

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE TRAVELLERS' TEXTS TO THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF CRETE

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Abstract

This study looks into the intention of tourists visiting the region of Crete, to follow routes that have been taken by travelers of the island during earlier times. Crete is a particularly prominent tourist destination of our country, as it combines in the best way a distinct physiognomic landscape and a cultural background, which displays a continuous timeline, starting from one of the most ancient civilizations, the Minoan one, up to the present day, containing many elements that inspire admiration. Beyond the inexhaustible Cretan nature, though, and the various cultural sites, there are also sophisticated tourist structures that have been proven to be a strong incentive for a visitor.

Thus, as Crete is one of the most important destinations of our country and as literary tourism, a type of tourism perfectly compatible with the EU's proposals to support sustainability, the study focuses on the possibility of exploiting the relevant travel literature.

In order to investigate tourists' intention to follow previously traveled routes, a 20 closed-ended, structured-response questions questionnaire was created and given to 191 adults to fill in. The aforementioned tourists did not belong to any excursion group and were in the city of Heraklion during the period of July 15th - September 15th, 2023. From the preliminary results of the survey, the interest of a significant percentage in highlighting the work of the tourists is evident. In the opinion of the sample, the preservation, processing and promotion of proposals linked to the works of previous travelers can function as tools to strengthen a sustainable tourism product.

Key words: *travel texts, Literary tourism, Crete, culture, sustainability*

Introduction - Literary tourism and sustainability

The World Tourism Council (WTC) makes reference to viability and sustainability in tourism in a study conducted in 2017¹. In it, forty-three issues are presented that affect the sector and are related, not only to ecology and the environment, but also to culture; in particular, it is stated that it is imperative to enforce respect in matters regarding the social and cultural authenticity of local communities. Sustainable cultural tourism is based on a series of strategies related to regional development and as stated on the website² of the European Union, is a driving force towards this specific goal. Tourism as an activity may include a

¹ Sustainability Reporting in Travel and Tourism-available:

[https://wtcc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2017/ESGs%20-%20Sustainability%](https://wtcc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2017/ESGs%20-%20Sustainability%20)

² <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/el/cultural-heritage/cultural-heritage-in-eu-policies/sustainable-cultural-tourism>

series of functions related to cultural interests (Lachlalis & als, 2019). Culture and literature are two interrelated concepts.

Literary destinations can become attractive if they meet specific conditions regarding technical excellence, authenticity, the ability to evoke emotions and the provision of amenities (Zhang & al, 2014). As a good of sustainability, history and culture are an advantage for Greece. Literary tourism, as a form of the cultural one, is the most qualitative form of alternative tourism and has as many forms as there are tourists (McKercher & Cros, 2015),.

During his/her visit to a place, the literary tourist tries to associate and cross-reference the author with the places and characters of his/her work (Fawcett & Mc Cormack, 2001) .

In previous studies, dealt with the possibility of developing literary tourism in areas of the island, with the aim of its sustainable development (Manola & al 2020:2021:2022); the results of the research were auspicious. A key tool for promoting sustainability, is the creation of cultural routes around a thematic axis (Mitoula & Kaldis, 2018). This, helps tourists wander around, aiming to connect with a wider environment of a cultural element, thereby acquiring new experiences in areas such as music, art, festivals, pilgrimages, architecture, conferences, etc (Caspo, 2012).

Tourists, of course, have a specific physiognomy which corresponds to the following types (Caspo, 2012):

- Targeted visitor, i.e. the one with strong experiences and high expectations
- Wandering visitor, with a superficial choice of destination
- Occasional visitor, with possible participation in activities
- Relaxed visitor, who usually has shallow experiences
- Casual visitor who is not culturally motivated and whose participation in cultural activities is superficial

The boundaries are not clear and it is relatively easy to move from one category to another.

