevance depends on the service model, customer needs and implementation capacity. Digitalisation may therefore be most useful when it supports access to and use of tourism services without displacing the personal and place-based qualities of rural tourism.

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Same Platform, Different Pressure: When Short-Term Rentals Become a Housing Problem

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Keywords| short-term rentals, housing affordability, tourism intensity, seasonality, evidence-based tourism policy, Croatia

Introduction | Short-term rentals (STRs) have become a structural component of European tourism: in 2025, guests spent 951.6 million nights in EU accommodation booked via Airbnb, Booking and Expedia, 11.4% more than in 2024 (Eurostat, 2026c). They expand capacity and channel tourism income to households, but are also linked to housing withdrawal, rising housing costs and displacement. Regulation is now following measurement: EU-wide STR registration and data-sharing rules have applied since May 2026 (Regulation (EU) 2024/1028), and the proposed Affordable Housing Act would allow housing-motivated restrictions only in delimited areas under housing stress, subject to tests of necessity and proportionality (European Commission, 2026). Yet destinations with comparable platform activity display very different housing outcomes. This paper asks under which conditions STR growth translates into significant housing pressure, and how they can be identified before regulators intervene.

Theoretical background | We propose a *conditional amplification perspective* in which tourism is not a universal cause of housing stress but a local amplifier whose effects depend on destination context. STR effects on rents and prices are well documented but heterogeneous: in Barcelona they are several times larger in the most Airbnb-intensive neighbourhoods (Garcia-López et al., 2020), and in the United States they are weaker where owner-occupancy is high (Barron et al., 2021). The core mechanism is the reallocation of dwellings from residential to tourist use as potential short-term rental income outstrips residential rents (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). We argue that three conditions determine whether this mechanism produces housing stress: tourism intensity; the spatial and temporal concentration of tourism demand; and constraints on housing supply (Saiz, 2010). Destination maturity provides the broader context (Butler, 1980): the marginal benefits of additional STR capacity are likely to dominate in emerging destinations, and its marginal social costs in mature or saturated ones.

Methodology | The paper combines a comparative, multi-scale descriptive analysis with an extreme-case study. First, Eurostat platform data for 2025 are used to measure the volume, intensity (nights per inhabitant), spatial concentration and seasonality (July–August share) of STR activity across EU-27 countries and NUTS 2 regions (Eurostat, 2026b, 2026c), and to set these against house-price dynamics (Eurostat, 2026a). These comparisons identify contrasting tourism–housing configurations rather than cross-country causal effects. Second, Croatia is analysed as an extreme case that combines very high intensity with the sharpest seasonality in the EU. Its profile is interpreted alongside municipality-level evidence on housing affordability, price spillovers and emigration. Third, the paper examines the destination-management instruments of the Croatian Tourism Act (Zakon o turizmu, 2023) against the necessity and proportionality logic of the proposed EU framework.

Findings | STR volume alone does not explain housing pressure. France and Italy, the EU's largest and third-largest platform markets (212.6 and 138.7 million nights), recorded year-on-year house-price growth of only 0.9% and 4.0% in Q4 2025, against 21.0% in Hungary, where platform intensity is below the EU average (1.4 vs 2.1 nights per inhabitant). The highest intensities are Mediterranean: Malta (13.7), Croatia (10.8) and Cyprus (7.8).

Unlike Malta and Cyprus (29% of nights in July–August), Croatia combines high intensity with extreme concentration: 94% of its 41.9 million platform nights are spent in Adriatic Croatia, the EU's second-largest NUTS 2 platform market after Andalucía, and 57% fall in July and August (EU: 33%). At the municipal level, tourism intensification reduces housing affordability, with seasonality exerting the strongest effect among the tourism measures (Mikulić et al., 2021). Price effects spill over into neighbouring municipalities and operate most strongly through the conversion of housing stock into tourist accommodation (Vizek et al., 2023). Tourism activity is associated with higher emigration in late-stage coastal areas but lower emigration in early-stage continental areas (Mikulić et al., 2024). The evidence is therefore consistent with a conditional interpretation: STRs amplify scarcity where high intensity and concentrated demand meet constrained residential supply, and their net effects shift with destination maturity.

Contributions and implications | The paper makes three contributions. First, it replaces the binary view of STRs as opportunity or threat with a specification of the conditions under which housing pressure emerges. Second, it shows why national aggregates are the wrong diagnostic scale: pressure materialises locally and seasonally. Third, it translates the conditional perspective into a policy principle: regulation should be place-based, evidence-led and proportionate. Croatia's Tourism Act operationalises this logic. A tourism development index classifies every local unit annually; destinations in the two most developed categories must base their management plans on carrying-capacity calculations whose mandatory indicators include the share of dwellings in tourist use, the potential for new residential construction and a destination-level housing-affordability index (Pravilnik o metodologiji izračuna prihvatnog kapaciteta, 2024); and local councils may determine permissible accommodation capacity on this basis (Zakon o turizmu, 2023). Such tools generate the local evidence that the proposed EU necessity and proportionality tests would require, and capture tourism intensity and peak-season loads, which the proposal's price-to-income criteria do not.

Conclusion | STRs are a permanent feature of Mediterranean tourism. The relevant question is not whether they are inherently beneficial or harmful, but when their marginal social costs exceed their benefits. Housing pressure emerges conditionally, through the interaction of tourism intensity, spatio-temporal concentration and housing-supply constraints. Uniform rules therefore risk over-regulating emerging destinations and under-regulating mature and saturated ones. Measurement before intervention, differentiation by destination context and the integration of tourism, housing and spatial-planning policy are central to effective STR governance across the Mediterranean.

Declaration of AI use | Claude (Anthropic, Claude Opus 5.5) was used to edit the text. The authors reviewed all content and take full responsibility.

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2. Planning, Policy & Governance

From Consultation to Participation: Enhancing Social Legitimacy through Tourism Governance in Island Destinations

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Keywords | participatory governance; resident participation; tourism governance; social legitimacy; island destinations; Thassos

Introduction | Tourism development in island destinations generates economic opportunities but also pressures infrastructure, natural resources, land use, and residents' quality of life. Effective tourism governance requires stakeholder coordination and an integrated approach to the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of destination development (Buhalis & Costa, 2026; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011). Resident participation enables local perspectives to inform tourism planning (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Moscardo, 2011). However, consultation does not necessarily ensure meaningful participation or substantive influence over decisions (Arnstein, 1969; Tosun, 1999). This study examines how institutional arrangements shape the relationship between resident participation and social legitimacy in island tourism governance.

Theoretical background | The study draws on participatory governance, community participation, tourism planning, and social legitimacy, distinguishing consultation from substantive participation. Arnstein's (1969) participation ladder differentiates tokenistic involvement from citizen influence, while Tosun (1999) highlights structural and institutional constraints on community participation in tourism.

Tourism governance involves interactions among public authorities, private actors, local communities, and other stakeholders in tourism policy formulation and implementation (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011). Social legitimacy encompasses pragmatic, moral, and cognitive dimensions of the relationship between organisations and their social environment (Suchman, 1995). Recent research highlights resident participation in tourism governance and the management of tourism-related pressures (Sarantakou et al., 2025). Building on this literature, the study examines how institutional arrangements shape resident influence and how participation may contribute to the social legitimacy of tourism policies.

Methodology | This qualitative comparative case study aims for analytical rather than statistical generalisation and comprises three stages. First, a targeted literature and document review established the conceptual framework, distinguishing consultation from substantive participation. Second, Madeira and Mallorca were compared as established island destinations with different approaches to tourism planning, sustainability, and stakeholder engagement. Madeira's sources addressed sustainable destination management and certification (Direção Regional do Turismo, 2023; European Commission, 2024), while Mallorca's covered tourism planning, sustainability, and tourism pressures (Blázquez-Salom et al., 2023; Consell de Mallorca, 2020; García-Buades et al., 2022). The comparison followed five dimensions: institutional integration; continuity and stability; scope and quality of participation; influence over decisions; and feedback and social legitimacy.

Third, Thassos was examined as a complementary case of structured resident participation, drawing on initiatives undertaken in cooperation with UN Tourism and ICF, including the Residents Study and the subsequent establishment of the Thassos Residents' Tourism Committee (TRTC), informed by the study's findings (UN Tourism, 2023, 2024).

Documents were purposively selected for their relevance to tourism governance, sustainability, institutional arrangements, and resident participation. Sources included peer-reviewed research, official policy documents, and institutional announcements. The documents were examined thematically, focusing on participation mechanisms, institutional roles, decision-making authority, and feedback; the five dimensions guided the Madeira–Mallorca comparison.

Institutional announcements were treated as evidence of stated objectives and reported developments, not independent evaluations of effectiveness. Outcomes that could not be established were treated as evidence limitations, not proof of absence.

Findings | Madeira and Mallorca demonstrate different institutional approaches to tourism planning, sustainability, and destination management. Madeira's sustainability and certification arrangements support destination performance monitoring (Direção Regional do Turismo, 2023; European Commission, 2024), while Mallorca's planning instruments and research highlight the social and spatial implications of tourism pressures (Blázquez-Salom et al., 2023; Consell de Mallorca, 2020; García-Buades et al., 2022). The comparison considers five dimensions: institutional integration, continuity and stability, scope and quality of participation, influence over decisions, and feedback and social legitimacy. However, institutional frameworks do not necessarily demonstrate substantive resident influence.

Thassos offers a distinct approach centred on structured resident engagement. The UN Tourism–ICF initiative included a Residents Study examining tourism's social impacts. The study identified the need for a structured mechanism for residents to express their views, and the Thassos Residents' Tourism Committee (TRTC) was subsequently established as a voluntary advisory body to facilitate community participation in tourism governance (UN Tourism, 2023, 2024).

Three distinctions emerge: institutional capacity does not guarantee resident influence; consultation contributes to decision-making when institutions consider and respond to residents' input; and an advisory committee formalises participation without demonstrating its effectiveness. Available documentation establishes the TRTC's intended role but not whether residents' proposals influence municipal decisions, receive formal responses, or affect policy outcomes. The evidence allows comparison of institutional arrangements but is insufficient to assess differences in participatory effectiveness or social legitimacy across the three destinations.

Contributions and implications | The study contributes to participatory tourism governance research by distinguishing the institutionalisation of resident participation from actual decision-making influence. The Madeira–Mallorca comparison identifies institutional features that may inform participatory arrangements without implying direct replicability. It highlights the importance of clear roles, transparent procedures, and feedback on how residents' contributions inform decisions.

In Thassos, the Thassos Residents' Tourism Committee (TRTC) provides a structured channel for resident engagement within the UN Tourism–ICF initiative (UN Tourism, 2024). Its practical significance depends on how residents' views reach decision-makers, how proposals are addressed, and whether institutional responses follow. Future research should examine residents' experiences and the committee's influence on tourism policy and social legitimacy.

Conclusion | Moving beyond consultation requires resident participation to be integrated into tourism governance. The findings show that sustainability frameworks, planning instruments, and advisory committees do not automatically ensure substantive resident influence or social legitimacy. In island destinations, participation should be assessed through its practical operation, responsiveness, and connection to decision-making and feedback. Thassos offers an opportunity to examine structured resident engagement, although the TRTC's influence and contribution to social legitimacy remain to be established empirically. Ultimately, meaningful participation depends on whether residents' contributions inform decisions and receive an institutional response.

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Bridging Tourist Demand and Supply for Beekeeping Products and Bee-Tourism Experiences in Rural Northern Albania

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Keywords | Rural tourism, Tourist demand, Bee tourism, Beekeeping products, Beekeeping experiences, Local honey.

Introduction | In rural areas, tourism is closely connected with the environment, natural resources, local traditions, and place-specific products. Integrating local products into tourism offerings can enrich visitors' experiences while generating additional income for producers and local economies (Gonda et al., 2021; Kastenholz et al., 2016). In Northern Albania, honey and other beekeeping products are an important component of household production and originate in the same rural areas where tourism is developing (Zaganjori & Striniqi, 2025). Nevertheless, the literature indicates that effective links between local producers and tourism offerings require cooperation and coordination among the relevant stakeholders (Adhikari, 2024; Fusté-Forné et al., 2026). However, limited empirical evidence exists on whether the supply of beekeeping products and bee-related tourism experiences corresponds to tourist demand, particularly in emerging rural destinations in the Western Balkans. This study examines tourists' purchases, preferences, and interest alongside the practices and supply reported by beekeepers and accommodation establishments in rural Northern Albania.

Theoretical background | Research on rural tourism and local products emphasises that products associated with a particular territory can strengthen tourists' connection with the destination, support local producers, and contribute to the social and economic development of rural areas (Adhikari, 2024; Dhora et al., 2026; Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). Purchasing and consuming local products are also embedded in the experience created while staying in and exploring a rural destination (Kastenholz et al., 2016). In this context, honey and other beekeeping products may communicate a destination's production traditions and natural characteristics (Gonda et al., 2021; Zaganjori & Striniqi, 2025). Bee tourism encompasses apiary visits, tastings of different types of honey, learning about production processes, and other activities connected with bees and nature (Fusté-Forné et al., 2026). Consumer interest in and willingness to pay for honey may also be influenced by botanical and geographical origin and how the production landscape is presented (Uldemolins et al., 2025). The three groups provide complementary descriptive evidence on demand and supply; differences in their reported percentages are not treated as measures of unmet demand.

Methodology | The study was conducted across nine rural destinations/localities in Northern Albania: Vermosh, Theth, Razëm, Tropojë, Bogë, Pukë, Fushë-Arrëz, Reç and Bajzë-Koplik. Data were collected between July and August 2026 through three structured questionnaires administered to beekeepers, accommodation establishments, and tourists. The sample comprised 140 beekeepers, 48 accommodation establishments, and 102 tourists. Purposive sampling was used, with participants selected according to their presence and activity in the study areas. The questionnaires collected information on the use and sale of beekeeping products, cooperation between beekeepers and accommodation providers, and tourists' purchases, preferences, and interest in bee-related experiences. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages. Because participants were unevenly distributed among the study areas, the findings were analysed mainly for each stakeholder group as a whole and should not be interpreted as statistically representative comparisons among the nine study localities. The questionnaires did not assess whether interested tourists had sought but could not find bee-related experiences; unmet demand was therefore not measured.

Findings | Beekeeping products were already present in the tourism offerings of the surveyed rural areas. Among the 140 beekeepers, 57.9% sold directly to tourists and 75.7% cooperated regularly with accommodation establishments; however, only 22.9% offered tastings, apiary visits, or other tourism activities. Among the 48 accommodation establishments, 81.3% used locally produced honey or other beekeeping products, and 52.1% reported that tourists requested or purchased these products during their stay. Only 6.3% offered organised bee-related experiences. Of the 102 tourists, 41.2% had purchased beekeeping products, while 23.5% expressed interest in honey tastings, apiary visits, or similar experiences. Flower honey was the most preferred type (76.5%). In addition, 32.4% of all surveyed tourists stated a willingness to pay up to €30 for one kilogram of honey. Organised bee-tourism experiences were reported less frequently than honey sales and use. Tourists' stated interest suggests scope for testing these experiences. However, percentages across groups measure different aspects and have different denominators; they do not establish unmet demand or a measured demand–supply gap.

Contributions and implications | By examining beekeepers, accommodation establishments, and tourists within a single analytical framework, this study connects three groups directly involved in the supply and consumption of beekeeping products and experiences. Honey sales and use are more developed than organised tourism experiences. Tourists' stated preferences and interest can inform pilot offerings. For beekeepers, accommodation providers, and rural destination organisations, the findings provide an empirical basis for developing honey tastings, apiary visits, and joint bee-tourism packages. Such initiatives should prioritise coordination, clear visitor arrangements, product interpretation, and links between local honey and the rural landscape. Conceptually, the study extends rural tourism and local-product research by examining bee tourism through an integrated three-stakeholder demand–supply perspective, rather than considering producers, tourism businesses, or tourists separately.

Conclusion | Local honey and other beekeeping products already form part of the tourism economy in rural Northern Albania. Direct sales to tourists, widespread use of local honey by accommodation establishments, and tourists' purchasing behaviour create favourable conditions for bee-tourism development.

At destination-policy level, integrating beekeeping into rural tourism strategies could support product diversification, strengthen local value chains, and retain a greater share of tourism expenditure within rural communities. Apiary visits and organised tastings remain limited among surveyed providers. Cooperation among beekeepers, accommodation providers, and tourism operators could support pilot packages to assess actual tourist participation. Because the study used purposive sampling and descriptive analysis, its results describe the surveyed groups and should not be generalised to all stakeholders in Northern Albania. Future research could use larger probability-based samples to assess experience availability and tourists' responses to specific bee-tourism packages.

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Reframing Mediterranean Film Representations: State Incentive Narratives, Place Identity and Tourism Imageries in Greece

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Keywords | film tourism, place identity, tourism imaginaries, cultural test, film incentives, Greece

Introduction | The cultural test associated with audiovisual incentives requires applicants to demonstrate how their productions satisfy specific investment eligibility criteria. In Greece, the question related to film locations references diverse landscapes, architectural features, historical background, and both European and Mediterranean identities. This study examines the forms of place identity constructed in applicants' responses, evaluating whether they accentuate distinctive local settings, reinforce established Mediterranean imagery, or combine both. The analysis focuses on narratives submitted to the Hellenic Cash Rebate Programme as proposed screen representations, rather than as evidence of final on-screen content or audience reception (Nieto-Ferrando et al., 2024).

Theoretical background | Tourism imaginaries are socially recognised representations of places (Salazar, 2012), whereas a projected destination image selectively communicates specific attributes and meanings (Govers & Go, 2005). Screen productions contribute to these anticipations (Kim & Richardson, 2003). However, filming locations may also substitute for other places (Bolan et al., 2011). This distinction is particularly relevant in the Mediterranean context, where widely recognised images such as beaches, distinctive light, antiquity, and picturesque settlements may obscure local variation (Neil & Wyer, 2023). The cultural test is an informative, though context-dependent, source: applicants respond to an institutional prompt that prescribes culturally relevant qualities. These responses reveal how producers position locations within a policy framework, rather than indicating whether policy directly influenced creative decisions.

Methodology | The study analyses applications submitted between 2018 and 2024. Of 607 identified investment schemes, 363 fiction productions met the location and genre criteria, and 276 provided responses to question A.3 of the cultural test, suitable for analysis. Excluded categories comprised documentaries, animation, video games and projects involving only post-production in Greece. 87 fiction productions without an A.3 response were de facto excluded from this analysis. The unit of analysis was a meaning-bearing text excerpt. Qualitative content analysis (Camprubí & Coromina, 2016) combined deductive codes derived from the question with codes developed iteratively from the responses, followed by thematic interpretation (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Codes were refined through repeated readings and the merging of conceptual overlaps. Multiple codes could apply to one excerpt, with MAXQDA preserving links to source passages for contextual interpretation. The conceptual framework (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013) distinguishes Place Representations (natural, marine, rural, urban, and industrial landscapes; built heritage; social and cultural practices) from Place Attributes and Values (evaluative qualities, identity claims, and destination projection). MAXQDA supported coding, code co-occurrence mapping, and descriptive counts, with each code counted at most once per response (Maxwell, 2010). Project origin contextualised comparisons among domestic, EU cross-border, and other international responses. Counts reflect the distribution of themes in the applications, not their incidence in completed works or as a measure of tourism outcomes. Archive access was officially granted by the Hellenic Film and Audiovisual Center for the purposes of this research. Responses were anonymised before analysis.

Findings | The corpus presents Greece through a range of images that reach beyond the coastal stereotype. Natural landscapes are referenced in 135 responses, architecture in 107, urban landscapes in 95, and marine landscapes in 84. Applicants also describe industrial Piraeus, lesser-known rural areas, contemporary neighbourhoods, historical layering, and everyday community practices. These specific places coexist with familiar promotional framings: the "sea, sun and sand" code appears in 64 responses, while 33 explicitly attempt to move beyond established tourism clichés. Mediterranean identity is referenced in 28 responses and European identity in 14, though both terms are present in the question and should not be interpreted as entirely spontaneous. Mediterranean identity is frequently associated with landscape, natural light, and traditional forms, whereas European identity is more frequently associated with contemporary urbanity, infrastructure, or layered heritage. Location substitution appears in 23 responses, with Greek settings representing other places. The association between locally anchored detail, promotional shorthand, and geographic substitution indicates that "Mediterranean" functions both as a recognisable aesthetic and as one aspect of more specific identities. Code co-occurrences connect Greek identity to heritage, modernity, authenticity, and, at times, picturesque charm; these categories are neither mutually exclusive nor indicative of a simple progression away from stereotypes.

Contributions and implications | This study proposes a conceptual model of symbolic place construction, emphasising the interaction between Place Representations and Place Attributes and Values. Landscape, heritage, architecture, and cultural practices gain significance through claims of authenticity, identity, and destination appeal. The results indicate that concepts of Greek identity are multifarious and contingent. Mediterranean identity is commonly linked to natural landscapes, distinctive light, and traditional rural architecture, while European identity is often associated with contemporary urban and industrial areas. Applicants refer to familiar images such as the sea, sun, and heritage, but also highlight less familiar urban and everyday locations. Location substitution shows how Greek settings can represent other geographies (Rittichainuwat et al., 2018). In these descriptions, authenticity is produced through the deliberate selection and framing of places, rather than being an intrinsic quality of a location (Buchmann et al., 2010).

The proposed framework enables analysis of how film narratives construct projected destination images and tourism imaginaries (Govers & Go, 2005; Salazar, 2012). The analysis draws on applicants' accounts; this study does not address audience interpretations or tourism impacts.

