SPOT
SOCIAL AND INNOVATIVE PLATFORM ON CULTURAL TOURISM AND ITS POTENTIAL TOWARDS DEEPENING EUROPEANISATION

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Landscape and Tourism
Looking Forward

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Global tourism and the landscape

Global tourism: various significant qualitative shifts, which recent crises are contributing to or reconfiguring, providing the incentive and the grounds for sustainable place-making and development: a shift from 'mass' to 'mild'/ 'green' tourism, from special-interest tourism to special-purpose tourism, from tangible to intangible destination experiences, etc. (Purcell et al, 2020; Knezevic et al, 2021; INSETE, 2021).

These tourism shifts have a strong bearing on the landscape: through them, the landscape seems to be regaining its place, role and purpose in spatial/ land stewardship and decision-making.

Such forms of tourism may contribute actively to sustainable landscape management, i.e. revitalization of traditions and resource protection, while fostering bottom-up involvement in landscape stewardship, strengthening identity formation, participatory practices and social cohesion.

Landscape and cultural tourism

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

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

Tourism shapes cultural practices and landscapes, leading to cultural change. Landscape can be seen as a mediation platform where local visions/ goals/ actions and policy frameworks play a role in promoting or inhibiting growth, diversity and identity (~landscape stewardship), creating opportunities for many types of tourism (i.e. cultural tourism, wellness/ health tourism, gastro tourism, etc.).

Landscape and (cultural) tourism may reciprocally strengthen each other, as well as social participation, identity construction and community building, inciting a benign cycle of both landscape preservation/ stewardship and (cultural) tourism growth.

(Cultural) tourism may contribute actively to landscape management, protection and revitalization of traditions, i.e. through local products' markets, small-scale industries, reviving of gastronomic traditions and rural practices, etc.

