

CULTURAL NARRATIVES AND TOURISM MOBILIZATION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF LITERARY TOURISM THROUGH ITALIAN TRAVELOGUES ABOUT CRETE

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Abstract: This article examines the role of cultural narratives in shaping and reinforcing tourist motivation, with a focus on literary tourism and, more specifically, Italian travelogues texts referring to Crete. It analyses how literature, combined with cinema, television productions and other narrative media, contributes to the construction of symbolic representations of the destination and influences travel decisions. The empirical research is based on a sample of 300 British tourists who visited Crete and explores the degree of influence of narrative frameworks on tourist behavior and motivations for visiting. British visitors were selected due to their long-standing tradition and familiarity with literary and film-induced tourism, making their perceptions particularly relevant for assessing the impact of narrative forms, including Italian travelogues. The results show that cultural and literary narratives are powerful factors of attraction, reinforcing the search for authentic, lived and meaningful experiences. The majority of participants reported being familiar with the concept of “literary tourism” and recognized its decisive influence on their choices and behavior, while almost all expressed a willingness to organize trips to destinations linked to writers, literary works or audiovisual productions. In this context, Crete appears not only as a well-established tourist destination, but also as a multidimensional cultural and literary location, where travelogues could be transformed into experiences and symbolic capital for sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Cultural Narratives, literary Tourism, sustainable tourism Italian travelogues, Crete, British visitors

1 Introduction

Literary tourism refers to visiting places related to writers, books and the broader literature heritage, highlighting the social and cultural connections of the place visited, [1]. In the same context, film induced tourism describes visits to locations associated to films, tv series or content on streaming platforms. Both forms are included in the same broader framework, when storytelling is forming an

expected experience for visitors who seek to visit and engage with locations mentioned and described in narratives. Visitors seek to reproduce scenes and fragments of literary works, or other digital narratives, and to 'read' the destination through such cultural products that have already formed a perception of the place visited and its imaginary characters lived there, [2], [3].

At the same time, such travel narratives whether historical or contemporary - may work as tools to highlight cultural heritage and create themed trails, connecting natural environment, historical monuments and other intangible cultural elements of the place visited. For destinations, such as Crete, travel narratives may be an additional opportunity to highlight local products, as well as soft cultural elements, emphasizing local culture and enforcing cultural entrepreneurship, [4], [5].

This paper is a study that focuses on travel narratives, in relation to Crete. The research focuses on a sample of 300 tourists from Great Britain, who have visited Crete and analyzes their connection -if any- with travel narratives making their perspectives relevant for understanding how narrative frameworks-including references to Italian travelogues-shape travel motivations and perceptions.

2 Problem Formulation

Literary tourism is framed under the broader umbrella of cultural tourism, and relates to traveling practices that are motivated by the connection between a place and literature, [6]. A relationship that is formed by authors who have lived in a place, works written somewhere, scenes described in narratives, libraries, museums, cultural events and festivals or even thematic routes. The core of this idea is that place is not just a geographical area to visit, but a location carries symbols, senses and messages which are activated through the narrative story in the visitor's memory, [7].

Main idea in this theoretical framework is that the narrative is a mechanism producing importance, and bringing meanings and assigns significance to the places in relevance, [8], [9]. Narratives organize experiences, create expectations, give identity to people and places, and offer unique content to

understand the place visited. Thus, the journey may also act as the continuation of a story. The visitor seeks the presence of heroes' traces, to follow them, reproduce images and scenes coming up from the narratives and / or construct new personal narratives in the same place, [10].

The theory of experiences in tourism shift the focus from the product itself (: what is offered) to the feelings experienced (how is experienced), [11], [12]. In this framework the destination is not just infrastructure, facilities and sightseeing, but a scene where the traveler / visitor has an active role: s/he feels, remembers, interprets and gets moved. Literary tourism enhances the visitor's experiences, through an existing background emotional bond, between visitor and the narrative, [13], [14], [15].

A significant point in this theory is the authentic identity of visitor's experience. In literary and narrative tourism, authenticity does not always imply correspondence with the historical truth, but rather to the feeling of truth as experienced by the visitor, [16]. A place may be considered authentic because it fits with the picture in visitor's mind and imagination as it already exists. A picture that is somehow built through a book, a movie or even a tv show, even if it is far away from historical reality, [17], [18], [19].

