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## More Regionality than Globality – New Trends and Challenges of Contemporary Cultural Tourism

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The aim of this article is to identify and classify the challenges of contemporary cultural tourism, as well as trends in its development in the context of regional interpretation and the creation of a branded tourism product.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The main research method used in the article is an analysis of the directions of tourism in cross-border tourism areas, combined with indications of activity preferences - regional, supra-regional or global. The analysis was based on participant observation, as well as on respondents' indications during the questionnaire survey and targeted interviews. The data obtained through this method allow basic conclusions to be drawn regarding the development of the regional cultural tourism space.

**Findings:** As a result of the research carried out, a clear trend was noticed in recent years in the changing optics of tourism activities and interests in the context of cultural tourism - from global mobility to regional and local mobility. The challenges facing contemporary cultural tourism in the face of a globalising market and increasing expectations of individualisation and regionalisation of tourism were identified and classified.

**Practical Implications:** The observed changes and trends in the perception of the contemporary cultural tourism space, successfully translate into actions aimed at creating new tourism products and creating new regional tourism offers.

**Originality/Value:** The research presented in the article is completely original and has not been published before in the scientific literature, both regionally and internationally. Their value is considered high, due to the practical implications of the analyses in building a well-organised cultural tourism space.

**Keywords:** Cultural tourism, tourist space, globalization, regional tourism.

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## **1. Introduction**

For many years, cultural tourism has been the subject of academic discussion and deliberation around the world. Places of particular interest seem to be those where the intermingling of cultures, traditions or - in special cases - different perceptions of the same shared heritage are observed (Duda, 2023).

Regional cultural and natural heritage and tourism are inextricably linked. In many cases they are drivers for the development of the local tourism space and are a resource in both social and economic terms.

Properly prepared, presented and promoted elements of a region's heritage increasingly form the core of branded tourism products and determine their main narrative. In recent years, there has been a definite increase in the number of those seeking an authentic and much more strongly engaging regional cultural tourism offering to experience, interpret and educate.

It is the regionalization in cultural tourism that is beginning to displace global perceptions of tourism space, and tourists' expectations are increasingly focused on the authentic experience of regions, their uniqueness, distinctiveness, and relevance to the development of the cultural landscape.

Contemporary cultural tourism therefore poses numerous challenges, which are, as it were, a response to the needs and expectations of the audience (tourists). The most important ones, mainly in terms of the development of contemporary cultural tourism, therefore, include the appropriate interpretation of the tourist space and the resources present within it (Duda, 2020).

This interpretation, however, stems from the involvement of local communities in its process, a sense of regional identity and identification with the past and heritage, both tangible and intangible. Indeed, one of the basic features of sustainable tourism is the involvement of local communities in creating and promoting activities that make use of elements of their own cultural or natural heritage.

The topic of interpreting and perceiving the regional cultural tourism space has appeared systematically in the world literature for many years. However, despite a rich bibliography full of case studies, there is still a lack of clear identification and classification of the contemporary challenges faced by regional cultural tourism organizers, creators of heritage tourism products in the face of global changes in tourism activity and perception of space in this context.

This article is an attempt to organize the long-standing observations and research in this field, as well as to point out proposals for some actions that may contribute to a better understanding of the regional determinants of tourism space development.

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## 2. Development of Regional Cultural Tourism - A Literature Review

For many years there have been global changes in the shaping and interpretation of the tourism space. Not only have the forms and directions of travel changed, but also the motivations, expectations and needs of tourists themselves. Increasingly, the traditional model of leisure tourism (3S - Sand, Sea, Sun) is being replaced by an engaged and active form of spending time.

Alternatives have become increasingly popular models: 3E (Exploration, Experience, Education) and 3H (New Horizons, Heritage, Hospitality) (Berti and Mariotti 2015; Duda, 2018). The demand for greater individualization of the tourism offer, its uniqueness and competitiveness against similar products found around the world, has therefore forced changes in the functioning of the tourism market and large-scale, creative development of tourism offers and products, mainly relating to local and regional cultural-tourism spaces.

The interpretation of heritage within regional tourism-cultural spaces is an issue that has been repeatedly studied by scholars from different parts of the world. In addition to the now classic work of Tilden (1957), the issue has been addressed by Beck and Cable (1998), Berti and Mariotti (2015), Csapó (2012), Davies (2014) or Mikos von Rohrscheidt (2021), Adamopoulos and Thalassinos (2020) among others.

As the latter notes, heritage tends to be identified with specific spaces and thus considered as a spatial phenomenon, definitely more regional than global (Kalvet *et al.*, 2020; Nagy, 2012). A properly prepared and guided interpretation of a destination therefore helps to understand the genius loci of the place visited, to discover meanings and connections between individual elements of the content of the message as well as to actively involve the recipient (tourist) in the cognitive process.