Conclusion | The applications demonstrate an ongoing negotiation between recognisable Mediterranean and European imagery and differentiated representations of Greece. Viewing these submissions as applications for public financing, rather than as finalised films or tourist responses, clarifies both their value and their limitations. More precise accounts of location selection could strengthen cultural analysis and destination storytelling by increasing attention to place-specific characteristics. Further study is required to determine whether these accounts of identity persist in screen depictions and tourist expectations.

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Expansion and Spatial Reinforcement in Romania's Official Tourist Resort Network, 2012–2026

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Keywords | officially designated tourist resorts, spatial clustering, spatial reinforcement, network expansion, tourism geography, Romania

Introduction | Official tourist resort status in Romania is a legal and institutional designation granted to settlements and tourism zones, not a direct measure of tourism performance. The rapid expansion of the designated network raises a spatial question: to what extent have new designations extended its geographical reach, reinforced existing concentrations, or both? This study examines changes in the network between 2012 and 2026, using Romania's complete system of 3,181 local administrative units (LAUs) as the analytical framework. It assesses changes in geographical coverage, tests whether resort-designated LAUs were more spatially clustered than expected under random allocation, and examines whether later additions were disproportionately adjacent to the existing network.

Theoretical background | Tourism is unevenly distributed, and established concentrations may persist as activity spreads to new destinations (Cehan et al., 2019; Constantin & Reveiu, 2018). Recent research has documented the expansion of Romania's resort network and its principal concentration areas (Herman et al., 2026; Pop et al., 2026), while evidence from other countries also points to persistent resort cores (Zhu & Yan, 2024).

Spatial clustering refers to resort-designated LAUs being neighbours more often than expected by chance. Spatial reinforcement concerns a different relationship: whether later designations occur next to the pre-existing network. Distinguishing the two allows geographical expansion and the consolidation of local clusters to be examined separately.

Methodology | The network was reconstructed for three legal snapshots – 2012, 2022 and 2026 – from statutory lists and amendments to Government Decision No. 852/2008 (Guvernul României, 2008, 2022, 2025). The final snapshot represents the statutory list in force on 28 July 2026. These snapshots record legal status at selected points in time, not the exact dates of individual designations. Since a single LAU may contain several resorts, the analysis counts resort-designated LAUs rather than individual resorts. The three cumulative networks comprised 79, 156 and 215 LAUs, respectively.

County-level coverage and concentration were assessed descriptively. Spatial relationships were defined by Queen contiguity, under which LAUs are neighbours if they share a boundary or vertex. Binary join-count permutation tests compared observed resort–resort adjacency links with random allocations preserving network size. Reinforcement was tested for the 77 and 59 LAUs added between successive snapshots, using 4,999 random placements among previously non-designated LAUs. Additional permutations preserved the observed county totals.

Queen contiguity includes corner contacts that Rook contiguity would exclude, whereas distance-based neighbourhoods could introduce further links. Neither alternative was tested; the reported effect sizes therefore apply specifically to the Queen definition.

Findings | Between 2012 and 2026, the network grew from 79 to 215 LAUs, an increase of approximately 172%. Coverage extended from 29 to 35 counties, and the combined area of resort-designated LAUs rose from 3.73% to 11.65% of Romania's territory.

This wider geographical coverage was accompanied by pronounced clustering. In 2012, the network contained 21 resort–resort adjacency links, compared with a mean of 5.71 under random allocation: 3.68 times the expected number. By 2022, the observed count had reached 98 against an expectation of 22.33, a 4.39-fold excess. In 2026, there were 182 links compared with 42.44 expected, or 4.29 times the random expectation. All three tests were significant at $p = 0.0002$.

Resort-designated LAUs also became less isolated. The share with no resort-designated neighbour fell from 65.8% in 2012 to 44.2% in 2022 and 31.2% in 2026. Over the same period, the share belonging to connected components of at least three LAUs increased from 13.9% to 55.8%.

New additions were disproportionately adjacent to the earlier network. Among the 77 LAUs added by 2022, 33.8% bordered a previously designated LAU, compared with 12.5% under random allocation. For the 59 LAUs added by 2026, the observed proportion was 64.4%, against an expectation of 19.5%. These relationships remained statistically significant when the observed county distribution was held constant.

Contributions and implications | The distinction between clustering and reinforcement shows how expansion into additional counties can coincide with the consolidation of existing resort concentrations. New designations were more likely than expected by chance to occur beside the earlier network, but this association does not establish that earlier designations caused later ones. Neighbouring LAUs may share mountain, coastal or therapeutic resources, as well as tourism infrastructure.

Eligibility requirements also constrain where resort status can be granted. These include accommodation capacity, infrastructure and planning conditions (Guvernul României, 2024). Changes to the criteria during the study period mean that the three networks were not formed under identical regulatory conditions. Clusters extending across county boundaries also suggest a potential need for inter-county tourism coordination.

Conclusion | Romania's officially designated tourist resort network expanded substantially between 2012 and 2026 while remaining strongly clustered. Adjacency exceeded random expectations in every snapshot, isolation declined, and later additions were increasingly likely to border the earlier network. National expansion therefore occurred alongside local reinforcement. The pattern is consistent with path dependence, but does not independently establish it. Tests using Rook and distance-based neighbourhoods, together with data on tourism resources and designation eligibility, are needed to assess its robustness and distinguish the mechanisms involved.

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Can Ecotourism be a Vector for Sustainable Tourism Development in National Park of Tanjung Puting and Surrounding Villages in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia?

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Keywords | Ecotourism, Sustainable Tourism Development, Tanjung Puting National Park, Tourism Villages, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia

Introduction | Central Kalimantan (80% forest since 1957) contains peat swamp and lowland rainforest, a global carbon sink and "lung of the world," hosting the largest Bornean orangutan population. Global demand for palm oil, logging, and gold mining caused severe degradation. The province has the second highest deforestation rate in Indonesia, losing 56,900 ha in 2025 (Auriga 2025). Monoculture palm oil generates quick capital but degrades soil and hydrology within 5-10 years, causing peat fires and floods. The Regional Tourism Master Plan (RIPPARPROV) proposes ecotourism as a low-impact, high-value alternative to shift from an extractive to green service economy (Rhama 2018). This study tests that claim of TNTP and three tourism villages. Questioning: Can ecotourism drive equitable sustainable tourism development?

Theoretical background | There are three foundations: ecotourism as defined by Hetzer, Ceballos-Lascuráin and TIES (nature-based, low-impact, community-benefiting travel, with a "strong" from that adds research, restoration, and indigenous empowerment); Elkington's Triple Bottom Line (Planet, Profit, People), used as a diagnostic for real community welfare versus leakage and cultural commodification; and Dayak philosophy (the people-forest interdependence upheld by customary adat law). A comparison of eight studies shows a consistent pattern: ecotourism raises awareness, protects biodiversity, creates livelihoods and supports local culture, but it can also bring waste, deforestation, wildlife disturbance, unequal benefit sharing and commercialised traditions, so its benefits are real but depend on planning and community participation.

Methodology | Qualitative-dominant mixed-methods with Penta Helix framework: Government, Community, NGOs, Business, Academia, and Media. Data: 30 key informants via purposive snowball + 341 Likert surveys (109 tourists, 125 workers, 107 entrepreneurs), bilingual, triangulated. Fieldwork took place in two phases: February – March 2024 and March – May 2026. It consisted of interviews and observations in Tanjung Puting National Park and in three villages in Central Kalimantan: *Pasir Panjang*, *Sekonyer*, and *Penyombaan*.

Survey data were collected and analysed to identify the statements most critical to the impact of ecotourism on sustainable tourism development. A spider chart was used to filter the data: of the original statements, 21 were retained because at least 80% of respondents endorsed them. These essential statements were then used to build the questions for the key informants, in order to validate the real situation in the field. Finally, to strengthen the findings, the author supplemented the interviews with direct observation, documents, and secondary data.

Findings | The findings follow the three pillars. Ecotourism raises local incomes well above conventional work, strengthens Dayak customary governance and women's roles, and improves waste management and forest restoration around the park.

Contributions and implications | Dayak culture is described as quite fragile, and if short-term gains from exploiting nature remain the priority, it risks disappearing. Ecotourism is therefore proposed as one of the solutions for sustaining indigenous heritage. In the

comparison with the literature, the study agrees that benefits are conditional, and it adds two points from its own fieldwork: evidence of gender inclusion in homestay, handicrafts and orangutan care.

Conclusion | Ecotourism in TNTP is not only niche leisure but also a structural vector for sustainable development. It beats extractive work (10M IDR guide salary, 24.67M IDR *kelotok* net), gives conservation a self-sustaining rationale, and preserves *adat* governance and advanced gender inclusion. Sustainability requires active Penta Helix model.

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Preliminary data for first-Aid preparedness as a dimension of tourist safety: evidence from Shkodra, Albania

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Keywords| Tourism; Tourist Experience; Tourist Safety; First-Aid Preparedness; Shkodra, Albania

Introduction | Tourism destinations are expected to provide attractive experiences and to ensure conditions in which visitors can travel, participate in activities, and access assistance safely. Safety destinations are important dimensions of the tourist experience, alongside service quality, accessibility, hygiene, and environmental conditions. Tourists often enter unfamiliar environments and may encounter circumstances, including transportation incidents, environmental hazards, outdoor activity-related injuries, and unexpected medical emergencies. Evaluation of a touristic destination from visitors is based on the perception of safety to respond unexpected events. This study aims to describe tourists' first-aid preparedness and safety-related experiences in Shkodra, Albania, and to examine the association between previous first-aid training and self-reported confidence in providing basic assistance.

Theoretical background | Within the context of destination safety, the issue of first-aid preparedness is one that is under-discussed. First aid may be particularly beneficial in destinations that offer a variety of environments and activities for tourists, as they can expose visitors to a variety of dangers. Tourists are often unprepared and uninformed concerning the local healthcare ecosystem, emergency procedures, languages, and available medical services, which renders them reliant on the first-aid safety information provided by the destination.

Methodology | A cross-sectional survey involving 200 tourists who visited Shkodra between May and June 2026 was conducted with voluntary participation. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, anonymization and provided with the relevant information. Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of Shkodra University. A structured questionnaire divided into four sections was used constructed on a five-point Likert scale. A quota sampling method was used, with trained interviewers recruiting respondents at different locations and times to approximate a sample representative of the target population in terms of gender, age and educational level.
Cronbach's alpha assessed the internal consistency of the nine-item satisfaction scale, while descriptive statistics summarized respondent characteristics and survey responses. Associations between categorical variables were examined with Pearson's chi-square test, and differences in mean satisfaction between tourists intending versus not intending to revisit Shkodra with Anova. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Findings | Among the 200 respondents, 19 of them (9.5%) reported experiencing an accident during their visit to Shkodra and its surroundings, while 16 (8.0%) required medical assistance. Among respondents who answered the question regarding first aid, 21 reported receiving first aid, whereas 70 reported that first aid was not provided.
Tourists generally reported a relatively high level of confidence in responding to minor emergencies. 137 respondents (68.5%) stated that they felt confident providing basic first aid to another tourist, while 127 (63.5%) indicated that they could assist someone experiencing minor injuries during a trip. However, only 76 respondents (38.0%) had previously completed a first-aid course, suggesting a notable gap between perceived confidence and formal first-aid training.

The findings also demonstrate strong support for integrating first-aid information into tourism services. 129 tourists (64.5%) expressed a desire for hotels and tourism providers to offer first-aid information, while 179 (89.5%) considered first-aid knowledge important for every traveler.

Among tourists with previous training, 93.4% (71 of 76) reported feeling confident in providing basic assistance compared with 53.2% (66 of 124) among those without training. We found statistically significant association between previous first-aid training and confidence ($\chi^2(1) = 35.282$, $p < 0.001$). Training was also significantly associated with the reported ability to assist someone experiencing minor injuries ($\chi^2 = 22.80$, $p < 0.001$).

Tourists evaluated Shkodra positively, with particularly high ratings for friendliness of local residents (mean = 4.47), quality of food (4.36), and restaurant availability (4.36). Behavioral intentions were also very positive: 91.0% would revisit Shkodra, 98.5% would recommend it, and 98.0% would speak positively about the city. These results suggest that first-aid preparedness represents a relevant opportunity for strengthening an already positively evaluated tourist experience.

Contributions and implications | Study contributes to the tourism safety literature by examining first-aid preparedness as a specific dimension of the tourist experience in the context of Shkodra. While destination safety is generally considered in relation to risks and emergency situations, the findings provide empirical insight into tourists' first-aid training, confidence in providing basic assistance, experiences with medical emergencies, and expectations regarding safety information from tourism providers.

The findings have practical implications for destination managers and tourism providers. Hotels, tour operators, guides, and other tourism businesses could incorporate basic first-aid information into visitor services and provide clearer guidance on emergency procedures and access to medical assistance. First-aid awareness and training initiatives could also be promoted as part of broader destination-safety strategies. For Shkodra, integrating such measures into tourism services may strengthen visitor preparedness and contribute to a safer and more resilient tourist experience. These recommendations can also serve as a model for other tourist destinations.

Conclusion | The findings indicate that first-aid preparedness represents a relevant component of tourist safety and the overall tourism experience in Shkodra. Although most tourists perceived first-aid knowledge as important and many expressed confidences in providing basic assistance, formal first-aid training was considerably less common. The significant association between previous first-aid training and confidence in assisting others suggests that training may strengthen tourists' preparedness to respond to minor emergencies.

At the same time, the reported experiences of accidents and medical assistance demonstrate that health and safety considerations are relevant during travel. The strong support for receiving first-aid information from hotels and tourism providers further indicates an opportunity to integrate basic safety information into tourism services. Overall, strengthening first-aid awareness, training, and destination-level safety communication could contribute to improving visitor preparedness and supporting a safer and more resilient tourist experience in Shkodra.

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Megaproject governance and institutional change: a systematic literature review

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Keywords| Institutional Change, tourism, megaprojects, Institutional Theory.

Introduction | Infrastructure megaprojects are highly complex sociotechnical initiatives characterised by high budgets, long life cycles, multiple stakeholders, and transformative impacts on territories, socioeconomic dynamics, and territorial use rights (Flyvbjerg, 2014). Megaprojects do not operate in regulatory or social vacuums. Rather, they can shape and reconfigure the institutions governing territorial spaces (Aghajani et al., 2026; Morris & Geraldi, 2011).

In tourism, large-scale infrastructure projects mobilise elites, attract international corporations, and redirect public investment, potentially generating institutional change (Falaster et al., 2017). Despite this, the relationship between megaproject governance and institutional change remains underexplored, particularly how institutional arrangements are transformed in complex and contested contexts (Silva & Gajendran, 2023; Ullberg, Körling & Strava, 2025; Aghajani et al., 2026). This study therefore asks: How does the scientific literature categorise institutional change processes in infrastructure megaprojects?

Theoretical background | Governance shapes outcomes and actions related to institutional compliance and institutional change in megaprojects (Msulwa, 2022). These projects can become platforms for institutional change in the environments in which they are designed and implemented, driven by institutional requirements for implementation, such as changes in land-use and occupation legislation (Qiu et al., 2020).

Within institutionalist literature, both Sociological Institutionalism and Historical Institutionalism recognise that informal relationships, such as family ties, friendships, and personal connections, play a central role in shaping governance (Rye, 2018).

In this context, institutional change is understood as transformations in public policies or organisational arrangements through the introduction of new practices, the redefinition of norms, or the reconfiguration of power relations within the organisational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014).

Methodology | A Systematic Literature Review was conducted to define the roles of governance in institutional change in infrastructure megaprojects. The study follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) protocol to ensure methodological rigour and reproducibility (Page, McKenzie et al., 2021). We conducted the search in Scopus and Web of Science using Boolean search strings related to megaprojects, governance, and institutions, including terms such as mega-project, megaproject, "large-scale Project", "governance", "complexity", "institutional change", and institution. We considered peer-reviewed scientific articles published between 2010 and 2026. In total, we included 23 articles. After filtering, we read the articles in full and categorised them according to the theoretical line of argument of this work.

Findings | The areas investigated primarily include infrastructure megaprojects in transport and connectivity, including railways, bridges, metro systems, highways, ports, and airports. Water infrastructure, sanitation and energy, urban regeneration, real-estate theme parks, tourism megaprojects, and mega-events were also identified, including resorts, festivals, and infrastructure associated with sporting events (Hällström, 2024; Qiu et al., 2019; Di Maddaloni et al., 2025; Msulwa, 2022; Zheng, 2020; Fainstein, 2001; Golubchikov, 2017; Uriarte et al., 2019).

The categorisation of institutional change processes identified two main pathways: institutional compliance and active institutional change (Msulwa, 2022). Compliance is characterised by investors and megaproject managers submitting to existing laws and bureaucratic rules to obtain regulatory legitimacy (Aghajani et al., 2026). Active institutional change occurs when megaprojects' scale conflicts with existing rules, leading projects to flexibilise, modify, or actively alter local contractual and regulatory frameworks (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Msulwa, 2022).

Based on Mahoney and Thelen (2010), we also identified four incremental modes of institutional change in megaprojects: layering, conversion, drift, and replacement (Christensen & Greve, 2018; Streeck & Thelen, 2005; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Layering refers to superimposing new decrees or agencies onto a stable legal structure without repealing it. This represents an additive and incremental form of institutional change, as illustrated by the introduction of the Danish "modern SOE" model with state loans (Christensen & Greve, 2018). Conversion, in turn, involves reorienting existing rules to accommodate new speculative interests. In this case, the degree of alteration is low in law but high in practice, as illustrated by the "corporatisation" of environmental protection areas to expand mass tourism in Finland (Fortin & Söderlund, 2023). Drift occurs through active state inertia, whereby the State fails to update laws amid accelerated real estate and tourism expansion. Like conversion, this mode involves little change in law but significant change in practice, as seen in the lack of enforcement of agrarian laws in El Puertito de Adeje. Finally, replacement systematically eliminates former common rights and imposes

new pro-market regimes. This represents a high and exclusionary degree of alteration, exemplified by replacing traditional regulations with special regimes and free-market transport regimes.

The results further reinforce that informal institutions influence the trajectories of infrastructure interventions. While formal rules provide projects' legal structure, informal rules shape implementation through interpretations, assumptions, decoupling processes, and negotiations among political and economic elites (Falaster et al., 2017; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Biesenthal et al., 2018). These institutions also help maintain governance arrangements based on interpersonal networks of trust and reciprocity (Matinheikki et al., 2019).

Contributions and implications | The review contributes to the debate on Institutional Theory and megaproject governance, while expanding the discussion of governance in tourism infrastructure megaprojects and the role of informality. Understanding the different processes through which institutional change occurs is important for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to understand megaproject implementation.

The literature indicates that multilevel governance structures need to consider local governments and host communities, given the asymmetries and conflicts associated with implementing these projects (Di Maddaloni & Sabini, 2022). Applying institutional theory to institutional change in megaproject literature is also fruitful for future empirical research. The main gap identified concerns the lack of intersection between informality and institutional change.

Conclusion | The review shows that megaprojects depend on dynamic institutional arrangements. Institutional change occurs through different mechanisms, including incremental processes, informal relationships, and multilevel governance dynamics. Future research should consider informality as a category of actors or institutions when understanding institutional change in megaprojects, including those in tourism, sports, events, accommodations, and leisure.

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3. Economics, Methods and Tourism Research Impact

Human Value Formation in Hospitality: Integrating Customer Personalisation and Employee Experience

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Keywords | Human value formation, Hospitality, Personalisation, Employee experience, Customer-dominant logic, Platform governance

Introduction | Hospitality value is formed through the alignment of service design, customer interpretation and human encounter. Digital technologies, analytics and platforms have expanded organisations' capacity to personalise services, recommendations, loyalty benefits and prices (Piccoli et al., 2017; Chandra et al., 2022). Yet personalisation is not inherently value-creating: customers may experience it as relevant recognition or as intrusive, opaque and unfair (Tomczyk et al., 2022; Belanche et al., 2024). Customer-centric personalisation research gives limited attention to the employees who translate digitally configured promises into lived encounters and to the organisational conditions that shape those encounters (Chathoth et al., 2020; Saito et al., 2025). This conceptual paper develops human value formation as an integrative lens for exploring how personalised hospitality value is formed across customer, employee, organisational and platform contexts.

Theoretical background | Customer-dominant logic (CDL) locates value in customers' lived experiences, practices and contexts rather than in the offering itself, while previous studies link this perspective with human-centred service innovation (Heinonen, 2025). A tailored offer therefore remains a value proposition until the customer interprets it as relevant, fair and meaningful. Personalisation research nevertheless concentrates largely on data-enabled configuration, customer heterogeneity, willingness to pay (WTP) and behavioural outcomes (Piccoli et al., 2017; Tomczyk et al., 2022).