In order to highlight the cultural wealth, it should be a strategic goal to connect technology with tradition. Digital technology is a powerful tool and the tourist promotion of an area and the connection with the literary hero can be achieved even through virtual reality or via theatrical events (Tsatalbassoglou, 2019;2020)

As the literary tourism is a mild form of tourism, it can easily be combined with alternative activities that encourage the maximization of the use of basic resources in regional development. To develop the sustainability of a place through tourism and to minimize the negative impact on the environment and society, tools should be developed that highlight the positive benefits for destinations and their societies. Of particular importance in this direction is the adoption of initiatives by the bodies concerned with technology, always focusing on culture, as business needs are covered and the appropriate infrastructures are created, in order to meet high-level quality requirements (Vardopoulos & al, 2023).

It necessary, to utilize the comparative advantages of each region, in order to create a strong brand name (Mitoula & Kaldis, 2018) . A useful procedure is the understanding of the ways, in which a literary tourist supports the sustainability of a place, because his/her choices are the cause of new needs emerging and, therefore, new tools are required to promote the place (Manola & al., 2021).

Regarding the island of Crete, comparative advantages are its geographical position, landscape, cultural heritage, tradition, and gastronomy. Crete attracts a percentage that exceeds 25% of all tourists and offers a prolonged tourist season, as the summer lasts for more than seven months of the year, thus, favoring activities that are not only associated with the classical triptych "sea-sun-sand", but they also promote alternative forms of mild tourism that are oriented towards the viability and sustainability of the place (Igoumenakis, 2000).

Elements of culture mentioned in many travel documents are potential axes for a mild and sustainable tourism development.

1. Travel texts and tourism

Travel texts are a literary genre that specializes in travelers' descriptions of a place. By travelers we mean the travelers from Western Europe, who bequeathed us a series of written descriptions of the places they visited. However, it is not only the Western Europeans, but the Russians also visited the region for reasons of military, religious and commercial interest (Manola & Tsatalbassoglou, 2020). Travelers found themselves in the Greek area for various reasons at first, usually following a pilgrimage route, diplomatic or scientific mission, or even leisure. Their texts are an excellent source of knowledge, not only of historical, but also of everyday issues with events that can illuminate the data of historiography, as they give an image of the region from the point of view of Europeans depending on the time (Simopoulos, 1999). The aforementioned texts, as works of literature, may reflect personal opinions, but, beyond impressions, they also involve clear descriptions of space and time.

The geographical position of Crete in the Eastern Mediterranean, between three continents, favors the mixing of cultures, as in earlier times it was an almost mandatory stop for supplies. Then it became a destination in its own right and travelers such as Breydenbach, Thevet, Buondelmonti, Basilicata, Cootwijck, Pasculli, Pouqueville, Pashley, Boissonas, and many others, such as, more recently, Gerola, toured the island and recorded their impressions. The first travelers saw Crete as a resupply stop on the way to the Holy Land, but, little by little, the trips began to be made, first for trade and then for various interests, such as archeology, the scientific recording of flora and fauna, military support, or the recording and visualization of the monuments. Within all these descriptions, however, there are also records that make the texts useful as a source of information about the area and the society of Crete, especially with the presentation made by the painters and then the photographers. The collected material from the travel texts could even be used for educational purposes (Vigopoulou 2005).

The creation of alternative activities that include tours of historical and cultural interest in areas, detached from the classic structures of tourism, not only in terms of distance, but, mainly, in mentality, can economically strengthen the local populations, without causing negative effects on the lives of the inhabitants, thus contributing to viability and aiming at sustainability.

2. Research Methodology and Results

The research was oriented to the investigation of elements that could highlight the opinions of tourists regarding the utilization of travel texts in the tourism development of the Heraklion region. Other expected results were the recording of tourists' experiences from similar literary tourism actions and the possibility of implementing a viable and sustainable cultural development of the region. 240 people were asked for the research, of which 191 responded positively. The sample is small but it can be the first phase of a wider research that will continue (Babbie, 2018). In order to select the sample, random stratified sampling was used in three areas of Heraklion with similar dynamics and characteristics for the tourism industry. The final sample consists of 191 people, who voluntarily and anonymously answered a closed questionnaire of twenty structured questions. The individuals, all adults, were not members of an organized excursion. The research took place in Heraklion during the period July 15th – September 15th, 2023. Below, some of the results obtained from the questions and which are of particular interest for drawing first conclusions related to the subject are presented.

