

CULTURAL ROUTES AS A FACTOR OF SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL RESERVE AND DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL TOURISM

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Abstract

Cultural routes are considered as an important tool for the development of urban cultural tourism. The preservation of history and respect for the environment and local communities classify them as alternative forms of tourism. Today, these routes continue to contribute to cultural understanding, sustainable development and preservation of cultural heritage. The utilization of cultural routes has been placed at the center of interest of states in recent years, because it is a tool for spatial development, promotion of areas, support of the local and national economy and promotion of cultural identity. This is where Integrated Territorial Investment comes together. It is a holistic approach to highlighting cultural heritage and diversity, enhancing the attractiveness of areas.

The purpose of this thesis was to gather information on cultural routes as a means of promoting cultural heritage and cultural tourism. The initial objective was to explore the importance of cultural routes in the development of the domestic tourism product. An additional objective was to highlight the sustainability of cultural routes through the integration of new technologies.

A quantitative survey was conducted and addressed to those directly involved in the tourism and cultural sector. The questionnaires were collected online. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis.

The results of the survey showed that participants agree on the importance of cultural routes in highlighting landmarks. Also, sustainability should be at the core of cultural routes or green cultural routes should be created with a focus on sustainable tourism and environmental protection. Finally, the need to integrate technological tools into cultural routes was underlined in order to make them attractive as a tourist and sustainable product.

Key words: *urban cultural tourism, cultural routes, sustainable management, cultural heritage.*

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a general shift in global tourism trends towards alternative forms of travel. One of them is urban cultural tourism, which is booming remarkably. In this context, cultural routes play a central role and exhibit demand-supply dynamics. The analysis of empirical studies on urban cultural tourism highlights the emphasis given to destination

development and management, focusing on the institution of cultural routes. In addition, the commitment to European programmes that promote these directions is highlighted.

Urban cultural tourism has emerged as a major trend in the tourism sector, where visitors value the experience of urban life and culture. In this context, cultural routes are an important means of discovering cities and regions. These routes are shaped around cultural attractions, monuments, museums and other points of interest, offering tourists a rich experience. The institution of cultural routes has emerged as a leading means of integrating tourists into the culture of the destination and highlighting the history and heritage of the region.

At the same time, there is a significant effort by the European Union to support programmes promoting urban cultural tourism and related activities. These programmes seek to create innovative approaches to attracting tourists by encouraging cooperation between cultural operators and local authorities.

Cultural routes can create participation experiences, covering a wide range of activities from exhibitions and concerts to tours and educational programs, while routes can promote local culture, including local events, traditions and arts, enhancing the identity of the area. Regarding the relationship of cultural routes with new technologies and sustainable development, this relationship can be examined through the use of digital augmented reality in cultural routes, which may enrich the visitor experience by adding additional information and visual elements. At the same time, the use of technology can help preserve cultural heritage and reduce the environmental footprint.

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it provides an overview of urban cultural tourism, with emphasis on cultural routes. The study examines field trends, challenges and opportunities, as well as practices applied to promote urban cultural tourism.

The originality of the study lies in the fact that it combines two important aspects of urban cultural tourism: digital technology and sustainable development. The research highlights how new technologies can be used to enhance the visitor experience and improve the sustainability of cultural routes.

Literature review

A different approach to urban tourism

Several notable contributions have been made to the analysis of urban tourism. As early as 1989, four approaches to the analysis of urban tourism were formulated, reflecting a geographical bias (Ashworth, 1990). First, the facilities approach, which considers the spatial analysis of the location of tourist attractions, infrastructure and zones, including transport routes, hotels, etc. Secondly, the ecological approach that focuses on the study of the structure or morphology of urban areas, which are considered to evolve and function in both a systematic and organic way. Characteristic of this approach is the identification of functional zones or areas (e.g. historical core, shopping area), which is linked to the modern concept of tourist areas. Thirdly, the user approach that focuses on the characteristics, activities, motivations, purposes and attitudes of tourists, particularly in relation to tourism marketing. Fourth, policy approaches stem from city governments' concerns about welcoming and/or promoting tourism, focusing on a range of policy issues, including infrastructure provision and destination marketing (Ashworth & Page, 2011).

Pearce (2001) proposed a supply-side approach, which involves examining a set of issues (demand, supply, development, marketing, planning, organization, operations, and impact assessment) at each of a range of spatial scales (city, district, and impact assessment) at each of a range of spatial scales (city, district, and area). His argument is that the nature of supply will vary from one scale to another along with changes in responsibility for policymaking,

management, operations and other practical applications (Pearce, 2001). Of particular concern is how tourists are causing changes in collective and individual value systems, behaviour, norms, community structure, lifestyles and quality of life in host communities. The tourist experience and how traveling to an urban destination influences tourists' motivations, preferences, and cultural perspectives, which then shape their future trips and worldviews (Edwards et al., 2008).

As Wilson, (2017) notes, tourism encounters have become an important field for considering the exercise of soft power, as visitors integrate historical narratives of Western exploration and exploitation of the non-Western world in ways that shape global politics, geographical fantasies, and physical encounters. This affirmation of the unequal encounter with difference is particularly exacerbated in urban spaces of geopolitical conflict. Meetings never take place in a space free from history, material conditions and power (Valentine, 2008). Urban meeting locations can be civilized, pleasant, and even positive, but they are always embedded in unequal power relations, prejudices, and antagonistic intergroup moods (Shtern, 2016).

For a successful balance between tourism and culture, the OECD (2019) identified several criteria, such as the permanence of cultural activities, the participation of the local population other than tourists and the ability to produce all the goods and services required for this occasion. At the same time, however, the culture of the host country, the intangible cultural heritage, authenticity and locality must also be preserved. This is an issue that concerns not only cities as tourist hotspots, but also villages or non-"traditional" popular destinations (Št'Astná et al., 2020). Overall, the development of urban tourism seems to be an area of considerable interest to states at European level. The rise of urban centers, as nuclei covering different tourist needs, led to the creation of different types of urban tourism, such as cultural routes, cultural paths or city breaks, and gave rise to the development of branding strategies (Kazakov & Nikolova, 2015). An important point in these initiatives is the sustainable management of capitals, urban centers and monuments, so that they continue to attract tourists in a competitive and sustainable context (D' Auria, 2009; Istoc, 2012).

Policies to support urban cultural tourism in Europe and Greece

Since the 1980s, tourism in cities has grown rapidly as people became more interested in history and culture. At the same time, the negative effects of tourism on historic cities, such as increased traffic, overconsumption and environmental degradation, began to become increasingly apparent (Hayllar et al., 2010). This trend was reinforced by the emergence and growth of low-cost air transport, which made it easier for people to travel to cities that were once difficult to access. In addition, the liberalisation of air transport in the European Union has led to a reduction in air ticket prices, making tourism in cities more affordable (Papatheodorou, 2006). In 2010, the European Commission published a Communication outlining a new policy framework for tourism in Europe (Estol & Font, 2016). This Communication stated that "European tourism policy needs a new impetus" and recalled that the importance of tourism was defined by the Treaty of Lisbon, enabling the European Union to "support, coordinate and complement the action of the Member States" (Kaczorowska-Ireland, 2021), favouring cooperation and exchange of good practices between states and promoting the integration of tourism into other EU policies. According to this communication, the main challenges are increasing global competition, an ageing population, whose travel preferences need to be met. Climate change, water scarcity and pressure on biodiversity are then presented as key issues. Climate change was likely to reinforce the restructuring of travel modes with an impact mainly on a defined set of destinations.

