

**PHOTOGRAPHIC NARRATIVES OF GREEK INTANGIBLE  
CULTURAL HERITAGE: DRIVING FORCES OF ALTERNATIVE  
TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN  
TRADITIONAL/HISTORICAL AREAS**

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**Abstract**

*This research article explores the pivotal role of photographic narratives in documenting Greece's intangible cultural heritage and their contribution to sustainable development in traditional and historical areas through the lens of alternative tourism. The study emphasizes the significance of visual documentation in preserving cultural practices, traditions, and lifestyles, often overlooked by mass tourism paradigms. Focusing on Greece—a nation abundant in cultural diversity and historical depth—the research highlights how contemporary photographic communication can serve as a compelling medium for cultural sustainability.*

*The methodology integrates both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Initially, a content analysis of photographic collections from various Greek regions shared on diverse social media platforms was conducted, with particular attention to intangible cultural elements. These visual documents were examined for their potential to record 'authentic' cultural aspects and experiences. At the same time, a questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of 143 tourists (Greek and foreign) regarding the impact of photographic evidence on tourists' appreciation and engagement with the intangible cultural heritage of Greece.*

*The findings demonstrate that visual narratives not only keep intangible heritage alive but also play a key role in promoting sustainable tourism by impacting local communities. They also demonstrate how destinations that invest in the photographic display of cultural heritage can drive economic and social development.*

*The results of the research support the catalytic role of photographic evidence for the promotion of alternative tourism and in the attainment of sustainable development in*

*traditional/historical Greek regions. Within this context, it encourages tourism professionals and cultural heritage organizations to collaborate across disciplines to ensure the proper exploitation of photographic evidence, ensuring that Greece's rich intangible heritage is preserved and utilized in sustainable, productive development models.*

**Keywords:** *Photography, alternative tourism, intangible cultural heritage, sustainability*

## **1. Introduction**

Nowadays, when travelers are increasingly seeking authentic and enriching experiences, beyond mere destinations, the substance of cultural identity becomes of paramount importance, creating a narrative that transcends material aspects and is linked to invisible elements of generational "cells" that transcend time and space. The intangible cultural elements of a place may elicit positive emotions in those involved and largely meet their expectations (Chen, 2021; Su et al., 2020). Thus, it can improve the quality of the visitor experience, enhancing feelings of awe and creating a potentially deeper emotional connection and loyalty to the site (Su et al., 2020; Wu, 2016). This critical engagement of tourists has the dynamic to emerge regional diversity and enhance its competitiveness in the global market. Consequently, the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage is vital for sustainable tourism (Rodzi et al., 2013), especially in places with immeasurable cultural history and tradition, such as Greece. In this context, photography, as a form of visual communication, is crucial for the documentation and dissemination of these intangible cultural elements (Giovannini et al., 2021; Carboni & De Luca, 2016).

Photographic narratives, even in the broadest sense, convey ideas and engender emotions that transcend social and linguistic boundaries (Das & Chakrabarti, 2021). They record global human stories and information (Ray, 2020), connecting different viewers around the world. In this study, it is considered necessary to define the term 'photographic narratives' utilized in the title for restricting the research. This phrase refers to photographs that may document stories, act as historical records, or present subjects honestly and without bias. These images function as powerful tools for genuine storytelling. They do not direct viewers to specific agendas or deceive but serve memory as genuine repositories of cultural heritage. As such, they can include authentic intangible cultural elements (Rivers & Ingraham, 2020), increasing their accessibility and broadening their exposure. Specifically, in Greece, a country renowned for its diverse cultural landscape, photographic documentation can help as a powerful mechanism (Weber, 2008) for archiving, studying, preserving, and promoting its unique intangible cultural features. In addition, as a communication medium, it can encourage a deeper understanding and appreciation of the identity of traditional/historic places (Frosh, 2020).

However, visual narratives not only contribute to cultural awareness but also are a powerful, versatile tool for the reinvention of the alternative tourism experience. According to Urry and Larsen (2011), the visual dimension of tourism, particularly through photography, enables tourists to connect more deeply with the cultural essence of their destinations. These narratives also work as an educational tool, providing historical context and cultural knowledge that helps visitors deepen their understanding of the places they visit (Kelly & Kortegast, 2023; Giovannini et al., 2021; Crang, 1997). In addition, they serve as marketing tools, attracting prospective tourists through compelling images in guidebooks, websites, and social media (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020; Jimura & Lee, 2020; Ghorbani et al., 2023). Several scientific findings have directly or indirectly concluded that documenting and sharing visual stories can transform tourists into destination ambassadors (Govers et al., 2007; Balakrishnan et al., 2011; Tham et al., 2020; Tussyadiah et al., 2011), promoting sustainable

and innovative trends in the tourism industry. Thus, utilizing photographic storytelling, particularly in lesser-known locations, alternative tourism practices can enhance visitor engagement and immersiveness in travel experiences while ensuring the preservation of intangible cultural heritage and encouraging a more authentic and sustainable tourism model.

The primary aim of this research is to explore the intersection of photographic narratives, intangible cultural heritage, and alternative tourism in Greece. Specifically, the study seeks to identify intangible cultural elements through photographic testimonies, investigate their influence on tourists' preferences and behaviors, and assess their contribution to the overall travel experience. Simultaneously, it seeks to inform stakeholders of the significance of leveraging photographic evidence to strengthen alternative tourism strategies that safeguard and promote the rich intangible legacy of Greek culture.

