ICOT2025
Dubrovnik, Croatia, 25-28 June

BOOK of ABSTRACTS

International Conference on Tourism (ICOT2025)

Regenerative Travel: Balancing Technology and Sustainability

Organized by
UNIVERSITY OF DUBROVNIK FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS
Middlesex University
IATOUR

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CONFERENCE AIM

The ICOT2025 conference builds on the eminent support of the international scholarly community and the success of the previous thirteen International Conferences on Tourism (ICOT) held in China, Cyprus, U.K., Italy, Thailand, Portugal, Greece, but also virtually following the COVID-19 outbreak. The scope of ICOT2025 is to examine the needed innovative practices, technologies, initiatives, and policies to advance a more regenerative travel form that balances technology adoption with environmental sustainability and community benefits. As the travel industry rapidly adopts new technologies, we must consider how to ensure this progress supports sustainability. This conference explores how technology can be leveraged to regenerate environments and communities impacted by tourism instead of destroying them. The conference will discuss technologies and initiatives that optimize resource usage, reduce waste and emissions, and encourage meaningful travel experiences that benefit tourists, destinations, and local residents. Also, the conference addresses how scholars/practitioners can harness data, algorithms, and innovation to guide travelers to the most culturally rich and ecologically sound destinations and activities. This event provides a forum to debate these critical issues and forge a path toward a travel industry that restores what it touches. The conference will be a unique opportunity where academics, professionals, researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and post-graduate students from the fields and industries of tourism and travel will meet, discuss, exchange ideas and express their views and scientific approaches. The ultimate objective is to stimulate a dialogue on how tourism in current times should invest in innovative sustainable practices for its recovery and resilience, thereby building a more solid ground for sustainable, balanced, and holistic development.

CONFERENCE THEMES

The conference will focus on a broad range of topics related to tourism, including (but not limited to):

- Regenerative Tourism Practices and Certifications
- Tourism Development, Policy and Planning
- Sustainability, Degrowth and Overtourism
- Alternative and Special Forms of Tourism
- Community Responses to Tourists and Tourism
- Carbon Offset Programs and Re-forestation Initiatives
- Renewable Energy and Zero-Waste Infrastructure
- Protecting Water Sources and Encouraging Conservation
- Supporting Biodiversity through Conservation Efforts
- Eco-Friendly and Zero-Plastic Design Standards
- Cultivating Environmentally-Beneficial Local Production
- Circulating the Benefits within Indigenous Communities
- Virtual, Augmented and Mixed Reality Solutions for Recognizing Heritage
- Artificial Intelligence for Predicting Environmental Impact
- Blockchain Applications for Traceable and Transparent Supply Chains
- Online Reputation and Review Systems for Sustainability
- Trainings and Certifications for Regenerative Tourism Skills
- Education and Awareness programs for Travelers and Communities
- Transportation Infrastructure for Low-carbon Mobility
- Tech-driven Access Programs for Vulnerable Lands and Sites
- Sponsorships and Partnerships for Environmental Non-Profits
- Climate Adaptation and Resilience Planning for Destinations
- Financing and Investment for Renewable Energy Projects
- Tourism and Land Use Policies encouraging Regeneration
- Collaboration and Cooperation between Stakeholders

- Emerging Tourism Destinations
- Theoretical Perspectives on Tourism
- Economic/Social/Environmental/Cultural Impacts of Tourism
- Tourism Education and its Role in Managing Tourism Development
- World Heritage Sites
- Industry's Role in Managing Growth
- Destination/Place Marketing
- Information Technology in Tourism
- Tourism Research and Methodology
- Globalisation Effects
- Challenges and Best Practices of Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management
- Negotiation in Tourism
- Tourism Mobilities
- Transportation and Tourism
- Authenticity and Commodification
- The Future of Tourism
- Climate Change and Natural Disasters
- The Effects of Crime, Terrorism, Safety and Security
- Managing Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism
- Evolution and Transformation of Booking and Distribution Channels
- Responsible Tourism for Conservation and Development
- Social Networking and New Forms of Tourism
- Innovation in Tourism

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SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

WEDNESDAY 25 JUNE 2025

17:00-18:00	Registration
18:00-20:00	Sightseeing Walking Tour
20:00-20:30	Welcome Speeches
20:30-22:30	Welcome Reception

THURSDAY 26 JUNE 2025

9:00-10:00	Keynote Speech
10:00-11:30	Parallel Sessions 1 (rooms A, B)
11:30-12:00	Coffee Break
11:30-12:00	Poster Presentations
12.00-13.30	Parallel Sessions 2 (rooms A, B)
13:30-14:30	Lunch
14:30-16:00	Parallel Sessions 3 (rooms A, B)
16:00-16:30	Coffee Break
16.30-18.20	Parallel Sessions 2 (rooms A, B)

FRIDAY 27 JUNE 2025

9:00-10:00	Keynote Speech
10:00-11:30	Parallel Sessions 1 (rooms A, B)
11:30-12:00	Coffee Break
12.00-13.30	Parallel Sessions 2 (rooms A, B)
13:30-14:30	Lunch
14:30-16:40	Parallel Sessions 3 (rooms A, B)
16:40-17:10	Coffee Break
17:10-17.20	Short Closing Remarks
17:20-17:30	Awards' Ceremony
17:30-71:40	Closing Speeches
20:30-:23.00	Gala Dinner

SATURDAY 28 JUNE 2025

9:00–17:00	Day Trip

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

PROF. HAIYAN SONG

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

Professor Haiyan Song is Mr and Mrs Chan Chak Fu Professor in International Tourism in the School of Hotel and Tourism Management and Director of Research Centre for Digital Transformation of Tourism at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His research interests are in tourism and hospitality economics with particular focuses on tourism demand modelling and forecasting, consumer behaviour research, and tourism supply chain management. He has played significant roles in a number of international collaborative research projects. Prof. Song has published more than 250 journal articles in both mainstream economics journals as well tourism and hospitality journals. He is a Fellow of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism (IAST). The honours he received include the John Wiley & Sons Lifetime Research Achievement Award and Lifetime Research Achievement Award by the International Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education in 2010 and 2023, respectively. He also received the Michael D. Olsen Research Achievement Award by University of Delaware in 2014. Professor Song was awarded Honorary Fellowof Council of Australia Universities in Tourism and Hospitality Education in 2019.

PROF. MARKUS SCHUCKERT

University of New Hampshire, United States

Markus Schuckert is Professor and Department Chair of Hospitality Management (HMGT) at the Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics. His core industry experience is from aviation and tourism on international level. As an entrepreneur, Markus established a tourism and hospitality related consulting firm for market research, product development and change management in Europe. As a researcher, Markus is specializing in digital marketing, travel technology and strategic management for hospitality and tourism. Markus contributes to top journals in the field, international conferences, industry meetings, consulting, and by editing books for education and industry. Prior to joining UNH, Markus held academic positions in the U.S., Hong Kong, Switzerland, Austria and Germany.

KEYNOTE SPEECH I:

PROF. HAIYAN SONG

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

Applications of generative AI in tourism research

Generative AI (GenAI) is transforming tourism research by enhancing the efficiency and in-depth analysis of diverse data sources, including academic publications and user-generated content. This study explores practical applications of GenAI in three key areas: literature review, tourism demand forecasting, and tourist satisfaction studies. In literature reviews, tools like ChatGPT and Claude automate the systematic evaluation of academic and industry texts, identifying research trends, gaps, and synthesizing interdisciplinary insights. For demand forecasting, GenAI integrates machine learning to analyze historical data, socio-economic indicators, and real-time inputs (e.g., search trends, social media activity), producing predictive models that outperform traditional statistical methods. These models empower stakeholders to optimize resource allocation and crisis management strategies. In satisfaction studies, GenAI leverages sentiment analysis to decode nuanced emotions and preferences from reviews, surveys, and social media, enabling scalable, real-time feedback analysis. While GenAI accelerates knowledge discovery and mitigates human bias, challenges such as data privacy risks, algorithmic transparency, and contextual limitations necessitate robust governance frameworks. Despite these hurdles, GenAI holds transformative potential for evidence-based tourism research, contingent on interdisciplinary collaboration to balance innovation with ethical and operational considerations.

KEYNOTE SPEECH II:

PROF. MARKUS SCHUCKERT

University of New Hampshire, United States

What is left of "peace through tourism"? The bearing of tourism academia in a complex world

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it would have been difficult to envision widespread travel restrictions and increasingly stringent visa regimes. It would have been seemed unimageable, particularly in an environment formed by decades of progressive globalization and mobility liberalization. Thus, first the pandemic and subsequently a neo-isolationism movement are acting as a catalyst for a paradigm shift in international mobility, accelerating a departure from the ideals of open borders and unrestricted tourism. As the global community increasingly fragments into geopolitical blocs - no longer neatly defined by the Cold War's East–West dichotomy but rather by emerging strategic alliances, ideological divides, and regional power shifts - the role of travel and tourism as a route for peace, intercultural dialogue, and mutual understanding is facing renewed scrutiny by the reassertion of national sovereignty and growing inward-facing policy frameworks. Declining international arrivals and increasing bureaucratic hurdles for travelers are a metaphor for the rollback of globalization, while restrictive visa regimes and outbound quotas are eroded the cosmopolitan vision that connotated international tourism. Thus, this contribution is looking into the concept of Peace through Tourism and seeking to triangulate the current state of tourism academia in a re-fragmenting world. Questions need to be asked whether tourism and travel can be still seen as a vehicle for economic development, cultural exchange and mutual understanding, and if unrestricted tourism and travel as a vehicle of democracy are the instruments of choice for conflict resolution and global cooperation.An inspired and restarted conversation as well as revision of our current stance is needed in tourism academia regarding ways and means of (re-)influencing stakeholders in the promotion and beauty of cross-cultural engagement, human connectivity, and people-to-people diplomacy.

OTILIA A. ADZINYO
Ho Technical University, Ghana

DENNIS Y. DZANSI AND ALBERTUS J. STRYDOM
Central University of Technology, South Africa

Service quality factors influencing customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention in the hospitality industry in Ghana: A case study in the Volta Region

According to literature, service quality, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and customer retention are major factors which may influence the total quality management of service industries. A knowledge gap was identified in the literature on the direct and indirect effects of service quality on customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention in the Ghanaian hotel industry. A quantitative survey study was conducted to research these issues amongst hotels in the Volta Region of Ghana. The data collection instruments comprised of questionnaires. Convenience sampling was used to select respondents. Four hundred and fifty (450) questionnaires were administered across the one hundred and two (102) hospitality firms in the Volta Region of Ghana. Three hundred and eighty-nine (389) could be retrieved, for a response rate of 86.4%. Data were analyzed using SPSS software version 26 and Smart PLS 4. The results showed that significant positive relationships exist between service quality factors and customer retention. Tangibility, responsiveness and reliability had non-significant relationships with customer retention. Service quality factors had significant positive relationships with customer satisfaction, while reliability and assurance had non-significant relationships. The results also showed a significant positive relationship between service quality factors and customer loyalty. The study also found a significant positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty. For mediation effects, it was found that customer loyalty mediates the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer retention while customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. Customer loyalty also mediated the relationship between service quality and customer retention. The study recommended the need for

the hotels to develop a customer-focused organizational culture centered on training and development of skills such as empathy and assurance. Hotels must conduct a training needs assessment to identify the specific service quality skills that their employees are lacking and develop training programs to equip them with strong interpersonal skills such as active listening, empathy and emotional intelligence to improve customer outcomes in terms of customer satisfaction, customer retention and customer loyalty. Secondly, hotels need to develop an improved operation-centric strategy focused on making them more responsive to the needs and expectations of their customers.

SHOHREH ARMIN
Tor Vergata University of Rome, Italy

Crisis management and regenerative tourism: A comparative analysis of community-based heritage strategies in Venice and Petra

In an era of overlapping global challenges—climate change, pandemics, and overtourism - cultural heritage sites are becoming increasingly vulnerable to both physical and intangible losses. While traditional crisis management in tourism often focuses on short-term recovery and site restoration, it may fall short in addressing long-term cultural resilience. This paper presents a conceptual exploration of how regenerative tourism principles can enrich crisis response strategies by including social and community-based dimensions. As part of an ongoing master's thesis, this qualitative study is in a theoretical phase and builds on secondary sources such as academic literature, public reports by organizations like UNESCO and UNWTO, and policy strategies from destination authorities. The research focuses on two distinct heritage destinations—Venice (Italy) and Petra (Jordan) - which both face tourism-related pressures, though in very different socio-cultural and environmental contexts. The paper applies the Tourism Resilience Framework (preparedness, response, recovery) and introduces the idea of a fourth stage: regeneration. This additional phase shifts attention from simply rebuilding physical infrastructure to fostering cultural continuity and collective identity. Themes such as community participation, memory preservation, and adaptive planning are discussed as essential components of long-term sustainability. While the current stage of research is conceptual and based on document analysis, the paper acknowledges its limitations - namely, the lack of field engagement and the general nature of secondary data. It also reflects on the practical challenges of applying regenerative models across destinations with varying governance systems and cultural norms. This study does not aim to provide finalized solutions, but rather to open a space for dialogue about how post-crisis tourism planning can become more inclusive and future-oriented. It invites scholars and practitioners to consider cultural regeneration as a strategic, not idealistic, element of heritage protection.

OMER AYASH
Ben-Gurion University, Israel

Cabin pressure: The effect of the flight experience on passengers' spending at the destination

Understanding tourists' decision-making and the environmental factors influencing their consumption behavior is vital to advancing consumer behavior research in tourism. This study explores the relationship between flight experiences and consumer behavior among tourists, focusing on the intersection of expectations, perceptions, and actual behavior. Specifically, it investigates how different aspects of the flight experience influence tourist behavior at their destination. Employing a quantitative research approach, the study utilizes purposeful-heterogeneous sampling, as a choice to ensure cultural diversity principally driven by "indulgence-restrained" dimension. A total of 210 international participants completed a multivariate structured questionnaire using Qualtrics platform. Data were analyzed using structural equation modelling (SEM) to assess relationships between key variables. Findings reveal that a positive actual flight experience often associated with long-haul travel and higher accommodation classes significantly enhances passengers' perceived flight experience, often exceeding initial expectations. Interestingly, the level of travel class alone does not directly influence perceived flight experience; rather, the actual experience mediates this relationship. Additionally, cultural background does not have a direct effect on perceived flight experience, underscoring the dominant role of the actual in-flight experience. The most notable finding is that perceived flight experience significantly influences consumer behavior at the tourist destination. Passengers who reported a more favorable perception of their flight tended to exceed their planned expenditures during the trip. One-way ANOVA tests ruled out alternative explanations related to overall destination satisfaction or destination identity, reinforcing the causal effect of flight experience on spending behavior. These results highlight the strategic importance of enhancing personalization across all touchpoints of the flight experience to positively shape tourist behavior. From a managerial and marketing perspective, the study

underscores the potential of investing in improved flight services and customer experience design. Theoretically, it contributes to the understanding of behavioral mechanisms in tourism, while practically, it offers actionable insights for aviation and tourism professionals seeking to drive consumer engagement and economic value. This research lays a foundation for future studies and the development of innovative marketing strategies in the context of travel experience and tourist behavior.

RICHARD C.Y. CHANG AND ATHENA H.N. MAK
National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan

Table for one: Exploring the dining trajectories of solo diners

Amid rising rates of unmarried individuals, declining birth rates, and an increasingly aging population, the phenomenon of single-person consumption has gradually become a normative aspect of society, giving rise to what is termed the “solo economy.” Increasingly, individuals perceive dining alone as a valuable opportunity to disconnect from social networks and embrace solitude. Consequently, solo dining is becoming more commonplace, as many actively seek isolation to experience relaxation and personal enjoyment. Such experiences often yield heightened pleasure, suggesting parallels with the "escape from everyday life" motivations identified in previous literature. Dining alone thus emerges as an active, self-directed choice, aligning with the "push factors" in motivation theory, whereby individuals pursue personalized and intrinsically satisfying dining experiences. The growing prevalence of single-friendly restaurants further reflects this shift. However, despite the notable development of solo dining, scholarly attention to this phenomenon remains limited. This study therefore seeks to investigate the dining trajectories of solo consumers, focusing on their motivational drivers and the attributes by which they evaluate their experiences. The social identity theory and stigma theory have been adopted as the theoretical frameworks for this study. This study conducted eight focus group interviews with solo diners, with each session comprising three to four participants, resulting in a total of 35 participants. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis and validated through member checking and intercoder agreement. In terms of solo dining frequency, most participants reported dining alone more than twice per week on average. The findings revealed that the primary motivational factors for solo dining included the enjoyment of time alone, convenience, avoidance of social discomfort, and the appreciation of food. Furthermore, this study identified the key attributes influencing solo diners’ evaluations of their dining experiences, including menu design, pricing, service quality, dining ambiance, food quality, and parking availability. This study advances a

more comprehensive understanding of the dining trajectories of solo diners and makes a significant contribution to the restaurant literature. Finally, the findings provide practical implications for restaurateurs seeking to optimize various elements of the dining experience to better accommodate the needs of solo diners.

