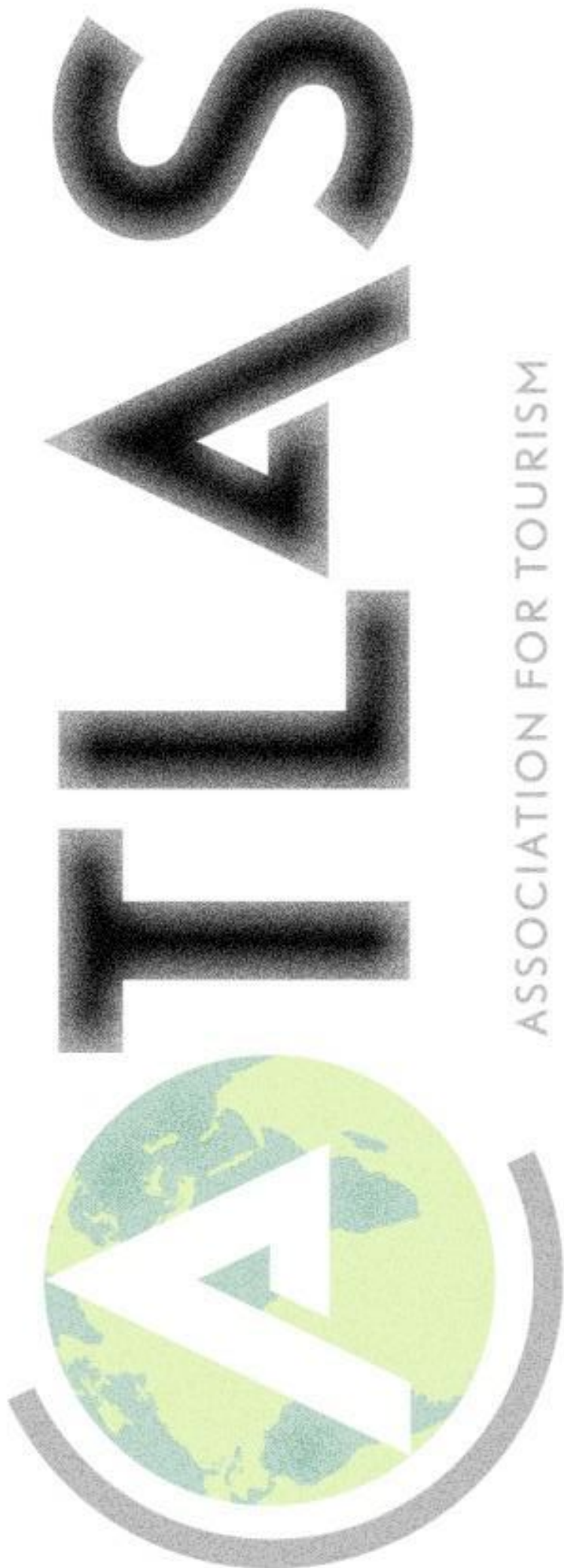




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ATLAS Tourism and Leisure Review**Volume 2024 – 1****Thesis prize winners 2023 & Prague Papers 2020 – 2021**

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Introduction

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This first issue of the ATLAS Review in 2024 presents two types of papers. First we introduce two prize winners of the ATLAS thesis prize 2023. Second, the Review consists of papers presented in (online) ATLAS conferences in 2020 and 2021.

Two years ago the Advisory Board of ATLAS introduced the ATLAS thesis prize for Bachelor and Master theses. In 2023 the Jury offered prize winners the opportunity to publish their results in the ATLAS Review. Two prize winners accepted this invitation. Angela Dimitrova of Breda University of Applied Sciences (the Netherlands) won the second prize for her Master thesis. Her thesis deals with the development of online leisure practices by players of Elder Scrolls Online, one of the most popular Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG). Angela explores the role of events and festivals in developing MMORPG communities. She used content analysis and netnography of digital feeds and chats from the game as well as participant observations of actual game play. More depth was added by carrying out interviews with players, selected through criterion-based sampling. This multi-faceted approach helped to reveal many interesting insights into the nature of the Elder Scroll practices. The Jury argued that Angela's thesis deals with an original topic in leisure and event studies, which clearly addresses a gap in the literature in a convincing way. Conclusions are tightly connecting theory and practice. The thesis is written in an interesting and engaging way and shows a remarkable level of academic writing and analysis.

Similarly, Radina Shikova from Bulgaria won in 2023 a second prize, but now for her Bachelor thesis. By using social practice theory, her study aims to explain any reported changes in the practice of nature-based tourism in Bulgarian national parks as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results show that most of the change in nature-based practices in Bulgarian national parks could be explained by systems of provision, such as regulations, health norms and restricted opportunities. The narrow available options for domestic travellers, which forced them to explore nature, resulted in an increased appreciation. In other words, the change in the system of provision in Bulgaria during the COVID-19 crisis resulted in a change in lifestyle in terms of choices related to nature and health. The study and its results could serve as a basis for further research in the field of social practice theory and nature-based tourism in the context of health crises. The Jury found her thesis well structured and written and concluded that findings rest on a well elaborated theoretical (using practice theory) and methodological framework. Research results are interesting and support findings elsewhere on the consequences of COVID 19 for (nature- based) tourism.

The other four papers were presented at various (online) ATLAS conferences and meetings. The first one of Adenike D. Adebayo of Liverpool John Moores University used the Importance-Performance Analysis framework to diagnose the situation in tourism development in Nigeria. The analysis gives a summary of the stakeholders' views on the state of tourism development. The findings mainly reveal that almost all of the tourism planning variables assessed were perceived to be important to tourism development. However, regarding performance, the tourism sector is not doing so

well in virtually all the areas which warrant that tourism planners need to concentrate on most of the variables in future tourism planning activities. This paper has clear implications for the Nigerian tourism sector and requires that urgent actions be taken to improve on most of the variables that are performing poorly to ensure that the industry develops into a tourist destination in Africa, as it aspires to be.

The second paper of Geesje Duursma, University of Groningen (Leeuwarden, the Netherlands) employs hospitality as sensitising concept in order to propose a model to intertwine hospitality and volunteering. Geesje Duursma (MSc.) is a restaurant owner, active in local hospitality and tourism business associations, and a PhD student at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. In her paper she argues that a welcoming experience for tourists is vital to repeat visits and positive word of mouth. Organisations face several challenges in attracting and retaining hospitable volunteers. However, the concept of hospitality is almost absent in conceptual thinking on tourism and volunteering. It is within this context that hospitality is employed as sensitising concept in order to propose a model to intertwine hospitality and volunteering. Based on similarities found in the literature the model uses theories and models from sociology (organisational culture), psychology (motivation and behaviour) and economics (outcomes and impact). The goal is to better understand the idea of hospitality, to introduce it to the research field of volunteering tourism and change the perspective on welcoming volunteers. Three changes of perspective are proposed. First, hospitality could be a guiding principle for organisations; second, the volunteer should be perceived as a host, but also as a guest and third: hospitality has a social value that has value for communities in which volunteer organisations operate.

In the third paper Serena Lonardi of the Universität Innsbruck (Austria) analyzes how the Cimbrian community of Luserna / Lusérn in Trento (Italy) promotes their minority language. The way tourists consume cultural heritage has been changing with increasing interest in intangible cultural heritage and in the minority, peripheral areas. Since intangible cultural heritage also includes oral traditions and languages, recent research has highlighted how minority languages represent an index of local authenticity and a differentiating factor for remote destinations. To analyze how the Cimbrian community of Luserna / Lusérn in Trento (Italy) promotes their minority language, Serena Lonardi uses a humanistic management framework. Through a qualitative methodology – 9 in-depth narrative interviews and digital ethnographic analysis of 10 websites – this paper focuses on online and onsite tourism promotion. Moreover, interviews also give an overview of locals' perceptions of tourism development in the town. Findings highlight that the language does not represent a pull factor per se, but becomes an essential differentiating factor when tourists are in the destination. Aligned with this, the website promotes Luserna / Lusérn as the last Cimbrian enclave but does not use the language extensively and just for place names, greetings, and limited tourism experiences. Interestingly, the tourism field is seen as an essential source of income and employment for the town, allowing the community to maintain a language relationship.

Finally, in the last paper Vanessa Santos from the KU Leuven (Belgium) investigates the use of service design tools in the context of building a collaborative development in the Scheldeland tourist region through the work of its Living Laboratory (LL) in Belgium. Firstly, the study introduces the context and the practical case of Scheldeland LL, carried out by KU Leuven, Tourism Flanders, and Apollo18 Design agency, who implemented the Systemic Design Thinking methodology (design & systems thinking) to encourage multi-stakeholders empathy and build a cultural tourism network in this region, during the work restrictions and social disruption

caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This LL is part of the SmartCultour project (Smart Cultural Tourism as a Driver of Sustainable Development of European Regions) in the framework of the Horizon 2020 project, and its goal is to support the sustainable development of cultural tourism through bottom-up development. Secondly, the research focuses on the methodology already initiated in the LL, specifically on the first stage of design thinking: building empathy, while reviewing what empathy is. The results show that Miro's toolbox helps foster online visual collaboration, although some empathy exercises in product and service design still require some physical interaction.

Exploring Cyberspace: Virtual Practices and Interaction Rituals around Thematic MMORPG Events

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Introduction

Offline events have been studied extensively by leisure scholars and are generally defined as “an occurrence at a given place and time; a special set of circumstances; a noteworthy occurrence.” (Getz, 2007, p. 18). The liminal qualities of offline events (Richards, 2014) create conditions for studying human behaviour from a different perspective (Finkel, 2010). Offline events, with their demonstrated capacity to foster a sense of togetherness (Finkel, 2010) and community building (Wilks, 2011), achieve this by creating an environment wherein attendees can engage in interaction rituals (Collins, 2004) and perform different practices (Panelli & Welch, 2005; Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012; Simons, 2019). Interaction rituals and practices as part of events can give scholars an idea about how communities are constructed and how they develop or stagnate over time (Nordvall, Pettersson, Svensson, & Brown, 2014; Simons, 2019). Thus, identifying and analysing interaction rituals and practices has become an established approach towards generating knowledge about events and event communities within a place-bound context (Collins, 2004; Getz, 2007; Panelli & Welch, 2005; Shove et al., 2012).

However, in recent years, with the rapid advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the network society (Castells, 2010), virtual events and virtual communities have been on the rise. Consequently, this has affected both human relationships (Castells, 2010) and the leisure field as a whole (Silk, Millington, Rich & Bush, 2016). This is evident in the significant number of purely virtual events and event communities that exist today. A prime example of a vast purely virtual community, where events also take place virtually, is found in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG) communities (Taylor, 2006; Simpson, Knottnerus & Stern, 2018).

The rise of virtual events and event communities, such as MMORPG communities, has prompted leisure scholars to argue that prioritising their study is crucial because failure to do so would lead to having a substantial area of leisure studies unexplored (Lupton, 2015). Consequently, this paper aims to investigate the formation of practices and interaction rituals as part of virtual events, with a particular focus on MMORPG communities.

This study seeks to contribute to leisure scholars' understanding of virtual practices and virtual interaction rituals as part of MMORPG events. Thus, the objectives of this paper are (i) to identify different virtual practices and virtual interaction rituals in MMORPG events, (ii) to explore how these virtual practices and virtual interaction rituals form in a purely virtual context, and (iii) to explore

how virtual practices and virtual interaction rituals in MMORPG events may or may not facilitate the development of MMORPG communities.

Theoretical background

Events, practices and interaction rituals

Events are defined as a multiphasic process (De Geus et al., 2016). They are designed to achieve certain social goals (Allen, O'Toole & McDonnell, 2005; Richards & Palmer, 2010), which they do successfully as shown by studies on community construction around offline events and festivals (Finkel, 2010; Getz, 2008).

Social goals that are achieved through event participation include a sense of togetherness, group solidarity (Finkel, 2010; Getz, 2008) and a sense of community (Van Winkel & Woosnam, 2013). These social goals are achieved through social interaction occurring at different stages of the event (Simons, 2014). As such, social interaction is an integral aspect of events (Nordvall, Pettersson, Svensson, & Brown, 2014), making them a catalyst for developing and strengthening human relationships (Urry, 2002).

The concept of social interaction encompasses verbal and nonverbal social exchange amongst individuals, wherein the use of symbols is recognised as a form of nonverbal social interaction (Barkan, 2011). Social interaction is stimulated by different practices occurring before, during and after offline events (Simons, 2019). Engaging in social interaction allows individuals to gain and spread emotional energy as suggested by Collins (2004). Thus, event practices may serve a comparable purpose in terms of emotional energy in individuals.

The general notion of practice is argued to be complex and dynamic (Panelli & Welch, 2005). Reckwitz (2002) suggests that practices are organised by interconnected elements and defines practices as a "routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, "things" and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge." (p. 249). Thus, practices can take many forms, such as a way of consuming something, or a way of working (Reckwitz, 2002).

Expanding on Reckwitz's (2002) theory, Shove et al. (2012) argue that any practice consists of three main elements, namely: materials, competencies, and meanings. These three elements are interconnected and a change in one element will be reflected in the other two elements (Shove et al., 2012). For practices to exist, different combinations of materials, competencies and meanings are required. A practice can be any daily activity people engage in and an alteration in any given practice(s) can affect a larger social structure, such as a community (Shove et al., 2012). Ergo, identifying and analysing practices is essential for understanding social norms and communities.

Practices have been found to reveal what a community is about and its primary activities (Panelli & Welch, 2005). Thus, by identifying and analysing different

practices within a community, researchers can better understand how it is constructed, shaped and how social interaction occurs (Nordvall et al., 2014; Shove et al., 2012; Simons, 2014, 2019). By engaging in practices, communities can create meanings and value (Rihova, Buhalis, Gouthro and Moital, 2015). Scholars differentiate between individual and group practices, suggesting that even individual engagement maintains a connection to the social world of a community (Shipway, Holloway & Jones, 2012). In essence, the individual self and the community construct of the social self are inherently related.

Most studied event practices are within an offline context. Rihova et al. (2015) distinguish between bonding, communing, and belonging practices during offline events. Bonding practices, similar to Crompton and McKay's (1997) notion of known group socialisation, entail socialisation with significant others wherein people catch up and share experiences. These practices have been found to motivate people to attend events (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Rihova et al., 2015). Communing practices are stimulated by the liminal qualities of events and are expressed in a sense of togetherness amongst attendees (Rihova et al., 2015). These practices entail attendees connecting with strangers temporarily. Belonging practices are expressed in a sense of belonging experienced by event attendees (Rihova et al., 2015), which extends beyond the event.

Overall, practices are performed by people, either individually or in a group, and through them, interpersonal relationships can develop (Shipway et al., 2012). The development of these relationships is better understood by looking at the interaction rituals, which are at the core of practices (Bargeman and Richards, 2020).

Interaction rituals are social connections between at least two individuals (Collins, 2004). An interaction ritual is described as a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention that together produce a shared reality for the participants (Collins, 2004). It is important to note that rather than focusing on the individual as the main unit of analysis, Collins (2004) focuses on the situation. This makes his theory widely applicable, especially in leisure and event studies.

Events can be seen as the main unit of analysis when exploring communities around them. Collins (2004) argues that humans are emotional energy seekers, and this motivates them to participate in interaction rituals with others. Consequently, people look for situations and opportunities, such as events, where they can participate in interaction rituals and gain emotional energy. If people successfully derive emotional energy from a specific situation, then the interaction ritual is deemed successful (Collins, 2004). Circling back to the notion of interaction rituals being essential for the formation of practices (Bargeman & Richards, 2020), it can be suggested that interaction rituals - like practices - are another fundamental part of events.

Similar to practices, interaction rituals, too, consist of different elements, or what Collins (2004) refers to as interaction ritual ingredients. For an interaction ritual to take place, four ingredients need to be present, namely, group assembly (bodily co-presence), barrier(s) to outsiders, mutual focus of attention and

shared mood (Collins, 2004). The latter two ingredients group together in a feedback loop and can be intensified through rhythmic entrainment during the state of collective effervescence of participants. In turn, interaction ritual participants experience a sense of togetherness (Collins, 2004; Simons, 2019).

Collins (2004) also recognises four different interaction ritual outcomes that create a combination of individual and collective benefits (Richards, 2014; Simons, 2019). First, group solidarity is about interaction ritual participants showing support for each other and for the entire group; it fosters trust. Second, generated emotional energy, which is essentially different emotions that either motivate or demotivate people, can also benefit both the individual participants and the entire group (Collins, 2004). Besides this, successful interaction rituals can produce and amplify motivating emotions and unsuccessful interaction rituals do the opposite. Third, symbols of social relationships (sacred objects) are also created through successful interaction rituals. They represent the group, and its members are associated with them (Collins, 2004). Additionally, these symbols can be charged with emotional energy and value by the interaction ritual participants. This causes a dependency between the economy of rituals and the material economy (Collins, 2004). Fourth, feelings of morality are another outcome of a successful interaction ritual. They can lead to group members experiencing righteous anger for violations, which makes them adhere to and defend the group, as well as its symbols (Collins, 2004).

It is important to note that Collins (2004) considers the interaction ritual ingredients and outcomes solely within an offline context. Thus, the question of whether successful interaction rituals can emerge virtually remains. Nevertheless, the author suggests that large-scale formal interaction rituals are more likely to be successful in a virtual context as opposed to smaller, more informal ones.

Digitisation of leisure and events

The leisure and events sector has been transformed by technology in recent years, which has resulted in the emergence and rapid growth of digital leisure (Silk et al., 2016). Consequently, a significant number of leisure activities and events have become exclusively virtual. With this, the number of virtual communities has increased as well (Castells, 2010). Many virtual communities are argued to be communities of practice that consist of people with common interests (Wenger, 1999). In such communities, people tend to share knowledge and competencies with others in order to improve practices within their realm of expertise (Gilbert, 2016). The two main drivers of knowledge and competencies exchange within communities of practice are reciprocity (Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling, 2003) and sense of community (Usoro, Sharratt, Tsui & Shekhar, 2007). Reciprocity refers to the willingness to share knowledge and competencies in a manner that is consistent with what has been received (Gilbert, 2016). Sense of community, on the other hand, refers to people trusting a community and feeling that they belong to that community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Usoro et al., 2007).

A substantial number of communities of practice revolve around video gaming (Abrams & Lammers, 2017), which has become a central virtual leisure activity

for many people worldwide (Brooks, Chester, Smeeton and Spencer, 2016). Within such communities of practice, people engage in social interaction with friends, acquaintances, and strangers (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell & Moore, 2006). This makes certain video games, such as MMORPGs, “sociologically rich social spaces” (Boyns & Loprieno, 2013, p. 37). In these social spaces, practices and interaction rituals unique to the virtual realm may form (MacCallum-Stewart, 2011; Simpson et al., 2018).

Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games as spaces for events

One of the most popular video game genres is the MMORPG genre (Taylor, 2006), which successfully incorporates network capabilities, allowing people worldwide to play together and to engage in social interaction (Cranmer, Han, Gisbergen & Jung, 2021). Generally, MMORPGs are described as “a type of virtual world, in that they are multi-user virtual environments in which users are represented by 3D avatars.” (O’Connor, Longman, White & Obst, 2015, p. 460). The virtual environment offered by MMORPGs can be referred to as cyberspace, which has been recognised as a conceptualisation of place (Driskell and Lyon, 2002). In cyberspace, players have freedom to interact with the environment and with other people who share the same environment. Interaction with the environment entails players exploring the world, collecting items and battling different entities, all of which provides experience for their character(s) (Ducheneaut et al., 2006). Interaction with other people entails interaction with the environment, but with company. This allows players to form in-game social relationships by applying real-world strategies and behaviours, such as adding someone to their friends list after having had an enjoyable play together (MacCallum-Stewart, 2011). This aspect of MMORPGs attracts a substantial number of gamers (Simpson et al., 2018).

Another compelling aspect of MMORPGs for people is the occurrence of different events, such as raids, dungeons, and quests (Ducheneaut et al., 2006). During these events, players rely on their game knowledge and competencies to accomplish a specific task upon which they can obtain a unique item or merely gain character experience (Ducheneaut et al., 2006; Simpson et al., 2018). The obtained items are often displayed for others to see. Players usually do this by equipping their character with the items (Ducheneaut et al., 2006). Through this, they demonstrate their game knowledge and competencies, thus gaining reputation within the MMORPG community (Cranmer et al., 2011).