The significance of this study lies in examining the degree of influence that photographic narratives exert on the documentation and promotion of intangible cultural attributes in Greek regions, especially as modern travelers increasingly seek unique and captivating destinations. Visual documentation is essential for capturing distinctive cultural practices, traditions, and lifestyles that are often overlooked by mass tourism approaches. Moreover, it emphasizes the role of photography in attracting alternative tourists interested in genuine, immersive experiences, thereby supporting sustainable economic and social development in traditional and historic areas. Deep awareness of photography's role in preserving, evolving, and promoting Greece's intangible cultural treasures may lead to more effective policies for responsible tourism, ensuring its thriving presence in the modern world.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)***

Intangible cultural heritage, as defined by organizations such as UNESCO (2003), encompasses a wide range of elements, including practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills—as well as instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated with them—that communities, groups, and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. The primary innovation of UNESCO's framework lies in its emphasis on cultural expressions as dynamic, evolving processes that are continuously practiced within communities (Bortolotto, 2007). This inherent link surpasses the physicality of items and rituals, encapsulating the essence of cultural identity as it is perceived and experienced in daily life. ICH, therefore, is more than a collection of practices or knowledge; it is the living pulse of a community's shared existence, perpetuated through collective consciousness and transformed across generations. An archetype code that derives sustenance and development from its roots, while simultaneously affecting and being influenced by socio-political circumstances of each era, affirming that the soul of a Greek locale, in this instance, asserts its presence in historical continuity.

However, the inseparable adaptability of ICH renders it vulnerable to assimilation by dominant trends, risking the preservation and transmission of unique cultural elements in the context of globalization (Lenzerini, 2011). In this framework, the abstract dimensions of cultural heritage, such as symbols, meanings, and images, gain heightened importance and require safeguarding, as they serve as critical pillars for fostering resilient emotional connections and economic benefits among local residents (Petronela, 2016), particularly in the context of alternative tourism. Yet, certain tourism strategies often exploit the cultural elements of both indigenous and non-indigenous local communities, commodifying them into commercial products, which disrupts community cohesion and undermines the self-determination of local cultures (Wanda, 2010).

Thus, imparting a sense of place, justice, and mission in the bond between individuals and locales is imperative, as these principles, combined with awareness and creativity, support the sustainability of ICH (Tan et al., 2018). Given the importance of safeguarding the intangible elements of historic and traditional locations, it is vital to explore areas and extensions of alternative tourism that can contribute to both the transmission of these evolving echoes to future generations and the perpetuation of their significance in the global community.

## ***2.2 Alternative Tourism and Cultural Sustainability of Intangible Heritage***

The existential human desire to explore other cultures and territories beyond one's residence seems to have existed since the earliest stages of civilization. Cultural tourism, therefore, can be considered one of the oldest forms of travel, as individuals ventured to visit historic sites, significant archaeological monuments, and cities of antiquity (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012). Over time, various theoretical approaches and definitions have been developed to construct a prevailing interpretation of "cultural tourism" that could delineate its essence comprehensively (Mousavi et al., 2016; Richards, 2013; McKercher & Du Cros, 2002). Certainly, this remains an intricate endeavor, and it is completely feasible that such a venture would evolve in a manner comparable to that of a steadfast stance for the human dimension. However, in order to create a conceptual flow that places this travel trend on solid ground and investigates its relative importance to sustainability, its shape must be addressed in light of contemporary situations.

Alternative tourism—whether seen as a countercultural or reflective critique of conventional tourism (Cohen, 1987), as a symbol of "Tourism of the Future," or as a concept contextualized within the zeitgeist of each era (Lanfant & Graburn, 1992)—has come to incorporate cultural tourism into its forms, integrating it in recent years with responsible, experiential engagement. This cultural progression was initially investigated in connection with experiential tourism (Duxbury & Richards, 2019) and later evolved through modern tourists' pursuit of more meaningful participatory activities, culminating in the term "creative tourism".

This transformative trajectory of travelers within the realm of alternative tourism was first expressed by Richards and Raymond (2000) as a new generation's inclination to connect authentically with the social and cultural qualities of the destinations they visit through their creative capabilities. Subsequently, UNESCO (2006) characterized "creative" tourism as the next tourism cycle following cultural tourism, defining it as travel oriented toward committed and authentic experiences involving participatory learning in arts, heritage, or the unique character of a place. This approach promotes connections with the individuals who inhabit and shape this living culture. In practice, its essence lies in transitioning from an experiential and environmentally responsible focus to an evolutionary trajectory of co-creation, shifting attention from the tangible to the intangible cultural dimension (Richards, 2011). This framework encourages deeper engagement between visitors and destinations, allowing travelers to immerse themselves in local culture and contribute to its preservation and revitalization.

As this third generation of tourism interacts with intangibles within historic or traditional environments, it frequently incorporates qualities such as authenticity (Lu et al., 2022), awe, uniqueness, exploration, self-discovery, and fulfillment (Alahakoon & Uduwara, 2021), which results in the enhancement of knowledge and emotions. These attributes improve the quality of the experience, which, according to Suhartanto et al. (2020), has the most significant impact on tourist loyalty, surpassing even the influence of motivation. By fostering tourists' preference and commitment to a destination through conditions rooted in its

intangible heritage, not only is the promotion and development of this heritage advanced, but its relevance is also ensured in an increasingly globalized world.

