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Landscape for Cultural Tourism: An affair to unfold

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Context and objective

The significance of landscape to the tourism experience: well-established and considered paramount.

So is culture to landscape, e.g. in the cultural constitution of landscape.

This paper critically explores the role and potential of landscape for cultural tourism practices and development and vice versa. In cultural tourism, the landscape assumes its full significance and multifaceted role in an overarching tourism experience.

Based on an overview of relevant scientific literature, with an emphasis on the Western/ European-centered cultural tourism experience.



On landscape



'Landscape' defined in the European Landscape Convention (ELC)= “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” (CoE, 2000).

The ELC= the only international accord entirely dedicated to the subject of landscapes (Clark et al. 2003; Priore, 2009) and the most significant reference document in Europe for landscape planning and management (Jones et al. 2007; Jones & Stenseke, 2011; Olwig, 2007).

The ELC's definition of landscape as “an area as perceived by people”

- a) highlights the relational/ anthropocentric character of landscape,
- b) acknowledges all types of landscapes (Sodano, 2017) and
- c) affirms the cultural constitution of landscape (Sauer 1925; Cosgrove 2017; M. Jones 2003; Olwig 1996).

Landscape and culture

Thus, landscape= a spatial unit of analysis on which human culture and history are inadvertently inscribed and may be deciphered, managed and put to use (i.e. through cultural tourism).

It “can be associated with a regional or local place and community. In this respect, it provides a sense of continuity, and thus strengthens identities” (Piekarska-Duraj, 2018).

Landscapes not only represent people’s perceptions of their surroundings, but also define the complex interrelationship between them and their living environment.





Thus, landscapes embody forms, practices and values of both local and ecumenical cultural heritage, including tangible and intangible traditions, knowledges and perceptions.

In fact, the configuration of the European landscape evolved in tandem with the evolution of the term 'landscape' in the European culture area.

Landscape=a European concept.

Landscape and tourism

Landscape for tourism= essential and crucial

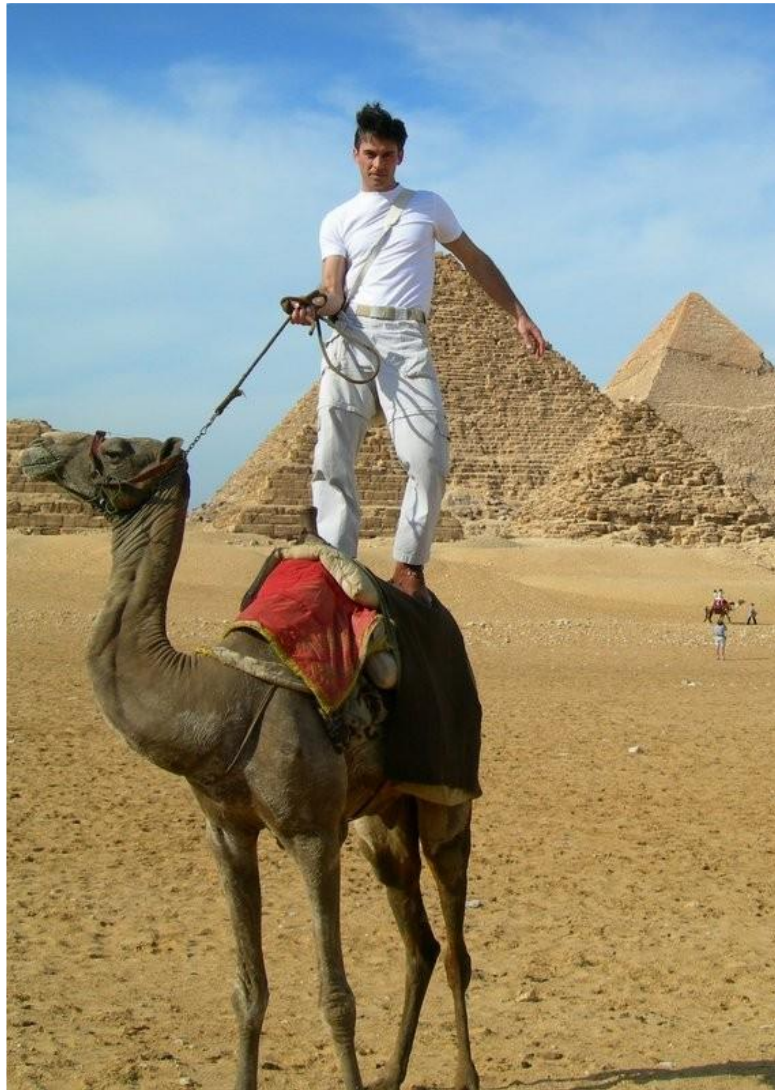
Landscape= a means of development, promotion, appreciation of tourism, but also:

Landscape serves as a resource, a setting, a context, a background and a product for consumption by tourism of all sorts.