At the same time, the approach to creating such a picture for the place expected to visit, explains how people form conceptions before even traveling to some place. The picture is formed by personal elements (former experiences, social environment, prejudices), structured sources (marketing materials, advertising campaigns) or autonomous sources (mass media, movies, books, digital social networks). Narratives are autonomous sources of high influence, as they are not interpreted as 'ads', and so they usually have greater persuasion, [20], [21].

Closely linked is the concept of tourism being influenced by film/TV-induced means, where movies, series and documentaries reform destinations and give them new meaning, [22], [23]. Visualization of a place feeds the desire to visit it, as it provides specific images, and ways of life. Contrary to literature, which gives space to imagination, visual media often define specific expectations, [24], [25].

The theory of the identity of a place and 'place branding' helps us better understand how destinations try to differentiate from other competitive places, [26]. The identity of a place consists of material

elements (landscapes, architecture, monuments) and intangible elements (customs, music, gastronomy, language, daily practices). Narrative strategies may connect these distinct elements, creating a new, unified story, for a visitor to remember, reproduce and seek to experience once more, [27], [28].

In this same field, the distinction between tangible and intangible cultural heritage is also included. While monuments and landscapes are offered for direct 'consumption', intangible cultural heritage often requires participation and interpretation through all human senses: tastes, sounds, rituals, social relationships. Theoretically, intangible heritage can be more attractive when it is embedded in narratives that explain it, and put it in a proper interpretative frame, thus closing the gap between traveler and local culture, [29], [30], [31].

Traveler's behavior can be interpreted through models of intentions and decision-making, where attitudes, social rules and the practical factors (time to travel, costs and accessibility) often affect travel decisions, [32]. Narratives are often stimuli that raise interest, reinforce positive attitudes and create the useful expected added value, [33], [34]. However, the transition from inspiration to the actual visit, involves several practicalities and is related with the way that the location incorporates and integrates narratives into specific, organized activities, [35], [36].

Finally, critical is also the participatory culture concept and digital storytelling. Visitors are not just consumers of narratives, but also reproducers of their own narratives through digital media channels. They post messages, share pictures and videos as well as and communicate their personal stories and feelings. So, destination's narrative becomes a dynamic content, influencing new travelers, in a repetitive process. In a similar way, in earlier periods, travel narratives functioned as early forms of travel guides, shaping expectations and proposing ways of reading and experiencing places before the journey. A modern theoretical framework about literary/narrative tourism needs to include the dynamic interaction between text, pictures and experiences, as well as the participatory creation of new meanings, linking people with destinations, [37], [38], [39], [40], [41], [1]24].

3 Problem Solution

3.1 Methodology

For this research a convenience sampling approach was implemented. 300 questionnaires were fully submitted, by travelers who visited Crete, originated from United Kingdom. Data were collected from 20/6 to 10/7/2024. The questionnaires were distributed at the two main airports of Crete to departing visitors. During the completion of the questionnaire, participants were provided with a one-page visual sheet including photographs and maps from Basilicata and visual material based on the documentation of Gerola, in order to ensure a common visual reference to the subject of the study and facilitate the understanding of the questions. The use of this visual material aimed to provide a shared interpretative context, allowing respondents to better engage with the concept of travel narratives and, more specifically, with references to Italian travelogues.

The questionnaire includes twenty five quantitative closed-end questions related to their knowledge and experience in literary tourism, if they know the term, if they have ever before visited places where authors had lived, or places that are mentioned in books or movies. In addition, the questionnaire explores visitors' understanding of travel writing, the ways in which they interpret the sources from which they obtain information and motivation (eg. Media, books, digital platforms). It also examines their intention to visit places associated with narratives to which they have been exposed during the research. All items were structured using simple categorical and Likert-type response formats, allowing for the descriptive analysis of attitudes, perceptions and behavioral intentions; The use of convenience sampling is acknowledged as a limitation; however, it is considered appropriate for an exploratory approach aiming to capture initial insights into the relationship between narratives and tourist behavior.