### ***2.3 Intangible Heritage in Photographic Documentation***

At every moment, life is influenced by information, while simultaneously becoming a potential part of continuous information. Verbal, written, or visual accounts—although expressed in specific forms—often carry invisible elements, such as symbolism, ideas, and abstract forms, stimulating imagination or thought. By evoking associations and emotions, they allow viewers to uncover deeper and more layered interpretations (Oestermeier & Hesse, 2000). In particular, information in its entirety incorporates both visible and immaterial elements, just like culture. Within the framework of this approach, genuine photographic representations, while recording the visible realm of culture, also function as a medium that indicates its intangible dimensions.

Photographic records, whether static or moving, are an invaluable depository of moments that encapsulate both ephemeral creative cultural elements (Salucci & Marino, 2018) and fundamental cultural imprints. The modern tourist, using digital photography, has the ability to capture a plethora of fleeting aspects of customs, morals, and daily activities in traditional locations. By visually recording data from the environment, participants, and interactions, they effortlessly store a rich cultural source of information. Subsequently, the sharing of these digital archives through online platforms ensures accessibility to an international audience, particularly in today's reality where photography is not only a universal language (Sander & Halley, 1978) but also the most popular form of communication on social media. Through this linguistic system, a dialogue emerges, generating new dimensions of co-creation of knowledge and social issues, based on images' ability to reveal multifaceted interpretations and narratives (Fairey & Orton, 2019). Consequently, socio-economic, political, religious, and philosophical ideas housed within photographic testimonies surface through content analysis and disseminate across digital communication platforms, offering a richer understanding of intangible cultural heritage (Qiu & Zhang, 2021).

Building on this approach, it becomes evident that a genuine photographic narrative not only has the ability to keep cultural memory alive but also enables the interpretation and recontextualization of intangible culture through the combination of synapses and emotions. It perpetually allows the viewer to make subsequent critical evaluations. Along these lines, Duda's (2023) noteworthy case study on the power of photography in tourism highlights that travel narratives possess the unique ability to redefine forgotten cultural heritage and transform it into a locus of deeper reflection for the future. The longer the photographic journey of an intangible local culture, the more ideas, interactions, and emotions it can ignite, being capable of leading to travel inspiration (Volo, 2017), which is considered a key factor in consumer decision-making (Dai et al., 2022).

By methodically examining the ways in which individuals interact with intangible cultural elements—such as information, engagement, participation, and cultural immersion—during their visits to historical or traditional sites, it becomes possible to identify various categories of cultural tourists (Jovicic, 2016). Photographic documentation, as a research field, both in terms of how travelers relate to it and its intrinsic content, can contribute significantly to illuminating these distinctions. Within this framework, the application of innovative marketing, guided by research and supported by emerging technologies, becomes imperative for the management and promotion of competitive destinations (Buhalis, 2000). The success of this approach hinges on the capacity of businesses to take heed of the contemporary pulse of cultural travel. Integrating the intangible wealth of photographic narratives into service design and adapting their offerings to create unique experiences for visitors are vital strategies.

By responding to the needs of each demographic group, such initiatives can enhance the sustainability and growth of cultural tourism destinations.

### **3. Methodology**

The research methodology predominantly employed a quantitative approach, supplemented by qualitative techniques in the initial stages. These stages concerned the analysis of visual content, focusing on photographs from various social media platforms and travel blogs, which featured both spontaneous and deliberate photographic recordings by travelers visiting locations of historical or traditional significance in Greece. While location (Greece) served as a general geographic criterion, no strict selection parameters were imposed. Based on these preliminary criteria, photographs were selected randomly. The content analysis aimed to assess whether a plethora of intangible cultural elements was present in these authentic photographic travel collections and to identify those appearing most frequently in the posted photographs.

The primary method of quantitative research involved distributing questionnaires to a sample of travelers who had visited tourist destinations within Greece. The questionnaire was disseminated online, initially published on Google Forms, with the link shared with potential participants along with a text explaining the research's nature and objectives, encouraging recipients to share it within their networks. Using snowball sampling on social media (Leighton et al., 2021), information was collected from individuals who had visited Greek traditional or historical destinations within the past five years. A total of 143 responses were gathered over 45 days.

#### ***3.1 Research Instrument***

A pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted in this study prior to the main data collection phase. The pilot study included ten participants to assess the clarity of the questions and ensure the internal consistency of the items. Also, it was designed based on literature analysis and findings from the photographic content analysis. Factors and variables from relevant empirical studies were included into the research instrument and tailored to the thematic section of the present inquiry. The questionnaire had 15 questions, with respondents rating their level of agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Additionally, demographic data, such as gender, age, education, and place of residence, were collected. The statements focused on the impact of photographic content featuring elements of Greek intangible cultural heritage on travelers' motivations, exploration, understanding, participation, experience enrichment, and overall satisfaction when visiting a Greek historical or traditional site.

#### ***3.2 Data Analysis Methodology***

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software. Descriptive statistical measures, such as means, standard deviations, and percentages, were initially used to examine the distribution of variables. Subsequently, parametric tests were utilized to investigate the influence of participants' demographic characteristics on their responses. As noted by Saunders et al. (2016) and Malhotra & Bricks (2006), parametric tests allow researchers to compare the means of responses across different groups within the sample. In this context, independent samples t-tests were employed to analyze differences based on gender (male-female), while one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was conducted for the variables of age and

educational level. The parametric tests were performed at a statistical significance level of  $p < 0.05$ .