SAMANTHA CHAPERON
University of Greenwich, London, UK

KADIR CAKAR
Mardin Artuklu University, Turkey

WENJIE CAI
University of Greenwich, London, UK

Regulating UBER in the peer-to-peer economy: A tourism stakeholder salience analysis

In recent years, many countries' governments have had to respond to changes in traditional business models and a shift towards sharing, peer-to-peer, and platform economies. In the tourism sector, we are familiar with 'disruptive innovators' such as Airbnb and UBER which have transformed travel and urban spaces due to the personalisation and affordability they offer to tourists. However, these platforms have challenged traditional accommodation and transport providers who tend to call for stricter regulatory measures to curb the unwanted increases in competition they now experience. This paper focuses on the development of UBER operations in the city of Istanbul Turkey. It uses Stakeholder Theory and a Stakeholder Salience framework to identify key stakeholder groups and to examine their responses to, and their likely influence in, the policy-making arena for UBER. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 15 tourism stakeholders representing hotels, travel agencies, tourism associations, academia, taxis, and other transport providers. A stakeholder salience framework provides insights into whether stakeholders possess power, legitimacy, or urgency in the policy arena. Power refers to the extent to which stakeholders can have an impact on the decision-making process, legitimacy requires analyses of the legal and traditional bases held by stakeholders, and urgency relates to the stakeholders' sense of criticality and time sensitivity. Unsurprisingly, the institutional and legal power bases held significant legitimacy, but the traditional taxi lobby held the highest levels of power, perceived to have significant influence over legitimate policy actors. Three themes were identified from

which stakeholder salience can be analysed most clearly, and which could be used to inform future research in other similar city or country contexts, and these were 1) governance, regulations and lobbying; 2) destination competitiveness, and 3) collaboration.

ATHINODOROS CHRONIS
California State University, United States

'That's incredible!' The commercial production of grandeur in tourism servicescapes

Referring to the quality or state of being grand and magnificent, *grandeur* is an exemplary instance of the "large" and it thrives in tourism. The term is used in association with natural wonders and it is also applied to express feelings of awe when facing certain architectural, artistic, and other monumental cultural structures. But while it is easier to apprehend grandeur in terms of size when admiring natural attractions, grasping its qualities when facing products of culture, is not a straightforward undertaking. Importantly, if grandeur has such a powerful grip in tourist experience, what are the ways in which tourism organizers can employ it in practice? How do we *make* "grandeur"? The purpose of this research is to explore the ways in which service providers commercially "produce" grandeur in cultural tourism servicescapes. In this paper, we draw from ethnographic research conducted in St. Petersburg (SPb), Russia, where we followed the communicative practices of professional tour guides escorting groups of tourists. Early on, we contacted a number of private companies offering guided tours and secured our participation in their excursions. In addition to the insight acquired from formal and informal discussions with company owners, managers, and guides, our data was derived through participant observation in eleven two-day excursions with groups of international tourists. Our notes and recordings were transcribed, coded, and analyzed in accordance with established methodological principles of ethnographic and qualitative research. Our findings reveal a number of "techniques of grandeur" used by tourism providers to stage SPb as an Imperial city steeped in grandiose achievements that – long after the demise of the Tsarist Russia - it is still a beacon of unsurpassable glory. We also provide insight on the employment of grandeur as a political tool for the substantiation and exhibition of power; and we elaborate on the way in which grandeur contributes to the elicitation of tourism awe and satisfaction. Furthermore, our findings provide practical guidelines for

the creation of a particular tourist imaginary and the positioning of a destination.

MARGARIDA FERREIRA DA SILVA, CARLOS COSTA, FILOMENA MARTINS AND CRISTINA PITA

University of Aveiro, Portugal

Do different stakeholders have the same perceptions of a coastal destination and similar behavioural intentions?

Studies have shown that domestic and international visitors' perceptions of a destination have a tendency to differ. Also, as residents are recognized as key informants with the potential to influence visitors' perceptions of the destination, it is important to ascertain how they regard the place they live in. It is highly relevant to understand different stakeholders' perceptions and intentions, yet studies examining and comparing the perceptions and recommendation intentions of these destination groups in a coastal context are scarce. The objective of this study is thus to analyse and compare perceptions of three groups in a destination (residents, domestic and international visitors) and their intentions to recommend (i.e. cognitive and affective image, and intention to recommend the destination to friends and relatives). This exploratory study was carried out in the city of Aveiro, a Portuguese coastal tourist destination. Data were collected from 1033 usable questionnaire surveys from Aveiro residents (n = 307), domestic visitors (n = 381) and international visitors (n = 345), between August and October 2019 in the city centre, using heterogeneous purposive sampling with a self-administered questionnaire. Participants were approached at a random day/time. Sample representativeness was increased by applying the questionnaire on both weekdays or at weekends and at different times of day. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS v. 28 and the one-way ANOVA procedure was adopted, with Tuckey and Games-Howell post-hoc tests. The results indicate significant differences in most cognitive image and affective image attributes, as well as intentions to recommend between the groups. The study extends knowledge of previous works by offering relevant information regarding the way residents and visitors perceive a coastal destination and display recommendation intentions. Furthermore, it provides

strategic information for decision makers, destination managers and planners, and tourist operators.

ZHIMING DENG
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

YAWEI JIANG
Griffth University, Australia

REGINA WANG
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

Enhancing pro-environmental behaviour in hotels: A digital intervention approach using travel live streaming

Promoting pro-environmental behaviors (PEBs) is critical for hotels striving to improve environmental management (EM) performance and align with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards. While existing initiatives prioritize regulatory compliance and corporate social responsibility, meaningful EM outcomes require active customer engagement, as guests' behaviors directly influence the success of sustainability efforts. Leveraging the pervasive role of digital technology in daily life, this study proposes a digital intervention framework using Travel Live Streaming (TLS) to amplify customer participation in hotel PEBs. By integrating *Technology Affordance Theory* and *Construal Level Theory*, the research aims to design immersive TLS-based nudges that reduce psychological distance, foster real-time engagement, and catalyzebehavioral change. The study pursues three objectives: (1) identifying TLS's choice architecture elements that optimize digital interventions; (2) designing digital interventions in TLS with interactivity and personalized engagement patterns; and (3) evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions on viewer PEB adoption. A sequential mixed-methods approach is adopted. Study 1 conducted four focus groups (n=32) with TLS viewers on Douyin (a TLS platform). Initial findings revealed that real-time interactions (e.g., comments, virtual gifts) and visual cues (e.g., eco-certification labels) are pivotal in shaping user engagement and environmental

awareness. Building on these insights, Study 2 designs digital interventions incorporating “hotel green labels” as visual cues and real-time dialogues to reinforce eco-friendly choices in hotel TLS. Collaborating with travel live streamers, the study employs a quasi-experimental design with three groups: intervention (TLS with PEB nudges), active control (TLS without nudges), and control (no TLS exposure). Pre- and post-intervention data on PEB intentions and construal levels (e.g., abstract vs. concrete environmental thinking) will be analyzed to assess behavioral changes. The research contributes to hotel EM literature by elucidating how digital affordances and psychological proximity in TLS reshape environmental decision-making. Practically, it offers hotels a toolkit to integrate ESG goals into customer experiences through immersive technology. By bridging the gap between sustainability communication and actionable behaviors, this study advances strategies for fostering eco-conscious hospitality ecosystems.

GIACOMO DEL CHIAPPA, MARCELLO ATZENI AND ANTONIO SALVATORE LORIGA
University of Sassari, Italy

Uncovering the meanings of authenticity in a virtual context: A qualitative approach

Virtual reality (VR) has become one of the most prominent innovations in the tourism industry. Particularly, historical and heritage attractions have implemented VR applications aimed at extending their experience portfolio during the visit as well as in the pre- and post-visit phases. In this context, literature has recently started to analyze the influence of VR on the perceived authenticity of the experience and how this affects the visitors' cognitive and emotional responses, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. Despite this, studies devoted to analyzing authenticity in virtual settings have adopted the same theories, concepts, and meanings to define and interpret authenticity in in-person tourism experience, while no research contribution has been focused on uncovering and analyzing the specific meanings that authenticity could assume when conveyed by virtual reality, with this being especially true when qualitative methodologies are considered. This ongoing research has been therefore carried out to contribute to this somehow overlooked research area. Specifically, this study adopts a qualitative approach based on 47 qualitative in-depth interviews with Italians selected using a snowball sampling technique. The interviews guaranteed data saturation and were carried out in the period April-July 2024. The interviews have been audio-recorded, entirely transcribed, and then translated to English as they were conducted in the interviewees' native language. For the data analysis, the research team will initially read the transcripts to familiarize themselves with the data and to clarify any issues arising from the translation of interview data into English. The data will be then analyzed through thematic coding to identify subjective meanings of authenticity in virtual settings, with both open and axial coding. The initial codes will be reviewed by the research team, and an independent person will revise the coding and decide whether he/she will agree with the codes. Whenever the research team and the independent reviewer disagree about the adopted coding, discussions will be made until an

agreement is reached, and the final coding will be then undertaken. Based on the study findings, contributions to literature as well as managerial implications will be discussed and suggestions for further research will be provided.

ENGELINA DU PLESSIS
North-West University, South Africa

Close encounters: A safe haven for rhinos?

The conservation of rhinos in South Africa faces ongoing challenges, mainly due to poaching and the complexities of wildlife tourism. Poaching has drastically reduced rhino populations, with numbers declining significantly from the 1960s to the 1980s, and continued high poaching rates are threatening the species' survival. However, wildlife tourism, including activities like photographic safaris and hunting, remains a vital economic driver, generating billions for South Africa's economy and funding conservation efforts. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further strained the tourism industry, causing a significant decline in tourism revenues, as revealed by a 2020 study by Wildlife Ranching South Africa (WRSA). With borders closed and tours cancelled, the financial support for conservation efforts faltered, exacerbating the risks to wildlife, including rhinos. Despite these setbacks, innovative conservation strategies, such as eco-tourism and managed game farms, present viable opportunities for sustainable conservation. These models allow tourists to safely view rhinos and other wildlife while contributing financially to conservation. A 2021 study conducted at the Kruger National Park explored tourists' perceptions of rhino conservation through 35 interviews with national and international tourists. Most participants expressed that increasing awareness about poaching and improving governance were critical to conservation. Tourists highlighted the importance of individual actions, such as reporting poaching activities and contributing financially to conservation programs. Given the rhino's value in the tourist experience, many tourists expressed a strong passion for its preservation. However, there was a lack of trust in government efforts, with some suggesting privatisation as an alternative conservation model and monitoring rhinos in smaller encounters. This research highlights tourists' opinions on whether it would be important to protect rhinos in smaller encounters and what the impact would be on the visitor experience. The results also indicate the importance of bridging the gap between tourists and government authorities, restoring trust, and fostering collaboration between all stakeholders

in the conservation process. As wildlife tourism recovers post-pandemic, integrating these perspectives could further enhance conservation efforts and ensure that rhinos are protected for future generations.

VASILIKI FRAGKOUDI, ALKMINI GKRITZALI AND PANAGIOTIS MANOLITZAS
Ionian University, Greece

EFTHYMIA SARANTAKOU
University of West Attica, Greece

The impact of socially integrated heritage-led urban regeneration on destination identity: Stakeholders' perspective

In Greece, industrial heritage is often overlooked in the context of urban regeneration and destination identity development. Therefore, conservation, preservation, protection and promotion of industrial heritage and enlisted buildings concern primary private ownership and initiative, as a result of mobilizing specific entities and stakeholders' interests. The aim of this ongoing research is to examine the impact of socially integrated heritage-led urban regeneration on sustainable destination identity and image development. To achieve this, we emphasize on the role of stakeholders in heritage-led urban regeneration process but also their contribution on shaping destination identity and promoting sustainable tourism. We focus on the case study of Kavala, a city in Northern Greece, with a significant remnant of tobacco warehouses in the contemporary urban fabric. To explore the role of stakeholders, we are conducting qualitative research involving local and regional stakeholders engaged in local government, cultural production and the formulation, organization, and implementation of tourism policy (DMOs). Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-person interviews with key stakeholders later subject in thematic analysis, concerning Destination Identity, heritage-led urban regeneration, *stakeholders'* collaboration and sustainable tourism. Our aim is to explore and understand both the motivations and objectives behind local cultural production and tourism policy formulation, as well as to examine how the Tobacco warehouses' regeneration will affect the perceptions and intentions of the creative clusters of Kavala benefitting socially the city, simultaneously contributing to the destination identity implementation and sustainable tourism planning.

V.G. GIRISH
Catholic University of Korea, South Korea

A perspective on well-being in trail running through the lens of the theory of planned behavior

Trail running constitutes a discipline that challenges participants while emphasizing endurance and overall well-being. Nevertheless, there exists a paucity of academic research pertaining to trail running. This study has formulated a conceptual model that integrates constructs such as recreational experience, assessed by variables including self-introspection, nature, freedom, and relationships, with the constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention). Furthermore, constructs such as resilience, fascination, flow experience, enjoyment, and overall well-being have been incorporated to provide a comprehensive elaboration of the conceptual model. A structural equation model was employed to estimate relationships. The results indicate that recreational experience exerts a positive influence on attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Furthermore, attitude positively impacts resilience. Resilience positively affects fascination and flow experience, although it does not influence enjoyment. Conversely, attitude also positively influences fascination, flow experience, enjoyment, and behavioral intention. Subjective norms do not affect fascination, flow experience, and enjoyment; however, they do influence behavioral intention. Perceived behavioral control positively influences fascination, flow experience, enjoyment, and behavioral intention. Finally, fascination has a positive effect on well-being. It is noteworthy that flow experience does not impact well-being, while enjoyment positively affects well-being. The findings of this study contribute to the trail running literature from theoretical perspectives. Practically, this study delineates the influential factors from psychological perspectives among trail runners, with implications specifically outlining what runners seek in trail running events.

GONZÁLEZ HERRERA
Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico

ZILEI YE AND SILVIA E. GIRALT
Alcala University, Spain

Alcalá de Henares heritage and tourism: Synergies and conflicts to consolidate sustainable cultural tourism

Alcalá de Henares is located northeast of Madrid, Spain. It was declared a World Heritage Site in 1998 due to the high value of its historic center, which is associated with its origins in Roman times, the conquest of the Arabs, its medieval development, and the splendor achieved during the Spanish Golden Age, making it one of the most important destinations for cultural-heritage tourism in Spain. The background study of the research reveals that there are not enough publications that address the development of cultural heritage tourism in Alcalá, which justifies the need to promote new knowledge that favors the sustainable management of heritage and tourism. The objective was to diagnose the current management of cultural heritage tourism in Alcalá as a premise for projecting its consolidation as a sustainable destination. The research design was qualitative-quantitative with a diagnostic-propositional approach, using methods such as documentary review, review of secondary databases, inventory sheets, field observation, cartographic and photographic interpretation, data collection through empirical research work, interviews, and consultation with specialists. The methodological approach was based on diagnosing the current issues related to the use of heritage and tourism in Alcalá de Henares; it aimed to identify synergies and conflicts to promote sustainable cultural tourism and propose strategies to achieve this goal. As a result, an inventory and assessment of the cultural heritage of Alcalá were carried out, as well as an analysis of the configuration of the current tourism development model and the institutionalization of sustainability in tourism, all of which show high potential for tourist use in the face of the need to improve management. On this basis, the main synergies and conflicts between cultural heritage and tourism for sustainable development and the projections for

the consolidation of Alcalá as a destination for sustainable cultural tourism are discussed.

ISABELL HANDLER
Feng Chia University, Taiwan

Kyoto at a crossroads: Residents' experiences of tourism growth and governance

Overtourism in Kyoto has generated increasing tensions between economic benefits and the well-being of local residents. While tourism contributes to job creation, infrastructure development, and business growth, Kyoto's long-term residents experience overcrowding, cultural commodification, and a declining quality of life. This study examines Japanese residents'perspectives on overtourism, drawing from a subset of 18 in-depth interviews conducted in Japanese, selected from a larger dataset of 38 interviews. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, this study explores residents'lived experiences, focusing on emotional and socio-cultural responses to tourism. The interview guide was designed based on Gössling et al's (2020) socio-psychological conceptualization of overtourism, which examines the psychological stressors associated with tourism growth. Key themes included perceived benefits and drawbacks of tourism, experiences of overcrowding, cultural commodification, governance, and media influence. Data were collected between November 2021 and February 2022, using purposive and snowball sampling to recruit long-term residents who had lived in Kyoto for at least ten years. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, was employed to identify patterns and refine themes. Findings indicate that many residents feel excluded from tourism policymaking, perceiving government decisions as prioritizing economic growth over local interests. Participants expressed frustration over infrastructure strain, rising living costs, and a shifting business landscape that increasingly caters to tourists rather than serving community needs. The commercialization of traditional spaces emerged as a key concern, with residents highlighting how local markets, restaurants, and festivals have adapted to tourist preferences, often at the expense of their original cultural and social functions. The transformation of heritage architecture and urban aesthetics to fit a curated "Kyoto-style" for visitors further deepened concerns about loss of

authenticity. Despite recognizing tourism's economic contributions, participants emphasized the need for more balanced visitor management strategies. Recommendations include greater transparency in tourism revenue allocation, improved visitor education initiatives, and policies encouraging tourism dispersal to less-visited areas. This study contributes to discussions on resident well-being, sustainable tourism governance, and the psychological effects of overtourism, offering insights relevant for Kyoto and other cities facing similar challenges.

