



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



Literary parks as vehicles for entertainment, learning and experiential experience: The case of Italy

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World Journal of Advanced Engineering Technology and Sciences, 2026, 19(03), 234-241

Publication history: Received on 17 May 2026; revised on 21 June 2026; accepted on 24 June 2026

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjaets.2026.19.3.0335>

Abstract

Literary parks represent an innovative form of cultural tourism that links literary heritage with tourist experience, education and entertainment. This paper examines the role of literary parks in Italy as vehicles of learning, experiential experience and local development. Through the study of Greek and international literature, the key concepts of cultural and literary tourism are analyzed, as well as the contribution of literary parks to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage.

Particular emphasis is placed on Italian literary parks, which draw on the life and work of significant writers and poets, transforming literary landscapes and places of memory into attractive cultural destinations. Characteristic examples of literary parks are presented and their activities are examined, such as thematic routes, educational programs, cultural events and digital applications, which enhance visitor participation and create authentic experiences of learning and entertainment.

The results of the study show that literary parks contribute substantially to the enhancement of cultural tourism, the promotion of local identity and the economic development of the areas in which they operate. At the same time, they promote experiential learning, strengthen the cultural awareness of visitors and create conditions for sustainable tourism development. In conclusion, literary parks in Italy represent successful examples of the utilization of cultural heritage, combining education, entertainment and cultural experience in a comprehensive and modern tourist product.

Keywords: Literary parks; Literary tourism; Cultural tourism; Experiential learning; Cultural heritage; Cultural entrepreneurship; Italy; Local development

1. Introduction

Cultural tourism represents one of the most significant sectors of the modern tourism industry, offering visitors the opportunity to discover the history, traditions and cultural heritage of a destination (Timothy, 2011; Smith, 2016). In recent years, there has been growing interest in special forms of cultural tourism related to literature, art and creative expression (Richards, 2018). In this context, literary parks constitute a particular form of cultural destination, combining the promotion of literary heritage with the experience of travel, learning and cultural discovery.

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Italy possesses a rich literary tradition and a significant number of literary parks dedicated to important writers and poets. These spaces were created with the aim of preserving and promoting cultural heritage, as well as enhancing local development through cultural tourism (Asero and Patti, 2009). Through thematic routes, cultural events and educational programs, literary parks offer visitors the opportunity to discover the life and work of prominent figures in Italian literature.

The aim of the present study is to investigate the role of literary parks in Italy as vehicles for entertainment, learning and experiential experience, as well as their contribution to cultural promotion and local development.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism refers to the movement of individuals with the aim of becoming acquainted with the cultural heritage, arts, traditions and way of life of a destination (Timothy, 2011). This form of tourism includes visits to museums, monuments, archaeological sites, cultural festivals and historic places (Smith, 2016).

According to Richards (2018), contemporary travelers increasingly seek authentic experiences that combine knowledge, participation and entertainment. The transition from passive consumption of cultural goods to experiential participation has led to the development of new forms of cultural tourism, among which literary tourism is included.

Furthermore, cultural tourism contributes significantly to economic development, the protection of cultural heritage and the creation of new employment opportunities in local communities (UNESCO, 2024; OECD, 2020).

2.2. Literary Tourism

Literary tourism constitutes a special form of cultural tourism that develops around places associated with the life, work or inspiration of writers and poets. Visitors seek to discover spaces mentioned in literary works or associated with significant literary figures, transforming the literary text into a motive for travel and cultural exploration (Herbert, 2001; Watson, 2006). This form of tourism is embedded in the broader context of cultural tourism and is connected to the growing search for authentic, creative and experiential experiences among contemporary travelers (Richards and Wilson, 2006).

According to Robinson and Andersen (2002), literature functions as a means of interpreting space and the cultural identity of a place. Reader-visitors are not confined to reading a literary work, but seek to experience the physical and social environment in which it was created. In this way, the place is transformed into a cultural landscape where literary narrative meets historical memory and tourist experience.

The development of literary tourism is directly linked to the concept of experiential learning. According to Kolb (2015), knowledge is acquired more effectively when based on experience and active participation of the individual. In this context, visitors to literary sites participate in thematic guided tours, cultural routes, text readings, educational workshops and other activities that enhance understanding of literary creation and cultural heritage.

Furthermore, literature can serve as a significant factor in shaping the image of a destination. Hoppen, Brown and Fyall (2014) argue that literary tourism contributes to the differentiation of the tourist product, creating new opportunities for the promotion and development of destinations that are often situated outside traditional tourist routes. Linking a place with a famous writer or literary work can enhance its recognition and attractiveness at both national and international level.

Also significant is the contribution of literary tourism to cultural entrepreneurship. The utilization of literary heritage through cultural routes, festivals, themed parks, museums and educational activities creates new possibilities for economic development and cultural innovation. Cultural entrepreneurship is based on the exploitation of cultural resources in a manner that generates social, cultural and economic value for local communities (Maniou, 2023a; Maniou, 2023b).