## **4. Results**

### ***4.1 Qualitative Approach***

The findings of the content analysis unveiled the extensive presence of intangible cultural elements in photographic narratives shared on social networks and travel blogs by travelers who visited traditional or historical sites in Greece. Specifically, the analysis identified cultural activities such as dance, music, and religious celebrations as the predominant representations (Shi et al., 2022). Furthermore, there was a significant emphasis on visual depictions highlighting local art, traditional attire, and handcrafted objects, which symbolize the cultural identity of communities.

Additionally, considerable focus was placed on the portrayal of everyday life and cultural practices, incorporating numerous elements of local gastronomy (Huete-Alcocer & Hernandez-Rojas, 2022), as well as family- or community-centered events. These representations offer a vivid and insightful depiction of traditional lifestyles and values.

The findings of this study not only document that the selected photographic material captures a plethora of intangible cultural elements but also reveal the extensive dissemination and promotion of these elements in the digital age. This documentation gains a new and broader dimension, functioning as a tool for the global promotion and preservation of cultural heritage.

### ***4.2 Quantitative Approach***

The aggregate analysis of the survey responses yielded a noteworthy outcome: an overwhelming majority of participants selected “agree” and “strongly agree” for all statements, with these responses significantly outnumbering the neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree options. This robust consensus underscores the pivotal role of photographic testimonials in shaping tourists’ decisions and experiences when visiting traditional or historical areas of Greece. This finding is aligned with the results of Das et al. (2024), which similarly emphasized the critical influence of visual representations on tourist decision-making.

Respondents’ answers further emphasized a compelling message: authentic, culturally rich visual narratives extend far beyond the mere documentation of intangible elements. They serve as a profound medium for cultural expression and engagement, resonating deeply with individuals on an emotional and experiential level.

#### ***4.2.1 Demographic Data***

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample. As shown, approximately 40% of participants were male, while 60% were female. Regarding age distribution, 46.2% of respondents were aged 46–60 years, 30.1% were between 31–45 years, and 15.4% were over 61 years old. Educational attainment exhibited less variability, with 53.1% of participants holding undergraduate degrees and 31.5% possessing postgraduate or doctoral qualifications. Finally, nearly 89% of the respondents reported Greece as their permanent residence, while 11% resided abroad.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	57	39.9
Female	86	60.1
<b>Total</b>	143	100.0
<b>Age</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
18–30	12	8.4
31–45	43	30.1
46–60	66	46.2
61+	22	15.4
<b>Total</b>	143	100.0
<b>Place of Residence</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Greece	127	88.8
Outside Greece	16	11.2
<b>Total</b>	143	100.0
<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Primary Education	8	5.6
Secondary Education	14	9.8
University/College	76	53.1
Postgraduate/PhD	45	31.5
<b>Total</b>	143	100.0

#### 4.2.2 Descriptive Statistics

Continuing with descriptive measures, Figure 1 shows averages that reflect particularly high levels of agreement in statements. Specifically, respondents give high importance to photographs that reflect the authentic atmosphere of tourist destinations rather than manipulated or misleading images (mean: 4.55). Additionally, tourists expressed a strong preference for learning about myths, customs, and traditions of Greek locales through photographic documentation (mean: 4.38). Similarly, a high level of agreement was recorded regarding the influence of prior photographic research on selecting destinations (mean: 4.38).

Equally strong is the impact of photography on tourists' quest for local recipes and dishes (mean: 4.35) and on their awareness of Greece's cultural heritage (mean: 4.31). Overall, the high levels of agreement across these statements underscore the importance of the content of photographic narratives in promoting cultural tourism and the sustainability of traditional/historical destinations.