2.1. Questions

Question 1: "What is the reason, for visiting the area?"



Figure 1: Travel Reason

The element that emerges from the first question is almost expected. 76% (146 people) of the respondents answered that they chose the island, in order to have a vacation. 9.9% (19) stated that they are interested in knowing the different culture of the island and this is particularly auspicious, as it is a target group that could potentially be addressed by programs with cultural content, such as the one being researched. The next highest percentage consists of 15 people, who visited the island because of the affordable travel packages that were offered to them.

Question 2: "What do you consider to be the positive elements of the area?"

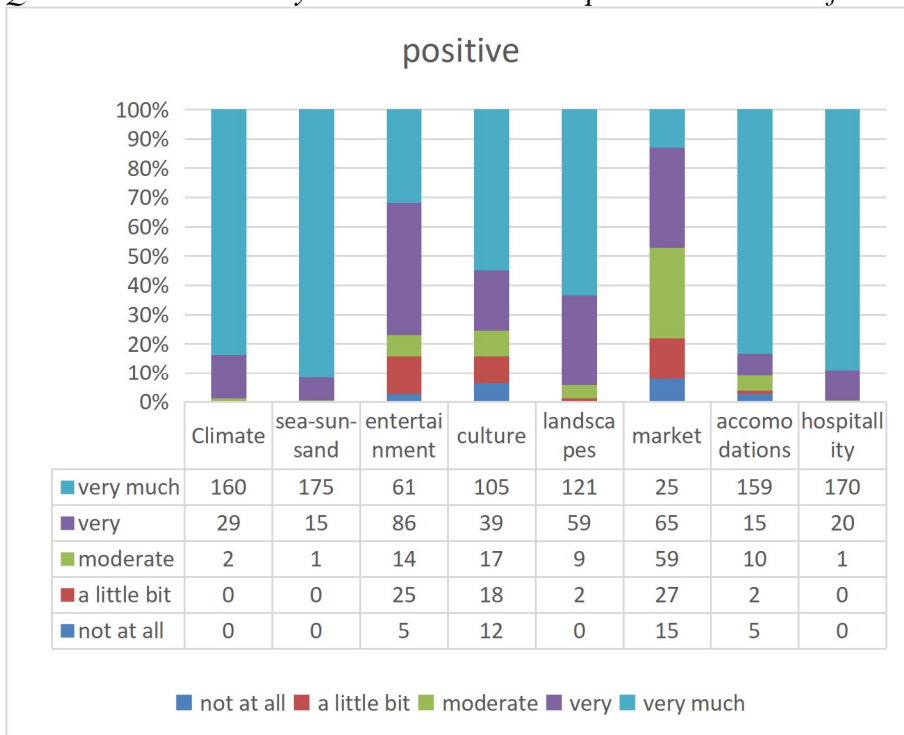


Figure 2: Positive elements

From the graph above it is evident that the largest percentage in 'very much' is attributed to 'hospitality', 'Climate', as well as the triptych 'Sun-sea-sand'. Right after that, the good 'infrastructures' seem to follow. All of the above is directly related to the finding of the first question regarding the reason for the visit. Despite this, culture and landscapes also appear to score highly.

Question 3: "What do you consider to be the negative points you identified during your stay in the wider area of Heraklion?"