International experience demonstrates that literary destinations can function as cores of sustainable development. Manola and Balerbas (2020) highlight the case of Veneto, where travel literature and literary routes contribute to the shaping of experiences that combine knowledge, culture and tourism. Similarly, Manola and Trikalitis (2020) argue that

experiential cultural routes reinforce the connection of visitors with cultural heritage, creating conditions for meaningful participation and learning.

The visitor experience constitutes a fundamental element of literary tourism. Pine and Gilmore (2019) note that in the contemporary “experience economy”, visitors seek activities that create emotional engagement and personal memories. Correspondingly, Manola (2020) underlines that personal experiences play a decisive role in shaping tourist behavior and in the overall assessment of the travel experience.

Furthermore, literary events and festivals constitute important mechanisms for strengthening literary tourism. According to Maniou and Mitoula (2025), literary festivals can contribute both to local development and to the sustainability of destinations, while Maniou et al. (2025) note that literary parks in Europe represent models of cultural entrepreneurship and innovative forms of cultural tourism. In parallel, Maniou et al. (2024) highlight the importance of Italian literary parks as instruments of cultural promotion and local development, with the Eugenio Montale Park in Milan serving as a characteristic example.

Overall, literary tourism constitutes a dynamically developing form of cultural tourism that combines literature, education, entertainment and local development. Through experiential experiences, cultural routes and cultural entrepreneurship activities, it contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage, the strengthening of local identity and the creation of a differentiated and sustainable tourist product.

3. Literary Parks in Italy

3.1. Definition and Historical Development

Literary parks are thematic cultural spaces developed in areas associated with significant literary figures. Their aim is to highlight the relationship between literature, landscape and cultural identity (Asero and Patti, 2009).

Their development in Italy began during the 1990s, when the need to protect and utilize areas of particular literary significance was recognized. Literary parks connect the natural environment with literary narrative, transforming space into a field of cultural experience (Treccani, 2023).

Today they operate as cultural networks combining guided tours, educational programs, cultural events and thematic routes, contributing to tourist development and the preservation of cultural heritage (Asero and Patti, 2009).

3.2. Examples of Literary Parks

Among the most significant literary parks in Italy is the Parco Letterario Francesco Petrarca in Veneto, dedicated to Francesco Petrarch. The park offers routes that connect visitors with the natural and cultural environment that inspired the poet (Treccani, 2023).

Equally important is the Parco Letterario Carlo Levi in Basilicata, which highlights the places connected with the author's work “Christ Stopped at Eboli” and contributes to the promotion of local history and cultural identity (Asero and Patti, 2009).

Similar initiatives have been developed around writers such as Giovanni Verga, Gabriele D'Annunzio and Giacomo Leopardi, offering experiences that combine literature with natural landscape, architecture and history.

4. Literary Parks as Vehicles for Entertainment, Learning and Experiential Experience

One of the most important characteristics of literary parks is their capacity to combine entertainment with learning. Visitors participate in thematic guided tours, narrations, cultural festivals, theatrical performances and literary readings, which transform literature into a living and engaging experience (Richards and Wilson, 2006).

At the same time, literary parks function as spaces of experiential learning. According to experiential learning theory, knowledge is acquired more effectively when connected with personal experiences and active participation (Kolb, 2015). Visitors do not remain passive recipients of information, but participate actively in the discovery of the cultural landscape.

The experiential dimension is reinforced by the connection of literature with place. Visitors walk along routes described in the authors' works, observe landscapes that served as sources of inspiration and gain a deeper understanding of the cultural environment in which the literary works were created (Herbert, 2001).

Furthermore, literary parks possess significant educational value. Schools, universities and research bodies utilize these spaces as outdoor learning laboratories. Through educational programs, creative writing workshops and interactive activities, a love of reading and cultural literacy among participants is fostered (Falk and Dierking, 2016).

5. Visitor Experience and Tourist Demand

The visitor experience constitutes a key factor in the success of literary parks. According to the "experience economy" approach, contemporary consumers seek experiences that create emotional engagement and personal meaning (Pine and Gilmore, 2019).

Visitors to literary parks seek authentic cultural experiences that combine knowledge, entertainment and contact with the local community. This authenticity enhances visitor satisfaction and contributes to the creation of a positive image of the destination (Urry and Larsen, 2011).

The growing use of social networks has also contributed to the dissemination of literary destinations, as visitors share experiences and images, enhancing the recognition of the areas (Richards, 2021).

6. Contribution to Local Development

Literary parks contribute significantly to local development, attracting visitors, strengthening local businesses and creating new employment opportunities (OECD, 2020).