Besides raids, dungeons, and quests, MMORPGs also incorporate thematic events where players can participate and celebrate a special occasion that mirrors real-world celebrations like Halloween and New Year’s Eve (Cranmer et al., 2021). While events like raids, dungeons, and quests have been explored by researchers, thematic events remain relatively understudied (Simpson et al., 2018). As thematic events mirror real-world celebrations, it is plausible to suggest that, akin to offline events facilitating the development of offline communities, thematic MMORPG events may also play a role in developing MMORPG communities.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role thematic events play in MMORPG communities, more insight is needed into the virtual practices and

interaction rituals that occur around these events. This leads to the following research questions: (i) What type of virtual practices and interaction rituals can be identified before, during and after thematic MMORPG events? (ii) How do these virtual practices and interaction rituals form within a MMORPG context? (iii) How do these virtual practices and interaction rituals facilitate (or not) the development of MMORPG communities?

Methodology

To conduct this study and to meet its objectives, it was important to dive deep in a virtual community in order to experience the core practices and interaction rituals, as they reveal the prevalent meaning of a community (Collins, 2004; Panelli & Welch, 2005). Thus, the MMORPG community of the Elder Scrolls Online (ESO) was selected as the researcher had been a part of it for the last five years. Such familiarity enabled easy access and utilisation of their skills and knowledge about the game for data collection. The vast size of the ESO community and the daily activity within it also contributed to its suitability for this study (Kozinets, 2010). With a total number of 20.27 million players (MMO Populations, n.d.), ESO is currently one of the largest MMORPG communities.

Moreover, ESO is one of the MMORPGs famous for incorporating celebratory thematic events into the gameplay (The Elder Scrolls Online, n.d.). During these thematic events, players can engage in activities, obtain unique items, or simply get together in the decorated for the occasion cyberspace.

Given the researcher's extended membership in the ESO community, potential bias was addressed by using triangulation as a research strategy that involved combining ethnographic methods such as participant observation of gameplay, netnography, and semi-structured interviews. This helped with paying attention to contextual detail in order to better observe and interpret social meaning when conducting this research, thus enhancing the overall credibility, validity and trustworthiness of the findings (Costello, McDermott, & Wallace, 2017; Patton, 1999). Employing a triangulation strategy also allowed for a more holistic data collection process and for the use of thick description, enhancing the transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Qualitative data were gathered before, during and after two thematic events until a saturation point was reached. The two thematic events were the Jester's Festival - announced back in January 2022- and the Anniversary Jubilee, which ran back-to-back from the 31st of March until the 19th of April 2022. The data were stored in a safe manner and the anonymity of event attendees was kept.

Data collection began with descriptive in-game participant observation and netnography alongside it a week before the first thematic event commenced. Initially, the researcher was observing what players were doing in the game in order to have an overview of the social situations that were occurring (Spradley, 1980). This enabled the researcher to actively engage in relevant social situations by identifying and participating in key activities, following Spradley's (1980) recommendations. During each activity, detailed notes were produced. This helped in gaining an objective overview of the situation - whilst minimising research bias - and in identifying deviant cases (Spradley, 1980). To provide a

structure for the participant observation and to collect relevant data, Collins's (2004) interaction ritual ingredients were used. In total, twenty-one in-game participant observations were conducted before, during and after the two thematic events.

Netnography was used as a supplementary method. It entailed following Discord and in-game chats before, during and after the two thematic events to provide more context and to investigate an additional number of people (Kozinets, 2010).

The semi-structured interviews with ESO thematic event attendees were the last step of the data collection process. Interviewees were selected through criterion-based sampling (Patton, 2014). The criteria included participation in at least three different thematic events. People were selected based on their overall experience in playing ESO - provided that they met the criteria - to maintain a balance between experienced and newer players within the limited sample. Five interviews were conducted immediately after the two thematic MMORPG events to explore the meaning players attribute to these events. Thus, it was important to ask questions that would enable interviewees to provide an array of answers. In turn, this aided the researcher in using a range of probes to reach a satisfactory depth of answer and to ensure that the interviews were of generative nature (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

A set of open questions was created based on Collins's (2004) interaction ritual ingredients and outcomes and on Shove et al.'s (2012) social practice theory. The order of questions was done based on the multiphasic nature of events (De Geus et al., 2016) in order to provide a logical sequence for the interviewees.

The data collection resulted in detailed field notes, screenshots and interview transcripts. All data were analysed using MAXQDA. A preliminary layer of coding was created to identify the theoretical themes of virtual interaction rituals (Collins, 2004) and virtual practices (Shove et al., 2012) before, during and after the two thematic events. As rituals are at the core of practices (Bargeman & Richards, 2020), the ritual ingredients and outcomes (Collins, 2004) were outlined using the coding system that was created. The practice elements were outlined as well, which helped to understand how practices as part of MMORPG events form and how practice elements are interconnected (Shove et al., 2012) in a virtual context. An additional layer of coding was created to ensure that no data were overlooked and to identify deviant cases.

A focus on contextual detail was kept to ensure that the findings were not of superficial level (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was done by describing and coding the collected data and by interpreting it with the interviewees' reflections generated through the interview. Additionally, to increase the trustworthiness and transferability of this study, the context of each virtual practice was considered (i.e., when and where the practice takes place) as Shove et al. (2012) argue that a practice can change based on its context.

Findings

The findings are structured according to the ESO thematic event journey (Getz, 2007). Such structure clearly outlines the identified virtual practices (Reckwitz, 2002; Rihova et al., 2015; Shove et al., 2012) and interaction rituals (Collins, 2004) before, during and after ESO thematic events. Additionally, it aids in understanding how social interaction is (or is not) stimulated during and around in-game thematic events.

Virtual practices and interaction rituals before a thematic event

Discussing practices

When a thematic event is announced on the official ESO website and forum, discussions amongst players start. During the data collection process, a brand-new thematic event (the Zeal of Zenithar) was announced and scheduled for June 2022. The discussions revolved around excitement and speculation around the announcement of the new event:

Let the wild speculation commence! Zenithar is work and trade, and coin, no? It is unlikely to be an extra experience event this one thinks. If it involves daily quests this one would bet on Blackwood – like a Blackwood anniversary event. Could be some sort of incentive to trade event – like extra gold when you sell something? Need a nap just thinking about it! (Post 1)

The above post is both a prompt for others to start speculating and a breakdown of the information provided by ZeniMax Online Studios (ZOS) - the game developer of ESO and event organiser. The person interprets the name of the new thematic event ('Zenithar') by suggesting that it might unveil its theme while simultaneously excluding possibilities, such as the event being focused on extra character experience. The person then finishes with a further show of excitement, indicating that the many possibilities of what the new thematic event could be about is positively overwhelming. Taking this into consideration and the person's deliberate engagement in these discussions, it could be argued that they are experiencing high levels of emotional energy (Collins, 2004).

As more participants started joining the conversations, the shared mood and mutual focus of attention amongst them became more evident. The way people were building on each other's ideas about the new event resembles collective effervescence, despite the lack of bodily co-presence (Collins, 2004). This is because participants are simultaneously communicating their thoughts while participating in the discussion over the course of a few hours.

Discussing practices exist in the game as well, shortly after a thematic event announcement. During the forum discussions, people in the game chats were mainly discussing the upcoming Jester's Festival and the potential rewards expected for the month it was scheduled for (players receive rewards for each day they log in the game and these rewards change every month):

Person 1: Do you think they will really give us the lion as a mount for this month?
Person 2: Yeah. You can check the daily rewards. It is in there.

Person 1: Not an April Fool's joke?

Person 2: I don't think so, no.

Person 3: That would be cruel, hahaha!

Person 4: That would be terrible lol!

As can be seen from the above conversation, the daily rewards are of high importance to ESO players. This underlying importance is expressed through a mixture of anticipation and humour as the possibility of the lion mount daily reward being an April Fool's joke is found to be both funny and 'cruel'.

Recruiting practices

Recruiting practices come in the game when players want to take part in a dungeon/trial event. These practices aid the formation of interaction rituals by leading to in-game group assembly and setting barriers to outsiders (Collins, 2004). The barriers to outsiders are specific requirements, such as the ability to perform a certain role (e.g., damage dealer, healer, tank), sufficient character level, and experience and competence of the dungeon/trial event that the group is being assembled for. One of the interviewees highlighted that:

They [players] would need at least 160 CP [the maximum level possible for character gear] because of the loot [gear drops]. If you really need something or other people need something, it's fair. (Interviewee 2, female)

Players having a minimum level ('at least 160 CP') is considered fair. The interviewee justifies their argument by explaining that this way all group members can benefit from participating by obtaining and exchanging usable rewards like character gear.

Experience and competencies are often required by most players when assembling a group for a certain dungeon/trial event. To find fellow group members, players write in the public chat what type of people they are recruiting for in order to do a specific trial event:

Person 1: LFM [looking for members] 2DDs [damage dealers] vRG [veteran Rockgrove] link [show] achievements.

Person 2: LFM [looking for members] 1H [healer] 2DDs [damage dealers] vSS [veteran Sunspire] training run, 600 CP [minimum level] and link [show] gear.

As can be seen, the messages follow a certain structure. Some elements are always present, such as the purpose of the message, the number of people needed, the required players' roles, and the difficulty (normal or veteran) of the specific dungeon/trial event they want to do. What stands out is that when someone is recruiting players for a veteran trial event - regardless of whether they want to do the trial as a training or not (i.e., to help players learn the specific mechanics of the trial) - they tell them to show their gear and/or trial achievements if they want to join their group. This highlights the importance of competencies (represented by trial achievements) and materials (represented by character gear) to most players. As such, competencies and materials can also be seen as barriers to outsiders (Collins, 2004). Consequently, this creates

something of a paradox as players are required to already have certain competencies and materials in order to further develop their abilities.

Collaborating practices

Collaborating practices appear during dungeon/trial events. The participant observations revealed that during these events, group members are focused on their competencies in using character abilities to tackle the dungeon/trial event obstacles. This mutual focus of attention creates a shared mood amongst group members, which is a mixture of fun and focused emotions. As a result, the ingredients cumulatively generate collective effervescence (Collins, 2004).

Group members progressing through the dungeon/trial, moving from boss to boss and utilising their characters' skills in a synchronised manner as one body (Reckwitz, 2002) creates rhythmic entrainment (Collins, 2004). However, in several cases, not all group members were progressing through the dungeon/trial event in a synchronised manner. Some group members were rushing from one boss to the next, killing them very quickly. This prevented the rest of the group members - usually of a lower character level - from collaborating when dealing with the bosses and dungeon/trial mechanics. This was further confirmed by one of the interviewees:

I feel like a third wheel in the whole thing. I collect the things, the drops from the dead stuff but I'm not having fun. (Interviewee 3, female)

This person explains that when this happens, instead of collaborating with their group members, they merely collect the rewards from the kills. This is significant because it suggests that without performing collaborating practices during events, the interaction ritual may be unsuccessful, despite all ingredients being present. In this case, whether the event has been completed successfully or not, is not at the forefront. What is more, when players find themselves in situations where collaborating practices are neglected, they sometimes share their experience in the game chat:

Person 1: Started a new character and just felt a 'new player' experience in the game... joined a dungeon (...) Heal just rushes over everything to get to first boss. I die because I'm level 15, another dude level 13 dies as well. Quest failed. I leave. (...) Then people like that wonder why we do not get new players to stay in the game.

This person recognises that they have experienced what new players experience when they join a dungeon event with random people. Furthermore, this individual expresses righteous anger (Collins, 2004) directed at 'people like that' and implies that the lack of collaboration with fellow group members during dungeon/trial events is the cause for new players not remaining in the game. This righteous anger then motivates them to share their experience with other players.

On the other hand, even if a group cannot complete the dungeon/trial event, they can still experience a successful interaction ritual, provided that all participants have the chance to collaborate. During one of the observations, a

group of players was trying to finish a veteran dungeon event, but after numerous attempts, the group gave up:

Person 1: I'm laughing and crying!

Person 2: Good effort.

Person 3: Thanks everyone!

Person 4: Good game, guys!

Person 1: Started so good. Well... still good try.

The conversation shows that in most cases the successful completion of a dungeon/trial event is not essential for having a successful interaction ritual and gaining emotional energy; rather, engaging in collaborating practices is.

The findings further revealed that collaborating practices not only are fundamental for event participants to experience a successful interaction ritual, but also for the exchange of knowledge and competencies (Wenger, 1999), especially during dungeon/trial events of veteran difficulty. Consequently, this facilitates extensive verbal social interaction via the game chats:

Person 1: What were the mechanics here?

Person 2: Well, either burn or it's gonna be a mess to be honest. xD

Person 1: Ok, let's try nuke.

This conversation took place before engaging a dungeon boss. One of the group members could not recall the mechanics, so they asked in the group chat about the best approach. The other group member casually conveyed information that would prevent a difficult situation for the group ('a mess'), causing Person 1 to agree.

Bonding practices

Bonding practices as recognised by Rihova et al. (2015) in offline contexts are also performed in a virtual context as part of MMORPG dungeon and trial events. When players engage in bonding practices during dungeon/trial events, the focus on competencies and the outcome of the event are not at the forefront. Instead, players focus merely on spending time with their friends in the game:

If we're just doing our normal dungeons and everything then I do not focus on the game. (...) We just chat about random things, our lives, and play. (Interviewee 5, female)

This shows that much like offline events, purely virtual events can also stimulate bonding practices and enhance known group socialisation (Crompton & McKay, 1997) amongst friends.

Preparing practices

Preparing practices form closer to the beginning of a thematic event. They revolve around logistics and entail minimal social interaction amongst ESO players. As event attendees receive rewards for participating in thematic event

quests, players need to make sure that they have sufficient inventory space on their character(s) and in their in-game bank:

I check that my inventory is as empty as possible because often through events you get a lot of stuff like weapons, armour, [crafting] motifs and so on. Collectibles. (Interviewee 1, male)

This suggests that for some players the main purpose of preparing practices is to ensure that they do not miss out on rewards due to insufficient inventory space.

An interesting phenomenon observed was that experienced players start giving advice to others through game chats and Discord. The advice was on how to best prepare for an upcoming thematic event. From an interviewee's perspective, this was helpful:

I didn't know what to prepare (...) Everyone was saying it on Discord (...) just remember, if you have alts [alternative characters] do your [crafting] writs on them because you get your chests from that as well. (Interviewee 4, male)

This stands out because contrary to Ardichvili et al.'s (2003) idea about reciprocity being a main driver of knowledge exchange within communities of interest, ESO players share knowledge and competencies as part of planning practices without expecting anything in return. Thus, it could be suggested that more experienced players want all thematic event attendees to benefit from the event as much as possible.

Planning practices

Planning practices entail players reaching out to their friends to decide what they want to do during a thematic event:

I like to make plans with my friends (...) because I will not do an event if I don't have company for it. (Interviewee 5, female)

Without engaging in planning practices, some players would not even participate in a thematic event. This suggests that for some people participation in thematic MMORPG events is not as important as the opportunity to spend time in the game with their friends. Consequently, thematic MMORPG events, too, can facilitate bonding (Rihova et al., 2015) and known group socialisation (Crompton & McKay, 1997) for attendees, which are also motives to participate.

Virtual practices and interaction rituals during a thematic event

Questing practices

All attendees were engaging in questing practices during both thematic events. The quests revolved around the theme of the celebratory event. Each thematic event area - where players start the special quests - often had over a hundred players gathered together, picking up or turning in quests to receive their rewards, throwing rose petals on one another, and activating thematic event

mementos (which trigger a themed character animation for the specific celebration). Questing practices during thematic events create a shared mood amongst attendees, which is expressed through players commenting on the special quests in the public game chat and in different Discord guild chats:

Person 1: Cake by the ocean.

Person 2: Much cake.

Person 3: Mmmm...

Person 4: I am about to eat cake...

Person 5: I just got up and hopped in to cash in for those sweet sweet gift boxes and to eat cake.

If a certain comment was in Discord, people were reacting to it by inserting cake emojis, pictures and GIFs. The shared mood created through questing practices was also highlighted by one of the interviewees:

I think that in the [thematic] events, you feel more like you're a part of this one community than when we just normally play (...) when you come up to the quest giver and you see like fifty people every time I'm like: Oh my God, there are so many people here! (...) It's very nice to see everyone in one place and doing the same thing (...) I enjoy being a part of it. (Interviewee 5, female)

What is striking is that the interviewee distinguishes between thematic events and dungeon/trial events (referred to as 'when we normally play') emphasising the ability of thematic events to reframe time and space (Richards, 2014). Consequently, a sense of community is fostered (Van Winkel & Woosnam, 2013) through observing fellow participants during questing practices. Moreover, the interviewee emphasises that during thematic events and questing practices, the extensive player base of ESO is truly visible.

The findings further revealed that some players take part in questing practices during thematic events primarily to collect unique rewards:

Only to take part because something is happening is not enough for me. I need to have a [materialistic] benefit from it. (Interviewee 3, female)

According to this interviewee, participating in thematic events solely for the experience is insufficient; they need to gain something material from them. This suggests that symbols (Collins, 2004) prevail over experience in terms of thematic event participation.

Creating practices

Creating practices involve the in-game crafting of thematic costumes that accurately represent the atmosphere and occasion of the thematic event for players' characters. Costume creation also allows people to display obtained rewards from the thematic event, which resonates with Ducheneaut et al.'s (2006) argument that MMORPG players often exhibit unique items and rewards to show their gains. As observed, players share screenshots of their costumes via Discord and the official ESO forum, showcasing their creations. This

behaviour mirrors findings from offline events, where attendees share photos of their costumes online (Simons, 2019):

Person 1: There are a lot of cool outfits that I have seen around. Here is the best I could do.

Person 2: Saw this Argonian [another player's character] in Stonefalls - a nice touch of whimsy.

The two attendees indicate that their attention during thematic events extends beyond creating their own characters' costumes to appreciating and engaging with the costume creations of fellow players. This is exemplified when players share screenshots of costume creations that have caught their attention in the game ('Saw this Argonian').

Trading practices

Trading practices take place simultaneously with questing practices. Trading practices form when players start using the public game chats to sell or exchange thematic event rewards they have spare quantities from. Moreover, attendees also use these chats to inquire information about what could be collected during the thematic event:

Person 1: What can drop from the event gift boxes?

Person 2: The usual stuff like style pages, crafting motives and materials.

Person 3: All style pages, crafting motives and materials or are there restrictions?

Person 2: Not all but most I think. New ones are excluded.

Through inquiring information, ESO players also develop their game competencies and knowledge as more experienced players share their knowledge without expecting anything in return, which contradicts the notion of reciprocity being a main driver of knowledge exchange amongst people in communities of practice (Ardichvili et al., 2003). Interestingly, people build on each other's questions to gather maximum information, which indicates the significance of knowing potential rewards for most players. This notion is further supported by one of the players asking specifically about 'restrictions'.

Recruiting practices

Recruiting practices appear during thematic events, primarily for dungeon/trial groups rather than thematic event participation. In ESO, this recurrence is explained by people who do not prioritise thematic events when they take place. The findings show that this is more common amongst experienced players:

(...) hardcore players don't need [thematic] events at all because they don't have anything to farm [collect]. It's like... really little amount of people (...) who have over 100k DPS [damage per second] and who want to have a new skirt (laughs). (Interviewee 2, female)

In the interviewee's view, experienced ('hardcore') players do not participate in thematic events because they do not benefit from them by collecting the special

rewards offered, such as crafting motifs and style pages, which are used by players to create different outfits and costumes for their characters ('to have a new skirt').

Virtual practices and interaction rituals after a thematic event

Reflecting practices

Reflecting practices emerge immediately after a thematic event, with players reflecting on their actions before and during the event and continuing to use special rewards and mementos obtained through participation. These practices extend the residual shared mood from the thematic event. For instance, event attendees continue to throw rose petals on each other's characters and use the collected event mementos for days after a thematic event has ended. This not only extends the positive shared mood amongst event participants but also allows players to showcase their participation in the celebration.

Attendees' reflection is also expressed after completing dungeon/trial events. For example, immediately after a trial event, one of the group members prompted everyone else in the group to gather at the virtual tavern (Discord voice guild channel):

Person 1: SO, to the tavern!

Person 2: YES

At the virtual tavern, people were sharing their experience during the last thematic event, which at that point had ended ten days ago, and telling others what type of rewards they had collected. This mirrors Simons's (2019) research on hybrid communities and offline events where it was found that event attendees engage in reflecting after an event.

Discussion and conclusion

The virtual practices identified in this research entail different combinations of interaction ritual ingredients, resulting in different combinations of interaction ritual outcomes (Collins, 2004).

