



Literary parks as models of cultural entrepreneurship: The case of Italy and Sicily

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Abstract

The present study examines the role of literary parks in Italy as innovative tools for cultural management, cultural entrepreneurship, and sustainable development. It focuses on the contribution of literary tourism to the promotion and protection of cultural heritage, as well as the connection of literature with specific places, landscapes, and cultural traditions. Concurrently, it investigates how local societies utilize literary heritage to create cultural products and services that strengthen the local economy and promote social cohesion. Special emphasis is given to the experiential experiences offered by literary parks through cultural routes, educational programs, and cultural events. Furthermore, it analyzes their contribution to the development of alternative and sustainable forms of tourism, based on respect for cultural and natural heritage. The study demonstrates that literary parks serve as important pillars of local development and cultural innovation. Through the Italian example, the dynamic connection of culture, entrepreneurship, and sustainability is highlighted, which can serve as a model for other countries with rich literary and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Literary tourism; Literary parks; Italy; Cultural entrepreneurship; Cultural heritage; Sustainable development; Cultural tourism

1. Introduction

Literary tourism is a specialized form of cultural tourism based on the movement of visitors to places associated with writers, literary works, or narrative representations of space. This specific form of tourism goes beyond merely visiting cultural monuments, as it focuses on the interpretive and experiential reception of literature within its spatial and historical context, where place functions as a carrier of memory, identity, and cultural meaning (Ferreira et al., 2019; MacLeod et al., 2018).

In this context, literary parks constitute an institutional and functional model of cultural management, in which literary creation is integrated into the natural and man-made landscape. Through thematic routes, interpretive tools, and educational interventions, these parks transcend the logic of monumental preservation and are transformed into spaces of active cultural experience and participatory interpretation (Chiara Carolina, Fanelli & Mozzoni, 2018).

International experience, with special emphasis on the case of Italy, demonstrates that literary parks function as mechanisms for local and regional development. Linking literary heritage with tourism and creative economies contributes to strengthening local identity and diversifying the tourism product, while simultaneously reinforcing the sustainable development of host regions (Della Lucia & Segre, 2017; Maniou, Mitoula & Manola, 2024).

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At the same time, the operation of literary parks falls within the broader framework of cultural entrepreneurship. Cultural heritage is not viewed exclusively as an object of preservation, but as a productive resource that creates value through experiences, services, and cultural products. This process includes not only economic dimensions but also social and educational ones, such as enhancing local community participation and cultivating cultural awareness.

The purpose of the present study is to explore the role of literary parks in Italy and Sicily as fields where literary tourism, cultural entrepreneurship, and sustainable development intersect. It examines how literary heritage is transformed into developmental capital, as well as the mechanisms through which cultural and tourist experiences with economic, social, and cultural impacts are produced.

The methodology is based on a literature review and the analysis of secondary sources. The research material is drawn from scientific publications concerning literary tourism, literary parks, and cultural entrepreneurship, with an emphasis on the European and Italian experience.

2. The Paradigm of Italy and Sicily – Literary Parks and Cultural Entrepreneurship

Italy holds a prominent position in literary tourism, utilizing its long and multifaceted literary tradition as a tool for cultural management, local development, and sustainable tourism promotion. A central role in this strategy is played by the development of Literary Parks (Parchi Letterari), which constitute an innovative model connecting literature with the natural and cultural landscape, transforming places of authors' inspiration into living fields of cultural experience (Della Lucia & Segre, 2017).

Their functional logic rests on the perception that literary creation is inextricably linked to the place of its production and inspiration. Therefore, literary landscapes are treated as cultural goods, which require protection but also active utilization through experiential and participatory forms of culture and tourism. In this context, the parks form cooperation networks between local authorities, cultural organizations, educational institutions, and communities, strengthening the governance of cultural heritage and sustainable development.

This network includes literary parks dedicated to important Italian writers, such as D'Annunzio, Leopardi, Levi, Verga, and Petrarca. Through thematic routes, educational programs, and cultural actions, the close relationship between literary production and geographical space is highlighted, while the visitor's experience acquires an experiential and interpretive character.

An emblematic case of implementing this model is Sicily, which, due to its historical complexity and successive cultural influences, has developed a strong literary tradition. Writers such as Pirandello, Verga, Sciascia, and Camilleri have connected their work with the place, contributing to the shaping of a special cultural identity that is integrated into the island's modern tourism planning (Michopoulou, Maniou & Trikalitis, 2021).