It gives him or her the satisfaction of co-creating the tourism offer and significantly increases interest in the chosen place, as noted by the aforementioned classic of modern heritage interpretation, Freeman Tilden (1957). Tourism as a global social phenomenon has changed over time. This process is still ongoing, and its contemporary audience - tourists - expect personalized access to tourism information, at any time, from any place and through any media. As Wijesuriya and his research team (2013) noted: "... with the development of technology, mobile devices have made it easier to access information anywhere, anytime...".

The author also notes the trend of replacing printed guides, with mobile apps. Stand-alone, customized apps, virtual walks or personalized guide systems are becoming more widely used educational and interpretive tools in the tourism space. Relatively low cost, accessibility and ease of use have resulted in a very rapid expansion of the technology worldwide.

Based on new technologies, making use of local and regional cultural, historical or natural heritage, innovative tourism products are increasingly being developed, reflecting the creativity of their creators. The tourist space of the region comprehensively combines various types of sightseeing methods with elements of regional education, active leisure and the promotion of cultural and historical heritage.

These activities are realised through new forms of cultural tourism, such as: questing, geocaching, urbex or the more classic, although using modern forms of communication and promotion - culinary tourism and event tourism. These often form the core of new tourism products, shaping the image of the region and increasing the sense of identity of its inhabitants.

This is particularly true of those destinations which, due to a lack of other assets (e.g., historic sites, museums of supra-regional importance, etc.), find it difficult to compete with well-known attractions or tourist destinations.

Regional cultural tourism, based on local heritage resources and landscape attractiveness, largely translates into the economy and economic attractiveness of the region. Culture and heritage elements (historical and natural) in a region often remain the only enclaves of authenticity, contributing to building its image and preserving its own identity.

Thematic cultural and/or natural trails are a particular manifestation of the regional narrative in the creation of tourism products. They have become a permanent feature of the tourist space, regardless of latitude, culture or language. They are a visible reflection not only of trends or fashions in contemporary tourism and promotional activities of regions, but above all of the acceptance of one's own identity, tradition and heritage, as well as the need to protect it.

The functioning of thematic cultural routes in the geographical and tourist space of a region certainly testifies to the maturity of the space and its functional design.

### **3. Research Findings - Assessment of the Needs of the Modern Tourist in the Context of the Development of the Regional Tourism and Cultural Space: Challenges and Trends**

Due to the global changes experienced by the tourism industry in recent years (first the terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid or Paris, then the COVID-19 pandemic, (Grima *et al.*, 2020) and now the war in Ukraine), there has been a rapid acceleration of trends in the progressive individualization of the tourism offer (including above all cultural tourism).

Although they were not born in recent years, and their emergence should not be linked to the development of pandemics, the global events have certainly contributed

to their rapid development. Contemporary cultural tourism increasingly relies on the visitor's own experiences and testimonies rather than on information and a cloud of data that is passed on to the viewer.

The classic version of the 'grand tour' has changed its face and, over the past few decades, is seen as a slow exploration of the world around us, visiting fewer places, but with a thorough recognition, understanding and quiet experience. Cultural tourism, including heritage tourism, is mainly aimed at the aware tourist, who wants to get to know in depth the cultural conditions and peculiarities of the place visited, using a variety of senses and emotions - e.g., by tasting regional food, listening to local music or exploring original and nowhere else to be found galleries, museums or religious sites.

These types of activities are therefore linked to the regionalization of the tourist space. Cultural phenomena most often concern a specific social, national, or religious group and are not global or even supra-regional in scope. A better understanding of the cultural landscape of a place is therefore linked to a regional approach to tourism and the tourism space. Taking all the above-mentioned conditions into account, tourism with a regional scope is today a more desirable form of cultural tourism than its implementation in the global space.

The contemporary cultural tourist (visitor) creates his or her needs and expectations long before undertaking a trip. His or her mobility is usually deliberate and refers to interests, the desire to know, compare and understand the differences between cultural landscapes, as well as to experience unique emotions and sensations, the satisfaction of which he or she seeks in the interpretation of the destination.

The growing trend of individualization and personalization of the tourist experience fits perfectly with the expectations of the modern tourist and builds his perception and image of the destination, which he will retain long after his return. Considering all of the above theses, it is worth attempting to identify and classify the challenges faced by the creators of the tourist and cultural offer in order to satisfy the already mentioned needs of the contemporary viewer. Thus, they can be divided according to their genesis and their relation to the space itself or its recipient (visitor).

