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Literary tourism and new technologies: The case of travel texts

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Abstract

Cultural tourism is a form of tourism that focuses on experiencing the tangible and intangible heritage of a particular area. It encompasses various creative aspects, including literature, which serves as a means of expressing cultural values, attitudes, and perceptions. By understanding the literature of a place and its people, regions can further develop and promote sustainability. This article explores the potential of utilizing touristic texts as a tool, aided by New Technologies, to create tourist trails that contribute to the sustainability of Crete.

Keywords: Literary tourism; Cultural tourism; Tourists; Crete; Alternative forms of tourism; New Technologies

1. Introduction

1.1. Literary tourism

The World Tourism Council's study in 2017(https://wttc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2017/) encompassed culture, emphasizing the importance of preserving the social and cultural integrity of the destinations visited.

Culture, being recognized as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, plays a vital role in highlighting the distinctiveness that renders a place captivating. In particular, literary tourism emerges from the interplay between authors, the settings they depict, and the characters they create (Fawcett & Cormack ,2001).

The culture of a location is brought to light and understood through the literary pathways, where both intangible and material cultural heritage are showcased. The common thread that links these paths could be the geography, a significant monument, or a specific historical event (Mitoula & al, 2008). Greece's rich history and vibrant culture serve as powerful marketing tools, playing a crucial role in enhancing its tourism industry through unique and alternative experiences (Mc Kercher et Cros, 2015) (Laloumis, 2018). Cultural routes enhance destination appeal by introducing new insights, preserving heritage, and boosting economic growth, while also supporting sustainability efforts (Mitoula & Kaldis, 2018) (Maniou ,2023). It is not a mere coincidence that regions previously unexplored by tourists are now becoming popular tourist destinations due to literary influences. A recent example of this phenomenon can be seen in Italy, where one of the poorest neighborhoods in Naples, the Luzzatti district, gained newfound attention thanks to Elena Ferrante's novel 'L'amica Geniale'. While this area may have been overlooked by tourists in the past, it has now become a source of income for its residents as visitors flock to see the authentic landmarks and settings described in the book, making it a must-visit destination along with other areas mentioned in the famous Tetralogy [Tsatalmpasoglou, 2019)].

An additional example can be seen in the city of Matera, where a single book(Carlo Levi (1945). Cristo si è fermato a Eboli. Torino: Einaudi) had a profound impact by transforming the entire city's way of life and addressing the intolerable

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circumstances faced by its residents. Presently, Matera's lunar-like scenery has garnered significant attention as a prominent tourist spot in southern Italy, having been designated as the cultural capital of Europe in 2019. Furthermore, numerous films have chosen Matera as their filming location [Manola &Tsatalbassoglou ,2021]. Spinalonga, a fortress located in the region of Lasithi, has become a renowned historic site and a favorite among tourists. Its popularity skyrocketed after the release of Victoria Hislop's novel "The Island," which vividly portrays the challenging life of the Hansenics. The book's success led to its adaptation into a television series. Additionally, Hislop's subsequent works, such as 'Cartes Postales from Greece,' and the accompanying series, have inspired numerous tourists to explore the literary trails she has suggested. These literary works have not only attracted visitors to the region but have also contributed to the sustainable development of lesser-known places. [Manola (2019), (Manola et al ,2022)].

Naturally, for the destination to hold appeal, it must fulfill specific criteria pertaining to its quality, ability to evoke emotions, and provision of amenities (Zhang & al, 2014). The combination of culture and tourism presents significant potential for fostering local development, with a primary focus on ensuring the sustainability of the region. It is essential that this partnership is given due importance and is placed high on the list of priorities (Terkenli, & Georgoula, 2022).

Crete is an exceptionally appealing tourist destination in Greece due to its captivating natural beauty and rich historical background. Moreover, the island boasts a remarkable cultural tradition, which further enhances its allure (Fawcett & Mc Cormack ,2001) but it also possesses a remarkably advanced tourist infrastructure.

2. Tourist texts as a 'tool' for tourism development

Greece, because of its strategic location, has always served as a significant point of interest for Italians, particularly during their voyages to the Holy Land, which was the primary destination for early explorers. The Venetians and Genovese, known for their expertise in trade and navigation, greatly profited from this travel trend. Recognizing the importance of Greece, they established it as a crucial logistical hub and a necessary stop along the way. Consequently, various travelers, whether for trade, pilgrimage, scientific exploration, or leisure, were introduced to the region, leaving behind diverse and detailed accounts that piqued the curiosity of future generations. These early explorers from Italian city-states documented their experiences in their records. As Italian interests in Greece grew, the number of travelers solely interested in the Greek region also increased, ultimately making it a popular final destination for many.

The works of explorers constitute a unique genre in literature. These writings encapsulate the personal observations and experiences of the authors during their journeys to different locations.

They can be considered as early travel guides, as they not only describe the events encountered by the authors, but also provide suggestions for routes to readers who are interested. These works are not only captivating to read, but also hold significant value for scholars from various fields due to the wealth of information they offer.