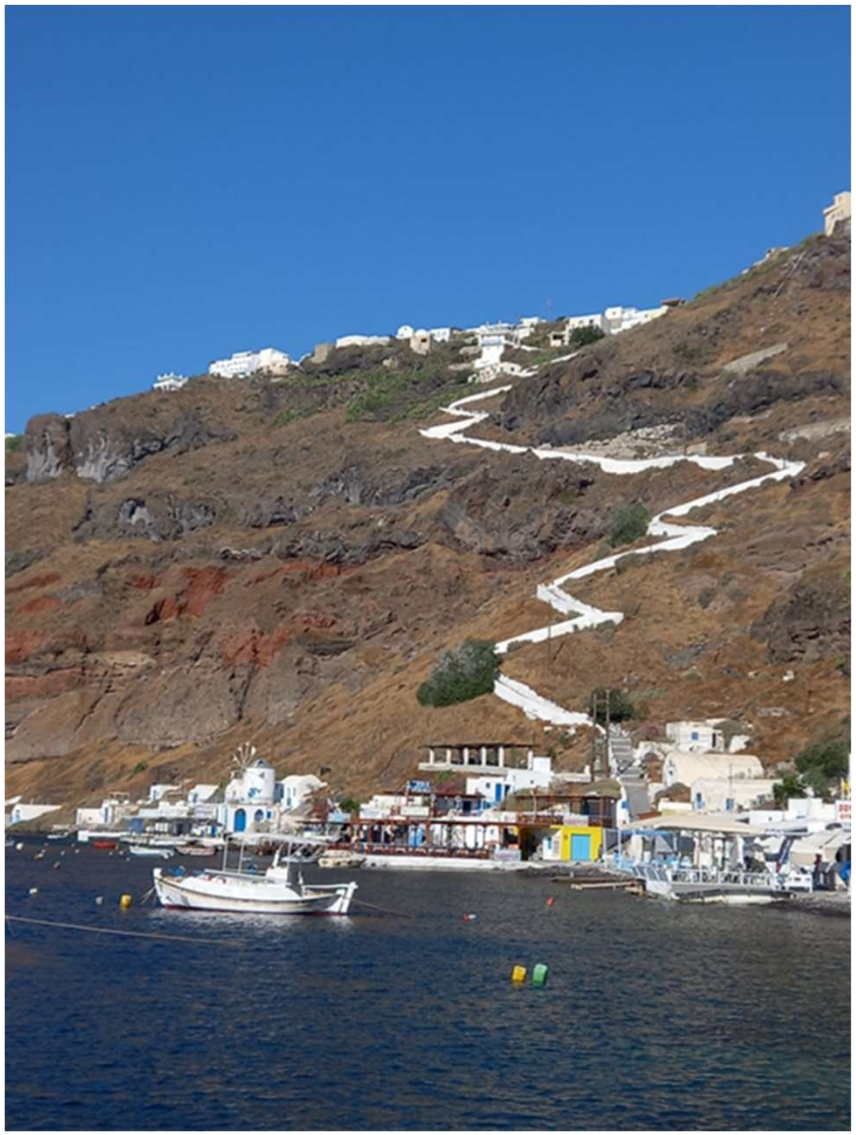
Study objectives

This presentation explores this reciprocal relationship in light of changing circumstances and parameters, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the context of a series of evolving crises (climate, energy, economic, etc.). Emphasis on 'cultural' tourism.

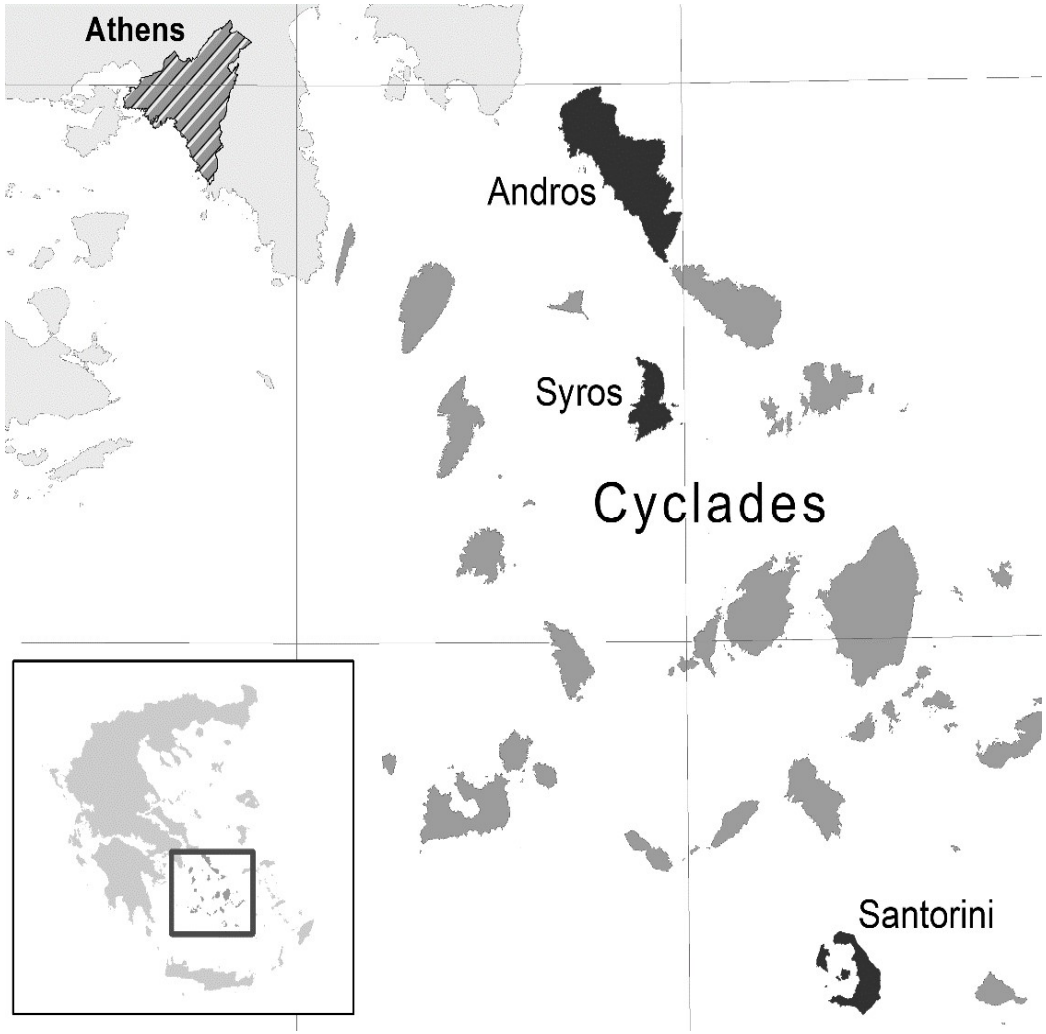
Addresses the prospects, pitfalls and potential of landscape for future tourism development and vice versa, based on a meta-analysis of relevant scientific literature and research findings of the H2020 EU Project SPOT.