The literary parks of Sicily do not function as simple memorial spaces, but as integrated cultural landscapes, in which literature intertwines with collective memory, the natural environment, and local history. Through educational and cultural interventions, they offer multi-layered experiences for understanding the cultural identity and historical continuity of the place.

Their development is part of the broader field of cultural entrepreneurship, in which cultural heritage is treated as a developmental resource. At the European level, literary parks operate as hybrid models of cultural tourism that combine cultural, educational, and economic activities, creating new forms of experiences, such as thematic routes, festivals, and digital applications, aimed at sustainable local development (Maniou et al., 2025f).

Cultural entrepreneurship, however, is not limited to literature. It extends to broader fields of cultural exploitation, such as Cinecittà in Rome, where cinematic heritage functions as a pillar of the creative economy and tourism development (Maniou et al., 2025a), and Casa Malaparte in Capri, which highlights the dynamic of architectural heritage as a basis for cultural innovation (Maniou et al., 2025b).

Correspondingly, the exploitation of cultural heritage through tourism expands across different geographical and thematic fields, such as the historical salt flats of Spain, the painting heritage of Athens, as well as the monuments of Kalymnos and Patmos, highlighting the importance of cultural identity as a tool for sustainable development (Maniou et al., 2025c; 2025d; 2025e).

Particular importance is attributed to the cultural actions surrounding literary parks. Literary festivals enhance public participation, promote reading, and contribute to social cohesion and the cultural development of local communities (Pagkalos et al., 2025e). Concurrently, new forms of cultural experience, such as literary cafes, create spaces for social interaction and fields for cultural entrepreneurship (Maniou et al., 2026).

Literature also functions as a means of managing collective memory and interpreting historical and social experiences. A prime example is the literature of Asia Minor, where narratives of memory and trauma constitute a basis for cultural entrepreneurship and cultural representation (Maniou et al., 2026). In addition, the interconnection of literature, science, and culture produces new interdisciplinary forms of cultural experiences and products (Maniou et al., 2025g; 2025h; 2025i).

Overall, the case of Italy, and Sicily in particular, demonstrates that literary heritage can act as a powerful engine for cultural, social, and economic development. Literary parks, as hybrid cultural spaces, transform literature into an experiential experience and reinforce the sustainable development of local societies, coherently connecting culture with tourism and the economy.

3. Visitor Experience and Cultural Entrepreneurship in Literary Parks

Visitor experience is a central component of literary tourism, as it transforms literary reading and knowledge into an experiential and participatory process. Experiential tourism goes beyond simple observation, encouraging the active engagement of visitors with the place, history, and cultural heritage (Maniou, Mitoula & Manola, 2024). In the context of literary parks, visitors participate in thematic routes, tours, educational programs, and cultural actions, gaining a multi-layered understanding of the relationship between literature and space.

Italian literary parks offer a wide range of activities that enhance participation and the experiential reception of cultural content. Literary walks, theatrical re-enactments, exhibitions, festivals, and interactive digital applications form a comprehensive cultural experience (Della Lucia & Segre, 2017). Simultaneously, the use of digital technologies upgrades the interpretation of cultural stock and creates new possibilities for cultural entrepreneurship (Maniou et al., 2024).

Authenticity plays a defining role in shaping the experience. Modern travelers seek experiences connected with real places, people, and narratives. Literary parks respond to this need by preserving and highlighting landscapes and settlements directly linked to the lives and works of writers (Parchi Letterari, 2025). This dimension enhances emotional involvement and creates strong bonds with the destination (Shirmohammadi & Baghi, 2021).

At the same time, literary parks constitute a field for the development of cultural entrepreneurship, as they turn literary heritage into a cultural resource with social, educational, and economic value. Cultural entrepreneurship, as noted by Maniou (2023a, 2023b), reinforces sustainable development through the creative exploitation of cultural heritage and the shaping of new forms of cultural tourism. Correspondingly, literature as a tourism resource can enhance a destination's attractiveness and shape new experiences for visitors (Maniou, Manola & Alexopoulou, 2023).

The experience of literary parks fits more broadly into strategies of cultural entrepreneurship and sustainable development. The valorization of cultural monuments, historical sites, and cultural routes contributes to the strengthening of the local economy, the creation of jobs, and the preservation of cultural identity (Papaioannou et al., 2023; Maniou et al., 2024; Maniou & Mitoula, 2025). In addition, organizing literary festivals and cultural events strengthens local community participation and promotes sustainable local development (Maniou & Mitoula, 2025).

