



TOURISM MOBILITIES AND THE PANDEMIC:

patterns and prospects from the Cyclades, Greece

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Context and objectives

- The COVID-19 pandemic has and continues to affect patterns of tourism mobility, at all geographical scales-signaling an uncertain course in the foreseeable future.
- In this context of tentative, fluid and ambivalent tourism mobilities, it is crucial to develop an understanding of distinctive trends and patterns from the bottom up. Especially so, in heavily tourism-dependent economies and societies, such as the Greek islands.
- This paper explores emerging cultural tourism patterns and prospects, in the context of the multifold and complex recent turn in tourism mobilities, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, using the case study of the Cycladic Islands, Greece (Andros, Santorini, Syros).





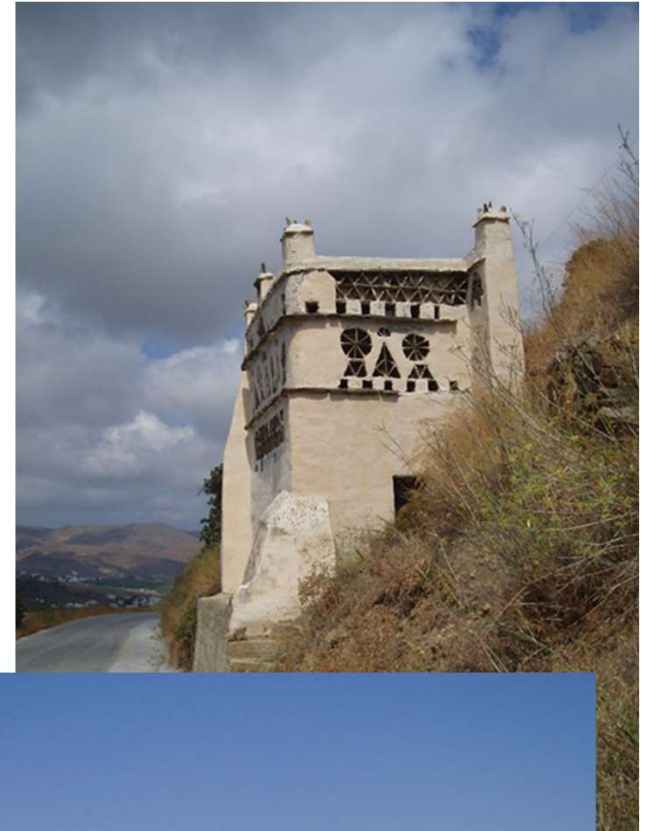
Methods and tools



- On-site intensive questionnaire survey, effectuated in the context of the SPOT HORIZON2020 EU project on cultural tourism a) among tourists and b) local tourism-related businesses (<http://www.spotprojecth2020.eu>).
- The paper critically analyzes and assesses the latter's views, practices, concerns and prospects on these new and emerging trends, in the Cyclades.
- 3 different survey locations were selected on each island (most representative of the range of different conditions pertaining to local tourism and culture).
- Questionnaires were distributed in both online and offline versions, and 79 tourists' and 70 businesses' questionnaires were collected, in total.

The cultural argument

- Emphasis on cultural aspects of tourism and related entrepreneurship.
- Cultural tourism, in this case, is viewed as the main alternative to the overarching type of tourism attracted in the Cyclades (3Ss tourism)
- However, it is their cultural attractions, taken all together, that render them a most significant pole of both local and international tourism attraction, constituting a competitive advantage vis-à-vis other similar destinations.
- The scientific contribution of the study lies in the elucidation of the emergent situation and unprecedented repercussions, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and concomitant State measures, with an application to similar small island tourism destinations.



Case study: the Cyclades

Research sites: Andros, Santorini, Syros



Tourism in the Cyclades: Although the Cyclades feature great differentiation in the degree of (tourism) development, they include some of the most famous tourist destinations around the world (i.e. Mykonos and Santorini).