Their contribution is particularly significant for small and rural areas that do not possess strong tourist visibility. Through the exploitation of literary heritage, these areas gain a competitive advantage and differentiate their tourist product (Asero and Patti, 2009).

Furthermore, literary parks contribute to the preservation of collective memory, the safeguarding of cultural identity and the strengthening of social cohesion through the participation of local communities in cultural activities (UNESCO, 2024).

6.1. Literary Parks, Cultural Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development

In recent years, the concept of cultural entrepreneurship has acquired particular significance in international literature, as it is associated with the utilization of cultural heritage to strengthen local development, employment and the sustainability of cultural resources (Maniou, 2023a; Maniou, 2023b). In this context, literary parks can be regarded as innovative models of cultural entrepreneurship, transforming literary heritage into a cultural and tourist product with significant social and economic ramifications.

Cultural entrepreneurship is not confined to the economic exploitation of cultural resources, but includes the creation of cultural value, the protection of cultural identity and the enhancement of the participation of local communities (Maniou et al., 2024a). In the case of literary parks, the connection of literature with the natural environment, local history and cultural memory creates new development possibilities, particularly in areas that do not possess strong tourist visibility.

International research emphasizes that cultural resources can constitute a fundamental driver of sustainable development, when exploited through comprehensive strategies combining culture, tourism and innovation (Maniou et al., 2024b; Maniou et al., 2024c). Literary parks represent a characteristic example of this approach, offering cultural experiences that combine entertainment, learning and the experiential participation of visitors.

Particularly significant is the role of new technologies in the development of cultural entrepreneurship. The exploitation of digital applications, virtual guided tours, interactive maps and social networking tools can significantly enhance the visibility and attractiveness of literary parks (Maniou et al., 2024d). Technological innovation contributes to the improvement of visitor experience and creates new possibilities of access to literary and cultural heritage.

Moreover, the connection of literary parks with other forms of cultural entrepreneurship, such as literary festivals, cultural routes and thematic events, reinforces their contribution to local development. According to Maniou and Mitoula (2025), literary festivals can function as mechanisms for strengthening the local economy and sustainable development, attracting visitors, promoting the cultural identity of areas and creating opportunities for cooperation between cultural bodies and local businesses.

Of particular interest is the study by Maniou, Mitoula, Manola and Maniou (2024), which examines the literary park of Eugenio Montale in Milan as a form of cultural entrepreneurship. The researchers note that the park contributes not only to the preservation of the literary heritage of the Nobel Prize-winning poet, but also to the tourist development of the area, attracting visitors with cultural interests and strengthening the local economy.

Furthermore, European experience demonstrates that literary parks can function as integrated entrepreneurial models of cultural tourism. According to Maniou et al. (2025f), literary parks in Europe effectively combine cultural management, education, local development and tourist promotion, creating a multidimensional product that meets the demands of the contemporary traveler.

Finally, the contribution of literary parks is not limited solely to economic development. As Maniou, Manola, Maniou and Pagkalos (2025) note, cultural activities connected with literature and festivals contribute to the improvement of quality of life, the enhancement of mental wellbeing and the creation of stronger bonds between citizens and their cultural heritage. Consequently, literary parks can be regarded not only as tourist destinations but also as spaces of cultural creation, social cohesion and sustainable development.

Overall, cultural entrepreneurship offers a particularly useful theoretical framework for understanding the operation of literary parks. Through the connection of culture, tourism, innovation and local development, literary parks emerge as significant vehicles for entertainment, learning and experiential experience, while simultaneously contributing to the sustainable development of the areas in which they operate.

The constructive role of digital technologies in entrepreneurship education must be emphasized. To strengthen this field, we must encourage digital integration across all educational areas. We should adopt paradigms like mobile devices [31], diverse ICTs [32-35], and AI & STEM Robotics [36-42] to enhance core educational processes like evaluation, intervention, and instruction. Furthermore, connecting these ICT tools with models of metacognition, mindfulness, and emotional intelligence development [43-46] accelerates and optimizes educational practices. This holistic approach yields significant results, particularly for cultural entrepreneurship, where psychological resilience and empathy are essential for success.

7. Conclusions

Literary parks constitute contemporary cultural spaces that combine entertainment, learning and experiential experience. The case of Italy demonstrates that the utilization of literary heritage can contribute both to cultural promotion and to the tourist and economic development of local communities.

Through the connection of literature with landscape, history and local culture, literary parks offer authentic experiences that meet the demands of contemporary cultural tourism. At the same time, they function as spaces of education and cultural participation, contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage and the strengthening of local identity.

The further development of literary parks, combined with the exploitation of new technologies and the participation of local communities, can constitute a significant factor of sustainable cultural and tourist development in the future.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

The Authors would like to thank the SPECIALIZATION IN ICTs AND SPECIAL EDUCATION: PSYCHOPEDAGOGY OF INCLUSION Postgraduate studies Team, for their support.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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