AHMED HAMMAD
University of Plymouth, United Kingdom

Moderating perceived organizational support in the transformational leadership: Employee innovative behavior relationship in Egypt's travel agents during Covid-19

The tourism sector, one of the largest and fastest-growing industries globally, is crucial to Egypt's economy, contributing to its national revenue. Unfortunately, Egypt's tourism industry has faced severe challenges since 2010 due to terrorism, tourist locales attacks, and recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, diminishing its appeal as a tourist destination. Responding to these challenges, frontline employees' innovative behavior (EIB) is crucial, due to their direct customer interactions, signifying their contributions to the tourism sector's survival. Research shows that transformational leadership (TL) and perceived organizational support (POS) significantly influence EIB. Yet, comprehensive models explaining the interplay among TL, POS, and EIB in Egyptian travel agents remain limited. Accordingly, this study explores the impact of TL on EIB moderated by POS among frontline employees in Egyptian travel agents. Utilizing a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, 205 out of 322 travel agents were visited, distributing 488 questionnaires to frontline employees using convenience sampling, collecting 320 valid responses. The questionnaire included 21 TL items, 6 EIB items, 8 POS items, and 6 demographic questions. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS – SEM) through Warp Pls was utilized to quantitatively analyse the causal relationships between the constructs. Subsequently, using purposive sampling, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with frontline employees to qualitatively explain unexpected quantitative findings by conducting thematic analysis through NVivo. The interview included 6 questions concerning the TL – EIB relationship and one question concerning the moderating impact of POS. The quantitative results indicated that all TL dimensions positively impacted EIB. Furthermore, POS significantly moderated the impact of idealised influence (charisma) and individualized consideration on EIB. The qualitative results justified these results, deepening the understanding of TL's relationship with EIB moderated by

POS among frontline employees in Egyptian travel agents. Theoretically, they offer valuable insights into these dynamics within Egypt's tourism sector, a developing country context often overlooked in prior research. Practically, they inform leaders, practitioners, and frontline employees on enhancing TL behaviors, promoting organizational support, and stimulating IBs, gaining competitive advantage and resilience. Finally, limitations and future research directions were discussed.

YEN-TING HSU AND ATHENA H.N. MAK
National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan

Why visit green restaurants? Exploring the values, motivations, and barriers among generation Y and generation Z consumers

Amid escalating environmental concerns, the trend of green dining has emerged, bringing green restaurants into public focus. However, a significant gap persists between consumers who stated environmental intentions and their actual engagement in sustainable behaviors. This study explores the values, motivations, and barriers influencing green restaurant consumption among members of generations Y and Z, who are recognized for their strong sustainability awareness and purchasing potential. A qualitative methodology was adopted, involving interviews with 20 participants from both generations who had visited green restaurants within the past year. To capture authentic consumer perspectives, fieldwork was conducted at two prominent green restaurants in Taiwan: Jiami Restaurant (formerly known as Rice Revolution Vegetarian Restaurant) and Taiwan Rice Dining Hall. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken, and data were analyzed through thematic analysis. This study adopts the theory of consumption value and food consumption value theory as underpinning theoretical frameworks to explore the values influencing the dining behavior of generations Y and Z. It also aims to gain a holistic perspective of the factors that matter to these generations in both conventional and green dining contexts. The findings are categorized into three sustainability values based on the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory for a more comprehensive understanding of consumer values. The findings reveal that both generations in the sample tended to prioritize product value (e.g., health, taste, and quality) and expressed strong altruistic values, particularly in their support for small-scale farmers and mission-driven restaurant owners. Generation Y appeared to be more influenced by significant others, while Generation Z placed greater emphasis on information transparency and sensory experience. Despite a high willingness to support green dining, barriers such as high price, limited access to information, and dissatisfaction with eco-friendly utensils persist. This study provides a

theoretical framework for understanding consumer food choice in sustainable contexts and offers practical recommendations for green restaurant operators, including enhancing value communication, improving the quality of reusable foodware, and adopting family-friendly or experience-driven strategies to foster deeper consumer engagement.

MYRIA IOANNOU AND NIKOLAOS BOUKAS
European University, Cyprus

Brand development via online and offline activities: The case of cultural tourism

Brands are important and valuable assets and as such they assume a central role in marketing. Even though the common understanding of branding is a simple one, its applications and perspectives on it, have significantly evolved. One of the driving forces behind this evolution has been the advancements in ICT which revolutionised the business landscape and upended the way consumers engage with brands. Cultural tourism is receiving increasing attention as it is a means for diversification from mass tourism and essentially a 'good' form of tourism, leading the way towards sustainability. In addition, cultural tourists tend to be more connected with the cultural destination and search for a deeper comprehension from the destination itself. Museums as safeguards and promoters of culture, provide a multidimensional and holistic value and can significantly enhance the visitors' experience, by providing exclusive and notable insights and interaction with authentic exhibits. However, research in this field is rather limited. Hence this paper aims to investigate online and offline branding activities and their impact on the brand development of cultural museums, from the providers viewpoint. Specifically, a qualitative study was conducted with a sample of 13 museums. During the in-depth interviews, the museum managers were asked to communicate their branding efforts. The results of the interviews were analysed using the "Interactive Model". The main findings show that even though museum managers realise the value of online tools, they, surprisingly, still use traditional offline tools. These primarily include print materials, such as newspaper advertising, catalogues and printed invitations. Further it was revealed that there was significant use of out-of-home screens and billboards, which are considered as important support media. On the other hand, regarding the use of online tools, the role of social media was also found to be relatively important. In this context, social media is considered as an extension and enhancement to the traditional offline media.

SOFIA KARAMPELA, GIANNIS PAPATHANASIOU AND AIGLI KOLIOTASI
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Spray it, say it: Urban art as a travel magnet

This abstract discusses the growing role of graffiti and urban art in tourism, showing how these forms of expression are now viewed not only as vandalism but also as important cultural resources. The rise of “graffiti tourism” represents a new trend in cultural travel, where such art forms help shape urban spaces and attract visitors. Examples from cities around the world reflect this development. Initiatives such as the "Casas-Tela" tours in Brazilian favelas, the vibrant Boulevard Olímpico in Rio de Janeiro, the famous murals in George Town (Penang), and the art-based renewal of Łódź, Poland, demonstrate how urban art is used to promote tourism and strengthen destination identity. Even historical locations like the Graffiti House in Virginia show the wide range of graffiti’s applications. From an economic perspective, graffiti-related tourism offers both cultural value and financial benefits, as seen in cities like León, Mexico. However, when street art becomes a tourist attraction, there are concerns about losing its original meaning and underground spirit. The link between graffiti and tourism is complex and sometimes contradictory. While graffiti is increasingly accepted as art, it is still often associated with illegality. Cities like Paris and Berlin manage graffiti in very different ways, reflecting varying public policies. In Corsica, there is tension between supporting street art and protecting historical heritage. In Barcelona, anti-tourist graffiti expresses local dissatisfaction with mass tourism. Overall, graffiti plays a dual role. It can both support urban change and act as a form of resistance. This highlights its multi-dimensional and contested place in today’s urban tourism landscape.

GURID KARVOLL, GRZEGORZ KWIATKOWSKI AND OVE OKLEVIK
Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway

Authentic culinary food production, businesses, customers and tourists

Food experiences are an essential part of the travel and tourism industry. Like good art, good food is aware of its environment. However, can local food still benefit customers and tourists in an increasingly globalized world? Past studies deliver clear-cut evidence that it definitely can and, for many reasons, should be. Yet, the same literature is less amplified regarding who and for what reason wants to keep local culinary traditions alive and foremost viable. Further, existing studies deliver only scant insight concerning artisan food production business involvement in the traditional setup and the arising benefits and dilemmas. Against this background, this study aims to trace the entrepreneurial ecosystem of five food producers in Norway to find out the strategies and processes artisan food producers adopt to ensure the growth and success of their businesses. Consequently, the paper will bridge the research gap of how artisan food producers adapt and thrive, balancing and blending tradition and innovation for growth. The paper will realise this goal by focusing on two research questions: (1) How do artisan food producers balance tradition and innovation in their pursuit of growth? (2) How do artisan food producers discover and/or create opportunities for growth and development? The paper offers valuable insights into the mechanisms behind food entrepreneurial journeys, how this is tied to local tradition, and how consumers and tourists accept the products. The paper probes these research questions using semi-structured interviews with artisan food entrepreneurs in Norway. Altogether, five artisan food producers were interviewed. The interviews were transcribed and analysed. This study will also highlight how these food innovations are utilized and extended to a customer and a tourist perspective. Implications for tourism management will be highlighted. This study offers well-crafted proxy information for entrepreneurs regarding activities development and the relevance of innovation for businesses, customers and tourists in the competitive marketplace.

IOANNIS KATSANAKIS, EVANGELIA KOPANAKI AND ASTERIOS STROUMPOULIS
University of Piraeus, Greece

Evaluation of the TANGO platform: Insights from the smart hospitality pilot

As tourism embraces digital transformation, there is an urgent need to evaluate how smart technologies can enhance guest experience while upholding data privacy, usability, and operational sustainability. This paper presents the theoretical framework, evaluation methodology, and analysis results from the hospitality pilot implementation of the TANGO platform (Digital Technologies ActiNg as a Gatekeeper to information and data flOws) at a hotel in Mallorca. TANGO is designed to securely manage personal data and identity credentials in tourism contexts, offering personalized guest services such as digital check-in, identity verification, and recommendation systems, while ensuring strong data protection aligned with GDPR requirements. The hotel selected for the pilot is actively involved in digital innovation initiatives and willing to integrate new systems into its operational environment. Its selection was based on openness to experimentation, representative service workflows, and suitability for evaluating cross-cutting components of the TANGO platform in real hospitality operations. Building upon our previously proposed theoretical model, the framework integrates the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), and the DeLone& McLean Information Systems Success Model, enriched with ISO/IEC 25010 software quality attributes and Business Process Model and Notation (BPMN). This comprehensive approach ensures multidimensional assessment across usability, acceptance, system reliability, data protection, and guest interaction workflows. The hospitality pilot was evaluated through expert-based component testing, a pilot evaluation questionnaire, and a qualitative interview with hotel management. Key performance metrics included ease of use, reliability, accuracy, perceived security, user satisfaction, and compliance with GDPR. The results confirmed that users found the platform intuitive and reliable, with high levels of

satisfaction for core functionalities. The hotel management interview offered a 360-degree operational overview, highlighting both benefits and integration challenges. Suggestions for improvement were collected, aligning with agile refinement principles and the PDCA cycle embedded in the framework. By presenting both theoretical insights and empirical evidence, this contribution advances the discourse on evaluating smart tourism platforms not only for functionality but also for sustainability, guest empowerment, and responsible innovation. It offers actionable guidance for hospitality providers and tourism stakeholders aiming to balance technology adoption with regenerative tourism goals.

AIGLI KOLIOTASI, SOFIA KARAMPELA, KONSTANTINOS KOSTALIS AND GEORGE ZAFEIROPOULOS
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Can you be happy in a crowd? Exploring tourist satisfaction in overcrowded heritage sites

What is happiness, and how is it connected to tourism? In recent years, the concept of happiness has become increasingly important in the field of tourism studies, as destinations seek not only to attract visitors but also to ensure their overall satisfaction and well-being. Happiness in tourism relates to positive emotional experiences, personal fulfilment, and memorable encounters that shape travelers' perceptions of a destination. This study aims to explore the concept of happiness in the context of tourism, focusing on tourists visiting Greece and, more specifically, those participating in guided tours of the Acropolis in Athens. Through primary research conducted over the past two years, we examined the experiences of international tourists who visited the Acropolis, many of them during peak months when the site is often overcrowded. Our objective is to assess whether overtourism—characterized by congestion, long waiting times, and reduced quality of experience - affects tourists' reported levels of happiness and their overall perception of the destination. Findings reveal that while the cultural and historical significance of the Acropolis continues to inspire awe and admiration, many tourists expressed frustration related to crowding and limited personal space, which negatively influenced their emotional response and satisfaction. Despite these challenges, some visitors emphasized the role of the guide and storytelling in enhancing their experience. These insights contribute to the broader discussion on sustainable tourism and tourist well-being, raising important questions about how destinations can manage visitor numbers while preserving both cultural heritage and the quality of the visitor experience.

MARTINETTE KRUGER AND ADAM VILJOEN
North-West University, South Africa

Staging loyalty: Exploring the experience economy and behavioural intentions at a South African music festival

This study explores the experiential dimensions and psychological drivers that shape attendee satisfaction, word-of-mouth (WOM), and revisit intentions at a major South African music event. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the extended 5E experience economy framework, the research investigates how entertainment, education, escapism, esthetics, and economic value influence loyalty-related behaviours. TPB provides a robust lens for interpreting these dynamics by highlighting the role of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control in shaping behavioural intentions. Constructs such as self-identity and conviviality were also included to reflect the social and emotional layers of festival experiences. Data were collected at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival (3–4 May 2024) through a self-administered questionnaire. A stratified sampling approach was employed to ensure representation across ticket categories, yielding 276 usable responses - short of the targeted 400 due to logistical constraints. While this may limit generalisability, the results nonetheless offer meaningful insights into attendee behaviour. All constructs demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80. Stepwise linear regression analyses revealed that satisfaction and revisit intentions were the strongest predictors of WOM, with educational experiences also contributing positively. Revisit intentions were significantly predicted by satisfaction, WOM, economic value, esthetics, and self-identity. Collectively, these models explained 57.7% of the variance in WOM and 71.0% in revisit intentions. Notably, while self-identity had a positive influence on revisit intentions, it exhibited a small but significant negative relationship with WOM recommendations. This suggests that a strong personal affiliation with the festival may lead to internalised loyalty without corresponding public advocacy - perhaps due to perceptions of exclusivity or a desire to preserve the festival's unique identity. Theoretically, this study extends TPB by integrating experience-based and identity

constructs into the loyalty discourse within event tourism. Practically, it highlights key experience economy levers - especially satisfaction, educational enrichment, and perceived value-for enhancing attendee retention and advocacy. The nuanced findings on self-identity provide event organisers and marketers with deeper insights into tailoring engagement strategies for diverse cultural audiences, ultimately helping stage events that entertain and foster lasting loyalty and positive WOM.

JIA-QI LIN AND CHIN-YI FANG
National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan

Next-gen hotel experiences: An extended UTAUT2 model on smart service technology, user intention, and customer loyalty

With the evolution from Industry 4.0 to the human-centric vision of Industry 5.0, smart technologies in the hotel sector have shifted from efficiency-focused systems to more personalized, sustainable, and guest-centered service models. While global hotel brands increasingly integrate smart services to enhance guest experience and operations, Taiwan's hotel industry remains in its early stages of adoption, with limited empirical research on consumer acceptance and usage. To address this gap, this study employs the Extended Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) - a widely used framework encompassing performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and social influence. The model was extended to incorporate technology readiness and technology trust, which better reflect the psychological and emotional dynamics of adopting smart hotel services. The study seeks to (1) examine the effects of UTAUT2 constructs, technology readiness, and technology trust on consumers' behavioral intentions to use smart hotel services; (2) explore the mediating role of usage intention on customer loyalty; and (3) provide strategic recommendations to enhance customer-technology interaction and long-term relationship management. Data were collected via purposive sampling (N = 317) through both online and offline channels, and analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS. Results show that hedonic motivation, technology readiness, technology trust, and smart usage habits significantly predict usage intention, which in turn mediates customer loyalty. Several core UTAUT2 constructs, however, exhibited limited effects in the overall model. These findings prompted a multi-group analysis based on age segmentation. Following prior literature that identifies age 30 as a meaningful life-stage boundary - and to ensure balanced sampling - participants were divided into "youth" (under 30) and "elder" (30 and above) groups. The analysis revealed distinct behavioral patterns, highlighting the importance of age-responsive service strategies. This study not only validates the extended UTAUT2 model in the

smart hotel context, but also offers actionable insights for hotel managers, system developers, and policymakers. These insights focus on fostering differentiated service design, building consumer trust, and optimizing user interfaces to support both the sustainable adoption of smart technologies and the development of regenerative hospitality practices.

PING-HAN LIN AND CHIN-YI FANG
National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan

How memorable rural tourism experiences shape young travelers' destination image, attachment, and satisfaction: An S-O-R theory perspective?

This study examines the impact of rural tourism experiences on destination image (DI), destination attachment (DA), and tourist satisfaction (SAT) among Generation Y and Z travelers, based on the Stimulus - Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework. In this model, memorable tourism experiences (MTE) act as external stimuli, while DI and DA serve as internal responses leading to SAT. Data were collected from 139 Taiwanese travelers aged 18 to 40, all with prior rural tourism experience in Yilan and the Greater Taipei Area. The analysis used SPSS 29.0 for descriptive statistics and SmartPLS 4.1.1.1 for confirmatory factor analysis, model fit evaluation, HTMT-based discriminant validity, mediation testing, and multi-group analysis (MGA). Results indicate that MTE significantly and positively influences DI, DA, and SAT. DI also acts as a partial mediator between MTE and SAT, supporting the S-O-R model by highlighting how external experiences shape behavioral outcomes through psychological mechanisms. Although the seven dimensions of MTE - hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge- were not directly included as constructs, they provided a conceptual basis for understanding the nature of rural tourism experiences.No significant differences were found between Generations Y and Z, suggesting cross-cohort consistency. This study contributes to rural tourism literature by integrating generational insights into a unified framework. Practical recommendations include designing experiences that emphasize local authenticity, narrative engagement, and social media strategies to enhance DI and SAT. Limitations include a relatively small sample size and regional focus. Future studies should consider larger and cross-cultural samples and explore additional mediators and moderators to refine the proposed model.