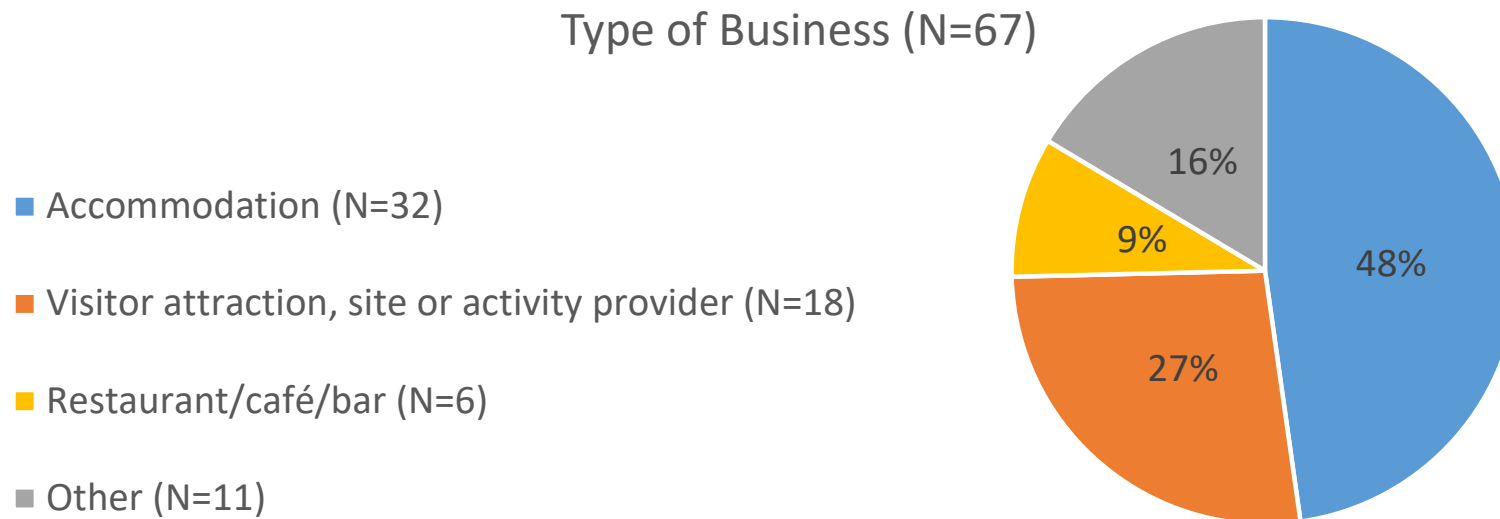
The cultural heritage of the Cycladic islands= multifold, spanning the whole historical timeline of human existence on earth (prehistory to present).

Potential for cultural tourism: very significant for the development of all tourism types, but especially for special-interest/ purpose, cultural and alternative tourism, in congruence with the landscape.

Tourists' sample profile.