Aim: to unveil and elaborate on current and emerging trends/ patterns that refer to and reinforce the relationship landscape-tourism, through a SWOT analysis.

The landscape, as a valuable cultural asset, is the primary attraction in tourism to the Cyclades, Greece.



UAegean case study: the Cyclades
Research sites: Andros, Santorini, Syros



Source: Laboratory of Cartography and Geoinformatics, Department of Geography, University of the Aegean

Cultural tourism does not represent a conscious tourism motive for most Cyclades visitors. However, broadly defined, culture remains the main factor underlying tourists' decision to visit these islands: it constitutes the Cyclades' distinctive tourism-attraction profile and competitive edge.

Cyclades cultural heritage: multifold (both tangible and intangible), spanning the whole historical timeline of human existence on earth (prehistory to present) from ancient to 'traditional' to contemporary.

Cultural/creative tourism potential: very significant and **in congruence with the landscape**.

Methodology and research design

This study/ meta-analysis relied on a multi-methodological approach (fall 2020-spring 2021), in the context of the SPOT HORIZON2020 EU project (focusing on cultural tourism and Europeanization, aiming towards sustainable development benefitting host communities and regional economies). [http://www.spotprojecth2020.eu]

It relies on those who propel and enact tourism trends, e.g. significant local tourism actors and stakeholders, in order to ascertain/ understand immediate problems and new trends in Cyclades' cultural tourism due to the pandemic, as well as visions of its future re-instatement. Methodology used for the data collection:

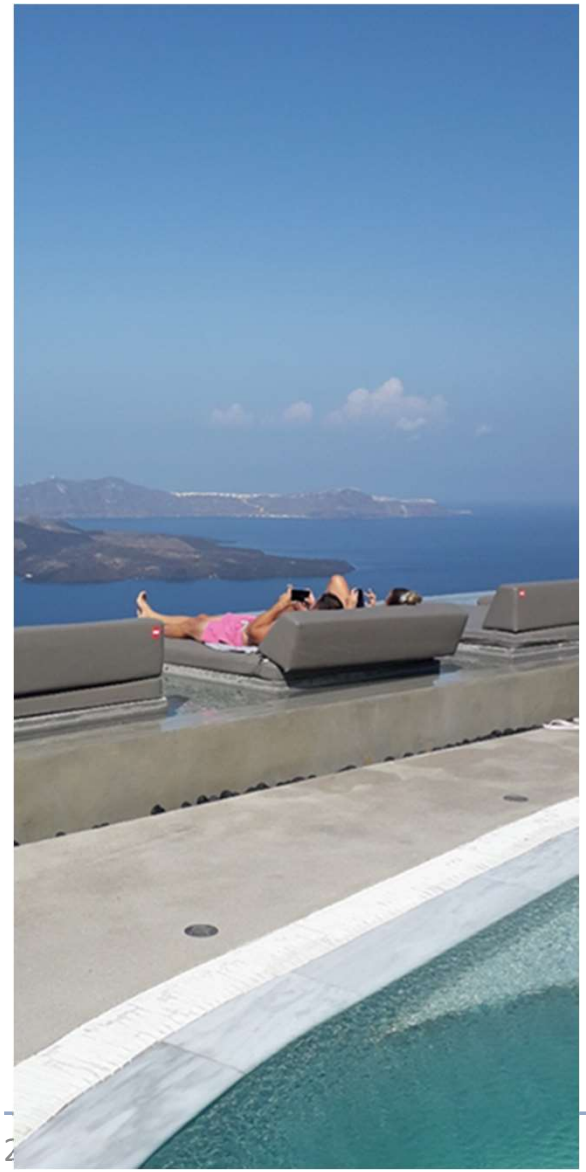
a) a series of in-situ in-depth interviews with key informants

b) an intensive questionnaire survey of local residents, businesses and tourists &

c) a focus-group panel discussion with key local/ regional stakeholders

The findings of all 3 methods of data collection: in agreement and support of each other; were then used for the SWOT analysis on landscape and (cultural) tourism.