The sample consists of 300 replies from citizens visiting Crete, originated from the United Kingdom. 156 of them were men, and 144 were women, indicating a balanced gender distribution. Almost half of them (142), were visiting Crete for 5-10 days, 69 for less than 5 days and 89 visited Crete for 11-15

days. 290 visited Crete for vacation, 4 visitors for conferences and 6 of them exclusively for literary tourism. More than half (157 replies) are people from 18 to 25 years old, 37 people from 26 to 35, 95 people from 36 to 50 and 11 people from 51 to 65 years old. 11 people have completed mandatory education, 131 have a secondary school degree, 14 a technical education degree, 119 college graduates, 18 people with master's degree and 7 PhDs. Finally, 148 people have an annual income of 15,001-25,000 euros, 28 people with annual income of 25,001-35,000 euros, 120 people with annual income of 35,001-55,000 euros, and 4 people with an annual income of more than 55,001 euros.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics.

	N	%
Men	156	52
Women	142	47
Days visiting Crete		
0-4	69	23
5-10	142	47
11-15	89	30
Reason for visiting Crete		
vacation	290	97
conferences	4	1
literary tourism	6	2
Age Group		
18-25	157	52
26-35	37	12
36-50	95	32
51-65	11	4
66+	0	0
Education level		

mandatory education	11	4
a secondary school degree	131	44
a technical school degree	14	5
college degree	119	40
master's degree	18	6
PhDs	7	2

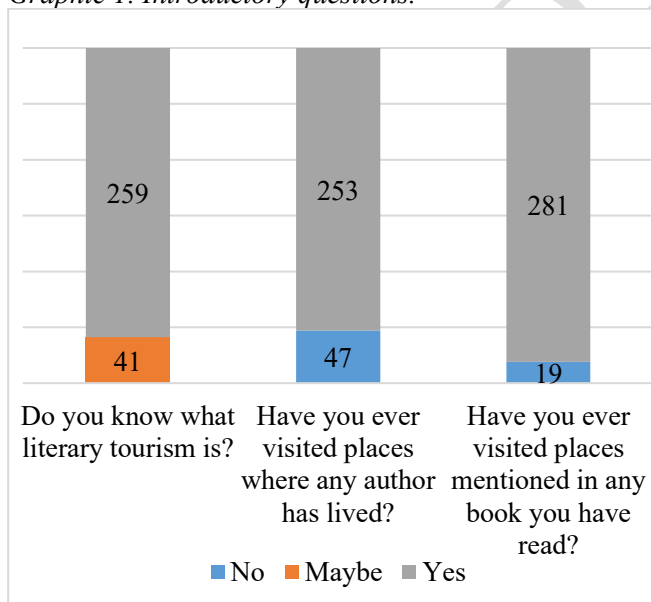
Source: Created by the authors.

3.2 Results

Tables and graphics below present the responses of questions.

259 people (86%) know what literary tourism is, 253 people (84%) have visited places where authors of their preference have lived and 281 people (94%) have visited places mentioned in books they have read.

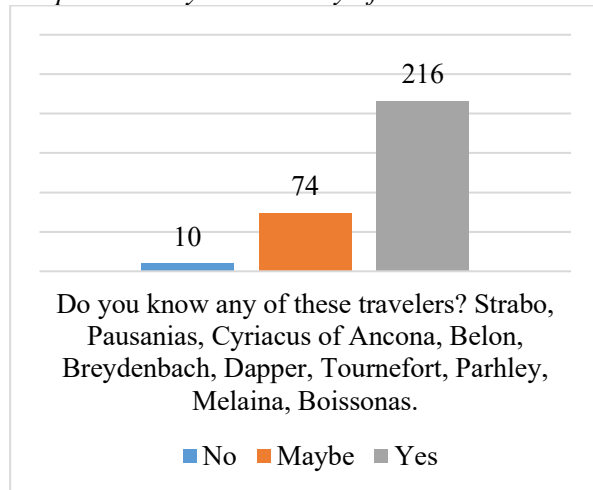
Graphic 1. Introductory questions.



Source: Created by the authors.