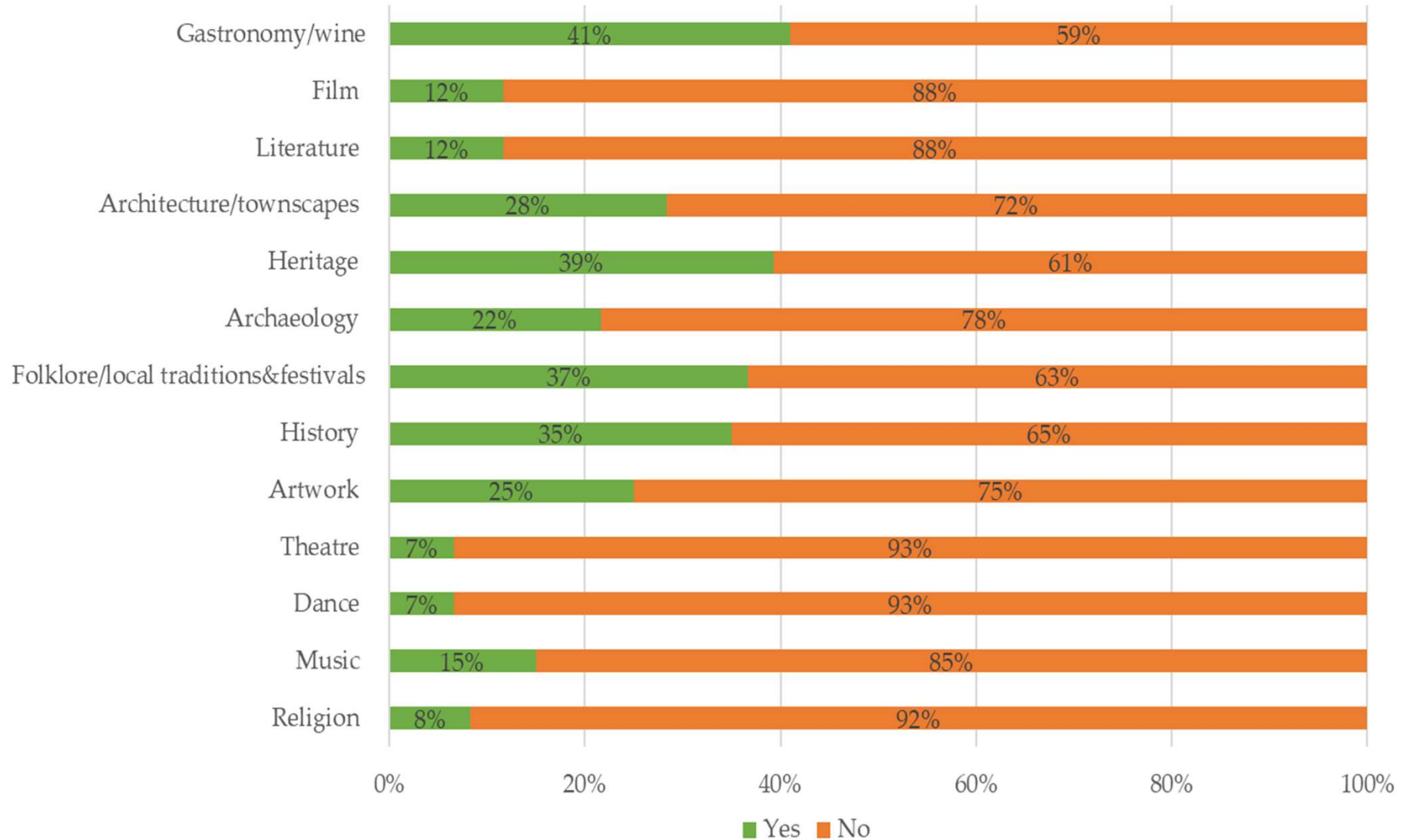
Features	Characteristics of the tourists' profile sample			
Gender	males	females		
	37%	63%		
Age	20-30	30-50	50-60	over 60
	19%	66%	4%	11%
Country of origin	Greece	Europe	USA	
	84%	15%	1%	
Educational level	Secondary education	High School graduates	Vocational education	University/Master/ PhD graduates
	1%	12%	15%	72%
Profession	Professional	Clerical support/ Elementary worker	Manager	Other
	29%	36%	21%	14%
Household income	Less than €10,000	€11,000 - €20,000	€20,000 - €40,000	More than €40,000
	19%	35%	21%	25%
Household composition	Single person	Couple	Three or four persons	More than 5 persons
	46%	28%	24%	2%

Businesses' sample profile.