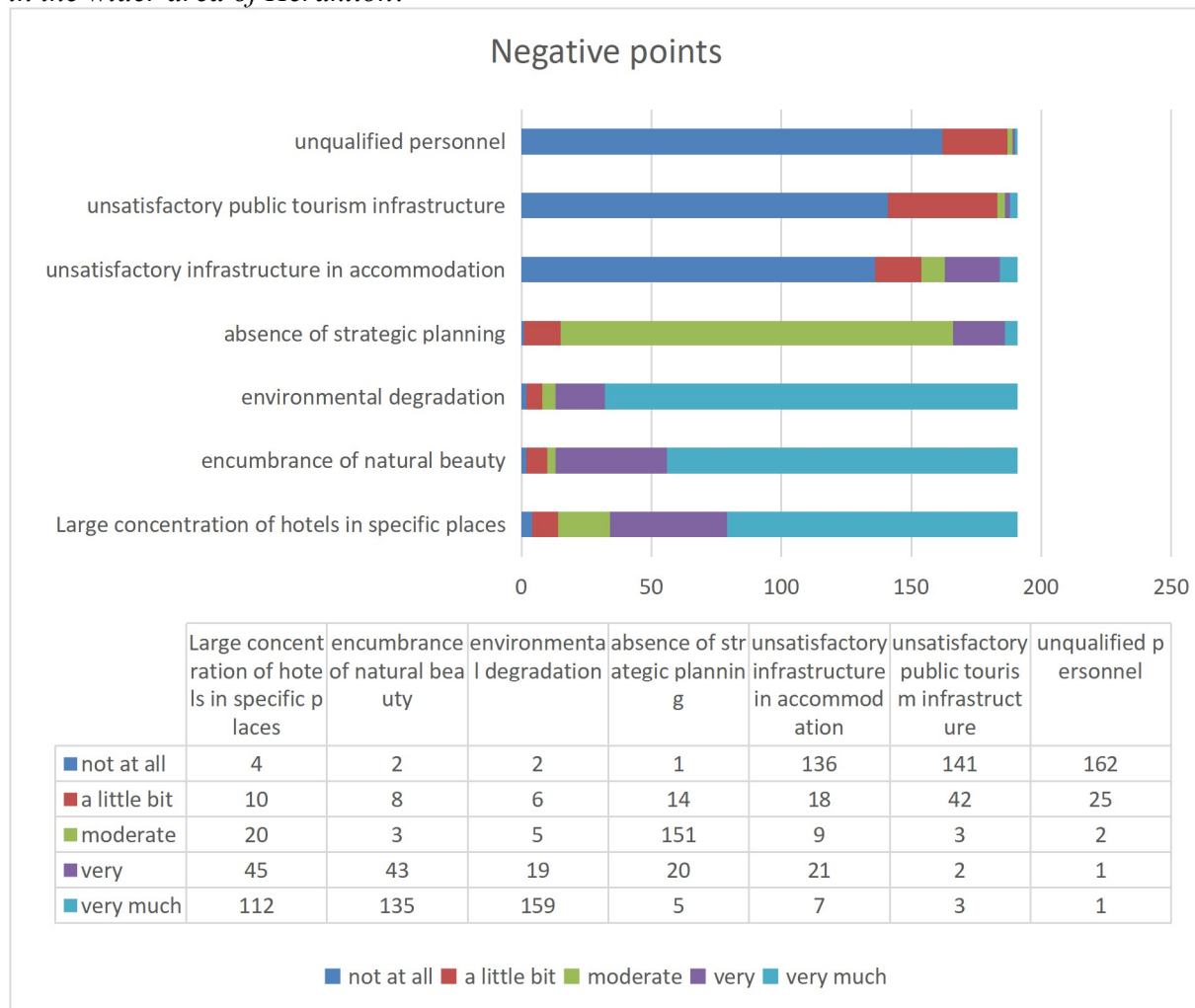


Figure 3: Negative points/ elements of the wider area

According to the responses, one of the biggest problems encountered in the wider region is environmental degradation (83% answered 'too much') and its burden on the landscape. The answer regarding the absence of strategic planning is also of interest, where most preferred to answer neutrally, as they had no knowledge of the matter (at a rate of 79%). Clearly, there is particular satisfaction regarding the personnel, who are characterized as sufficiently qualified.

Question 4: "Do you think that the accommodation facilities you have enjoyed so far are in the direction of sustainability?"



Figure 4: Accommodation facilities and sustainability

137 people responded positively, i.e. 71% of the sample. In another question that is not analyzed here, it was answered that there were guidelines for saving energy, promoting recycling, etc.

Question 5: “Have you traveled following elements from the life and work of an author, or a literary hero?”