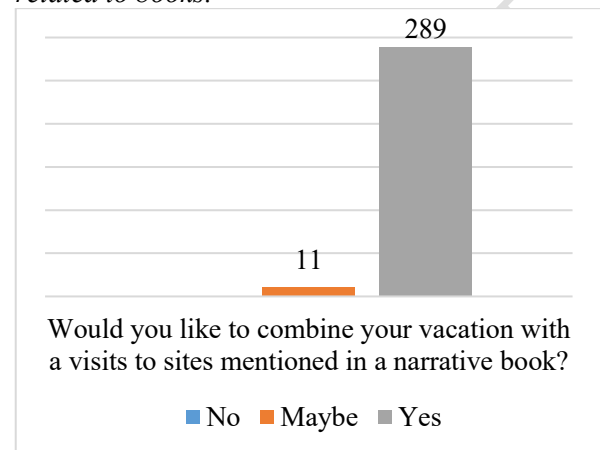
216 people (72%) stated that they know travelers mentioned in books and 289 people (96%) would be willing to arrange their vacation in a place related and inspired by a source of narrative, they would had been subjected to.

Graphic 2. Do you know any of these travelers?



Source: Created by the authors.

Graphic 3. Combine vacation with visits to sites related to books.



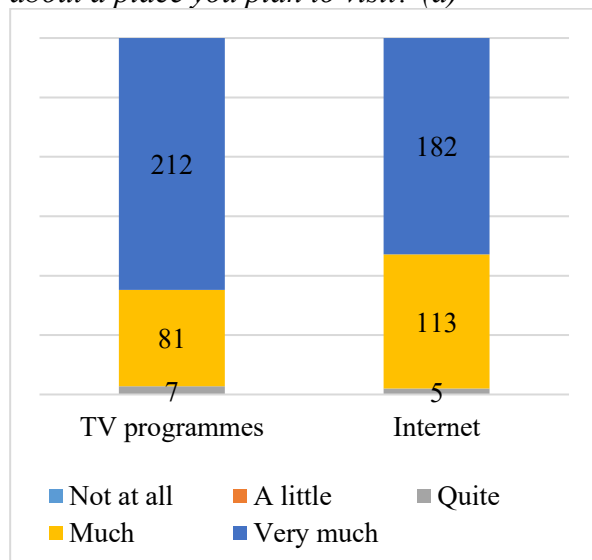
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In general, the sample indicates a strong level of familiarity with narratives and their role as a factor influencing travel experiences, a result that agrees with former international research for literary or film-induced tourism.

A total of 212 participants (71%) get information about a place to visit from TV programs, 182 people (61%) from the internet, 178 people (59%) from printed travel guides, 97 people (32%) from literary books and 294 people (98%) from cinema movies (Graphics 4, 5, 6).

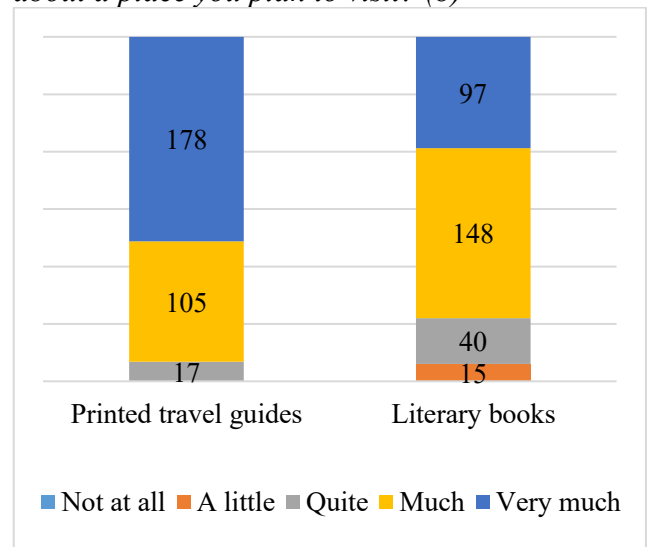
It is very interesting that despite the modern digital channels most of the people are inspired by cinema and TV, while also 'traditional' sources, such as the printed travel guides, still have a significant impact. This finding confirms that such narrative sources function as important drivers of travel planning, as described in former international research.

Graphic 4. Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? (a)



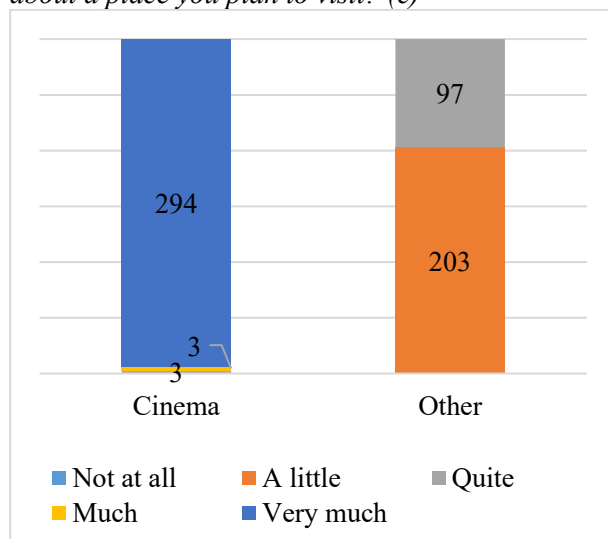
Source: Created by the authors.