Context of the study



Until July 2021, the repercussions of the pandemic had been grave for tourism-dependent countries, e.g. Greece, and particularly the Cyclades—heavily tourism-dependent economies (Constantoglou & Klothaki, 2021; Medová et al, 2021; WTTC, 2021; TheGlobalEconomy.com, 2022).

The broad spectrum of the Cyclades cultural assets elicits variable cultural tourism, a form of tourism that has been especially affected by the pandemic and its global and local repercussions (Jacobsen et al., 2021; Knezevic et al., 2021; Iaquinto, 2022).

A great number of cultural activities ingrained in local ways of life were banned or did not take place at all during 2020, especially those conducive to large concentrations of participants/ spectators, such as religious feasts and all sorts of cultural festivals.

Grave impact on the businesses, but tourists' satisfaction with their visitation practices was reportedly mixed.

Serious curtailing of tourist mobilities: type of tourism, ratio of domestic vs. foreign tourism, frequency of travel, length of stay at the destination, type of transport used, preferred type of destination, behavioral patterns during traveling, cultural activities engaged in at destination, etc.

Types of changes in traveling patterns as a result of the pandemic (open-ended question)

The majority of tourist respondents stated that the COVID-19 pandemic imposed serious restrictions on their frequency of traveling, especially on traveling abroad.

The majority also stated that they took shorter holidays than usual.

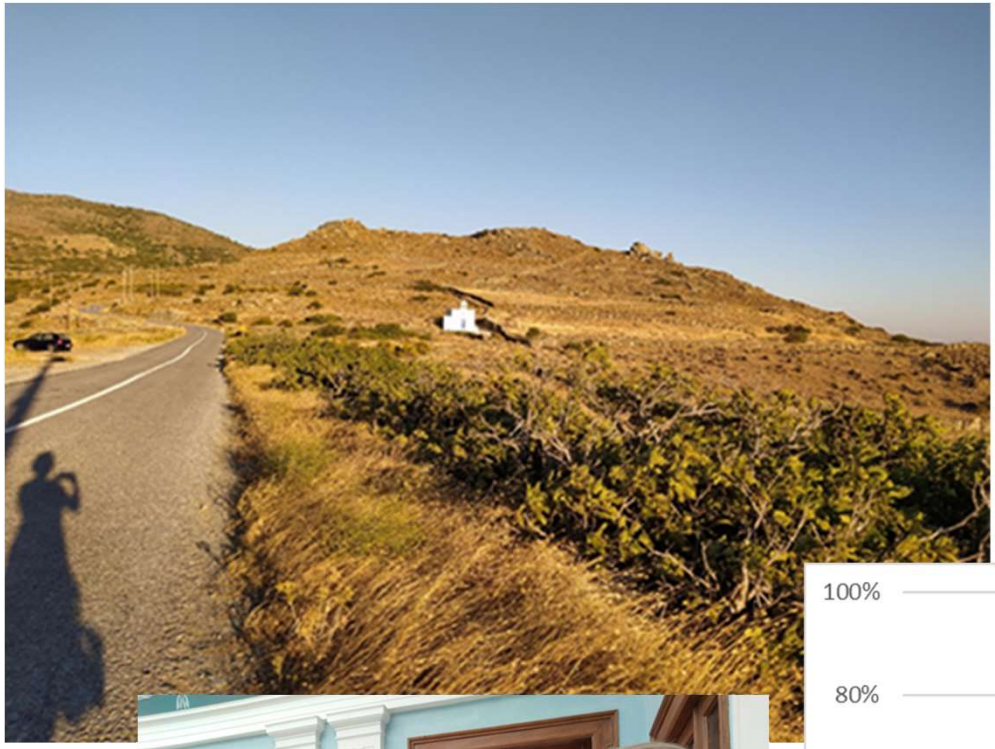
Several European tourists stated that they chose Greece, because they felt safe there and trusted the way that the Greek State had handled the pandemic and its repercussions on the country.