The European Union proposed a "sustainable competitiveness" and stressed the need for continuous updating of competitiveness variables to be combined with the conclusions of the Madrid Declaration on a "socially responsible tourism model". Member states declared their willingness to participate in the implementation of the EU tourism policy framework, to promote "responsible and ethical tourism and, in particular, the social, environmental, cultural and economic sustainability of tourism" and agreed on the need to raise awareness of the importance of knowledge, innovation and new technologies in tourism development and management. As regards the urban dimension of EU tourism policy, the 'Cities of tomorrow' report was published in 2011. This European model of the city is based on advanced social progress, democracy, cultural dialogue and diversity, green, ecological and environmental regeneration. From the point of view of Green Cities, the main challenge identified is mobility, the inefficiency of which causes congestion, pollution, traffic and accidents. This is a major issue, considering that annually 1 % of EU GDP is lost due to congestion and that urban traffic generates 40% of CO2 emissions (Lund, 2007). For this reason, CIVITAS, which is an initiative for cleaner and better transport in cities, has supported various sustainable mobility projects in urban tourism. One example is the development of new mobility services for tourists in Burgos, Belgium, which provide information, itineraries and guidance on public transport and access to bicycles, as well as incentives for collective and cleaner forms of travel.

Not surprisingly, the concept of "green city" is considered an asset for the tourism development of European cities (Angelidou et al., 2017). The European Green Capital award, supported by the European Commission, acts as a branding platform that offers advantages to increase tourism, according to the dedicated website (ec.europa.eu, 2020). Resilient cities face the challenge of adapting to climate change, as extreme weather events and high temperatures affect their vulnerability, especially in coastal zones (Kakoutis, 2019). Furthermore, the "Creative Cities" perspective is linked to city tourism, particularly the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) system, which focuses on culture as a driver of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (OECD, 2014).

At the heart of policies that enhance urban tourism is the Local Government of Organizations in tourism, influenced by the political guidelines at national and regional level for tourism, as well as by the financial instruments at both national and community level, which define the line of action of Local Government towards the promotion of tourism initiatives (Lagos, 2012). In regions where tourism activity develops irregularly, the participation of local authorities in the planning of local tourism development is necessary. This requires research into the potential development of tourism activity and mapping of tourism business plans. Also, in these areas, it is necessary to create tourism infrastructure at urban level to welcome the tourist flow and utilize the available tourist resources (E.E.T.A.A., 2022). In addition, the creation of development agencies/companies by Local Government Organizations is important to support specific forms of tourism that exploit the characteristics of the host place. Also, supporting small and medium-sized tourism enterprises through funding programmes is an essential action. Cooperation with collective managers, entrepreneurs and workers in the tourism sector can enhance the creation of tourism policy guidelines and provide technical assistance. In addition, participation in Community programmes and initiatives is an important means of financing tourism proposals (Lagos, 2012).

Cultural routes as a form of cultural tourism

Cultural routes are forms of tourism linked to local history, culture and the environment. They offer visitors a unique experience, as they allow them to experience up close the authenticity

of a place and the special characteristics of a people (Banila, 2016). Cultural routes have been in increasing demand in recent years as tourists seek experiences that go beyond the ordinary. This trend is linked to a general change in mindset, with a focus on environmental sustainability and the local community (Mitoula & Kaldis, 2020). Cultural routes contribute to the development of the regions, as they create new jobs, strengthen the local economy and promote cultural heritage. In addition, they are aligned with the principles of sustainable development, as they have a low environmental impact (Mitoula & Kantzoura, 2016). The cultural routes were officially recognized as a cultural product by the Council of Europe in 1987. According to the Declaration of Santiago de Compostela, cultural routes are collaborative projects that aim to promote culture, educate and sensitize visitors about the historical and environmental wealth of the regions (Kakoutis, 2019).

The routes are usually developed on the basis of a historical route or a cultural concept and aim to understand and promote common European values (Council of Europe, 2020). The content of a cultural route can vary depending on the characteristics of the area and the variety of cultural and natural heritage that exists. In particular, cultural routes can be thematic cultural routes: i.e. routes that include a specific theme, such as wineries, abandoned industrial buildings, historical cultural routes: routes that focus on monuments and cultural elements of a particular period, mixed cultural routes: routes that include cultural elements of a particular type or era, as well as elements of natural heritage as part of the more integrated cultural identities of a place (Mitoula & Kaldis, 2020).

In addition to the above classification, cultural routes, depending on their scale, can be divided into: a) urban cultural routes, limited to the monuments and cultural elements of a city in urban areas, b) local cultural routes, focused on a limited geographical unit (e.g. within a municipality, region) and c) extended cultural routes, which can extend over a much wider geographical area, especially when it comes to specific topics (e.g. medieval castles throughout the Ionian Sea), (Mitoula et al., 2016). Finally, it is worth noting that the choice of the most appropriate cultural route for an area depends on its particular identity. The inclusion of a cultural element/monument in a cultural route does not negate the possibility of including the same element in other cultural routes of another nature (Monopatiapolitismou.gr, 2021). Overall, cultural routes cover a wide range of disciplines (such as History, Arts, Religion, etc.) providing leisure opportunities and educational activities while supporting the principles of responsible tourism and sustainable development (Mitoula & Kaldis, 2018).

Good practices of cultural routes in Greece and Europe and their contribution to the development of urban cultural tourism

In Greece, several cultural routes are identified, such as the Palm Road, the Routes of the Olive Tree, the Iter Vitis, the Cultural Route of European Cemeteries, the European Route of Historic Spas, the European Route of Industrial Heritage and the Iron Curtain Route.

The Palm Route, which is a route of Mediterranean Intercultural Dialogue and was certified in 2003 by the Council of Europe, belongs to its 38 Cultural Routes. It is located in the region of Thrace and offers visitors the opportunity to explore the multiculturalism of the region (Council of Europe, 2020). The Routes of the Olive Tree, certified since 2005, is an initiative that integrates history, tangible and intangible heritage, as well as urban cultural tourism. The route crosses more than 20 countries, offering suggested routes for the discovery and promotion of olive culture (olivetreeroute.gr, 2021). The Routes of the Olive Tree have been recognized by UNESCO as the "Global Route for Intercultural Dialogue & Sustainable Development" and by the Council of Europe as the "European Cultural Route" (Council of Europe, 2020). Apart from the benefits that the participants-tourists derive from routes, such as this one, the places themselves are promoted in all the countries involved and not only,

their special characteristics are highlighted, while their history and culture are made known. In addition, through the collaborations created in these programs, the ground is formed for the exchange of know-how, innovative initiatives, future cross-border projects, etc. Overall, increasing employability, strengthening the local economy and, above all, promoting cultural heritage are considered the most important benefits (Vasilara, 2018).

In Europe, an example of good practices in urban tourism and cultural heritage management is, initially, Lyon, where its painted murals are an artistic approach used to adorn specific sites and facades, showcasing a work of art often associated with the city itself. These murals are a way to highlight historical characters of the area and its cultural heritage. The guided tour of Lyon with its painted frescoes takes visitors to the monuments designated by UNESCO, as well as to more remote districts rarely seen by tourists (European Union, 2019). Another good practice is found in Lyon, but also in other French cities, the "traboules", a type of secret covered corridors. Traboules are corridors, which are as old as the city itself (4th century). The visitor has the opportunity to pass through buildings and courtyards, admire the architecture, the spiral staircases, the facades and galleries of priceless aesthetic and historical value. The city of Lyon, recognizing their historical and cultural value, decided to contribute to their conservation and allow the public to get to know them (En.lyon-france.com, 2023). Finally, Malaga in Spain is a city that for years has received millions of tourists, to the extent that its cultural heritage is threatened. However, to diversify tourist flows from traditional holidaymakers, Malaga has invested heavily in new galleries and museums, increasing exhibition spaces in the city from 400 m² to 35,000 m² in just two decades. Thanks to this transformation strategy, Malaga won the "Tourism Award with Identity" and is now known as the city "where art lives". Today, museums are the main activity for visitors, while individual routes and activities give them the opportunity to get to know the history and local culture through sustainable practices (Malagaturismo.com, 2023).