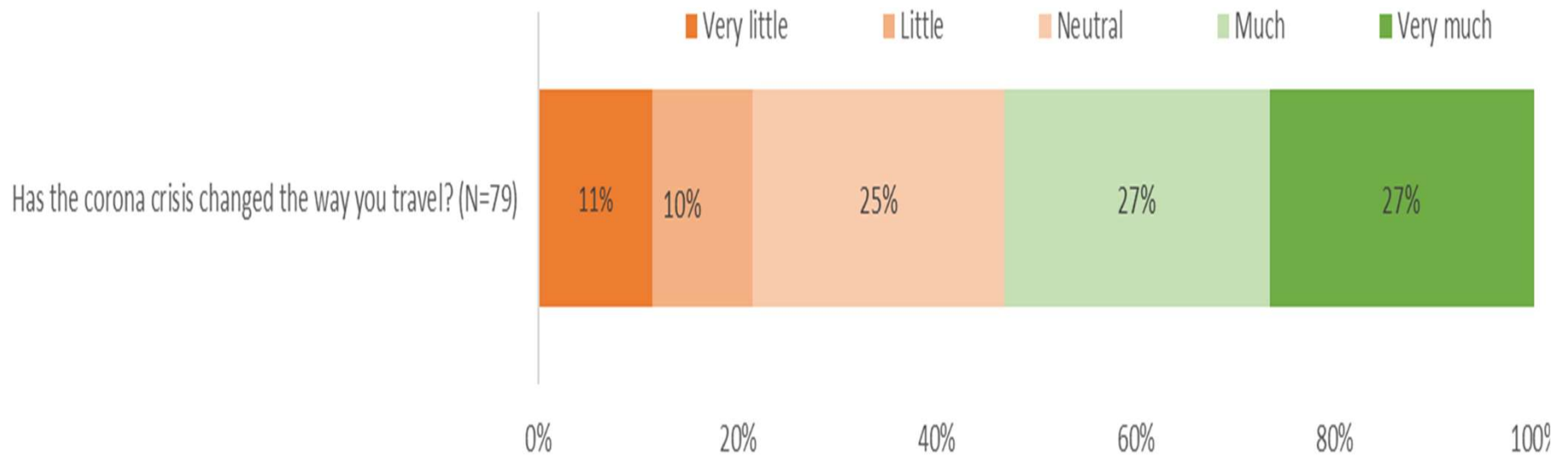
- The majority of businesses (85%) were located within a radius of less than 2km of the main local cultural sites and attractions.
- The majority of tourists attracted by these businesses were couples or lone travelers, and secondarily families.

Businesses' offer of cultural themes



Research Question 1

“How did the pandemic alter tourists’ travel choices/ behavior/ preferences with regard to their cultural site visits and event attendance?”