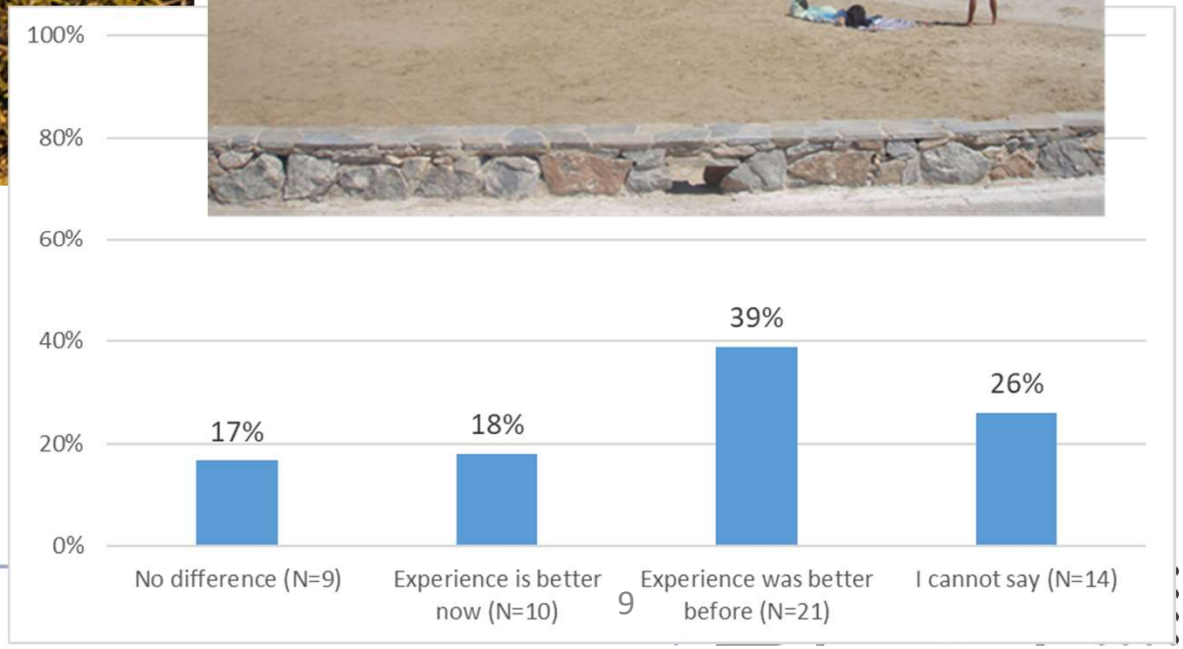
Furthermore, many domestic tourists chose 'staycations' in the Greek islands, rather than travel abroad.

Those who did manage to travel in 2020 expressed their concerns about the safety measures, as well as insecurity and annoyance for having to wear masks and constantly use sanitizers.

Many stated that they tried to avoid public transport as much as possible, preferring to rent their own transportation vehicles when traveling around the islands.

Comparison of current visit to that/those of pre-pandemic times (closed-ended question)





Comparison of current visit to that/those of pre-pandemic times (closed-ended question)