Discussing practices can emerge simultaneously within different virtual contexts (e.g., in the game, the official ESO forum, and different Discord channels). Through these practices, players express their excitement and engage in speculation about new thematic events and potential rewards. The mutual focus of attention and shared mood become increasingly noticeable when participants start building on each other's ideas. This resembles a state of collective effervescence, despite the lack of bodily co-presence, albeit not entirely the same as Collins's (2004) notion of it. Nonetheless, it results in a significant emotional response from players and the success of the interaction ritual can be explained by the fact that participants know each other only through virtual interaction (Simpson et al., 2018).

Recruiting practices appear both before and during thematic events. This shows that similar to offline events (Simons, 2019), virtual events, too, are associated

with recurrence of specific practices during different stages of the event (Getz, 2007). The recurrence of recruiting practices during thematic events happens due to players forming groups for dungeon/trial events and not for thematic events. This may be explained by the low difficulty of thematic events as participants do not seek help from others to complete the quests. However, to further explore this, more research is needed where the data collection sequence can be repeated before, during and after more than two thematic events.

Moreover, recruiting practices are characterised by explicit barriers to outsiders (Collins, 2004). These barriers encompass specific character prerequisites that players must meet, as well as demonstrable familiarity with the dungeon/trial event that the group is being assembled for. Thus, the potential lack of practice elements, in this case materials and competencies (Shove et al., 2012), can establish barriers to outsiders, highlighting the intricate relationship between interaction rituals and practices (Bargeman & Richards, 2020) in a virtual context.

Collaborating practices are more prominent during dungeon/trial events rather than thematic events. They form during dungeon/trial events, provided that all group members engage in collaboration. These practices are characterised by mutual focus of attention and shared mood amongst participants (Collins, 2004). Notably, for most players, engaging in collaborating practices is more important than the outcome and rewards of the dungeon/trial event, emphasising the importance of collaboration for a successful interaction ritual. Collaborating practices also play an integral role in facilitating knowledge and competencies exchange amongst players. This enables players to learn more about the game and to improve their skills in ESO, resonating with Gilbert's (2016) argument about the underlying value of knowledge and competencies exchange within communities of interests.

For bonding practises, the virtual world of ESO serves merely as a platform where in-game friends are co-present through their characters. These practices are mostly characterised by barriers to outsiders. Consequently, it is challenging to observe these practices and insights can be obtained mainly through interviews. When bonding practises form, known-group socialisation is emphasised (Crompton & McKay, 1997), indicating that these practices fulfil the same purpose in a virtual setting as they do in an offline one (Rihova et al., 2015). However, potential alterations in bonding practices may not impact MMORPG communities at a large scale (Shove et al., 2012) due to the associated barriers to outsiders and the fact that they tend to form amongst in-game friends.

Preparing practices are characterised mainly by mutual focus of attention (Collins, 2004). These practices fall under the category of individual practices (Shipway et al., 2012) as players prepare for thematic events on their own. However, planning practices can also become group practices when more experienced players start showing solidarity (Collins, 2004) towards fellow players by sharing tips on how to best prepare for an upcoming thematic event. Thus, planning practices may facilitate knowledge and competencies exchange amongst ESO players. Besides this, the underlying motive for players to perform

preparing practices seems to be thematic event reward acquisition, further highlighting the interdependence between the economy of rituals and the material economy (Collins, 2004).

Planning practices are characterised primarily by mutual focus of attention and barriers to outsiders (Collins, 2004) as revealed through the interviews. Similar to bonding practices, planning practices, too, are challenging to observe. Without planning, some players would not even take part in the upcoming thematic event as they do not want to do it without company. Thus, planning practices seem to have an effect on the formation of bonding practices. However, more research is needed.

Bodily co-presence through characters, mutual focus of attention, and shared mood (Collins, 2004) iemerge in questing practices. Through these practices, thematic events can reframe time and space (Richards, 2014) in a virtual context. Consequently, this may foster a sense of togetherness (Finkel, 2010) and a sense of community (Van Winkel & Woosnam, 2013) for MMORPG players, which indicates that questing practices share characteristics with offline communing practices as recognised by Rihova et al. (2015). Nevertheless, it seems that the underlying reason for taking part in questing practices is to collect unique rewards, which is something that could be investigated further through additional interviews.

The use of rewards and symbols as part of creating practices is visible. Players use them to create character costumes and to nonverbally communicate (Barkan, 2011) their experience and status to the rest of the community (Ducheneaut et al., 2006). This also supports the notion of material commodities consumption as part of event participation (Collins, 2004). These practices are characterised by mutual focus of attention on personal character costumes, as well as on fellow players' costumes.

Trading practices take place simultaneously with questing practices and allow thematic event attendees to inquire information from fellow players about the event rewards. The information is provided mostly by highly competent players who do not gain anything by sharing it, which stands in contrast to the idea that reciprocity is a main driver of knowledge exchange within communities of practice (Ardichvili et al., 2003). Thus, through trading, most ESO players enhance their game knowledge and competencies. These practices are characterised by a mutual focus of attention, the objects of which are the thematic event rewards.

Reflecting practices emerge immediately after a thematic event and sustain a residual shared mood (Collins, 2004). Through them, players share experiences from the thematic event and talk about collected rewards. These rewards serve as symbols infused with the emotional energy from the thematic event, mirroring Simons's (2019) findings.

To conclude, virtual interaction rituals surface through the network capabilities of MMORPGs (Cranmer et. al., 2021) and the dynamic virtual environment. Moreover, small-scale virtual interaction rituals can also be successful for participants, which stands in contrast to Collins's (2004) argument that large-

scale formal interaction rituals are more likely to be successful in a virtual context as opposed to smaller ones. However, this still poses the question of to what extent can small-scale virtual interaction rituals be more successful than large-scale ones, which could be further researched.

Virtual practices develop through combinations of different interaction ritual ingredients, wherein certain ingredients are more prominent depending on the type of practice. These practices before, during and after thematic events facilitate the development of MMORPG communities in two principal manners. The first one is through knowledge and competencies exchange amongst players, which is at the core of collaborating, preparing, and trading practices. The second one is through enhancing players' gameplay by harnessing the liminal qualities inherent in thematic events (Getz, 2007). In a MMORPG setting, these liminal qualities are expressed through questing and creating practices. Engagement in these practices can stimulate a sense of togetherness (Finkel, 2010) and solidarity (Collins, 2004) for thematic event attendees as that is when the vast player base becomes truly visible.

However, certain types of virtual practices, like recruiting practices, can hinder the development of MMORPG communities if the barriers to outsiders associated with them are strictly enforced by most players. These barriers may result in the exclusion of certain players from opportunities for knowledge and competencies development, thus preventing the virtual community from moving forward.

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Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for encouraging nature-based rural tourism practices: a focus on Bulgarian natural areas

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Introduction

It has long been acknowledged that the tourism industry is relevant for the prosperity of nations (Bazargani & Kiliç, 2021). According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) in 2019 Croatia and Greece had the biggest share of tourism's total contribution to their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the European Union, respectively 24.3% and 20.3% (WTTC, 2021). There is also a trend that Southern countries are generally more dependent on tourism, therefore, having a bigger share of tourism in their economy. However, when it comes to domestic travel the trend is the opposite, with France and Germany leading in domestic overnight trips in 2019, while countries like Greece, Bulgaria and Croatia are significantly falling behind (Eurostat, 2021), suggesting that countries with a lower economic status do not travel as much themselves, but at the same time rely heavily on the presence of tourists in their area. In fact, a study by Hall (2004) surveyed over 400 German people, who associated Bulgaria with cheap Black Sea mass resorts and mostly thought it unlikely to visit the country in the near future. This has led to image diversification attempts aiming at emphasizing the uniqueness of the cultural and natural resources (Ibid).

Biodiversity and ecosystem services could be considered among the most valuable tourism assets, especially in developing countries, where biodiversity-based tourism greatly contributes to socio-economic development (WTO, 2011). Balkan countries tend to focus primarily on the protection and use of natural resources when developing eco-tourism (Đukić et al., 2014). While there is existing literature on national parks and tourism in Europe over the years, such literature is mostly about Western European destinations. Research concerning South-Eastern states is outdated to a great extent – still discussing the post-communist transition (Hall, 2000), failing to provide a more modern perspective.

Ever since the start of the pandemic in the early 2020, affected countries around the world have relied on restricting the movement of people to control the spread of the virus (Rume & Islam, 2020). This directly influenced the usual flow of international tourists negatively. When it comes to domestic travel, it is generally reported that numbers declined but not as drastically as international tourist numbers (Gunnella et al., 2021). In fact, it is believed that domestic tourism is increasing significantly especially in destinations with large domestic markets, with open-air, nature-based and rural activities being a major travel trend that is said to be shaping the future of tourism (WTO, 2022a). However, concrete domestic tourism statistics are lacking and the scarce empirical research on the topic does not take into consideration South-Eastern Europe.

The social distancing regulations combined with tourists' fear of travelling paved a way for strengthening sustainable tourism behaviour (Palacios-Florencio et al., 2021). Tourism scholars argue about the positive transformational opportunities of the COVID-19 pandemic for the tourism industry, expressed in environmental awareness, as well as critical reconsideration of the industry and its future (Gössling et al., 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). According to Sigala (2020), COVID-19 research in tourism should inspire new mind-sets and behaviours, such as practicing environmental management not as a legal necessity, but as a "personal lifestyle for a responsible future" (p. 314). In that sense, exploring specific activities tourists engage with, especially in natural areas, could serve as an appropriate method of assessing the transformational effects of a health crisis on environmental awareness. However, academic literature is lacking in exploring specific nature-based tourism practices in the era of COVID-19 in Europe.

However, while most of the recent research on the impacts of COVID-19 in Bulgaria provides a strong positive correlation between the pandemic and increased domestic travel (Ivanova et al., 2021; Slavova, 2021; Terziyska & Dogramadjieva, 2021), it is lacking in its implication for specific nature-based tourism practices. Not to mention the lack of future predictions regarding nature-based tourism in Bulgarian natural areas. Consequently, the present study aims to explore the recent phenomenon of COVID-19 and its potential implications for the future of nature-based tourism practices. Therefore, by focusing on local stakeholders in national parks in the country of Bulgaria, such as small-scale business owners and landscape managers, a connection between the crisis and nature-based behaviour change is to be established. The results from the paper can aid the better understanding of practices during times of crisis, which could be a valuable tool for governance systems to be better prepared for such types of shocks in the future (Kanda & Kivima, 2020). By focusing on Bulgaria specifically, the results could serve as an example for other Balkan countries, due to the numerous similarities between them in terms of landscape specifics, tourism market and economic development.

By investigating the relation between COVID-19 and the encouragement of nature-based tourism practices, the present study is intended to answer the following main research question:

1. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected nature-based tourism activities in the country of Bulgaria?

To support the argumentation follow-up secondary research questions have been outlined:

2. What are the main characteristics of pre-COVID nature-based tourism practices in Bulgaria?
3. How do local Bulgarian stakeholders view changes in nature-based tourism practices during COVID-19?
4. What is local Bulgarian stakeholders' view on the future of nature-based tourism practices after COVID-19?

Nature-based tourism

For a very long time nature-based tourism has been one of the fastest growing elements of tourism (Kuenzi & McNeely, 2008). According to Valentine (1992), there isn't one concrete definition of the term. It could, however, simply be explained as "tourism [that] is primarily concerned with the direct enjoyment of some relatively undisturbed phenomenon of nature" (Ibid, p. 108). The UNWTO define nature tourism as "a form of tourism in which the main motivation is the observation and appreciation of nature" (WTO, 2001, p. 4). Besides enjoyment, visiting natural areas is useful if you want to experience outdoor adventures, as well as learn about and/or participate in conserving the environment (ACS, 2022). In addition, nature-based tourism can be beneficial to one's health, both physically and mentally (Chen & Prebensen, 2017). Nature-based tourism could be considered a variation of rural tourism. According to the UNWTO, rural tourism could be classified as a tourism activity that takes place in a non-urban area, characterized by low population density, agriculture and forestry dominated landscape, as well as traditional social structures (WTO, 2019). Contrary to the widespread definition of tourism as travel away from home (WTO, 2011), in the case of rural tourism home regions of tourists are the target market (Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010).

If travelling to a natural area is accompanied by an interest in the traditional cultures, and a particular objective to minimize negative impacts, nature-based travel can be classified also as ecotourism (WTO, 2001). In fact, in past academic literature these two concepts are often used as synonyms. More recent research states that the development of nature-based tourism can lead to ecotourism and rural tourism development (Komasi et al., 2022), making these concepts closely interrelated. Finally, nature-based travel involves a particular variety of nature-based forms of activities and practices, such as hiking, camping and/or skiing (Fredman & Tyrväinen, 2010). Such a variety of tourism practices may eventually lead to socially desirable impacts, such as sustainable development (Lamers et al., 2017). In that sense, when the experiences that nature provides are properly accounted for and accessible, the demand for sustainability increases, making "travel and tourism [...] a force for safeguarding the natural world" (Spalding et al., 2021, p. 127). It is believed that any environment could host the development of nature-based tourism and the interest in it is to some extent due to the perception that nature-based tourism might be the most sustainable form of tourism (Valentine, 1992). In order for ecotourism to be sustainable the natural and cultural assets need to survive and prosper simultaneously (Wearing & Neil, 1999).

Practice theory

A practice is something that is related to a routinized behaviour that usually involves some sort of a physical and/or mental activity as well as different objects and items. However, practice theory goes beyond the definition of a practice as an outcome of events. It looks at practice as an ongoing process involving a particular sense of meaning, knowledge and skills that are continually transformed (Shove et al., 2012). In practice theory, performing a practice requires three core elements: materials, competences and meaning, and when it comes to new practices or a change in practice, these three elements are mutually shaping, rather than independent (Ibid.). In other words, when one of these elements change, the other

two are bound to change as well. Having said that, social practice theory is used to understand social practices, performances, emotions and their meanings (Lamers et al., 2017).

The use of practice theory in the context of tourism creates knowledge about the industry and helps to grasp its complexity related to mobility and performativity (de Souza Bispo, 2016). Moreover, practice theory is useful for answering questions related to “how and when a practice emerged, how it developed, matured, aged and perhaps disappeared or dissolved into other practices” (Lamers et al., 2017, p. 58). The famous social theory scholar Theodore R. Schatzki points the practical aspect of practice theory as “knowing how to carry out desired actions through basic doings and sayings” (2012, p. 16). Interdependencies between elements which constitute a practice are maintained over time only through consistent performance (Shove et al., 2012). What is then the role of the individual performing that practice? As Shove et al. (2012) puts it, “individuals feature as the carriers or hosts of a practice” (p. 12). This shifts the understanding that knowledge, know-how and meanings are attributed to the individual, and instead treats these qualities as “elements and qualities of a practice in which a single individual participates” (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 250). In other words, the significance and meanings of engaging with nature-based tourism practices are not simply attributed to the heads and body of the individual, but they are simply features constituting the practice of nature-based tourism (Shove et al., 2012). It is believed that in order to reach the required knowledge on social practices one needs to use methods that allow observation of these practices as well as participation in them (Yanow, 2006). This is in line with the understanding that tourism does not just happen only with tourists, but instead it requires the participation of locals and professionals (Schatzki, 2012). In that sense, individual behaviour is shaped by social structures, such as rules and regulations, and vice versa. By using on the social practices model designed by Spaargaren (2003), behavioural practices are placed in the centre, rather than focusing on individual attitudes and norms, also referred to as Agency and Structure respectively. The relevance of practice theory expands also into (tourism) policy creation and governance (Lamers et al., 2017). A successful empirical research using practice theory methods could serve as a useful policy tool by identifying and advising more effective social practices.

Methodology

The geographical area of interest in the present study is the republic of Bulgaria, South-Eastern Europe. Although there are three separate research locations in this study, they will not be considered as three separate case studies, because the focus is on the nature of the practices tourists perform, rather than the location they perform them in. Besides, these three locations attract relatively similar types of tourists performing similar practices. In that sense, it would be easier to generalize the findings by combining all three locations into one singular case – Bulgarian natural areas. The Bulgarian natural landscape is very diverse and is a very strong pull factor for both international and local tourism development. An early survey from 2001 showed that when it comes to domestic trips, the main reason Bulgarian citizens travel their own country is to engage with activities like mountain hiking, visiting churches and monasteries, and/or skiing (Vulchev, 2001). The fact that these tourism practices are primarily nature-based, shows the high touristic value of natural areas in Bulgaria. The present study will focus on the only three main

national parks (NP) on the territory of the republic of Bulgaria, namely “Rila”, “Pirin” and “Central Balkan”.

The target population of this research consists of park managers, tourism entrepreneurs and visitors in the three national parks in Bulgaria. To be exact, these three parks will be used for performing physical research as well. The physical research included on-site observations, casual conversations with tourists on the topic of COVID-19 and its impacts on nature based practices in Bulgaria, as well as blending in with the crowd and becoming one of the nature-based tourists themselves. Prior to the fieldtrip five extensive online interviews were conducted, two with park managers, respectively operating in National Park “Central Balkan” and National Park “Rila”, and three tourism entrepreneurs working in tourism agencies as well as owning tourism properties in the parks. The same exact approach was used in gathering data from each park in order to ensure equality in representation, provided that external setbacks out of the control of the researcher do not take place. These online interviews added more clarity to the whole situation in Bulgarian national parks when it comes to tourism practices and COVID-19, which was a useful foundation for the fieldwork. Targeted sampling was used for recruiting the representatives of the national parks and the tourism sector as well as landscape managers, through sending official e-mails, while convenience sampling was used to gather data from tourists on-site.

The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of questions related to general information about the interviewee and their workplace/professional focus, followed by questions about the tourism sector, the particular respondent’s personal experience developing their business and/or expertise, as well as how the COVID-19 pandemic fits in the picture. All questions in the interview were open-ended and often stimulate follow-up questions to elaborate on a particular topic and/or provide clarity. The general length of the interviews was 30-40 minutes depending on how interviewees answered the questions. Moreover, these interviews were done in Bulgarian as preferred by the interviewees. The interviews were recorded, provided that the interviewee agreed, in order to retrieve the answers later. To perform observations of and talk to tourists in natural areas, physical fieldwork took place for 3 full days.

Before performing any type of analysis, the recorded interviews were transcribed into text. Consequently, they were grouped into two categories according to the respondent and their role in the research. Therefore, these categories are ‘landscape managers and ‘tourism entrepreneurs’. Since direct consumers of practices could be considered as important change agents (Verbeek & Mommaas, 2008), an additional group was added consisting of “tourists” and their opinions, gathered during the fieldwork. In that sense, the first category consists of two extensive interviews, category two includes three extensive interviews and the final group consists of short interviews with 20 participants. The total sample size, therefore, consists of 25 participants, which varied in terms of age and occupation, while the female-male ratio was relatively balanced. The means by which the transcribed interviews were analysed was through thematic analysis methods, specifically open coding. After the interviews had been transcribed, all parts of the transcripts that were related to a particular topic relevant for the results were assigned with a code. Consequently, these codes were categorized into themes in order to have a more structured overview of the data collected. The main subjects

relevant for the research objective were, therefore, highlighted, which was based on Spaargaren's (2003) social practice model, in which practices are influenced either by lifestyle changes or system of provision changes. This distinction helps to establish a clear understanding of the underlying reasons for potential changes in nature-based tourism practices in national parks in Bulgaria. After the themes were outlined for the three separate categories of respondents, they were compared to each other to see whether there were any significant differences between the perceptions and understanding of these actor groups. Finally, field observations are mentioned in order to cross-reference the rest of the findings section.

Results

Practices

The most frequent answer to the question "What types of practices do you/tourists perform in national parks" were hiking, trekking, taking photographs, meeting new people, relaxing, while virtually all interviewees mentioned hiking/trekking first. This is definitely not a surprising finding, since the national parks in Bulgaria are more or less designed for such practices and mainly attract tourists looking for similar experiences. On that note, the general motivation of tourists to visit natural areas is mainly related to positive experiences, such as improving physical and mental health, enjoying the serene and clean environment, escaping daily routines and relaxing. Looking at this from a practice theory lens, the aforementioned practices consist of materials, competence, and meaning (Shove et al., 2012). In the context of nature-based practices in Bulgarian national parks, the *materials* required to engage with hiking activities are the hiking trails, without which, though not exclusively, this practice cannot be performed. Additionally, hiking equipment is another material dimension of visiting nature. Both professional and casual equipment is used by tourists in Bulgarian national parks, according to the difficulty of the specific hiking trail, such as hiking shoes, wind and water resistant clothes, either physical or digital maps. Additional elements include the roads and parking spots in order to reach the starting point of a trip, as well as mountain huts and other forms of accommodation nature-based tourists require. When it comes to *competence*, there are a couple of considerations that tourists should take into account before performing any practices in the mountain, including getting acquainted with the route and weather conditions, travelling in groups and having basic medical knowledge. It can generally be stated that Bulgarian tourists are competent when it comes to performing nature-based practices. As far as *meaning* is concerned, similar to the aforementioned motivation, nature-based practices are connected with positive connotations. Connecting nature-based practices with escapism and personal enjoyment seems to be the generally accepted meaning of the practice among Bulgarian tourists, which to some extent also brings national pride. If there is one thing that Bulgarian people appreciate most about their country is its natural environment and they tend to often visit it especially during weekends. During the field observations first-hand visual understanding of what tourists do when they visit national parks in Bulgaria was achieved, which falls in line with the previously mentioned elements of nature-based practices.