MOKOENA LEHLOHONOLO, ELMARIE SLABBERT AND ENGELINA DU PLESSIS
North-West University, South Africa

An exploratory content analysis of destination management: The case study of three selected small towns in South Africa

Tourism is increasingly viewed as a catalyst for local economic development in small towns in South Africa. Yet, despite their growing reliance on tourism, these towns often struggle with fragmented and ineffective destination management practices. This research explores the critical destination management challenges and latent opportunities within three South African small towns: Clarens, Stilbaai, and Dullstroom. The study addresses the central problem of underdeveloped tourism governance structures that hinder sustainable tourism growth despite these towns' natural and cultural assets. The study's goal is to understand how destination management is operationalised in small towns and to identify institutional barriers and enabling factors that could inform more coherent tourism development strategies.Methodologically, this qualitative study used an exploratory content analysis framework combining secondary data from local Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and strategic tourism documents with primary data gathered through six semi-structured interviews with tourism officials at municipal and local tourism bureau levels. An interview guide was used to collect primary data, which was then analysed and interpreted through thematic analysis. Findings reveal several intertwined challenges, including complex institutional frameworks, a lack of stand-alone tourism strategies, poor implementation planning, and the absence of updated tourism data. Municipal tourism responsibilities are often nested within broader economic development portfolios, leading to diluted tourism focus and operational inefficiencies. Furthermore, weak stakeholder coordination, insufficient budget allocations, and the neglect of visitor management practices hinder long-term tourism development. However, the study also uncovers significant opportunities: strategic use of sub-branding, geographic positioning near major cities, and the potential for inclusive local economic transformation through tourism SMMEs. These findings'implications underscore the necessity of

clearer governance structures, integrated data systems, and the development of stand-alone tourism strategies that reflect local tourism realities. By highlighting the need for collaborative planning, phased implementation models, and innovative branding, this study provides actionable insights for local governments and destination managers seeking to maximise tourism's socio-economic benefits. This research contributes to the limited literature on destination management in small towns and calls for more context-sensitive, locally grounded approaches that move beyond urban-centric development paradigms.

YING LIU AND RICHARD T. R. QIU
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

Optimising robotics technology in productivity enhancement for the hotel industry

The integration of robotics technology into the hotel industry presents transformative potential for enhancing productivity and operational efficiency, particularly in dynamic markets such as China. This study explores optimisation pathways for robotics adoption in the hospitality sector, focusing on evaluating the role of service robotics in improving hotel performance metrics, streamlining operations, and enhancing customer experience. Drawing on the insights of Tussyadiah (2020) into the dual impact of intelligent automation on service quality and human interaction, the research compares the performance efficiency of various robot models across diverse operational scenarios, such as cleaning, delivery, and front-desk tasks, while analysing their adaptability to different hotel environments. Key factors influencing the productivity enhancement process, including internal and external environmental conditions, technical characteristics, and task complexity, are systematically examined to identify opportunities for maximising the effectiveness of robotics in hotel operations. Methodologically, the study integrates econometric modelling, big data analysis, and simulation-based estimation to generate actionable insights into robot performance and hotel-robot compatibility. A panel data analysis is conducted to explore hotel preferences with an emphasis on identifying scalable business models that enhance market share. Additionally, a “robot-hotel” adaptation matching model is proposed to align robotic capabilities with hotel typologies, offering actionable strategies for optimising robot deployment while balancing automation with human-centric service. By addressing gaps in robot-task compatibility, operational efficiency, and business model scalability, this research aims to provide practical recommendations for stakeholders in the hospitality industry. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of systematic frameworks for leveraging robotics technology in the hospitality sector,

advancing both academic discourse and industry practices in the era of intelligent automation.

SILVIA MARIA LÓPEZ RUIZ
University of Girona, Spain

A transatlantic look of the challenges of belonging to UNESCO world heritage list in urban destinations

UNESCO World Heritage Cities (WHCs) face the dual challenge of conserving the attributes for which they were recognised while also remaining inhabited and liveable spaces. These territories are not immune to the global challenges facing urban destinations. Their international distinction as cultural magnets exacerbates these issues in some destinations. A comparative analysis was carried out between WHCs in two regions: Europe and Latin America. Case studies and in-depth interviews were conducted with site managers or heritage site governance experts in 22 destinations (11 in each region). The study aimed to identify the most prevalent issues in each region, compare whether the same global challenges exist, and highlight differences. The study also offers solutions to these issues that are being implemented by these heritage territories and which, in the future, could serve as models for destinations in similar situations, encouraging joint working. The vision of UNESCO and the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC) regarding these issues is also considered. The results show that the global issues in both regions are housing, tourism, management and governance, and conservation and the environment. Both regions agree that housing is the most important issue. Tourism is one of the most important issues for Europe, while for Latin America, the most important issues are financial and economic, mobility and access, and social issues. There is a significant difference in the importance of loss of local trade in Europe compared to LA, whereas social issues are more prominent in the LA region. In some cities, there is a conflict between the interests of continuing to belong to the World Heritage List such as conserving universal values and the development and adaptation of territories to global needs. There are also disagreements regarding what UNESCO demand and their position in governance. This research encourages new studies of World Heritage properties that consider regions globally, allowing for replicable results and interregional cooperation.

MARTA LOZANO DOMÍNGUEZ, NATALIA HUSTOVA ANTONIO GUEVARA PLAZA
University of Malaga, Spain

Data science platform for blue tourism analysis and online marketing

The project aims to promote blue tourism by creating a technological platform for data science through a marketplace that centralizes promoting and marketing tourism products and services in coastal destinations of Andalusia.This tool raises awareness of blue tourism and the sustainable development of tourism activity, protecting marine resources through recommendations that encourage users to choose the most respectful tourism option, as well as an intelligent analysis of the data generated by the platform for destination managers and companies to improve the design of their tourism strategies and decision-making sustainably and respectfully with the marine environment.The benefits that the platform brings thanks to its functionalities are: a) to achieve sustainable governance of Andalusian destinations and their marine resources through the design and implementation of strategies that respond to the problems and needs of the demand and the economic, social and natural environment. To improve the competitiveness and online visibility of blue tourism companies, especially micro-SMEs, in a free and intuitive tool for marketing and analysis and visualisation of data in dashboards. This also enables the long-term sustainable and viable development of their businesses through appropriate strategies and intelligent data-driven decision making. b) to promote blue tourism establishments by favourably positioning the most sustainable and best rated establishments according to the user opinion sentiment analysis module, c) to raise awareness and encourage travellers to book blue tourism services and other complementary ones through centralised marketing in a single tool. Users can thus purchase their complete tourism experience on the platform and choose the most sustainable option thanks to the information provided, d) to improve satisfaction and the tourism experience based on sustainability thanks to the module for generating personalised recommendations according to travellers' interests detected through their activity on the platfor, and

e) to ensure collaboration and creation of public-private blue tourism synergies thanks to the interoperability of the tool that allows participants to sell their products and services both individually and in packages with other companies/organisations.

TAFADZWA MATIZA
North-West University, South Africa

Exploring the impact of celebrity influence on travel intention: Do celebrities shape tourist behaviour?

Despite the importance of celebrity influencers and online short-format video content in tourists' decision-making, there is still relatively limited academic inquiry into how celebrity influence is exerted via online short destination marketing videos and impacts tourist behaviour. Therefore, drawing on the Cognition-Affect-Conation (CAC) model, the study's primary objective was to explore the effect of a celebrity's online short destination marketing video on tourists' travel intentions. The study also considered the interaction effect of value perception and emotional arousal as underlying affect mechanisms in tourist behavioural intention. Data were generated via global insights firm Cint (https://www.cint.com/) from 601 American consumers as potential international tourists to South Africa. A purposive-convenient sample of Americans was selected since the United States of America is South Africa's top international tourist source market, and Americans had some familiarity with the content of the celebrity, Emmy Award-winning comedian, Trevor Noah. As part of the study, respondents were asked to watch a humorous short destination marketing video featuring the comedian addressing some stereotypes about South Africa while showcasing the country's major attractions. A composite scale was developed based on extant literature. Respondents then completed a self-administered online survey which measured their cognitive, affect, and conation responses to the video. The results of the partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) show that celebrity influence had a direct effect on tourists' intrinsic conation (transactional intention) and affect (perceived value and emotional arousal). Notably, while this direct effect did not extend to tourist travel intention, the underlying affect mechanisms positively nuanced the effect of celebrity influence on tourist travel intention via simple and serial mediation. The significance of the results lies in the affirmation and deepening of the CAC theory by modelling new affect constructs and establishing their significance as underlying affect dimensions in predicting behavioural

intentions. The results provide tourism stakeholders such as destination marketing practitioners, private enterprises, as well as tourism-oriented government and quasi-government agencies with valuable insights into online destination marketing, celebrity influence, human emotions and consumer behaviour in tourism.

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Modelling the relationship between green hospitality and the CBBE of star-rated accommodation

Researchers have been particularly interested in the hospitality sector's impact on the environment via its energy and resource consumption and waste generation. Consequently, the concept of "green hospitality", which emphasises adopting eco-friendly policies and practices within tourism-oriented accommodations, has been considered an approach to mitigating the impact of hospitality industry-related consumption. However, there is a limited academic inquiry into the perceptual effect of green hospitality on the anticipated experiences, satisfaction and subsequently, brand equity guests, particularly concerning star-rated accommodation. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to explore the influence of green hospitality on the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) of potential guests towards star-rated accommodation establishments. The study adapted and applied Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) Stimuli-Organism-Response (SOR) theoretical framework to model guests' green hospitality-induced CBBE of South African star-rated accommodation. Data were generated in 2024 from an online panel sample of n=1443 potential guests from Germany (n=482), India (n=428) and the African Region – Angola, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe (n=533). The survey was administered by Cint Global Insights. Partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) tested the hypotheses proposed by the study. Our findings indicate the positive relationship between pro-environmental measures and social influence in enhancing guests' expected experiences. Additionally, anticipated experiences positively nuanced the effect of green measures and social influence on start-rated accommodation's CBBE, particularly their perceived brand association and uniqueness. However, the findings also reveal how complex the intersection between green practices and guest expectations is, indicating that green initiatives representing the accommodation's 'green behaviour', may diminish the positive effects of pro-

environmental measures on anticipated guest experiences in star-rated accommodations. Thus, highlighting a gap between green hospitality practice and guests' perceived experiences; implying a potential green hospitality-premium experience appeal gap in higher star-rated accommodations. There is a need for non-intrusive and visible initiatives, and to achieve this, hotels must consider guests as active partners in green hotel management. The role of social influence is key, and again, guests play an important role here in sharing their experiences. The industry should note that the tourist plays a critical role in green hospitality.

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Cruise tourism in Zadar: Local residents' perceptions

In recent decades, the Adriatic region of Croatia has become heavily reliant on tourism, which is predominantly seasonal and focused on sun-and-sea experiences. This dynamic has contributed to the phenomenon of overtourism, particularly in coastal areas. In addition to overnight visitors, cruise ship passengers arriving as day-trippers exert further pressure on local infrastructure and residents, often resulting in environmental degradation, diminished quality of life, and mixed economic effects. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on overtourism by providing empirical insights into residents' attitudes toward cruise tourism in a highly developed tourist destination whose cruise port is still in the early stages of development. This paper focuses on the city of Zadar, which saw a notable expansion of cruise tourism following the construction of the Gaženica Port in 2015. The impacts of cruise tourism became especially evident in 2019 and again in 2024, following the industry's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aims to examine local residents' perceptions of the pressures associated with cruise tourism during the peak summer season, which already sees high levels of tourist activity. To that end, a survey involving 232 residents of Zadar was carried out during March and April 2025, a period selected to ensure more considered and reflective responses outside the peak tourist season. The results reveal limited public awareness regarding cruise tourism management. Although economic benefits are generally acknowledged, environmental concerns are prominent among residents. Overcrowding in Zadar's historic center, driven largely by cruise visitors, is identified as a major sociocultural issue. At the same time, respondents recognize the promotional value and enhanced international visibility associated with cruise tourism. Further analysis indicates that age, education, and professional involvement in tourism influence perceptions. Older individuals and those with higher education levels express stronger concerns about the negative consequences of tourism. In contrast, residents working within the tourism sector are more inclined to highlight its

economic benefits. ANOVA results confirm significant differences in perception across demographic groups. Younger respondents tend to be more environmentally conscious, while older residents and those economically dependent on tourism are more likely to emphasize its advantages.

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Residents' attitude toward tourism focusing on community attachment and ecocentric attitudes: A case of the vicinity of Shuri Castle (World Heritage Sites), Okinawa, Japan

The purpose of this research is to explore residents' attitudes toward tourism focusing on community attachment and environmental attitudes of residents on economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism. The research was conducted in the vicinity of Shuri Castle in the Southernmost prefecture of Japan. Shuri Castle is the castle of Ryukyu Kingdom (1462~1867), one of the most popular tourism destinations of Okinawa. The castle was destroyed in World War II and rebuilt in 2000. However, the castle was on fire and destroyed again in 2019. Fortunately, the national and local governments have been putting great effort into rebuilding the castle and the castle will be scheduled to complete in 2027. Approximately, three million people visit Shuri Castle every year. As the number of tourists increases, negative impacts of tourism have been increasing. The research was conducted using the mixed methods of interview and survey in 2022. Five hundred and eight surveys were distributed, and 508 surveys were collected, and 470 surveys were used for analysis. The survey was analysed by multiple regression using SPSS 22. The qualitative part of the survey result showed that the residents perceived economic, social and environmental impacts favorably. However, the residents deeply concerned about the safety of the area due to the increasing traffic of rent-a-car and tour buses. The quantitative research showed that the stronger the residents held community attachment, they felt negatively toward the economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism. The results also showed that the stronger the residents held environmental attitudes toward tourism, the more they felt negatively toward the economic, social, and ecocentric impacts of tourism.

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Overtourism, tight markets and traveling costs: Higher prices and the rise of new tourism destinations

In recent years, the growth in tourism demand has been tremendous, increasing investment costs in most major destinations and compelling hospitality firms to seek alternative investment opportunities. This paper examines the impact of overtourism, tight markets, and declining travel costs on the tourism investment decisions between prime and secondary destinations. A prime tourism destination refers to a well-established and renowned location that attracts a large number of tourists. They are characterized by well-developed transportation networks, as well as a wide range of accommodation options. Conversely, a secondary tourism destination is a less established location, often regional or niche, that attract fewer visitors compared to prime destinations. Secondary destinations typically have limited transportation and hospitality facilities, often lacking direct international connections. To address it, we develop a game-theoretical model of strategic investment and competition, where hospitality firms choose either to invest in the costlier but more preferred prime destination or in the cheaper but less preferred secondary destination. Our model adopts a vertical differentiation framework with the cost of investment in prime destinations higher than in secondary destinations. Overtourism effects and travel costs are incorporated into the tourists' utility function. Tight market effects, on the other hand, are introduced into the firms' objective function in a quadratic and interdependent manner. In our methodology, we create a simulated economy with the described and an arbitrary number of hospitality firms competing against each other. Then, we derive the equilibrium to where this economy converges and analyze the firms' strategic decisions, and make comparisons. We found that overtourism, tight markets, and lower travel costs have favored investment decisions in secondary destinations compared to prime destinations. Our results also indicate that higher investment costs, tight markets, and declining travel costs have been key drivers

of the rising prices observed across the tourism industry. Firms have increased prices to capitalize on consumers'growing preferences for travel and lower traveling costs, and to offset their own rising costs. Our findings not only explain the upward trend in tourism prices but also highlight the investment diversification trend towards secondary and emerging destinations.

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Host volunteers' support for tourism development: A phenomenological study

This phenomenological study explores the attitudes of host volunteers towards tourism development. The host volunteers under study are members of voluntary associations that contribute to community development and environmental conservation. Host volunteers' attitudes and their contribution to tourism development are explored using the sense of community theory, which refers to community members' sense of belonging and intra-group relationships. Sense of community theory refers to both communities of space and communities of interest. Additionally, the theory is useful for examining host volunteers' social interactions with other members of voluntary associations. In this respect, the qualitative research methodology was considered appropriate for exploring host volunteers' experiences. More specifically, phenomenology was chosen to explore host volunteers' views and the meanings associated with their experiences. Purposive sampling was used to select fifteen local volunteers who are permanent residents of towns in Northern Greece and members of voluntary associations. A semi-structured interview format was chosen to select primary data covering other issues beyond volunteers' sense of belonging, such as community development and social capital enhancement. The phenomenological analysis provided deep insights into the meanings that host volunteers attribute to their volunteering experiences. The results of the study confirmed the sense of community

theory, which explains host volunteers' contribution to the local economy and the conservation of the natural environment. The study also provides practical implications concerning the management of voluntary associations in the context of community development. The practical implications also revealed that cooperation between voluntary associations and local governments could generate positive results regarding tourism planning.