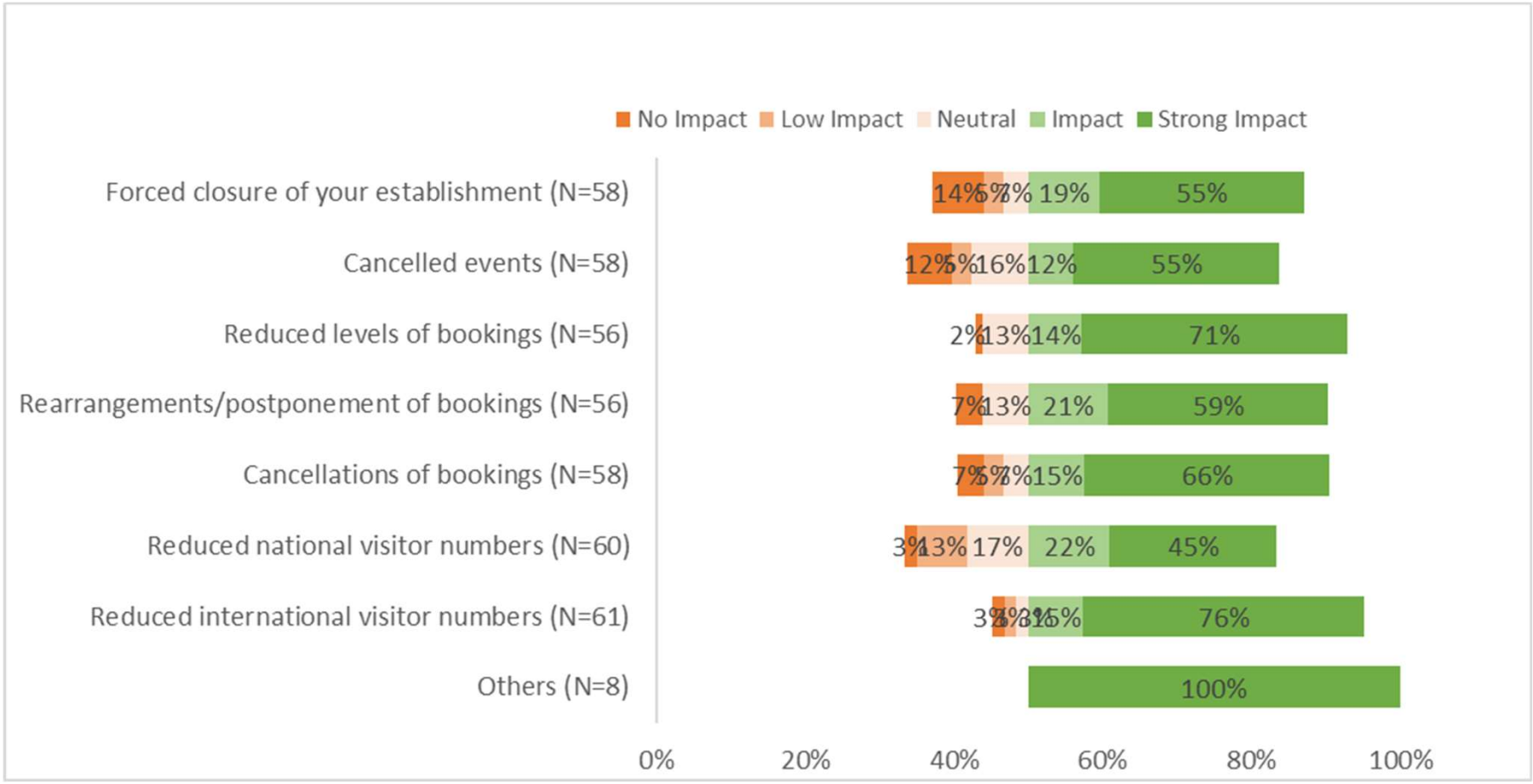
The highest percentage of our respondents (39%) stated that they were more satisfied with their pre-pandemic visit(s) to the area. The main reasons are related to travel restrictions during the pandemic, and the lack of cultural activities and events due to pandemic risks and their repercussions.

A fairly high percentage of respondents (17%) said that they could not see any difference between the two points in time: this must be viewed in the general context of high levels of tourist satisfaction from cultural tourism in the Cyclades, as a rule (Trip Advisor 2022), and the loyalty of 'repeat customers'.

A surprising 18% stated that their tourism experience was better during the summer of 2020 than other visits in the past. It can be inferred (researchers' knowledge and personal observation) that the latter interviewees were the type of tourists who tend to prefer quieter holidays rather than the hustle and bustle of busy towns, crowded beaches, party/ feast atmosphere, noisy situations, etc.

Some tourists shared with us their enthusiasm for enjoying a very relaxing and unusually crowd-free August in the 3 island destinations (i.e. in Santorini).

Impact of the pandemic on the businesses (closed-ended question)



Businesses' measures to offset the negative impact of the pandemic (closed-ended question)

Measures followed by our respondents to combat the impacts of the pandemic: Development of new initiatives and products (24%); Development of new digital services (39%); Enhancement of existing digital services (42%); Exploration of new markets (45%); Maintenance of connections with existing customers (50%); and Advertising as normal (48%).

However, as these numbers are all below 50%, we may deduce that these business owners/ managers seemed rather disinclined to take any forward-looking actions, but rather assumed a 'let's-wait-and-see' attitude as to how the situation would evolve. They felt abandoned by the State, left to their own devices.