On the basis of its mediational nature, the landscape represents the primary and most enduring medium of contact between tourist and destination.

The tourist sets out on a trip with landscape images, dreams or ideas of the prospective/ consumed destination place. The tourism industry markets well-selected images, cultural discourses, resources, signs and uses of landscapes (i.e. through advertising/ promotion/ place-branding etc.).





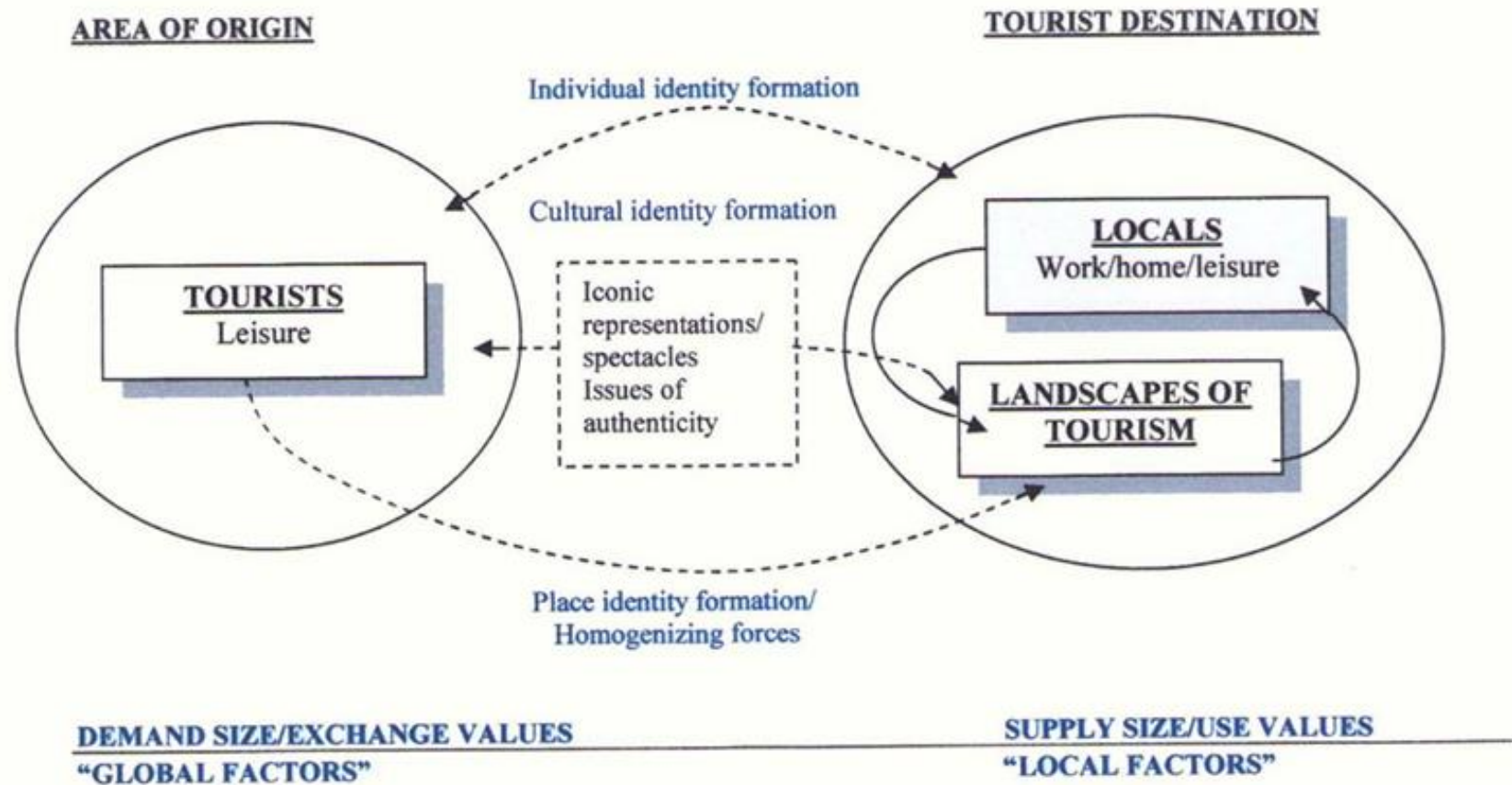
The tourist/ visitor, through cognitive/ performative/ affective etc. processes of experiential re-interpretation of cultural signs—either deliberately or inadvertently—assesses, validates and consumes the meanings and identity of the destination, through its landscapes.