Cultural routes as a form of Integrated Territorial Investment

Cultural routes represent a mechanism that contributes to the promotion and enhancement of areas, extending the tourism season. They include tours of the natural and cultural environment, combined with local events (Banila, 2016). The use of these routes has focused on the heart of states' interest in recent years, as they are a tool for spatial development, promotion of areas, support of local and national economy and promotion of cultural identity. In this context, Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs) appear, which are a means of integrated territorial development for the implementation of development strategies in specific territorial units (NSRF, 2015). This is based on innovative approaches to promote the sustainable development of areas and the management of cultural heritage.

In more detail, the Integrated Territorial Investment is a tool funded by European funds and programs, overcoming any constraints or bureaucratic rigidities. The content of these initiatives focuses mainly on addressing problems in specific areas, making these areas not only visitable, but also tourist attractions (Makrigiorgou, 2016). To implement this goal, a spatial strategy development plan is designed for each area, which is developed in stages and includes defined objectives and results. These include the maintenance of buildings, the improvement of the economic situation and employment, the preservation of the natural and built environment based on a sustainable approach to the development process (Tzioga, 2009).

It is important to note that this approach offers significant benefits for both the regions and all stakeholders, as it offers thematic cultural routes that represent a different tourist proposition and competitive packages. It is a holistic approach to highlighting cultural heritage and diversity, enhancing the attractiveness of the participating regions. In addition, technologies and actions can be integrated, involving collaborating parties and creating a

distinctive tourism product. The role of the strategic plans of the Integrated Territorial Investment is crucial, as they can ensure publicity, greater participation of stakeholders and businesses, transparency and effectiveness of interventions in terms of sustainability (Region of Western Greece, 2016).

Cultural routes as a factor for sustainability and promotion of cultural heritage

A key element closely related to cultural heritage is the possibility of its sustainable development. The concept of sustainability focuses on the effective management, conservation and promotion of heritage, with the aim of preserving its image and identity for current and future generations. Sustainability concerns not only tangible heritage, but also intangible cultural and natural, including environmental protection. The integrated management of cultural heritage has probably become the most important strategic choice for Local Regions today, since it is considered the core of the cultural identity and history of the people. It acts as a unifying element for people, but at the same time it is a ground for the circulation of creativity, while it is also an object of social responsibility (Charalabopoulou, 2019).

Cultural routes play a key role in the effective and sustainable management of cultural heritage, enabling not only the economic exploitation of monuments and archaeological sites with economic benefits, but also the creation of a protective framework for them. The design of these routes requires, however, the adaptation of plans and projects according to the needs of the place and its particularities (Ashworth & Page, 2011). The results of the effort will also represent a sample of the cultural reserve and historical wealth of the region, showcasing it globally. For the success of the project, it is also necessary to integrate cultural heritage into the tourism sector and attract visitors. The cultural route is a complex product that transcends the narrow spatio-temporal framework and incorporates the cultural identity and history of the place. It takes into account the sustainability of the cultural and natural reserve, as well as the needs of visitors. Cultural routes can help promote monuments and historical sites, as well as highlight the importance of their management (Kaloudiotis, 2016). They can also contribute to the development of economically and socially sustainable experiences, using cultural heritage in spatial and urban planning. As a tourism product, cultural routes must be competitive and offer personalized experiences (Somarakis et al., 2016).

Recording the latest research carried out on cultural routes will allow a better understanding of their specific characteristics and their potential for the regions. In a more general context, tourist routes, and heritage trails in particular, can help preserve the environment and manage visitors, contributing to economic development (Strauss & Lord, 2001). Cultural routes can then be used as a development tool for marginal or rural areas, since they help stimulate economic activity by attracting tourists to these areas. For Csapó and Berki (2008) the first key factor of a thematic route is the sights of the area. The characteristics of geographical, natural, social, economic, environmental infrastructure influence the appearance and structure of tourist attractive spots (Csapo & Berki, 2008). Following their research, the cultural routes were analyzed from a multidimensional perspective, the one that connects the content with the geographical space and its particular identity. In particular, cultural routes emphasize the uniqueness of a place, introducing the model of a new type of cultural heritage. The cultural route illustrates the contemporary design of heritage values for private and public sector stakeholder organisations as a resource of sustainable social and economic development (Kaloudiotis, 2018).

To implement successful sustainable tourism approaches, a wide range of tourism stakeholders need to be involved, therefore cooperation provides an ideal basis for doing so. Following this finding, Briedenhann and Wickens (2004) argued that pooling activities and

attractions in less developed areas stimulates cooperation and partnerships between communities in local and neighbouring areas and serves as a vehicle for stimulating economic development through tourism. Moreover, the fragmented and diverse nature of the tourism industry is often an obstacle to sustainable practices. Cooperation can therefore help overcome this fragmentation by contributing to the dissemination of sustainable practices.

Many other researchers have focused on the element of partnership as a necessary component for planning and promoting cultural routes, such as Meyer (2004). The latter underlined that for the successful development of routes, the formation of collaborative networks between a multitude of often very different tourism suppliers is crucial (Majdoub, 2010). It should be noted, however, that most researchers have studied the cultural routes from the spatial scale perspective, focusing on the image of an area, its impact on spatial and economic development or sustainability (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). However, these tourism products go beyond a simple visit to a destination, become an experience and enclose narratives and memories (www.coe.int, 2023).

Digital and Green Cultural Routes

The importance of cultural routes is increasingly recognised at local and national level. New technologies have created new opportunities for the development and promotion of cultural routes, with the creation of digital cultural routes. Digital cultural routes offer a number of advantages, such as facilitating access to a wider audience, reducing environmental impact and the potential for a creative and innovative approach (Góral, 2016). However, to be successful, digital cultural routes will need to meet the needs and expectations of visitors. This means that they should be well designed and offer a complete and quality experience. In addition, the digital transformation of cultural reserves must be sustainable. This means that it should take into account environmental and economic factors. Cultural routes are an important tool for promoting culture and developing the local economy. New technologies can help enhance their importance and attract more visitors (Poulaki et al., 2021).

Thousands of visitors each year find attraction on the cultural routes, with some focused on religious aspects, mainly in relation to pilgrimage, while others explore the special cultural and natural heritage of the areas they cross. These routes are analyzed from the point of view of art history, history or geography. Today, the availability of new data sources, especially in digital form, provides innovative ways of analysing these cultural elements (Economou, 2019). On the one hand, open data sources on the areas crossed by the routes open up new perspectives, which can be integrated into traditional surveys. On the other hand, as browsers increasingly use smartphones to share their experiences on social networks or through special applications, analyzing their online interactions may provide real-time insight into what is happening along these paths (Manovich, 2007).

Fast forward to today, digital cultural routes are an interesting proposition for expanded groups of visitors and a field of creativity, serving as a vehicle to stimulate economic growth. The fragmented and diverse nature of the tourism industry is often an obstacle, but with the use of technology, it is expected to be overcome, leading to innovative products and unprecedented cultural experiences (Graf et al., 2016).

For the management of the above challenges, different methodologies have been proposed that facilitate the grouping of tourist spots and allow the emergence of local cultural diversity. Most methodologies typically use qualitative techniques that require expert analysis (Laitamaki et al., 2010). However, there are various quantitative techniques based on the structural information of tourist areas, such as clustering techniques (CT). There is evidence that the application of CTs can create cooperative relationships in high-tech sectors (Porter, 2000), however, these techniques can also be applied to more traditional sectors, such as

tourism. A similar example concerns the study of Gosal et al. (2019), who elaborated and grouped the attractiveness of different tourist locations. In the same context, Nilashi et al. (2019) used groups to predict tourism choice preferences in ecotourism, as well as Guo et al. (2020) grouped tourist attractions to predict a city's competitiveness. These clustering techniques can create a new promising direction of development for the tourism industry (Estevao & Ferreira, 2003).

