



Case Studies of Literary Parks in Italy as Forms of Cultural Entrepreneurship

Fotini Maniou ^{1,*}, Maria Manola ², Ioanna Maniou ³, Papadomanolaki Maria ⁴ and Diannis Ioannis ⁵

¹ Sustainable Urban and Regional Development, Harokopion University of Athens, Greece.

² Department of Tourism Management University of West Attica University of West Attica, Greece.

³ Medical School National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece.

⁴ Department of Graphic Design and Visual Communication University of West Attica (UNIWA), Greece.

⁵ Department of Informatics and Computer Engineering University of West Attica (UNIWA), Greece.

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Abstract

The present study explores the role of literary parks in Italy as a form of cultural and experiential tourism, focusing on their contribution to the tourist experience, cultural identity, and sustainable local development. Literary parks constitute a specific paradigm of cultural valorization of literary heritage, as they combine the natural and cultural landscape with the narrative power of literature. Furthermore, they contribute to the strengthening of the local economy, promote alternative forms of tourism, and reinforce local identity, despite challenges such as seasonality and the need for sustainable management.

Keywords: Cultural tourism; Literary tourism; Literary parks; Italy; Cultural identity; Sustainable development

1. Introduction

Cultural tourism is one of the most important and fastest-growing forms of tourism internationally, as modern travelers increasingly seek experiences connected with the history, art, literature, and cultural identity of a place (Kastenholz & Gronau, 2020). In this context, literary tourism has emerged as a distinct form of alternative tourism, based on the connection of literature with place, memory, and cultural experience (Çevik, 2020). Literature has the ability to transform a place into a cultural symbol, endowing it with a special identity and tourist value (MacLeod et al., 2018). Through the works of writers, places acquire a narrative character and become linked to stories, figures, and cultural representations that attract visitors from different parts of the world (Altun, 2023). In this context, the so-called "Literary Parks" (Parchi Letterari) were created, which are cultural routes and thematic spaces dedicated to authors and literary works associated with specific geographical areas (Gouchan, 2023). Italy is a prime example of a country that systematically utilized its literary heritage to develop alternative forms of cultural tourism (Della Lucia & Segre, 2017). Since the 1990s, Italian literary parks have developed in various regions of the country, linking the work of important creators with the natural and cultural environment of their regions. Through cultural routes, events, narrations, thematic tours, and experiential activities, these parks contribute both to the preservation of cultural memory and to the enhancement of the local economy and tourism (Chiara Carolina, Fanelli & Mozzoni, 2018).

2. Theoretical Framework of Cultural and Literary Tourism

Cultural tourism constitutes one of the most important forms of tourism activity globally and is directly related to visitors' need to experience the cultural heritage, history, traditions, and way of life of a place. According to Richards (1996), cultural tourism involves the movement of individuals to cultural attractions and activities with the aim of

* Corresponding author: Fotini Maniou

acquiring knowledge and experience. The concept of cultural tourism includes both tangible elements of culture, such as monuments, museums, and historical sites, and intangible features, such as literature, art, gastronomy, and local traditions. Over the last decades, forms of tourism have diversified significantly, as modern tourists increasingly seek authentic and experiential experiences. In this context, forms such as creative tourism, experiential tourism, and literary tourism have developed, which are based on the visitor's active interaction with the place and its cultural identity. Cultural tourism contributes significantly to the economic and social development of local communities, as it enhances the visibility of cultural heritage and creates new forms of local entrepreneurship. At the same time, it can act as a means of protecting and promoting the cultural identity of a place. However, excessive tourism development may lead to phenomena of cultural commodification and alteration of the authenticity of the cultural experience, which necessitates the implementation of sustainable tourism development practices (Timothy and Boyd, 2003).