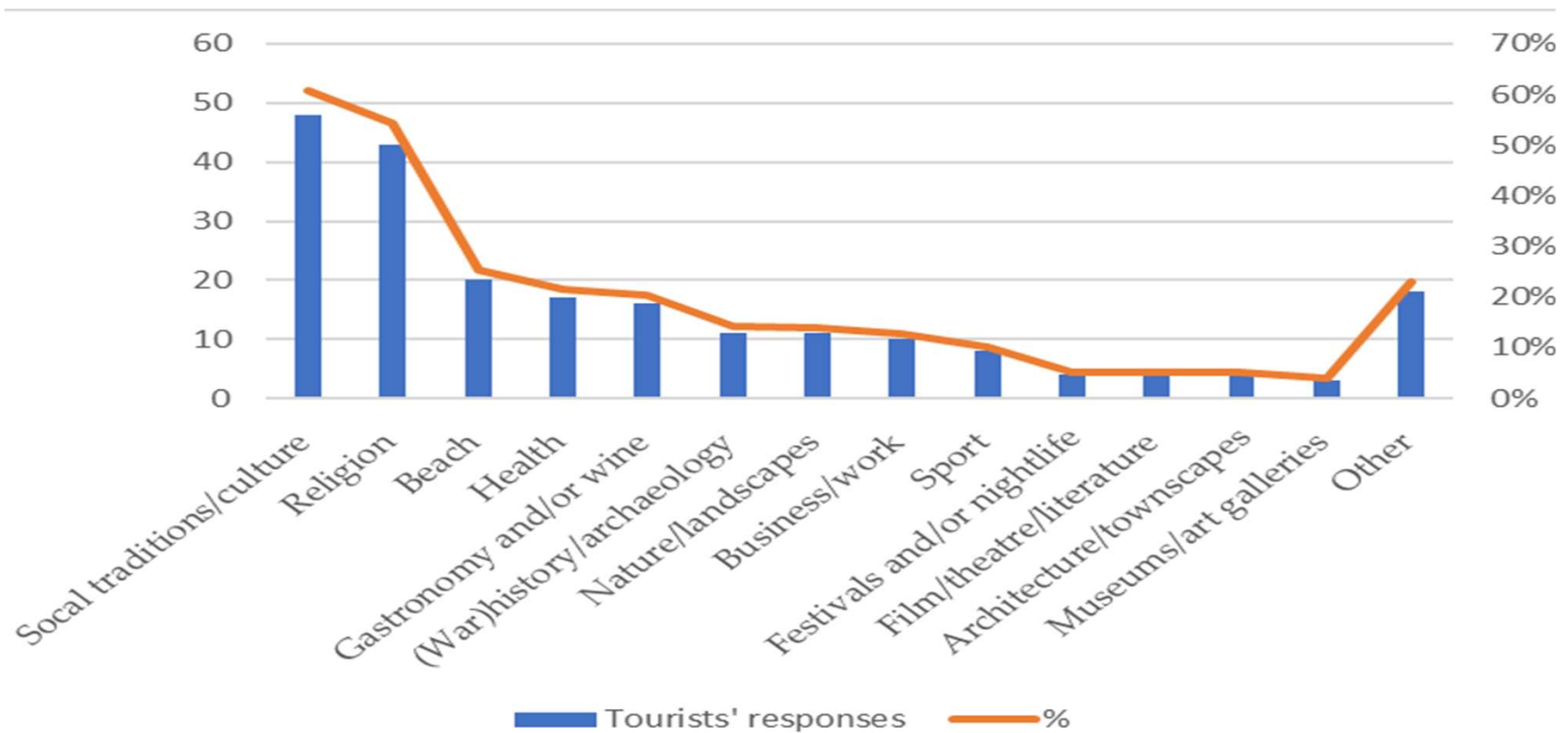


Research Question 1

“How did the pandemic alter tourists’ travel choices/ behavior/ preferences with regard to their cultural site visits and event attendance?”

- ✓ The majority of tourists responded that :
 - ✓ the pandemic imposed **serious restrictions on the frequency** of travelling and especially **on travelling abroad**.
 - ✓ they took **shorter holidays** than usual
 - ✓ they were concerned about the **pandemic safety measures** while travelling (i.e. feeling of being ‘**cautious**’ or ‘**anxious**’ while travelling).
 - ✓ they **felt insecure and annoyed** for having to wear masks and constantly using sanitizers
 - ✓ they **avoided public transport** and **preferred private means of transport**, when travelling around the islands.
 - ✓ They chose ‘staycations’ in the Greek islands and did not travel abroad
- ✓ Finally, about 20% of our tourist respondents said that the pandemic did not change the way they travelled around the islands.
- ✓ The only activity that was missed, according to their responses, was attending local fiestas and arts events, very much tied into summer holidays in the Cyclades