The clusters resulting from clustering can be used in several ways. They can be used either independently as landmarks, or as elements in a cultural route. Grouping techniques are a powerful tool for analyzing and exploiting the cultural resources of an area (Duarte-Duarte et al., 2021). Through clustering, the entities subject to study are organized based on common characteristics, which facilitates their understanding and management (Fergadakis, 2021). Therefore, the use of clustering techniques can provide benefits such as improving understanding of the structure and dynamics of an area's cultural resources, supporting informed decision-making on the development and management of cultural resources, and creating new opportunities to promote culture and develop the local economy (Meyer, 2004).

Methodology

The aim of the study was to gather information on cultural routes as a means of promoting cultural heritage and cultural tourism. The initial objective was to explore the importance of cultural routes in the development of the domestic tourism product. An additional objective was to highlight the sustainability of cultural routes through the integration of new technologies. Based on the purpose and objectives formulated, the research questions were formed, which contributed significantly to the development and success of the research and were the following: 1. What is the contribution of cultural routes to the enhancement and promotion of urban cultural tourism? 2. In what ways do cultural routes through the integration of new technologies contribute to sustainable development, environmental protection and preservation of cultural heritage?

For this research, it was decided to adopt a quantitative data-based approach, collecting measurements that included both qualitative and quantitative data. These data were then analysed using standardised statistical techniques. The main research tool was the structured questionnaire (Creswell, 2016). The selection of participants was critically based on the needs and requirements of the researchers and the sampling applied is characterized as appropriate (Cohen et al., 2008).

Data collection started in October 2022 and was completed in December 2022. The survey focused on people related to tourism development and promotion, sustainability and digital technologies. Participants' responses were statistically analyzed in the Social Science Social Package (SPSS) 26.0.0. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Descriptive statistics were used as the first step of the analysis to present the participants' answers to all questions of the questionnaire. In this context, tables and graphs with frequencies (n) and relative frequencies (%) were created presenting the results. In inferential statistics, bivariate analysis and crosstabs were performed – affinity check with crosstab tables. The bivariate analysis was used to investigate relationships between qualitative – categorical variables. The significance level for the analysis was 0.05.

The research was based on 75 people. This number was satisfactory, since the population related to the issue was limited. More specifically, regarding gender, the answers to the questionnaire were from 56 women and 19 men. 68% of participants belonged to the age group between 36 and 55 years old. In terms of level of education, 54.7% held a master's degree. Regarding the institutions or enterprises that took part in the survey, 17.3% of the sample belonged to the highest institutional bodies of tourism, as well as the administrative

staff of tourism and culture, a significant percentage of 13.3% belonged to people related to Municipalities and 17.3% of the sample concerned catering businesses, as well as tourism and cultural enterprises.

Results

The first question of the questionnaire regarding the first research question was related to whether specific policies have been adopted to enhance urban cultural tourism in Greece and Europe. To this question, 32% of the sample answered positively (n = 24) while 17.3% answered negatively (n = 13).

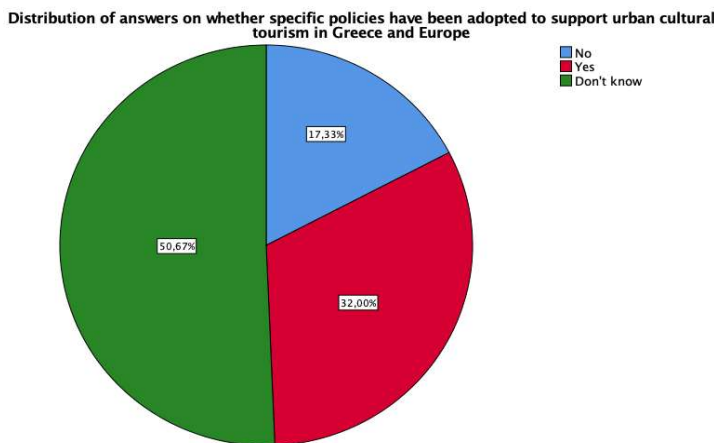


Figure 1. Distribution of answers on whether specific policies have been adopted to support urban cultural tourism in Greece and Europe

Next, participants were asked to note some policies to enhance urban cultural tourism in Greece and Europe. 33.3% noted specific actions and programs such as Visit Greece (n = 7). Also, a large percentage, reaching 28.6%, referred generally to exhibitions, events and general actions (n = 6). Further behind, with 14.3% were urban tours and the presentation of cities as tourist destinations (n = 3) and with the same percentage came communication, promotion and communication policies. Finally, support for businesses and tourism operators was also noted as a policy, accounting for 9.5% of responses (n = 2).

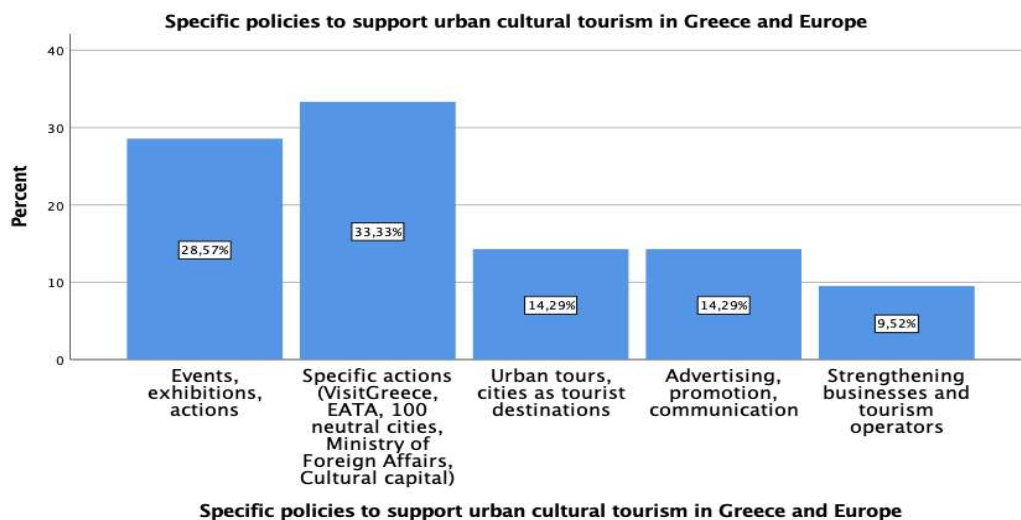


Figure 2. Specific policies to support urban cultural tourism in Greece and Europe

Next, participants were asked about the importance of cultural routes in the development of the domestic tourism product. The most popular answer to this question, with 69.3%, was that all the above choices as results of cultural routes contribute to the development of the domestic tourism product (n = 52). The investigation of seasonality was selected by 12% of the sample (n = 9), Improved market positioning was selected by 5.3% (n = 4) and new target groups were selected by 4% (n = 3). Finally, 5.3% of the sample replied that cultural routes do not affect to a significant extent the development of the domestic tourism product (n = 4).