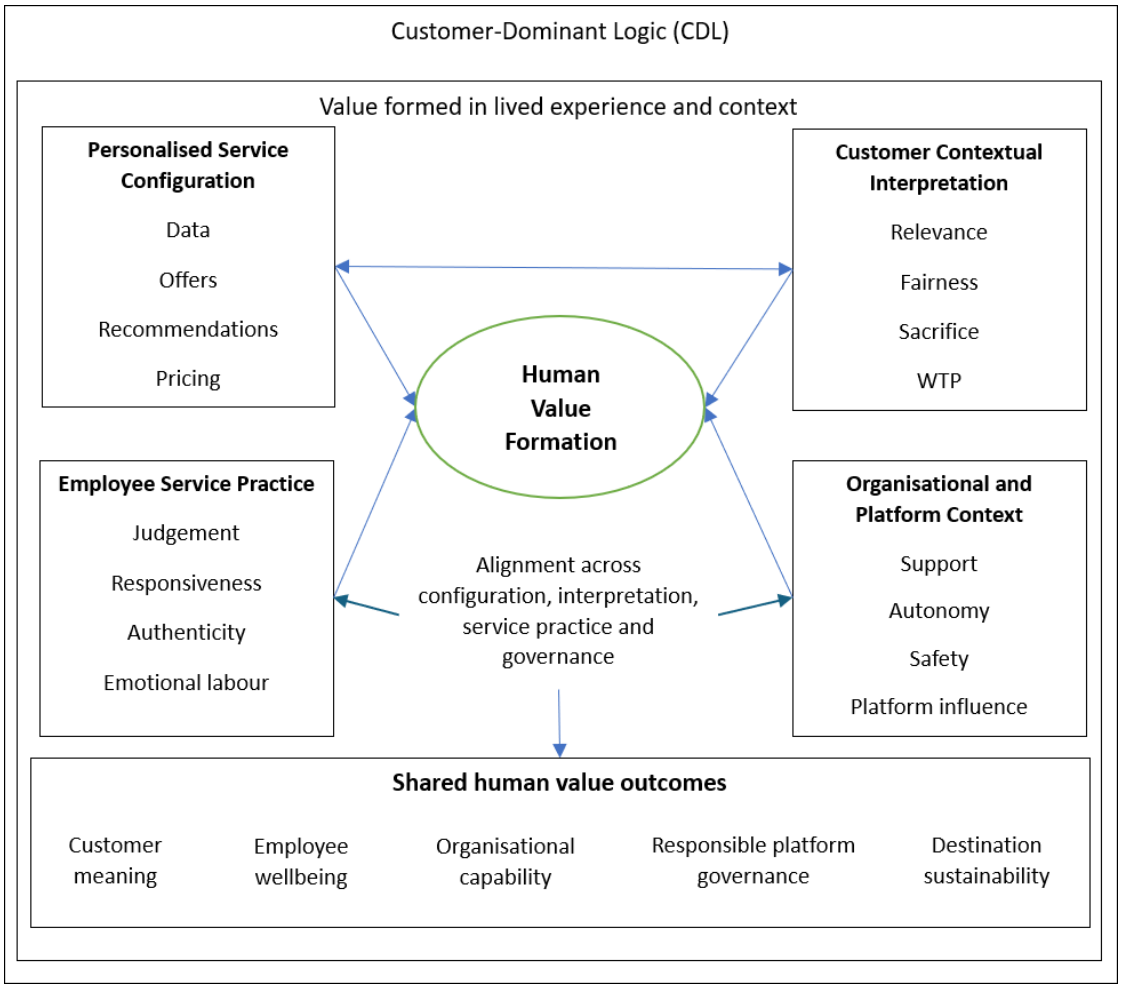
Value co-creation research recognises interaction and resource integration (Ranjan & Read, 2016; Carvalho & Alves, 2023), but hospitality also depends on employee judgement, discretion and emotional labour (Chathoth et al., 2020; Saito et al., 2025). These processes occur in workplaces shaped by pressure, unequal customer power, harassment and organisational silence (Ram, 2018; Alrawadieh et al., 2022; Turkoglu, 2025), while digital platforms influence visibility, pricing, loyalty and access to customer relationships (Buhalis et al., 2019; Napierała & Tomczyk, 2026). Existing research has generally examined these elements separately, leaving their interdependence under-specified.

Methodology | The paper undertakes an integrative conceptual synthesis of five domains: hospitality personalisation and personalised pricing; CDL and value co-creation; customer interpretation and WTP; employee experience; and organisational and platform context. Previous work on personalisation, hospitality value co-creation and employee wellbeing provides organising anchors (Chandra et al., 2022; Carvalho & Alves, 2023; Saito et al., 2025). The domains are compared according to their focal actors, location of value, and enabling or constraining conditions. Points of convergence and omission are then integrated into a four-dimensional framework and research agenda.

Findings | Human value formation describes how hospitality value emerges across customer and employee experience within organisational, technological and social contexts (Ranjan & Read, 2016; Carvalho & Alves, 2023). The framework integrates four dimensions: personalised service configuration, customer contextual interpretation, employee service practice, and organisational and platform context. Configuration proposes value through data, recommendations, loyalty tools and pricing (Piccoli et al., 2017; Tomczyk et al., 2022); customers judge its relevance, fairness and sacrifice (Tomczyk, 2025; Belanche et al., 2024); employees translate the personalised service promise into the guest's lived experience through professional judgement, responsiveness and emotional labour (Chathoth et al., 2020; Turkoglu, 2025); and organisational and platform conditions shape the resources, autonomy, safety and governance available (Buhalis et al., 2019; Alrawadieh et al., 2022; Napierała & Tomczyk, 2026). Four propositions follow: (P1) customer interpretation conditions whether personalisation becomes value; (P2) the translation of personalised service configuration into lived hospitality depends on employees' service practices; (P3) organisational and platform context enables or constrains alignment; and (P4) alignment across all four dimensions supports shared

outcomes, whereas misalignment risks value co-destruction and harm to employee wellbeing. Five outcome domains are proposed: customer meaning, employee wellbeing, organisational capability, responsible platform governance and destination sustainability (Figure 1). In Figure 1, double-headed arrows connect each interacting pair; inward arrows show contributions to value formation, and the downward arrow connects formation with shared outcomes.

Figure 1. Human value formation in hospitality.



Source: Authors' own work.

Contributions and implications | The paper reframes personalisation as a configured service proposition whose value depends on customer interpretation and employee service practice (Tomczyk et al., 2022; Heinonen, 2025), treats employees as constitutive actors in value co-creation (Chathoth et al., 2020), and integrates employee experience, organisational support and platform governance into hospitality value formation (Saito et al., 2025; Turkoglu, 2025; Alrawadieh et al., 2022; Napierała & Tomczyk, 2026). Managers should align customer insight with employee information, authority, training, staffing and emotional capacity. Transparent data use, fair pricing, safe reporting and protection from customer misconduct should form part of service strategy (Ram, 2018; Belanche et al., 2024). Artificial intelligence (AI) and platform tools should be assessed for customer trust, employee workload, pricing integrity, organisational autonomy and control of customer relationships (Buhalis et al., 2019; Napierała & Tomczyk, 2026). Destinations should assess job quality, organisational capability and reciprocal value alongside visitor expenditure and satisfaction. Future research should test the framework through multi-actor studies of customers, employees, managers and platforms.

Conclusion | Hospitality value is formed through the alignment of personalised service configuration, customer contextual interpretation, employee service practice and organisational and platform context (Heinonen, 2025; Chathoth et al., 2020; Napierała & Tomczyk, 2026). Human value formation therefore provides a basis for evaluating personalisation through customer meaning, employee wellbeing, organisational capability, responsible platform governance and destination sustainability (Saito et al., 2025; Turkoglu, 2025).

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Investigating Destination Branding: What history has to say

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Keywords | Byzantine Empire, destination branding, imperial iconography, cultural heritage, diplomacy, brand identity

Introduction | This report seeks out to understand the inner workings of branding in the Byzantine Empire, and the tie-in with what can now be described as destination branding. The Byzantine Empire, a state that carried on from the eastern part of the Roman Empire for more than a thousand years, built an image around political authority, religion, art and culture. Through Constantinople, the Hagia Sophia, imperial symbols and religious iconography, Byzantium created a strong and recognisable identity that presented wealth, power and religious importance to both its own people and foreign onlookers (Haldon, 2009; Yeleuova, 2023).

Theoretical background | A major part of Byzantine branding was the use of symbols and material culture. The affair of building an imperial image relied on icons, colour, architecture, textiles and religious imagery, all used to communicate power and prestige. Gold and purple, for example, carried ideas of divinity and royalty, while icons and monumental buildings strengthened the connection between the empire and Orthodox Christianity (Pentcheva, 2010; O'Neill, 2021). There is also the role of trade and diplomacy. As Byzantine objects, religion and artistic styles moved into other regions, they worked to spread the empire's image and influence beyond its own borders, as key destination brand elements for the Byzantium brand (Ball et al., 2016; Walker, 2012).

The literature review led us to formulate the following research question: How key historical elements, could by adopted, by brand strategists, as to enhance the brand, the brand building activities, and the brand equity measures of the brand.

Methodology | The report uses academic and historical work concerning the Byzantine Empire, art, religion, diplomacy and material culture, with branding used throughout as the main lens. Each symbol, practice and historical example is tied back to the way Byzantium built and communicated its image, looking at how architecture, icons, textiles, trade and diplomacy could strengthen the identity of the empire and make it recognisable to others.

Findings | Where it concerns Byzantine branding, the empire is far from short of strong and recognisable elements. Its religious symbols, architecture, textiles and imperial colours provided a visual identity that carried ideas of wealth, order, hierarchy and cultural superiority. The use of diplomacy and trade also helped this identity move beyond Constantinople and into neighbouring regions. At the same time, this influence did not disappear with the empire itself. Byzantine goldwork, mosaics, religious imagery and other visual elements are still being used by modern fashion and jewellery brands to create feelings of luxury, heritage and authenticity (Bobek, 2023; Mphatak, 2022).

Contributions and implications | These points show that the Byzantine image was not built from one symbol or one form of communication. The strength of the branding came from the way religion, politics, art, material culture and diplomacy worked together and continuously supported the same larger identity. For modern branding, the Byzantine case shows the value of heritage and recognisable visual elements, while also showing how an old cultural image can be reused and given new meaning in contemporary markets. The study also aims at looking at the selection of historical data, and literature, which could be used, as enablers of a stronger branding strategy, for the destination under discussion. There are very few studies that borrow key strategic elements of destination branding, related to the history. The Byzantium of course doesn't exist anymore, but the strategic geo-cultural, and traditional brand elements, could support the authorities to embed the historical foundations of such a strong brand to every marketing activity. In addition, experiences, of uniqueness in place could support the overall branding strategy.

Conclusion | What we can derive from Byzantine branding, is that the image of the empire was not only the result of military or political power. Its art, religion, architecture, luxury goods and diplomacy all played their part in creating a strong, firm and recognisable identity. Although the Byzantine Empire itself came to an end, the symbols and cultural elements connected to it continued on, leaving behind a brand image that still finds its place in modern design, fashion and cultural representation.

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Price Communication and Revisit Intention in Marrakech Hotels: A Stimulus–Organism–Response Perspective

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Keywords| Price transparency, Price fairness, Perceived price, Revisit intention, Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR), Marrakech

Introduction | The rapid transformation of the tourism and hospitality sector, driven by digital platforms, dynamic pricing and increasingly informed consumers, has made price communication a strategic issue for hotels(Gretzel et al., 2020). Online booking interfaces have facilitated price comparison while also increasing customers' exposure to differences in price presentation, additional charges and perceived inconsistencies. Consequently, price is not only a monetary exchange mechanism but also an informational and relational signal that can shape customers' evaluations of fairness, value and trust(Bolton et al., 2003; Xia et al., 2004). Although previous research has examined pricing, price fairness and customer loyalty, fewer studies have conceptualised price communication as an integrated construct and examined how its different dimensions translate into future behavioural intentions (Achabou & Dekhili, 2024; Ali et al., 2016).

This gap is particularly relevant in emerging destinations such as Marrakech, where hotel offers are diverse and pricing practices may be perceived differently across booking contexts. This study therefore asks: How does hotel price communication, through transparency and its effects on perceived price fairness and perceived price, influence tourists' revisit intention in Marrakech?

Theoretical background | The study is grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, which explains how external stimuli affect internal psychological states and subsequently generate behavioural responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1980). In the proposed model, price transparency represents the stimulus (S), referring to the clarity and comprehensibility of price information and the absence of unexpected charges(Haws & Bearden, 2006; Matzler et al., 2006). Perceived price fairness and perceived price represent organismic evaluations (O). Price fairness reflects consumers' assessment of whether the price is equitable and justified(Bolton et al., 2003; Xia et al., 2004), while perceived price refers to tourists' subjective assessment of the monetary price level for example, whether a hotel price seems low, reasonable or expensive. It is conceptually distinct from perceived value, which concerns the overall trade-off between benefits received and sacrifices made the subjective evaluation of the price in relation to quality, value and the experience received (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Revisit intention represents the behavioural response (R) and refers to the intention to revisit Marrakech as a destination. Based on this framework and previous research on price fairness, perceived value and hospitality pricing, four hypotheses are proposed: H1, price transparency positively influences perceived price fairness; H2, price transparency positively influences perceived price; H3, perceived price fairness positively influences revisit intention; and H4, perceived price positively influences revisit intention (Zeithaml et al., 1996).

Methodology | The research adopts a quantitative, hypothetico-deductive design. Data are being collected through a structured questionnaire administered to tourists staying in or visiting Marrakech. The target is 150–200 usable responses, with tourist profile, accommodation type and booking channel considered in the analysis. All constructs are measured using multi-item scales adapted from established literature and assessed on a five-point Likert scale. Price transparency is measured through items addressing the clarity and presentation of prices; perceived price fairness through items concerning equity and justification; perceived price through items assessing the perceived monetary price level

example low and expensive or reasonable and unreasonable); and revisit intention through established behavioural-intention measures. The data will be analysed using SmartPLS and partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The measurement model will be assessed through internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity, while the structural model will be evaluated using path coefficients, bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, p-values and R^2.

Based on this framework and previous research on price fairness, perceived value and hospitality pricing, four hypotheses are proposed: H1, price transparency positively influences perceived price fairness; H2, price transparency positively influences perceived price; H3, perceived price fairness positively influences revisit intention; and H4, perceived price positively influences revisit intention.

Findings | As data collection and empirical testing are still in progress, the study does not yet report final statistical results. The proposed analysis is designed to determine whether price transparency is associated with higher perceptions of price fairness and perceived price, and whether these internal evaluations are subsequently associated with tourists' revisit intention to Marrakech. The analysis will also indicate the relative explanatory contribution of the proposed relationships and provide evidence on the applicability of the SOR framework to hotel pricing communication in the Marrakech context.

Contributions and implications | The study contributes theoretically by conceptualising price communication as an integrated mechanism within the SOR framework rather than treating price transparency, fairness and perceived price as isolated pricing variables. It also extends the discussion of hospitality pricing by connecting the informational characteristics of price communication with tourists' psychological evaluations and behavioural intentions. Empirically, the study provides evidence from Marrakech, a major tourism destination in Morocco, thereby contributing to research that remains concentrated in other hospitality and market contexts. From a managerial perspective, the findings are expected to help hotel managers identify which aspects of price communication require greater clarity and consistency. In particular, understanding tourists' perceptions of fairness and value may support more transparent communication of room rates, conditions and additional charges. At destination level, the study may also contribute to discussions of trust and visitor–business relationships.

Conclusion | This study proposes an SOR-based explanation of how hotel price communication may shape tourists' revisit intention in Marrakech. By linking price transparency to perceived price fairness and perceived price, the research moves beyond a purely monetary understanding of hotel pricing and focuses on tourists' psychological evaluations of communicated prices. The empirical results, once data collection and analysis are completed, will provide a basis for assessing the proposed relationships and refining the model in future research.

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Intercultural Competence at the Service Encounter: Service-Provider Skills and Tourist Evaluations Across Destination Service Domains

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Keywords| destination marketing, 6As, intercultural competence, service encounters, service-provider skills, tourist evaluation

Introduction | A tourism destination comprises tourism products, services, experiences that visitors consume as part of their overall travel experience, provided by different stakeholders across multiple service dimensions (Buhalis, 2000; Gao et al., 2022). Tourism destinations have been conceptualised from the 3As (Burkart & Medlik, 1981) to the 6As framework (Buhalis, 2000), including attractions, accessibility, amenities, available packages, activities, and ancillary services, providing a comprehensive basis for understanding and assessing key destination components. Assessing tourists' perceptions of individual service domains helps to understand how destination service provision contributes to the overall visitor experience and destination performance (Gao et al., 2022; Shariffuddin et al., 2023).

Theoretical background | Tourists evaluate destinations' physical attributes along with the quality of their interactions with service providers (Parasuraman et al., 1988), which contribute to their perceived value and satisfaction, key components of their overall evaluation of the destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

Tourism shapes tourist experience, making interpersonal service encounters an important source of value creation and knowledge development (Sørensen & Jensen, 2015). International tourism fosters cross-cultural interactions, increasing exposure to cultural differences and communication challenges (Reisinger & Turner, 2012). Service providers significantly influence how cultural differences escalate or are alleviated through customised, immersive interactions (Volgger, 2023), awareness of cultural differences, implementation of culturally targeted strategies, etc. (Reisinger & Turner, 2012).

Enhanced intercultural sensitivity and communication skills can improve service quality, customer satisfaction, and business performance, highlighting the importance of intercultural training (Koc, 2020). The significance of cultural awareness, linguistic proficiency, empathy, and effective communication in multicultural hospitality contexts is underscored as a crucial component of hospitality education (Yang et al., 2015), with key dimensions focusing on intercultural understanding, cross-cultural communication and interaction skills, language ability, cultural empathy, cultural adaptability, mediation, and awareness of both local lifestyles and tourists' cultural backgrounds (Tsaur & Tu, 2019), openness, flexibility and preparedness (Arjona-Granados et al., 2025).

Previous research has investigated how satisfaction assessments relate to destination experiences, attributes, and overall satisfaction (e.g., Chen & Tsai, 2007; Gao et al., 2022; Shariffuddin et al., 2023). Studies have also examined cross-cultural communication strategies, the impact of intercultural competence (IC) on service reliability and customer satisfaction (Ihtiyar & Ahmad, 2015), and its significance in hospitality education (Yang et al., 2015; Tsaur & Tu, 2019; Arjona-Granados et al., 2025). However, it remains unclear whether different perceived aspects of service providers' IC carry the same importance across different destination service encounters within the same destination.

The present research addresses this gap by examining how three perceived aspects of IC relate to tourists' evaluations of accommodation, attractions, activities, transportation services, culinary services, shopping and overall destination assessment in Athens Riviera, an increasingly important part of the broader Athens tourism landscape, which links the city's urban attractions with its coastal environment and multiple kinds of experiences (INSETE, 2024). The analysis investigates: (a) the association of the perceived aspects of IC and tourists' assessment across each destination-experience domain; (b) the role of IC in destination experiences; and (c) the extent to which different perceived aspects of IC are associated with tourists' overall destination and service-experience domain assessment.

Methodology | This quantitative study examines the relationship between IC and tourists' assessments of destination experiences in Athens Riviera. Using the 6As framework, the research adapts its destination-components logic to analyse specific service domains within the destination. The study examined the relationship of the three perceived aspects of service providers' IC: a) skills and communication, b) knowledge of tourists' cultural preferences/customs, c) adaptation of services to tourists' cultures, across six destination domains: accommodation, attractions, activities, transportation, culinary services, shopping/tourism retail and destination assessment, implementing a Likert-scale measure. The establishment of construct validity was achieved by adapting measurement items from previously validated scales in the tourism and service literature.

Destination attribute assessment items were based on Chi and Qu (2009) and Eusébio and Vieira (2013), while service-related items were informed by Turner et al. (2002) and Ihtiyar et al. (2013), which provided the theoretical basis for operationalising the study constructs. The measurement items and questionnaire were adapted and contextualised to align with the specific objectives and research context. Multiple linear regressions were conducted separately for each destination-service domain/overall assessment, examining R^2, adjusted R^2, F-statistics, unstandardised regression coefficients, standardised beta coefficients, and significance levels. Multiple-testing correction was applied, while multicollinearity and regression assumptions were assessed using tolerance, VIF, residual diagnostics, and scatterplots. Across the 21 coefficient tests, the Benjamini–Hochberg False Discovery Rate correction was applied at $q = .05$. Activity and quota sampling methods were employed, with quotas defined according to respondents' nationalities. Data were collected from 153 tourists visiting Athens Riviera, with effective sample sizes ranging from 149 to 152 across models due to item-level missing data. The sample was mainly female (54.9%) and aged 26–45 (45.8%), from France (18.1%), the USA (12.8%), Great Britain (12.8%), and Germany (8.7%).

Findings | The seven-item scale demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.848. All six service-domain regression models were statistically significant, with service-provider skills and communication in the tourist's language emerging as the most consistent predictor across models, with significant associations for Activities ($\beta=.476$, $p<.001$, $R^2=.196$), Attractions ($\beta=.290$, $p=.003$), Culinary Services ($\beta=.354$, $p<.001$), Shopping and Tourism Retail ($\beta=.337$, $p<.001$), and Transportation Services ($\beta=.332$, $p=.001$), overall destination assessment ($\beta=.293$, $p=.003$).

The pattern differed for Accommodation, where service providers' cultural knowledge initially emerged as a domain-specific signal but did not remain significant after multiple-testing correction.

Contributions and implications | Overall, across heterogeneous destination service domains, tourists' perceptions of service-provider skills emerge as the most consistent intercultural correlate of positive destination evaluations, whereas cultural knowledge and explicit cultural adaptation show no comparably robust independent associations after multiple-testing correction. The findings indicate that service providers' ability to communicate effectively with international visitors is consistently significant and contributes to evaluations of activities, attractions, culinary services, transportation, shopping, tourism retail, and destination assessment. Explicit cultural adaptation was not significant in any model, suggesting that tourists may respond more to effective intercultural interaction than to explicit cultural adaptation. This highlights the importance of communication skills, interactional flexibility, responsiveness, handling culturally diverse visitors, and adaptation of interpersonal behaviour in tourism service provision. These findings support greater emphasis on intercultural communication and interaction skills in service-provider training.

Conclusion | Overall, the study provides empirical support for the relationship between IC and tourists' destination experiences, enriching the destination-components perspective of the 6As by showing that, beyond the structural characteristics of each component, the quality of intercultural service interaction is a cross-cutting element associated with evaluating multiple destination components.