Tourist motivations to visit the area during the pandemic

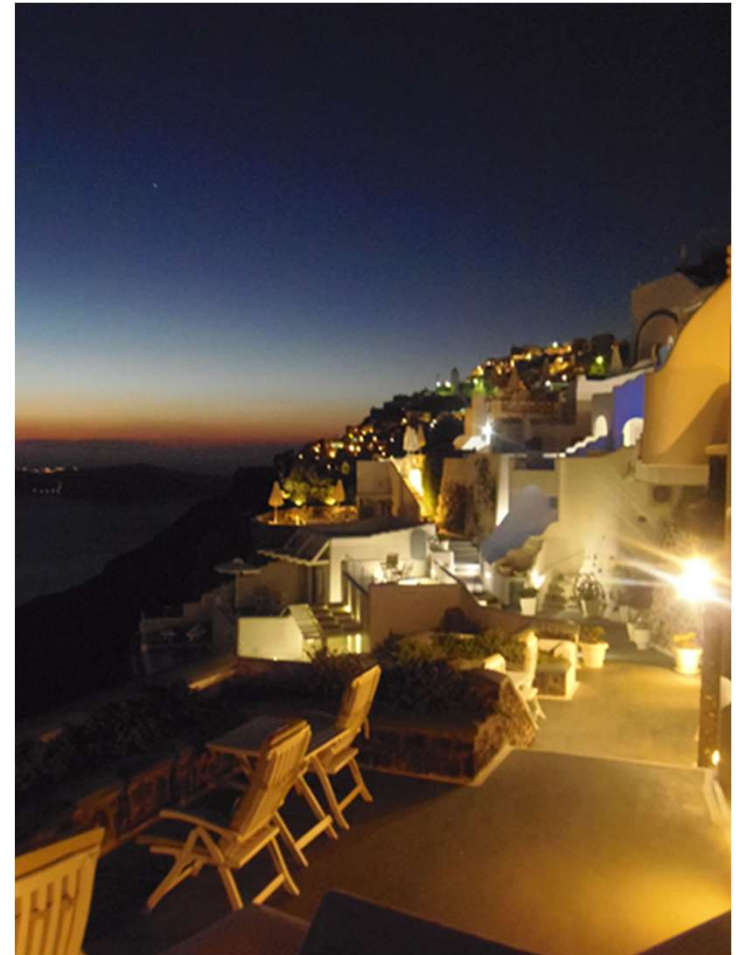
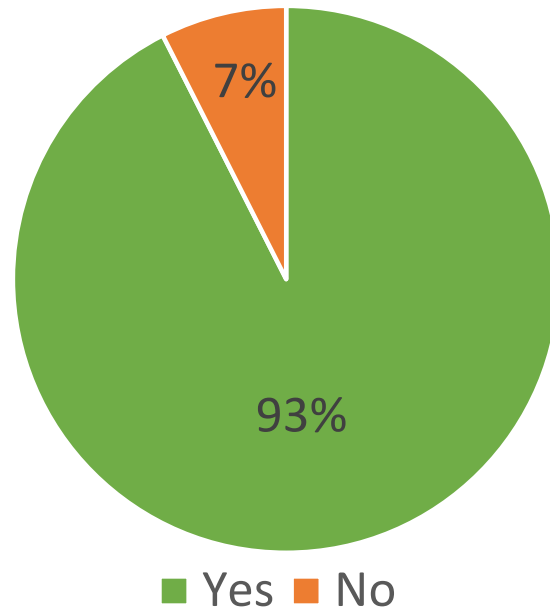


- local traditions & culture (48%)= the main motive to visit the islands followed by religious motives
- going to the beach (25%) was also very important.
- gastronomy and wine were also high (20%), as the Cyclades also tend to be very popular for the quality of local food and wine.

Research Question 2

“How did the pandemic alter approaches of tourism-related businesses and entrepreneurship towards cultural tourism?”