COVID-19 impact on tourist flow in Bulgarian national parks

All national parks in Bulgaria conduct special tourism monitoring activities yearly in order to help manage the tourist flow better and investigate its impact on the biodiversity of the park. That being said, the official management office of all national parks provided official documents consisting of detailed information about the tourist flow from 2018 to 2021 in the respective regions of the parks (Table 1).

Table 1. Total tourist flow in Bulgarian national parks (2018-2021)

	2018	2019	2020	2021
NP "Pirin"	215,656	340,162	548,041	688,262
NP "Rila"		271,000	83,475	176,077
NP "Central Balkan"	~70,000	~70,000	~75,000	>70,000

The three parks and the data on tourist flow seem to represent three completely different scenarios – increase in tourism (NP "Pirin"), decrease in tourism (NP "Rila"), and neutrality (NP "Central Balkan"). As it is not the main focus to the paper and this information was not anticipated initially, the particular reason for this phenomenon is not clear. Perhaps the different parks have different monitoring strategies resulting in big gaps or there are other unaccounted for factors that lead to this phenomenon. However, in the first two months of the pandemic in 2020, the whole country of Bulgaria was under a complete lockdown and travelling out of town was pretty much impossible. During that time some important consequences could be mentioned when it comes to natural areas and tourism. Firstly, the drastic decrease in visitors for a short time improved some aspects of the natural environment. Due to the sudden drop in visitors, that ecological change was extremely noticeable not only in natural areas, but it has been reported in many places around the world. Specifically, for Bulgarian national parks, a couple of respondents revealed that despite the complete lockdown, people from municipalities located right next to the national parks had no problem visiting them. Those local people were the only actual tourists in the parks during the first two months. However, these numbers were very low, bringing the second consequence - the local tourism economy suffered immensely. Not only did owners have to close their mountain huts because of the decreased tourist flow, but the tourists that could go didn't because of the uncertainty of whether they would have a place to stay in or not. This created a wicked feedback loop for tourists and tourism entrepreneurs for a short time. After mountain hut owners were allowed to open their businesses again, they were forced to reduce their guest capacity with at least 40%, which led to financial difficulties resulting in higher prices for the same quality of service.

Thematic analysis

Agency, or Lifestyle, is understood as lifestyle characteristics, such as preferences, choices related to nature-based travel, prospects and overall worldview. While, *Structure* is understood as the system of provision in a society, including enabling as well as restricting elements, necessary to perform a particular activity. Table 2 presents a summary of the key findings compared across themes and stakeholders.

Table 2. Channels of information compared accross themes.

Stakeholder group	Lifestyle	System of provision
Landscape managers	Tourist profile: nature lovers No particular changes in materials or competence of nature-based practices due to COVID-19. A change in meaning is reported – healthier lifestyle and environmental awareness.	An increase in regulation measures was mentioned as a result of the pandemic. A significant drop in tourism numbers during the first two months was reported as result of the lockdown. A particular desperation to visit natural areas as the only safe environment during the restriction period could be observed. Changes in the meaning dimension of practices mostly attributed to the regulations and norms
Tourism entrepreneurs	Tourist profile: health seekers No reported changes in practice induced by Lifestyle Somewhat increased respect in people towards nature	Significant economic decline in tourism businesses during the first couple of months of the pandemic The only change mentioned is the tendency to replace overnight stays with day trips. Change in meaning after people are forced to explore nature due to limitations
Tourists	Personal motivation: love for nature; health considerations No reported changes in practice induced by Lifestyle A particular increase in nature visitation was reported. Varying opinions on whether meaning has changed or not	Excluding the first two months of the lockdown, tourists did not report any effects on their nature-based behaviour. A shared observation of an increase in more young people visiting the mountain due to the lack of other alternatives was mentioned. The lockdown seems to be widely related to the increased environmental awareness.

Discussion and conclusion

Identifying nature-based tourist motivation to perform nature-based activities or to simply visit natural areas could be attributed to the benefits tourists connect to or seek (Tangeland, 2011). The themes Agency and Structure were both noticeable when it comes to explaining the underlying reason or motivation to engage in nature-based tourism practices. However, according to the interview analysis, Structure, or the System of provision, seems to be the prevalent one. The restrictions, norms, and limitations around the pandemic shaped how society would perform their normal activities because it was on a national level and everyone was forced to comply. This makes the pandemic act as a disruption in the normal daily routine of people (Greene et al., 2022). According to Goossens (2000), the people have an unmet need, their purchase motivation rises and looks for a product to fulfil that unmet need. The scarce provision of recreational activities more or less pushed people to discover the mountain. That is not to say that people did not appreciate nature before, it only comes to show that System of provision as a factor in shaping social practices (Spaargaren, 2003) turns out to be the main influence when it comes to nature-based practices in Bulgarian national parks in the times of COVID-19.

When assessing the profile of the nature-based travellers in the context of Bulgarian national parks, it is reported that there isn't a particular set of characteristics that define a person that visits national parks. This falls in line with Valentine's (1992) explanation that nature-based tourists are not homogeneous. After analysing the interviews with all stakeholder categories of interest in this research a potential change only in the meaning dimension of nature-based practices is reported, while the other two elements (materials and competence) are unanimously considered as unchanged. More specifically, it is generally accepted that people have started to appreciate nature and its benefits more due to the COVID-19 situation than before, while physically people perform the same activities with the same required equipment and skills/knowledge. According to practice theory literature, though, the three elements of social practice, are explained as related and influencing each other (Qui et al., 2021). In other words, when one of the elements changes, the other two eventually follow. This is definitely not the case in the present research. However, when speaking of other social practices like driving a car, it is often when the meaning of performing a practice changes, eventually the rest changes (Liedtke et al., 2013). Perhaps the dramatic effects of COVID-19 in most aspects of life has led to us assuming a drastic change in human-nature interactions, while in reality the findings show otherwise. Taking into account the relatively recent nature of the events surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, perhaps not enough time has passed in order for the change in meaning of nature-based tourism practices in Bulgarian national parks to change the material and competence aspect. In that sense, in order to investigate whether material and competence really do not change overtime as a result of the pandemic, additional research in the following years should take place.

According to Roy (2020), the global scope and influence of the COVID-19 is a potential factor for a global system change. Despite its devastating impact on the tourism industry as a whole, such a crisis could have transformative properties (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). This could be expressed by an increase in sustainable

practices people engage with and environmental awareness. Although international tourist numbers dropped drastically, domestic tourism in Bulgaria increased. Rousseau and Deschacht (2020) researched online search behaviour of people in 20 of the biggest European states, including Bulgaria. What they found was a positive change in public awareness towards natural areas due to an increase in visitation and appreciation of green spaces in Europe. Therefore, it could be concluded that the effects of the pandemic on environmental awareness and willingness to visit nature is a common phenomenon for Europe as a whole. By exploring social practices in an environmental context, the present study draws implications for sustainable development. In that sense, the results from performing qualitative research in Bulgarian national parks show that indeed the COVID-19 pandemic encouraged tourists to engage in nature-based tourism activities in ways of increasing nature appreciation, which answers the main research question of the present study.

Being a safe environment, national parks were seen as the best alternative to normal tourism and entertainment. The regulations eventually changed the meaning of performing a nature-based practice. More specifically, it could be concluded that nature-based practices are now instilled with expression of the increased environmental appreciation as a result of the pandemic. It is more important, however, whether this change will be long term or it will disappear as soon as the pandemic is over. As of the current time this research was conducted (Spring of 2022) much of the regulations, if not all, related to COVID-19 have been eliminated. Travel in Bulgaria has resumed and the situation as well as opportunities provided are virtually the same as pre-COVID-19 times. However, as reported by most of the respondents in this study, the changes in meaning of performing nature-based practices are still present and will remain in the following years. This establishes a positive vision for the future of nature-based practices in Bulgarian national parks, which could pave the way for sustainable tourism development in the coming years.

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Importance-Performance Analysis: A Diagnostic Tool for the Development of Tourism in Nigeria

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Introduction

Despite the tourism potentials in Nigeria, tourism development in the country has been affected by several challenges. For example, the Nigeria Presidential Council on Tourism Development in 2005 identified some problems that militate against tourism development in Nigeria, including inadequate funding, the absence of a tourism master plan, the poor state of infrastructure, internal security, the lack of a tourism development fund and policy discontinuity (Okpanku, 2015). Also, Ajayi (2012) recorded a lack of facilities and infrastructure, the non-existence of a national carrier, poor management and lastly the insurgency which has virtually crippled other sectors of the country's economy. Correspondingly, Agbebi (2014) still echoed some of these concerns that confront the industry (such as funding, corruption, lack of strong commitment and dedication, the ineptitude of personnel, policy flip-flop and bad implementation). From these scholars' comments, after eight years of identifying tourism as a viable sector in 2006 and the formulation of the Nigerian Tourism Development Master Plan, there is still evidence to suggest that little has been achieved over the twelve years.

For Esu (2015) Nigeria's tourism legal environment is weak and has minimal tourism legislation. He also stated that for the Nigerian Government to benefit from the massive tourism potential, there is a need to establish an institutional and regulatory framework to enable tourism entrepreneurs to succeed (Esu, 2015). Further, another issue is the absence of an institutional or organisational capacity to control tourism at the national level Honey & Gilpin (2009). Moreover, the overlaps among government departments at both national and regional levels pose difficulty in working out a coordinated plan (Honey and Gilpin, 2009).

Further, there have been problems with implementing tourism policies, and local communities can frustrate tourism policy implementation effort if such policies were formulated without their input in the first instance or if they are unhappy with tourism development. Generally, in Nigeria policy formulation and decision-making is passive and top-down, and there have been issues in tourism development in some communities, for example, Erin-Ijesha in Osun State (Adeyemo & Bada, 2016). It could be said that since the top-down approach has not recorded much success in time past, there should be greater emphasis on changing this standpoint. Other issues are the lack of reliable data on the numbers of international arrivals and departures from Nigeria (Adeleke, 2008; NTDMP, 2006).

Tourism is considered to hold the potential for economic development in Nigeria if there is political stability (Dickson & Dickinson, 2015). In this context, Adeleke (2008) states that for Nigeria to be able to develop tourism, the government need to ensure peace and stability. This is because images perceived by tourists about Nigeria include those of crime, corruption and terrorism: Boko Haram insurgencies

in Northern Nigeria, political violence, militancy and kidnapping in the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria. A prominent case is the terrorist attack on the Government Secondary School Chibok, Borno State in April 2014 when the Boko Haram sect abducted over 200 young school teenagers which attracted global attention, the "Bring back our girls" BBOG campaign all over the world. Also, recently in March 2018 saw the abduction of 110 Secondary School girls in Dapchi, Yobe State. The Boko Haram attacks have escalated the security crisis in Nigeria since 2010 (Hoffmann, 2013).

Having identified the tourism sector as a priority with potential for economic development as late as 1999, it was at this time that the government began to pay attention to tourism development, tourism policy and planning (Adeleke, 2008; Nwanne, 2016). For example, as the military Head of State between 1976 and 1979, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo allocated NGN1million to each state for tourism development (Fagbile, 2006). It was not until 1999 that tourism issues started to spring up again when the democratic government came into power during Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's regime as President (Fagbile, 2006). Likewise, during his second regime as President in the year 2006, the government authority identified tourism as a priority industry capable of earning foreign exchange and bringing economic development (NTDMP, 2006). Despite these, tourism development still encounter some difficulties.

Given the fluidity of the tourism sector and the diverse range of stakeholders involved, tourism development can be complex. Tourism planners and destination managers can use an awareness of stakeholders' experiences and what is thought relevant to tourism development as a guide development. The importance–performance analysis (IPA), is a relevant model that can be used to address questions about tourism development. This study used the IPA to analyse tourist development in Nigeria.

The Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA)

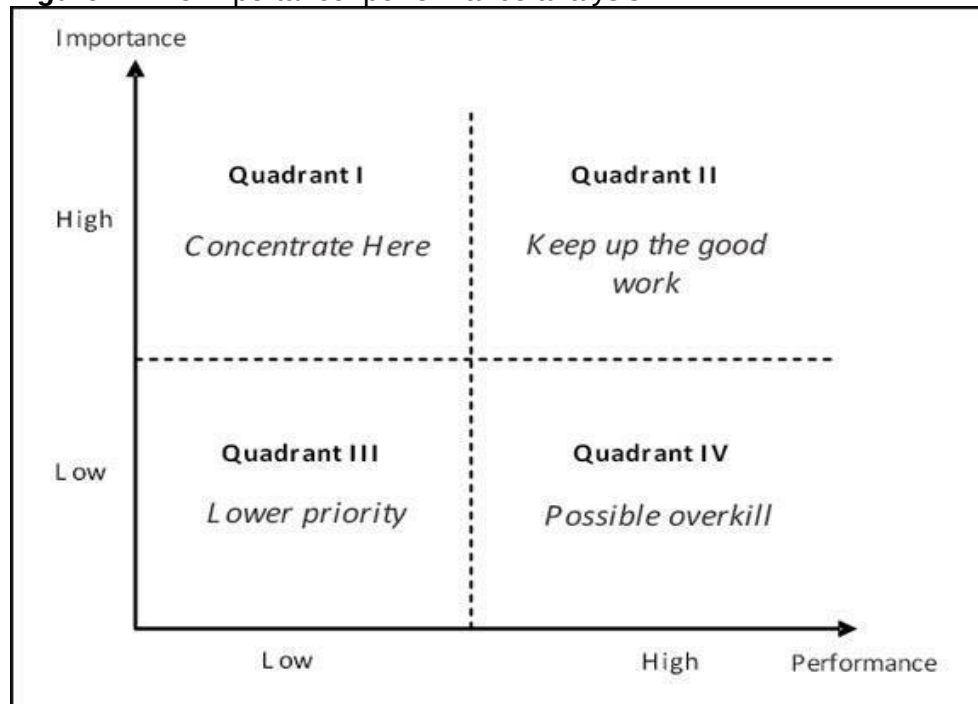
The Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) framework is designed to assess the importance and performance of many variables simultaneously. IPA has been used to evaluate in different field such as the banking industry ((Matzler et al., 2003), education (Silva & Fernandes, 2011), destination marketing and tourism management (Griffin & Edwards, 2012). It can guide organisations in identifying the most appropriate strategic options to enhance competitiveness (Lai & Hitchcock, 2015). Using the IPA technique, results can be presented in a two-dimensional grid to show the strengths and weaknesses of the tourism variables being studied ((Evans & Chon, 1989). With a visual analysis of the data, policymakers or managers can identify the areas where the resources and programs need to be concentrated and where they might be misdirected according to the respondent feedback (Evans and Chon, 1989). This research expands on the work of Evans and Chon (1989), which adopted the IPA matrix to solve tourism problems and resolve policy issues in two tourists' destinations in the United States of America. Put simply, variables deemed 'very important' and to be performing 'very poorly' will be those of greatest concern to policymakers and stakeholders.

According to Evans and Chon (1989) and Lai and Hitchcock (2015), the importance-performance analysis follows three simple steps which include:

1. The development of a list of variables to be used in the study. The variable list is the foundation upon which one builds, and it is essential to develop a list which accurately reflects the relevant issues. Again, Lopes & Maia (2012) emphasise that determining the variables to measure is a crucial factor in the success of IPA.
2. The determination of a sample frame to conduct the survey research.
3. The calculation of the perceived Importance-Performance Analysis of each variable studied. The matrix, made up of four quadrants, allows each variable to be plotted according to its perceived importance and performance. The IPA is presented using a two-dimensional matrix where the x-axis depicts 'performance' and the y-axis depicts 'importance' (Prajogo & McDermott, 2011; Tzeng & Chang, 2011), as illustrated in Figure 1.

Quadrant I: variables that fall into this cell reflect that they are very important to the respondents, whereas the performance levels are relatively low. This communicates a direct message that improvement efforts should 'concentrate here' (Evans and Chon, 1989). It is of high importance and low performance, and there is need for immediate attention as the organisation has a significant weakness in this area ((Deng, 2007).

Quadrant II: represents variables described as being very important to the respondents and, at the same time, the destination seems to have high levels of performance on these activities. The message here is to 'keep up the good work'. It is of high importance, and high-performance value needs to be maintained here (Evans and Chon, 1989; Deng, 2007).

Figure 1: The importance–performance analysis

Source: Tzeng and Chang (2011)

Quadrant III: is characterised by variables with low importance and performance ratings. Even if the level of performance is low in this cell, managers should not be excessively concerned since the variables are perceived to be of 'low priority'. Limited resources should be expended on these low priority variables (Evans and Chon, 1989).

Quadrant IV: the last cell represents variables of low importance, but relatively high performance. Respondents are satisfied with the organisation/destination's performance but fail to match a great deal of importance to it, meaning 'possible overkill' (Evans and Chon, 1989). This implies that the resources managers commit to these variables could be used elsewhere, i.e., in Quadrants I or II (Prajogo and McDermott, 2011).

The IPA model is useful as a diagnostic tool used to examine the level of importance that people associate with a variable and the level of its performance as perceived by them (Griffin and Edwards, 2012). Further, the analysis of representation from IPA can help formulate an action plan to improve on the variables that have been identified not to be doing well (ibid.). When plotting the IPA matrix, the scaling of the axes and the location of variables into the four quadrants is critical since this determines the results and their interpretation (Matzler et al., 2003). The strategies implemented from the results derived can address the crucial issues (Lopes and Maia, 2012).

According to Lai and Hitchcock (2015), a comprehensive review of the literature is essential to justify the values of the new attributes set. Hence, the review of the

literature was done to derive the list of issues/questions addressed by the IPA in this research. This is presented in Table 1.

Methodology

The questionnaire was designed using Qualtrics online survey software. Following the recommendations by Martilla & James (1977), the variables included in the questionnaire were selected through the review of existing literature (see list of variables used in designing the questionnaire in Table 1. These variables were used to create the sections in the tourism policy and planning importance-performance questionnaire. The importance measures were placed on one side, and the performance measures beside it, to allow the respondents progress naturally from one question to the other. This has been adopted in other importance-performance analysis studies; see for example Frauman & Banks (2012) and Griffin and Edwards (2012).

The variables were grouped under four major themes: 1) environmental situation analysis (micro and macro), 2) stakeholder participation, 3) endorsement of a strategic approach to destination planning and 4) implementation/monitoring and evaluation. These broad themes were further divided into twelve sub-themes to form the questionnaire. This asked the stakeholders how important each variable was to tourism policy and planning, and how they would rate the performance of the same variables in the Nigerian tourism industry using a six-point Likert scale, ranging from very important (5) to very unimportant (1) and don't know/ N/A (6). Correspondingly, the performance scale sought to know the performance of each attribute on a six-point Likert-scale, ranging from very high (5) to very low (1) and Don't know/ N/A (6).