Literary tourism is a special form of cultural tourism and refers to travel activities related to authors, literary works, and places associated with literary creation (Quinteiro & Marques, 2022). Visitors choose to travel to areas that were a source of inspiration for writers or are described within literary works, seeking to experience the space through literary narrative and its symbolic meaning. According to Herbert (2001), literary tourism is connected with visitors' desire to seek authentic experiences and come into contact with the culture and imagination captured within literature. Literary places acquire special value as they transform into cultural symbols that combine reality with literary representation. Examples of literary tourism include authors' homes, literary museums, thematic routes, and literary parks. Tourists are not only interested in visiting a place, but also in the emotional connection with it through literature. The literary narrative functions as an interpretive tool of space and creates a deeper experience of participation and identification. At the same time, literary tourism contributes to the creation of a cultural image and branding for a destination, enhancing its tourist attractiveness (Hoppen, Brown and Fyall, 2014). Despite its positive elements, literary tourism also faces challenges, such as the difficulty of maintaining authenticity and the risk of commodifying literary heritage. In some cases, excessive tourist exploitation can alter the cultural character of a place and limit the meaningful relationship between literature and cultural memory.

Literature is directly linked to space and cultural identity, as writers often draw inspiration from the natural and social environment in which they live and create (Ben-Amos, 2023). Literary places acquire a special symbolic character because, through the works of writers, they are transformed into carriers of history, memory, and culture. The concept of "place identity" refers to the special characteristics that differentiate one place from others and create emotional bonds between space and people. Literature reinforces this process, as it endows the place with a narrative and symbolic dimension. Through literary works, visitors gain the ability to "read" a place differently, connecting the landscape with stories, characters, and cultural references. In the case of literary parks, the connection between literature and place takes on special significance, as natural spaces are transformed into cultural routes of experience and memory. This cultural valorization strengthens local identity and contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage, especially in areas with lesser tourism development.

Experience is a core element of modern tourism, as travelers seek activities that offer participation, emotion, and personal involvement. In the context of literary tourism, the visitor's experience is shaped through narratives, cultural routes, tours, readings of literary texts, and participation in cultural events. Literary parks function as spaces for experiential learning, where the visitor is not limited to a passive role but actively participates in the cultural experience. According to MacCannell (1976), tourists seek authenticity through their travel experiences. This authenticity relates both to the physical space and to the cultural narrative accompanying the destination. In literary parks, the experience is enriched by linking the landscape with literary creation, generating a special form of cultural consumption (Maniou, 2023b).

The useful and constructive role that digital technologies play in the realm of education for entrepreneurship must now be emphasized. To strengthen the field of entrepreneurial education, we must encourage and be inspired by the use of digital technology across all educational areas. We have to be inspired and adopt paradigms like Mobile devices (35), a range of ICTs (36-39), AI & STEM ROBOTICS (40-46), and other technologies and paradigms that enable and enhance educational processes like evaluation, intervention, and instruction, which could be embraced and used in entrepreneurial education. Additionally, the use of ICTs in connection with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, and emotional intelligence development [47-51] speeds up and improves educational practices and results, especially for cultural entrepreneurship.

3. Literary Parks in Italy

Literary parks constitute a special form of cultural management and thematic tourism, which connects literature with physical space and cultural heritage. They are cultural routes and organized spaces created in areas associated with the

life, work, or inspiration of important writers and poets. The creation of literary parks in Italy began in the early 1990s at the initiative of the Italian writer Stanislaw Niewo, who sought to protect and promote areas of special literary significance. The basic idea of the institution was to transform places connected with literature into living cultural experiences, where nature, history, and literature coexist and complement each other. Gradually, literary parks expanded to various Italian regions, gaining a significant role in cultural and tourism development. Italy, due to its rich literary and cultural tradition, provided an ideal ground for developing this form of cultural tourism. Today, Italian literary parks include areas associated with major creators, such as Giacomo Leopardi, Carlo Levi, Eugenio Montale, and Pier Paolo Pasolini. The development of literary parks is also linked to the growing importance of cultural heritage as an element of tourism development. The promotion of literary sites enhances the cultural visibility of areas that are often located off the classic tourist routes, thereby contributing to the diversification of the tourism product and the promotion of alternative forms of tourism.