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From capital attraction to regenerative yield: A conceptual framework for responsible investment in Mediterranean tourism

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Keywords| Regenerative tourism, Tourism investment, Responsible business conduct, ESG, Destination governance

Introduction | Mediterranean destinations compete for tourism capital while facing overtourism, climate exposure, seasonality and contested resident legitimacy. Investment promotion and sustainable tourism policy are usually treated as separate agendas, yet the financing decision fixes a project's location, scale, ownership and design before governance can respond. In the Western Balkans, visitor pressure reflects weak institutional capacity and limited community participation more than raw numbers (Gajić et al., 2026). This paper asks: under what conditions can the attraction of tourism capital be organised to produce net-positive outcomes for people, places and ecosystems, and how can those outcomes be specified well enough to be monitored? It introduces regenerative yield: the net-positive, monitored return that an investment delivers to the ecological, social and economic systems of a place, in addition to its financial return.

Theoretical background | Research on tourism foreign direct investment (FDI) mainly addresses capital volumes and growth effects. Tourism development has been found to influence FDI (Işık, 2015), and small-state characteristics shape inflows to islands (Read, 2008), but the type and conduct of capital, and the distribution of its benefits, receive less attention.

Regenerative tourism moves beyond limiting harm towards net-positive contributions to people, places and nature (Dredge, 2022), drawing on living-systems thinking (Bellato et al., 2023) and diverse economic practices (Cave & Dredge, 2020); it is a capacity-building journey, not a universal template (Sharma & Tham, 2023). Responsible business conduct supplies procedures for specifying investor behaviour, notably the due diligence expectations of the OECD (2018, 2023). In listed tourism firms outside the Mediterranean, credible environmental, social and governance (ESG) signals ease financing constraints (Wang, 2025) and are associated with higher employment, particularly where greenwashing is weak (Hu et al., 2025), although tourism equities remain risky in crises (Nahiduzzaman et al., 2025). Resident participation (Thees et al., 2020) and destination management organisation (DMO) stewardship (Gretzel, 2021) condition whether benefits are realised and pressure is contained.

Methodology | The paper is conceptual, abductive and theory-building. In October 2026, one Boolean query was run in the scite citation database for each of five clusters: Mediterranean investment incentives and sustainable tourism; regenerative tourism; ESG and responsible business conduct in tourism investment; overtourism and destination governance; and tourism FDI and host-economy linkages. The ten highest-ranked records per query were checked for editorial notices and retained if they offered a defined concept, a mechanism or empirical evidence on a relationship the framework requires. OECD instruments were added as institutional anchors and the mitigation hierarchy (Arlidge et al., 2018) as a measurement anchor. Retained sources were coded by framework element, evidence type (empirical, conceptual or normative) and setting, and propositions were formulated where coded sources converged on a mechanism. The review is purposive rather than systematic; no primary data are presented.

Findings | The analysis yields a three-tier framework. Three conditions (incentive design, investor conduct and absorptive governance) act through three mechanisms (local linkages, credible signalling and social licence) to produce regenerative yield, moderated by insularity, seasonality, institutional vulnerability and climate exposure. Regenerative yield is assessed as a profile, not a single score: ecological, social and economic indicators are measured separately against place-specific baselines agreed before investment.

A non-compensatory rule applies: a project qualifies only if every ecological indicator meets its floor, whatever its social or financial gains, and ecological harm follows the mitigation hierarchy, with offsetting confined to residual impacts after avoidance, minimisation and remediation (Arlidge et al., 2018). Jobs cannot be traded against ecological losses, nor gains for one resident group against losses for another. Seven propositions follow. P1: incentives partly conditional on independently verified responsible-conduct criteria yield a pipeline with higher regenerative yield than volume-based incentives. P2: assured ESG disclosure with documented due diligence lowers financing constraints and lengthens holding periods. P3: governance capacity strengthens the effect of conditionality. P4: local sourcing, employment and co-ownership arrangements raise local value retention. P5: resident involvement and published monitoring reduce conflict and delay. P6: the four moderators shape these relationships, with the greatest benefits and risks in small, seasonal and fragile destinations. P7: a larger share of patient capital raises regenerative yield. Their evidential status differs. P2 extends an association observed in listed tourism firms (Wang, 2025) and P4 draws partial support from ESG–employment evidence (Hu et al., 2025); P5 and P6 rest on governance and small-economy evidence from other contexts (Thees et al., 2020; Read, 2008; Gajić et al., 2026); P1, P3 and P7 are conceptual expectations derived from due diligence standards and the framework's logic. None has been tested on Mediterranean investors, and no effect of conditionality on investor behaviour is claimed. Each proposition has an indicative measure, such as local procurement share or permit appeals and delay days.

Contributions and implications | The paper connects two literatures that seldom meet, tourism FDI and regenerative tourism, and offers regenerative yield as a testable concept that bars offsetting ecological losses with social gains. For investment promotion agencies, it suggests embedding a few place-specific, auditable criteria in incentive evaluation, with independent verification against greenwashing, and rewarding shoulder-season viability and reinvestment. For DMOs, stewardship functions and living labs can supply the monitoring and resident involvement the framework requires. For investors, the framework expects assured disclosure to reduce financing frictions and local linkages to reduce conflict risk; these are hypotheses, not established effects. The research agenda includes comparisons of Mediterranean incentive regimes, project-level tests of financing and investor-behaviour effects, mixed-method assessment of linkages and social licence, and island–mainland comparisons.

Conclusion | The choice is not between attracting investment and protecting places, but between investment that is specified, incentivised and governed for regenerative yield and investment that is not. If the propositions hold, investment promotion, destination governance and sustainable finance can be aligned around a common test: whether a project leaves the place and its people better off in ways agreed in advance and monitored over time. Limitations include the purposive review, the reliance on evidence from non-Mediterranean, listed-firm samples and the untested status of investor-behaviour effects, so the propositions require empirical testing.

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From Types to Research Streams: A Systematic Review of Contemporary Literary Tourism Scholarship (2020-2025)

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Keywords| Literary tourism, systematic review, research streams, tourism studies, interdisciplinarity, 2020-2025

Introduction | Over the past two decades, literary tourism has developed into a dynamic area of research that extends well beyond its traditional focus on authors, literary places, and literary pilgrimages. Recent studies have explored topics such as digital technologies, sustainability, education, destination development, and new forms of visitor engagement. Although interest in the field continues to grow, research remains scattered across different disciplines and approaches, making it difficult to gain a clear picture of its overall direction. This paper reviews literary tourism scholarship published between 2020 and 2025 in order to map recent developments, identify emerging research trends, and highlight areas that deserve further attention.

Theoretical background | The study draws on the systematic literature review framework proposed by Xiao and Watson (2017). Instead of organising previous studies according to established literary tourism typologies, it adopts an inductive approach that allows broader research patterns to emerge from the literature itself. This perspective better reflects the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of contemporary literary tourism research.

Methodology | A systematic review was conducted following the framework proposed by Xiao and Watson (2017). Relevant studies were identified through major academic databases such as Web of Science and Scopus and additional sources including ScienceDirect (Elsevier), Emerald Insight, EBSCOhost, Taylor & Francis Online, and SAGE Journals Online, Google Scholar and ResearchGate to minimise publication bias and improve coverage of interdisciplinary publications that may have not been indexed in the two core databases.

The following combinations of keywords were used: “literary tourism”, “literary tour”, “literary destination”, “literary heritage”, “book tourism”, “fiction tourism”, and “writer tourism”. Searches were limited to publications between January 2020 and December 2025 in to capture the most recent developments in the field. After applying the screening and eligibility criteria including link with literary tourism, time of publication (2020-2025), language (only English), full text, peer-reviewed, 159 journal articles were included in the final dataset (out of 168 initially extracted). A structured data extraction and coding process was used to analyse the included studies. For each article, information on the author, year, article title, journal, country or destination studied, methodological approach, theoretical and conceptual foundations, and thematic content (later developed into stream) was recorded. Methodological approaches were classified as qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods.

Findings | The review shows that literary tourism research has continued to expand in recent years, although qualitative and conceptual studies still dominate the field and most research is concentrated in Europe and Asia. Rather than fitting the literature into existing literary tourism categories, the analysis identified eight interconnected research streams: Literary Places and Heritage, Literary Narratives and Texts, Literary Experiences, Literary Events, Digital Literary Tourism, Dark Literary Tourism, Destination Development and Management, and Educational and Cultural Functions. Together, these streams reflect the broadening scope of literary tourism research and its growing engagement with issues of digital innovation, cultural heritage, visitor experience, destination management, and education. At the same time, the review points to continuing geographical imbalances, limited methodological diversity, and the widespread reliance on case-study research.

Contributions and implications | By bringing together recent scholarship and organising it into contemporary research streams, this review offers a clearer picture of how the field has evolved over the last five years. The proposed framework provides a useful basis for future studies, encourages greater methodological and geographical diversity, and identifies promising directions for comparative and interdisciplinary research.

Conclusion | Literary tourism is evolving into an increasingly diverse and interdisciplinary field, yet important gaps remain. By synthesising recent scholarship and proposing a stream-based framework, this study contributes to a more coherent understanding of contemporary literary tourism research and provides a foundation for future theoretical and empirical work.

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The Impact of War on Travel Plans: Understanding Revenge Tourism Following Violent Conflict

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Keywords | Revenge Tourism; War; Distress; Resilience; Optimism; Wellbeing; Post-Conflict Tourism

Introduction | Periods of violent conflict profoundly disrupt everyday life and significantly affect leisure and tourism activities. During wartime, individuals often face mobility restrictions, security concerns, economic uncertainty, and psychological distress, all of which reduce their ability and willingness to travel. However, emerging research suggests that travel intentions may not simply return to pre-crisis levels once a conflict ends. Instead, many individuals develop a strong desire to compensate for missed travel opportunities through what has become known as “revenge tourism” (Zaman et al., 2021).

Despite growing interest in revenge tourism, most previous studies have focused on post-pandemic travel behaviour, while limited attention has been given to revenge tourism in wartime contexts. Moreover, little is known about the psychological mechanisms and personality characteristics that shape post-conflict travel intentions. The present study addresses these gaps by examining revenge tourism during the “Iron Swords” war in Israel. Specifically, it investigates how individual personality characteristics, namely optimism and resilience, influence intentions to engage in revenge tourism.

Furthermore, the study explores the mediating roles of perceived distress and wellbeing in explaining the relationship between personality traits and post-conflict travel intentions. Understanding these mechanisms contributes to both tourism recovery research and broader discussions regarding human adaptation to crisis situations.

Theoretical background | Revenge tourism refers to the strong motivation to travel following a period in which travel opportunities were restricted or unavailable. Previous research suggests that individuals often seek compensatory experiences after prolonged periods of deprivation. Travel becomes a mechanism for restoring personal freedom, reducing accumulated stress, and compensating for missed opportunities (Jeffrey & Sposato, 2023; Wang & Xia, 2021).

The present study extends this literature by examining revenge tourism in a wartime context. Two personality traits are particularly relevant in understanding individual responses to conflict. Optimism reflects a general tendency to expect positive outcomes and maintain confidence in the future. Resilience refers to an individual's ability to recover from adversity and adapt to stressful circumstances. Both traits have been associated with improved psychological adjustment during crises.

The study proposes that optimism and resilience influence revenge tourism both directly and indirectly through psychological wellbeing and perceived distress. Wellbeing reflects individuals' overall satisfaction with life and perceived quality of life, whereas distress captures psychological strain, anxiety, and emotional burden resulting from the conflict situation. By examining these relationships simultaneously, the study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding post-conflict tourism behavior.

Methodology | The study employed a cross-sectional online survey conducted in November 2023, approximately one month after the outbreak of the Iron Swords War. The sample consisted of 650 Jewish Israeli adults recruited through IPanel, an established online survey panel, using random selection among eligible panel members.

The study received approval from the institutional ethics committee, and all participants provided informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and confidential.

The questionnaire included several sections. The first collected demographic information, including gender, age, marital status, income, education, and religiosity. The second measured optimism and resilience using validated scales (Scheier & Carver, 1985; Smith et al., 2008). The third assessed respondents' levels of wellbeing and distress (Kimhi & Eshel 2009; Derogatis, 2001). The final section examined revenge tourism intentions using measures adapted from previous revenge tourism studies (Zaman et al., 2021).

The sample consisted of 52.1% women and 47.9% men, with an average age of 42.3 years. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to test the proposed conceptual model. The measurement model demonstrated acceptable fit to the data (χ^2/df = 2.775, CFI = .919, TLI = .911, RMSEA = .052, SRMR = .056).

Findings | The results reveal a complex set of relationships between personality characteristics, psychological states, and revenge tourism intentions. Both optimism and resilience significantly influence individuals' psychological responses to war. Specifically, resilience was found to have a negative effect on distress and a positive effect on wellbeing. Similarly, optimism contributed positively to wellbeing while reducing psychological distress.

The findings further indicate that wellbeing serves as a predictor of revenge tourism intentions. Individuals reporting higher levels of wellbeing demonstrated stronger intentions to engage in travel once conditions allow. Wellbeing appears to enhance confidence, motivation, and readiness to resume leisure activities following periods of conflict.

Interestingly, distress also contributed to revenge tourism intentions, suggesting that accumulated psychological pressure may motivate individuals to seek travel experiences as a coping mechanism. This finding supports the central premise of revenge tourism, whereby travel functions as a response to prolonged stress, restrictions, and emotional burden (Zaman et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2023).

The structural model demonstrates that optimism exerts a direct positive influence on revenge tourism intentions, while resilience primarily affects travel intentions indirectly through its impact on wellbeing and distress. Together, these findings suggest that both positive psychological resources and crisis-related emotional strain contribute to post-conflict travel demand.

Overall, the results indicate that although warfare severely damages tourism activity during the conflict period, it may simultaneously create conditions that generate strong future travel demand once stability is restored.

Contributions and implications | This study makes several important contributions to tourism research. First, it extends the concept of revenge tourism beyond pandemic contexts and applies it to violent conflict situations. This represents one of the first empirical examinations of revenge tourism following wartime restrictions (Guan et al., 2024).

Second, the study integrates personality psychology with tourism behaviour by demonstrating how optimism and resilience shape post-conflict travel intentions through psychological wellbeing and distress. The findings highlight the importance of considering both positive psychological resources and emotional consequences of conflict when examining tourism recovery.

From a practical perspective, tourism authorities, destination marketers, and policymakers should prepare for increased travel demand following the restoration of security and stability. Recovery campaigns may benefit from emphasizing emotional renewal, wellbeing restoration, and opportunities for positive experiences.

Conclusion | Violent conflicts significantly disrupt tourism and leisure activities while generating substantial psychological distress among affected populations. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that these same experiences may contribute to increased future travel intentions through the phenomenon of revenge tourism. Optimism and resilience help individuals cope with wartime challenges, while wellbeing and distress play important mediating roles in shaping travel motivations. As a result, post-conflict tourism demand may experience a rapid rebound once security conditions improve. Understanding these mechanisms provides valuable insights for tourism recovery planning and contributes to broader knowledge regarding human resilience and adaptation during and after crises.

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Where the Algorithm Meets the Place: A Science-Mapping and Systematic Review of Artificial Intelligence and Residents' Place Identity in Tourism Destinations

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Keywords | artificial intelligence, AI localisation, place identity, psychological ownership, residents, systematic literature review, science mapping

Introduction | Mediterranean destinations are rapidly deploying artificial intelligence (AI) at the host–guest interface: multilingual chatbots, virtual guides and AI storytellers that increasingly speak with a local voice. Research on AI in tourism has grown quickly but remains largely tourist- and service-centred (Jabeen et al., 2022), recently probing the mixed admiration and fear that service robots evoke (Tian et al., 2026). Residents' perspectives are rarely addressed, even though AI that "performs" local culture may either affirm or appropriate the identity of the community it represents. This study asks: *what is known about how AI cues relate to residents' place identity, and where does this question sit within the wider AI–tourism literature?* Because bibliometric clusters are often reported as if they were systematic reviews, we keep the two separate and sequence them explicitly.

Theoretical background | Place identity is the part of the self-formed through cognitions about the physical and social environment (Proshansky et al., 1983). Psychological Ownership Theory explains how people come to feel that a target is "theirs" through identity, efficacy and belonging motives (Pierce et al., 1991, 2001), with promotion-focused and prevention-focused (territorial) forms (Avey et al., 2009). Destination psychological ownership is known to shape residents' place-related behaviour (Zhang & Xu, 2019) and residents' life satisfaction depends on how they are involved in tourism (Jia et al., 2023).

Residents may respond to the same tourism change with either approach or avoidance reactions (Ud Din et al., 2024). Recently, AI localisation has been conceptualised as the extent to which AI embeds local cultural elements through speech modulation, visual signifiers and persona, explicitly drawing on Place Identity Theory (Yang et al., 2026). Whether such cues reach residents' identity, however, remains untested.

Methodology | We follow a two-stage design in which each stage answers a different question (Zupic & Čater, 2015; Tranfield et al., 2003). *Stage 1 – Cluster analysis (science mapping: where is the topic?).* Searches of Scopus and Web of Science run between 15 September and 1 October 2026 for a broader AI–tourism programme produced 64 export files (12,158 records), reduced to 8,623 after de-duplication by DOI and normalised title; 7,400 carried author keywords. A keyword co-occurrence network (minimum eight occurrences; 586 keywords; 7,328 links) was partitioned with the Louvain algorithm. Clusters are treated as descriptive maps, not as evidence about mechanisms.

Stage 2 – Systematic review (synthesis: what is known?). The map only located the branch; the review followed PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021). On 29 September 2026, without date limits, Scopus was searched with TITLE-ABS-KEY(("place identity" OR "place attachment") AND (mediat* OR "mediating role" OR mediator) AND ("psychological ownership" OR "community well-being" OR "quality of life" OR wellbeing) AND (resident* OR communit* OR host*) AND (tourism OR tourist* OR destination*)) and Web of Science with TS=(("place identity" OR "place attachment") AND (mediat* OR "mediating role") AND ("psychological ownership" OR "community well-being" OR "quality of life") AND (resident* OR communit* OR host*) AND (tourism OR tourist* OR destination*)).

Of 35 records (Scopus 11; Web of Science 24), six duplicates were removed and 29 were screened on title and abstract; 12 met the inclusion criteria: empirical models in which residents' or visitors' place identity or attachment (including community attachment) was a dependent or mediating variable with at least one tested antecedent, in a tourism setting. The protocol was not prospectively registered; it followed a version-controlled internal procedure (SOP v1.2, 22 September 2026), and screening decisions and code are available from the author.

Findings | *Cluster level.* Five clusters emerged (modularity = 0.454). “Artificial intelligence” (682 occurrences) anchors a technology-and-measurement cluster with generative AI, AI literacy and scale development, whereas “place attachment” (44 occurrences) sits in a

separate resident-well-being cluster with quality of life, residents, social exchange theory and support for tourism. The two keywords never co-occur directly, and “place identity” appears only seven times, below the mapping threshold. Only seven of 8,623 records mention both AI and place-identity or ownership terms in their text, and none examines residents. *Review level.* None of the 12 included studies treats AI or any other technology as an antecedent of place identity or attachment. Reported antecedents are experiential (cultural involvement, architectural authenticity, perceived conflict), relational (host–guest interaction, community attachment), institutional (destination social responsibility, place branding) or evaluative (perceived benefits and costs, tourism impact perceptions). The closest evidence lies on the tourist side: an AI streamer's local accent strengthened viewers' sense of groundedness, more strongly than a human streamer did (Yu et al., 2026). Smart-tourism scholarship anticipates a convergence of touristic and residential experience through technology (Gretzel & Koo, 2021), yet offers no identity-level test. The direction between ownership and place identity is also contested, as existing evidence runs from ownership to place-related outcomes (Zhang & Xu, 2019).

Contributions and implications | *Methodologically*, the study shows how science mapping and systematic review play complementary but non-substitutable roles: the map revealed a structural disconnection that keyword counts alone cannot explain, while the review established that the substantive link is untested. *Theoretically*, it derives three propositions for a resident-centred model: (P1) AI localisation cues strengthen residents' place identity through in-group categorisation; (P2) place identity fosters promotion-focused psychological ownership of the destination; and (P3) a competing prevention pathway, in which locally voiced AI triggers territorial defence of cultural symbols, mirroring residents' avoidance reactions (Ud Din et al., 2024). *Practically*, Mediterranean destination managers who localise AI guides should involve residents in co-designing the cultural cues AI uses, and should monitor residents' identity responses alongside visitor satisfaction.

Conclusion | AI and place identity form two well-developed but disconnected streams in tourism research. Separating where a topic sits (science mapping) from what is known about it (systematic review) exposes a clear gap: the effect of AI cues on residents' place identity has not yet been examined. Limitations include keyword-based mapping, a corpus assembled for a wider project, and English-language sources only. Future work will test the propositions with residents of AI-enabled destinations.

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4. Management and Marketing

Nation branding nitpicked through the lens of the Greek nation brand

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Keywords | Nation branding, Greek nation brand, brand equity, social media, national identity, cultural heritage

Introduction | This paper seeks out to understand the inner workings of nation branding, and the tie-in with the Greek nation brand. What are the key dimensions-variables that build a strong nation brand? Looking at the case of Greece, a globally recognized successful brand, the study aims at demonstrating the key elements of a successful nation-brand, and key success factors for a relatively new category the nation brands. Nation branding, the strategic communication intended to harbor positive worldwide reputation and image of a country, facilitating exports, tourism, investment and foreign policy (Lee & Alhabash, 2025), is a concept that stands on the firm basis of strategic brand management and branding elements, but with its fair fight against the social and cultural tribulations of the modern era.