Table 1: Variables selected from the literature for IPA the questionnaire

THEMES	VARIABLES
SITUATION ANALYSIS – ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATION ANALYSIS (MICRO AND MACRO)	Theft/ attack (Mair, 2015; Mansfield & Jonas, 2006; Pearsall & Pierce, 2010; Wade & Eagles, 2003) Crime rate (Blancas et al., 2010; Frauman & Banks, 2011; Kim et al., 2012; McCool et al., 2001; Nunkoo, 2015; Sharma et al., 2008; Wan, 2012).
	Incorporation and implementation of local ideas in community/ site management ((Choi & Sirakaya, 2006)
	Tourism related master plan (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Dodds, 2007; Sofield & Li, 2011)
	Availability of development control policy (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006).
	Local resident participation in planning process (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Landorf, 2009).
	Stakeholder collaboration (Bello et al., 2016; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Ezeuduji, 2015; Landorf, 2009)Ezeuduji, 2015; Bello, Carr and Lovelock, 2016(Adebayo & Butcher, 2021)).
	Level of cooperation among stakeholder groups (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006).
	Regional development, economic restructuring ((Baidal, 2004; Dredge & Jenkins, 2003; Mair, 2006, 2015).
	Employment in tourism (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Simao & Partidário, 2012).
	The planning document quantifies the economic benefit of tourism to the area.
	The planning document quantifies the employment creation ability of local tourism activity
	The planning document identifies the major economic activities in the local area
	The planning document establishes the relative importance of tourism, compared with other industries, to the economic development of the local area
	The planning document evaluates the adequacy of business skills possessed by local tourism industry operators
	The planning document includes quantitative analysis of current visitor numbers, length of stay and spending
	The planning document includes broadly based goals related to the economic benefits of future tourism development
	Specific objectives target the equitable distribution of tourism's economic benefits throughout the local area (Simpson, 2001; Ruhanen, 2004).
	Indigenous product development opportunities;
	Marketing of indigenous product.
	Indigenous employment opportunities;
	Indigenous business development opportunities; (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010).
	Availability of local credit to local business (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006).
	Percent of income leakage out of local community (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006).
	Seasonality of tourism/tourist visitation (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006).
	Conservation and environmental protection (Cao, 2015) flora and fauna (Simão and Partidário, 2012).
	Future development goals (Ruhanen, 2004).
	Restoration of attractions (Zhang et al., 1999)
	Use of low-impact technology (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006).
	Incorporation of environmental criteria in tourism planning (Torres-Delgado & Saarinen, 2014).
	The planning document describes the area's principal geographic features

	The planning document describes the main characteristics of the local climate The planning document identifies flora and fauna which are unique to the area The planning document assesses the resilience and/or fragility of the physical environment The planning document describes the principal tourism sites in the area The planning document evaluates the current capacity of tourism plant and infrastructure The planning document includes broadly based goals related to environmental protection (Ruhanen, 2004; Simpson, 2001). Distribution of land uses for tourism (Torres- Delgado & Palomeque, 2014; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010). Environmental protection of indigenous land (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010) The planning document identifies current land use and ownership patterns in the area (Ruhanen, 2004; Simpson, 2001). Air quality index Amount of erosion on the natural sites. Frequency of environmental accidents related to tourism (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006). Degradation/erosion of natural and cultural resource (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006). Availability of funds for maintaining cultural sites (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006; Whitford and Ruhanen, 2010). Retention of local customs and language. Loss of authenticity and becoming impersonal (Cao, 2015; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). Indigenous product/cultural authenticity; Quality of life improvements (Landorf, 2009; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010). Host community satisfaction and attitude toward tourism development (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006). Continuance of traditional activities by local residents (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006). Resident involvement in tourism industry (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006). The planning document identifies current population levels and demographics The planning document acknowledges a need to integrate local tourism strategies with national policies for tourism development (Simpson, 2001; Ruhanen, 2004). Accurate data collection and tourism information change (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006). Trustworthiness, usefulness and enjoyment on intentions ((Aye et al., 2013). GIS for tourism planning and marketing ((van der Merwe & van Niekerk, 2013). Training/ educating/ mentoring (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006; Whitford and Ruhanen, 2010). Historical buildings (Frauman and Banks, 2011). Number of expert consultation in tourism development (Park & Yoon, 2011). The planning document identifies locally important community values. The planning document identifies locally important lifestyle features. The planning document identifies current issues which are critical to residents. The planning document assesses community attitudes to tourism. The planning document assesses the overall quality of life in the area. The planning document includes a vision for the future which aligns with local community values, attitudes and lifestyles. The planning document includes broadly based goals related to community values and lifestyle protection. The planning document includes broadly based goals which emphasise the local benefits of tourism development (Simpson, 2001; Ruhanen, 2004).
STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION	

	Economic benefit (Simão and Partidário, 2012). Level of tourism development, tourist/resident ratio, type of tourist (Panyik, 2012 cited in Panyik, 2015). Seasonality of tourism offer (Torres- Delgado & Palomeque, 2014). Interactions and community legitimacy (Krutwaysho & Bramwell, 2010). Length of residence, Level of knowledge about the industry (Panyik, 2012 cited in Panyik, 2015). Percentage of guides at site that are locals (Larson & Poudyal, 2012). Operate the destinations welcome centre. Develop and promote special events. Development through media promotion and advantage. Communication of promotional plans to local businesses. Develop linkages with regional tourism organisations to promote entire region. Spokesperson with government agencies. Assist and support private sector product development. Develop sales staff to solicit group business. Attend consumer and trade travel shows (Evans and Chon, 1989). Public-private sector partnership (Ahebwa, 2013; Dredge, 2006)
	Central government agency(ies) took part in the planning process Relevant regional and/or territorial council(s) took part in the planning process Governmental (national or regional or local) opinion influenced the final strategic direction selected. The relevant regional tourism organisation(s) took part in the planning process. The local tourism industry took part in the planning process. Regional/district tourism organisation or local tourism industry opinion influenced the final strategic direction selected. Representatives of existing visitor groups took part in the planning process. Existing visitor group opinion influenced the final strategic direction selected. Other local organisations (non-tourism) took part in the planning process. Local community took part in the planning process (Simpson, 2001; Ruhanen, 2004). Indigenous participation (Dredge & Jenkins, 2012)(Dredge and Jenkins, 2012). Ordinary local residents took part in the planning process. Secondary stakeholder (other local organisations or local residents) opinion influenced the final strategic direction selected (Simpson, 2001; Ruhanen, 2004). Aviation reform, develop infrastructure (Zhang et al., 1999). Tourism promotion, tourism education/training, development of tourists' attractions (Zhang, Chong and Ap, 1999) Centralisation or decentralisation, foreign investment (Zhang, Chong and Ap, 1999). Tourism receipt (Zhang, Chong and Ap, 1999).
IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW /	Tourist /attitude toward tourism development (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; McCool et al., 2001). Education and training programs for visitors (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006).

IMPLEMENTATION/ MONITORING AND EVALUATION	Golf and tennis opportunities. Historical and cultural. Scenic attractions. Hospitality of local people. Rest/relaxation opportunities. Shopping opportunities. Suitable restaurants. Entertainment. Suitable accommodations (Evans and Chon, 1989). Specific objectives are prioritised in terms of implementation urgency. The planning document clearly assigns responsibility for key task implementation. The planning document contains a clearly articulated review and evaluation mechanism. The planning document estimates the resource costs of the recommended development strategy The planning document indicates specific methods by which the identified resource costs are to be allocated to development participants (Simpson, 2001). The time dimension of the planning process reflects a long-term orientation (Simpson, 2001; Ruhanen, 2004).
	Management/operation (Xiao, 2006). Public access to sites, accommodation, transport (Martin & Assenov, 2014). Policy decision-making, clear boundaries between government and private interest (Dredge & Jenkins, 2012). The planning document includes broadly based goals related to the nature and scale of future tourism development. The planning document includes broadly based goals related to community values and lifestyle protection. The planning document includes broadly based goals which emphasise the local benefits of tourism development. The planning document identifies a range of alternative strategies by which broadly based goals may be achieved. The planning document evaluates each strategy option prior to determining a range of specific objectives. Specific objectives support previously established broad goals. Specific objectives selected are based on supply capability as opposed to market demand. Specific objectives selected are realistically achievable in the context of the current situation analysis. Specific objectives for future tourism activity are quantified and readily measurable (Simpson, 2001; Ruhanen, 2004; Landorf, 2009). Occupancy rate for official accommodations ((Blancas et al., 2010). Accommodation development ((Kosmaczewska et al., 2016).
STRATEGIC INDICATOR OF DESTINATION PLANNING/ ENDORSEMENT OF A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO DESTINATION PLANNING	Quality of public transport (B(Blancas et al., 2010; Frauman & Banks, 2011). Variety of shopping facilities (Simão and Partidário, 2012). Policy takes into account the relationship between transport and tourism ((Weston & Davies, 2007). Tourism marketing strategies and preferences (van der Merwe & van Niekerk, 2013; van Niekerk, 2014) Strategy and planning for indigenous tourism sector. Involvement and participation in industry Market research (Whitford and Ruhanen, 2010). Tourism promotion budget (McCool et al., 2001). Existence of sustainable tourism development plan (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; McCool et al., 2001)

Questionnaire piloting

After designing the questionnaire on Qualtrics, a copy was sent via email in PDF format to people for piloting. In total it was piloted by nine academics in the UK and Nigeria. The pilot was done for two main reasons, as advised by Bryman (2012): first, to ensure that the questions and the instructions for completing the questionnaire are clear; second, to ensure that the layout and formatting are clear enough. This was also to guarantee that respondents would understand the questions and respond accordingly.

Administering survey and analysing quantitative data

A questionnaire-based survey is common in leisure and tourism research; it is used when quantified information is needed (Veal, 2017). This type of survey is of two formats: face-to-face or telephone interview design, and the respondent-completion design. In the face-to-face or telephone interview design, the interviewer will read the questions out from the questionnaire and document the answers (Veal, 2017). In the respondent-completion format, the presence of an interviewer is not necessary, it requires the respondent to read the questions and write down their answers on the screen if it is online or on the questionnaire for a paper copy (Veal, 2017).

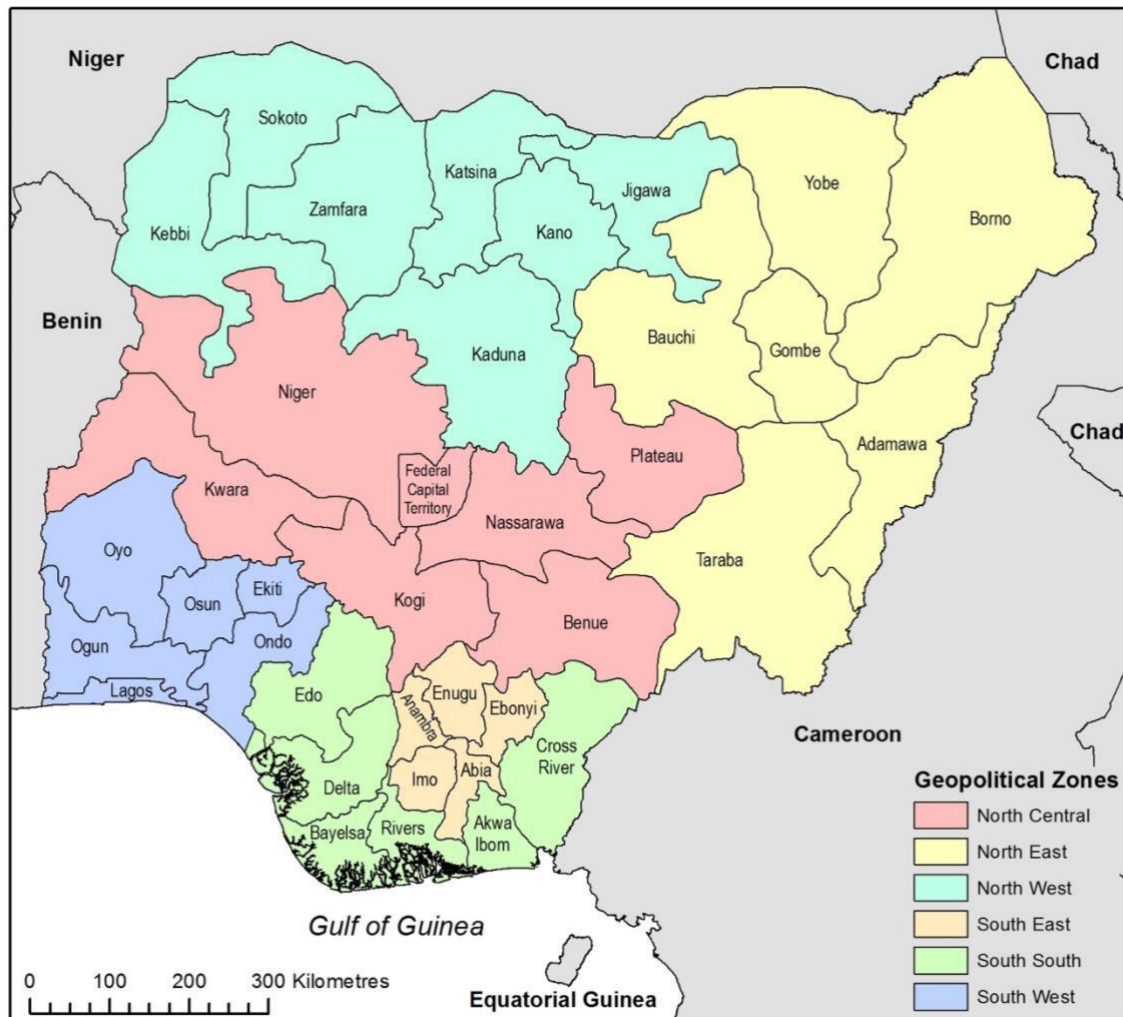
Some advantages of personally administered questionnaires according to Bougie & Sekaran (2016) are that the researcher can collect the completed questionnaire immediately after the respondent has completed it. Also, it offers the opportunity for the researcher to introduce the topic of research to the respondents and it can motivate them to respond frankly.

However, a disadvantage is that the researcher may be biased by explaining the questions differently to respondents (Bougie and Sekaran, 2016). To overcome this disadvantage, the researcher only read out the question to the respondents and avoided giving any further explanation, as the information on the research background in the consent form already provided them with all they needed to know about the research. The face-to-face interview format (Veal, 2017) was adopted for this research, and the respondent interview arrangement was made between May 2016 and July 2016. Interviews were scheduled from early July to ending of August 2016 with twenty-six (26) stakeholders within the Nigerian tourism industry (see Table 2).

Table 2: Questionnaire survey respondents

Respondents	Number	Stakeholder Group
The Federal Ministry of Information and Culture (FMIC)	1	Federal
National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO)	1	Federal
Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC)	1	Federal
Tourism directors	4	State
Assistant tourism directors/ employees	2	State
Attraction managers	3	State
Hoteliers/ Events manager	3	Private
Tour operators	3	Private
Airlines managers	2	Private
Academics	3	Academics
Community representative	3	Community
Total	26	

A questionnaire survey was conducted in three out of six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, which included North-Central (Kwara and Federal Capital Territory); South-South (Delta State) and South-West (Oyo, Ogun, Lagos, Ondo, Ekiti and Osun State) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Map of Nigeria showing the six geo-political zones

Source: Author (2018)

The data collection was conducted to determine the expectations of stakeholders in tourism concerning how important they perceived the tourism planning and development variables to be, and how the Nigerian tourism industry was performing in relation to these variables.

The survey was administered personally face-to-face by the researcher in the form of an interview. Also, it was discovered from the piloting stage that because of the length and style of the questionnaire, respondents might lose focus or misinterpret the questionnaire (i.e., assessing the two parts of importance and performance). For each interview session, the researcher gave the respondent a consent form and the participant information sheet after agreeing to participate; the consent form was signed and handed back to the researcher.

After this, the questions were read out, and the researcher ticked the questionnaire following their responses to the importance and performance categories.

Respondents were required to rate the variables in each section on a 6-point Likert scale, with a higher number representing a higher rating. They were able to state if they didn't have an experience of a variable, which represents 'don't know' (N/A), this was excluded for the purpose of analysis. This explanatory phase of the research was used to identify the current situation in tourism policy and planning and to clarify the areas where performance is low.

For the data analysis, the responses were entered into Qualtrics where the questions were designed, and after that, the results were imported into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 23 for analysis. The importance and performance mean scores of all the variables were analysed using SPSS and was also used to plot the responses into the importance-performance analysis matrix.

Results

The overall results are presented in Tables 3 to 6, which indicates the mean score and standard deviation for all the variables for both the importance and performance questions.

Table 3: Means/standard deviations scores

A. ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATION ANALYSIS (MICRO AND MACRO)	Importance Dimension		Performance Dimension	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
i. Political				
1. Addressing safety and security issues at visitor sites and destinations	4.92	.272	2.96	1.148
2. Ensuring public and visitor confidence against crime at public places	4.73	.452	2.77	1.177
3. Policies for reducing crime rate at tourism sites	4.81	.402	2.80	1.080
4. Public image management of Nigeria as a destination that suffers from safety and security issues	4.72	.678	2.79	1.073
5. Tourism policy acknowledges the need to integrate local tourism strategies with national policies for tourism	4.77	.514	2.60	1.225
ii. Economic				
6. Employment creation ability of the tourism industry	4.76	.452	2.96	1.148
7. The contribution of tourism as a pillar of economic development compared to other sectors of the economy has been made explicit to all stakeholder groups by government authorities	4.60	.500	3.04	1.183
8. Adequacy of business skills possessed by local tourism industry operators	4.54	.706	2.35	1.018
9. Specification of goals for future tourism development in Nigeria	4.73	.452	2.81	1.059
10. Distribution of tourism's economic benefits throughout the local area	4.31	.838	2.27	1.079
11. Provision of opportunities and incentives for Indigenous crafts	4.54	.508	2.19	1.021
12. Provision of incentives to locals for business development opportunities	4.40	.707	1.92	.776
13. Government policies and plans to reduce the effects of seasonality	4.42	.902	2.12	1.166
14. Level of foreign investment in tourism	4.68	.690	1.80	.816
iii. Environmental/ Physical				
15. Effective policies for conservation and environmental protection	4.81	.402	2.26	1.023
16. Restoration and maintenance of attractions and cultural/heritage sites	4.69	.471	2.54	1.272
17. Incorporation of environmental criteria in tourism planning	4.46	.508	2.65	1.129

18. The authorities have measured the current environmental carrying capacity of tourism sites	4.32	.802	2.32	.945
19. The resilience and/or fragility of the physical environmental biodiversity have been estimated and are being considered by government authorities	4.21	.658	2.04	.976
20. Land use and ownership patterns are considered by government authorities when planning for tourism	4.46	.582	2.68	1.069
21. Policies for the protection of renewable resource such as solar energy, timber	4.48	.586	2.24	.831
iv. Social				
22. Availability of funds for maintaining cultural sites and other attractions	4.69	.549	2.12	1.275
23. Loss of product/cultural authenticity through tourism commodification	4.16	.800	2.65	1.093
24. Improvement in quality of life through tourism	4.73	.533	2.77	1.107
25. Tourism development does not hinder continuance of traditional activities by local residents	4.50	.510	3.04	1.216
26. Tourism policy takes into consideration current population level and demographics for future planning	4.58	.578	2.69	1.192
v. Technology				
27. Utilisation of Geographical Information System (GIS) technology in tourism planning and marketing	4.73	.452	2.38	1.061
28. The use of social media in promoting Nigeria as a tourism destination	4.85	.368	3.27	1.218
29. The use of social media in promoting local tourism business in Nigeria	4.73	.452	2.77	1.210
vi. Culture and Heritage				
30. Policies for the protection of natural and heritage sites from erosion	4.73	.452	2.42	1.172
31. Avoiding degradation of cultural/heritage resources in tourism development	4.58	.504	2.73	1.185

Note: Scale range: 1-5 for each item. Higher scores indicate higher ratings for each variable.

Table 4: Means/standard deviations scores

B. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION		Importance Dimension		Performance Dimension	
i. Local Community		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
32.	Assessment of the overall quality of life in the area	4.54	.508	2.31	.788
33.	A vision for the future which aligns with local community values, attitudes and lifestyles	4.46	.508	2.58	1.018
34.	Level of local resident's knowledge about the contribution of tourism to regional and national economy	4.73	.452	2.12	.864
35.	Number of local tour guides employed on site	4.64	.700	2.62	1.169
36.	Involving non-tourism organisations in the planning process	4.24	.831	2.28	1.370
37.	Involving of the LOCAL tourism organisations in the planning process	4.58	.929	2.23	1.070
38.	Giving local communities' ideas priority over other stakeholders	4.08	.929	2.39	.941
ii. Public-Private Collaboration					
39.	Promoting public-private sector partnership	4.77	.430	2.62	1.169
40.	Incorporation of (national, regional and local) governments suggestions/ideas/views in decision-making about tourism development strategy	4.54	.508	2.88	1.243
41.	Involving of the relevant regional tourism organisation(s) in the planning process	4.50	.510	2.80	1.155
42.	Involving of representatives from existing visitor groups in the planning process	4.04	.999	2.17	1.114
43.	Development of tourist attractions as part of tourism integrated planning	4.62	.496	2.62	1.329
44.	Promotion of cooperation and collaboration among stakeholder groups	4.58	.504	2.73	1.373

Note: Scale range: 1-5 for each item. Higher scores indicate higher ratings for each variable.