The institution of literary parks in Italy was created with the aim of connecting literature with the natural and social environment, as well as preserving cultural memory. Stanislaw Niewo envisioned literary parks as spaces of cultural experience, where the visitor could "experience" literature through the landscape, narratives, and cultural activities. Through the works of writers, areas acquire a special symbolic and cultural character, which can be utilized for tourism in a sustainable way. The development of literary parks in Italy was supported by both local authorities and cultural organizations, which recognized the importance of cultural heritage for regional development (Maniou et al., 2025f). Many of the parks were created in rural or less developed tourist areas, strengthening the local economy and promoting forms of mild and sustainable tourism. At the same time, the institution of literary parks was connected with the broader European trend of developing cultural routes and thematic forms of tourism. Cultural routes contribute to the promotion of European cultural heritage and strengthen the interconnection of culture and tourism at a local and international level.

Literature functions as a means of cultural representation of space, as images, emotions, and social realities related to specific places are captured through the works of writers. The natural landscape acquires a symbolic character and is transformed into a carrier of cultural memory and identity. In literary parks, this relationship between literature and landscape is utilized as a core element of the tourist experience. Visitors have the opportunity to wander through areas described in literary works or connected with the lives of writers, experiencing a form of "cultural narration" in real space. This cultural valorization contributes to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. Through events, cultural actions, and educational programs, literary parks strengthen collective memory and promote knowledge of local history and literature. At the same time, they contribute to the strengthening of local identity and the creation of cultural awareness among both residents and visitors. The connection of literature and landscape is also an important tool for tourism promotion and destination branding. Areas acquire a recognizable cultural image, which differentiates the destination and enhances its competitiveness in the field of cultural tourism.

Literary parks in Italy operate as organized networks of cultural routes and activities. Their structure usually includes nature trails, historical buildings, museums, information centers, and spaces for cultural events. Many parks utilize digital applications and interactive media to enhance visitor participation and experience (Liu, 2020). A key functional element of literary parks is connecting the visitor with the literary narrative through experiential activities. Visitors participate in thematic tours, literary text readings, educational programs, and cultural festivals, acquiring a more meaningful relationship with the place and its cultural history. In parallel, literary parks collaborate with local businesses, cultural bodies, and educational institutions, reinforcing local development and creating networks of cultural cooperation. Their operation is not limited solely to tourism but extends to cultural education and awareness.

4. Case Studies of Literary Parks in Italy

Carlo Levi Literary Park – Basilicata: One of the most famous literary parks is the one dedicated to Carlo Levi in the Basilicata region. The park is connected with the work *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, in which the author describes the life and hardships of the rural communities of southern Italy. Through routes, exhibitions, and cultural actions, visitors get to know the rural identity of the area and the social conditions that influenced Levi's work. At the same time, the park promotes forms of mild and sustainable tourism (slow tourism), encouraging a deeper acquaintance with the place and its traditions.

Parco Giacomo Leopardi – Recanati: In the town of Recanati is the park dedicated to Giacomo Leopardi, one of the most important Italian poets. The natural and urban landscape of the town was a source of inspiration for many of his works. Visitors can tour spaces connected with his life and poetry, discovering the close relationship between the literary work and the environment. The park contributes to the preservation of cultural memory and strengthens Recanati's literary identity as a place connected with Leopardi.

Parco Eugenio Montale – Cinque Terre: Eugenio Montale's literary park is located in the Cinque Terre region. The impressive coastline, terraces, and traditional villages characterizing the area significantly influenced Montale's poetry. The park highlights the connection between nature and literary creation, while promoting the value of the cultural landscape that has been recognized by UNESCO. Through walking trails and educational activities, visitors experience the landscape that inspired the poet (Maniou, Mitoula, Manola & Maniou, 2024).

Parco Pier Paolo Pasolini – Ostia: The park dedicated to Pier Paolo Pasolini in the area of Ostia presents a different dimension of literary and cultural tourism. In addition to its literary significance, it highlights Pasolini's cinematic work, as well as the social issues that concerned the creator. The park is an example of urban cultural tourism, where literature is linked to contemporary history, cinema, and social reality.