ANGEL PEIRO-SIGNES, MARIVAL SEGARRA-OÑA, OSCAR TRULL AND JOAQUÍN SANCHEZ-PLANELLES

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Circular economy self-assessment tool for the food service industry

The food service industry, spanning restaurants, cafés, and catering, generates considerable environmental impacts due to high resource use and waste across its operations. These establishments, positioned between hospitality and food production, manage complex logistical processes with significant ecological consequences. To support sustainability in this sector, this work introduces a structured self-assessment framework designed to measure circular economy performance in Food Service Establishments (FSEs). Unlike generic models, it reflects the operational realities and pressures specific to food service. The framework focuses on five core areas: circular planning, energy, water, waste and, food waste and sustainable sourcing. Each dimension includes targeted indicators that help identify areas for improvement while offering clear pathways for action. circular planning is central, guiding long-term thinking and strategic decisions to reduce dependency on finite resources and strengthen resilience. Energy and Water dimensions assess consumption and efficiency, recognizing their critical roles in everyday activities like cooking, cleaning, and refrigeration. The tool separates waste and food waste to highlight differences between packaging and organic streams. This allows for focused strategies, such as waste prevention and food recovery, that respond to each stream's specific challenges. sustainable sourcing addresses the environmental impact of purchasing decisions, encouraging supply chain practices that prioritize sustainability criteria. What sets this tool apart is its dual role. It works as both an evaluative system and a learning platform. FSEs can benchmark their practices and draw from a bank of real examples to guide improvements. Rather than applying an external template, the tool builds from the realities of the sector. It supports operators in making informed, flexible decisions under growing

sustainability demands. The aim is not to complicate, but to clarify, and to show that circular practices are achievable, practical, and directly linked to day-to-day choices in food service settings.

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"Work force health and tourism": Current working conditions and retention strategies of skilled workers in thermal spa and health destinations – A case study from three German-Austrian cross-border regions

This study addresses the shortage of skilled workers in thermal spa and health destinations in the Bavaria-Austrian region. It aims to develop sustainable strategies to attract and retain professionals, enhancing the working and living conditions in these destinations. Despite the recognized importance of skilled labour in the tourism and health sectors, there is a lack of understanding on the operational dynamics and retention strategies within thermal spa and health destinations. The study aims to investigate the current working conditions and retention strategies in thermal spa and health destinations across Lower Bavaria, Salzburg, and Upper Austria. It seeks to identify areas for improvement to enhance job satisfaction and professional retention. A quantitative method was adopted, involving extensive data surveys that cover participants' job roles, responsibilities, professional backgrounds, and overall job satisfaction. The survey aimed to gather data on current workforce conditions, training needs, and factors influencing the attraction and retention of skilled professionals in the health tourism industry. The survey questionnaire was designed by the project team in collaboration with industry experts. This consultation ensured that the survey would capture relevant and comprehensive data pertinent to the project's goals. The survey instrument consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions to balance quantitative rigor with qualitative insights. This approach ensures a robust scientific basic for the findings. The survey revealed significant insights into the current landscape of working conditions as well as living conditions in the targeted regions. Key findings include the identification of critical factors affecting job satisfaction and retention, as well as potential areas for enhancement which should focus among others not only on hard factors but also on soft factors. These preliminary results are essential for stimulating discourse and catalysing efforts to strengthen

the workforce ecosystem not only in thermal spa and health destinations but also in general. The study's findings have significant implications for policy and practice, particularly in developing strategies to improve working conditions and retention in thermal spa and health destinations. The research also contributes to the theoretical understanding of workforce dynamics in these sectors.

MARIA SAVVINOPOULOU AND NAOUM MYLONAS
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Dynamic capabilities as levers for growth in wine tourism: The contribution of entrepreneurial and market orientation

The present study investigates the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and market orientation with the dynamic capabilities of wine tourism firms and the relationship between dynamic capabilities and firm performance in the wine industry. This research examines how entrepreneurial orientation and market orientation develop dynamic capabilities which yield improved firm performance in Greek wineries operating within the wine tourism industry. The research void was that there was no other research discussing the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and market orientation, and the implementation of resource-based view and dynamic capabilities view theories, integrating a framework to explain and investigate critical factors that affect firm performance. The research adopted a quantitative design to test this conceptual framework in wine tourism firms for the first time in their specific market. The researchers used a structured questionnaire to obtain 171 valid responses from 430 wine-producing firms, with a response rate of approximately 39.77%. The study sample consists of entrepreneurial wine producers operating in Greece. The questionnaire was made available from March to October 2024. The snowball sampling technique was used to develop the required sample for the needs of this study. The sample of the surveyed population was mainly obtained through internet research and personal visits to wineries, exhibitions, and festivals. To enlarge the sample, the questionnaires were administered through Google Forms to the emails of the wine producers, which were found through personal research and after conversations with various links and associations throughout Greece. The questions in the research portion were Likert-type scales using a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Using survey data and applying structural equation modelling (SEM), outcomes suggest that entrepreneurial orientation and market orientation positively influence dynamic capabilities, which in

sequence enhance competitive firm performance. This analysis demonstrates the essential role of dynamic capabilities in wine tourism firms by providing both theoretical additions to the resource-based view and the dynamic capability view theories and practical recommendations for wine tourism entrepreneurs. The research provides crucial knowledge about what strategic approaches produce business success in wine tourism start-ups.

YOLANDI SCHOEMAN AND PAUL OBERHOLSTER
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Designing a wild future: An ecotourism living labs' blueprint for sustainable ecotourism in rural South Africa

Ecotourism in South Africa's Lowveld stands at a critical inflection point. Despite the region's extraordinary biodiversity, deep cultural and ancient landscape heritage and global appeal via Kruger National Park, the surrounding rural areas remain disconnected from the ecological and economic value generated by tourism. While ecotourism is widely promoted as a tool for inclusive growth and conservation, current models often centralize profit, marginalize communities, and place unsustainable pressures on fragile ecosystems. This paper proposes an alternative: the Ecotourism Living Labs (eTLL) Framework, a place-based innovation model designed to regenerate ecosystems and rural economies through collaborative tourism development. Rooted in global Living Lab theory and adapted to African contexts, eTLLs are real-world platforms where communities, researchers, and tourism stakeholders co-create, pilot, and refine ecotourism solutions grounded in ecological integrity and local empowerment. The conceptual framework is structured around four interconnected pillars: (1) inclusive stakeholder engagement to ensure community-led governance and co-design of tourism futures; (2) biodiversity asset mapping to identify and activate underutilized ecological and cultural capital for conservation and education; (3) co-creation of uniquely positioned ecotourism products and circular economies that regenerate landscapes, heritage, and livelihoods; and (4) adaptive monitoring and learning, embedding feedback loops to track biodiversity, visitor impact, and socio-economic outcomes. While field research will follow, including stakeholder interviews, participatory mapping, eTLL trails and design workshops, the framework provides a strategic foundation for piloting eTLL in nodes such as Mbombela, Graskop, Sabie, and Barberton. The model also intersects with emerging pioneering science-adventure tourism concepts, such as NASA's Spaceward Bound program, which proposes integrating citizen science and biodiversity regeneration and restoration into transformative tourism experiences.

Ultimately, this project seeks to reposition the Lowveld as a blueprint for regenerative ecotourism in Africa—where rural communities do not merely host visitors but co-engineer biodiversity futures through innovation, stewardship, and inclusion. The eTLL framework invites transdisciplinary collaboration and investment to co-create resilient ecotourism systems that restore nature, empower people, and redefine the role of tourism in sustainability transitions.

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Can protected areas thrive through luxury ecotourism products?

Can protected areas flourish amidst the challenges of biodiversity loss, socio-economic inequality, and escalating environmental pressures? This study explores the transformative potential of luxury ecotourism products to serve not only as indulgent experiences but as regenerative agents within protected areas. Grounded in the theoretical lenses of Socio-Ecological Systems (SES) and Coupled Human and Natural Systems (CHANS), the research draws on literature that critiques superficial sustainability efforts in tourism and calls for more integrated, adaptive models that embed sustainability into the core of tourism operations. While luxury ecotourism is often promoted as a tool for conservation and community upliftment, evidence on how it performs in practice—especially in complex socio-ecological contexts—remains limited. A qualitative, exploratory design was employed using semi-structured interviews with 44 participants representing management, conservation, and maintenance personnel across 20 luxury game lodges in four key protected areas in South Africa. These sites were purposively selected from a larger pool of 59 lodges based on their ecological sensitivity, governance model (public, private, or hybrid), and voluntarily engagement in sustainability practices. The data were analysed thematically using ATLAS.ti and a two-cycle coding process, supported by triangulation with sustainability reports and operational policies. Findings reveal that luxury ecotourism products hold significant potential to contribute to biodiversity restoration, socio-economic upliftment, and operational sustainability. However, persistent challenges were noted, including tensions between guest expectations and conservation goals, difficulties sourcing reliable local goods, internal conflicts between conservation and operational departments, and inadequate ecological monitoring systems. Despite these, emerging best practices—such as real-time biodiversity monitoring, participatory governance, and immersive guest education - suggest a path

forward. The study proposes a strategic “managerial ecology” framework that bridges luxury tourism operations with regenerative outcomes. The results are transferable to similarly complex protected area contexts globally and contribute to redefining luxury ecotourism as a viable force for ecological and socio-economic resilience.

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Revitalizing Eilat through urban tourism: A path to sustainable economic growth

As Eilat faces economic challenges and a plateau in its traditional tourism industry, this research investigates the potential of urban tourism (UT) as a transformative strategy to rejuvenate the city's economy and promote long-term sustainability. The study examines the feasibility of UT initiatives and delves into the perspectives of key local stakeholders, aiming to identify actionable pathways for development.Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates quantitative survey data from residents and visitors with qualitative insights from interviews with municipal authorities and leaders in the business and tourism sectors. Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including tourism operators, restaurateurs, hoteliers, and municipal policymakers. These participants, chosen for their deep familiarity with Eilat's socio-economic landscape, discussed topics such as UT's feasibility, resident integration in tourism planning, city branding, local cultural heritage, and public transportation. Public transport emerged as a critical element, facilitating tourist access to less central areas and mobility for air travelers. The quantitative component involved 309 participants -147 local residents and 162 domestic tourists. Residents completed digital questionnaires distributed via social media and direct links, while tourists participated in a judgment sample survey conducted at hotels and tourist sites. The survey explored socio-demographic details, preferences for UT attractions such as local culture, culinary experiences, and historical heritage, perceptions of potential adverse effects on traditional tourism, and exposure to existing UT offerings. The goal was to assess UT's appeal in extending tourist stays and identifying preferred developments. Quantitative findings show strong local support for UT as a means to diversify Eilat's economy. However, careful management is necessary to address concerns about rising living costs and environmental impacts. Qualitative insights highlight the importance of inclusive decision-making and preserving Eilat's unique identity and

ecological assets. The study offers a strategic roadmap for UT development, recommending public-private partnerships, sustainable infrastructure investment, and ongoing community engagement. These actions aim to position urban tourism as a regenerative development model that benefits all stakeholders.

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AI algorithms vs. human experts vs. hybrid systems: How temporal perception moderates engagement with tourism recommendations

This research investigates how the recommendation source and tourists' time perception influence their engagement with recommendation systems. It intends to examine the dynamic interplay between different recommendation sources - artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms, human travel experts, and human-AI collaboration systems - and tourist engagement, while being moderated by temporal factors. In today's fast-paced digital age, time is considered a scarce resource. Consumers must balance choice quality with the time invested when making leisure and entertainment decisions. This proposal introduces two key temporal concepts: 1) Scenario-based time metaphor (ego-moving vs. time-moving), hypothesized to affect how tourists evaluate travel recommendations; and 2) Social jet lag (the mismatch between internal biological rhythms and social schedules, potentially relevant related to travel), proposed to influence engagement depending on interaction timing. Methodologically, the proposed study will employ four scenario-based experiments. These experiments will be designed to simulate realistic tourism decision-making tasks (e.g., hotel selection and itinerary planning). In terms of sample selection, participants are planned to be recruited from online consumer panels and social platforms to capture a diverse demographic. The primary objective is to systematically analyze how recommendation sources may impact tourist engagement (Studies 1–4), while also investigating the moderating roles of time metaphors (Study 3) and social jet lag (Study 4). It is anticipated that the recommendation source will affect tourist engagement. Furthermore, tourists' distinct time perceptions are expected to moderate their responses to different sources. The proposal suggests that tourists' cognitive framing of time during the recommendation process could directly impact their engagement level and subsequent decision efficacy. The significance lies in integrating psycholinguistic

(time metaphors) and chronobiological (social jet lag) concepts into tourism recommendation systems, adding a crucial temporal dimension often overlooked in preference-matching studies. This proposed research seeks to advance understanding of how tourists' time perceptions shape their processing and acceptance of AI-driven travel advice. By providing empirical evidence, it aims to offer a theoretical foundation for adaptive, "time-smart" AI systems that seamlessly fit travelers' chronotypes. Practically, the findings could help personalize recommendation interfaces, precisely adjust content framing, and carefully tailor timing for optimal engagement in diverse international tourist contexts worldwide.

DIMITRIOS STYLIDIS
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Host-guest quality interaction and its outcomes

Despite the widely accepted position of the host community in tourism, limited empirical evidence exists on the the quality of interaction between residents and tourists and its multiple possible impacts on both parties. Drawing on the zone of proximal development, social learning, and cognitive appraisal theoretical frameworks, this work presents results from studies conducted in different locations between 2019 and 2024. The findings indicate that host guest interaction quality serves as antecedent to several outcome variables including destination image, overall satisfaction, destination loyalty, emotional solidarity and perceived emotions. These results shed light on the process by which visitors develop their knowledge of and feelings towards a destination and its people via interactions with local community members. When residents actively engage as information providers, then tourists are more likely to gain better insights into the place and develop bonds with their hosts. Such engagement serves as a positive feedback loop where visitors develop a greater appreciation of the destination and its people, contributing to sustainable forms of development and marketing. Attention is also drawn to the management of such interactions, as the latter is increasingly facing issues of excessive tourist demand and commercialisation, raising questions about authenticity in hospitality.

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A non-compensatory approach to measuring tourism competitiveness in European destinations

Destination competitiveness has gained a significant importance in driving economic development in countries and regions. In addition, there is a remarkable nexus between tourism competitiveness and tourism sustainability, and, therefore, there are even more initiatives aimed at measuring competitiveness that include sustainability indicators, such as the Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI). Existing methodologies for measuring destination competitiveness, such as the TTDI, offer valuable insights, but also have notable limitations, most of them associated with a compensatory scheme. In this regard, the present study proposes a composite indicator to assess destination competitiveness in the 36 European destinations included in the latest edition of the TTDI, given the strong regional dependence on tourism. The approach integrates a non-compensatory scheme with a Mixed-Integer Linear Problem and an external weighting procedure based on Principal Component Analysis. The proposed methodology has diverse advantages, such as the prevention of the compensation between individual indicators, the restrictive character of the aggregation procedure, and the non-influence of subjectivity in weights determination. The resulting classification aligns with the classification published by the World Economic Forum, demonstrating the effectiveness of the method as an alternative to compare destinations while avoiding indicator compensation. The proposed method allows the use of weights as important coefficients, thereby eliminating the compensating nature in the construction of the indices. In other words, the good or excellent performance of one metric does not compensate for the poor performance of another. Additionally, the procedure does not require an

indicator normalisation process, as it uses ordinal values according to preference, which makes the process less subjective. Following the ranking process, a post-optimisation analysis is conducted to inform decision-making. The objective is to ascertain the sensitivity of the ranking to changes in individual indicator values. This involves quantifying the necessary adjustments to an individual indicator to achieve a better ranking position while holding others constant.

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Tourism market segment formation through individual social interactions: A discrete choice perspective

Tourism market segmentation has traditionally relied on explicit characteristics such as demographics, geography, and behaviour, yet the mechanisms driving segment formation remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining how individual social interactions shape market segments through a discrete choice framework. This study adopts a social interaction framework comprising three key effects: endogenous Endogenous (peer influence), exogenous socioeconomic traits), and correlated (shared behavioural patterns) social interaction effects. It focuses on three pivotal tourism contexts: destination selection, hotel booking, and restaurant patronage. A novel methodological feature involves employing a random forest classifier to dynamically determine social reference groups, enhancing the identification of influential peer networks by analysing demographic, behavioural, and contextual data. The objectives are to uncover how social dynamics drive behavioural convergence and to establish a robust framework for segment formation from the perspective of individual choices and social interaction. The study employs stated choice experiments across three contexts, simulating real-world decision-making scenarios where attributes like destination attractions, hotel locations, and restaurant quality are evaluated and traded off. A discrete choice framework will be implemented, integrating individual preferences for these attributes with social interaction effects derived from reference group behaviours. The random forest classifier is expected to identify reference groups (e.g., cohorts influenced by online ratings or shared socioeconomic traits), offering insights

into how social interactions segment markets beyond conventional categorisations. Methodologically, the integration of the random forest classifier with discrete choice models aims to advance understanding of socially driven market structures. Anticipated contributions include theoretical refinement of segment formation mechanisms and practical strategies for tourism firms, such as designing peer-influenced marketing campaigns or tailored service bundles that align with emergent social-driven segments.