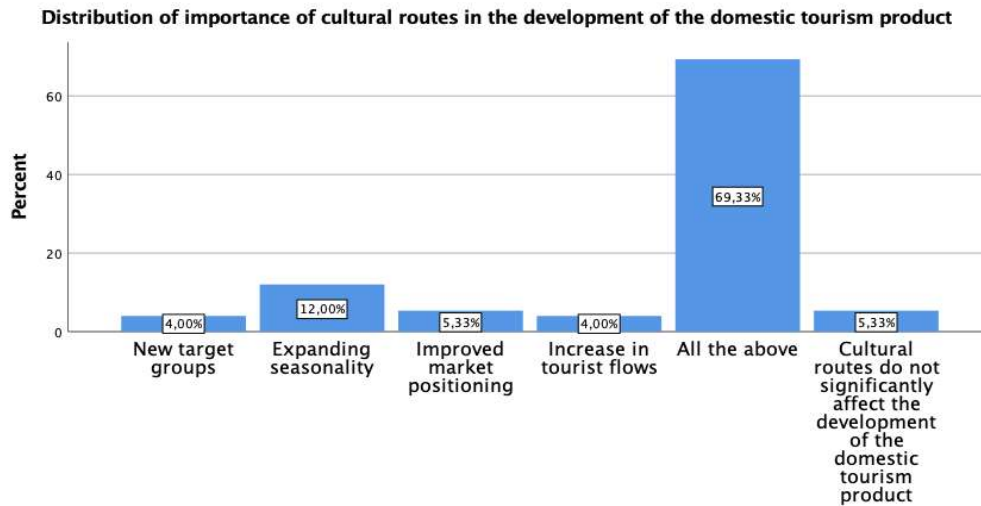


Figure 3. Distribution of importance of cultural routes in the development of the domestic tourism product

In addition, another question asked participants to note the extent to which the strategy of development and diversification of urban cultural tourism is linked to cultural routes. According to the results, 45.3% answered that these elements are interrelated (n = 34). At the same time, 44% replied that the strategy of development and diversification of urban cultural tourism is strongly linked to cultural routes (n = 33). Finally, Only 6.7% chose the moderate grade (n = 5) and 4% chose the low grade (n = 3).

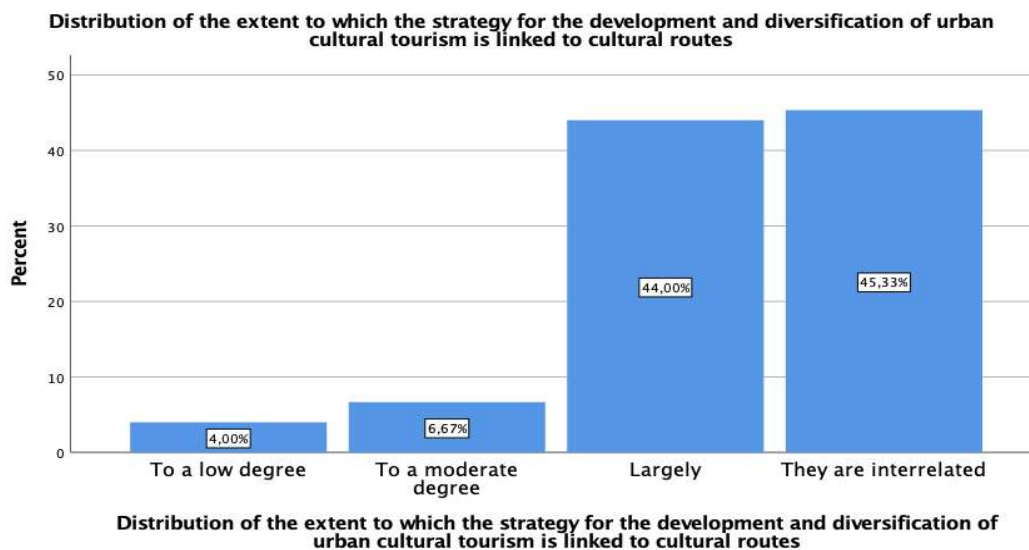


Figure 4. Distribution of the extent to which the strategy for the development and diversification of urban cultural tourism is linked to cultural routes

The next question that the sample was asked to answer was closed-ended and concerned how the institution of cultural routes would be characterized as a factor of strengthening and developing urban cultural tourism. The analysis showed that 45.3% of the sample replied that cultural routes present a tourist potential that has not been properly exploited by local and national bodies (n = 34). In addition, 33.3% noted that there are still many actions to be carried out so that cultural routes contribute decisively to the development of urban cultural tourism (n = 25). From another perspective, 21.3% of participants answered that cultural routes are a very dynamic and decisive factor in the development of urban cultural tourism (n = 16).

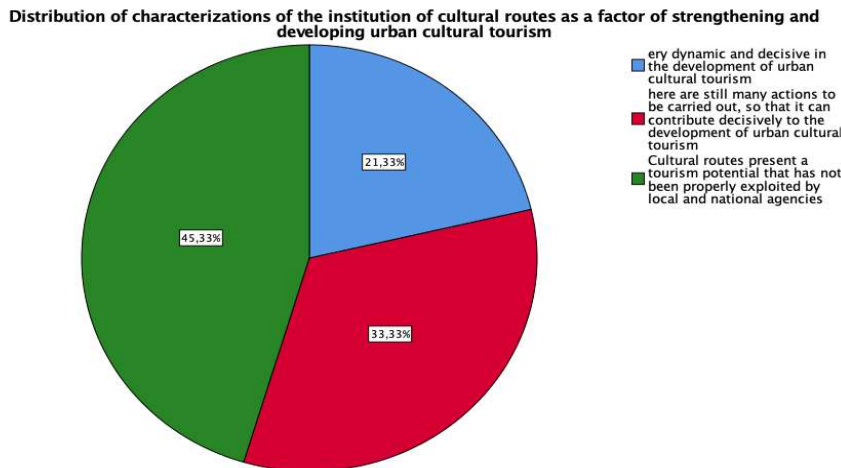


Figure 5. Distribution of characterizations of the institution of cultural routes as a factor of strengthening and developing urban cultural tourism.

Another bivariate analysis concerned questions regarding the characterization of the institution of cultural routes as a factor of strengthening and developing urban cultural tourism and the role of Marketing and Destination Management Organizations in promoting cultural routes. In general, looking at the results, it is observed that the role of Marketing and Destination Management Organizations in the promotion of cultural routes is considered important whether the sample believes that cultural routes enhance urban cultural tourism or not. At the same time, the role of Marketing and Destination Management Organizations is not as important to people who believe that there are still many actions for cultural routes to contribute to urban cultural tourism.

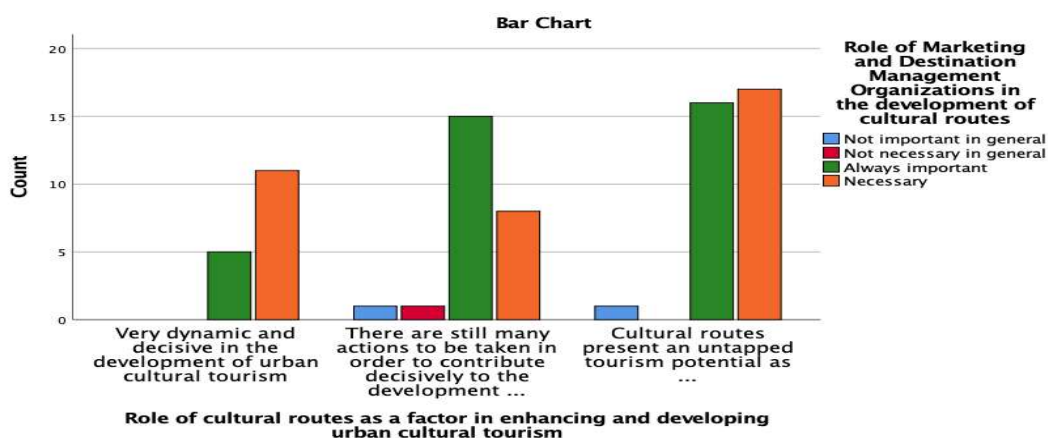


Figure 6: Role of cultural routes as a factor in enhancing and developing urban cultural tourism and role of Marketing and Destination Management Organizations in the development of cultural routes

Finally, a bivariate analysis was made on the role of cultural routes as a factor in enhancing and developing urban cultural tourism, as well as whether there is an Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) to support cultural routes. The conclusion that emerges from the analysis is, whether one believes that cultural routes contribute to urban cultural tourism or not, that there is no Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) to support cultural routes.