Browsers often play a crucial role in uncovering incidents that are not known to other sources and aiding in the comprehension of events (Simopoulos ,1999). The historical presentations are not merely linear in nature, but rather serve as an indirect means of gathering information about the social, intellectual, and political aspects of the visited locations. These presentations are always viewed through the lens of the traveler's ideology and personality (Tsatalmpasoglou ,Manola ,2024). During the 19th century, travelers directed their attention towards humanity itself, enhancing their writings with both ideological and factual components, rather than solely focusing on the historical landmarks of that era. (Vigopoulou ,2005). These texts serve as valuable resources of both tangible and intangible cultural information. Even in the present day, as some of these texts still exist, they hold the potential to be utilized in the development of cultural routes in Crete. Initially, the island was regarded merely as a source of essential materials for pilgrims, but over time it transformed into a sought-after destination. These texts offer a portrayal of a world abundant in monuments and culture, as evidenced by the detailed drawings and photographs that document the contemporary world for travelers. The collected material can even be used for educational purposes (Vigopoulou ,2005). At present, advancements in computer science have the potential to greatly enhance educational practices through the utilization of IT. This can be applied in numerous ways, including the improvement of metacognition and emotional intelligence. (Bravou & Drigas ,2019). Travel texts are notable for their capacity to bridge the gap between the past and the present, making them an excellent foundation for merging technological advancements with sustainable tourism growth. By charting paths in a voyage of enlightenment and learning, they pave the way for the integration of innovative applications.

3. IT applications

Applying technology to the texts of tour guides has the potential to bring numerous advantages in promoting cultural-literary tourism. Through the use of technology, stakeholders can have an enriched experience. In this context electronic games and virtual reality can be used as a powerful tool both for education and for cultural applications [16-23]. By visually presenting monuments in their present state and contrasting them with the descriptions provided by authors in their works, it could generate curiosity and interest in visiting these sites in the future, particularly for monuments that are not commonly visited or are difficult to access. The incorporation of AI into the educational system aids in fostering interdisciplinary learning and the growth of students' emotional intelligence, while still acknowledging and respecting the pivotal role of teachers in the learning process (Cope et al.,2020). Applications have the potential to extend their functionality beyond information dissemination, education, and entertainment. They can greatly enhance various activities, particularly in the realms of education and culture. This is especially true when these applications are designed for use on mobile devices like smartphones and tablets.

Below are a few examples of applications currently being utilized to promote cultural heritage. Some of these applications are specifically designed for tour guides, while others feature monuments highlighted in tour descriptions:

3.1. EUROPEANA

The Europeana project serves as a digital library providing open access to Europe's cultural heritage. Utilizing the digitized collections, educators(https://www.europeanschoolnetacademy.eu/) can create learning scenarios across various subjects, particularly cultural topics, by connecting museums, libraries, and other institutions with schools and educational programs.
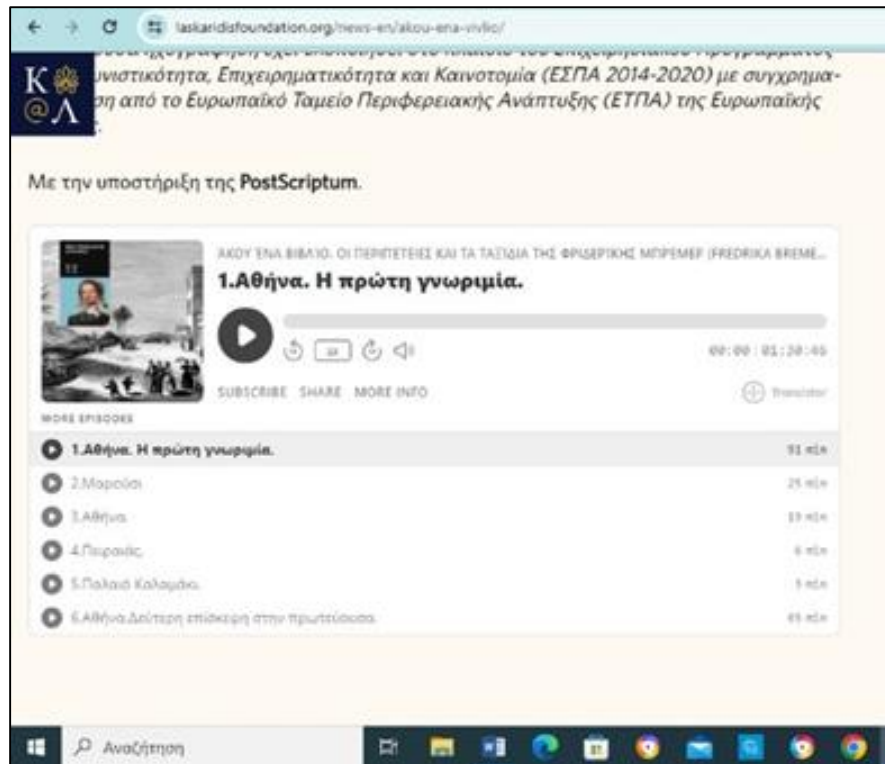
3.2. 3D4DELPHI

The 3D4DELPHI project is an inventive technological application that seeks to showcase monuments. Its main objective is to scientifically document archaeological cases related to the Delphi region. By merging a collection of 3D images captured from both ground and aerial sources, this project serves as "a foundation for creating augmented reality applications"(Using information from the website: https://3d4delphi.gr/). While its primary purpose is to document research hypotheses, it can also be utilized for various other purposes.