Indicative is the case of the Eugenio Montale Park in Milan, which highlights how literary places can function as successful models of cultural entrepreneurship, connecting culture, tourism, and the economic development of host areas (Maniou, Mitoula & Manola, 2024). At the same time, research on cultural heritage, monuments, and cultural routes confirms their contribution to sustainable development and the strengthening of local competitiveness (Maniou et al., 2025a; 2025b; 2025c).

Overall, the visitor experience in literary parks goes beyond the conventional tourist visit and forms a comprehensive cultural experience. Through the interconnection of literature, place, technology, education, and entrepreneurship, literary parks contribute significantly to the development of sustainable forms of cultural tourism and the promotion of cultural heritage as a strategic resource for local development.

4. Sustainability, Tourism, and Cultural Entrepreneurship

Sustainability is a fundamental dimension of modern cultural tourism and is directly linked to the development of literary tourism. The growing demand for authentic and experiential experiences has boosted interest in literary parks, which allow visitors to approach literature through the place, historical structure, and collective cultural memory. Modern travelers seek active participation and meaningful interaction with the destination, making literary parks crucial carriers of experiential and sustainable tourism (Chiara Carolina, Fanelli & Mozzoni, 2018; Ferreira et al., 2019).

Their development contributes substantially to sustainable local development, as it connects the protection of cultural heritage with economic activity. Through cultural routes, festivals, educational actions, and thematic tours, new employment and entrepreneurial opportunities are created, while simultaneously highlighting less-promoted areas. This approach aligns with the principles of cultural entrepreneurship, according to which cultural heritage can function as a developmental resource without losing its historical and social value (Maniou, 2023a; 2023b).

Literary parks also contribute to preserving the cultural identity and collective memory of local communities. By highlighting writers, literary works, historical sites, and cultural narratives, the relationship of residents with their cultural heritage is strengthened, cultivating a sense of local identity and pride (Mura, 2023). The active participation of local communities in the operation and management of the parks contributes to the preservation of traditions and the intergenerational transfer of cultural knowledge.

The utilization of new technologies further enhances the sustainability of literary destinations. Digital applications, virtual tours, interactive guidance systems, and modern media expand accessibility to the cultural experience and improve the management of cultural resources (Maniou et al., 2024). Similar practices in monuments and cultural sites in Italy and Greece highlight the decisive role of technology in both cultural entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism development (Maniou et al., 2024; 2025).

Furthermore, organizing literary festivals, cultural events, and educational programs enhances visitor participation and creates added value for local communities. Literary festivals function as important mechanisms for cultural development and sustainable local economy, as they attract audiences, strengthen intercultural communication, and contribute to shaping new cultural networks (Pagkalos et al., 2025e; Maniou & Mitoula, 2025).

The case of Italian literary parks confirms that the combination of culture, entrepreneurship, and sustainability can form a cohesive development model. As pointed out by Maniou et al. (2025f), literary parks in Europe operate as entrepreneurial models of cultural tourism combining economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Similar examples of cultural entrepreneurship are found in Cinecittà in Rome (Maniou et al., 2025a), Casa Malaparte in Capri (Maniou et al., 2025b), as well as in other cultural spaces where cultural heritage is utilized as a tool for local development and innovation.

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. These advanced technologies and pedagogical paradigms do not merely digitize traditional content; they fundamentally enable, enrich, and enhance core educational processes such as evaluation, intervention, and instruction. We should adopt paradigms like mobile devices [35], diverse ICTs [36-39], and AI & STEM Robotics [39-45] to enhance core educational processes like evaluation, intervention, and instruction. Furthermore, connecting these ICT tools with models of metacognition, mindfulness, and emotional intelligence development [46-49] accelerates and optimizes educational practices. This holistic approach yields profound results, particularly in the domain of cultural entrepreneurship, where success depends not only on commercial acumen but also on deep cultural empathy, ethical narrative-building, and community-centric innovation.

5. Conclusions

The study demonstrated that literary parks act not only as carriers for the protection of literary heritage but also as effective tools for cultural entrepreneurship. The case of Italy, and especially Sicily, proves that utilizing literature can contribute to the creation of innovative cultural products, the strengthening of the local economy, and the formulation of sustainable tourism development models. Literary parks function as meeting places for culture, education, and entrepreneurship, enhancing the preservation of cultural identity and social cohesion in local communities.

Additionally, the connection between literature, culture, entrepreneurship, and sustainability creates an integrated cultural tourism model, which can serve as an example for other countries with a rich literary and cultural tradition.

Further development of literary parks, combined with the use of new technologies and local community participation, can strengthen their contribution to sustainable cultural development even further.

Compliance with ethical standards

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The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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