The connection between landscape and tourism extends to the performative nature of the travel experience and its pleasures (theories of emotion, affect, and more-than-representational geographies) (Terkenli 2014).

Thus, landscapes become significant grounds for personal or destination cultural change and identity formation.



The landscapes of tourism model (Terkenli 2014).



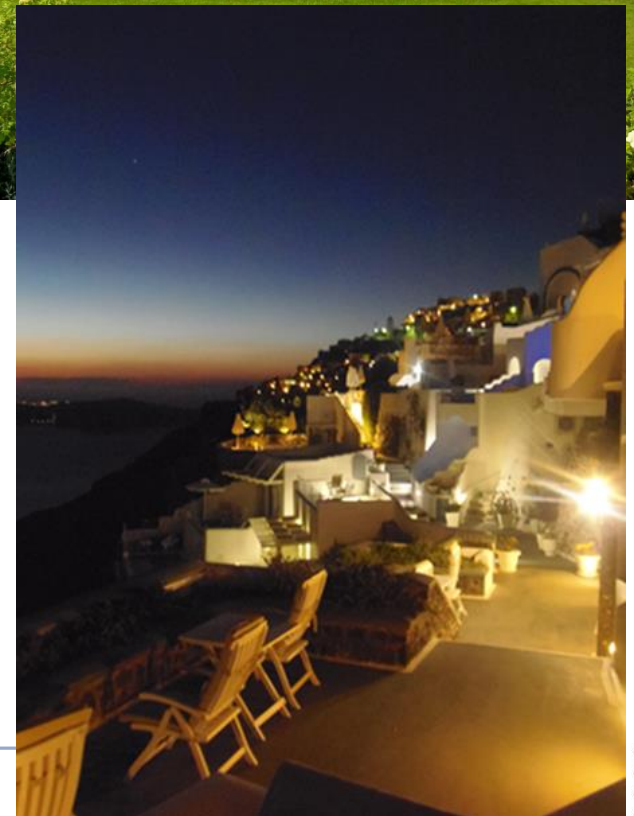
Cultural tourism

Cultural tourism has a bearing on any/all possible cultural aspects of both destination and market.

It practically materializes such tourism pursuits and purposes, by targeting but also transforming ‘the cultural’, in its broader sense, at the travel destination.

‘Cultural tourism’ refers to the compound set of activities of tourism planning, effectuating and experiencing a destination, with the—broadly defined—motive of culture. Has eluded definition due to the dynamic nature of culture.

“A type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination” (UNWTO definition in Tsartas et al. 2000: 18).





Cultural tourism and landscape

Landscape and cultural tourism may reciprocally strengthen each other, as well as social participation (Piekarska-Duraj, 2018).

Landscape can be seen as a mediation platform, rather than just a physical entity, where local visions/ goals/ actions and policy frameworks play a role in promoting or inhibiting diversity and identity (~landscape stewardship), and in defining opportunities for cultural tourism.

Tourism shapes cultural practices and landscapes, leading to cultural change. Tourism= one of the driving forces of place transformation (Salazar, 2012).

Rather than just consuming and exploiting, cultural tourism may also aim to contribute actively to landscape management, protection and revitalization of traditions, e.g. working on organic farms, helping in (grape) harvest, stone-walling, pruning, etc. (Garrod et al 2006, Rosendahl et al. 2021).

+ Cultural tourism may foster bottom-up involvement and mobilization in landscape appropriation, both for inhabitants and for tourists, leading to identity formation, change and societal fragmentation or cohesion.



Positive and negative perspectives

Global tourism has been shifting from exploring famous cultural resources, namely monuments and museums, towards intangible resources= integration of everyday life, landscape and popular culture into the tourist product (Richards, 2011).

Cultural tourism has become an important tool in creative place-making (Richards, 2020). Furthermore, it has come to be associated with slow, 'mild' and more sustainable forms of tourism, i.e. 'green' tourism etc.

≠ Traditionally, tourism has been associated with landscape despoliation, commoditization, banalization, homogenization or other negative change.

Furthermore, cultural tourism often becomes a factor of exploitation and commodification of indigenous cultures and landscapes for purposes of consumption. The experience of turning the tourist gaze on these cultures can transform them into globalized commodities, unless there is genuine involvement and empowerment of the communities involved.

Therefore: important to strike a balance between the sustainability of (indigenous) cultural resources and their commercialization through market forces (Richards, 2018).