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Revitalizing cultural tourism in Famagusta's walled city through museum restoration and a proposed public library: A Lusignan-Venetian fortified heritage site

Drawing on Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Cultural Heritage Theory, the aim of the study is to test how cultural tourism can be strengthened by enriching museums and establishing a culturally oriented public library, based on the perceived responsiveness of tourists and local residents toward these cultural infrastructures. Focusing on Famagusta's Walled City, a higher level of perceived value and engagement is hypothesized to contribute positively to cultural tourism development. A quantitative method is planned through a uniquely structured questionnaire based on conceptual themes, with items specifically designed for this study using the perceived impact process framework. The survey will target tourists and local residents using appropriate non-probability sampling methods. Questions follow a 5-point Likert scale and will be pilot-tested. An identical version is to be distributed online via tourism platforms such as Tripadvisor and Airbnb. Data will be analysed using SPSS, including descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, and exploratory factor analysis. Preliminary expectations anticipate that enhancing existing museums and integrating a newly proposed, culturally oriented public library into tourism strategies can strengthen visitor engagement, support sustainable cultural tourism, and contribute to the preservation of cultural identity. This approach is expected to generate in-depth, context-specific insights rather than broad generalizations. While museums are often included in tourism development policies, the active role of public libraries remains under-researched in the extant literature. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by proposing a conceptual model in which Cultural Initiatives by Public Libraries (CIPL) and Cultural Heritage Preservation (CHP) predict Cultural Tourism Impact (CTI). Within this framework, Tourist Engagement (TE) acts as a mediator, and Local Government Support (LGS) functions as a moderator influencing extended seasonal tourism. Thus, the originality of this research lies in the specific interrelations introduced

within the model, which have not been previously examined together in the context of cultural tourism. Furthermore, within this novel design the development of an original questionnaire provides a multidimensional and theory-driven contribution to the academic understanding of cultural impact.

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Marketing knowledge and skills as the key to transformational challenges of accommodation SMEs

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism accommodation sector play a vital role in South Africa's economic development. Yet, they face mounting challenges in sustaining competitiveness within an increasingly digital and dynamic marketplace. This study examined how SMEs in accommodation in Gauteng, North West, and the Free State utilise various marketing mediums, identify knowledge and capacity gaps, and adopt strategies to enhance visibility and customer acquisition. The interviews were conducted between October and December 2020. Drawing on 30 semi-structured interviews with SME owners and managers, this qualitative study employed an interpretivist paradigm to uncover rich, context-specific insights into marketing practices, challenges, and perceived effectiveness. Key themes were identified using thematic content analysis. Despite widespread recognition of marketing's critical importance, most participants lacked formal marketing training and operated without dedicated marketing personnel or strategic plans. Budgetary constraints were a recurring theme, limiting the ability to hire professionals or allocate consistent funds for promotional efforts. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, and online booking portals like Booking.com have emerged as the most accessible and cost-effective tools. Participants praised their reach, interactivity, and performance-tracking features, although many lacked the necessary skills to fully leverage their capabilities. Word-of-mouth (WoM) marketing, both traditional and electronic, was unanimously acknowledged as the most powerful promotional mechanism, underlining the importance of service quality and customer experience in driving referrals. The findings reveal a need for targeted interventions to build SME marketing capacity. These include training in digital marketing and strategic planning, developing collaborative marketing initiatives, and access to affordable support resources. Notably, the study advocates for repositioning

marketing as an investment rather than an expense, particularly for SMEs seeking growth and resilience in a competitive tourism landscape. This research offers valuable insights into the persistent marketing challenges SMEs face and proposes actionable, scalable solutions. It highlights the pressing need for policymakers, industry bodies, and educational institutions to support SME capacity-building through practical tools, training, and partnerships that foster sustainable tourism development in South Africa.

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A multidimensional social profitability assessment model for tourism investments: Cost-benefit analysis applied to a thermal tourism destination

Assessing the social profitability of tourism projects has become imperative in response to growing demand for transparency and sustainability in destination management. While methodologies such as cost-benefit analysis (CBA) and social return on investment (SROI) have been widely applied in infrastructure and transportation sectors, their adoption in tourism, particularly for public-sector evaluation, remains marginal. This study addresses this gap by developing a multidimensional assessment model aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), integrating economic, sociocultural, and environmental impacts through a weighted cost-benefit framework. The methodology combines scenario-based modeling with empirical application to two initiatives under the Ourense Thermal Sustainability Plan (PSTOT) in Spain. Key innovations include: 1) a taxonomy of 27 impact factors categorized as endogenous (project-specific) and exogenous (context-dependent) variables, 2) dynamic weighting systems calibrated to four territorial archetypes (coastal/inland, high/low tourism intensity), derived from surveys of 360+ respondents per scenario (n = 1,456), and 3) normalization protocols for cross-project comparability. Results demonstrated the model's capacity to quantify trade-offs between mass tourism and community well-being, particularly in depopulation-prone regions, by integrating subjective resident perceptions (10-point semantic differential scales) with objective metrics (e.g., CO_2/tourist, gentrification indices). Methodological limitations include the model's reliance on territorial archetypes and survey

data from a single regional context, which may require validation in diverse geographic and demographic settings to ensure generalizability. Additionally, the subjective nature of resident perceptions introduces potential cultural biases, necessitating context-specific adjustments to semantic scales. Application challenges arise in adapting the framework to varying regulatory environments and cultural priorities. For instance, regions with divergent governance structures or community engagement practices may need localized recalibration of impact factors and weighting systems. Despite these considerations, the research provides a replicable framework to quantify intangible social costs, advancing sustainable tourism planning. By enhancing accountability through transparent impact assessment protocols, the tool supports policymakers and stakeholders in balancing economic growth with social equity and environmental preservation.

JASNA POTOČNIK TOPLER
University of Maribor, Slovenia

Travel writing as a sustainable initiative for destination branding

Travel writing has emerged as a powerful yet underutilized tool for sustainable destination branding, offering a unique intersection of storytelling, cultural preservation, and eco-conscious tourism promotion. This study explores how travel writing can serve as a sustainable initiative to enhance destination branding by stimulating authentic narratives, encouraging responsible tourism, and encouraging local voices. The primary objective is to analyse the role of travel literature in shaping perceptions, driving the engagement of visitors, and supporting long-term sustainability goals without compromising cultural or environmental integrity. Through qualitative analysis of contemporary travel narratives and case studies of destinations successfully leveraging storytelling for branding, this research demonstrates that well-crafted travel writing can influence tourist behaviour, promote lesser-known regions, and mitigate overtourism by redistributing visitor interest. The findings based on a case study from France reveal that travel writing not only strengthens destination identity but also aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting inclusive economic growth and preserving cultural heritage. By bridging the gap between traditional marketing and sustainable tourism practices, this study advances previous work by positioning travel writing as a strategic, low-impact branding tool that prioritizes community involvement and ecological sensitivity. The significance of this research lies in its potential to redefine destination branding strategies, offering policymakers, marketers, and content creators actionable insights into developing narrative-driven tourism for sustainable development. Ultimately, this paper advocates for the integration of travel writing into destination management frameworks as a cost-effective and ethically sound approach to global tourism branding.

BIANCA VADUVA AND IOANA S. STOICA
University of Bedfordshire

Creativity and storytelling in tourism and place branding: A case study of Vang Vieng and Luang Prabang, Laos

This research explores the pivotal role of creativity and storytelling in digital tourism marketing, with a focus on the branding of two Laotian destinations: Vang Vieng and Luang Prabang. The study is inspired by the growing recognition that compelling storytelling, especially through video, has become a cornerstone of successful place branding strategies in the post-pandemic era. Using secondary data and thematic content analysis, the research investigates official tourism campaigns led by the Lao National Tourism Administration and provincial tourism boards. The study applies three key ideas: the Narrative Paradigm, Place Brand Co-creation, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). It examines how narrative techniques within video content influence place identity, stakeholder engagement, and strategic differentiation. The analysis focuses on the content and structure of promotional videos, exploring both emotional and rational appeals. These narratives present a mix of local and tourist perspectives, featuring community members, cultural heritage, and tourist activities, thus fostering authenticity and participatory storytelling. “Intangible tourism experiences” are defined here as the emotional, cultural, and symbolic aspects of travel that cannot be physically measured but are crucial to perception and memory. The research highlights how such experiences are communicated through storytelling that emphasizes local culture, values, and aspirations. Findings show that Luang Prabang leverages its UNESCO heritage status and cultural continuity to promote stability and introspective tourism, while Vang Vieng positions itself as a youthful, eco-adventure destination. Both places successfully use storytelling to enhance brand identity and build trust with global audiences. The study underscores the importance of narrative co-creation with local stakeholders, aligning branding strategies with sustainable and regenerative tourism goals. This research contributes to the growing literature on digital place branding, offering insights for tourism boards, marketers, and policymakers. It also

recommends future research involving primary data collection and AI-supported video analysis to deepen understanding of audience engagement and storytelling efficacy.

PEET VAN DER MERWE AND ANDREA SAAYMAN
North-West University, South Africa

Visitors' perceptions and behaviour in crowded areas of Kruger national park

Tourism is a significant source of revenue for Kruger National Park (KNP) in South Africa. However, certain areas within the park - particularly the southern section - have reached a stage where overcrowding has become a concern. Research by Brett (2018) found that 90.9% of respondents perceived the southern section of the park as overcrowded, making it the focus of this study. Crowding in this region is especially evident at wildlife sightings, where vehicles cluster together to view iconic species such as lions, leopards, and elephants. Other congested areas include day-visitor facilities and picnic sites, where guests gather to relax, dine, and purchase supplies. The increasing number of tourists has also led to a rise in open safari vehicles (OSVs), prompting complaints from visitors regarding their prevalence and conduct. This research aims to explore visitor perceptions and behaviours in crowded areas of KNP using a mixed-method approach. The first phase (qualitative) consisted of 23 interviews conducted in 2022. The interview guide focused on visitor characteristics (e.g., average number of visits and length of stay), their perceptions of crowded areas, and their experiences with visitor behaviour in these locations. The second phase (quantitative) involves ongoing data collection, which commenced in May 2025 and is expected to conclude by June 2025. A non-probability sampling method was applied. Preliminary findings indicate that crowding is most prevalent at wildlife sightings rather than at restaurants, entrance gates, or reception areas. Many respondents expressed frustration and anger regarding the congestion. Additionally, most visitors felt that OSV operators should adhere to park regulations, as current behaviours, such as reckless driving and obstructing views, negatively impact the visitor experience.

EFSTATHIOS VELISSARIOU AND CHRISTOS AMOIRADIS
University of Thessaly. Larissa Greece

PANAGIOTIS KATSANOS
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Wine tourism and wine routes in the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace in Greece

This paper focuses on the development and current state of wine tourism in the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace in Greece, as well as its future prospects. A mixed-methods approach was employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The initial steps involved defining the research questions and conducting a literature review to collect secondary data. Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires distributed to winery managers, complemented by personal interviews to gain deeper insights. The target population consisted of 39 wineries, with the quantitative survey achieving a response rate of 72%. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 10 winery managers, focusing on their views regarding the development of wine tourism. The study acknowledges certain limitations, including challenges in data collection and a reduced response rate. A total of 28 wineries participated in the survey, all of which are open to visitors—highlighting the winemakers' active engagement in wine tourism. Moreover, all participating wineries have developed infrastructure to accommodate guests, including tasting rooms and services such as guided tours of the winery and vineyards, wine sales, and more. The existing infrastructure and services reflect a high level of organization among the region's wineries and indicate strong potential for the growth of wine tourism in the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. However, offerings such as on-site accommodation, restaurants, and the organization of social events are still in the early stages of development. The results of the survey indicate that wine tourism in the Region already possesses significant potential, attributed to the extensive vineyard areas, established wineries, internationally recognized wines, as well as additional contributing factors such as geographic

location, favorable climate, and the availability of tourist resorts. Consequently, wine tourism represents a valuable opportunity for the broader tourism development of the Region. However, the research also underscores several challenges faced by the sector, notably the need for improvements in infrastructure and the quality of tourist services. Moreover, several proposals are put forward including the strengthening of collaboration with local stakeholders to enrich the visitor experience. Lastly, the study recommends further investigation into the motivations, expectations, and experiences of wine tourists.

GABRIJELA VIDI, BOŽENA KRCE MIOČIĆ AND TOMISLAV KLARIN
University of Zadar, Croatia

Sustainability as a determinant of destination choice, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intentions

Previous research indicates that tourist loyalty is directly correlated with tourists' perception of the sustainability of a destination's development. At the same time, the implementation of sustainable practices in a destination plays a key role in increasing tourist satisfaction. The objective of this study was to examine the extent to which improvements in the ecological, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions of tourism sustainability at a destination influence tourists' choice of destination and their intention to revisit. This paper presents the findings of a quantitative study based on a structured questionnaire conducted on a random sample of 1,609 tourists who spent a minimum of two nights in Zadar County. The survey was conducted between October 1, 2023, and September 1, 2024. Zadar County is a tourism-oriented region, with over 2 million tourist arrivals in 2024 and a highly pronounced summer season. The study confirmed the relevance of distinct ecological, economic, and socio-cultural components of destination sustainability as influential factors in tourists' decision-making processes concerning their choice of destination and their subsequent intention to revisit. The results indicate that fewer than one-quarter of respondents have demonstrated loyalty to the destination to date, despite simultaneously reporting a notably high level of overall satisfaction with their stay. The findings further reveal that tourists consider all dimensions of sustainability when choosing a destination; however, the most influential factors were identified as the opportunity to enjoy peace and quiet (i.e., the absence of noise), the preservation of the local community's socio-cultural identity, a natural setting free from light pollution, and low levels of environmental pollution caused by waste. In contrast, the least influential factors were the use of renewable energy sources, the efficient use of water resources, and the presence of energy-efficient infrastructure within the destination. Moreover, the study found that loyal tourists display significantly higher sensitivity to sustainability

measures implemented at the destination than those who choose a different location each year.

ADAM VILJOEN AND MARTINETTE KRUGER
North-West University, South Africa

Ageing well: Finding generational cohorts at a sustainable lifestyle event

Health, wellness, and well-being are increasingly linked to sustainable and regenerative priorities. Health-conscious consumers attending lifestyle events seek experiences and products aligned with their wellness goals, including organic and locally sourced food, fitness classes, yoga, meditation, and nutrition and mental health workshops. With the global wellness market valued at $1.8 trillion in 2024, understanding these consumers' needs, experiences, and sustainability behaviours is vital for designing relevant offerings. This study examines the profiles and preferences of health-conscious visitors at the 2024 Good Life Show, Southern Africa's premier conscious living event, held in Cape Town and Johannesburg. An online post-event questionnaire captured socio-demographics, spending behaviour, decision-making, event experience, satisfaction, lifestyle, and sustainability practices. From 169 responses, 129 valid cases were analysed using SPSS, with age selected as the primary segmentation variable, guided by Generational Theory and contextualised for South Africa. Exploratory factor analyses identified five event experience dimensions aligned with the extended experience economy, two satisfaction factors, one loyalty factor and three sustainable behaviour factors. Visitors were segmented into three age-based cohorts: (1) Baby Boomers and mature Generation X, (2) Generation X and older Millennials (Generation Y), and (3) younger Millennials and Generation Z. ANOVA and cross-tabulation analyses revealed significant differences between these groups. Based on these differences, a typology of age-based visitor segments is proposed. *Sustainable Longevity Seekers* (av. age: 59.02) are tradition-oriented, valuing consistency but reporting lower levels of engagement and perceived value. *Mindful Lifestyle Seekers* (av. age: 40.62) are educated professionals who blend traditional values with exploratory behaviours, demonstrating moderate satisfaction and strategic planning. *Conscience Experience Seekers* (av. age: 30.21) are socially motivated, highly educated individuals who seek immersive, aesthetic

experiences. Despite lower incomes, they perceive the highest economic value and typically attend in larger groups. The study contributes to academic knowledge on generational segmentation within wellness-oriented events, providing actionable insights for event organisers and tourism stakeholders seeking to meet the evolving expectations of this growing niche market. Findings can inform targeted programming, marketing, and sustainable engagement strategies across generational cohorts.