3.3. DIGIPAST App.

The DIGIPAST App is a tourism-focused application that aims to enhance the exploration of cultural monuments and archaeological sites in Greece and Spain. Developed by a company that specializes in technology, the app(Website of MOPTIL - https://digi-past.com/about-2/) utilizes 3D Virtual Recreations, Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Through these advanced features, smartphone and tablet users can delve into the rich history of these sites, comparing their current state to what existed in previous eras. The company's website provides detailed information about the platform's development and its capabilities.

3.4. TRAVELLERS MAP / TRAVELTRAILS / TRAVELOGUE and LISTEN TO A BOOK

The Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation(https://www.laskaridisfoundation.org) specializes in cultural matters, particularly those concerning travelers. Recently, it has introduced technological tools like TravellersMap and TravelTrails, which consolidate the journeys of travelers in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Travelogue website brings individuals and locations together, essentially pioneering the amalgamation of nearly all traveler initiatives. The website's diverse applications for searching and engaging with texts make it truly unique. An additional distinctive addition to the Foundation's repertoire is the innovative Listen to a Book feature, where the two-volume work of traveler Fredrika Bremer has been recorded for the first time. The primary goal is to promote her work and, secondarily, to provide enjoyment for those unable to read it. (Image 1)
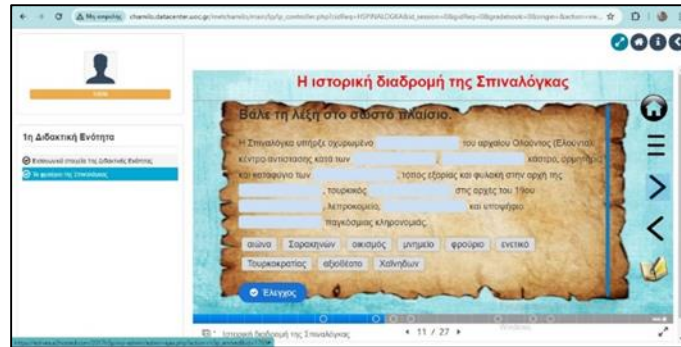
Source: laskaridisfoundation.org

Figure 1 Listen to the sound- Fredrika Bremer

3.5. EDIVEA

The Laboratory of Advanced Learning Technologies in Lifelong and Distance Education (EDIVEA)(https://www.edivea.org/) has developed a highly successful program that integrates education with technology. For years, this program has been instrumental in training teachers through thematic cycles and workshops. As part of their initiatives, postgraduate students from the University of Crete have created 3D digital augmented reality games focusing on sixty-one cultural points of interest in Crete. These games emphasize the human-centered aspect of artificial intelligence applications.

One example is the educational program for the course "Spinaloga", a fortress frequently mentioned in tourist literature. The program aims to provide knowledge about the history of the fortification project across different eras, the identification and classification of these eras based on historical periods, and a deeper understanding of the anthropogeography of the island, particularly during its time as a leprosarium. Special attention is given to exploring the correlation between the isolation experienced by Hanseniasis patients and the recent isolation measures during the coronavirus era. The development of various competencies was linked to group activities that students explored while visiting the island with the help of mobile augmented reality tools and platforms (chamilo), analyzing historical materials, verifying information understanding, and grasping map configurations. Apart from fostering cooperation, cultivating a positive mindset towards preserving cultural heritage and recognizing the value of technology for educational objectives is crucial at the attitudinal level. (Image 2)

Source: chamilo.datacenter.uoc.gr/

Figure 2 Educational Material - Spinaloga

4. Conclusions

Technology has been instrumental in promoting cultural heritage by increasing awareness of monuments, museums, and sites among the general public. Its utilization in education became more prominent during the pandemic. To further enhance its impact, creating alternative educational activities related to cultural themes can be beneficial, especially in less-traveled areas. This approach not only boosts local communities without adverse effects but also supports sustainable development. Additionally, technology allows for virtual visits, making it accessible to individuals with mobility issues and visually impaired individuals, enabling them to learn about historical journeys like Fredrika Bremer's travels in Greece during the Otto era. AI-driven promotion of tourist destinations not only provides valuable information but also offers a comprehensive outlook that respects individuals' preferences and provides diverse options to cater to various educational needs and interests. The feedback shared by travelers serves as a valuable resource where the fusion of tourism, culture, and technology can present fresh perspectives. This can be achieved by highlighting existing attractions on tourists' itineraries and by providing suitable guidance to discover new destinations. The ultimate goal is to enhance the overall quality of life by fostering an understanding of history, facilitating relaxation, promoting nature exploration, and ultimately ensuring enjoyable experiences.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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