		Is there an Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) to support cultural routes?			Total
		No	Yes	DG/MA	
How would you characterize the institution of cultural routes as a factor for strengthening and developing urban cultural tourism?	Very dynamic and decisive in the development of urban cultural tourism	5	2	9	16
	There are still many actions to be carried out in order to contribute decisively to the development ...	4	1	20	25
	The cultural routes present a tourist potential that has not been exploited as ...	12	5	17	34
Total		21	8	46	75

Table 1: Role of cultural routes in enhancing urban cultural tourism and existence of an Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) to support cultural routes.

Then, the participants were asked to answer, **regarding the 2nd research question**, whether specific actions have been taken to link environmental protection with cultural routes. The distribution of answers to this question is different, with the majority of 53.3% answering do not know or do not answer (n = 40). Nevertheless, 29.3% stated that concrete actions have indeed been taken to link environmental protection with cultural routes (n = 22). In contrast, 17.3% answered negatively to the relevant question (n = 13).

Distribution of views on whether concrete actions have been taken to link environmental protection with cultural routes

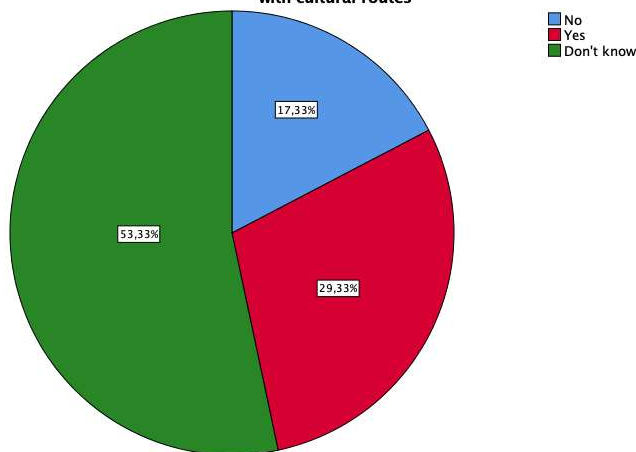


Figure 7. Distribution of views on whether concrete actions have been taken to link environmental protection with cultural routes.

Next, participants were asked to note three actions to link environmental protection with cultural routes. To this question, 14 answers were noted by the participants and the unified cultural routes stood out with 27.3% (n = 6). Then, the environmental criteria for the inclusion of businesses in the cultural routes followed with 9.1% (n = 2).

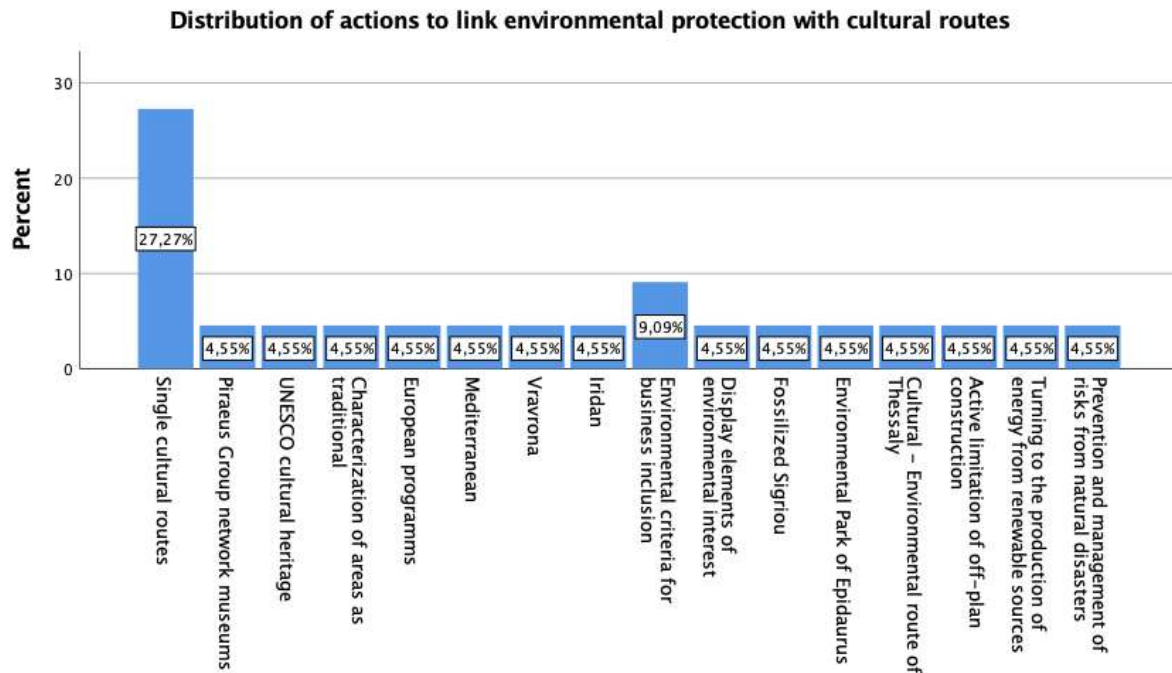


Figure 8. Distribution of actions to link environmental protection with cultural routes

Following the questionnaire, a question was asked about the need to integrate technologies into cultural routes. It is noteworthy that 84% of the sample characterized the integration of technologies as very important or necessary (n = 63). Also, 13.3% said that integrating technologies into the cultural routes themselves is important. In contrast, only 2.7% said such integration was not important.

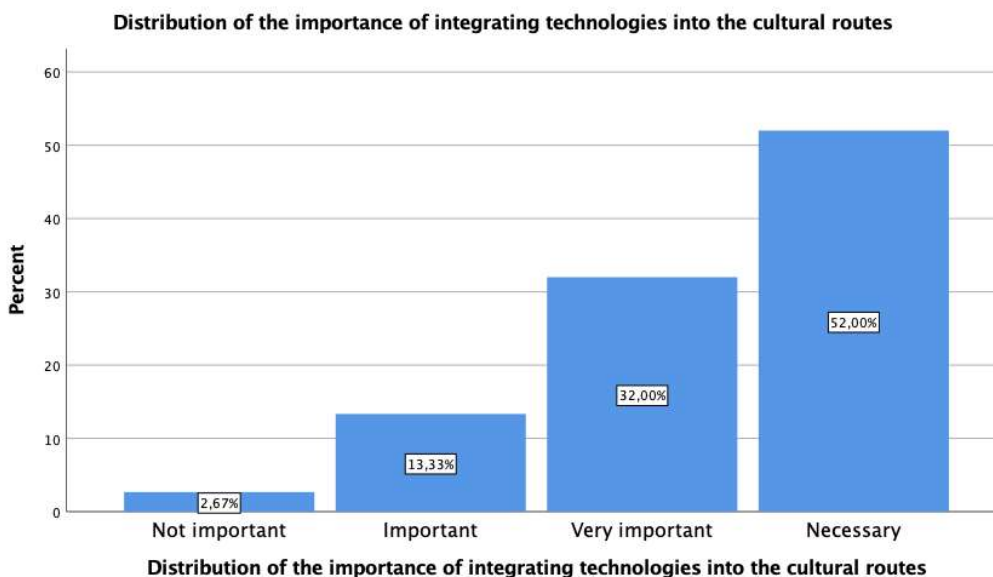


Figure 9. Distribution of the importance of integrating technologies into the cultural routes

At the same time, participants were given the option to clarify their answer, if they wished. To the corresponding question, there were 18 answers and 50% of them referred to the fact that technologies enhance and improve the tourist experience resulting in cultural routes becoming more attractive and attracting more people (n = 9). At the same time, 38.9% of the answers were related to the fact that technologies offer additional services, such as digital maps, social

network elements, qr codes for additional information on monuments, and the possibilities of guided tours (n = 7).