Graphic 5. Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? (b)



Source: Created by the authors.

Graphic 6. Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? (c)

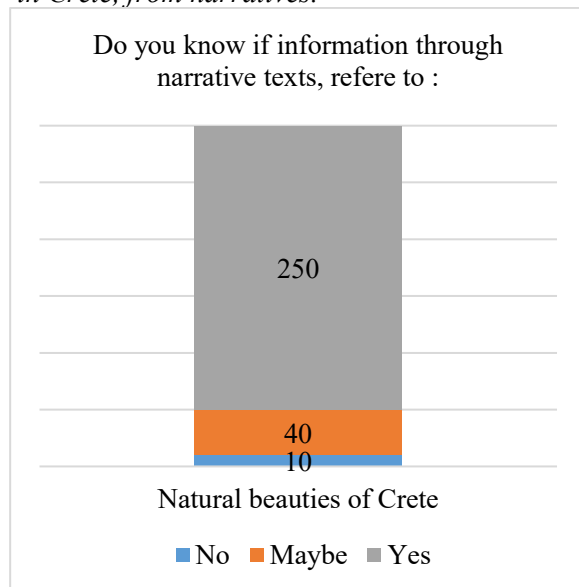


Source: Created by the authors.

250 people (83%) mention that narratives mostly focus on natural beauties in Crete and they also present great monuments existing on the island. A smaller number of people (143 persons – 48%) state that narratives also highlight cultural heritage of Crete, such as customs, songs, traditional costumes or even local recipes of food (Graphics 7, 8, 9).

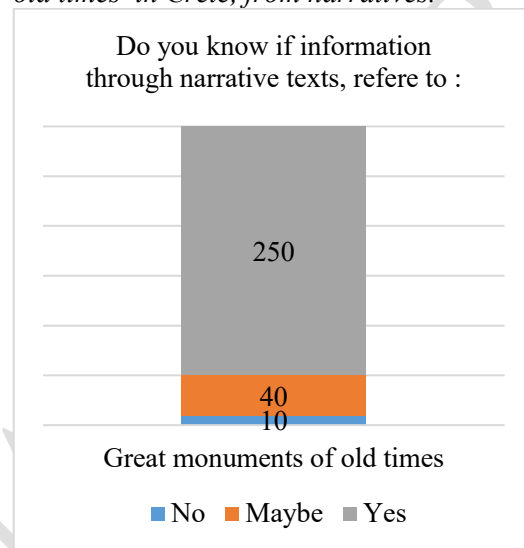
It clearly resulted that cultural elements have a less significant relevance, but it is not clear the reason for that. It could either be due to people's interests, or linked with the interests of producers who create different kinds of narratives and influence potential tourists.

Graphic 7. Information about natural beauties in Crete, from narratives.



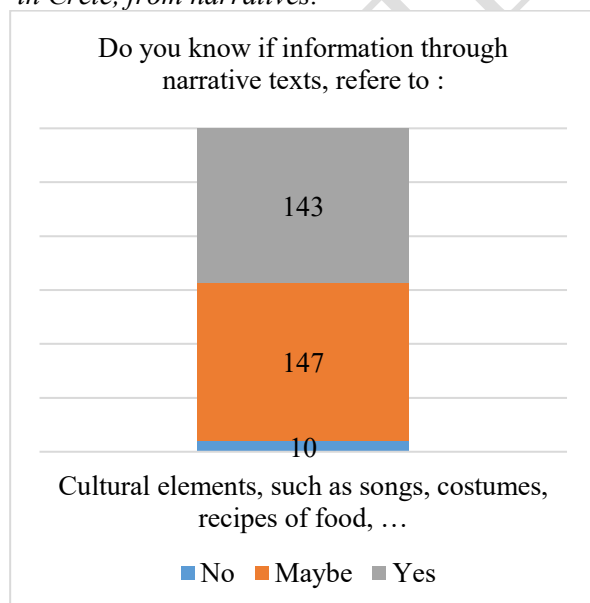
Source: Created by the authors.