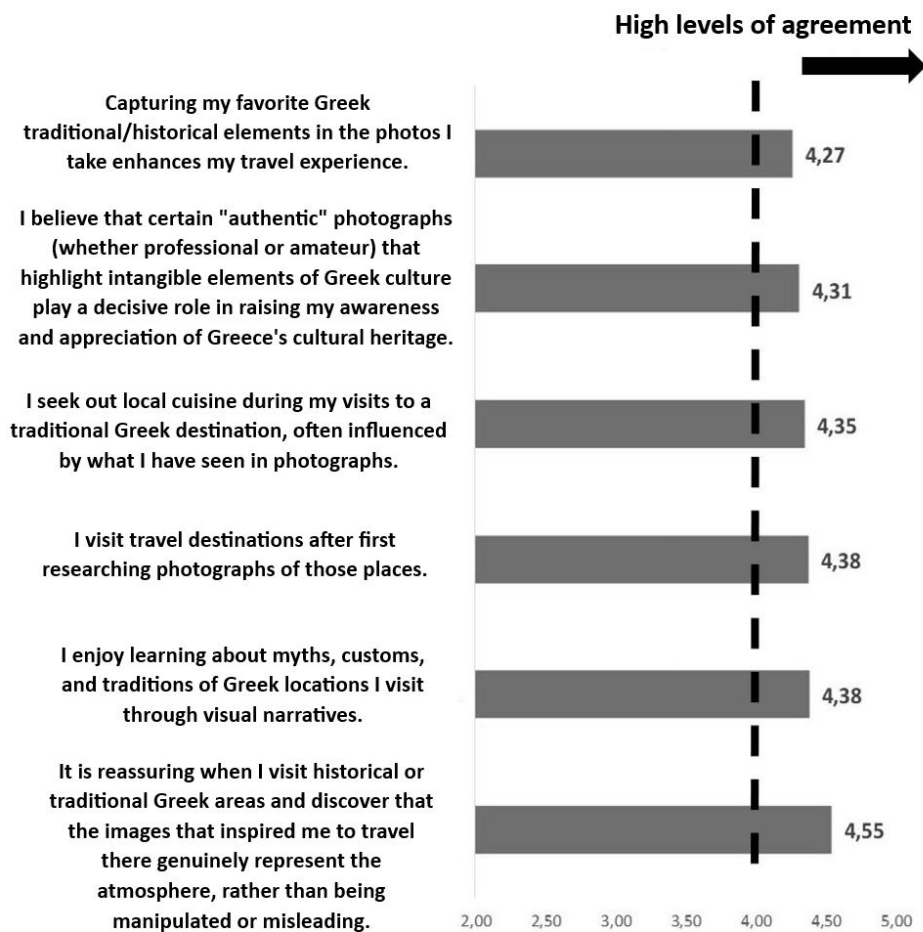


Figure 1: Responses (Descriptive measures: Means)

This sentiment was echoed in responses reflected in Figure 2. Notably, participants acknowledged that photographic documentation enhances their appreciation of the historical and cultural significance of Greece’s destinations (mean: 4.21) while also implicating their interest in local crafts (mean: 4.20). Furthermore, photography was recognized for capturing the interactions and relationships developed with locals (mean: 4.20). Statements such as "I prefer guided tours that provide in-depth information on Greek historical and traditional elements, especially when complemented by photographic content that enhances my understanding of the area" and "Images showcasing compelling historical or cultural elements are among the main reasons I visit traditional and historical areas in Greece" received mean scores of 4.16 and 4.08, respectively.