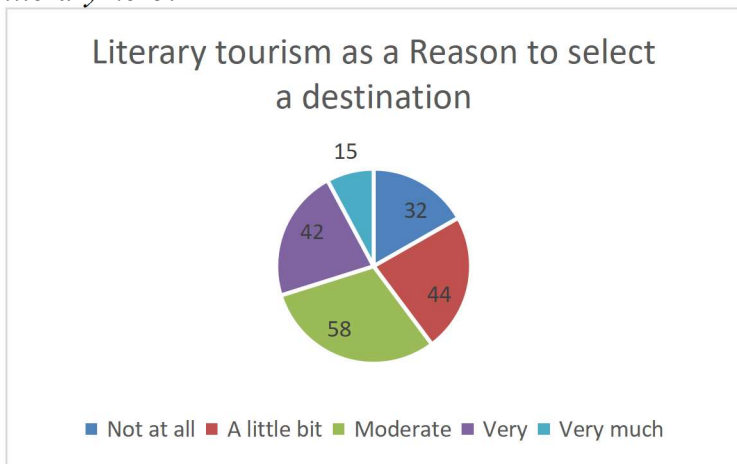


Figure 5: Literary tourism, as a reason to select a destination

The largest percentage, reaching 30%, is granted to the answer 'moderate', with 58 people choosing it. The answer 'a little bit' follows, with 44 people and a percentage of 23%, while the answers 'very', 'not at all' and 'very much' scored 22%, 17% and 8%, respectively. The aforementioned answers are expected based on the previous research of Manola & al (2021; 2022; 2023).

Question 6: ‘The island has welcomed many famous travelers, such as Buondeltempo, Cootwijk, Pasculli, Pouqueville, Pashley, Boissonas, Vivanti, Walker and Gerola. Would you be interested in following in their footsteps if you have free time?’

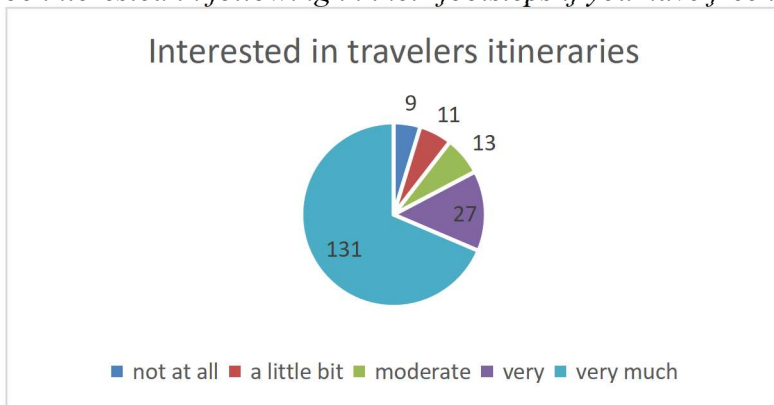


Figure 6: Interest in travelers' itineraries

In this particular question, the intention of the respondents to follow in the footsteps of the travelers is clearly visible, in case they are given the opportunity. 68.5% answered 'very much' and 27 people answered 'very', i.e. 14%..

Question 7: “Which of the following do you think could contribute to the development of this type of literary routes?”