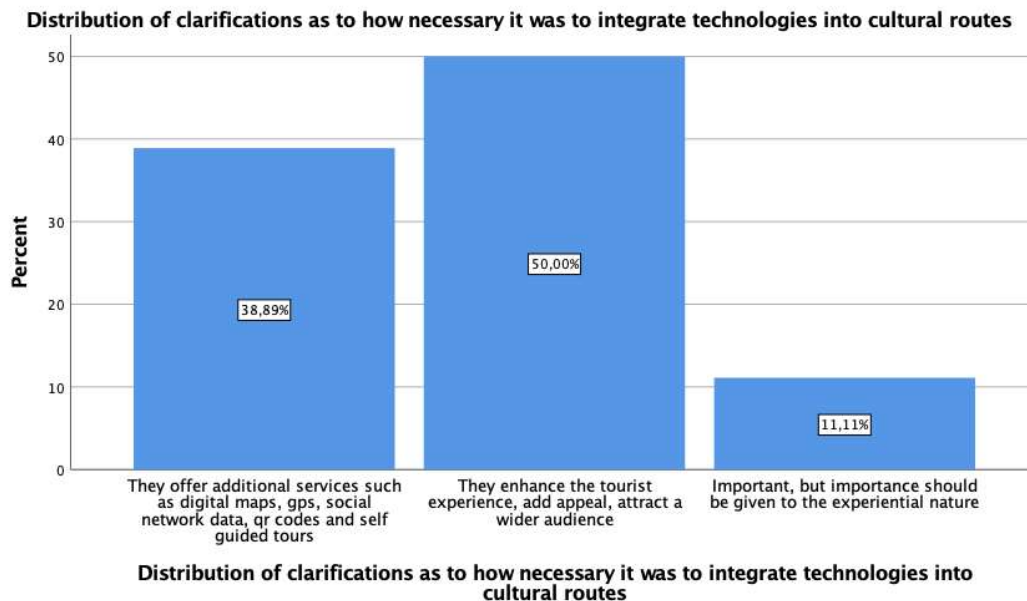


Figure 10. Distribution of clarifications as to how necessary it was to integrate technologies into cultural routes.

The next question of the questionnaire was open-ended and related to the participants' opinion on the impact of "Green Cultural Routes". 74.5% of participants responded that Green Cultural Routes have a positive social and economic impact (n = 41). In addition, 3.6% noted that the impact is positive but in order for it to arise there should be conditions such as proper organization, coordination and cooperation of the actors involved (n = 2). On the other hand, 5.3% considered the impact of Green Cultural Routes as moderate on society and the economy (n = 4).

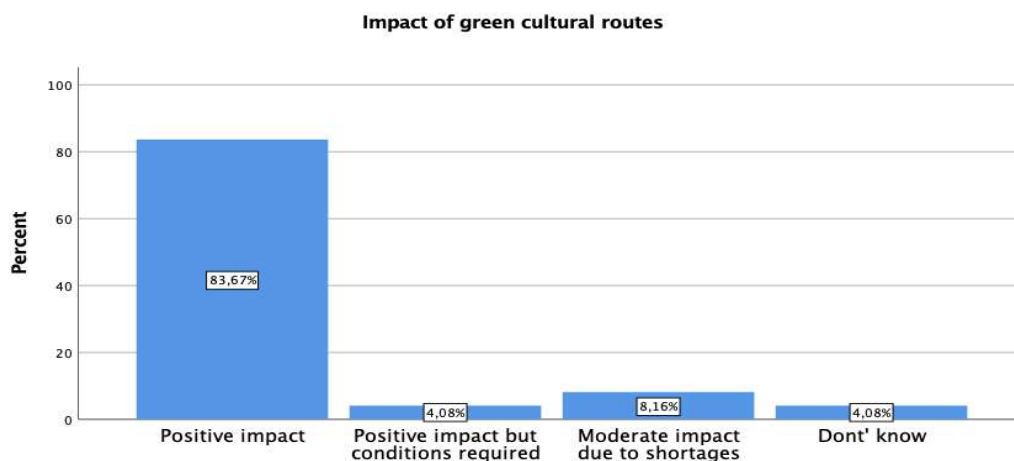


Figure 11. Impact of green cultural routes.

Continuing the bivariate analysis, the questions that took part were related to whether cultural routes are becoming necessary tools for promoting the sustainable development of areas and whether "Green Cultural Routes" have an impact on society, institutions and socio-economic

as a whole. It seems that the sample showed a strong attitude of positive impact of Green Cultural Routes, while at the same time showing a positive attitude towards whether cultural routes are becoming necessary tools to promote sustainable development of areas.

The "Green Cultural Routes" is an action that has been adopted in some Regions in order to promote cultural heritage and highlight the importance of environmental protection. How would you describe its impact in terms of citizens, tourists, institutions and the overall socio-economic impact?

		How would you describe its impact in terms of citizens, tourists, institutions and the overall socio-economic impact?				Total
		Positive impact	Positive impact but conditions are required	Moderate impact due to shortages	I don't know	
Are cultural routes becoming indispensable tools to promote the sustainable development of regions?	I agree	41	2	4	7	54
	DG/MA	0	0	0	1	1
Total		41	2	4	8	55

Table 2: Views on whether cultural routes become necessary tools to promote sustainable development of areas and views on whether Green Cultural Routes have a socio-economic impact

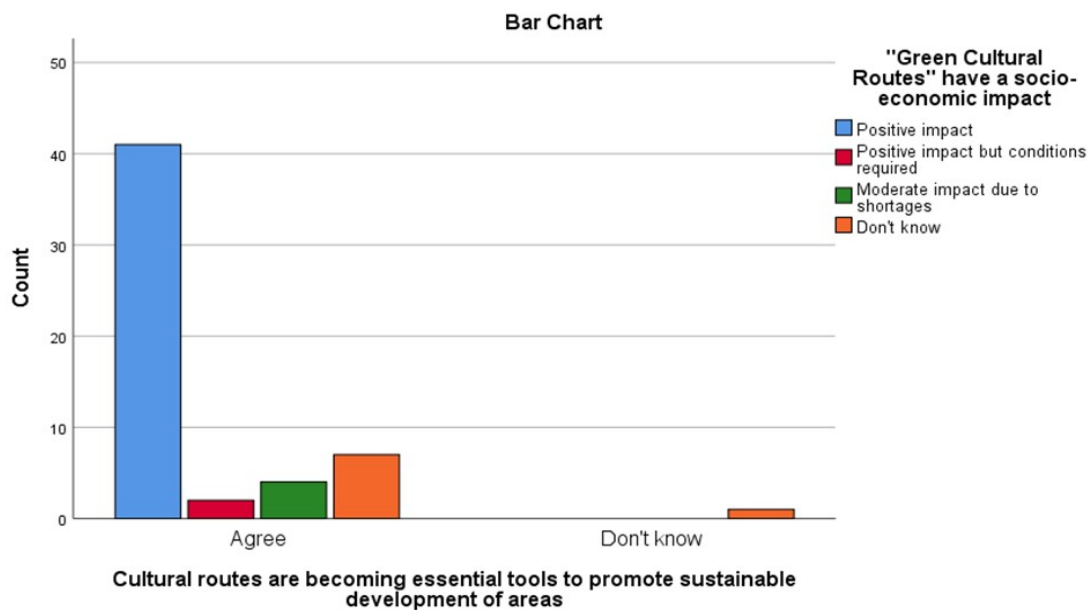


Figure 12: Views on whether cultural routes are becoming essential tools to promote sustainable development of areas and views on whether "Green Cultural Routes" have a socio-economic impact.

Moving on to the analysis, a two-variable correlation was performed on questions about whether specific actions have been taken to link environmental protection with cultural routes and about the importance of integrating technologies into the cultural routes themselves. It is observed that nine out of 13 people who stated that no specific actions have been taken to link environmental protection with cultural routes consider it very important or necessary to integrate technologies into cultural routes. Also, 18 of the 22 who replied stated that concrete

actions have indeed been taken to link environmental protection with cultural routes. Therefore, there is not much difference of opinion in the sample on these questions.