Government assistance to businesses (closed-ended question)

General stakeholders' agreement that all sides/ parties/ sectors/ levels of governance ought to be involved in the islands` cultural tourism development and decision-making, (verified by on-site participant observation).

The study's findings most significantly exposed long-underlying structural problems in the islands` tourism sector, which have thus become clearer and more specific.

Stakeholders said that pandemic-induced developments may lead to all sorts of new/ reformed types of cultural tourism: more spatially secluded; engaging smaller numbers of people/ participants; more abstract and digitally-supported types of experiences; more 'authentic' experiences; more controlled and hybrid big-event activities.

Sustenance of business (closed-ended question)

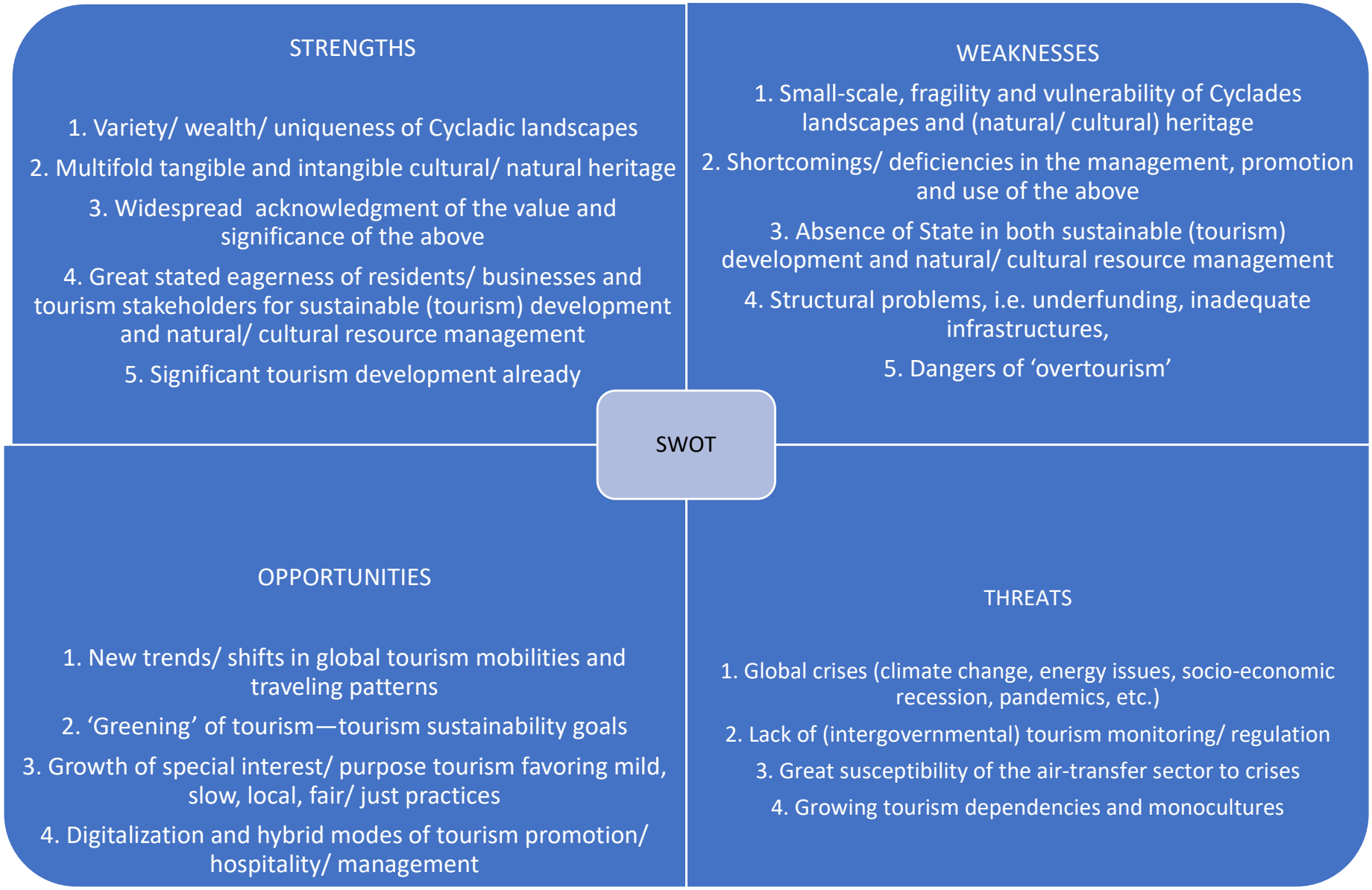
Few business representatives (27%) had managed to sustain their business for one full year. Many businesses used funds from the previous profitable fiscal years (2018 and 2019) towards their 2020 business needs and survival, but several closed down indefinitely-many of them in the culture sector.