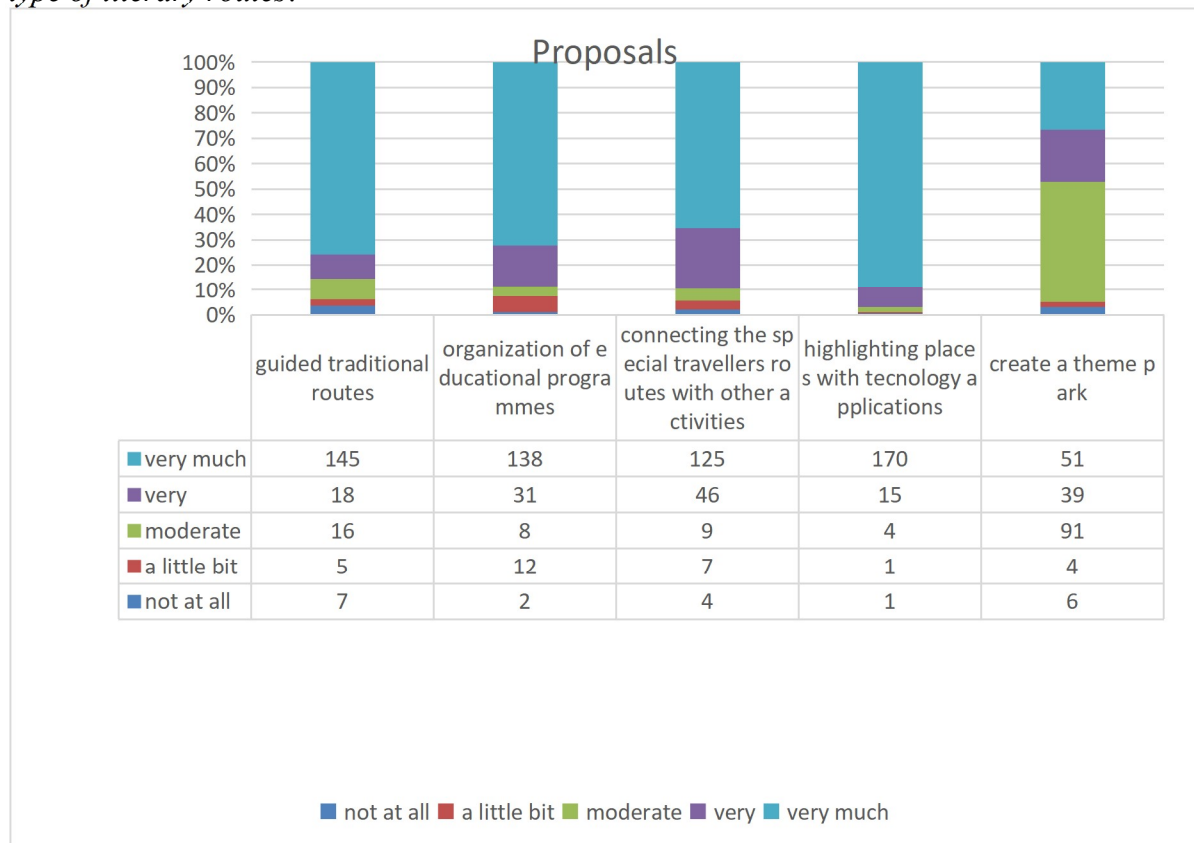


Figure 7: Proposals for further development

The respondents are interested in following organized guided tours, in the footsteps of earlier travelers, as well as educational programs, but almost all of them, as can be seen from the table above, wish to combine knowledge with technology, as in this specific question they responded 'very much' at a rate of 89%.

Question 8: “Which of the following do you think, presented in the works of earlier travelers, promotes sustainability in a tourist destination?”