		How necessary is the integration of technologies into cultural routes?				Total
		Not important	Important	Very important	Necessary	
Have specific actions been taken to link environmental protection with cultural routes?	No	1	3	2	7	13
	Yes	1	3	8	10	22
	DG/MA	0	4	14	22	40
Total		2	10	24	39	75

Table 3: Views on whether concrete actions have been taken to link environmental protection with cultural routes and importance of integrating technologies into cultural routes

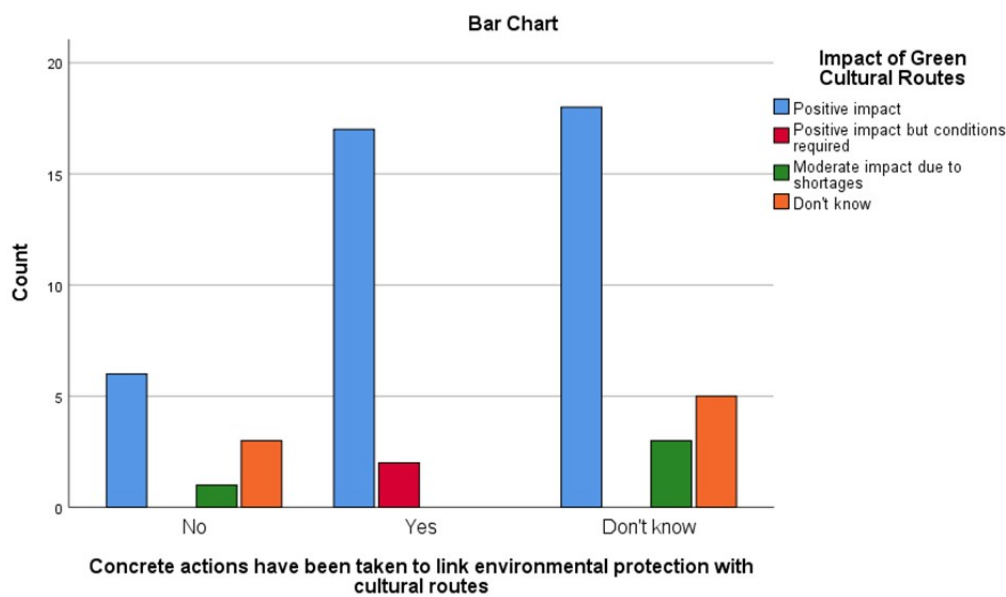


Figure 14: Views on whether concrete actions have been taken to link environmental protection with cultural routes and views on the impact of Green Cultural Routes

It is noteworthy that it is observed that based on the results of the x2 test, the two questions investigated are independent and the relationship between them is marginally not statistically significant [$\chi^2(6) = 11.672, p = .070$].

Table 4: Degree of independence of views on whether concrete actions have been taken to link environmental protection with cultural routes and views on the impact of Green Cultural Routes

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11,672	6	,070
Likelihood Ratio	15,732	6	,015
Linear-by-Linear Association	,000	1	,986
N of Valid Cases	55		

Discussion

Cultural routes are a successful model of tourism development in many countries of the world. They share common characteristics, such as a core theme, which defines individual actions and shapes an overall brand. The objectives of the cultural routes are to attract tourists, extend the tourist season, create development conditions for businesses and producers, attract investors and strengthen the local economy. Cultural routes are an important tool for the development of the regions, as they can attract more tourists, stimulate the local economy and preserve cultural heritage.

As far as Greece is concerned, cultural routes introduce a new model in the management, preservation and promotion of the country's cultural reserve, through the transformation of the operation of cultural sites from competitive to cooperative. In other words, it gives the opportunity to involve more institutions and companies, resulting in the creation of a collaborative network with the common goal, the promotion of culture. Over the years, European funds have been utilized, as well as internal investments, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. However, it should be understood that for the successful financing of cultural tourism from Community programmes within the framework of regional development, the spatial distribution of these funds plays an important role. Most countries, such as Great Britain, Germany and France, adopt decentralized policy strategies, which should aim at the tourism and cultural education of local government bodies, as well as at disengaging from organizational dysfunctions (Palaskas & Papatheodorou, 2006). The European Recovery and Resilience Fund programme to upgrade services and monuments of cultural interest, with the aim of increasing their visibility and visibility, is an important opportunity for Greece.

The €650 million that Greece will receive from this programme can be used for a series of actions, such as upgrading infrastructure and equipment of cultural institutions, museums, archaeological sites, libraries and theatres, creating new cultural destinations and activities aimed at attracting different groups of visitors, promoting Greece's cultural heritage internationally. The use of these resources should be made with careful planning and coordination in order to achieve maximum efficiency. The actions to be implemented should be adapted to the needs and characteristics of the different regions of Greece, as well as to the needs of visitors. This program is an important opportunity for Greece to utilize its rich cultural reserve for the country's development (www.culture.gov.gr, 2023).

Through the review of the strategic development of urban cultural tourism, the need for the adoption of a place branding was observed, which would enhance the attractiveness of this product for visitors and investors, would create the basis for economic development, through the exploitation of available cultural elements, either from the tangible objects of culture or from the intangible aspects of culture (Peeters et al., 2018; Lamnatos & Mitoula, 2020). Urban tourism, in fact, is inextricably linked to cultural heritage. In order to integrate cultural heritage management into a smart marketing plan for urban tourism, it is necessary to base this plan on the principles of sustainability and protection of cultural and historical wealth, while attracting tourists (Paskaleva-Shapira & Besson, 2006).

The role of the partners involved is equally important, so that the vision is formed, supported and promoted and the objectives are effectively communicated (Hernández-Martín et al., 2017). For this reason, Destination Management Organizations, Local Government, Environmental and Cultural Associations, bloggers or influencers, the locals themselves, must be involved in order to create a common goal (Sehremeli, 2019). The role of each Region and Municipalities in raising the awareness of permanent residents for additional actions that will promote actions for the safe development of urban tourism and cultural identity is also very important (E.E.T.A.A., 2022). Therefore, with this safe development in mind, it is necessary to incorporate criteria to ensure the sustainability of new destinations. This need is becoming

more and more urgent, because in addition to the increasing and seasonal traffic, factors, such as the environmental, health and economic crisis, have a catalytic effect on their sustainability. Interest now revolves around the healthy development of urban cultural tourism, through anticipation and risk management (Istoc, 2012).

Conclusions-Suggestions for future research

Cultural routes are an important tool for the enhancement and development of urban cultural tourism. The majority of survey participants believe that cultural routes can help increase tourist flows, explore seasonality, improve market positioning and attract new target groups. In addition, cultural routes are considered interlinked with the strategy for the development and diversification of urban cultural tourism. However, cultural routes have not been fully exploited by local and national actors. Survey participants believe that there are still many actions to be taken in order for cultural routes to contribute decisively to the development of urban cultural tourism. Destination Marketing and Management Organizations (DMMOs) play an important role in creating and promoting cultural routes, collaborating with local stakeholders and businesses, and ensuring the sustainability of cultural routes. Also, the development of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs) to support cultural routes may contribute to enhancing their importance for the development of urban cultural tourism.

Research also shows that cultural routes are an important tool for promoting sustainable development of areas. The vast majority of survey participants believe that cultural routes can contribute to environmental protection, sustainable development of areas and strengthening the local economy. In fact, the integration of technologies in cultural routes is considered essential to enhance the visitor experience and attract new target groups. The technologies can offer additional services and information, as well as possibilities for tours without guides. In relation to green cultural routes, the majority of participants believe that they have a positive social and economic impact, through reducing the environmental impact of tourism, strengthening the local economy and promoting the sustainable development of areas. The research presented so far has had some limitations. For example, it did not study the factors that hinder the smooth cooperation and coordination of actions between institutions and professionals involved in the tourism and cultural industry. To address these limitations, it is proposed to conduct a new survey, which will try to understand the causes behind the lack of information and knowledge among the professionals and political superiors involved.

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