Theoretical background | A primary cultural setback that plagues nation branding is the dispute of national identity. The affair of creating a brand for a nation requires cultural and social traits to be shaped into strategic narratives, but this can oftentimes mean that lesser shown identities are pushed aside and already existing fissures become more visible (Sevin et al., 2025; Durrani, 2025). There is also the issue of misrepresentation. When the image shown through media has little reflection in the actual social, economic and cultural state of the nation, the brand can seem shallow and insincere, disturbing the reliance needed to establish it.

Methodology | The methodology adopted this research is the case study one. The particular method was chosen, as comprehensive for rich data collection, and supportive to the development of theory through valuable observations, the adaptability allows evaluation of complex systems (Lisiectal 2026) uses recent academic work concerning nation branding, identity, media and brand equity, with the Greek nation brand used throughout as the main example. Each challenge, management strategy and branding element is tied back to Greece, looking at the way the country is shown to foreign audiences and at how these portrayals can strengthen, or in other cases weaken, the image of the nation brand.

Findings | Where it concerns the Greek nation brand, the country is far from a stranger to these issues. Its rich history and culture provide strong awareness, familiarity and heritage, but this awareness can stay on a surface level. The constant leverage of strictly ancient historical aspects can also leave the brand in a state of disconnect with modern audiences (Theodoropoulou, 2026) At the same time, social media stands to heavily benefit the Greek nation brand through more casual and interactive representations of Greek culture and life, while heavily edited or selective content can just as easily seem pretentious and out of touch (Lee & Alhabash, 2025).

Contributions and implications | The nation branding area has lately emerged for various and key reasons. This study summarizes the most important implications in an effort to demonstrate the importance of the topic, which lately the literature started discussing. The nation branding offers:

- Involvement of the local communities, and the building of common activities, and experiences for the brand under study.
- Coordination of the nationwide activities along with the destination specific ones.
- The engagement of more stakeholders in the strategic planning process, and the managerial one.
- Linkage of the brand with the experiences the visitors live
- Build up crises management plans both for the nation, and the destination in the same context.

These points show that building equity for a nation is not simply a matter of showing the country more. The image needs to be recognisable, but also credible and close enough to the actual nation to create trust. For the Greek nation brand, culture and heritage remain an obvious advantage, while more contemporary and authentic narratives can help the brand move beyond surface level awareness and create stronger familiarity with foreign audiences.

Conclusion | What we can derive from nation branding, is that no branding effort comes without the trials of the modern socio-cultural era and circumstances. Those are all evident and true in nation brands and in the Greek nation brand specifically. Although with the strategic alignment of brand management, more authentic representations and successful brand elements that build up equity, there can be the construction of a strong, firm and persuasive nation brand that can catch and enchant audiences from all over the globe.

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What defines the architectural identity of boutique hotels? A visual analysis of Greek boutique hotels

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Keywords| boutique hotels; architectural identity; spatial identity; hospitality design; servicescape; visual analysis

Introduction | Boutique hotels have become an established segment of contemporary hospitality and have attracted considerable academic attention for the distinctive character of their design, atmosphere, and guest experience (McIntosh & Siggs, 2005; Buhagiar et al., 2024). Their appeal extends beyond their typically smaller scale, as the physical environment plays an important role in creating a particular aesthetic and experiential setting (Lim & Endean, 2009; Han & Lee, 2021). This perspective is consistent with the servicescape concept, which emphasises how the physical surroundings of a service environment shape users' perceptions and experiences (Bitner, 1992). In hotel settings, design-related features may also affect guests' emotional responses, quality expectations, and booking intentions (Baek & Ok, 2017).

Despite this growing body of research, relatively little attention has been given to the systematic visual examination of boutique-hotel design across a complete, nationally defined population. The present study addresses this gap by examining all officially certified Greek boutique hotels and mapping recurring architectural and spatial features, design patterns, and qualities that characterise their visual identity.

Theoretical background | The servicescape perspective provides a useful framework for understanding how the physical environment contributes to the hospitality experience (Bitner, 1992). In boutique hotels, architectural and interior-design features are particularly important because they contribute to the aesthetic and experiential character of the property (McIntosh & Siggs, 2005; Lim & Endean, 2009). Lockwood and Pyun (2020) conceptualise hotel servicescapes through five dimensions—aesthetic quality, functionality, atmosphere, spaciousness, and physiological conditions—providing a basis for examining the physical environment as a multidimensional construct. Specific design elements such as colour, lighting, layout, style, and furnishings have also been shown to shape perceptions of hotel environments (Countryman & Jang, 2006), while hotel design has been linked to broader aspects of property performance (Zemke et al., 2018). Research on lifestyle and heritage-oriented hotels further suggests that spatial, material, cultural, and atmospheric qualities contribute to the formation of distinctive hotel experiences (Han & Lee, 2021; Chang, 2017). Sensory research extends this understanding beyond visual qualities by recognising the contribution of multiple sensory inputs to tourism experiences (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2003). Taken together, these perspectives support an examination of architectural and spatial design as an integral part of the boutique-hotel servicescape and provide the conceptual basis for the visual analysis undertaken in this study.

Methodology | The study employed an interpretive visual analysis using a census approach that covered all 237 hotels officially certified as “Boutique Hotels” by the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels at the beginning of the primary research (22/01/2025). The survey was conducted between January and June 2025. The visual corpus comprised 3693 photographs obtained from the hotels’ official websites, representing interior spaces, buildings, and surrounding environments. The analysis was conducted by creating code analysis sheet, for each hotel examined. The codes examined pertain to the architectural characteristics and spatial qualities of hotels. Specifically, they include the hotel’s style, details of the style’s design (combination of styles, distinctive lobby design, unique room design), the material elements that shape the architectural identity of the hotels (colors, lighting, construction materials, furnishings, artwork), and the intangible elements that contribute to the hotel’s overall atmosphere.

The interpretive visual analysis was conducted by experts, the researchers (both architects), with supplementary support from ChatGPT (OpenAI; Plus subscription), between January and June 2025. All AI-generated descriptions were checked against the original photographic material by the researchers, and inaccuracies were corrected before the final coding. The coding categories were informed by established research on hotel atmospherics, servicescapes, and hotel design (Countryman & Jang, 2006; Lockwood & Pyun, 2020; Zemke et al., 2018). The coded material was subsequently examined to identify recurring design patterns and spatial characteristics across the complete population.

Findings | The analysis shows that the architectural and spatial identity of Greek boutique hotels is not associated with a single stylistic expression. Instead, it emerges through combinations of recurring design features alongside considerable stylistic variation. Among the styles that stand out and shape the overall aesthetic identity of the hotels, Minimalist, Contemporary, and Mediterranean styles are the most prominent. The accommodations often incorporate a combination of different styles, a factor that was examined and studied separately. The research identified common patterns in the use of colour, lighting, materials, furniture, artworks, decorative elements, and the organisation of key hospitality spaces. The findings also reveal recurring and comparable design solutions across the hotels examined. This coexistence of variation and repetition suggests that visual differentiation does not necessarily result in substantive architectural differentiation. Overall, the findings indicate that the identity of Greek boutique hotels is better understood as a combination of recurring spatial and design characteristics than as a clearly defined architectural style.

Contributions and implications | The study contributes to hospitality and architectural-design research by providing a census-based account of the visual characteristics of officially certified Greek boutique hotels and by developing a structured framework for their visual analysis. Covering the complete population of officially certified hotels extends previous research based largely on individual properties or selected samples and provides a broader empirical basis for examining boutique-hotel design. Conceptually, the study connects architectural analysis with the servicescape perspective by treating spatial and design features as interconnected components of the hospitality environment (Bitner, 1992; Lockwood & Pyun, 2020).

It also demonstrates how systematic visual analysis can be used to investigate design identity within a population of hospitality accommodations defined at the national level. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that greater coherence between architectural concept, spatial organisation, materiality, atmosphere, and interior design may support more distinctive boutique-hotel environments. The research contributes to the formulation of tourism policy guidelines by highlight architectural design of accommodations as a fundamental component of the tourism experience. It advocates incentives for context-sensitive and individualised design approaches that reflect the distinctive architectural and spatial identity of each property. Finally, it emphasises the integration of spatial characteristics and qualities into accommodation design strategies, with the aim of promoting unique and enhanced experience for the guests.

Conclusion | The analysis indicates that the architectural and spatial identity of Greek boutique hotels is not tied to a single stylistic expression. Rather, it emerges through combinations of recurring design features, alongside significant stylistic diversity. The three styles that dominate the design of Greek boutique hotels are the Minimalist, the Contemporary, and the Mediterranean style. Among the elements that shape the servicescape of the accommodations, common patterns were identified in the use of color, lighting, materials, furnishings, artwork, decorative elements, and the organization of key hospitality spaces. The coexistence of variety and repetition suggests that visual differentiation does not necessarily lead to substantive architectural differentiation. Overall, the findings suggest that the identity of Greek boutique hotels is best understood as a combination of recurring spatial and design characteristics rather than as a clearly defined architectural style associated with the architectural character and local features of each specific destination.

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Tourism performance across diverse destinations: a municipal index by population group in São Paulo, Brazil

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Keywords | tourism performance; composite indicators; tourism observatories; municipalities; tourism planning.

Introduction | Assessing municipal tourism performance requires recognising destination diversity and tourism's importance in local economies. Tourism supports employment, business activity and revenue in municipalities of different sizes, whose natural, cultural, rural and urban characteristics contribute to regional tourism.

Comparing municipalities of similar population size contextualises performance and identifies leading destinations within each group.

São Paulo, Brazil's most populous state and largest state economy, offers diverse tourism resources (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics [IBGE]). The Tourism Observatory of the Association of Municipal Governments of Municipalities of Tourist Interest in the State of São Paulo (AMITESP), developed with the University of São Paulo, provides the empirical basis. This study presents the Municipal Tourism Performance Index (MTPI; Índice Municipal de Desempenho do Turismo, IMDT, in Portuguese), using data from 101 municipalities and comparisons within population groups.

Theoretical background | Assessing destination performance requires distinguishing resources and enabling conditions from observed results. Resources, supply and management conditions support tourism development, while outcome indicators describe realised activity and economic results. These dimensions inform a multidimensional assessment but have different meanings (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Enright & Newton, 2004).

International frameworks guide context-sensitive indicator selection for tourism planning and management (World Tourism Organization, 2004; Dupeyras & MacCallum, 2013; European Commission, 2016). Anguera-Torrell et al. (2021) developed the Urban Tourism Performance Index, combining aviation, hotel and online search data for 16 destinations during the pandemic. Berbekova et al. (2025) proposed a quality of life performance index for 82 destinations, linking tourism impacts with residents' well-being. The MTPI combines tourism supply and enabling conditions with indicators of tourism-related economic importance, organised by population size. Composite indicators support systematic comparison (OECD et al., 2008), while observatories connect evidence, governance and public policy (Font et al., 2023; Scuttari et al., 2025).

Methodology | The study covers 101 municipalities in São Paulo state participating in the AMITESP Tourism Observatory, organised into seven population groups ranging from up to 5,000 to over 200,000 residents. The MTPI integrates seven dimensions: accommodation establishments (H); the share of formal employment in selected tourism-related activities (E); tourism expenditure as a share of total municipal expenditure (D); an ordinal score for the reported contribution of selected activities to municipal service tax revenue (I); recorded transport modes (M); recorded digital communication channels (C); and six institutional governance attributes (G).

Accommodation, employment, expenditure and service tax each receive a weight of 20%; mobility receives 10%; and digital communication and governance receive 5% each. Accommodation (H) measures supply; expenditure (D) measures public resource allocation; and mobility (M), communication (C) and governance (G) describe enabling conditions. Employment (E) represents an observed economic indicator for selected tourism-related activities, while service tax (I) is an ordinal proxy for their reported fiscal contribution. Neither isolates visitor-generated activity. Greater expenditure indicates budgetary effort rather than demonstrated effectiveness. Indicators are min–max normalised within each population group and aggregated as follows: MTPI = 0.20H + 0.20E + 0.20D + 0.20I + 0.10M + 0.05C + 0.05G.

Sensitivity analysis examines ranking stability across 14 scenarios, changing each weight individually by ±10% and subsequently rescaling the weights to sum to one. It also tests a logarithmic transformation of accommodation establishments, ln(1 + H), following guidance on assessing the sensitivity of composite indicators to methodological choices (Saisana et al., 2005).

Findings | The MTPI was calculated for 98 municipalities with complete information across all seven dimensions. The leading municipalities in the respective population groups were Monteiro Lobato (0.7037), Pardinho (0.6469), Buritama (0.7014), Guararema (0.5296), Votuporanga (0.6084), Mairiporã (0.5586) and Araçatuba (0.5544).

All seven leaders retained first place across 14 weight-change scenarios. Ranking movements were limited to two places; minimum within-group Spearman correlations ranged from 0.943 to 0.998, indicating stability under the tested variations.

The logarithmic transformation highlighted the influence of accommodation: Nazaré Paulista moved into first place in the 10,001–20,000-resident group. The analysis also identified a priority for checking Buritama's accommodation register, which includes 1,009 establishments, of which 1,000 are holiday homes, supporting improvements to the Observatory's database.

The distribution of leading municipalities across population groups demonstrates the value of contextualised benchmarking. Each position reflects a combination of supply, public resource allocation, enabling conditions and economic indicators. Examining these components separately supports local diagnoses; a higher aggregate score does not establish greater visitor demand, spending or policy effectiveness. Ranking stability concerns the tested methodological choices, rather than validation of tourism outcomes.

Contributions and implications | The MTPI supports benchmarking among similarly sized municipalities, distinguishing supply, budgetary effort and institutional conditions from tourism-related economic indicators. Population grouping improves contextual comparability but does not convert inputs into outcomes.

For public managers, the findings support priority setting, investment decisions and co-operation among municipalities with comparable characteristics. For the Observatory, the index expands the interpretation of existing data and guides improvements. Linking indicators, institutional capacity and communication with local stakeholders supports their application to tourism planning (Font et al., 2023; Crabolu et al., 2024).

Conclusion | The MTPI organises evidence on tourism supply, public resource allocation, enabling conditions and tourism-related economic importance. It identifies leading composite scores within population groups and produces stable rankings under the tested weighting variations. Its contribution lies in contextualised municipal assessment and in translating Observatory data into evidence for public decision-making. The index does not directly measure visitor flows, overnight stays, occupancy or visitor expenditure, and does not establish causal effects of public investment.

Periodic application can strengthen monitoring, regional co-operation and policies tailored to local conditions.

Declaration of AI use | OpenAI Codex (GPT-6, September 2026; GPT-6.1, October 2026) assisted with drafting, restructuring, translation into British English and final editing. The author reviewed the text and takes responsibility for its content.

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Designing Mediterranean hotel breakfasts: A conceptual framework integrating guest choice, local food heritage and operational feasibility

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Keywords | hotel breakfast; choice architecture; local food; food waste; hospitality operations; Mediterranean lifestyle

Introduction | Mediterranean hotel breakfasts connect food heritage, guest choice and daily operations. Their design must accommodate local culinary content alongside supplier commitments, staffing and kitchen capacity. This paper asks how these requirements can be integrated into an operationally feasible breakfast design framework.

Theoretical background | Hotel field experiments show that plate size and social cues can reduce food waste without changing reported guest satisfaction (Kallbekken & Sælen, 2013). Experiential messages influenced vegetable choice at a hotel buffet (Cozzio et al., 2020) and were more effective than functional messages in reducing croissant plate waste at breakfast (Cozzio et al., 2021). Managers and chefs identify guest behaviour, overproduction and overserving as breakfast-waste drivers (Appel et al., 2025).

The Greek Breakfast initiative connects local food, hotel experiences and producers (Kyriakaki et al., 2016). Mediterranean lifestyle definitions include food, conviviality and connection with place (Sidossis et al., 2024). Evidence boundaries for short stays require distinguishing service and behavioural outcomes from health effects (Cenić Stojaković et al., in press).

These sources inform an integrated design proposal; they do not establish the effectiveness of the proposed framework.

Methodology | Targeted, non-systematic searches of publisher, bibliographic and institutional repository records were conducted on 14 October 2026. English-language peer-reviewed studies addressing hotel food choices, breakfast waste or local-food integration were selected. Conceptual synthesis combined their findings with the authors' practical breakfast design specification covering procurement, service observation, resource mapping and feasibility review. Literature supplies behavioural and contextual grounds; practitioner specifications supply implementation requirements. Their connections to each proposition are stated below. No hotel pilot or stakeholder validation was conducted.

Findings | Domain 1, guest choice environment, comprises spatial arrangement, visual salience and communication. Changes should make the specified Mediterranean offer accessible and attractive while preserving choice and enjoyment.

Domain 2, Mediterranean food heritage, integrates producers, seasonal ingredients, regional recipes and accurate food stories. Proposed indicators are the proportion of offered items containing ingredients of documented origin within a predefined region; the share of procurement expenditure on verified regional ingredients; and the proportion of dishes with documented regional culinary provenance. Supplier records, invoices and recipe specifications would provide evidence. Ingredient origin and recipe provenance would be recorded separately. Guest-perceived authenticity would be assessed separately through questionnaire items requiring pretesting. These are candidate indicators, not a validated authenticity scale.

Domain 3, operational feasibility, covers supplier contracts, committed volumes, mandatory products, equipment, staffing, kitchen capacity, replenishment, occupancy and seasonality. Implementation would be co-designed with the chef and food-and-beverage team after observation of existing service.

P1: Changes in placement and presentation can alter selection while maintaining guest satisfaction. Hotel experiments on messaging and plate size (Kallbekken & Sælen, 2013; Cozzio et al., 2020) provide the behavioural rationale; the practical specification extends this rationale to spatial redesign under existing-resource constraints. The placement extension is a hypothesis. Testing would compare usual service with redesigned presentation while holding food range and recipes constant. Outcomes would include target-item uptake per guest and satisfaction, with a prespecified acceptable difference for satisfaction.

P2: Alignment of local-food integration with procurement capacity supports implementation feasibility. Kyriakaki et al. (2016) provides the local-producer rationale; supplier commitments and kitchen requirements derive from the practical specification. This relationship remains proposed. Hotels or implementation periods with comparable heritage targets but differing documented procurement alignment could be compared using product availability, substitutions, preparation time and staff-reported feasibility. Such observational comparisons would require accounting for hotel size, staffing and occupancy.

P3: Coordinated display-volume, replenishment and guest-facing changes reduce buffet and plate waste more than either intervention component alone. Kallbekken and Sælen (2013), Cozzio et al. (2021) and Appel et al. (2025) inform the waste rationale; the practical specification motivates coordination. A factorial pilot could compare usual service, operational changes only, guest-facing cues only and their combination, with allocated service periods and occupancy-adjusted analysis. Synergy would require testing an interaction rather than assuming it.

Evaluation would distinguish guest experience from operational performance. Discarded edible food would be weighed separately as kitchen surplus, buffet surplus and plate waste, expressed as grams per cover. Preparation waste is outside scope; food retained for safe later use would be recorded separately. Procurement cost, service workload and satisfaction would accompany waste measurements. Comparable weekdays, guest mix and occupancy would be considered in comparisons.

Contributions and implications | The contribution is the explicit linkage of guest choice, documented Mediterranean food heritage and operational feasibility, together with source-to-proposition reasoning and candidate comparisons. The model supports testable hotel and destination applications while retaining the distinction between documented heritage and perceived authenticity.

Conclusion | This conceptual framework proposes a practical route from Mediterranean food heritage to hotel breakfast design. Feasibility assessment and staged field testing are required to examine its propositions, measurement burden and applicability across hotels.

Declaration of generative AI use

Claude Opus 5.5 (Anthropic) and ChatGPT (GPT-6, OpenAI) were used to support literature searching and suggest revisions. The authors reviewed all content and sources and take full responsibility for the text.

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Beyond Compliance: Hotel Accessibility Capabilities and Inclusive Destination Governance in Campania Region, Italy

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Keywords | Accessible tourism; Inclusive hospitality; Destination governance; Organisational capabilities; Campania; Qualitative research.

Introduction | Accessible tourism is increasingly recognised as a matter of equitable participation, service quality and destination competitiveness rather than merely the removal of architectural barriers. Hotels may offer an accessible bedroom while the wider visitor journey remains fragmented by inaccessible transport, attractions, digital information or customer service. Campania, with its coastal, urban, archaeological and inland destinations, provides a pertinent Mediterranean setting in which to examine this disconnect. This exploratory study asks how three-four- and five-star hotels conceptualise and operationalise accessibility and how destination-level arrangements enable or constrain genuinely inclusive visitor experiences.

Theoretical background | The study draws on the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), the whole-of-journey perspective on accessible tourism (Darcy and Dickson, 2009), dynamic capabilities theory (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997), and the humanising REC framework (Relationality, Embodiment and Cognition) articulated for accessible tourism by Devis-Rozental et al. (2026).

These perspectives serve distinct but complementary purposes. We conceptualise Integrated Destination Accessibility Capability (IDAC) as a proposed organisational and inter-organisational analytical construct: the capacity to identify accessibility needs, mobilise resources, adapt services and coordinate provision across the visitor journey. Its five provisional dimensions are (1) physical and sensory access; (2) continuity and usability across the journey; (3) accessible information and communication; (4) staff competence and responsive service adaptation; and (5) inter-organisational coordination and inclusive governance. REC is not an additional IDAC dimension or an interchangeable capability model. Rather, it provides the traveller-centred interpretive lens through which the experiential quality of these capabilities is assessed: relationality concerns respectful encounters and co-production, embodiment concerns diverse lived and sensory experiences, and cognition concerns intelligibility, agency and meaningful participation. The integration is justified by a complementary-levels argument: IDAC addresses how organisations and destination networks enable accessibility, whereas REC examines whether those arrangements translate into humanising experiences as understood by travellers with disability. The proposed relationship is sensitising and will be critically refined through empirical accounts rather than assumed to be validated (Buhalis and Darcy, 2011; United Nations, 2006).