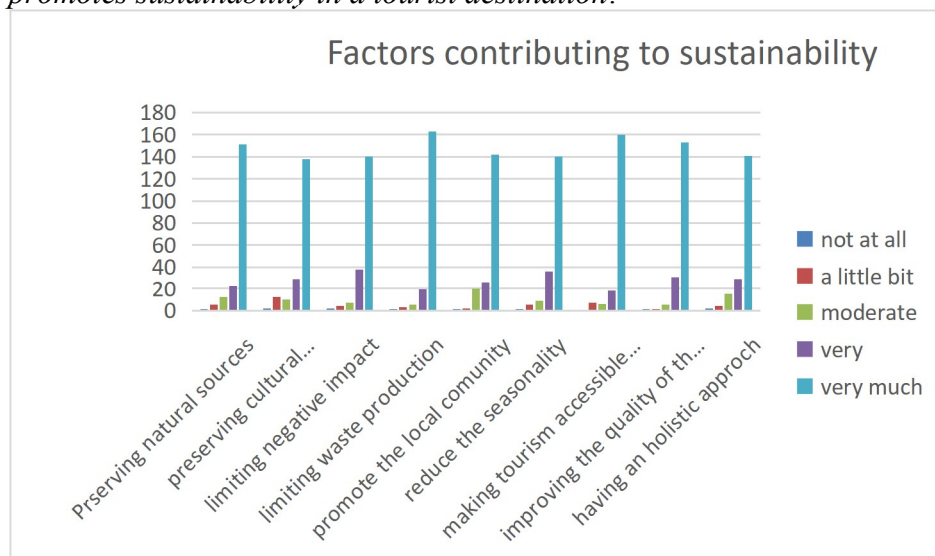


Figure 8: Factors contributing to sustainability

According to the respondents, the factors that contribute to the sustainability of a destination, presented in the works of earlier travelers, depend ‘very much’ on the conservation of natural resources, tangible and intangible heritage, the limitation of waste outside the monuments, and in general the holistic way of addressing the issue of sustainability.

Question 9: “Can the creation of new itineraries based on the work of earlier travelers, with a focus on viability and sustainability benefit the local population?”

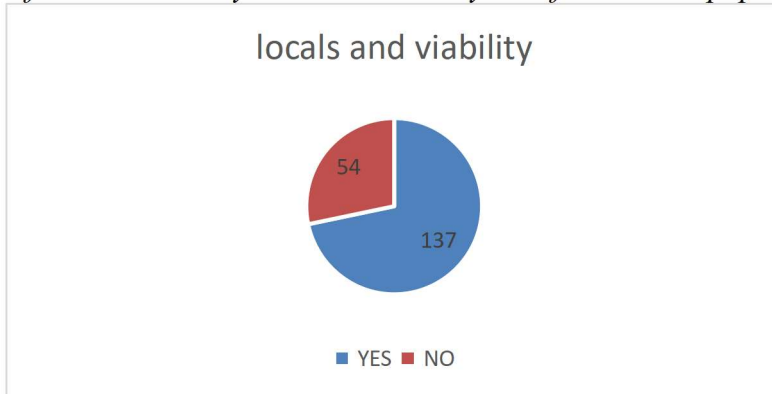


Figure 9: Local population and viability

To this question, the vast majority of the respondents answered positively as can be seen from the graph above. Designing routes in the footsteps of earlier travelers can enhance viability/sustainability and benefit the local population according to 71% of the sample.

Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from this research, combined with the theoretical background, reveal the following: The area of Heraklion is suitable for the development of literary tourism, as it is a point that is already on the list of visitors for cultural reasons. To a large extent, visitors would return to Crete, as they believe that the island has the potential to offer a lot at an excellent price-quality ratio. The visitors evaluate positively the hospitality, the monuments, the good food and negatively the degradation of the landscape and the lack of information from the authorities. They are looking for new forms of utilizing their free time, and the creation of guided tours based on the works left by earlier travelers is a good opportunity to utilize historical sources and connect them with today. This connection can even be made through technology, as in the younger ages, such a prospect seems tempting. The possibility of involving the visitors of the island in activities that will include similar routes can lengthen the tourist season and arouse curiosity towards the discovery of areas outside the usual destinations. The negative first responses to the topic of literary tourism seem to come from a lack of knowledge on the topic, which, once covered, changes the mood of the visitors, who clearly show their interest. The proposal for new activities that will involve earlier travelers’ itineraries may involve tourists more in a process that will cause a change in attitude towards the destination, thus changing their physiognomy for their next excursions and putting culture in the place selection criteria. In continuation of previous researches³ and with this one, the certainty remains that literary tourism has not yet developed in the region, as the appropriate strategies have not been developed. As can be seen from the responses in the questions, there is no comprehensive presentation, promotion and utilization of tourism projects. The softening of interests and the inclusion of new destinations mentioned in tourism projects can

³ Manola & al (2021;2022;2023)

bring about a sustainable development provided that there is a balance with the protection of cultural heritage, as there is always the risk of the negative effects of tourism. For this reason, the local population must always operate with its cultural wealth in mind, acquiring the appropriate knowledge and adopting a long-term planning that will favor the participation of all interested residents and will address the issue holistically, based on the axes of viable and sustainable development.

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