Table 5: Means/standard deviations scores

C. ENDORSEMENT OF A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO DESTINATION PLANNING i. Tourism Policy/ Governance	Importance Dimension		Performance Dimension	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
45. Management function of government in tourism operations	4.35	.689	2.92	1.093
46. The planning process has a long-term orientation	4.35	.892	2.92	1.077
47. Public access to attraction sites, accommodation, transport	4.65	.629	2.92	1.354
48. Specific tourism objectives selected are achievable in the context of the current situation analysis	4.40	.707	2.58	1.060
49. Specific objectives selected are based on supply capability as opposed to market demand	4.40	.707	2.83	1.007
50. Evaluating each strategy option prior to determining a range of specific objectives	4.44	.507	2.79	1.021
51. Specific objectives for future tourism activity have been quantified and readily measurable	4.52	.510	2.56	1.158
52. Maintaining databanks of tourism accounts for the Nigerian tourism industry	4.68	.476	2.32	1.406
53. Adoption of policies by the Nigerian government for promoting entrepreneurship in the tourism industry	4.65	.485	2.58	1.206
54. Availability of training/ educating/ mentoring programmes for tourism employees	4.81	.402	2.38	1.359
55. Experts' consultation involved in tourism development planning	4.64	.496	2.54	1.303
56. Degree of decentralisation of the tourism industry	4.32	.748	2.68	1.282
ii. Strategic Approach				
57. Existence of a segmentation strategy for the Nigerian inbound market	4.32	.476	2.56	1.003
58. Existence of integrated marketing strategy for tourism development	4.50	.510	2.85	.967
59. Policy take into account the relationship between transport and tourism	4.65	.485	2.85	1.190
60. Existence of strategy and planning for domestic tourism sector	4.54	.706	2.69	1.225
61. Existence of communications strategy using traditional mass media such as TV, radio, brochures, newspaper and magazines	4.62	.571	3.04	1.341
62. Existence of an issues/crisis management, public relations strategy (spokesperson, emergency plans)	4.52	.653	2.42	1.060
63. Coordinated and planned development of infrastructure and superstructure for aiding tourism development	4.62	.697	2.35	1.294

Note: Scale range: 1-5 for each item. Higher scores indicate higher ratings for each variable.

Table 6: Means/standard deviations scores

D. IMPLEMENTATION/MONITORING AND EVALUATION i. Visitor Attitude	Importance Dimension		Performance Dimension	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
64. Availability of education and training programmes for visitors on environmental protection, respect for local customs and traditions	4.62	.496	2.54	1.303
65. Visitor's opinion of destination features such as historical and cultural, scenic attractions hospitality of local people, rest/relaxation opportunities, shopping opportunities, suitable restaurants, entertainment, suitable accommodation	4.65	.485	3.04	1.306
ii. Sustainability				
66. Prioritising specific objectives in terms of implementation urgency (economic, environment, cultural)	4.54	.508	2.68	1.249
67. Tourism policy clearly assigns responsibility for key task implementation	4.65	.485	2.46	.989
68. Development and promotion of special and mega events	4.58	.703	2.85	1.120
69. Policy estimates the resource costs of the recommended development strategy	4.28	.678	2.42	1.060
70. Policy indicates specific methods by which the identified resource costs are to be allocated to development participants	4.44	.507	2.33	1.167
71. Monitoring occupancy rate for accommodation establishments	4.42	.504	2.24	1.052
72. Provision of quality public transport	4.81	.402	2.27	1.079
73. Policy contains a clearly articulated review and evaluation mechanism	4.46	.508	2.23	1.177
74. Participation in international tourism and travel fairs and exhibitions for the promotion of Nigerian tourism industry	4.58	.504	2.20	1.118
75. Assessment and evaluation of host community attitudes and satisfactions towards tourism	4.73	.452	2.24	1.091

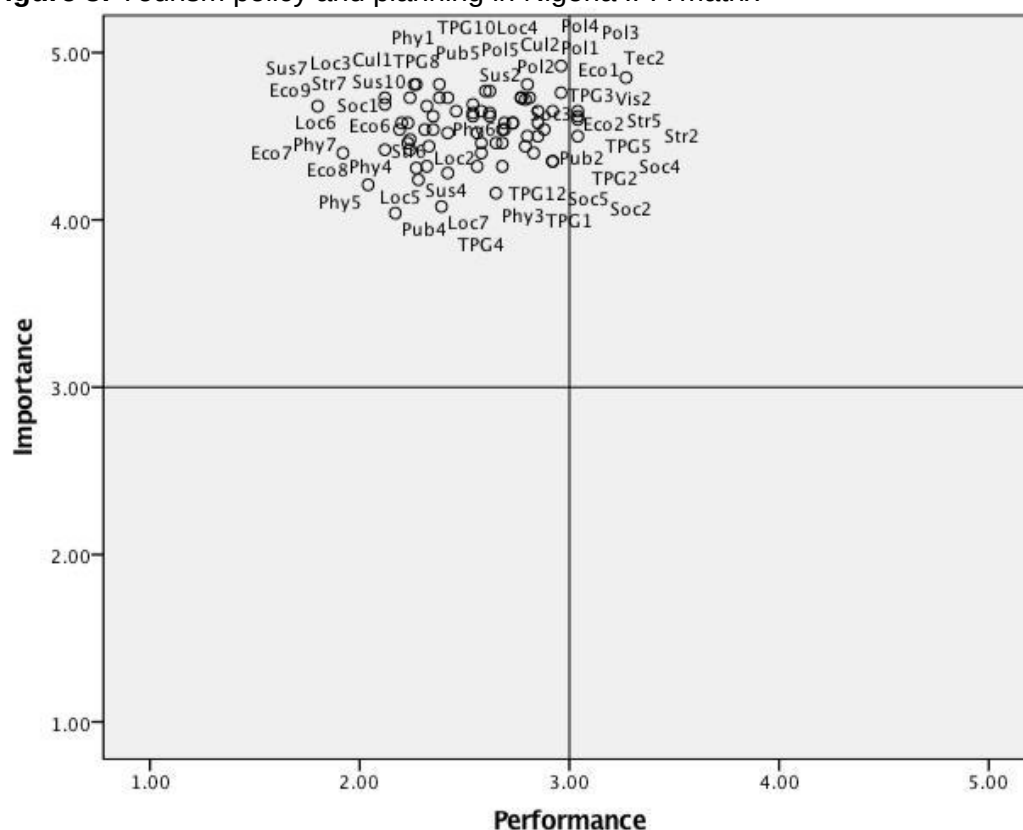
Note: Scale range: 1-5 for each item. Higher scores indicate higher ratings for each variable.

Representation of the variables on IPA matrix

The mean scores for the importance and performance of the variables from Tables 3 to 6 were used to position the grid lines on the IPA matrix. The purpose of plotting the variables on the importance (y-axis) and performance (x-axis) is to establish a broad view of stakeholders across a range of issues examined. In plotting the IPA matrix, the scaling of the axes and the location of variables into the four quadrants is critical as this is what determines the results and its interpretation (Matzler et al., 2003). Following Martilla and James (1977) the reference lines on the IPA grid is a point that divides the data into half, and this was added using three as the midpoint of the scale used.

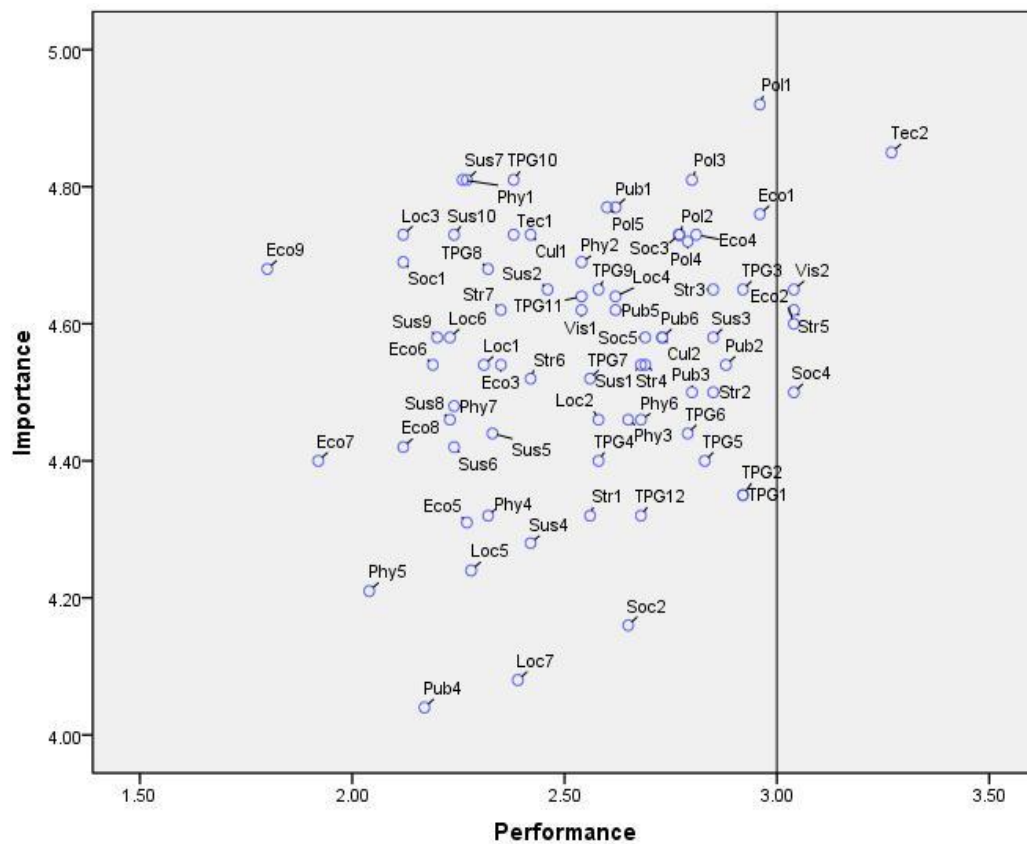
From the diagram, the relevant industry stakeholders and tourism policy makers in Nigeria can be able to identify quickly areas in which they need to focus or improve on for better tourism governance in the future. The IPA grid in Figure 3 represents that the perception across the board among the stakeholders is that there is a defect in most of the variables, except for a few that are doing relatively well.

Figure 3: Tourism policy and planning in Nigeria IPA matrix



Given the clustering of the variables in Figure 3, another zoomed-in matrix is produced in Figure 4, which enables the researcher to see visibly the distributions of these variables within the 'concentrate here' and 'keep up the good work' quadrants.

Figure 4: Tourism policy and planning in Nigeria zoomed-in IPA matrix



Discussion

To begin, the results from the IPA give an initial overview of stakeholders' perspectives on tourism policy and planning in Nigeria. One main finding is that almost all the variables were deemed to be important and almost all the areas were deemed to be performing poorly. This is indicated by the mean scores for the importance variables, which are above 4, and those of performances, which are all below 4. In most cases, the importance variables are tending towards the end of the scale range, which means that they are all of high importance but are low in terms of performance both in absolute and relative terms. The standard deviation on the tables also showed that there is more consensus among the stakeholders over what is important and slightly less over the performance.

The results of the variables assessed suggest that there is a need for greater organisation in tourism policy and planning for the industry to succeed in the long-term – although, some of the variables were more important to the stakeholders than others and the same applies for the variables in terms of performance. The result suggests that governance need to address these issues generally.

Most of the variables that fall under the 'concentrate here' quadrants are not being adequately considered right now, as shown in the importance and performance

results. These will need to be well thought out when formulating and implementing future tourism policies and plans. Indeed, the analysis does indicate that currently, tourism governance is of concern to the participants in the study, as indicated by their responses to the variables in the questionnaire which consisted of the six sub-categories below:

- a) Environmental (land use and ownership patterns are considered by government authorities when planning for tourism; incorporation of environmental criteria in tourism planning).
- b) Social (loss of product/cultural authenticity through tourism commodification; tourism development does not hinder continuance of traditional activities by local residents, tourism policy takes into consideration current population level and demographics for future planning).
- c) Public-private collaboration (incorporation of national, regional and local government's suggestions/ideas/views in decision-making about tourism development strategy; involving of the relevant regional tourism organisation(s) in the planning process).
- d) Tourism policy/governance (management function of government in tourism operations; the planning process has a long-term orientation; specific objectives selected are based on supply capability as opposed to market demand; evaluating each strategy option prior to determining a range of specific objectives; the degree of decentralisation of the tourism industry).
- e) Strategic approach (existence of integrated marketing strategy for tourism development; the existence of strategy and planning for domestic tourism sector).
- f) Sustainability (prioritising specific objectives regarding implementation urgency, i.e., economic, environment and cultural; development and promotion of special and mega-events).

Generally, for a country like Nigeria that has embarked on tourism development since the 1960s, and prioritised the sector in both 1999 and 2006 (see Chapter 3), the absolute and relative level of 'performance' is generally low compared to the level of 'importance' that stakeholders attributed to the tourism policy and planning variables. The results from the tables show that the mean and standard deviation scores for the importance are similar, hence, there is no notable difference in the distribution of the respective scores. Where the standard deviation for the 'importance' level was lower, this means that the stakeholders had a more consistent reaction in relation to the importance variables. Where the standard deviation was higher in the 'performance' category, this means that the stakeholders had a greater variation of reactions to the variables in terms of performance.

Broadly, for most of the categories, important management implications arise as respondents indicated that the tourism sector in Nigeria has performed low on highly important variables, which come under the 'concentrate here' on quadrant I of the IPA grid, representing 93.4% of the variables. As advised by Deng (2007),

there is need for immediate attention as the organisation has a significant weakness in these areas. This is evident through the clustering of the variables on the grid, and those aspects need to be modified in the current and future practices within the industry. The general implication is that there is a need for urgent improvement on most of the variables.

These results confirmed a sense that most Nigeria citizens have, given the nature of governance generally in Nigeria, where the people have a belief that Nigeria as a nation has not got its politics right since attaining independence status in 1960 and that nothing works in Nigeria (Rilwan, 2013). It is surprising that even the current President Muhammadu Buhari also stated in one of the National Newspapers that nothing is working normally in the country as a result of the total breakdown of Nigeria's core values over the years (Group, 2016).

However, there is a positive side where the tourism sector is doing relatively well, representing 6.6% of the variables, and the advice here is that they should continue to 'keep up the good work' in those areas. Since they are of importance, and correspondingly there is a relatively high performance, they need to maintain the present value (Evans and Chon, 1989). They are where an organisation possesses major strengths and have opportunities to achieve a competitive advantage (Deng, 2007), these variables are above 3 and are situated in quadrant II.

For example, it was notable that five out of the seventy-five variables were reported to be performing relatively well. These include:

Eco2: The contribution of tourism as a pillar of economic development compared to other sectors of the economy has been made explicit to all stakeholder groups by government authorities

Soc4: Tourism development does not hinder continuance of traditional activities by local residents

Tec2: The use of social media in promoting Nigeria as a tourism destination

Str5: Existence of communications strategy using traditional mass media such as TV, radio, brochures, newspaper and magazines

Vis2: Visitors' opinions of destination features such as historical and cultural, scenic attractions hospitality of local people, rest/relaxation opportunities, shopping opportunities, suitable restaurants, entertainment, suitable accommodation.

These suggest that the tourism sector has done the right thing in terms of creating awareness amongst the stakeholders on the importance of tourism contribution to the Nigeria economy. This is because it has been acknowledged that tourism can contribute to the economic development of nations (see Dredge, 2010; McDowall & Choi, 2010). Consequently, the sector is being marketed by using traditional mass mediums and technology-social media platforms are also being used. Technology is important to marketing tourism development (Koutra & Edwards, 2012), and the sector has adopted this medium in addition to other traditional mediums. Further, the stakeholders believed that tourism development does not in

any way hinder the continuance of traditional activities by local residents. Finally, visitors to tourist attractions in Nigeria are aware of the tourist facilities available to them and that they have an opinion that the facilities are good.

No variables are considered to be of 'low priority', i.e., low importance and low-performance quadrant III. Likewise, none of the variables is positioned in the 'possible overkill' quadrant IV of the IPA matrix. Therefore, quadrant I is the area that needs to be improved upon. Overall, it is believed that the industry is doing the right things in quadrants II and III (Prajogo & McDermott, 2011).

Almost all categories fall within the 'concentrate here' quadrant. These findings are a cause for concern as all the categories in the 'concentrate here' quadrant are politically significant and warrant that tourism planners take action. The distribution of the circles that represent the variables on the grid in the zoomed-in version reveal a somewhat uniform distribution of the variables.

The results do not explicitly enable the researcher to prioritise critical categories of issues to examine further as they reveal that the problem is pervasive, not focused on either political, economic, environment, socio-cultural, technology, culture and heritage, community, public-private collaboration, tourism policy/governance, strategic approach, visitor attitudes, and sustainability. Put simply, there is a lack of pattern that might suggest any of the categories are regarded as either more important or performing better than any other.

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Welcoming volunteers

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Introduction

Local volunteers often play an essential role in shaping a welcoming experience and atmosphere for tourists. In the research field of volunteer tourism, the guest experience is dominant. Wearing and McGehee (2013, p. 124) state that 'there are more funding and support opportunities available for research targeting those who consume the tourism product than for those who produce it'. Host communities and locals volunteering for tourism have been investigated less (Lockstone-Binney, Holmes, Smith & Baum, 2010). Uriely, Reichel and Ron (2003) consider the phenomena of volunteer activity, tourism and leisure as intertwined. However, conceptual thinking on associating these phenomena with hospitality is almost entirely absent. This is odd because volunteers shape a welcoming experience and are also shaped by a hospitable experience. It is a visitor's experience that determines whether they are satisfied and willing to engage in repeat visits and positive word of mouth (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012), so the experienced hospitality is what the organisation should focus on. However, the experience depends on the hospitable behaviour of staff and volunteers, which is heavily dependent on 'hospitableness' as an attitude of staff and volunteers. This raises the question of how can the conceptualisation of both hospitality and volunteering shape a hospitable experience? Furthermore, how could concepts from hospitality help tackle challenges involving welcoming volunteers supporting tourism? Following an introduction to volunteering and hospitality, similarities between the concepts of volunteering and hospitality are considered in this paper. By using hospitality as a sensitising concept (Lugosi, 2021), the hospitality culture (Pizam, 2020) and perspectives on volunteering (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010), a conceptual model intertwining the concepts of volunteering and hospitality is proposed.

Volunteering

A common challenge for hospitality and volunteering is their difficulty to be defined. Salamon, Sokolowski and Haddock (2011, p. 221) state:

Volunteering is a complex phenomenon that has often defied definition, let alone measurement. Undertaken in leisure time, it is nevertheless a form of work. Pursued for no monetary compensation, it nevertheless produces both tangible and intangible benefits not only for its beneficiaries, but also for the volunteers. Supposed to be undertaken as a matter of free will, it is often motivated by a sense of personal, cultural, religious, or other obligation.

Wilson defines volunteering as 'any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause' (2000, p. 215). Freeman (1997, p. 141) writes that 'volunteering activity is work performed without monetary recompense. It creates social output that would otherwise require paid resources. Most definitions feature

four primary dimensions: (1) free will, choice and motivation, (2) absence of (a concern for) remuneration, (3) structure (organised setting), and (4) intended beneficiaries (benefits for others, as well as the volunteer) (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991).

Hospitality, hospitable and hospitableness

Hospitality and being hospitable are phrases used in everyday language, the meanings of which are often taken for granted. Brotherton and Wood (2000, p. 142) note: 'hospitality is a contemporaneous human exchange, which is voluntarily entered into, and designed to enhance the mutual well-being of the parties concerned through the provision of accommodation, and/or food, and/or drink'. Contemporaneous indicates that the production and consumption of hospitality occur at the same time. Pijls-Hoekstra (2020) describes four perspectives of scholarly research on hospitality and hospitableness - a historical perspective, a moral and motivational perspective, the exchange perspective and the personal hospitality perspective. She considers these from the host's perspective and that of the guest receiving hospitality. She also states that it should not be an ambition to strive for a universal definition but to clarify what the perspective is and which definition is appropriate for it. In order to move this discussion forward, this paper proposes several 'definitions' which will form the basis for this study.

- **Hospitality:** Hospitality is a quality of an institution (organisation; a group of people) with respect to the way it treats its visitors (guests, clients, customers, patients etc.) so that they feel more or less welcome and their needs are more or less met within the limits of the 'raison d'être' of the institution.
- **Hospitable:** Being hospitable concerns the behaviour of an individual (belonging to the institution), leading to the intended visitors to feel more or less welcome and to more or less meet the needs of its visitors (within the boundaries of the 'raison d'être' of the organisation).
- **Hospitableness:** Though a less common word in everyday language, it is increasingly used in hospitality literature. We would like to define it as the attitude of an individual with respect to visitors and the inclination of a member of an institution to behave so that visitors may feel more or less welcome and their needs are more or less met within the limits of the 'raison d'être' of the organisation) (see also Brotherton, 1999).