Methodology | A qualitative, exploratory multiple-case study is proposed in Campania, encompassing Naples, the Sorrento–Amalfi coast, the Pompeii archaeological corridor and, where feasible, inland or island destinations. Purposive maximum-variation sampling will include approximately 15–20 managers from three-four- and five-star hotels, 8–12 destination stakeholders (including public authorities, heritage and transport providers and social organisations focused on disability theme), and a dedicated sample of approximately 12–15 travellers with disability with recent experience of the selected destinations. Traveller participation is a core, non-optional component of the design; recruitment targets are provisional and will be reviewed for diversity and information richness. Recruitment will combine invitations through hotels and destination organisations with independent outreach through disability-led organisations, accessible travel networks and open calls, avoiding exclusive gatekeeping by service providers. Selection will seek variation in mobility, sensory and cognitive access requirements, age, travel context and destination experience; participants may self-identify their access needs without disclosing a medical diagnosis.

Separate, accessible semi-structured interview guides will address organisational practices and travellers' experiences across planning, booking, transport, accommodation, attractions and departure. A short structured accessibility checklist and documentary review will support triangulation but will not constitute a validated scale. Travellers with disability and disability-led representatives will be invited to advise on interview questions, accessible formats and interpretation of emerging themes, with appropriate recognition and remuneration where feasible. Prior to recruitment, the study will obtain applicable institutional ethics approval; participation will be voluntary, with accessible information sheets and informed consent offered in plain-language, digital or other requested formats. Interviews may be conducted remotely or in accessible locations, with breaks, communication support, alternative response modes and the option to decline questions or withdraw in accordance with the approved protocol. Consent for recording will be sought separately. Data will be pseudonymised, securely stored with restricted access, and reported without identifying individuals or establishments; retention and processing will follow institutional requirements and applicable data-protection law. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2022) and cross-case comparison will examine both convergent and contradictory accounts, with explicit attention to differences between managerial claims and the lived experiences of travellers with disability.

Findings | Empirical findings are not yet available. Four provisional propositions will guide, but not predetermine, analysis: P1, visible structural adaptations may be prioritised over sensory, cognitive and digital accessibility; P2, hotel classification may not predict continuity across the accessible journey; P3, staff competence may mitigate service barriers but cannot substitute for accessible infrastructure; and P4, fragmented destination governance may weaken hotel-level efforts. Disabled travellers' accounts will be treated as primary evidence for assessing whether the proposed IDAC capabilities support relational, embodied and cognitive inclusion, and may challenge or revise the framework. The eventual report will distinguish participant perspectives, document contradictory cases and avoid unsubstantiated numerical claims.

Contributions and implications | The proposed IDAC–REC integration connects organisational and destination-level accessibility capabilities with situated experiences of travellers with disability. The theoretical contribution is a testable, multilevel account of how coordinated accessibility provision may or may not be experienced as dignified, understandable and participatory. For managers, this suggests assessing not only compliance and facility-level provision but also journey continuity and feedback from disabled guests. Destination organisations and policymakers could support co-designed accessibility information, cross-sector training, transport–heritage–hotel coordination and accessible mechanisms for reporting barriers. In Campania, the interfaces between accommodation, heritage sites, pedestrian environments and multimodal transport warrant particular attention. These are prospective implications, subject to empirical evaluation rather than established outcomes.

Conclusion | Inclusive destination performance cannot be inferred from hotel compliance alone. This exploratory study proposes IDAC as a capability-oriented framework and REC as a complementary, traveller-centred lens for evaluating the human consequences of those capabilities. By making travellers with disability integral to recruitment, data generation and interpretation, the design aims to avoid relying solely on managerial accounts. Limitations include purposive sampling, the regional setting, potential recruitment barriers and the provisional status of the integrated framework. Future research may extend the analysis through longitudinal accessibility assessments and comparative Mediterranean studies. No completed fieldwork or empirical findings are claimed.

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Meaningful Work, Limited Recovery: Hotel Managers' Well-Being and Career Sustainability in Cyprus

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Keywords | hospitality employee well-being, hotel management, work-life balance, psychological detachment, seasonal tourism, Cyprus

Introduction | Hotel management involves service responsibilities characterised by operational uncertainty and demanding schedules. In Cyprus, seasonal business cycles can make it hard to retain managers and to build sustainable careers in hotel management. Long hours, work interruptions during time off, and limited recovery time can hurt managers' lives and make managers think about leaving the sector of hotel management. Although year-round tourism is often suggested as a way to provide stable jobs, it is unclear whether simply extending the operating season would solve these work-life problems for hotel management.

Against this background, the main research question guiding this exploratory study is: How do working conditions, organisational support and tourism seasonality shape hotel managers' work-life balance, well-being and career sustainability in Cyprus? The study examines working patterns, well-being support, and career intentions that were reported by participants in the Cyprus Hotel Managers Association (CyHMA) Career Barometer: Leadership and Work-Life Balance Study 2026, which was conducted for the first time in Cyprus under the collaboration of the University of Nicosia and the CyHMA. The study treats career sustainability as a concern for the organisation and the whole sector rather than seeing well-being as only an individual responsibility for hotel management.

Theoretical background | The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model explains how demands such as heavy workload and constant availability cause strain, and how resources such as staffing, supportive colleagues and clear authority help employees manage them (Demerouti et al., 2001). Work-family conflict theory holds that the time and strain of one role can impair performance in another (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Recovery research identifies psychological detachment from work during off-time as key to recovery (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Hospitality reviews describe individual, group and organisational influences on employee well-being but note a fragmented field (Saito et al., 2025; Nafees et al., 2024), and hotel research shows that multiple work stressors lead to different psychological experiences (Wong et al., 2025). These ideas guide the analysis; the survey data do not establish causality or assess clinical mental health.

Methodology | The study uses a cross-sectional descriptive analysis of 159 survey submissions recorded from August 7 to October 1, 2026. The sample is self-selected and experienced: 76 respondents (47.8%) reported more than 20 years in hotel management, and 76 (47.8%) worked in the Ayia Napa, Protaras, or Famagusta area, limiting generalisation to all hotel managers in Cyprus. Sampling was non-probability and voluntary-response. CyHMA e-mailed its members an invitation explaining the study, with a link to the online questionnaire; three reminders followed. Two hundred members were invited with a response rate of 79.5%. Submissions were screened for duplicates and ineligible entries; none were excluded.

The protocol and questionnaire were approved by a joint CyHMA and University of Nicosia committee, which assessed the study to ensure it raised no ethical concerns. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents gave informed consent online after reading an information statement. No names or hotel names were collected; results are reported only in aggregate, no subgroup under five respondents is reported, and quoted comments are anonymised. Data were stored on a secure University server in line with the GDPR and Cyprus Law 125(I)/2018.

The questionnaire covered roles and hotel characteristics, working schedules, workload and well-being ratings, organisational support, career intentions, and one open-ended question on making hotel management a sustainable career in Cyprus. Numeric responses were summarised as means, and categorical responses as counts and percentages. Because the survey export did not provide response-scale anchors, scores are reported as recorded, not as standardised measures or clinical benchmarks.Item non-response was low: gender was missing for five respondents (3.1%) and physical exhaustion for four (2.5%). No imputation was performed; percentages use the full sample (N = 159) and means use available responses (physical exhaustion, n = 155). Gender was not used in any comparison. Of the 159 respondents, 110 (69.2%) answered the open-ended question; the 49 blanks (30.8%) were treated as non-response, not as an absence of concerns.

The 110 open-ended responses were coded using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006): familiarization, initial coding (allowing multiple codes per response), theme development, review, and definition and naming. Two University of Nicosia researchers conducted the coding in Microsoft Excel, and they resolved disagreements through discussion. Theme counts indicate how often commenters raised a concern, not the prevalence among managers. Because the study was a university-association partnership, CyHMA had no role in coding or interpretation.

Findings |Reported working patterns indicate substantial time demands during the main operating period. A total of 114 respondents (71.7%) reported working at least five and a half days per week, and 110 (69.2%) reported working more than 50 hours per week. Work also frequently extended into scheduled time off: 94 respondents (59.1%) said they often or very often handled significant work matters on a scheduled day off. A further 105 (66.0%) reported often or very often being expected to remain available outside normal working hours.

These descriptive findings align with the survey's broader emphasis on work demands, while differing from evidence about front-line employees in some of the cited literature.

The ratings show a contrast between professional meaning and opportunities for recovery. The mean score for meaningful work was 4.58; 97 respondents (61.0%) selected 4 or 5 when asked whether they would choose hotel management again. By comparison, mean scores were 2.66 for having enough time for personal and family life, 2.56 for mentally disconnecting off duty, and 2.84 for sufficient recovery between demanding periods. The recorded means for sustained excessive workload, constant availability, and staffing pressure were 4.71, 5.05, and 4.94, respectively. The unavailable scale anchors mean these scores should be compared within this dataset, not treated as external benchmarks.

Leave responses reinforce the recovery concern. Thirty-eight respondents (23.9%) said they had taken more than five consecutive days away from work and fully disconnected during the previous year. Sixty (37.7%) took time away but still dealt with work matters, while 61 (38.4%) had not taken such a break. Career intentions were mixed: 29 respondents (18.2%) reported being likely or very likely to leave their current employer within 12 months, and 38 (23.9%) reported being likely or very likely to leave hospitality within three years.

The descriptive comparison between operating patterns shows no clear work-life advantage among respondents in year-round hotels. The mean personal and family time score was 2.69 for year-round respondents and 2.61 for seasonal-hotel respondents. Mean constant-availability scores were 5.04 and 5.07, respectively. These small, unadjusted differences do not establish whether operating pattern affects managers' experiences. Open-ended responses called for more realistic hours, better work-life balance, adequate staffing, qualified teams, improved compensation and recognition, clearer career progression, and less operational interference. Some respondents also advocated extending the tourism season.

Contributions and implications | This study combines reported job demands, recovery, career intentions and operating context in a manager-focused account of hotel work in Cyprus. The coexistence of meaningful work with long hours, frequent off-duty work and low recovery ratings suggests that commitment should not be taken as evidence of sustainable working conditions, consistent with hospitality well-being approaches that consider organisational resources alongside individual experience (Saito et al., 2025). This is not evidence of a mental-health disorder or that work conditions caused career intentions.

For hotel owners, the findings support reviewing staffing depth, delegation, off-duty contact expectations and schedule predictability, and clarifying decision-making responsibilities between owners, general managers and department heads. For tourism planners, season-extension strategies may support employment continuity, but should be assessed alongside staffing and work design. Future research should use more representative samples, publish scale anchors, link repeated surveys to staffing, schedules, leave, turnover and operating patterns, use interviews to explore the themes in depth, and evaluate interventions longitudinally.

Conclusion | Among these 159 respondents, hotel management was often described as meaningful, yet long hours, work on days off, and limited opportunities to disconnect and recover remain notable concerns. The findings do not establish prevalence across Cyprus or whether year-round operation improves well-being. They suggest a practical agenda: evaluate season extension alongside adequate staffing, clear delegation, predictable schedules, protected rest and leadership boundaries, so that managers can meet service responsibilities without constant availability becoming routine.

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Port vs. Destination: Measuring Cruise Port Attractiveness through a Composite Index

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Keywords | attractiveness, cruise, port of call, Composite Attractiveness Score (CAS), Mediterranean

Introduction | This study aims to develop and apply a comprehensive composite index to assess the attractiveness of cruise ports of call, introducing the Composite Attractiveness Score (CAS). Its primary purpose is to comparatively evaluate the multidimensional characteristics of each port of call-decoupling the intrinsic attributes of the destination from the operational and economic conditions of the port infrastructure-and to examine how these dimensions align with scheduled cruise activity. To test its applicability across diverse Mediterranean operational and spatial environments, an empirical case study is conducted focusing on four distinct ports in different countries: Thessaloniki (Greece), Split (Croatia), Palermo (Italy), and Valencia (Spain).

Theoretical background | Previous research in maritime economics and port management has extensively explored port performance evaluation using multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA) approaches (Lorenčič et al., 2022). Furthermore, scholarly attention has been directed toward identifying the critical criteria governing cruise port of call selection (Nguyen et al., 2024) and understanding the pivotal role that a destination's overall tourist attractiveness plays in strategic itinerary design (Alves & Santos, 2022).
Addressing existing gaps in the literature, the index proposed in this study is uniquely tailored for ports of call, relying on standardized spatial and economic measurement criteria. It must be noted that this tool does not evaluate the totality of port operations, nor does it deterministically forecast the commercial routing decisions of cruise lines.

Instead, its conceptual framework is structured around the triad of supply, organization, and demand. Supply is captured by the Destination-Side Index (DSI), reflecting the destination's tourism ecosystem, while organization is represented by the technical and economic parameters of the port via the Port-Side Index (PSI). The synthesis of these two sub-indices yields the Composite Attractiveness Score (CAS). Regarding demand, the scheduled cruise calls for the year 2026 are examined independently. This deliberate methodological separation avoids circularity within the index, allowing researchers to investigate the complex, non-linear relationship between measured attractiveness and actual market activity-demand, which is also shaped by external factors such as commercial networks and corporate alliances.

Methodology | The selection of the four Mediterranean ports (Thessaloniki, Split, Palermo, and Valencia) was based on their comparability as intermediate cruise stops, while simultaneously offering varying spatial typologies and operational constraints. Grounded in bibliography, seven core variables were selected and adapted into operational functional definitions (Table 1).

Table 1. Operational measurement of variables.

Aspects	Dimensions / sub-indices	Variables used in our analysis	Measurement method
Supply	Destination-Side Index (DSI)	Terminal–city centre accessibility	Walking-network distance from terminal to city centre (km) · ↓
		Tourism and visitor amenities	Count of named mapped elements within 2 km · ↑
		Cultural and heritage attractions	Count of unique named attractions within 2 km · ↑
		Public transport accessibility	Count of named mapped elements within 2 km · ↑
		Shore-excursion diversity	Number of thematic categories represented (0–6) · descriptive only
Organization	Port-Side Index (PSI)	Maximum permissible vessel draft	Maximum permitted cruise-vessel draft (m) · ↑
		Published port/terminal charges	Published charges under a standardised call scenario (€) · ↓

Source: the authors (based on an international literature review)
(*Note*: ↑ indicates higher values are preferred; ↓ indicates lower values are preferred).

Spatial measurements were established using the passenger cruise terminal of each port (as of October 3, 2026), with pedestrian network distances calculated to the urban core. More specifically, the variables: a. tourism and visitor amenities, b. cultural and heritage

attractions and c. public transport accessibility, were extracted using Overpass Turbo (a web-based data mining and visualization tool for OpenStreetMap) within a 2 km buffer zone, distinguishing between nominal amenities/stops and unique historical/cultural sites. Shore excursion diversity is evaluated across six thematic categories, based on the bibliographical framework of Sun et al. (2021) and adapted to the scope of this study. However, this variable is excluded from the final composite index calculation, as it exhibited identical values across all four ports and offered no analytical differentiation. The data for permissible vessel draft and for port/terminal charges are derived from the selected regions' port authorities. The latter are used for calculations based on a standardized reference scenario: a 100,000 GT vessel, 300 m in length, with a 10-hour stay and 3,000 transit passengers, excluding, among others, pilotage, towing, and bilateral commercial discounts.

Following the methodological guidelines of OECD and JRC (2008) for cross-port comparability, data normalization was implemented using the min–max method on a scale of 0 to 100. Positive-oriented variables applied:

$$100 \times \frac{\mathrm{Xi} - \mathrm{Xmin}}{\mathrm{Xmax} - \mathrm{Xmin}}$$

whereas negative-oriented variables applied:

$$100 \times \frac{\mathrm{Xmax} - \mathrm{Xi}}{\mathrm{Xmax} - \mathrm{Xmin}}$$

Assigning equal analytical weights, the Composite Attractiveness Score is formally defined as:

$$\mathrm{CAS} = (0.50 \times \mathrm{DSI}) + (0.50 \times \mathrm{PSI})$$

Findings | The analytical results reveal distinct strategic profiles among the examined ports (see Table 2). Palermo achieves an optimal equilibrium, combining high scores across both sub-indices (DSI: 84.5, PSI: 84.1) which translates into a robust overall CAS of 84.3 and substantial cruise traffic (270 calls). Conversely, Thessaloniki and Split exhibit pronounced dichotomies: Thessaloniki boasts an exceptionally high destination attractiveness (DSI: 94.4 due to its proximity and rich urban amenities) but faces severe infrastructural/economic constraints on the port side (PSI: 11.3), aligning with a lower volume of scheduled calls (59). In contrast, Split demonstrates strong port-side efficiency (PSI: 90.0) coupled with moderate destination appeal, yet secures the highest market demand in the sample with 376 calls, underscoring the dominant role of broader network economics. Valencia's low DSI score reflects the specific peripheral geography of its cruise terminal relative to the urban core rather than a deficiency in overarching tourism value.

Table 2. Composite Attractiveness Score by port of call

Port of call	Destination-Side Index (DSI)	Port-Side Index (PSI)	Composite Attractiveness Score (CAS)	Scheduled Calls (2026)
Thessaloniki	94.4	11.3	52.8	59
Split	62.3	90.0	76.2	376
Palermo	84.5	84.1	84.3	270
Valencia	0.0	30.0	15.0	264

Source: port authorities, authors' calculations

(Note. All scores range from 0 to 100 within the four-port sample.)

Contributions and implications | This study formulates a standardised, reproducible composite index that effectively decouples destination appeal from port-side operational constraints. By analysing performance through the dual lens of DSI and PSI, port authorities, Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), and municipal stakeholders can identify precise structural bottlenecks-whether in urban accessibility, visitor infrastructure, or port pricing frameworks—thus enabling evidence-based strategic interventions.

Conclusion | The empirical application of the Composite Attractiveness Score (CAS) framework confirms that diverse combinations of destination assets and port operational conditions can coexist with varying levels of market activity. The index serves as a valuable diagnostic tool and benchmarking baseline for comparative port research, encouraging more targeted strategic planning in Mediterranean cruise tourism. Key avenues for future research include expanding the sample size to encompass a broader range of ports and conducting sensitivity analyses regarding weighting configurations.

Declaration of AI Use I ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-6) was used to support the structuring and linguistic refinement of this abstract. The author reviewed and verified the final content and retains full responsibility for it.

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5. Sustainability, Society and Development

Visitor Pro-Circular Behaviours in Rural Destinations: A Conceptual Model

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Keywords | Circular Economy, Rural Tourism, Visitor Behaviour, Circular Tourism, Pro-circular Behaviours, Conceptual Model.

Introduction | The Circular Economy (CE) has become an increasingly important approach for reducing resource consumption and supporting more sustainable tourism systems. While previous studies have explored circular practices adopted by tourism organisations, much less attention has been given to visitors and the factors that influence their engagement in pro-circular behaviours throughout the travel experience. Existing research has largely focused on isolated behaviours or individual determinants, providing limited understanding of how visitors' knowledge, attitudes, destination characteristics, and perceptions of tourism businesses interact to shape behaviour. This study addresses this gap by proposing a conceptual model that explains visitors' pro-circular behaviours and the factors influencing their adoption. By considering both individual and destination-related factors, the model seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of behavioural change within circular tourism.

Theoretical background | The proposed model is grounded in Circular Economy literature, pro-environmental behaviour research, and tourism studies. Its behavioural foundations are primarily informed by the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Norm Activation Theory, and the Model of Responsible Environmental Behaviour. Together, these theoretical perspectives explain how knowledge, attitudes, personal and normative considerations, perceived facilitating conditions, and contextual factors may influence pro-circular behavioural adoption.

The model incorporates visitors' knowledge of circularity, attachment to travel-related items and to rural destinations, destination contextual facilitators, perceived circular characteristics and practices, attitudes towards circularity and pre-existing pro-circular behaviours. These constructs are expected to influence pro-circular behaviours undertaken at the destination. The framework therefore conceptualises circular behaviour as a process extending across consumption stages and contexts rather than as a set of isolated actions performed solely at the destination.

Methodology | The model was developed through a structured conceptual synthesis grounded in an extensive literature review of pro-circular consumer behaviour across economic sectors. The review was used to identify and categorise the behaviours, determinants, constructs, and theoretical perspectives most consistently addressed in previous empirical research. These findings were then critically integrated and contextualised within rural tourism, considering the temporal and spatial specificities of the visitor experience and the influence of tourism businesses and destination conditions. This process supported the definition of the model's constructs, their conceptual boundaries, and the relationships proposed between prior everyday-life behaviours, behaviours performed at the destination, and subsequent behavioural change.

Findings | The resulting framework proposes that visitors' pro-circular behaviours at rural destinations are shaped by the interaction between internal and external factors, as well as by behaviours already practised in everyday life. The inclusion of prior pro-circular behaviours recognises that visitors do not enter the destination as behaviourally neutral actors: established habits and practices may be transferred from the home context to the tourism experience.

Contributions and implications | By considering prior everyday-life behaviours alongside behaviours adopted at the destination, the model distinguishes between the transfer of established practices to the tourism context and behavioural changes potentially stimulated by the destination experience.

From a practical perspective, the framework may support destination managers and tourism businesses in identifying interventions that encourage visitors to adopt and maintain pro-circular behaviours. The model may also assist policymakers in designing destination strategies that combine infrastructure, communication, business practices, and regulation to facilitate circular transitions in rural tourism.