5. Tourist Demand and Local Development

Literary parks are an important factor in developing special forms of tourism, as they combine culture, literature, and local heritage. They belong mainly to the category of cultural and so-called niche tourism, i.e., tourism addressed to specialized interests and visitors seeking authentic and quality experiences. Through literary routes and cultural activities, the parks contribute to the diversification of tourist destinations. Instead of focusing tourist demand solely on popular cities or coastal areas, visitors are also directed towards smaller destinations possessing special cultural value. Thus, the local economy is strengthened, and new development opportunities are created for less-known areas.

At the same time, literary parks contribute to the extension of the tourist season (Shirmohammadi & Baghi, 2021). Cultural visits do not depend exclusively on weather conditions, allowing for the attraction of visitors throughout the year. Events, festivals, book presentations, and educational programs can be held outside the summer season, reducing the seasonality that characterizes many tourist destinations. Moreover, literary parks frequently attract visitors with a high educational level and a strong interest in culture and history. This particular category of tourists tends to seek authentic experiences, stay longer at the destination, and contribute substantially to the local economy. In parallel, the parks strengthen the cultural branding of the areas, creating a recognizable identity connected with specific writers, works, or cultural features.

The operation of literary parks is closely linked to the principles of sustainable tourism (Rech et al., 2025). Their primary goal is not mass visitor turnout, but the qualitative valorization of cultural and natural resources in a way that protects the local environment and cultural heritage. One of the most significant advantages of literary parks is the preservation and promotion of local identity. Simultaneously, residents are encouraged to actively participate in the preservation and promotion of their cultural heritage. The involvement of the local community is a prerequisite for the success of literary parks (Tang & Xu, 2023). Local bodies, cultural associations, businesses, and producers collaborate to organize events and provide tourism services. In this way, economic benefits are generated that diffuse into the local society and strengthen social cohesion. Furthermore, research on cultural and sustainable tourism in Italy shows that protecting cultural heritage and highlighting authentic experiences increases the attractiveness of destinations and contributes to long-term tourism development.

Despite their significant benefits, literary parks also face several challenges. One of the main problems is their limited international visibility. Many parks are primarily known at a national or regional level and struggle to attract a large number of foreign visitors. Another issue is funding. Maintaining infrastructure, organizing cultural events, and promoting the parks require financial resources, which often depend on public programs, sponsorships, or local initiatives. A lack of stable funding can restrict their development and affect the quality of services provided. Seasonality also remains a major challenge, especially in areas dependent on other forms of tourism. Although literary parks contribute to expanding the tourist season, footfall often remains concentrated in specific periods of the year. Concurrently, there is a risk of excessive commercialization of culture. Efforts to attract more visitors can lead to the simplification or alteration of cultural heritage, resulting in the loss of authenticity in the literary experience. Finally, several researchers point out the risk of the so-called "Disneyfication" of literature, meaning the transformation of complex literary works and cultural narratives into oversimplified tourism products that emphasize entertainment at the expense of their historical and cultural value (Yang et al., 2026). Moreover, measuring the actual footfall and economic impact of literary parks remains difficult, which hinders the evaluation of the effectiveness of relevant policies.

6. Conclusions

Theoretical analysis has shown that literary tourism is a subcategory of cultural tourism, relying on the search for authentic experiences and emotional connection with a place. The visitor's experience is not limited to mere observation but extends to experiential participation and interpreting space through literature. The study of Italian literary parks highlighted that they are important tools for cultural policy and tourism development. Through examples such as the Carlo Levi, Giacomo Leopardi, Eugenio Montale, and Pier Paolo Pasolini parks, it was demonstrated that each region uniquely leverages its literary heritage, creating distinct forms of cultural experience. At the same time, it was found that literary parks contribute to strengthening the local economy, promoting alternative forms of tourism, and preserving cultural identity. However, challenges also emerged, such as the need for sustainable management, limited international visibility, and the risk of commodifying cultural heritage. Overall, literary parks are a successful paradigm of connecting culture and tourism, which can serve as a model for similar initiatives in other countries as well. Their further development can contribute to the dissemination of cultural heritage and the enhancement of sustainable tourism at a European level.

Compliance with ethical standards

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The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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