However, "all parts/ aspects of the cultural sector have been gravely affected", with very questionable prospects of returning to the pre-pandemic status quo for the workforce previously employed in culture.

All interviewees expressed the need for better coordination/ regulation of future inflows, in order to realize alternative types of tourism. All acknowledged the importance of culture for tourism, and cultural tourism itself as "the future of the islands".

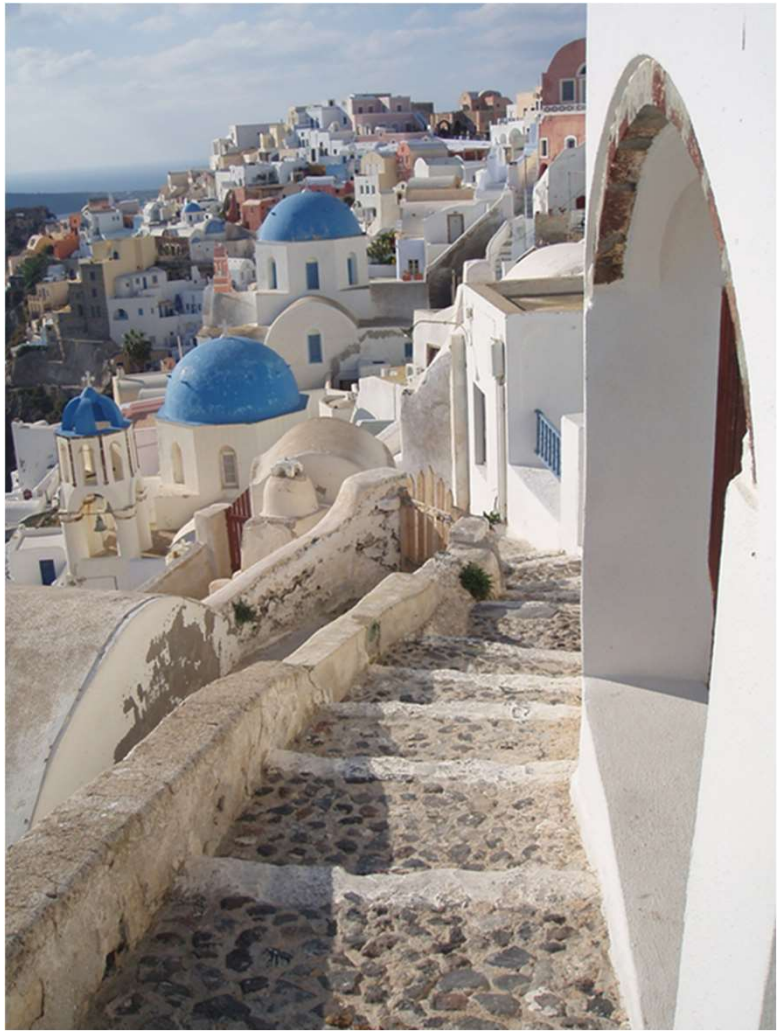
…"as long as culture is embraced by the local side as part of their everyday practice and reality, rather than become a tourist product".

SWOT analysis: landscape for Cycladic tourism



Conclusions: back towards the future

The role of culture (the competitive edge of Greek island tourism)= vital in the context of the anticipated regeneration of locally-based tourism, and consequently in sustainable island development, in the post-pandemic era (without the compromises of economic dependency and tourism monocultures).

The landscape seems poised to figure very prominently in these new and developing forms of travel (i.e. a return to locally-sourced products or a quest for outdoors alternative activities and individualized experiences, such as wine-making or fishing tourism, glamping, etc.).

Through proper planning/ management for 'sustainability', 'authenticity', 'locality' 'democracy' etc., cultural tourism may promote sustainable local/ regional (tourism) development: processes in which landscape plays a pivotal role.