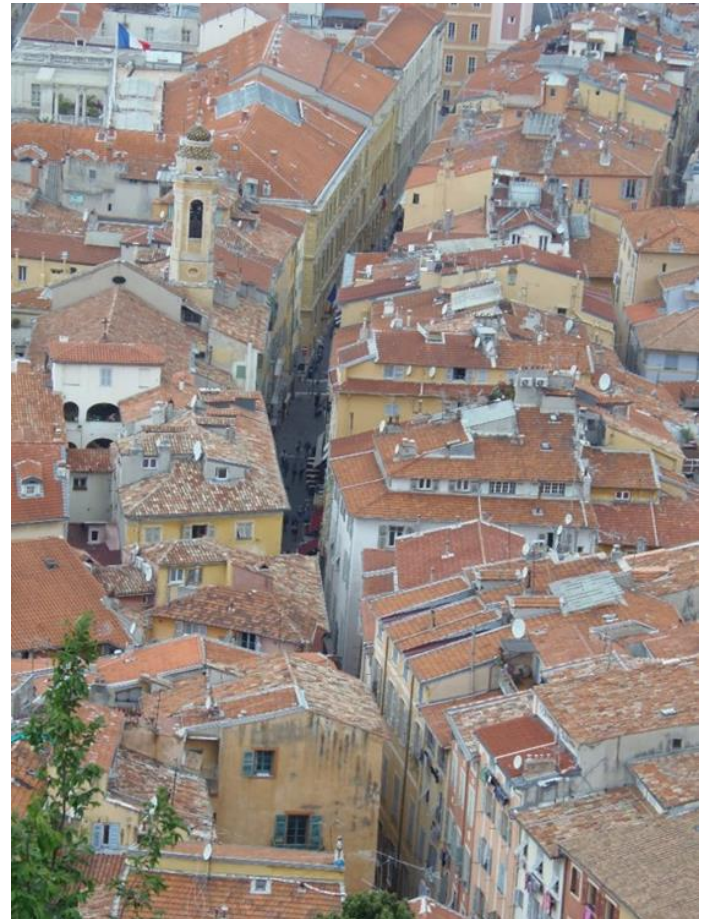
Cultural tourism and sustainability

A regional focus on cultural tourism can be an incentive for sustainable development: i.e. EU CAP subsidies in regions less suitable for farming would perhaps be more efficiently invested in regional cultural tourism and proper landscape stewardship—tightly linked to sustainable development at the local and regional levels.

≠ One of the most important trade-offs in tourism development is the leaking away of profits to international investors (Sokhanvar, 2019): often a threat to landscape quality and cultural identity.

+ Cultural tourism may contribute to a certain levelling out of cultural differences at all levels, franchising cultural heritage and landscape (the 'new cultural economy of space', Terkenli & d'Hautesserre 2006).

≠ Conversely, cultural diversity/ individualization etc. may be enhanced/ promoted through cultural tourism and vice versa: incite a benign cycle of both cultural (landscape) preservation/ stewardship and cultural tourism growth.



On sustainability



Sustainable development focusing on use rights instead of property rights (Nesticò, Morano, & Sica, 2018) requires due governance, and may enhance a development of landscape commons, especially benefitting those local parties that are committed to taking care of their cultural values (Pedroli, 2019; Rodgers & Mackay, 2018).

Issues of landscape/ resource use justice, ownership and access rights, participatory governance, democracy etc. play a crucial role here, i.e. the divergence in attaining sustainability both in (cultural) tourism development and landscape stewardship between Europe and SIDS (small island developing states).

Recent scientific inroads

Scientific interest in the synergies between landscape and cultural tourism has been growing, but no comprehensive theoretical framework or research structure yet, as few such efforts have been undertaken so far (Smith & Ram 2017).