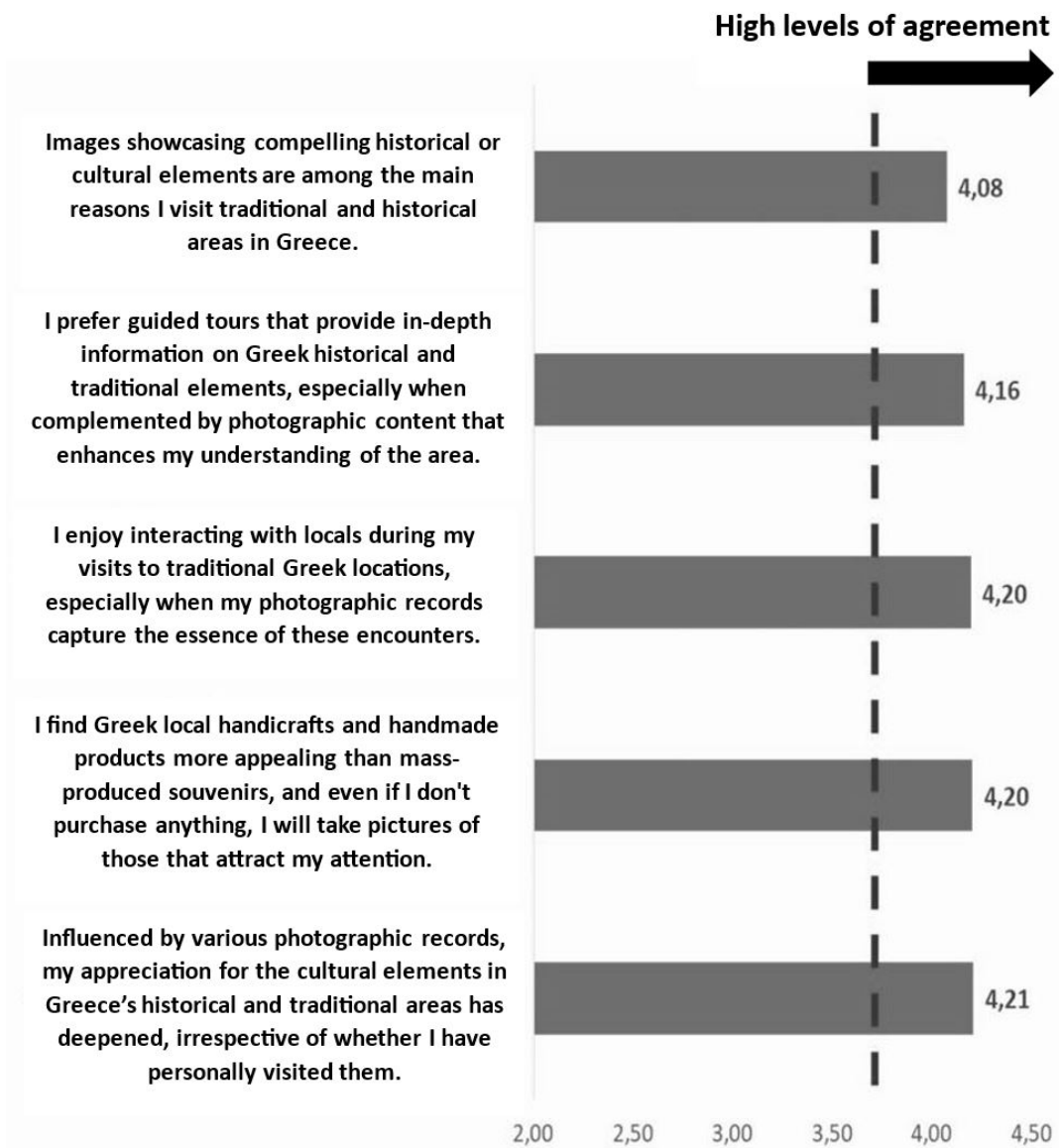
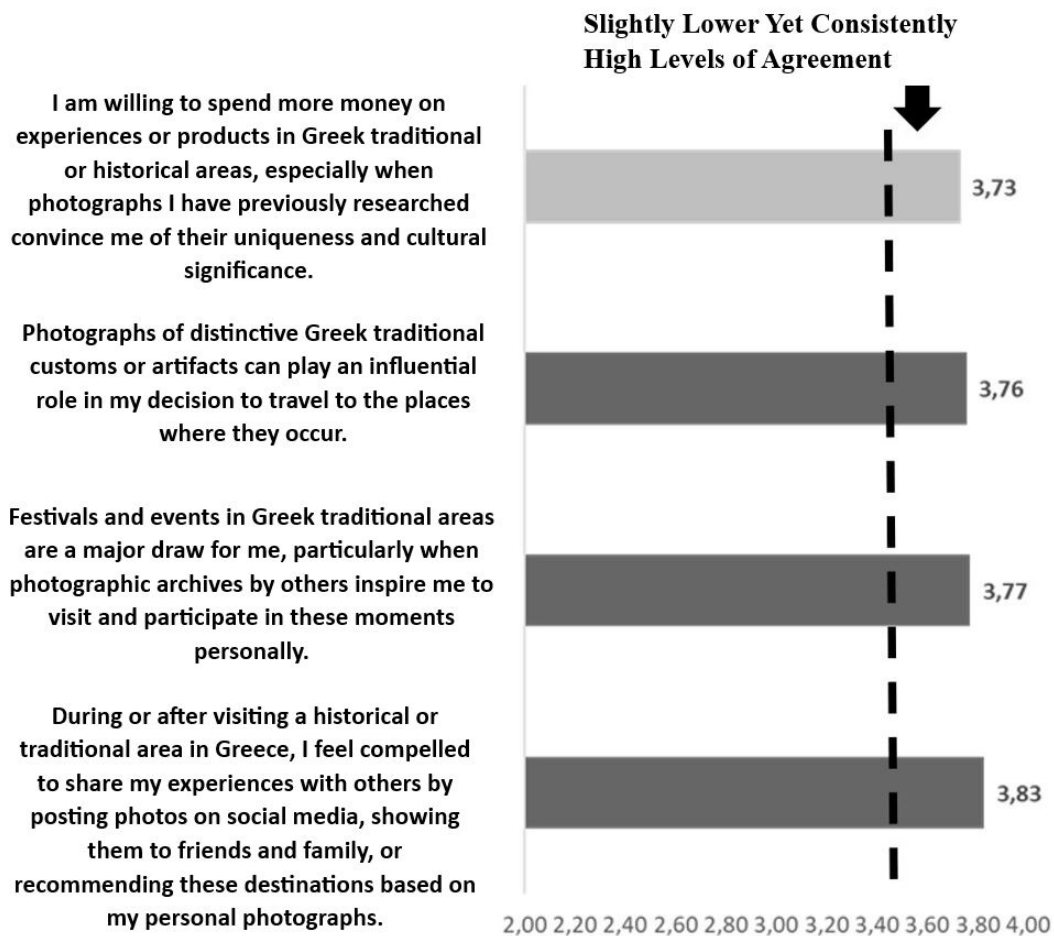


Figure 2: Responses (Descriptive measures: Means)

Slightly lower but still relatively high levels of agreement were observed for the subsequent statements (Figure 3). The influence of photography in encouraging tourists to spend more money at Greek destinations was less pronounced (mean: 3.73), though not negligible. This is understandable, as financial decisions often involve more deliberate considerations compared to other aspects of travel. Conversely, there was a strong inclination toward using photographs on social media to share and disseminate travel experiences (mean: 3.83). Photography also played a pivotal role in promoting festivals and cultural events (mean: 3.77).



**Figure 3:** Responses (Descriptive Measures: Means)

*4.2.3 Parametric Tests*

As noted in an earlier section, independent t-tests were utilized to examine whether participants’ responses and attitudes varied by gender. Table 2 reveals statistically significant differences across four statements. Specifically, in all these cases—pertaining to tourists’ engagement with intangible cultural elements through photographic documentation—women demonstrated higher levels of agreement compared to men. These findings indicate that women exhibit more positive attitudes toward photographic material with cultural content. These results are consistent with Deng and Liu (2021), who observed that women tend to capture more cultural and historical elements in their photographs than men. This correlation underscores women’s perspective toward photographic records of intangible heritage, both as creators and as viewers.