Graphic 8. Information about great monuments of old times in Crete, from narratives.



Source: Created by the authors.

Graphic 9. Information about cultural heritage in Crete, from narratives.



Source: Created by the authors.

Analysis per demographics.

Knowledge of literary tourism is strongly related to all different educational levels, with less significant results in young people (18-25 years old), and those with a secondary school degree (*Table 2. Education level X knowledge of literary tourism.*, *Table 3. Age Group X knowledge of literary tourism.*).

Table 2. Education level X knowledge of literary tourism.

Education level	Maybe	Yes
a technical school degree	0	14 (100%)
a secondary school degree	41 (31%)	90 (69%)
PhD	0	7 (100%)
master's degree	0	18 (100%)
college degree	0	119 (100%)
mandatory education	0	11 (100%)

Source: Created by the authors.

Table 3. Age Group X knowledge of literary tourism.

Age Group	Maybe	Yes
18-25	41 (26.1%)	116 (73.9%)
26-35	0	37 (100.0%)
36-50	0	95 (100.0%)
51-65	0	11 (100.0%)

Source: Created by the authors.

Visiting places where authors have lived is less stated by men, people younger than 25 years old or those with a secondary school degree. Annual income has also a link, as only 70.9% of those with an annual income from 15,001 to 25,000 euros, responded positively *Table 4. Demographics X Have you ever visited places where any author has lived?*).

Table 4. Demographics X Have you ever visited places where any author has lived?

Sex	Yes (N)	No (N)	Yes (%)
Men	109	35	75.7%
Women	144	12	92.3%
Age	Yes (N)	No (N)	Yes (%)
18–25	114	43	72.6%
26–35	37	0	100%
36–50	91	4	95.8%
51–65	11	0	100%
Education level	Yes (N)	No (N)	Yes (%)
Mandatory	7	4	63.6%
Secondary school	90	41	68.7%
Technical	12	2	85.7%
College	119	0	100%
Master's degree	18	0	100%
PhD	7	0	100%
Income (€)	Yes (N)	No (N)	Yes (%)
15,001-25,000	105	43	70.9%
25,001-35,000	28	0	100%
435,001-40,000	5	0	100%
40,001-55,000	111	4	96.5%
55,001 +	4	0	100%

Source: Created by the authors.

Quite more interesting are the demographic relevance to the different kinds of sources and channels that influence travelers of the sample. Cinema is a broad channel that affects almost all people in an horizontal manner (

Table 9. Demographics X Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? [Cinema].).

‘much’ replies as an indicator of a less stressed positive attitude

Gender is mainly associated to the TV and books. Women report higher responses for both channels, while also men are also focusing to the

Table 5. Demographics X Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? [TV programmes].,

Table 8. Demographics X Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? [Literary books].).

Education appears to be a strong factor mainly related to the printed travel guides and literary books, as college graduates, people with a master's degree or PhD rate high results in this topic. At the same time those with a technical or a secondary school degree are mainly focused on less positive replies (

Table 7. Demographics X Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? [Printed travel guides].;

Table 8. Demographics X Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? [Literary books].).

Age groups also influence preferences for literary books, as younger people focus not only on literary books but also on other digital channels (

Table 8. Demographics X Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? [Literary books].).

Finally, the days of visiting Crete does not appear associated with any particular information channel or response pattern.

Table 5. Demographics X Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? [TV programmes].

N	A little	Quite	Much	Very much
Sex				

Men	144	0	6 (4.2%)	70 (48.6%)	68 (47.2%)
Women	156	0	1 (0.6%)	11 (7.1%)	144 (92.3%)
Age Group					
18-25	157	0	0	45 (28.7%)	112 (71.3%)
26-35	37	0	0	37 (100%)	0
36-50	95	0	7 (7.4%)	0	88 (92.6%)
51-65	11	0	0	0	11 (100%)
Education level					
Technical	14	0	0	4 (28.6%)	10 (71.4%)
Secondary school	131	0	7 (5.3%)	75 (57.3%)	49 (37.4%)
PhD	7	0	0	7 (100%)	0
Master	18	0	0	0	18 (100%)
College degree	119	0	0	0	119 (100%)
Mandatory	11	0	0	0	11 (100%)

Source: Created by the authors.