In a subsequent research stage, the conceptual model will be operationalised through measurement scales derived and adapted from the literature and applied to visitors to rural destinations. Data collected from visitors will be used to assess the reliability and validity of the proposed constructs and to test the hypothesised relationships between individual, organisational, and destination-related factors, prior pro-circular behaviours, and behaviours performed during the visit. This empirical application will determine the model's explanatory capacity and assess its usefulness for both theory development and the design of interventions by tourism businesses, destination managers, and policymakers.

Conclusion | By integrating individual, organisational, and destination-related factors within a single framework, this study provides a basis for understanding how circular behaviours develop across the tourism experience. Future empirical testing will contribute to validating the proposed relationships and advancing knowledge on the role of tourism demand in the transition towards more circular rural destinations.

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Beyond the Plate: Future Food Systems as Drivers of Destination Connection, Gastronomic Tourism and Place Marketing

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Keywords | Future Food Systems; Gastronomic Tourism; Destination Marketing; Iceberg Model; Place Connection

Introduction | Food is fundamental to tourism. Food offers visitors an opportunity to experience the culture and identity of a destination. This abstract considers food as part of a wider destination food ecosystem connecting visitors with people, producers, landscapes, culture and place. Will future food systems play a critical role in marketing destinations as gastronomic destinations, and if so, how? It explores how food-system transformation could move destination marketing beyond what visitors eat towards where food originates, and how it is actually produced. Using food-system transformation in South Holland as a case study, the paper examines how connections between food, sustainability, health, social inclusion, and regional production could be extended to visitors. Also, how it can be incorporated into future gastronomic destination strategies.

Theoretical Background | The Iceberg Model provides a systems-based theoretical approach for understanding how visible outcomes are influenced by less visible practices and structures and, at the deepest level. At the same time, it underlines any paradigms and mental models. The model encourages deeper analysis of the relationships, mechanisms, systems and values that generate these outcomes.

The model is applied as a four-level coding framework: (1) observable events and outcomes, (2) recurring practices and behavioural patterns, (3) institutional, economic and supply-chain structures, and (4) underlying assumptions, values and paradigms.

Every single level is examined for causal or enabling relationships with the levels above it, rather than treating the iceberg solely as an illustrative metaphor (Reinprecht et al., 2026).

That can apply to tourism. From the visitor's perspective, the visible “tip of the iceberg” includes local dishes, restaurants, markets, food festivals, culinary events and other gastronomic experiences. Research increasingly identifies these experiences as important components of destination image and differentiation. Sio et al. (2024) demonstrate that gastronomy has become an increasingly significant element in the formation and communication of destination image. In the same vein, Picazo et al. (2025) highlight the importance of gastronomic offerings within tourism marketing and destination promotional communication.

The Iceberg Model suggests that the gastronomic experiences encountered by tourists represent only the visible manifestation of a much deeper destination food ecosystem. Beneath these experiences are agricultural and production practices, local and regional supply chains, hospitality businesses, and waste-management practices. Also governance structures and relationships between communities, producers and consumers. Antón et al. (2019) emphasise the roles of authenticity, cultural contrast and adaptation in shaping memorable gastronomic tourism experiences. Their findings suggest that the significance of gastronomy extends beyond consumption itself. Culinary experiences create opportunities for tourists to enter into a form of cultural dialogue with the destination. This relationship between food and place is also evident in the work of Dias and Posheliuznaia (2025). They examine how authentic local cuisine contributes to tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty.

The South Holland case introduces a food-systems perspective, identifying through the Iceberg Model an emerging paradigm in which food extends beyond consumption to become a mechanism connecting people, health, environment, economy, community and place. Food can therefore create synergies across the social, economic, cultural and ecological dimensions of a destination. At the same time it strengthening cohesion, wellbeing and belonging. The future-oriented “green” Iceberg Model further envisages shorter supply chains, regenerative and biodiversity-focused practices, and stronger relationships amongst food-system actors, reflecting a transition from production- and profit-centred systems towards a more holistic ecosystem emphasising ecological and social value (Reinprecht et al., 2026).

These perspectives indicate a transition from gastronomy as a tourism product towards gastronomy as a destination ecosystem. Research associates gastronomy with memorable experiences (Antón et al., 2019), destination image (Sio et al., 2024), destination marketing (Picazo et al., 2025), and tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Dias & Posheliuznaia, 2025). The Iceberg Model provides a more holistic analysis, moving beneath visible tourism phenomena towards the wider food ecosystem.

The synthesis of these theoretical perspectives therefore provides the foundation for exploring whether future food systems can become a strategic component of gastronomic destination identity and marketing. T the same time, the Iceberg Model provides an opportunity to investigate the deeper structures, mechanisms and paradigms behind those experiences. The future of gastronomic tourism may therefore depend not only on the distinctive foods a destination offers, but increasingly on the stories, people, landscapes, philosophies and sustainable food systems behind the plate.

Methodology | This exploratory research adopts a qualitative case-study methodology, using the South Holland food-system research as its principal case. The case incorporates five municipalities at different stages of food governance development: The Hague, Rotterdam, Leiden, Dordrecht and Krimpenerwaard. The existing study examined municipal food strategies, food visions, policy documents and local initiatives using the Iceberg Model, identifying interventions at the outcome, practice, structural and paradigm levels.

The unit of analysis is the specific municipality, with the existing South Holland research as the principal secondary source. Reported initiatives, policy instruments and stakeholder relationships are extracted into a comparative matrix and coded deductively against the four Iceberg levels.

A second interpretative coding stage maps potentially tourism-relevant themes, local sourcing, cultural narratives, participation, ecological practices and governance, onto destination -marketing concepts.

The analysis distinguishes (a) observations explicitly reported in the original study, (b) interpretations supported by tourism literature and (c) prospective applications proposed by this paper. No primary visitor interviews, tourism-impact measurements or causal tests are claimed. The source report and underlying coding matrix must be checked before presenting this procedure as completed.

These findings are complemented by desk research, conceptual analysis and theoretical synthesis to explore their potential relevance to gastronomic tourism and destination marketing. Attention is given to themes that could create synergies between food systems and tourism. These can be local and regional food chains, food education, food festivals, community engagement, sustainability, and regional identity. It might also be a reason for collaborations amongst public authorities, businesses and communities.

Findings | Preliminary analysis suggests that the relationship between future food systems and gastronomic tourism extends beyond food consumption towards a dynamic connection between food, people and place. Across the case-study destinations, food interventions already create synergies amongst producers, communities, municipalities, education, health, environmental sustainability and local economies. That happens through activities including food education, community meals, food-waste initiatives, local markets, food festivals etc

Municipal food education, community meals, waste-reduction initiatives and local-market activities are treated as food-system examples described in the underlying case account; their frequency, implementation status and measured policy effects require confirmation against the original report. Their relevance to visitor experiences and destination promotion is an analytical extension, not a documented outcome of the South Holland study (Reinprecht et al., 2026)

Viewed through the Iceberg Model, these findings suggest that gastronomic destination development may depend considerably on the systems and mechanisms operating beneath the visible visitor experience. Restaurants, dishes, markets and culinary events represent the visible tourism product. But their authenticity and sustainability are supported by deeper elements. This reinforces the wider tourism literature suggesting that gastronomy can contribute to memorable experiences, destination image, marketing and destination loyalty (Antón et al., 2019; Sio et al., 2024; Dias & Posheliuznaia, 2025; Picazo et al., 2025).

Food may therefore strengthen destination connection through storytelling and heritage, dialogue. Communities can enhance experiences and locally embedded hospitality. Future food systems could consequently become part of a destination's marketing identity, shifting the emphasis from simply communicating “what to eat” towards explaining where food comes from, who produces it, what values and philosophy it represents (Reinprecht et al., 2026).

Destination connection is defined as the visitor's cognitive, emotional and behavioural relationship with a place developed through encounters with its food ecosystem. It can be operationalised through:

- awareness of food provenance and local producers (cognitive);
- perceived authenticity, place identity and emotional attachment (affective);
- participation in producer-led or community food activities (experiential);
- intention to revisit, recommend or purchase local products (behavioural).

These are proposed indicators for future surveys, interviews and visitor-behaviour studies. They have not been measured in the present exploratory analysis

Contributions and Implications | The paper contributes conceptually by creating a synthesis between food-system transformation, gastronomic tourism and destination marketing. All this through the Iceberg Model. It proposes that gastronomic tourism should not be analysed exclusively at the level of culinary products and visitor consumption, but more holistically as part of a wider destination ecosystem.

The distinctive analytical contribution is a traceable chain linking visible gastronomic experiences to recurring production and consumption practices, governance and supply-chain arrangements. Also, deeper assumptions about food, community and ecological value. This enables destination marketers to identify which claims about authenticity or sustainability have systemic support, and which are merely promotional narratives.

For destination marketers and tourism organisations, this perspective could expand destination branding from iconic dishes and restaurants towards food ecosystems incorporating farms, fisheries, markets, producers, traditions, communities and sustainability initiatives. For hospitality businesses, stronger integration with local food systems could create synergies supporting menu authenticity, local sourcing, producer storytelling. For policymakers and destination managers, the findings emphasise the potential importance of collaboration between tourism, agriculture, food policy, health, culture, ecological management and local communities.

Conclusion | Future food systems have the potential to influence the dynamics of how gastronomic destinations are developed, experienced and marketed. The South Holland case indicates that food-system transformation involves considerably more than changing what people consume. It can reshape relationships amongst producers, consumers, communities, institutions, landscapes and natural resources. Translating these principles into tourism creates an opportunity to reconsider food as a mechanism through which visitors connect meaningfully with the identity, culture and geography of destinations.

What tourists see and consume represents only the visible part of the gastronomic tourism ecosystem. Beneath the plate are the networks, policies, supply chains, communities, agricultural landscapes, ecological relationships and paradigms that make the experience possible.

The central proposition emerging from this exploratory analysis is therefore that the future competitiveness and authenticity of gastronomic destinations may increasingly depend not only on the food they serve, but on the food systems they represent. Future empirical research should investigate whether visitors recognise and value these deeper dimensions, how they affect destination attachment and behavioural intentions, and how destination organisations can translate food-system transformation into credible gastronomic destination narratives without reducing sustainability and local identity to marketing claims.

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Mapping Tourism Supply for Destination Planning in the Aveiro Region

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Keywords| Tourism supply, Spatial planning, GIS, Central Place Theory

Introduction | Planning the distribution of tourism activity requires information about where accommodation, services, attractions and transport connections are located (Lau & McKercher, 2006). This study examines tourism supply in Aveiro and Ílhavo, two municipalities in central Portugal that include urban centres, the Aveiro lagoon and coastal communities. It investigates how spatial analysis can identify concentrations of tourism supply and differences in the functions of these places. The aim is to inform planning across municipal boundaries by examining where services and connections could support a wider distribution of visits.

Theoretical background | Central Place Theory explains the number, size, and distribution of settlements that provide goods and services, known as central places (Christaller, 1966). In tourism, it helps interpret the concentration of accommodation and services in some locations (e.g. Jakar & Binesh, 2024). A place with accommodation, restaurants and transport connections may provide a base for visiting nearby areas and help retain the economic benefits of tourism within the local economy (Daniels, 2007). Transport networks, administrative boundaries and changes in demand also influence tourism supply (Christaller, 1966). The analysis, therefore, examines the distribution of services and accessibility, as well as the relationships suggested by the theory.

Methodology | Secondary geospatial data were compiled from Portuguese public institutions and OpenStreetMap as of 31 March 2025. The datasets were processed in a geographic information system and assigned to a grid of 150-metre cells covering Aveiro and Ílhavo. Each cell recorded accommodation capacity and the number of food and beverage establishments and tour operators. Information on attractions and accessibility was used to compare the areas identified through the analysis. Global spatial statistics were used to assess whether the three types of supply were clustered across the study area. Local spatial statistics identified accommodation clusters, while Lee's L measured the spatial association between accommodation capacity and complementary services (Anselin, 2024). The identified clusters were then compared using maps and standardised indicators of supply, attractions and accessibility.

Findings | Accommodation, food and beverage, and tour operator establishments have shown statistically significant global clustering and positive spatial autocorrelation (all $p < 0.001$). Accommodation capacity showed a positive spatial association with food and beverage establishments ($L = 0.189$; $p = 0.002$) and with tour operators ($L = 0.148$; $p = 0.002$). Five accommodation clusters, each representing at least three neighbouring grid cells classified as high-high, were identified in the city centres of Aveiro and Ílhavo, as well as in Barra, Costa Nova, and São Jacinto.

Aveiro city centre had the greatest concentration of accommodation and complementary services, together with a range of attractions and transport connections. Barra, Costa Nova and São Jacinto contained beaches and recreational resources but generally had fewer complementary services. Barra and Costa Nova had stronger road and bus connections than São Jacinto, whose accessibility depended more on ferry services. Ílhavo city centre had a smaller tourism supply, while cultural heritage stood out relative to its other attraction indicators.

Contributions and implications | The study shows how the spatial distribution of supply can inform planning when detailed visitor movement data are unavailable. It identifies where accommodation and services are concentrated together and can help destination managers assess the requirements of each area. In accordance with CPT theory, this is not a representation of demand but an organisation of supply across places of different sizes distributed within a destination, with distinct characteristics shaped by market, transportation, and geographical contexts. Moreover, the findings describe tourism supply and its spatial relationships but do not measure visitor numbers, spending, or movement between clusters. Planning decisions based on these results should account for that distinction. The analysis has some limitations. Granularity is limited to a 150 m2 grid cell. Spatial association does not establish whether accommodation attracts services or whether both respond to other factors, such as accessibility and local demand. Tour operator registration addresses may not correspond to where activities take place. OpenStreetMap data may also contain gaps or classification errors.

Conclusion | Tourism supply in Aveiro and Ílhavo is concentrated in Aveiro city centre, with other clusters providing coastal, recreational and cultural resources. Spatial analysis helps identify these differences and the service and accessibility conditions associated with them. The results provide a basis for coordinating tourism planning across the two municipalities. Visitor movement data would allow further assessment of whether the relationships identified in the supply correspond to travel between these areas.

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Rethinking Tourism Destination Governance through a Community-Based Approach: An Italian Case Study

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Keywords | network governance; community-based tourism; community cooperative; destination governance; inner areas; destination management organisation

Introduction | For nearly twenty years, tourism governance research has been dominated by the network model, which treats destinations as webs of formally interdependent stakeholders. In practice, this model often fails to build local capacity for action and leaves community-led initiatives exposed to external actors. This article proposes an alternative foundation: community-based tourism (CBT) governance, anchored in residents' ties to place rather than in an abstract network of nodes. It examines how, in Italy's small inner-area towns, the community cooperative turns this principle into institutional practice through resident ownership and asks who is included and who remains outside.

Theoretical background | Network governance models destinations as coordinated, formally equivalent actors; critics argue that this equivalence obscures unequal power and exposes participatory governance to elite capture, tokenism and outside interference (Dredge, 2006; Farmaki, 2015; Jánová et al., 2025). Community-based tourism instead treats the community as a place-rooted subject of empowerment (De Andreis, 2023), yet risks assuming a homogeneous community, overlooking internal hierarchies of class, gender, age and length of residence that shape who participates and who benefits (Tosun, 2000; Blackstock, 2005; Fan et al., 2023). In Italy, the community cooperative offers a distinct institutional response (Mastronardi & Romagnoli, 2020; Bizzarri, 2026): under Puglia's regional law (Legge regionale Puglia n. 23/2014), one-member-one-vote control and mandatory reinvestment of surplus in local services extend tourism governance beyond a single-sector logic. Formal equality among members, however, does not guarantee substantive equality among residents.

Methodology | The study combines a structured literature review with an exploratory single case study. Scopus was searched on 20 October 2026 for "network governance", "community-based tourism" or "community cooperative*", combined with tourism, destination or inner-area terms and with governance, destination management, participation or empowerment (titles, abstracts, keywords; articles, reviews, chapters and books in English or Italian, 2010 onwards). Of 618 records, one duplicate was removed; 196 passed title and abstract screening and 107 passed an eligibility assessment of full abstracts against the study's two axes: network versus community-based governance in tourism development, and CBT theory applied to destination governance. Backward snowballing added 26 sources, giving a corpus of 133; the selection is reported following the PRISMA 2020 flow of identification, screening and eligibility (Page et al., 2021). The case is the Biccari Community Cooperative (Monti Dauni, Puglia). The documentary corpus comprises municipal tourist-flow statistics for 2013–2025 (Osservatorio Turistico della Regione Puglia, 2025), regional legislation, and the cooperative's statute, website and visitor offer, plus information provided by the cooperative, analysed through qualitative content analysis with deductive codes from the review (ownership, decision-making, surplus allocation, membership and access, benefit distribution) and triangulated across sources.

Findings | Biccari, a mountain town in Puglia's Monti Dauni within Italy's National Strategy for Inner Areas, hosts a cooperative founded in 2013 as a labour cooperative, which adopted a community cooperative statute on 7 June 2017 and scaled up its activities from 2020. One-member-one-vote governance and mandatory reinvestment of surplus fund not only tourism but also housing, mobility and welfare services. With local farmers, artisans, guides and associations as members, the cooperative curates the visitor offer without a separate destination management organisation, employing four permanent staff plus seasonal workers. Arrivals rose from 60–140 a year (2013–2018) to 564 in 2023, and overnight stays from 372 in 2016 to 1,183 in 2023, with the steepest growth after 2020, although causality cannot be established. The cooperative has 229 members, about 9% of the 2,579 residents on 1 January 2026 (ISTAT, 2026), above the legal minimum of 7% for towns of 2,500–5,000 inhabitants (Legge regionale Puglia n. 23/2014, art. 4): over 90% of inhabitants remain outside formal decision-making while sharing tourism's costs and benefits.

Members include users, workers and supporters of all ages, the latter often retirees or professionals with little active involvement. The five-member board, elected by these resident members, includes three women, and three presidents aged 30–45 have succeeded one another in nine years, the first later becoming mayor, which blurs the boundary between cooperative and municipal leadership (Cooperativa di Comunità Biccari, n.d., personal communication, October 2026). Data on assembly attendance and income distribution are unavailable.

Contributions and implications | The case shows that community cooperative ownership supplies network-governance theory with an institutional mechanism it has generally lacked: cooperation that does not rest on participants' goodwill alone, because ownership, control and territory coincide in the same resident population. Such governance favours cooperative learning over the top-down replication of rules typical of networks, and suits shrinking inner-area towns, where it turns tourism income into wider regeneration (Ivona et al., 2021). The case also qualifies CBT theory: resident ownership narrows, but does not close, the gap between formal and substantive participation, since internal power relations cannot be inferred from statutory rules alone (Blackstock, 2005; Fan et al., 2023). Its legitimacy depends on open membership, transparent reporting of benefit-sharing and the inclusion of non-member residents, newcomers and less-organised groups. Finally, national tax law does not recognise the cooperative's multifunctional character, limiting its competitiveness and transferability (Mastronardi & Romagnoli, 2020).

Conclusion | Community cooperative ownership, which vests control and surplus in a place's residents rather than in a functional group of stakeholders, gives community-based tourism governance its most territorially grounded institutional form. Biccari illustrates this model in an inner area, alongside rising arrivals and overnight stays. It also shows that resident ownership is bounded: it includes members rather than the whole community, and formal equality does not settle how power is exercised. As a single, largely descriptive case based on secondary data, the study cannot establish causality or be generalised; Biccari is promising rather than representative. Future research should pursue matched comparative case studies; fieldwork with members, non-member residents and visitors on empowerment, exclusion and benefit-sharing; and longitudinal analysis of whether resident ownership remains open and accountable as visitor numbers grow.

Declaration of AI use. Claude (Anthropic; model Claude Opus 5.5) was used under the author's supervision to: (i) run the Scopus search reported in the Methodology and carry out the title/abstract screening and eligibility assessment, which the author then checked; (ii) revise and condense the English text of this abstract in response to the reviewers' comments; and (iii) check reference formatting and retrieve DOIs through Crossref. No additional works were drawn on by the tool beyond those cited. The author verified all content, data and sources and takes full responsibility for the work.

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Waste Reduction and Circular Consumption in Europe: Implications for Sustainable Tourism Destination Management

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Introduction | Tourism may increase pressure on local waste systems, especially in destinations with strong seasonality, large visitor flows, and limited capacity for waste collection and treatment, as is often the case in Mediterranean and island destinations. European countries also differ in residents' stated willingness to reuse packaging, sort waste for recycling, avoid unnecessary packaging, and buy products in recycled packaging. These country-level differences provide a useful benchmark for tourism research, but they do not predict how individual tourists behave while travelling. Pro-environmental behaviour can change between everyday life and holiday settings (von Briel et al., 2026; Wu et al., 2021). This study considers differences in stated waste-reduction and circular-consumption intentions across EU Member States and uses them as a baseline for later comparison with tourist-level data. As part of the TWISST project, the analysis focuses on patterns throughout the EU, the position of Portugal and Mediterranean tourism countries, and how these differences can guide questions about waste-management measures that should later be tested using tourist behaviour data.

Theoretical background | The study concentrates on pro-environmental consumer behaviour, circular consumption, and waste management in tourism destinations. Progress towards a circular tourism model depends not only on infrastructure and organizational changes, but also on whether consumers reuse materials, recycle, prevent waste, and choose more sustainable products (Gusmerotti et al., 2024). Tourists do not necessarily behave the same way on holiday as they do at home because environmental behaviour also depends on the conditions they encounter at the destination (Wang et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). Packaging choices similarly depend on convenience, environmental awareness, and how consumers perceive reusable or recycled alternatives (Martinho et al., 2015; Miao et al., 2023). Therefore, country-level differences in these orientations can offer context for European source markets but do not directly measure tourist behaviour. This distinction is especially important in Mediterranean and island destinations, where tourism can increase local waste volumes and put additional pressure on collection and treatment systems (Diaz-Farina et al., 2020).