CHENG-CHI WANG AND ATHENA H.N. MAK
National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan

Exploring the path to sustainable tourism development in the Penghu Archipelago

The rapid growth of the global tourism industry has made sustainable tourism a central concern in both international policy and academic discourse. The Penghu Archipelago, a popular offshore tourism destination in Taiwan, has been selected as the case of this study to explore the challenges of sustainable tourism development in small islands. Comprising 90 islands, Penghu is rich in marine resources and attracts over one million visitors annually. However, concentrated tourist influxes, pronounced seasonality, ecological strain, and a declining residents' quality of life highlight the complexity and urgency of sustainable governance at the destination.This study adopts the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) theory and the Diamond Model as analytical frameworks to explore the current state and challenges of sustainable tourism development in the Penghu Archipelago, focusing on seven dimensions: carrying capacity, resident quality of life, tourist experience, demand management, seasonality regulation, smart tourism, and destination management organizations. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through literature review, field observations, and semi-structured interviews with 17 participants, including three scholars, two government officials, and 12 residents (six engaged in tourism). Thematic analysis was employed to systematically code and interpret the data through open, axial, and selective coding. By integrating the theoretical framework with multiple data sources, cross-comparison was conducted to identify key factors influencing the sustainable tourism development of the Penghu Islands, leading to the formulation of concrete and feasible policy recommendations. The findings indicate that Penghu has entered the "consolidation stage" of the TALC, facing limited infrastructure, overtourism in peak seasons, and low visitor numbers in off-seasons, exacerbating seasonality imbalance. Residents reported a declining quality of life and limited resources; tourism operators expressed concerns about tourism bubbles and climate change impacts; and tourists expected deeper, eco-friendlier experiences. Local

governance fragmentation, lack of long-term monitoring, and insufficient community participation weaken Penghu's capacity to balance ecological preservation and economic growth. The study concludes that integrated policy planning, off-season product diversification, smart tourism development, and enhanced community engagement are critical for achieving a resilient and sustainable tourism future in Penghu.

CORNELLE WOOLF
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Analysing the universal accessibility of the South African hotel sector for tourists with impairments

This study examines the universal accessibility of South African hotels for tourists with impairments, focusing on the gap between hotel accessibility features and the needs of impaired travellers. Accessibility in tourism is crucial, as impairments (such as visual, physical, and hearing) can become disabilities when societal barriers restrict access. Despite progress in accessible infrastructure, South African hotels still face significant challenges, particularly in service delivery and staff training. The Scandic hotel developed over 150 accessible guidelines to make a hotel fully accessible and accommodating all impairments. Using the Scandic accessibility guideline as a theoretical framework, the research adopted a qualitative, phenomenological approach within the interpretivism paradigm. Non-probability sampling techniques, including purposive and snowball sampling, were used. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, telephone calls, and face-to-face meetings with 30 participants, including 21 impaired travellers (demand side) and 9 hotel managers (supply side). A manual thematic analysis identified key accessibility gaps and areas for improvement. Findings reveal that while South African hotels meet basic accessibility standards, they often neglect the effectiveness of these features. Physically impaired guests prioritize space, ramps, and accessible bathrooms; visually impaired guests value trained staff and proper lighting; and hearing-impaired guests require communication tools and visual alerts. All groups stressed the need for better lighting and accessible online booking. A key shortcoming is the lack of staff training, with many hoteliers relying on goodwill over competence. The study underscores the critical role of technology in improving accessibility. Key recommendations include integrating digital solutions such as accessible booking websites, digital menus, accessible communication, and mobile applications for enhanced guest experiences. Improved lighting throughout hotel facilities and mandatory accessibility training for staff are critical. This study is

among the first in South Africa to compare accessibility from both supply and demand perspectives, offering insights to inform policy and drive industry-wide improvements in inclusive tourism. Theoretically, this study extends the application of the Scandic accessibility model within a Global South context, offering a nuanced framework that incorporates the lived experiences of Travellers with impairments and service providers, thereby advancing accessibility discourse in hospitality and tourism literature.

LILI ZHANG, GLENN MCCARTNEY AND SHARON SIRONG CHEN
University of Macau, Macau

The mediating role of empathetic response on destination loyalty towards island destination in China

Screen-induced tourism has emerged as a distinctive phenomenon in contemporary tourism research, characterized by tourists' motivations to visit destinations prominently featured in films, television dramas, and entertainment programs. This trend reflects the profound influence of visual narratives in shaping travel preferences. Audiences are increasingly drawn to destinations that offer immersive experiences reminiscent of the emotional and visual landscapes portrayed in screen works, bridging the gap between fictional narratives and real-world exploration. Within this context, Dongshan Island in Fujian Province, China, presents an exemplary case of screen-induced tourism transformation. Approximately a decade ago, the island was thrust into the national spotlight following its feature in the popular Chinese film "Left Ear," which showcased its exceptional landscape and unique cultural characteristics. Subsequently, the island has become a prominent filming location for various screen works, attracting an increasing number of tourists. To systematically investigate this phenomenon, the researchers are planning an on-site survey towards tourists on DongshanIsland. The research proposal aims to explore the complex psychological factors driving tourist attachment to Dongshan Island by examining the intricate relationships between tourists' self-congruity, tourists' emotional solidarity towards residents in destination, and destination loyalty towards rural area. Specifically, the study investigates empathy responses of tourists derived from the screen work as a mediating variable connecting these psychological constructs, which is rare studied in the previous studies. Empathetic responses to screen content represent viewers' emotional engagement with screen characters, narratives, and settings. Research by Waysdorf and Reijnders (2019) found that narrative transportation and character identification mediated the relationship between self-congruity and destination attachment among screen tourists. This study will utilize structural equation

modeling (SEM) through a carefully designed survey instrument targeting on-site tourists visiting the Dongshan island. The anticipated findings from the field research will provide nuanced insights into the psychological factors that drive tourist attachment and loyalty, offering valuable implications for destination marketing, sustainable tourism development, and understanding the impact of screen representation on destination perception.

GEORGIA ZOUNI, IOANNIS KATSANAKIS, AFRODITI KAKARAKI AND DIMITRA MARGETA LYKOUDI

University of Piraeus, Greece

Traditional vs digital marketing strategies on consumer behavior

The rapid evolution of marketing strategies, driven by technological advancements, has created a dynamic interplay between traditional and digital marketing approaches. While digital marketing offers immediacy, personalization, and global reach, traditional methods maintain relevance through trust-building and tangible consumer engagement. However, limited research exists on how these approaches influence consumer behavior across different demographics. This study addresses this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of traditional and digital marketing strategies and their impact on consumer purchasing behavior, focusing on the potential of hybrid approaches. To explore these dynamics, a structured, self-administered questionnaire was designed and distributed online using convenience sampling. A total of 148 valid responses were collected through emails and social media platforms. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections: one measuring participants' engagement with traditional and digital marketing channels and their impact on purchasing decisions, and another capturing demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, education level, frequency of internet and social media use). Likert-scale items were used to quantify attitudes and behaviors. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 27. The results reveal a clear preference for digital marketing, particularly among younger consumers, significantly influencing online shopping behaviors, engagement, and information access. Regression analysis confirms that digital marketing positively correlates with consumer behavior, explaining 16.3% of its variability. In contrast, traditional marketing was viewed more neutrally, retaining effectiveness among specific demographics, mainly older consumers, due to its emphasis on credibility and sensory experience. Furthermore, demographic analyses indicate that age

significantly affects perceptions of digital marketing, while gender and education level do not produce statistically significant differences. These findings emphasize the importance of adopting an omnichannel strategy, blending the personalized efficiency of digital marketing with the trust and familiarity associated with traditional methods. The study concludes that integrating both strategies offers a comprehensive approach to reaching diverse audiences, enhancing brand engagement, and optimizing conversion. The insights provided serve as actionable recommendations for businesses aiming to align their marketing practices with evolving consumer expectations in a digitally-driven marketplace.

SPECIAL SESSION I:

TRANSFORMATIVE COOPERATIVE PROCESSES FOR TOURISM RESILIENCE

ORGANISED BY

MARTIN FONTANARI
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Building resilient and sustainable tourism destinations through education: A theoretical framework for stakeholder learning and engagement

This paper presents the second phase of an ongoing research initiative focused on enhancing resilience and sustainability in tourism destinations. In the first phase, a technology-oriented framework was developed, integrating tools such as artificial intelligence, IoT, and big data analytics to enhance destinations' ability to anticipate disruptions, manage resources efficiently, and support sustainable operations. While this model provided operational agility and data-driven foresight, it highlighted a critical limitation: the need for human capacity and adaptive learning to complement technological solutions. Building on these findings, the current phase introduces an education-centered theoretical framework designed to empower all stakeholder groups, including destination managers, tourism businesses, local communities, and tourists, through targeted learning actions, and positions learning as a strategic enabler of destination resilience. Drawing from concepts of transformative learning, education for sustainable development (ESD), and the theory of the learning organization, the proposed framework identifies the distinct knowledge needs, capacities, and roles of each stakeholder group, and outlines tailored educational strategies. These include professional training programs for tourism managers focused on strategic foresight and crisis leadership, digital and green skills development for tourism enterprises to support innovation and sustainability practices, participatory learning initiatives to promote civic engagement and local ownership among communities, and awareness-raising campaigns to encourageenvironmentally and culturally responsible behavior among tourists. This framework emphasizes the importance of continuous learning ecosystems in building adaptive capacities and fostering what recent literature refers to as resilience agility: the dynamic ability to respond to shocks while sustaining long-term development. By integrating education into destination governance,

development, and stakeholder engagement, the framework contributes to a shift from reactive adaptation to proactive transformation. This research aims to serve as a practical guide for policymakers, educators, and destination stakeholders, paving the way for future pilot applications in real-world tourism contexts. Ultimately, it advocates for a knowledge-driven transformation of tourism ecosystems, ensuring their capacity to thrive amidst ongoing global challenges.

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Cooperative networks for destination resilience: Theoretical confidence-model

The conceptual study explores collaborative resilience initiatives to develop destination resilience. The research aims to investigate how network level resilience transitions contribute to the overall proactive development of destination resilience. The approach taken in this study involves a theoretical modelling methodology centred on network collaborations that have the potential to create tourism value and enhance resilience characteristics within the destination. The methodological novelty is that the theoretical modelling presented addresses internal factors of the tourism value-chain as objects of resilient cooperation, involving the synthesis of corporate, network and destination resilience. This results in a conceptual framework for tourism cooperative networks aimed at co-creating resilient tourism value in the destination, the Confidence-Model. The model shows the co-creation of value chains consisting of integrative survival capacities, transition networks, cooperative resource management, leisure sharing economy and communication collection points. The Confidence-Model offers perspectives for enhancing co-creation within the value chain at different stages of synthesis, ultimately contributing to the long-term resilience of the destination. The Confidence-Model highlights how stakeholders are fundamentally connected to destinations through the resilient cooperative business model, which implies the regionally-centred journey towards destination resilience. This requires the cultivation of autonomous tourism supply chains and the creation of resilient tourism products with USPs, ultimately resulting in unique experiences and the development of valuable livelihoods. The conceptual research adds to the body of knowledge on the 6th Kondratiev Wave in the context of destination management by formulating a comprehensive framework that promotes the adoption of collaborative resilient strategies in tourism management and destination

governance. These principles are grounded in Christian ethics implying essential prerequisites of successful cooperative relationships. They encompass "*cooperative belief*" (confidence in a partner's entrepreneurial skills to work together), "*tacit cooperative know-how*" (the ability to collectively achieve goals that surpass individual company achievements), and "*implicit cooperative mindset*" (placing the partner's objectives ahead of one's own business goals). These principles routed in Christian values contribute to the knowledge on the 6th Kondratiev Wave in terms of developing strategies to create meaningful livelihoods for destination resilience, defining implications for tourism business models, especially in the era of digital transformation.

SOCRAT GHADBAN AND CHRISTINA TSONI
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Sustainable rural tourism in the context of recurrent crises: Stakeholder engagement and resilience: A case study in Lebanon

This study explores how stakeholder engagement contributes to the resilience of sustainable rural tourism projects amid recurring and multidimensional crises, drawing on an in-depth case study of Cezar's Projects in Lebanon. Situated within the frameworks of stakeholder theory, resilience, and sustainable tourism, the research employs a qualitative methodology that combines semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and social media analysis. Data triangulation and thematic coding techniques ensure analytical rigor and credibility. The findings reveal that stakeholder engagement operates through three interconnected dimensions—moral, strategic, and pragmatic—each playing a vital role in resilience-building. These dimensions are expressed through practices such as co-created initiatives, inclusive governance, and the integration of local value chains. The study also reveals key resilience mechanisms, including economic diversification, adaptive management, and the cultivation of strong emotional bonds among stakeholders. Notably, the leadership style of the project initiator emerges as a central factor, with the founder acting not only as an entrepreneur but also as a community facilitator and catalyst for cohesion. Emotional engagement, often overlooked in resilience literature, is identified as a distinctive mechanism that enhances collective endurance and adaptability. By examining a tourism project embedded in a context marked by economic instability, political uncertainty, and security challenges, the study offers unique empirical insights into how tourism actors navigate hard times. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism development by emphasizing the importance of local agency, shared values, and emotionally grounded collaboration in fostering long-term resilience. Practical implications are offered for policymakers, tourism practitioners, and community leaders seeking to build adaptive capacities in similar settings.

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Epidaurus Village, Greece

ANTONIA RUSCOVIC RADONIC
Silkarica Art Gallery, Cavtat, Croatia

SEBASTIAN KAISER
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Unconventional project building approaches for resilient cross-border partnerships

The present empirical study explores an unconventional cooperative approach for building resilient cross-border partnerships. The objective of the study is to examine the toponymic and historical unity that serves as the foundation for the establishment of cross-border partnerships and tourism cooperative networks at the destination level. The study employs the case study method, a qualitative approach which involves the detailed examination of a small, defined area to identify, analyse and interpret its historical patterns and cultural relationships. This method is applied to the two cross-border municipalities. The locations under discussion are Epidaurus in Greece and the city of Cavtat, also known as Epidaurum in the municipality of Konavle in Croatia. The toponymical unity is attributed to historical and cultural ties that have remained strong between the two regions over the centuries. The toponymical unity refers to the historical migration of the ancient Greeks in the 7th century BC. This toponymical unity and native historical connections between the two tourism communities in these cross-border municipalities has laid the foundation for the present collaborative development directions. The study's implications suggest a potential for twinning between the two historical regions, both of which possess a strong tourism orientation. This assertion is bolstered by the resolute and fervent desire of the inhabitants to establish a connection with their sister city and to acquire knowledge about its cultural facets. The study elucidates the significance of a mediating event, namely a music festival held in Croatia in honour of Greek Epidaurus, in promoting community-driven tourism cooperation. The study concludes that the organisation of

cultural events on a collaborative basis has the potential to facilitate cross-border cultural exchanges. These exchanges, in turn, strengthen cooperative relations and tourism business interactions between the residents, which has cooperative resilience-focused implications for Epidaurus and Cavtat, and furthermore between Greece and Croatia.

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The power of local community participation to regenerate destinations

Tourism development often leads to socio-economic and environmental challenges for local communities, including resource conflicts and the erosion of cultural heritage. While community-based tourism (CBT) has gained recognition as a means to mitigate these issues, there remains a need for effective capacity building and policy support to safeguard local interests. Additionally, community-based conservation strategies can be hindered by collective action problems, making individual efforts insufficient. Effective community participation across all stages of tourism development - goal setting, policy drafting, planning, and implementation - has proven crucial to ensuring that local communities maintain significant control and benefit from tourism activities. This study aims to explore the current state of CBT, emphasising the potential for local communities to actively participate in conserving and regenerating their destinations. Using a combination of bibliometric analysis and a system thinking approach, data from 26 Scopus-indexed articles is under analysis. A system thinking approach allows to understand the interconnection between variables and enables the identification of feedback loops, addresses both positive outcomes (empowerment, sustainability) and negative risks (resource conflicts, cultural erosion), helping to proceed for the creation of a conceptual model. A conceptual model is also being developed to connect key variables within a community-based ecosystem to understand its potential for place regeneration. The study also considers the emergent concept of regenerative

tourism, positioning local communities as the core centre to promote a sustainable tourism development.Preliminary findings suggest that integrating CBT in regenerative criteria can enhance community empowerment, promote cultural conservation, and encourage sustainable tourism practices. However, the effectiveness of such approaches is contingent upon adequate policy support and collaborative governance structures that facilitate meaningful community engagement. The study is limited to secondary data from Scopus-indexed sources, needing further empirical validation of the proposed model to assess its applicability in diverse real-world contexts.

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Educational resilience and regional development: Didactical approaches, challenges and prospective opportunities

The present research explores the concept of educational resilience as it is applied in the field of sustainable development. The objective of the present study is to systematise the methodological and didactic approaches to building educational resilience using the methods of cooperative community engagement. The research explores the educational case created within the joint International Summer School on Sustainable Development offered by Heilbronn and Kaiserslautern universities, Germany. Researchers are conducting a field study to explore the educational resilience strategies that contribute to sustainable regional development in the historical town of Epidavros, Greece. The research methodology under scrutiny features the core elements for the development of educational resilience: favourable framework conditions, multidimensional elements of the learning situation, application in the experimental cultural destination, establishment of cooperative partnerships, coaching techniques, and sustainability and resilience-focused learning contents. The techniques employed in the development of educational resilience encompass asynchronous communication and permanent provision of information. The attainment of this objective is contingent upon the possession of superlative academic credentials and professional expertise, in addition to methodological knowledge and didactic skills. These competencies are employed within the frameworks of keynote speeches, structured workshops, and the supervision of collaborative projects. The research demonstrates that by focusing on educational resilience, it is possible to enrich learning environments through the establishment of challenging and authentic learning scenarios, compelling students to learn, broaden their skills, and implement them in a structured project. The study emphasises that a fundamental pedagogical requirement for fostering educational

resilience involves positioning students as the central element in every learning context, ensuring that all aspects revolve around them within a collaborative implementation framework.The collaborative framework fosters an inclusive educational environment, drawing together a diverse array of ethnic backgrounds, gender-diverse learning groups, and a wide range of countries from which students originate.