Table 6. Demographics X Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? [Internet].

	N	A little	Quite	Much	Very much
Sex					

Men	144	0	2 (1.4%)	56 (38.9%)	86 (59.7%)
Women	156	0	3 (1.9%)	57 (36.5%)	96 (61.5%)
Age					
18–25	157	0	0	58 (36.9%)	99 (63.1%)
26–35	37	0	1 (2.7%)	8 (21.6%)	28 (75.7%)
36–50	95	0	2 (2.1%)	43 (45.3%)	50 (52.6%)
51–65	11	0	2 (18.2%)	4 (36.4%)	5 (45.5%)
Education level					
Technical	14	0	2 (14.3%)	1 (7.1%)	11 (78.6%)
Secondary school	131	0	1 (0.8%)	76 (58.0%)	54 (41.2%)
PhD	7	0	2 (28.6%)	4 (57.1%)	1 (14.3%)
Master's degree	18	0	0	7 (38.9%)	11 (61.1%)
College	119	0	0	20 (16.8%)	99 (83.2%)
Mandatory	11	0	0	5 (45.5%)	6 (54.5%)

Source: Created by the authors.

Table 7. Demographics X Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? [Printed travel guides].

N	A little	Quite	Much	Very much
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Sex					
Men	144	0	14 (9.7%)	50 (34.7%)	80 (55.6%)
Women	156	0	3 (1.9%)	55 (35.3%)	98 (62.8%)
Age Group					
18-25	157	0	15 (9.6%)	70 (44.6%)	72 (45.9%)
26-35	37	0	2 (5.4%)	3 (8.1%)	32 (86.5%)
36-50	95	0	0	32 (33.7%)	63 (66.3%)
51-65	11	0	0	0 (0.0%)	11 (100%)
Education level					
Technical	14	0	0	13 (92.9%)	1 (7.1%)
Secondary school	131	0	17 (13.0%)	78 (59.5%)	36 (27.5%)
PhD	7	0	0 (0.0%)	7 (100%)	0 (0.0%)
Master's degree	18	0	4 (22.2%)	0	14 (77.8%)
College	119	0	0	5 (4.2%)	114 (95.8%)
Mandatory	11	0	0	2 (18.2%)	9 (81.8%)

Source: Created by the authors.

Table 8. Demographics X Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? [Literary books].

N	A little	Quite	Much	Very much
Sex				

Men	144	15 (10.4%)	37 (25.7%)	82 (56.9%)	10 (6.9%)
Women	156	0 (0.0%)	3 (1.9%)	66 (42.3%)	87 (55.8%)
Age Group					
18-25	157	5 (3.2%)	20 (12.7%)	83 (52.9%)	49 (31.2%)
26-35	37	0	0	10 (27.0%)	27 (73.0%)
36-50	95	10 (10.5%)	20 (21.1%)	65 (68.4%)	0 (0.0%)
51-65	11	0	0	0	11 (100%)
Education level					
Technical	14	0	14 (100%)	0	0
Secondary school	131	15 (11.5%)	40 (30.5%)	76 (58.0%)	0
PhD	7	0	0	0	7 (100%)
Master's degree	18	0	0	8 (44.4%)	10 (55.6%)
College	119	0	0	64 (53.8%)	55 (46.2%)
Mandatory	11	0	0	0	11 (100%)

Source: Created by the authors.

Table 9. Demographics X Where do you usually get information about a place you plan to visit? [Cinema].

	N	A little	Quite	Much	Very much
Sex					

Men	144	0	2 (1.4%)	3 (2.1%)	139 (96.5%)
Women	156	0	1 (0.6%)	0	155 (99.4%)
Age Group					
18-25	157	0	3 (1.9%)	3 (1.9%)	151 (96.2%)
26-35	37	0	0	0	37 (100%)
36-50	95	0	0	0	95 (100%)
51-65	11	0	0	0	11 (100%)
Education level					
Technical	14	0	0	0	14 (100%)
Secondary school	131	0	3 (2.3%)	3 (2.3%)	125 (95.4%)
PhD	7	0	0	0	7 (100%)
Master's degree	18	0	0	0	18 (100%)
College	119	0	0	0	119 (100%)
Mandatory	11	0	0	0	11 (100%)

Source: Created by the authors.