**Table 2: Independent t-tests based on gender**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Sig. P Value</b>
I enjoy learning about myths, customs, and traditions of Greek locations I visit through visual narratives.				0.001
	Male	57	4.1228	
	Female	86	4.5581	
I believe that certain "authentic" photographs (whether professional or amateur) that highlight intangible elements of Greek culture play a decisive role in raising my awareness and appreciation of Greece's cultural heritage.				0.000
	Male	57	3.8772	
	Female	86	4.6047	
I find Greek local handicrafts and handmade products more appealing than mass-produced souvenirs, and even if I don't purchase anything, I will take pictures of those that attract my attention.				0.002
	Male	57	3.9298	
	Female	86	4.3837	
Influenced by various photographic records, my appreciation for the cultural elements in Greece's historical and traditional areas, has deepened, irrespective of whether I have personally visited them.				0.031
	Male	57	4.0526	
	Female	86	4.3140	

Statistically significant differences were also observed based on age. A one-way ANOVA revealed meaningful variations in five statements (Table 3). Among these, respondents aged 31–45 recorded higher mean scores, suggesting greater levels of agreement compared to other age groups. This indicates that individuals within this age range are more likely to perceive photography not merely as a tool for documentation but as an instrument for enriching their tourism experience. Also, this group demonstrated a heightened capacity to appreciate intangible cultural heritage and acknowledged photography's influence in shaping their decision to visit a destination. This finding supports observations that more mature age groups show a preference for cultural engagement because of the cognitive and emotional benefits of these activities (Viola et al., 2024).

**Table 3: One-way ANOVA Based on Age**

Statement	Age Group	N	Mean	Sig. P Value
Photographs of distinctive Greek traditional customs or artifacts can play an influential role in my decision to travel to the places where they occur.	18–30	12	3.0000	0.000
	31–45	43	4.0698	
	46–60	66	3.9091	
	61+	22	3.7500	
	Total	143	3.7552	
I enjoy learning about myths, customs, and traditions of Greek locations I visit through visual narratives.	18–30	12	4.1667	0.006
	31–45	43	4.7209	
	46–60	66	4.3030	
	61+	22	4.0909	
	Total	143	4.3846	
I believe that certain "authentic" photographs (whether professional or amateur) that highlight intangible elements of Greek culture play a decisive role in raising my awareness and appreciation of Greece's cultural heritage.	18–30	12	3.6667	0.007
	31–45	43	4.5814	
	46–60	66	4.3333	
	61+	22	4.0909	
	Total	143	4.3147	
I find Greek local handicrafts and handmade products more appealing than mass-produced souvenirs, and even if I don't purchase anything, I will take pictures of those that attract my attention.	18–30	12	3.3333	0.001
	31–45	43	4.4419	
	46–60	66	4.2727	
	61+	22	4.0000	
	Total	143	4.2028	
Festivals and events in Greek traditional areas are a major draw for me, particularly when photographic archives by others inspire me to visit and participate in these moments personally.	18–30	12	3.1667	0.000
	31–45	43	4.3023	
	46–60	66	3.7727	
	61+	22	3.7273	
	Total	143	3.7692	

**5. Discussion**

The findings of this research underscore the profound extent to which photographic narratives unveil and activate mechanisms tied to the representation of Greece’s intangible cultural heritage, as well as their critical contribution to the sustainable development of its traditional and historical locales. While the power of photographs as tools for shaping a destination’s image and advancing tourism marketing strategies is commonly recognized (He et al., 2022), this study further reveals that the genuine depiction of intangible aspects of a place significantly influences all phases of the travel experience.

In particular, the study highlights that candid photographic representations that incorporate intangible cultural elements of Greece’s historic and traditional regions play an essential role in inspiring travel decisions, fostering emotional engagement, and cultivating a sense of exploration. These findings converge with a recent study (Tsilimpokou et al., 2024) revealing that cultural experiences were the primary factor that influenced tourists' decision to attend traditional events in Greece, as they were initially influenced by photographic evidence from others. This agreement reinforces the interconnected nature of cultural heritage and visual content in determining tourists' interests, intents, and interactions with the place they visit.

Moreover, the study indicates that travelers place high value on the authenticity of images that have inspired them to visit a destination, seeking features that harmonize with the

expectations these images have created. So, when their experiences align with these, it enhances their overall satisfaction. Therefore, it is not only authenticity in cultural identity that significantly boosts tourist satisfaction and builds loyalty (Tian et al., 2020) but also authenticity in photographic documentation. Similarly, this study corroborates the conclusions of Herath et al. (2020), which emphasize that the visual communication of a destination's authenticity plays a decisive role in forming its distinct identity.

However, tourists may be dissatisfied when they select a destination based on digital media photos that reflect an ideal or inaccurate image, since photos like this are frequently perceived as deceptive marketing (Xu et al., 2021). In contrast, visual stories that really depict the destination create trust in their source and nurture a stronger connection with it, a conclusion strongly supported by the study's findings. Furthermore, such narratives play an important role in promoting lesser-known traditional or historic locations, enhancing the tourist experience, and providing a more thorough and meaningful interaction with the country's cultural heritage. Given the strategic significance of tourism to Greece's economy, these narratives—when genuinely presenting intangible cultural heritage—can emerge into vital vehicles for boosting sustainable tourism while broadening the cultural dimension that visitor experiences.

The study also demonstrates that local food is seen as a key cultural aspect inextricably tied to the exploration of traditional localities (Bessière, 1998). This finding lines up with the insights of Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016), who argue that a destination's culinary services have a significant impact on tourist preferences, with some travelers seeing them as critical to destination selection and satisfaction, while others see them as an essential part of their overall holiday experience. Furthermore, the data demonstrate that photographic narratives stimulate or amplify visitors' desire to partake in authentic gastronomic experiences in Greek traditional or historical areas. Authentic visual representations of local cuisine have the potential to attract greater numbers of tourists, particularly those who consider culinary experiences a central aspect of their journey. By spotlighting local gastronomy, such visual narratives can promote sustainable practices, elevate local products, and support traditional Greek communities.