Challenges faced by the organizers of tourism and cultural spaces to meet the expectations of the modern tourist:

- a) providing for individual visits to the site, combined with the creation of appropriate organisational and informational infrastructure linked to the visited site,
- b) making full reference to the local/regional cultural heritage, explaining its importance for the development of the region, its distinctiveness and uniqueness in relation to other - neighboring cultural regions; showing its value in the context of the social and historical development of the region,

- c) to prepare a narrative, which will be at the same time part of an appropriate interpretation of the place, bearing in mind that information itself is not yet an interpretation - it is only a certain discovery, a revelation, based on the information layer (according to one of Freeman Tilden's principles of interpretation - 1957),
- d) individual approach to each recipient of the interpretation of the space - the narrative should be adapted not only to the age of the visitor, but also to his/her level of knowledge, interests, and desire to know and understand the destination,
- e) breaking down intercultural, inter-religious, linguistic, or social barriers between the different sides of a cross-border space, especially where it has been divided as a result of unfavorable historical and political ties across the border; building up an appropriate narrative in cross-border spaces which are an area of shared cultural heritage,
- f) creation of activities and actions involving the receiver (visitor, tourist) in the interpretation process of the place - using dialogue, joint discussions, games, or narrative tours,
- g) activities aimed at the understanding of the meaning of the visited space by the visitor. All stages of interpretation should aim to develop a dialogue between the space and the visitor; contentious issues should be clarified, and coherent issues reinforced.

The challenges mentioned above mainly concern the organisers of the space and the people (organisations) responsible for shaping it and creating branded cultural tourism products. Of course, some challenges are also faced by the visitor himself, who needs to have an open mind to build intercultural bridges with the space visited.

A survey of a group of more than 200 culturally-motivated tourists showed that perceptions of cultural tourism activities in the place visited are overwhelmingly perceived in the context of regional space rather than supra-regional or, in extreme cases, global space. Some of the most anticipated cultural tourism activities are juxtaposed below with the direction and extent of the perception of their importance for space (Table 1):

**Table 1.** *Experiences of cultural tourism vs. reception range (after survey research)*

No	Cultural tourism activities	local or regional approach	overregional or global approach
1	Experience of gastronomic or wine values	87%	13%
2	Experience of spiritual and religious values	64%	36%
3	Experience of high-cultural values	41%	59%
4	Experience of cross-border cultural space	95%	5%
5	Experience of intangible values	98%	2%

*Source: Own elaboration.*

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The very juxtaposition of the basic forms of cultural tourism experiences shows that a regional (sometimes even local) approach definitely dominates tourists' expectations compared to a global or even supra-regional approach. Only in the case of high culture tourism do audiences relate their experiences to well-known artists (theatre, classical music, or the art of painting) with a global reach. In other cases, there is a strong preference for references to regional space and a deeper knowledge and understanding of its meaning and value.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Cultural tourism, including heritage tourism in its broadest sense, has been a subject of discussion and scientific reflection around the world for many years. Places of particular interest seem to be those where the intermingling of cultures, traditions or - in particular cases - different perceptions of the same shared heritage are observed. Cultural and natural heritage and tourism are inextricably linked.

In many cases they are drivers for the development of the tourism space and are a resource in both social and economic terms. Properly prepared, presented and promoted, elements of a region's heritage increasingly form the core of branded tourism products and determine their main narrative. In recent years, there has been a definite increase in the number of those seeking a regional product that is authentic and much more strongly involved in the process of experiencing, interpreting, and educating.

Not only have the forms and destinations of travel changed, but also the motivations, expectations and needs of tourists themselves. Increasingly, the traditional model of leisure tourism (3S - Sand, Sea, Sun) is being replaced by an engaged and active form of spending time.

Alternatives have become increasingly popular models: 3E (Exploration, Experience, Education) and 3H (New Horizons, Heritage, Hospitality) (Berti and Mariotti, 2015; Duda, 2018). Each of the above models is largely based on a regional approach to experiencing the tourist space, as also indicated by the trend observed in contemporary cultural tourism.

One of the most important interpretative challenges of the cross-border heritage tourism space is therefore to find common points of reference in relation to the region's history and to realise a narrative based on intercultural transmission. Such points will include experiencing the authenticity of the region and its originality compared to other areas.

The organisers of such a regional space still have many challenges and barriers to overcome. The expectations and motivations of tourists to experience the cultural landscape of the visited region largely contribute to the diversity of activities and actions aimed at overcoming these barriers and challenges. Increasingly, huge and

multicultural tourism reception areas are being replaced by regional and local spaces, realising a slow and sustainable experience of place.

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