Welcoming volunteers in the tourism context

Volunteer tourism often concerns 'volunteering with a significant travel component' (Smith & Holmes, 2009, p.404). Wearing (2002) suggests that '...the generic term 'volunteer tourism' applies to those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups, in the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment' (p. 240). Uriely et al. (2003) propose expanding the notion of volunteer tourism to include those who engage in volunteering as tourists or visitors and include 'the members of the local community who volunteer in the tourism industry' (p. 59). Senior citizens who volunteer in

museums or at heritage sites are examples of these local volunteers. Based on the previous notions, Smith and Holmes (2009) urge researchers to 'go beyond' in researching volunteers in tourism and include volunteers as tourists and volunteers supporting tourism, particularly those from the local community. The local volunteers are engaged in activities in their own community. Attractions, destination service organisations and events are the three dominant areas in which they are involved (Smith & Holmes, 2009, p. 405). Research by Alonso and Liu (2013) indicates that local volunteers contribute to tourism development and strengthen the community's social aspect and fabric.

A conceptualisation of hospitality and volunteering for tourism

The definitions of volunteering and hospitality share some similarities. Both concepts are intangible, undertaken as a matter of free will, there is an absence of remuneration, and both phenomena are difficult to measure. Although financial remuneration is absent, both in volunteering and hospitality, there can be a form of reciprocity. Volunteers motivated by serious leisure goals and hospitality can bring gratitude, knowledge or a good feeling to their work. Conversely, they can experience a good feeling, personal development, and gratitude through their volunteer work.

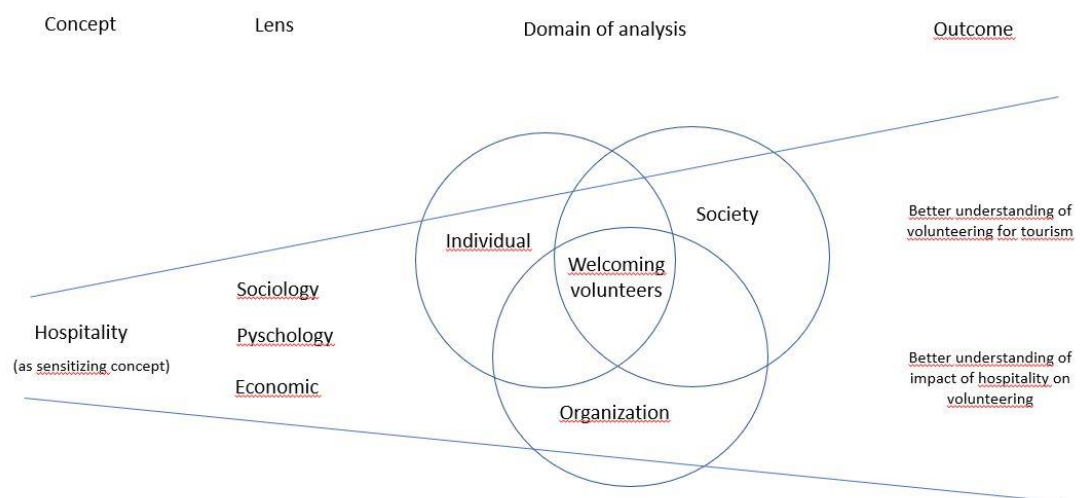
Lockstone-Binney et al., (2010, p. 435) selected three disciplines to research the phenomena of volunteers and volunteering in leisure:

In a disciplinary sense, the sociological view focuses upon the conceptualisation of volunteering as leisure, the psychological view seeks to understand motivations driving volunteering, while the perspective of economists supplements these standpoints in terms of why people volunteer and further examines the value of volunteer contributions.

Just as in the research field of volunteering, hospitality researchers also argue for a more multidisciplinary approach. Hospitality researchers often focussed on management themes, investigating hospitality through an economic lens. However, the social lenses of sociology and psychology can also be applied in hospitality research. Lashley, Lynch and Morrison (2007) reason from a social perspective on hospitality with the host-guest transaction as the primary focus. Morrison argued that 'it had moved from being a topic simply for thematic investigation directly, or indirectly, for the study of management to one that also locates the study of hospitality as a significant means of exploring and understanding society' (Morisson, 2018, p. 190). Pizam (2020) also approaches hospitality from a sociological point of view. He defines hospitality organisational culture as: 'a system of shared norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and expectations whose ultimate goal is to provide exceptional service and memorable satisfactory experiences to all the organisations' stakeholders' (Pizam, 2020, p. 432). Using the psychology lens, hospitality researchers Tasci and Semrad (2016, p. 40) suggest that 'the organisation might refine its personnel's understanding of the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviours to achieve desired levels of hospitableness'. Although hospitality is often seen as a free choice, it is also often motivated by a sense of obligation (Lashley et al., 2007; Telfer, 2000). Hospitality in a commercial setting can be defined as an economic exchange, obtaining food, drink and lodging in exchange for a monetary fee. Defining hospitality as a

transaction and exchange imply defining hospitality as a process that can add value, reciprocity and deliver some outcome. Lugosi (2021) applies hospitality as a sensitising concept for a framework for applying hospitality to study tourism. He also advocates for a more interdisciplinary approach, a broader set of stakeholders and more regard for guest-guest relations. To conceptualise hospitality and volunteering for tourism in Figure 1 hospitality is applied as sensitising concept as focus for this paper using an adapted version of Lugosi's (2021) model.

Figure 1: Hospitality as sensitising concept for volunteering (Lugosi, 2021, p. 25)



Holmes, Smith, Lockstone-Binney and Baum (2010) advocate a more holistic and inclusive conceptualisation of tourism volunteering. Therefore, the perspective of the volunteer and the organisation's perspective (managers and paid staff), visitors (tourists) and community/society, in general, should be considered too. Based on the definitions discussed earlier, the context of museums and the perspective of hospitality, challenges within the three domains of sociology, psychology and economics are further explored.

The sociological- psychological lens and challenges

Edwards and Graham (2006) describe four areas of change in volunteering in the context of museums. These changes can be generalised in the broader context of volunteering. First, the volunteer is changing in terms of motivation and lifestyle with a new generation of volunteers using volunteering for career development. Second, personal and social development become more and more important, and volunteers' expectations change. Third, the new generation of volunteers often has serious leisure motives. Serious leisure is defined as the '...systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting for participants to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience' (Stebbins 1996, p. 215). For the retention of volunteers, it is vital to understand the driving motivations

of volunteers. Research by Stamer, Lerdall and Guo (2008) on volunteer programs worldwide provide three practices for management to increase the performance of volunteer programs:

(1) building a community of volunteers; (2) enhancing volunteers' learning experiences; (3) fostering the self-management of volunteers. These practices offer evidence for the value of the 'serious leisure' concept in the theory and practice of volunteer management (Stamer et al., 2008, p. 203).

Volunteers are often employed in front-line service and in direct contact with tourists. Research on volunteering in the heritage sector shows that volunteering often involves emotional labour which has consequences for those performing it. 'Emotional labour requires one to induce or suppress feeling to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7).

Economic lens and challenges

Hospitality purely for the purpose of marketing and attracting visitors and customers often implies an economic and management perspective; hospitable behaviour as a tool, and hospitality as an outcome that leads to (economic) outputs. Organisations that want to 'get started' with hospitality perceive this often as a responsibility of the volunteer. Management expects hospitable behaviour to be engendered by organising hospitality training. These management ideas corroborate observations by Lugosi (2021) on hospitality and tourism. He states that 'hospitality has often been conceived primarily as a supporting component of the tourism product' (Lugosi, 2021, p. 24). Hospitality is perceived as a tool to improve satisfaction, profitability and productivity. In the economic approach to volunteering, volunteers are considered unpaid workers (Holmes, 2003). They help to cut costs and to improve their economic position. Orr (2006) combines the economic and leisure perspectives as follows: 'The economic conception of volunteering as unpaid work has dominated within the museum sector, but to conceive of museum volunteering as promoting lifelong learning through serious leisure offers the potential for museums to rethink their approach to volunteer management' (Orr, 2006, p. 206). Often, the economic approach comes with a top-down and professional management approach. The top-down and economic program management approach (sponsor and volunteer program organiser) was not always experienced as hospitable (Holmes, Nichols & Ralston, 2018). For example, volunteers were asked to travel at their own expense for an introduction meeting and did not even get a free cup of coffee at Wembley stadium. Employing volunteers in museums should not be only for economic reasons such as cutting staffing costs. There are also more positive effects. By deploying volunteers, there is scope to expand services and offer innovative projects to a broader audience (Goodlad & McIvor, 1998). Holmes (2003) questioned if the managerial approach towards leisure seeking volunteers was appropriate. At the same time, Graham and Lennon (2002) advocate the use of managerial techniques to enhance the volunteer experience and the mutual benefits of both the volunteers and the hosting organisation in terms of onboarding and support for their efforts.

Intertwining hospitality and volunteering

Due to developments and changes in society, volunteer management is becoming increasingly important. Volunteer organisations are interested in attracting new volunteers, retaining volunteers and engendering the hospitable behaviour of the volunteers. Management has to act on changes in society itself and on changing demands of the same society. The concept of hospitality can be applied in many ways. Hospitality can be (among others) a guiding principle, a quality, an experience, a facility or a result. Using the concept of hospitality in different contexts could help face the challenges for local organisations working with volunteers. Table 1 shows several possibilities to connect the concepts of hospitality and volunteering.

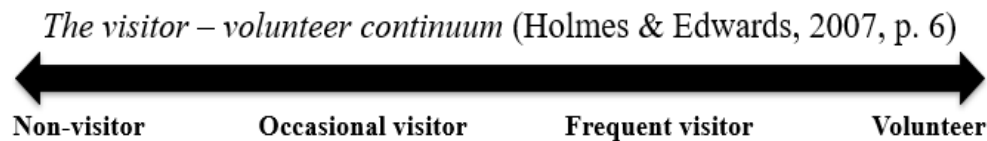
Table 1: Domains, volunteering and hospitality

 Discipline	Concept 	<u>Volunteering</u>	<u>Hospitality</u>
<u>Sociological</u>		<u>(Serious) leisure</u> (Stebbins, 1996)	<u>Culture</u> (Pizam, 2020)
<u>Psychological</u>		<u>Motivation</u> (Wilson, 2000; Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010; Stamer et al., 2008)	<u>Attitude & Behaviour</u> (Tasci & Semrad, 2016)
<u>Economic</u>		<u>Why & Value</u> (Holmes, 2003)	<u>Why & Value</u> (Lugosi, 2021)

To attract and retain volunteers, the host-guest concept can be combined with serious leisure and the culture of hospitality. Therefore, three perspective changes are proposed: the guest as a potential host, the host as a guest, and the hospitable community (guest-guest).

1 - The guest as a potential host

Holmes and Edwards (2007) found that volunteers and museum visitors share many characteristics and motivations. Seeing them as 'loyal visitors' who gradually become part of the museum experience, allowing them to use their own museum experiences to help others and build hospitable allow the co-creation of memorable and meaningful museum experiences.

Figure 2: The visitor-volunteer continuum

The change of perspective from volunteer to active visitor aligns with the host-guest perspective. The regular visitor who becomes a volunteer is both host and guest in the museum. If a museum is a welcoming and hospitable space and people spend more time there, they may gradually move along the 'visitor-volunteer continuum'. From an organisational viewpoint, the roles can also be reversed; volunteers are guests in a host organisation.

2 - The host as a guest

Building on the concept of serious leisure in which volunteers sometimes both produce and consume the experience (Orr, 2006), the same can be said of hospitality. The servicescape model describes the impact of surroundings on both customers and employees. Employees (volunteers) interact with customers and each other within the organisation's physical facility. 'Ideally, therefore, the organisation's environment should support the needs and preferences of both service employees and customers' (Bitner, 1992, p. 58). As a host, the volunteer produces a welcoming experience and, at the same time, consumes the welcoming experience. A hospitable experience ensures repeat visits and loyal customers, which can also be expected from hospitality for volunteers. The organisation has both a hospitality producing role and a hospitality facilitating role. Where the economic thinking of management is often based on a top-down approach, volunteers with serious leisure motives require a different approach. A hospitality approach can lead to more satisfied volunteers, which become ambassadors to attract new volunteers.

3 - The hospitable community

Hospitable behaviour by volunteers is dependent on many variables. Motives, knowledge, other volunteers and facilities are just a few of those. Hospitable behaviour is not only the individual's responsibility, as Pizam (2021) points out. A culture of hospitality is needed in which the volunteer feels they are one of the stakeholders. A culture of hospitality is more than an organisation driven by purely economic – monetary goals. Deploying concepts from hospitality in volunteer organisations also yields social rewards and a connection and contribution to society. In the hosting community, volunteer to volunteer hospitality creates a sense of hospitality and community among themselves.

The conceptual model

Intertwining the economic and serious leisure approach, the host-guest concept and the disciplinary approach lead to the conceptual model presented in Figure 2. The disciplines of sociology, psychology and economics constitute the pillars. Motives, attitude and behaviour play an essential role in hospitality and

volunteering, and are placed in the centre. The hospitable behaviour of the volunteer leads to results. These results can be described in economic terms and reciprocity for the volunteers and social rewards. Thus, the organisational culture of hospitality and welcoming volunteers is both a base and a result when hospitality becomes an essential part of volunteering. These perspectives are combined with the concept of hospitality culture (Pizam, 2020) and hospitality as a sensitising concept (Lugosi, 2021). Intertwining the concept of hospitality into volunteer management could also be described as host and guest transactions in which roles are reversible. The volunteer–visitor continuum and serious leisure concepts fit into this way of thinking.

Figure 3: Conceptual model welcoming volunteers



Conclusion and future research

Hospitality is more than a word; it is a feeling, experience, and phenomenon. In volunteering for tourism, hospitality can be perceived from different perspectives, at the level of the individual, organisation or society. But also from the academic perspectives of sociology, psychology and economics. A conceptual model for intertwining the concepts of volunteering and hospitality is proposed. Based on the literature and challenges outlined above, three changes of perspectives are proposed. First: hospitality is more than a tool or outcome; it could be a guiding principle for organisations. The second perspective is on the host and guest. To attract and retain volunteers, management should perceive their volunteers as hosts and as guests - guests in their organisation who need hospitality too. Thirdly, hospitality has a social value that has value for communities in which volunteer organisations operate.

In addition, the model raises several questions for further research:

Q1 How does management define, perceive and experience hospitality in their organisation?

Q2 How do volunteers define, perceive and experience hospitality in their organisation?

Q3 What do volunteers need to be hospitable to visitors and each other?

The proposed model can help management and organisations develop an organisational culture to engender, foster, and maintain hospitable behaviour by their volunteers, thus leading to valuable output and impact. The model can lead to practical tools for organisations enabling the application of concepts from hospitality in volunteering.

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Online and onsite tourism experiences of minority languages: the case of the Cimbrian language of Luserna / Lusérn, Trento (Italy)

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Introduction

With the continuous growth of tourism consumption until 2019 (UNWTO, 2019) and the unprecedented crisis caused by the spread of the SARS-COVID-19 virus, sustainable tourism has been gaining increasing importance both for tourism practitioners and tourism scholars (Gössling et al., 2020). As cultural tourism still accounts for the main reason for tourism consumption, this also regards tangible and intangible cultural aspects of a destination. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is particularly fragile, as it needs constant practice from the population to survive (Kim et al., 2019).

Cultural tourism has experienced a relevant change in recent decades: tourists are increasingly interested in the minority, peripheral areas, and the intangible cultural heritage of the population in the country they visit (Richards, 2018). In this vein, minority groups have started to use their culture, including their ICH, in order to differentiate and promote the destination, as well as attract more visitors (Richards, 2010).

Intangible heritage is defined as “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills [...] that communities, groups [...] recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (UNESCO, 2003, p.6). Among the domains under which ICH is manifested, UNESCO (2003) included “oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage” (p.6).

Recent research has highlighted, on the one hand, how minority languages differentiate the destination, as they contribute to an authentic encounter with the local culture (Kelly - Holmes & Pietikäinen, 2014). On the other hand, tourism, in many cases, has positively impacted the process of language preservation (Greathouse - Amador, 2005; Whitney-Squire, 2016).

With a humanistic management approach, aiming to emphasize and focus on human beings (Melé, 2016), this research will focus on the Cimbrian community of Luserna / Lusérn, a small town near Trento (Italy), still speaking the Cimbrian language, an Upper German variety. The objective of this paper is twofold: (1) analyze to what extent language is employed as a resource in online and onsite tourism promotion (Kelly-Holmes et al., 2011) and (2) reveal what are the challenges and potentialities of tourism development according to the Cimbrian minority community.

Theoretical framework

The use of minority languages in tourism has already been discussed by both the sociolinguistic and tourism literature. Minority languages differ from the official languages of a State and are often spoken by a group numerically smaller than the population of that State (Council of Europe, 1992). According to many linguists, languages are deeply connected with the culture of the community, as they stand for a unique view of the world (Bradley & Bradley, 2019). This is particularly true for minority languages, as they are spoken by and represent a particular and unique cultural group (Bradley & Bradley, 2019). Moreover, languages are fundamental for cultural transmission from one generation to the next and are therefore included among the manifestations of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003). Minority languages, therefore, contribute to the differentiation and attractiveness of the destination (Pechlaner et al., 2011; Pietikäinen, 2015; Ugolini & Costa, 2009) since tourists consider languages as a fundamental part of the natural and historical environment (Moriarty, 2015) and minority languages as a unique and authentic representation of heritage (Pietikäinen, 2015). Minority languages, thus, align with the need and importance for tourism practitioners of selling something local, particular, and unique (Kim et al., 2012), as well as emphasizing the authenticity of tourism products and experiences (Dlaske, 2015; Kim & Kim, 2020).

Moreover, they also contribute to a Memorable Tourism Experience through cultural contact with the local culture (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Kim et al., 2012). For instance, Jaworski & Thurlow (2010) highlight how multilingualism on public signs is more attractive for tourists than the official language since it contributes to the sense of localness and creates an authentic destination experience. In this vein, languages can become the main focus of the tourist gaze (Urry & Larsen, 2011). In places where minority communities reside, this has led to the use of minority languages in various contexts: branding element for the destination (Bacsi, 2017; Brennan, 2018; Pietikäinen & Kelly - Holmes, 2011), commercial goods (Ferguson & Sidorova, 2018).

On the one hand, minority languages represent an added value for tourists and a differentiating factor for the destination (Brennan, 2018; Pechlaner et al., 2011; Pietikäinen, 2015; Ugolini & Costa, 2009). On the other hand, research has confirmed that tourism can positively impact the local minority community. These impacts are not only economical but are also related to an increased sense of pride and identity (Whitney-Gould et al., 2018; Whitney-Squire, 2016). This is particularly important for language preservation, as minority languages are often threatened with extinction (Bradley & Bradley, 2019). The tourism field, with its increasing number of visitors from outside the community, has led community members to desire to learn more about one's past and heritage, including the language (Greathouse - Amador, 2005; Whitney-Squire, 2016). Research conducted by Beard-Moose (2009) highlights how important tourism was for the Cherokee community in North Carolina (US) since "tourism is what kept Cherokee being Cherokee" (p.4) since visitors want to see and experience "authentic Indian stuff" (p.4).

Negative impacts of an increased number of visitors from outside the community have been related to the need to master the national or global language, which is

inevitability linked to language endangerment (Bruyèl-Olmedo & Juan-Garau, 2015). Tourism also provides risks of language commodification (Duchêne & Heller, 2008), stereotypization (Kaomea, 2000), and a tokenistic use of the language (Moriarty, 2015).

This research evolves around the framework of humanistic management, whose aim is to emphasize and focus on human beings: values like human life, dignity, and ethics (Melé, 2016). Recent research has integrated the humanistic management paradigm into tourism research, thus recommending a shift in the traditional perspective of tourism management (Della Lucia & Giudici, 2020). The paradigm of humanistic management also includes the principles of sustainability (Della Lucia & Giudici, 2020). According to the sustainable development paradigm – categorized into economic, social, and environmental pillars – it is fundamental to ensure that future generations can satisfy their needs (Brundtland, 1987). This also includes one's intangible cultural heritage and languages that can only be transmitted to future generations when practiced daily. In this vein, sustainable tourism should also aim at maintaining intangible cultural heritage (Kim et al., 2019).

However, little research has been conducted on using minority languages online, especially in online tourism promotion (Kelly-Holmes et al., 2011). Previous research has proven that authenticity is an essential aspect of local branding and tourist promotion (Kim & Kim, 2020). Indexes of authenticity are essential not only for local spaces but also for online spaces. Through a qualitative methodology, this research will first provide insight on the feelings and opinion of community members and will then analyze how the Cimbrian language is used on websites.