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CopenPay regenerative tourism experiences: How tourism enterprises foster social value-creating interactions between tourists and residents

This study investigates CopenPay, a pilot program in Copenhagen designed to offer regenerative tourism experiences and reward participants for engaging in climate-friendly actions. The research focuses on four distinct tourism enterprises that provide settings for collaborative and participative experiences involving both tourists and residents. Employing a qualitative revelatory case study approach, the study utilizes participant observation (27 hours total) and interviews (n=24) to explore the socio-material arrangements and practices of tourism enterprises as intermediaries of social value-creating interactions. First, thematic analysis was used on the interview data, to code interview transcripts, refine themes and patterns iteratively, then this was triangulated with observation data, to enhance understanding and validity, and to uncover new insights. The mediated social value-creating interactions are dissected into practice-bundles consisting of (1) the mediating practices of the enterprises, (2) the mediated social-value creation interactions between tourists and residents, and (3) the resulting social value outcomes. These practice-bundles are categorized into four empirically derived phases: alignment, orientation, activity, and debrief. In the alignment phase, enterprises initiate social value creation by sharing perspectives and designing activities that allow like-minded tourists and residents to meet and interact. This phase builds anticipation for doing good, earning rewards, and joining environmentally regenerative activities. The orientation phase involves welcoming, accommodating, and instructing participants, fostering a sense of togetherness through storytelling and information sharing. These practices provide the necessary infrastructure and responsibilities, resulting in a self-organizing process among participants. During the activity phase, guiding and assisting practices ensure the activity remains safe, meaningful, and enjoyable. These practices

set common goals, encourage participation, and reinforce social interactions, contributing to a relaxed atmosphere where participants exchange knowledge and experiences, reducing social and cultural distance. Finally, the debriefing phase focuses on recognizing and evaluating collective achievements. This phase enhances participants' understanding of their social and environmental impact, solidifying social value-creating interactions and fostering a sense of community and achievement. It ensures collective efforts are visible and creates spaces to exchange impressions and enjoy rewards, contributing to community building.

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MARTIN FONTANARI
International School of Management, Germany

How to develop destination resilience through cooperative networks: Empirical investigation

The empirical research examines how tourism cooperative networks, established at the regional level of the destination, can generate actions to implement resilient tourism value co-creation. The theoretical framework of this study is provided by the conceptual Confidence-Model, which stands for "COoperative Networks For the tourism Industry to develop Destination resilieNCE". The methodological approach taken in this study includes the instrument of qualitative expert interviews designed specifically for the expert examination of the confidence-model. The data for the expert examination is localised within the destination of Kitzbühel in Tyrol, Austria. Two reasons to select this luxurious alpine ski resort for the expert validation of the Confidence-Model are the essential characteristics of the destination's historical tourism development, as well as the authentic Tirolean mindset, which emphasizes self-sufficiency. The sample selection for this study is based on the criteria that the experts are already known for inspiring resilience within the local tourism community. This yields six discussions with the experts whose profiles match the essential elements of the tourism value chain outlined in the confidence-model, including agriculture, hospitality, tour operations, transport and mobility, marketing and communication, and policy and environment. The qualitative data was analysed using the problem-centred hermeneutic method, which has the advantage of allowing the author to explore different thematic foci related to the conceptual confidence-model.
The study highlights that horizontal, vertical and lateral collaboration across the tourism value chain significantly enhances the resilience of tourism supply chains at the destination. The empirical study offers collective transformative business strategies designed to facilitate innovation and the creation of resilient tourism products with local Unique Sale Points (USPs). The practical findings

highlight that a reflective, proactive approach to resilience building enables stakeholders to create resilient tourism value chains and become more competitive partners in the region. This improves their ability to manage crises for the business, partners, locals and tourists alike. This research defines the pathway for communities to take proactive control of their futures by equipping DMOs with the tools to become regional managers responsible for coordination of cooperative processes in value co-creation and resilience building in destinations, considering the priorities of the local community.

SPECIAL SESSION II:

FOOD AND WINE TOURISM IN THE BALKANS: PROMOTING INTERDISCIPLINARY AND CROSS-REGIONAL DIALOGUES

ORGANISED BY

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ILINKA TERZIYSKA
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Tasting the terroir of crosslocations: Wine tourism in the border regions between Greece and North Macedonia

Reflecting on the terroir definition of wine, Hall and Mitchell (2002) coined the notion of touristic terroir to describe the unique combination of physical, cultural, and natural properties that give each region its distinctive appeal. Among them, human geography has been widely recognized as an indispensable resource that adds value to the tourism experience and enhances the sense of place. Marlowe and Lee (2018) further distinguished terroir wine tourism as being shaped by an amalgam of local specificities, including advertising and identity. In the case of border locations, place-making is formed by a complex interplay of similarities and differences between co-existing regimes that continuously interact, often undermining the idea of uniformity within national boundaries. Thus, perceptions of wine tourism terroir may derive from interconnected symbolic, tangible, and legal aspects. Despite this relationship, “terroir across political borders remains uncharted territory”, especially “in places where border disputes are heightened” (Monterescu, 2022). The present study aims to address this gap by focusing on Greece and North Macedonia, the borders between which were established only in 1913, after the Balkan Wars and the Ottoman Empire’s dissolution. In particular, this work centers on (a) the PDO zone of Amyndeon in the Prefecture of Florina, Northern Greece; and (b) the Bitola Wine District in Pelagonija-Polog (or Western Wine Region The specific objectives of this ongoing research include: 1) addressing “blended” cultural components in the wine tourism terroir of the two border regions, as expressed in individual and collective marketing efforts; 2) analyzing ethnographic narratives, interpretations, and constructions of place on both sides of the borders; and 3) examining how institutional, legal, and historico-political conditions (e.g., bilateral tensions, INTERREG programs, implicit power dynamics) shape the representations, attitudes and

practices on these locations. This paper draws on ethnographic observation, in-depth interviews, and content analysis of wineries' websites in both regions.

GAVRAIL GAVRAILOV
Plovdiv University, Bulgaria

Pig ears between culinary symbol and disgust: The case of a festival in Stara Zagora

In February 2025 the first edition of “Celebration of the Stara Zagora delicacy – pig ears” was held. During the festival two tons of pig ears were eaten by the visitors. What was the process of valorization and how did cultural evaluation, and heritage preservation of this local symbol started? In the article the prehistory of the event is presented as a culinary symbol that has its genuine part in the regional landscape. Stara Zagora as the fifth largest town in Bulgaria has its own cultural value, but in the last decades it has been known mostly as an industrial center, specializing in energy productions. As a part of the transition, of the region new forms of tourism have been planned since the start of EU Green deal. In 2020 focus groups on cultural tourism perspectives was held by me, organized by the Thracian tourism region, where Stara Zagora municipality is a member. As a part of these activities “The International Day of Mavrud” (traditional sort of grape) was invented. Five years later the local community of Stara Zagora convinced the municipal authorities that pig ears are not only a culinary delicacy but also a cultural phenomenon which has a potential for touristic valorization. How was the local controversy about the notorious fame of pig ears overtaken and what had happened behind the scenes of the event among the local actors? How can local food be combined with local wines? The main goal of the article is to present this process of valorization of the cultural heritage surveyed by personal interviews and media coverage of the event.

MLADEN MICEVSKI
South-West University Neofit Rilski, Bulgaria

Sustainable gastronomic tourism in the border region: Challenges and opportunities for Northern Macedonian municipalities

Gastronomic tourism is a rapidly growing form of tourism that attracts with aromas and flavors. Many countries and regions worldwide use it to ensure a more intensive development of tourism in general, as well as to boost regional and local economic development. Gastronomy provides new perspectives on tourist destinations, helps in rebranding, and offers different and more intensive promotional approaches to tourism development. But on the other hand, gastronomic tourism development plays a pivotal role in preserving traditional culinary heritage, since it tends to keep the authenticity of the food culture of a place. The countries from the Balkan Peninsula are very rich in authentic flavors combining specific ingredients into delicious specialties. This ensures a solid basis for gastronomic tourism development. Even more, the cross-border relations, collaborations, and knowledge sharing between these countries can be used as an opportunity for developing this type of tourism since all the countries have a lot of gastronomic heritage in common. Gastronomic tourism, specifically, in the border region between North Macedonia and Bulgaria shows enormous potential due to the similarities, but on the other hand, the challenges are quite numerous. This paper focuses on the identification and classification of all the challenges and opportunities that the municipalities on the North Macedonian side of the border region face regarding gastronomic tourism which should rely on sustainable practices. The study was conducted by interviewing representatives of 5 municipalities (Strumica, Stip, Berovo, Kumanovo, and Kriva Palanka) to gain insight into the opinion of the authorities in the direction of the future development of this form of tourism, preferably using common approaches and sharing knowledge with the other side.

ILINKA TERZIYSKA
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Sustainable food festivals as drivers of rural development: A business model for cultural and creative tourism

Food festivals have become a significant vehicle for cultural and creative tourism (CCT), particularly in rural and remote areas where they serve as platforms for preserving local heritage, promoting regional products, and supporting economic development. The study presents a business model for rural food festivals, grounded in sustainability principles and informed by the analysis of five case studies from Bulgaria. It builds on a prior literature review on cultural and creative tourism in rural and remote regions under the CROCUS project (https://crocuseurope.eu/), which identified food festivals as a promising practice. In this second phase, a qualitative, secondary-data-based case study approach was used to deepen the understanding of their dynamics. Secondary data included social media coverage, festivals' websites, NGO publications, and academic papers. The selected festivals were analysed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns and practices across the elements of the business model canvas, along with innovation and sustainability. The findings reveal that successful food festivals rely on strong community engagement, diverse funding sources, collaborative governance, and the strategic use of both tangible (local products, spaces) and intangible (culinary traditions, folklore) cultural resources. Key elements of the proposed business model include the integration of educational activities, digital outreach, partnerships with NGOs and research institutions, and innovative approaches such as online marketplaces and environmental conservation efforts. The paper offers a structured business model that can be adapted and replicated in other rural and remote areas. It highlights how food festivals, when effectively organized and locally grounded, can act as catalysts for cultural revitalization, economic resilience, and sustainable tourism. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on creative tourism and rural regeneration, offering practical recommendations for policymakers, community leaders,

and festival organizers seeking to leverage local assets in a sustainable and inclusive way.

SPECIAL SESSION III:

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

ORGANISED BY

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The influence of leadership, dynamic capabilities and technology in driving effective sustainability strategies in the hotel sector

The hospitality sector faces pressure to adopt sustainability strategies, yet challenges persist, with hotels contributing approximately 1% of global carbon emissions. Existing research highlights the role of technology in enhancing operational efficiency and sustainability, but limited studies integrate strategic leadership and dynamic capabilities as critical enablers. This study addresses this gap by examining how leadership, organizational capabilities, and technology adoption collectively drive effective sustainability strategies in hotels. Using Great Hotels of the World (GHoW) as a case study, the research employs a mixed-methods approach. Qualitative interviews with hotel managers identify, previously, key sustainability concerns and strategic priorities, followed by a survey of managers from 60 independent hotels worldwide to assess the impact of leadership and technology on sustainability performance. The study also evaluates the mediating role of stakeholder collaboration and organizational resources while analyzing how hotel type, size, and managerial experience moderate sustainability outcomes. Literature review suggests that while AI-driven solutions and digital innovations enhance efficiency, organizational resistance, cost constraints, and regulatory complexities hinder widespread adoption. By integrating strategic leadership theory and dynamic capabilities with sustainability frameworks, this study offers a novel perspective on overcoming industry-specific barriers. The anticipated contributions include actionable insights for corporate hotel managers, highlighting best practices in leveraging leadership and technology for sustainability. The findings will aid in bridging theoretical gaps while providing practical recommendations for corporate hotel managers striving for long-term environmental and operational resilience.

MICHAŁ ŻEMŁA
Jagiellonian University, Poland

Managing overtourism in European cities: Systematic literature review results

Overtourism is claimed to be a characteristic manifestation of unsustainable tourism. The phenomenon has been observed in numerous destinations worldwide for about ten years. Among the examples frequently attracting the attention of researchers studying overtourism as well as journalists are European cities. The systematic literature review was implemented to study overtourism in European cities. The analysis embraced all publications in the Scopus until the end of 2024. All publications with the word "overtourism" in the title, abstract, or keywords were found (826 publications). Abstracts of all those publications were studied to detect publications in which empirical research was conducted in European cities (181 items). Numerous presented studies in Spain or Italy, especially Venice and Barcelona. The literature review suggests very few tools, approaches, or strategies to minimise overtourism. It is hard to point to a single solution that appeared effective in numerous destinations. Moreover, it is also hard to find a single example of a European city that succeeded in such a fight against overtourism. The only tool being used by local authorities in numerous cases and bringing some visible effects was found to be legal measures and regulations. Using this tool, some negative consequences of overtourism can be weakened or even solved; however, this will not eliminate the phenomenon as a whole. With the "blurred" nature of overtourism and its differentiated reasons and effects in particular cities, this may suggest that finding a universal remedy for overtourism is difficult or even impossible. Instead, the search for solutions for particular local problems is required. This makes future research of local cases, especially case studies of success, even more desirable. Several publications deal with the role of stakeholders' cooperation in counteractions to overtourism, which was detected to be or postulated as an effective tool, but further research in a bigger number of cities and studying it more in-depth are necessary. Similarly, several studies examine the issue of deconcentration strategy as a potentially effective solution

to some problems connected with overtourism. However, the conditions of its effectiveness are still to be specified, as there are also examples that neglect this strategy.

BEATA PALIŚ
Jagiellonian University, Poland

Sustainable development strategies in the international conference tourism market

The article aims to verify sustainable development strategy in the international conference tourism market. The article also has a utilitarian goal: to create guidelines and a model for implementing sustainable development strategies in conference and congress facilities. An in-depth literature search was used, particularly in Web of Science and Scopus databases and online sources of leading associations of the meetings industry, including industry reports. The desk research method was used as part of the study. The largest congress centers in the world were selected for the study, including those belonging to the AIPC - International Association of Convention Centres (AIPC, 2025). A geographical criterion was applied, and venues from every region of the world were selected. The article discusses the following research problems: Have congress venues worldwide implemented sustainable development strategies? What sustainability activities are being undertaken by these facilities? Are these strategies standardized? Are they prepared in the form of a document? In which region of the world are these strategies more developed? The research has shown that congress venues worldwide implement sustainable development strategies, but not all entities have taken up this issue. These strategies are also not standardized. They differ in the scope of the activities undertaken. The utilitarian objective of the study is to provide helpful guidance for the meetings industry on the implementation of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance) policies and to create guidelines for the implementation of sustainability strategies in congress venues. Research shows that the meetings industry is pursuing sustainability measures. Still, they are insufficient, especially in the context of the European Commission's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD, which replaced the NFRD in 2024.) The industry, for example, in Poland is at the beginning of exploring this issue. The research results may help develop a sustainable development strategy for conference and congress tourism.

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Innovative marketing strategies to advance sustainable and regenerative agritourism goals

Agritourism has emerged as a compelling pathway for regenerative travel, an approach that reimagines tourism not only as a source of revenue but also as a catalyst for community empowerment and ecological and cultural stewardship. Within this context, the current study explores how agritourism businesses, particularly those operating in rural and peri-urban environments, can deploy values-aligned marketing strategies underpinned by digital technologies such as search engine optimization (SEO), algorithm-driven targeting, and data analytics to attract values-oriented travelers. Drawing from empirical and conceptual work on regenerative tourism and values-oriented marketing research, we argue that such technologies, when used with intentionality, can amplify the visibility of farm-based experiences that reflect the values of environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community resilience.Digital tools offer agritourism operators enhanced capacity to compete in increasingly saturated tourism markets through more personalized and efficient engagement with travelers. However, existing literature on sustainable tourism marketing underscores the importance of credibility and value alignment in influencing visitor decision-making. Agritourism enterprises often lack the digital literacy or strategic capacity to compete with other tourism operators, despite increasing consumer demand for local, authentic, and ecologically sound travel experiences. Our findings show that bridging this digital divide is not only a business imperative but also a mechanism for strengthening community-led tourism development in ways that align with regenerative goals. This mixed-methods study examined data-driven

marketing in agritourism through a literature review and a structured agritourism operator survey. Findings will provide a framework for implementing analytics-supported marketing strategies tailored to agritourism operations. Marketing strategies including geolocation, value-aligned content marketing, and search engine optimization, and smart analytics tools can help support more effective place-branding and operational profitability, and help direct visitors toward experiences that reinforce, rather than extract from, rural landscapes and livelihoods.By situating agritourism at the nexus of technological innovation and regenerative values, this study contributes to emerging dialogues on how micro-enterprises in tourism can reposition themselves within increasingly data-driven markets without compromising their social or ecological ethos. These findings have implications for tourism planners, destination managers, and policy actors seeking to design enabling environments that support digitally empowered, regenerative tourism ecosystems.