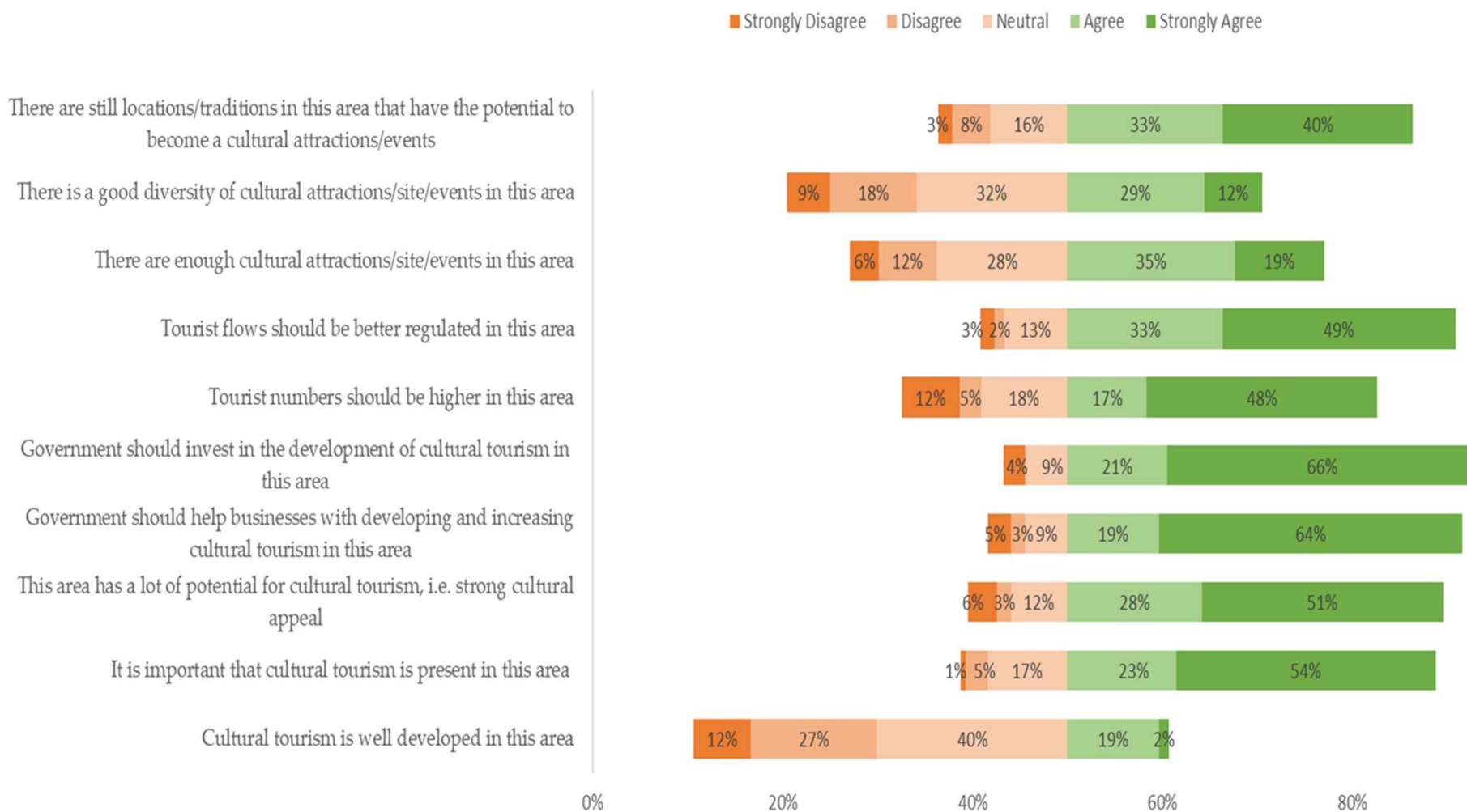
Business affected or not by Corona virus (N=67)