Equally significant is the preference of tourists for photographs as a medium for learning about and disseminating cultural elements of a place. This inclination positions photographic narratives as vital vehicles for intangible heritage, facilitating the comprehension of Greek customs and traditions. As such, photography emerges as a transformative agent in shaping alternative tourism models and fostering local development by emphasizing cultural elements that influence tourists' perceptions, satisfaction, and loyalty to a destination (Lee & Xue, 2020). Within this context, tourism professionals could exploit the potential of photography through various initiatives, such as the creation of digital content, curated guided tours, thematic itineraries, exhibitions, interactive museum displays, and collaborations with local cultural organizations in educational programs. Such initiatives could highlight the unique intangible cultural facets of Greece's traditional and historical areas, galvanizing public interest and contributing to cultural sustainability.

Furthermore, this study confirms that cultural tourists frequently prefer not just fun but also deeper comprehension and involvement with the culture and history of their regions of choice. Such interaction is regarded as beneficial and essential to their trip experience. This emphasizes the relevance of integrating photographic tales into alternative tourism, as they are attractive to tourists who prefer meaningful interactions with a destination's historical and cultural spirit above mass tourism (Jovicic, 2016). The study's findings demonstrate participants' increased sensitivity to and appreciation for genuine local artifacts, with photography used to capture and value these cultural belongings. Travelers seek immersive experiences that include human connection and substantial cultural interactions, a viewpoint

underlined by Souza et al. (2020). Consequently, their instinct to document these unique moments visually strengthens their connection to a traditional or historical destination. In doing so, they either inadvertently or intentionally capture and share intangible cultural elements. Through this trend of self-documentation, tourism experiences and intangible cultural aspects, as a unified entity, are commonly disseminated widely through digital platforms. This practice not only promotes awareness but also enables the ongoing reinterpretation and evolution of intangible cultural heritage on a global scale.

Lastly, the study finds that demographic characteristics such as gender and age shape tourists' tendencies and behaviors toward photographic narratives of intangible cultural elements. Of particular note is the absence of significant differences related to educational level. Women and individuals aged 31–45 were identified as placing greater emphasis on photographic content, which influences their decisions and behaviors, enhances their experiences, and fosters their appreciation for and commitment to the sustainable preservation of Greece's intangible cultural heritage. Consequently, targeted tourism marketing strategies focusing on these demographics could enhance overall effectiveness, warranting further investigation. Along these lines, Xiao (et al., 2022) emphasizes the necessity of tailored tourism marketing approaches, underscoring the central role of visual content in influencing travelers' perceptions and decision-making processes.

## **6. Conclusions**

Photographic testimonies influence to a profound and unparalleled degree the choices and actions of tourists, interact with their experiences, and possess the potential to promote sustainable development by enhancing and preserving the colossal invisible culture of Greece. Photography, as a medium, has become embedded in the essence of intangible cultural heritage, influencing the way we interpret and communicate not only visual meanings but culture itself. As a consequence, the unfeigned photographic narratives of intangible cultural elements play a pivotal role in the quest for authentic experiences and in promoting the sustainable development of local communities.

Focusing on Greece, the research highlights how contemporary photographic communication can undoubtedly serve as one of the leading tools for the promotion and preservation of intangible culture, supporting areas with traditional or historical treasures. At the same time, it highlights the catalytic role of photographic evidence in alternative tourism strategies to achieve sustainable development in traditional and historic Greek areas.

In this framework, policymakers, photographic analysts, and tourism experts are invited to work together in an interdisciplinary way, seeking broader interpretations of contemporary trends and travelers' needs. The holistic 'decoding' of travel photographic narratives, combined with their wise management by tourism professionals and heritage organizations, has the potential to ensure that Greece's rich intangible heritage is harnessed in sustainable, productive development models.

## **7. Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

As with any study, this one has certain limitations. First of all, using a quantitative survey using a questionnaire may restrict the variety of information that can be acquired regarding participants' opinions and experiences with intangible cultural assets. While quantitative data supports statistical study, it may not adequately convey the extent and complexity of tourists' relationships with heritage through photography. A mix of approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, may yield a broader view (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Wilson, 2006).

Second, the sample size of 143 passengers may not adequately reflect the diversity of travelers visiting Greece, particularly across locations or seasons. Furthermore, the study focuses primarily on visitors, overlooking the opinions of local residents, who are crucial to both the preservation of intangible heritage and the quest of sustainable development. Finally, while the findings provide important insights into the impact of photography on cultural tourism, the gender ratio of the sample (60% women) should be noted.

In light of these observations, various recommendations for further study might be made. To start with, future research may broaden their geographic and temporal scope, covering a bigger and more varied sample of visitors while taking into account the point of view of local residents. In-depth interviews and ethnographic observation might also provide useful insights into how photographic narratives of intangible cultural aspects impact the opinions of both visitors and locals.

Future study may go further into how current digital platforms and social media impact the reproduction and understanding of intangible culture through photography, perhaps opening up entirely novel possibilities for sustainable tourist expansion to traditional and historical places. Such research might look at how digital technologies change the way intangible cultural heritage is preserved, understood, and transmitted, perhaps revealing novel solutions for bridging cultural preservation with modern technology practices.

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