4 Conclusion

This study focuses on the relationship between tourism and its connection to narratives conveyed through literature, cinema, television programs or other channels. The study is based on a sample of

300 tourists in Crete who came from the United Kingdom. The most important finding is that such narratives are closely related to tourism and, moreover, are closely associated with tourism and appear to influence tourist' motivation to visit specific places in search of particular experiences. Most of the people in the sample stated that they were familiar with the term 'literary tourism' and, more importantly, that their decisions and behavior are influenced by it. Almost all of them are willing to spend their holidays in a place associated with an author, a film, a book or a travelogue text as a special form of historical and cultural narrative. From this perspective, Crete is not only a popular tourist destination, but also a place that can be visited for cultural/literary reasons, as the setting for stories, experiences and symbols that emerge from narratives.

In terms of channels of influence, the picture is clear: cinema and television dominate as sources of inspiration/information, without neglecting digital media and more "traditional" sources such as printed travel guides. Therefore, an effective advertising strategy should not be limited to a single channel, but should include a combination of audiovisual storytelling (films/series/shows), a strong online presence (search, content, reviews) and, at the same time supporting , materials that 'reinforce the experience (travel guides, curated routes). The realization that audiovisual media influence almost all visitors horizontally is particularly useful for targeted collaborations with productions and creatives.

In terms of what the narratives about Crete convey, natural landscapes and monuments dominate, while intangible cultural elements (customs, music/songs, traditional costumes, local recipes) feature much less prominently. This can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, it shows what the audience ultimately 'absorbs' from the available narratives; on the other hand, it points to an opportunity gap for the destination. If Crete wants to differentiate itself substantially, it can strengthen the presence of intangible heritage within the narrative (e.g. gastronomic stories, local customs, everyday culture) to transform the visit from 'viewing' the landscape to 'participating' in a way of life.

The demographic analysis provides another practical conclusion: Awareness of/connection to literary tourism and related behaviors vary according to age, education, gender and income. In particular,

younger respondents (18–25) and those with secondary education show a weaker connection to this concept/practice, while men are less likely to have visited places associated with authors and lower-income groups are less likely to report such experiences. Therefore, the product/message needs to be segmented: a different narrative style, a different entry point (e.g. more ‘visual-first’ for younger audiences, more ‘curated routes’ for better-educated groups) and experience packages that do not require a high budget.

Overall, the results suggest that a strategy for Crete could ‘combine’ literature, film and cultural heritage into specific, easily consumable experiences: thematic routes, places that recreate scenes/stories, synergies with local products and cultural entrepreneurship, and digital content that converts inspiration into travel decisions and bookings. At the same time, some limitations should be noted: The sample is based on a convenience approach and concerns British visitors to Crete, so while the conclusions are very useful for pointing in a direction/forming hypotheses, it would be good to confirm them with a more representative sample, different nationalities and perhaps a qualitative study (to understand why intangible elements in narratives do not come into play as strongly).

A key limitation of the study is that it relies on a convenience sample focused on British visitors to Crete, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the wider tourist population. Furthermore, the results are based on self-reported responses collected at a specific point in time, so they may be influenced by memory or social desirability effects and cannot establish clear causal links between exposure to narratives (books/films/television) and actual travel behavior.

Future research should prioritize building a larger and more diverse sample that includes visitors from other countries, so that comparisons across nationalities and cultural backgrounds become possible. With a broader international sample, researchers could test whether the same narrative drivers hold across markets and refine segmentation strategies, while also improving the overall reliability and external validity of conclusions about narrative-driven

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Contribution of individual authors to the creation of a scientific article (ghostwriting policy)

- **Anna-Eirini Tsatalbasoglou** conceived the research idea, designed the study, contributed to the theoretical framework, coordinated the research process, and led the writing of the manuscript. She also contributed to the interpretation of the results and to the statistical analysis.

- **Dimitrios Nentas** contributed to the statistical analysis and the processing of the quantitative data, as well as to the writing, technical revision and editing of the results section.
- **Maria Manola** contributed to the review of the manuscript and to the general scientific supervision of the study.
- **Roido Mitoula** contributed to the scientific supervision of the study and to the critical review of the manuscript.
- **Vilma Karagianni** contributed to the scientific supervision and to the overall methodological guidance of the study.
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