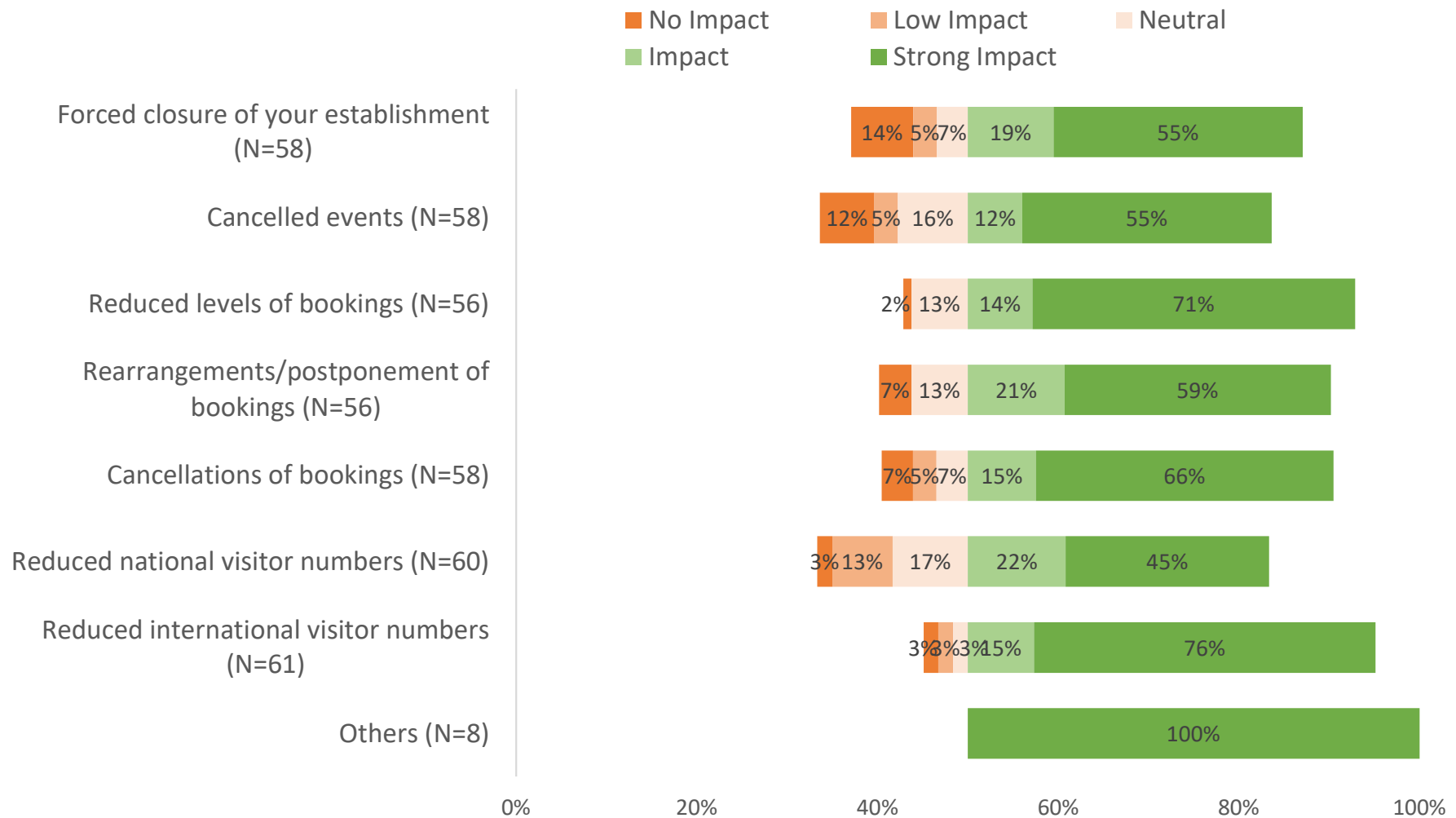
Research Question 2

“How did the pandemic alter approaches of tourism-related businesses and entrepreneurship towards cultural tourism?”

Businesses' perceptions on cultural tourism



Impact of the pandemic on the businesses



Study findings—in sum

- Tourists expressed their concerns and insecurities about health and safety issues, as well as the restrictions on choosing the frequency and location of travelling.
- The majority of tourists stated that the pandemic did not alter negatively their holiday experience, but they did feel disappointed by the lack of cultural events (i.e., local ‘fiestas’, festivals). They indicated that they enjoyed the less-crowded destination conditions.
- Most significantly, tourists showed particular interest for outdoor cultural sites, or visits to smaller-scale events in less crowded locations.



Study findings—in sum

- Similarly, findings point to great insecurity and uncertainty about the future amongst interviewed business representatives.
- Business managers did not feel urged to take any forward-looking actions, but rather assumed a 'let's-wait-and-see' attitude, as to how the situation will evolve in the future.
- Our findings reveal a high consensus on most issues and aspects among interviewed tourists and local business representatives, as regards tourism trends, practices, and development.
- The role of culture as an actual tourism attraction and the potential for further tourism growth, in almost all sectors of local society and economy, were broadly acknowledged by all the survey respondents.



Conclusive remarks

- The COVID-19 pandemic has been grave for Greek tourism, but overwhelmingly so for these small island economies, which are highly dependent on tourism.
- The physical/ natural and 'protected' aspects of destinations are presently favored, while newer trends are emerging in tourism mobilities (i.e. domestic, solo, reclusive, slow, silent, green, etc).
- The combination of the physical environmental lure, continued interest in cultural attractions, and the pursuit of less crowded/ reclusive motives seems to point to future tourism mobilities ~ small cities/towns and/or rural/semi-rural destinations, where the Landscape (combining all of these aspects) seems poised to figure very prominently.