Methodology | The study uses weighted country-level data from Special Eurobarometer 550/Eurobarometer 101.2 (European Commission, 2024), collected between March and April 2024. The analysis covers the 27 EU Member States. We excluded the EU27 aggregate and the West and East German subsamples to avoid double counting. We used four QB6 indicators: willingness to use reusable packaging, sort waste correctly for recycling, buy mainly products in recycled packaging, and buy mainly products with no more packaging than necessary. QB8, which measures willingness to pay more for repairable, recyclable, or sustainably produced goods, was included as a supplementary variable. Euclidean distances were calculated from the four country percentages. We used equal weighting because all indicators share the same percentage-point scale.

We examined country profiles using non-metric multidimensional scaling (MDS) with 60 random starts. The two-dimensional solution showed good fit (Kruskal stress-1 = .037) and was very similar to the classical scaling solution (Procrustes disparity = .005); its first two axes accounted for 77% and 16% of positive-eigenvalue configuration variance. We used property fitting to interpret the non-metric axes. Ward hierarchical clustering was then applied to describe broad country groupings. The four-cluster solution showed weak separation (average silhouette = .28), so we treat the groups as descriptive positions along a continuum rather than clearly distinct types. Sampling uncertainty was assessed using 1,000 parametric bootstrap replications. We tested sensitivity to indicator weighting by halving and doubling each indicator's distance weight in turn and by re-estimating the configuration after z-standardisation.

Findings | Property fitting shows that the first MDS axis is strongly associated with all four QB6 indicators (r = .86–.91), reflecting overall engagement in waste reduction across countries. The second axis separates countries with relatively stronger sorting and reuse from those with stronger recycled-packaging purchasing and packaging avoidance and is interpreted with more caution. In the closely matching classical MDS benchmark, the corresponding first and second axes represent 77% and 16% of positive-eigenvalue configuration variance. QB8 is strongly associated with the first axis (r = .80), indicating that countries with higher waste-reduction engagement also tend to report greater willingness to pay for more sustainable products. Denmark, Finland, and Sweden show the highest overall engagement. Austria, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Slovenia also record relatively high levels. France, Spain, and Malta are positioned at intermediate levels, whereas Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, and Portugal show lower overall engagement.

The group means follow the same pattern. The Nordic group averages 71.7% for reuse, 88.4% for sorting, 60.8% for purchasing products in recycled packaging, and 72.2% for avoiding unnecessary packaging, compared with 43.8%, 54.8%, 35.4%, and 36.4%, respectively, in the lower-engagement group. Portugal records 48.9% for reusable packaging, 64.4% for correct sorting, 32.7% for recycled packaging, and 29.5% for avoiding unnecessary packaging. Malta shows particularly high levels of sorting (93.6%) and reuse (73.8%), but much lower levels of purchasing recycled packaging (39.0%) and avoiding packaging (33.2%). Cyprus records lower values overall, especially for packaging avoidance (27.7%).

These results show that Mediterranean countries do not follow a common pattern. The main country configuration is robust to alternative indicator weights: Procrustes disparities range from .003 to .014, and rank correlations between baseline and reweighted inter-country distances range from .986 to .996. Cluster categorisations are less stable, reinforcing their interpretation as descriptive rather than discrete country types.

Contributions and implications | The analysis merges the four waste-reduction indicators instead of comparing countries one percentage at a time. MDS shows how national profiles relate to one another and confirms that no single indicator drives the overall pattern. For sustainable tourism research, these country profiles should be used as background information rather than as measures of individual tourist behaviour. They can help frame questions for further research, such as whether tourists from countries with different national profiles also differ in sorting, reuse, or packaging avoidance while travelling, and whether local infrastructure affects these practices. The results, therefore, do not support adapting interventions to tourists solely based on nationality or source market. Any such measures should first be tested using tourist-specific or observed behavioural data. Within the TWISST project, the next step is to compare the Eurobarometer country profiles with tourist survey results and local waste-management conditions, and then determine which interventions are supported by evidence from tourists.

Conclusion | European countries differ in both the level and type of their stated waste-reduction intentions. The MDS shows a clear overall pattern, while the clusters provide only a broad summary of country differences. Mediterranean and island countries also do not follow a single profile. Because the data describe resident populations, they cannot be used to predict how individual tourists behave while travelling. For tourism research, the country profiles are useful as a European benchmark for developing and testing questions with tourist-level data. Before these national differences are used to guide waste-management measures at destinations, they should be compared alongside observed or tourist-specific behaviour.

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Solid Waste Management in Maltese Hostels: A Socio-Technical Perspective on Behaviour, Operations and Governance

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Keywords | Solid waste management; hostels; sustainable tourism; Malta; circular economy; tourist behaviour; tourism governance

Introduction | Solid waste management (SWM) is a sustainability challenge for small island destinations, particularly in view that tourism intensity and limited space increase pressure on infrastructure. Maltese hospitality research documents significant food, plastic and packaging waste (Camilleri-Fenech et al., 2020), yet hostel-specific practices remain underexplored. Malta's hostel sector accommodated approximately 297,000 guests in 2024, compared with 147,000 in 2019 (NSO, 2025), with the sector gaining tract following the Covid-19 pandemic. Shared dormitories, communal kitchens and high guest turnover make waste separation dependent on both visitors and operational staff. This study examines how behaviour, infrastructure, hostel operations and destination governance shape SWM across three Maltese hostels.

Theoretical background | The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) links behaviour to attitudes, norms and perceived control (Ajzen, 1991), whereas the Attitude-Behaviour-Context (ABC) model emphasises enabling or constraining circumstances (Stern, 2000). Together, they help explain the documented gap between environmental intentions and tourist behaviour (Juvan and Dolnicar, 2014). This combined framework directs attention to

bin accessibility, signage, storage, collection schedules and management support alongside individual motivation.

Methodology | A qualitative multiple-case study examined three small, medium and large hostels in St Julian's and Sliema. These areas were purposively selected for their high concentration of hostels; contrasting property sizes enabled comparison of operational conditions. The hostel sector was selected because of its growth, limited research coverage and reliance on shared facilities and guest participation. Twelve people participated: five guests in one focus group, five operational staff in a second focus group and two hostel managers in separate semi-structured interviews. Purposive selection captured the perspectives of waste generators, handlers and decision-makers. Guest discussions explored awareness, convenience and social influence; staff discussed duties, training and operational challenges; managers addressed compliance, the Beverage Container Refund Scheme (BCRS), storage and organisational priorities. Data was analysed using six-phase thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), moving from initial codes to themes connecting individual and structural factors. Ethical approval and informed consent were obtained from the University of Malta (FEMA-2025-00278).

Findings | Six interrelated themes emerged: system visibility, guest participation, staff burden, operational constraints, BCRS implementation and governance gaps. Colour-coded bins and multilingual signs made separation systems visible, but peak occupancy and mass check-outs contributed to contamination and overflow. Convenience, bin accessibility and social norms shaped guest participation. Staff often compensated for inconsistent guest sorting through manual re-sorting, monitoring and collection coordination. Limited space, high waste volumes and municipal collection schedules increased workloads and weakened separation performance. Managers viewed BCRS as beneficial for recycling but described difficulties with storage, leakage, odours, pests and low recovery in high-turnover settings. Managers also reported discrepancies between hostel-level separation and street-level collection, indicating that local waste outcomes depend partly on destination governance rather than individual properties alone. Some hostels were moving towards prevention through refillable bottles, shared food shelves, bulk purchasing and fewer single-use products, consistent with the waste hierarchy (Pires et al., 2011).

Contributions and implications | The study contributes evidence from an under-researched accommodation segment and shows that SWM is a socio-technical system shaped jointly by behaviour, staff routines, infrastructure, policy instruments and municipal services. Operators should improve training, bin access and maintenance, and adopt source-reduction measures. Local councils, waste contractors, tourism authorities and hostels should coordinate collection schedules and practical infrastructure, including secure waste storage.

Conclusion | Guest education and recycling bins alone are insufficient. Sustainable hostel SWM requires alignment between visitor participation, employee capacity, operational infrastructure and destination governance. Peak-period pressure and space constraints can undermine otherwise visible environmental initiatives. Waste prevention offers a route beyond reactive sorting towards more resilient, circular practices in Maltese and comparable Mediterranean island destinations.

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From Concept to Sport-Wellness Event Insights: A Roadmap for Sport Tourism Development

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Keywords| behaviour change, wellbeing, sport events, community events, wellness, sport tourism, wellness tourism

Introduction | The wellness industry is a rapid and popular market that has grown by 35% since 2019 and is forecast to expand at 7.6% annually through 2029 (Global Wellness Institute, 2025). In tourism, emerging trends in wellbeing tourism include holistic wellbeing, with a growing emphasis on longevity (Tiwari et al., 2026). Promoting sport and wellness for the community can strengthen tourism outcomes while supporting residents' quality of life across key economic, environmental, health and social domains (Vogt et al., 2020).

The phenomenon that we conceptualise as sport-wellness events—where residents participate in local sport events and social gatherings that promote athleticism and wellbeing—is evident in the media, yet it remains underexplored in academic research. Sport event literature often focuses on mega-events and their economic benefits, whereas non-mega events and broader psychological perspectives have received comparatively less attention (Bazzanella et al., 2023). Although previous studies have examined how wellbeing tourism affects host communities, the effects of sport-wellness events remain limited. With the growing popularity of wellbeing among residents, sport-wellness events may represent a sustainable competitive advantage for regional tourism development. Moreover, they may contribute to a more authentic tourism offer through community-based practices.

This research aims to address the question of *how to encourage more people to participate in sport-wellness events*. Accordingly, the study has the following objectives:

1. To conceptualise the phenomenon of sport-wellness events and identify core wellbeing benefits through an extensive review of the literature, observations and expert insights.
2. To explain the motives and reasons of people who engage in sport-wellness events through interviews with participants.
3. To develop practical recommendations for destination managers and local authorities to increase participation and maximise the wellbeing benefits of such events.

Theoretical background | Components of the wellness tourism offer have been suggested by Dini and Pencarelli (2022), based on a review and analysis of the extant literature. Wellness tourism, as a broad multidimensional concept, is composed of ten different components of the offer system: hot springs, spas, medical tourism, care of the body and mind, enogastronomy, sports, nature and environment, culture, spirituality, and events. We extend these components to conceptualise a previously overlooked phenomenon of sport-wellness events (Bazzanella et al., 2023) through a multivocal literature review, integrating peer-reviewed scholarship with industry reports, event websites, media publications, policy documents, and user-generated content, in order to capture both scholarly and practitioner perspectives on the emerging phenomenon.

To further uncover the phenomenon of sport-wellness events, this study adopts the Capability–Opportunity–Motivation–Behaviour (COM-B) model (Michie et al., 2011). The COM-B model proposes that behaviour occurs through the interaction of three key conditions: capability (physical and psychological capacity to perform a behaviour), opportunity (external social and physical factors that enable/constrain behaviour), and motivation (reflective and automatic processes that energise and direct behaviour). The COM-B model forms the core of the Behaviour Change Wheel (BCW), a comprehensive framework for analysing behavioural determinants and identifying strategies to facilitate behaviour change. In the context of sport-wellness events, the framework provides a systematic lens for examining the individual, social, and environmental factors that motivate participation and for identifying how event design can encourage sustained engagement and wellbeing outcomes. This framework is widely applied in psychology, yet it remains relatively uncommon in tourism and events research.

Methodology | The research design is implemented in four phases. First, a multivocal literature review helps to identify an initial conceptualisation of the sport-wellness events phenomenon (mapping). Second, ethnographic observation of live events is conducted to ground and refine the conceptualisation and to identify the environmental and social design features that shape participation. Third, the Delphi technique is used to validate this conceptualisation through interviews with business providers/organisers (validation and identification of benefits) and to identify best practices. Fourth, semi-structured interviews with sport-wellness event participants are conducted to explore the factors underlying participation based on the COM-B model.

Findings | The anticipated defining characteristics of the phenomenon include: (1) active participation (i.e., physical participation); (2) openness to the community; (3) co-creation (influenced by other participants); and (4) the promotion of a culture of athleticism. The events are further expected to be conceptualised in relation to potential positive outcomes across psychological, physical and social dimensions of wellbeing. Participants' perceptions of their motivations for attending sport-wellness events are expected to be linked to their capabilities, opportunities and motivations. In particular, motivation and improved capabilities may play a key role in sustaining continuous participation, whereas perceived opportunities may influence initial participation. Relationships with adjacent concepts such as sport tourism and community events will be discussed. Finally, best practices from organisers and COM-B-informed recommendations to optimise event design and encourage participation will be developed.

Contributions and implications | This study advances events and tourism literature by positioning sport-wellness events within the realm of wellness tourism and by providing practical recommendations for local authorities and event organisers to increase participation in such events among residents and tourists. This puts a small-scale sport event on the map, with a focus on participation not the spectator's perspective.

Conclusion | Mediterranean destinations that lack the capacity to host mega-sport events may benefit from smaller-scale sport-wellness events that leverage the region's favourable climate, natural and coastal landscapes, and tourism infrastructure to encourage sport participation, strengthen community well-being, and reduce tourism seasonality. Future research should examine the extended benefits of such events for destination image and the overall attractiveness of the region.

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Protecting by Visiting?
The Governance Paradox of Ecotourism

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Keywords | Ecotourism; contrasting-case comparison; tourism governance; biodiversity conservation; local development; Morocco; Türkiye

Introduction | Ecotourism is widely promoted as a means of reconciling environmental conservation, local economic development and tourism growth. Critical literature stresses, however, that this reconciliation depends on governance and power dynamics rather than on the label itself (Duffy, 2013; Fletcher, 2019; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Tourism can generate economic opportunities while increasing pressure on fragile ecosystems, and Butler (1980) showed that weak early regulation can lead to hard-to-reverse saturation and degradation.

This study examines this governance paradox through three contrasting cases: Terres d'Amanar, a rural tourism complex in Morocco's High Atlas Mountains, Mogador Island in Essaouira (Morocco) and Büyükada Island (Türkiye). It approaches them not as equivalent destinations but as distinct tourism governance systems. It asks how governance arrangements shape the capacity of tourism to contribute to environmental protection and local development. We argue that ecotourism does not automatically produce conservation benefits by promoting visits to natural areas.

Theoretical background | Ecotourism is a normative framework meant to correct the excesses of mass tourism through environmental responsibility, conservation and local well-being. El Housni (2024) questions visitors' real capacity to improve the places they visit, a tension that islands expose through their spatial finitude and ecological vulnerability (Baldacchino, 2006). Carrying capacity, defined by Saveriades (2000) as the maximum visitation compatible with ecological and social integrity, is criticised for technocratic use that conceals political trade-offs (Lindberg et al., 1997) and is better understood as adaptive and processual (McCool & Lime, 2001). Governance is decisive: multi-level coordination and the integration of local actors determine policy coherence (Hall, 2011). Flagship species mobilise and legitimise environmental policies (Walpole & Leader-Williams, 2002); in Mogador, Eleonora's falcon (Qninba et al., 2015) justifies access restrictions. In Morocco's rural hinterlands, tourism is debated as a lever of local development (Berriane & Moizo, 2014).

Methodology | The study adopts a qualitative comparative multiple-case design based on contrasting cases (Ragin, 2014). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and documentary analysis. A total of 54 stakeholders were interviewed: 23 at Terres d'Amanar, 21 on Mogador Island, and 10 on Büyükada. Participants were identified through snowball sampling, whereby initially identified stakeholders referred the researchers to other relevant actors (Goodman, 1961). The sample included project employees, local suppliers, tourism professionals and commercial partners, institutional representatives, scientists, environmental and local development associations, natural area guides, and local residents, depending on the specific context of each site. Ethical considerations were also taken into account, with participants informed of the research objectives, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of the information collected. The analysis proceeded in two stages: an in-depth examination of each case, followed by a cross-case comparison using a common framework focused on stakeholder participation, regulatory arrangements, competing interests, conservation priorities, and the management of tourism-related pressures. Interview material was coded thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings | Interviews, field observations and sources highlight contrasting relationships between tourism and conservation across the three cases. At Terres d'Amanar, accounts from employees, local suppliers and tourism partners point to the project's contribution to employment and economic activity in a rural mountain setting. On Mogador Island, interviews with tourism operators, guides, institutional actors and conservation stakeholders reveal a tension: restricted access helps protect ecosystems and biodiversity, but the absence of formal quotas, ecological zoning and adaptive monitoring leaves management reliant on prohibition. On Büyükada, perspectives from institutional and local stakeholders, alongside observations of intensive tourism, highlight governance challenges associated with overlapping responsibilities and fragmented decision-making (Hall, 2011). Across the cases, the evidence suggests that visitation alone does not guarantee conservation benefits. Outcomes depend on ecological limits, tourism regulation, stakeholder participation and the capacity to reconcile competing territorial interests.

Contributions and implications | Theoretically, the study reframes the relationship between tourism and conservation as a governance paradox: tourism can support conservation rather than undermine it only under identifiable institutional conditions. Practically, it supports adaptive arrangements: for Mogador, moving from prohibition towards structured instruments and inclusive dialogue between professionals and conservation stakeholders; for Büyükada, clarifying competences and enforcing limits; for Terres d'Amanar, linking local development benefits to explicit environmental safeguards.

Conclusion | Ecotourism does not protect simply by attracting visitors. Its contribution to conservation and local development depends on governance systems able to set ecological limits, regulate activities and balance competing interests, which makes governance the decisive variable for sustainability-oriented tourism.

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Tourism Product Development through Events and Local Services

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Introduction | Tourism product development involves decisions about how accommodation, food, attractions and activities are combined within a destination. Sport events provide an occasion to connect these services with local experiences. The choices available depend on the resources of the host destination and the period in which an event takes place. In destinations with seasonal demand, these decisions also concern which services and experiences can be offered outside the main holiday period. This study examines how local tourism professionals connect sport events with the development of the wider tourism product. It asks how local resources, complementary services and seasonal conditions inform their proposals. The focus is on the relationship between an event and the offer that visitors can access during their stay.

Theoretical background | Event portfolio research situates individual events within wider tourism and community objectives (Ziakas & Getz, 2021). Recent work on cultural event portfolios extends this discussion to sustainable tourism development in secondary destinations (Rizzuti et al., 2026). This perspective is relevant to tourism product development because it directs attention to the relationship between events and the host destination's other attractions and activities.

Buhalis and Park (2021) connect tourism brand management with the experiences and services that constitute the destination product. Local identity and seasonal demand shape the opportunities for connecting these elements. Research on event authenticity links local identities with the social sustainability of host destinations (Le et al., 2024). Research on visitor markets shows that their contributions to reducing seasonal concentration differ (Cisneros-Martínez et al., 2023). Gkarane et al. (2025) examine sport events and seasonality through the insights of local tourism professionals, providing a basis for considering how these events connect with the wider tourism offer. Together, these studies suggest that the composition and timing of the tourism offer require attention to local conditions. Research on the development of destination sustainability strategies provides a further context for examining how such choices enter destination planning (d'Angella et al., 2025).

Methodology | The study uses a comparative qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews with 155 local tourism professionals selected through purposive sampling across seven destinations in Greece. The destinations encompass urban, coastal, mountain and rural tourism settings. Participants represent accommodation, food and beverage, travel services, retail, recreation and attractions. Open questions addressed seasonal tourism activity, sport events, local resources, infrastructure, promotion and stakeholder participation. Comparative qualitative analysis examined similarities and differences in professionals' accounts across the destinations. The analysis considered their proposals for connecting events with local resources and services, together with the seasonal conditions and coordination needs they described.

Findings | Professionals identify local resources as a basis for enriching the tourism offer around sport events. Their proposals include agricultural products, gastronomy, wine and local beverages, religious and cultural attractions, landscapes and outdoor activities. These suggestions indicate different ways to combine sport participation with experiences associated with the host locality. The proposed combinations reflect the resources available in each destination.

Complementary services form a second consideration. Participants connect event development with accommodation, food, recreation and attractions, alongside infrastructure and destination promotion. They also emphasise business involvement and cooperation. Their accounts present the event as part of a wider tourism offer whose development involves several local providers. This creates a practical need to coordinate the event with the services and activities available during visitors' stays. Seasonal conditions influence when these combinations are considered useful. Participants describe strong summer demand in some destinations and activity associated with cultural occasions or agricultural cycles in others. Their proposals therefore relate event scheduling to different local calendars. For tourism product development, this means considering the timing of the event alongside the local experiences and services that can accompany it.

Contributions and implications | The study contributes to tourism product development research by examining how sport events can be combined with local resources and complementary tourism services. The findings show how accommodation, food, attractions, recreation and locally distinctive experiences can form part of the wider tourism offer surrounding an event, while seasonal conditions influence when these combinations can be developed and promoted. For destination management organisations and municipalities, the findings inform product development and coordination among event organisers, tourism businesses and attraction providers. Planning can begin by identifying suitable local experiences and the services available during the proposed event period. Joint promotion can then communicate these combinations to prospective visitors. The emphasis on existing resources, local identity and business participation also connects these decisions with sustainable tourism planning. It gives destination policy a practical focus on supporting cooperation and the provision of complementary services.

Conclusion | Sport events provide a starting point for developing tourism products that combine participation with local services and experiences. Professionals' proposals show how the content of this offer varies with destination resources and seasonal conditions. Considering these connections together can guide the development and marketing of tourism products suited to the host destination.

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