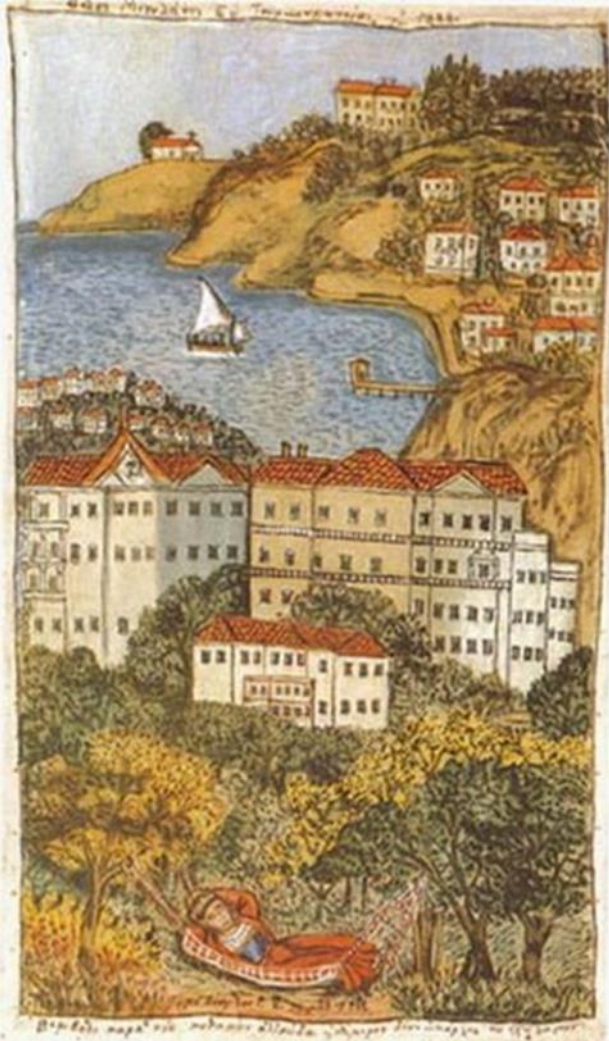
Jiménez-García et al. 2020 show that the most frequent research topics in this area= cultural heritage & national parks, while the topics of rural development and spatial analysis are also emerging.

Others (Tiberghien et al. 2017) introduce the concept of eco-cultural tourism related to visits to culturally and environmentally remote regions, or show that cultural tourism can be considered as the representation and discovery of a region's cultural identity (Manca 2016).

A number of research studies representing a variety of approaches to and aspects of the relationship tourism-landscape have recently been compiled in a special issue of the journal Land (Terkenli, 2021).



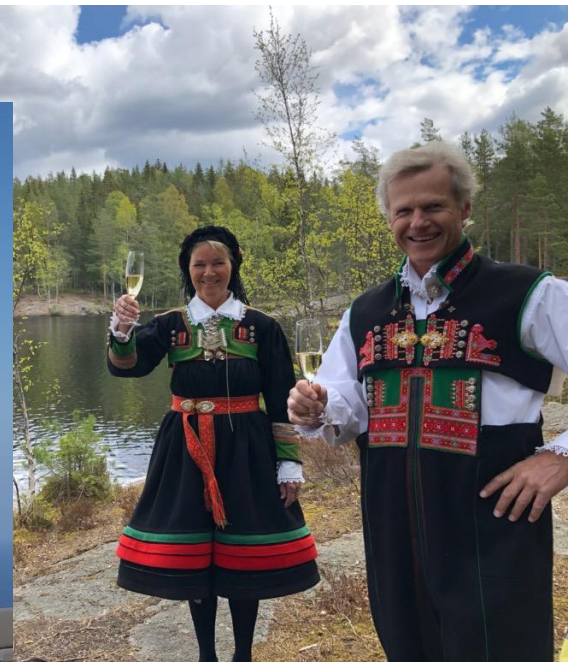
Back towards the future



Cultural tourism patterns and practices have been diversifying, seeking ever new thrills and attractions in response to society's changing cultural concepts and demands (i.e. the intangible, the digital, the 'green') and to various human and environmental crises—with a serious bearing on the role of landscape for tourism.

→ Growing tourist preferences for smaller urban and for rural or semi-rural destinations, favoring more 'natural', individualized and 'protected' forms of travel where the landscape seems poised to figure very prominently (i.e. a return to locally-sourced products, a quest for more dispersed alternative activities and special-purpose tourism pursuits).





As crises challenging contemporary societies continue to evolve, the landscape seems to be regaining its place, role and purpose in:

- a) spatial/ land stewardship and decision-making
- b) in human everyday lives and cultural change
- c) in the evolving realms of tourism and recreation (i.e. gastronomic tourism, glamping, wedding tourism, pilgrimages, etc.).

Conclusions

Through planning/ management for 'sustainability', 'authenticity', 'locality' 'democracy' etc., cultural tourism may promote differentiation, elicit democratization of cultural resource management, and foster cultural bridges of peace and unity in diversity (Kokkonen 2018: 57): processes in which landscape plays a pivotal role.

Such cultural tourism also fosters the personal development of its participants (both locals and tourists). The concrete and direct experience of people with regional geography, history, culture and art is thus crucial for the sustainable and creative management of cultural values and destination landscapes.





Thank you!