Methodological approach

Case study

This study will consider the Cimbrian community of Luserna / Lusérn, near Trento, in northeastern Italy. The Cimbrian language is an Upper German language, once spoken in a large territory in northeastern Italy. It was brought by Bavarian immigrants, who, between the 13th to the 16th century, moved there to chop the wood and cultivate the land (Bidese, 2021). The language is considered critically endangered by UNESCO's Atlas of the World Languages in Danger (Moseley, 2010). The Cimbrian language is now spoken in three enclaves: Giazza, near Verona; Roana, near Vicenza; and Luserna / Lusérn, near Trento. However, only in Luserna / Lusérn is the language spoken by almost the entirety of the population: 238 out of a population of approximately 290 persons (Servizio Statistica della Provincia Autonoma di Trento, 2014). On the contrary, in Giazza and Roana, the Cimbrian language is only spoken by a few older people (Bidese, 2021).

The Cimbrian language is now visible on bilingual signs in the streets, hiking paths, and stores and is taught in kindergarten and for one hour a week in schools as well (although interviewees lamented that the amount of hours is too little). Courses are also regularly offered to adults, also outside the community; festivals dedicated to literary prizes in Cimbrian, websites, newspapers, news on TV translated into Cimbrian, Facebook pages, street signs, and panels are bilingual.

Luserna / Lusérn was considered an adequate case study to analyze the mutual relationship between the tourism field and language preservation. First, the language is still spoken by the majority of the community, who are keen to preserve it and use it daily. Moreover, Luserna / Lusérn is becoming a loved tourism destination. The local DMO, now called Alpe Cimbra (Cimbrian Alps), comprises the municipalities of Folgaria, Lavarone, Luserna / Lusérn, and Vigolana. Even though the most touristic destinations are Folgaria and Lavarone, with their ski area, Luserna / Lusérn is getting increasing attention from visitors due to family hikes, restaurants, museums, and the Cimbrian heritage. The Cimbrian heritage is part of the main museum of Luserna / Lusérn, the Centro di Documentazione Luserna. One room is dedicated to showing and explaining the origin of the Cimbrian language, the history of the community, and its traditions. The Haus von Prükk is built inside an ancient house and presents the typical lifestyle of the Cimbrian population in the 19th century and aims at preserving the historical memory of the local community. The Cimbrian language is, finally, present in the local street signs, the hiking paths, and panels explaining critical moments in the town's history.

Qualitative methods

The choice of a qualitative methodology allows for an in-depth analysis of the preferences and feelings of the local population regarding the tourism field, on one side, and of the use of the Cimbrian language in tourism activities, on the other side.

This research used data triangulation and combined two methods: narrative interviews and digital ethnography. Narrative interview is an unstructured interview that allows for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied because it encourages informants to talk about special events (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Narrative interviews were not built on a question-answer format (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000) but on a self-generating schema. Interview partners were members of the Cimbrian community and, to various degrees, involved in the tourism field, as displayed in Table 1. Interviews were conducted between February 2020 and February 2021. The initial plan was to conduct the interviews face-to-face in a context familiar to the interviewees, but restrictions caused by the pandemic led to the integration of phone interviews. Therefore, three interviews were conducted over the phone and six face-to-face in Luserna / Lusérn. Personal connections are used to contact the first interviewee (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019), but snowball sampling after that, asking interviewees to mention whom the researcher should contact next. The interviews were conducted in Italian; only significant quotes were translated into English. With written consent from the interviewees, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were analyzed with thematic analysis, with a stepwise development of a category system (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

Digital ethnography allows transferring the ethnographic methods to online spaces (Kelly-Holmes et al., 2011). The aim was to understand how the tourist would find these sites and compare the opinions of local population with online tourism promotion. The author searched for the words 'Luserna' and 'Lusérn' in major search engines (Kelly-Holmes et al., 2011). This led to the inclusion of official destination websites, museums, cultural institute, restaurants and hotels, with a

total of ten websites (see Table 2 for an overview of the websites analyzed in this research and their characteristics). Following the model suggested by Kelly-Holmes et al. (2011), an analysis of the linguistic and cultural resources of the websites was conducted, and the following information was gathered:

- Type of tourist actor
- Language(s) of the website, i.e., use of majority language and global languages: English (EN), German (DE)
- Gateway language
- Use of Cimbrian and estimated percentage
- Inclusion of the Cimbrian language as part of the tourist experience

Table 2: description of interview partners

Interviewee	Gender	Type
I1	Female	Tourism
I2	Male	Governance
I3	Male	Cultural institute
I4	Male	Governance
I5	Female	Cultural institute
I6	Female	Restaurant
I7	Female	Librarian
I8	Male	Restaurant
I9	Male	Restaurant

Table 3: Description of websites

	Websites	Type of actor	Languages	Use of Cimbrian	Cimbrian in the tourism experience
W1	www.alpecimbra.it	Local DMO	It, De, En, Pol (Cimb)	Place names, dishes, poetry, teaching Cimbrian, brief descriptions, videos	Hiking paths, events, legends
W2	lusern.it	Museum	It, Cim, De	Place names, news (<i>Zimbar Earde</i>), newspaper (<i>Di Sait vo Lusérn</i>), publications	Hiking paths, events
W3	visittrentino.info	Regional DMO	It, De, Ned, Pol, Cz, Rus	Place names, legends, fairies	
W4	www.istitutocimbro.it	Cultural institute	It, Cim, De, Eng	Place names, roles of the employees, sayings (w/ audio), poetry, names of traditional fruits, wood, crops	Events
W5	europaregion.info	Euroregion	De, It	Videos	Events
W6	agriturgaleno.it	Restaurant	It, En, De	Company name of the farm in Cimbrian	Hiking paths
W7	ferdylusern.it	Restaurant	It	Title of the different tabs (most use of the Cimbrian)	
W8	www.lusernarhof.it	Restaurant	It	Greetings, Drinks (only <i>zimbar spritz</i>)	
W9	www.dolomiti.it	Tourism marketing and communication	It, En, De	Very limited use of the Cimbrian language	Webpage dedicated to the Cimbrian community
W10	trentino.com	Tourism communication and marketing	It Ger En	No use of the Cimbrian language (0%)	

Results

The findings of this study will present insights into the use of an Intangible Cultural resource in an online and onsite tourism environment, including opinions and perceptions of residents and community members.

According to most interviewees, the Cimbrian heritage, including the language, is a symbolic added value and a differentiating factor for tourists.

“The DMO is now called Alpe Cimbra [...]. Language is an attractive element for the tourism destination. The Cimbrian language is part of our identity, our history, and so on.” [I2]

“We used to have a menu translated into Cimbrian. [...] The cases where this menu was used to order food were very rare. [...] But many clients asked for it, to have a look at it, to take a picture or to take it home with them.” [I8]

However, some interviewees doubted that the language represents a pull factor per se, but it becomes a differentiating factor when tourists are in the destination and see and hear a different language. The fact that they see a different language means that they have the impression that they have experienced something different and authentic.

“Tourists come to Luserna because the food is good, but not because of the language [...] This is what I can see in my restaurant” [I9]

“The Cimbrian language isn’t a pull factor per se; it becomes so when the tourists are here and realizes they are in a town where a minority community resides, where the signs on the streets are different, and people speak another language.” [I6]

All interviewees have a positive attitude towards tourism. They do not see commodification and loss of authenticity as an issue for their community:

“The loss of authenticity due to tourism is a risk for a minority, of course. [...] But I don’t think we’re that far. The language on the signs and on the panels is important for the community. First, it provides a collective imagination for the community. Second, it shows the visitors that they are in a different territory.” [I6]

This is also due to the fact that Cimbrian people are proud of their heritage and are keen to promote this heritage and explain traditions and language to outsiders. Moreover, the interest from visitors also creates a sense of pride among community members.

“Well, Cimbrian people are always very proud. So, whenever it’s possible to use the language, by people who can speak it, of course, and can promote it, not only commercially, it’s seen as positive.” [I8]

“We, as Cimbrian speakers, are surprised to see all this interest in our heritage and our language. We are proud to have something so valuable” [I7]

Nonetheless, some of them lamented the use of the Cimbrian language from outside the community by people who do not know or do not master the language.

Interviewees do not think that the tourism industry is fundamental in language preservation, but it contributes. For instance, one interviewee mentions that the written language was developed with the museum's construction. Others mention the role of the tourism industry in the town's economy, allowing the community to work and reside in the town and maintain language relationships with the other community members.

“So, if there's the opportunity to keep these companies here in Luserna, even the language will benefit from that. All these families stay here and will keep speaking the language and pass it on to their children” [I1]

“Sustainable cultural tourism can contribute to preservation and promotion of the [...] minority culture since it sustains some basic activities that generate revenue for the town. The economy of the minority community is, thus, reinforced and can resist the pressures coming from the major language. [...] However, the community has also to be aware that their culture is an added value for tourists and be aware of it” [I5]

Similarly, all the websites selected underline the importance of the Cimbrian heritage for Luserna / Lusérn. The language is very often presented as a tourism attraction: most of them promote the town as “the last linguistic minority in which the Cimbra language [...] is still spoken by 90% of the population” (see, for instance, W1, W3, W9). However, the actual use of the language is quite sporadic and limited to some words or small sentences. For instance, place names are often written in Cimbrian: Lusérn is the most prominent example, but it is possible to find other names, like Rosspach and Astach.

In some websites, the Cimbrian language is used to greet visitors (e.g., Bolkhennt atz Lusérn, which means welcome in Lusérn, see W7, W8). Moreover, the language is also used for events related to the tradition like vorprennen in martzo, ‘burning march’ (W1, W2), but also other events like Zimbartörggelen Herbst atz Lusérn (W1), 1a Lusernar Zimbar Loaf Trail (W1, W3). However, not all the websites use the Cimbrian language in tourism experiences (see W3, W7, W8). Other websites refer to hikes with their Cimbrian names. The most widespread example is nå in tritt von Sambinélo (Cimbrian imaginary path). On this hike, it is possible to see the language in relation to things related to the heritage, like legends or tales: Brava Part, Tüsele Marüsele, etc. (W1). This specific hike was mentioned by different interviewees as the most loved and visited one. Other hikes are der staige von groaz kirage (the path of the Great War), der staige von langez (springs' path) and nå in tritt von Per (on the bear tracks).

“We offer a hike that can be found only here in Luserna; it's called nå in tritt von Sambinélo, which means ‘on the trail of the Salvanello.’ It presents the

Cimbrian legends, which adds value to the hike...It is the most popular hike here, visited by thousands of people every year.” [I1]

Interestingly, only the two websites directed inwards to the community (W2, W4) are translated into Cimbrian, even though not entirely available in this language. Although the page is not translated, the restaurant Ferdy Lusern (W7) has more extensive use of the Cimbrian language in its Italian version.

It is important to highlight that one interviewee was particularly skeptical about tourists' interest in the language. The same interviewee felt quite pessimistic about the process of language preservation. He also specifically mentioned the difficulty of reading and writing in Cimbrian.

“It’s hard to explain the value of the language to my children. [...] They also have a lot of friends outside the community who do not know the language” [I9]

“Panels in Cimbrian are not for the community, I believe. [...] I will never read it in Cimbrian” [I9]

Table 3 provides an overview of the main results.

Table 3: overview of results

Key-theme	Interviews	Website
Tourism experience	<i>“We offer a hike that can be found only here in Luserna; it’s called nã in tritt von Sambinelo. It presents the Cimbrian legends, [...] It the most popular hike here, visited by thousands of people every year.” [I1]</i>	<i>nã in tritt von Sambinelo der staige von groaz kirage der staige von langez nã in tritt von Per vorprennen in martzo</i>
Authenticity	<i>“The loss of authenticity due to tourism is a risk for a minority, of course. [...] But I don’t think we’re that far.” [I6]</i>	
Language preservation	<i>“Sustainable cultural tourism can contribute to preservation and promotion of the [...] minority culture, since it sustains some basic activities, that generate a revenue for the town. The economy of the minority community is, thus, reinforced.”</i>	<i>“the last linguistic minority in which the Cimbran language [...] is still spoken by 90% of the population” (W1)</i>
Language endangerment	<i>“It’s hard to explain the value of the language to my children” [I9]</i>	

Discussion and conclusions

This study aims at analyzing the role of a minority language in online tourism promotion and onsite tourism experience, as well as revealing the challenges and potentialities of tourism for the minority community. The study focused on the Cimbrian community of Luserna / Lusérn.

Aligned with the literature, results show that the Cimbrian language represents a differentiating factor for tourists (Bacsi, 2017; Brennan, 2018), even though it is not the main pull factor in choosing Luserna / Lusérn as a holiday destination. The Cimbrian language in Luserna / Lusérn is, to a limited extent, part of the tourism experience and landscape. It is visible in the town: in the street and paths sings, in the museums (Whitney-Squire, 2016), and sometimes, it is also part of the dining experience (Cohen & Cooper, 1986). In this vein, the results of this study confirmed that the Cimbrian language is an index of local authenticity (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Pietikäinen, 2015).

Similarly, on the websites, the importance of the Cimbrian language is highlighted with many sentences like: “it is curious to know that a large part of the population of Luserna speaks Cimbrian, an ancient Bavarian dialect to which the Cimbrian or the inhabitants of Luserna are very fond of!” (W6). However, the use of the language is quite sporadic – W10, for instance, has no Cimbrian word. This is probably related to the fact that language is not considered the main pull factor. Nonetheless, once tourists are in Luserna / Lusérn, they show interest in the language and are fascinated when they hear the language in the bars or the restaurants (Pechlaner et al., 2011; Pietikäinen, 2015; Ugolini & Costa, 2009). Experiences related to the Cimbrian heritage were appreciated by tourists, like the trail *nå in tritt von Sambinélo*.

Within the framework of humanistic management and sustainable tourism (Melé, 2016), language preservation was, by many interviewees, linked to economic development and employment in the area, guaranteed by the tourism industry. This very well relates to the well-known concept of sustainability, stating that the environmental, economic, and social/cultural pillars are interrelated (Brundtland, 1987). The tourism industry does not directly lead to language preservation but allows the community to remain in the town and use the language daily. Moreover, the tourism industry has contributed to reinforcing the sense of identity and cultural awareness among community members (Greathouse - Amador, 2005; Whitney-Squire, 2016): according to interviewees, bilingual signs remind local people, as well as visitors (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010), of their cultural heritage; similarly, the construction of the museum was a chance to develop the written language (Whitney-Squire, 2016). This representation of the Cimbrian culture was not seen as negative since the Cimbrian people are very proud of their heritage and are keen to show it to visitors.

However, interviews also dealt with the negative impacts of tourism, also mentioned in the literature (Duchêne & Heller, 2008). First, interviewees expressed concern about language commodification, but only when the language is used outside the Cimbrian community (Duchêne & Heller, 2008). Moreover, there was also some skepticism about any success of language maintenance in the future.

This study is, of course, not without limitations. Despite the in-depth analysis of the phenomenon (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000), qualitative methodologies consider only a few cases, and the analysis is, to some extent, subjective to the authors (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Moreover, this study was limited to a small minority community in northeastern Italy. Future research should remedy this limitation and include other minority communities in the analysis. Finally, further research should consider social media promotion (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, etc.), where it would also be interesting to compare the official promotion and user-generated content to get a more in-depth understanding of tourists' perceptions.

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Smart Cultural Tourism in Scheldeland Living Lab, Belgium: A systemic design approach for multi-stakeholders' empathy

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Introduction

Smart cultural tourism is the development trend of the future of the tourism sector as a driver of sustainable development (Ma, 2021; SmartCulTour, 2021). This industry is one of the largest sectors in the world, involving many different types of organizations, companies, and several groups of people that, with all their interdependencies, make its system quite complex (Jakulin, 2019). Thus, acknowledging the role of empathy is fundamental for building (and maintaining) collaborative relationships in cultural tourism, to connect the networks and make them more functional with digital solutions for the benefit of its participants. However, initiating collaboration is challenging, especially in the early problem-solving phases (Steenbakkers et al., 2015). In recent years, the systemic design thinking framework has received more attention within tourism to deal with the complexity of its system and is now being applied in multiple spaces of collective innovation, such as living laboratories (LLs). One of the main reasons for the adoption of this methodology is because it is built around concerns on relational issues, and because of that, it implements a range of service design tools that encourage the relationship building of multiple actors in the co-creation process in living labs (Greve et al., 2017). Therefore, the goal of this research is to conduct an empirical investigation of multi-stakeholders' empathic processes conveyed by digital tools in LLs.

As matters stand, work and social restrictions brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic forced digital communication usage covering relationship and project management, as well as remote teamwork collaboration. These restrictions accelerated the digitization process and demanded a closer analysis of the digital tools facilitating the interrelations between stakeholders. Taking this into account, this article is structured as follows. First, the context and the practical case of Scheldeland Living Laboratory are introduced. Secondly, the study investigates the research methodology already initiated in the LL, carried out by KU Leuven, Tourism Flanders, and Apollo18 Design agency, who implemented the Systemic Design Thinking methodology. Finally, this research explains the service design tools used during the first stage of design thinking: building empathy in the multi-stakeholder systems of the Scheldeland region while reviewing what empathy is in the context of design thinking. The results of this paper were first presented as an extended abstract at the ATLAS Annual ONLINE Conference in September 2021. Tourism 21: Re-building Tourism – Continuities and Changes, and the presentation was part of the special track 9 on “Cultural tourism re-visited. ATLAS SIG Cultural Tourism”, chaired by Greg Richards.

Context

The European Union is supporting several projects rethinking cultural tourism in Europe to provide regions with strategies and multidisciplinary methods that engage stakeholders in co-creating smart cultural tourism practices, as is the case of the SmartCulTour project. SmartCulTour - Smart Cultural Tourism as a Driver of Sustainable Development of European Regions. This is a four-year project in the Horizon 2020 programme, coordinated by the University KU Leuven, UNESCO, and several universities across Europe and research centres in cultural tourism. SmartCulTour intends to redefine the concept of cultural tourism and support regional development in all European regions with important tangible and intangible cultural assets, including those located in rural peripheries and the urban fringe, through sustainable cultural tourism. This is being done through the development of six living labs in which service design techniques and arts-based methods are implemented, tested, and evaluated to enhance collaboration between the cultural sector and the tourism industry.

Living Labs (LLs) are localized spaces of collaborative innovation (LSCI) “built on every day practice and research, with an approach that facilitates user influence in open and distributed innovation processes engaging all relevant partners in real-life contexts, aiming to create sustainable values” (Bergvall-Kåreborn et al., 2009). These can be physical or virtual spaces that bring together various stakeholders for collaboration and collective ideation to solve societal challenges (Hossain et al., 2019). There are several efforts found in the literature to define typologies of LLs, specifically concerning the coordination and stakeholder participation approaches (Leminen 2013), multi-stakeholder collaborations (Nguyen & Marques, 2021), as well the effectiveness of innovation processes and the tools used in living labs (Leminen & Westerlund, 2017). However, there is still some criticism concerning the lack of a common methodology for living laboratories, considering the multiple practices taking place in different LLs to channel the collective efforts of participants (Capdevila, 2014). In addition, there is currently no overview of the literature on interactions in face-to-face and remote labs (Wei et al., 2019). The type of interactions and the role that physical presence/distance plays in the activities developed in a Living Lab impacts aspects such as empathy, consensus building, learning processes, and knowledge sharing. To address these gaps, the SmartCulTour project is creating a toolkit of methods to promote cultural tourism stakeholder consultation and engagement that will allow European destinations to safeguard cultural tourism’s contribution to sustainable development. This set of service design and art-based tools/methods (also known as manual or menu) will serve as one building block of a system of instruments to keep pace with the needs of the Living Labs throughout the lifecycle of the SmartCulTour project (Li, & Smit, 2021).

Scheldeland Living Laboratory

Scheldeland is a tourist region situated in between four important Flemish cities of Art: Brussels, Ghent, Mechelen, and Antwerp, which represent the primary international cultural tourism products of Belgium. This region is relatively rich in historical, cultural, and industrial heritage, with “the Fortress of Liezele, built in the early 20th century, and multiple medieval castles and sites, such as the Castle Marnix de Saint Aldegonde, originally of the 10th–11th century, and the Belfry of

Dendermonde” (Neuts et al., 2021, p.6). The region extends along the basins of Scheldt, Dender, and Rupel rivers, and recent nature innovations made along the river landscape are considered a lever for tourism in Scheldeland, so deeply marked by its tidal character. Thus, it provides products not only focused on culture but also on slow tourism activities such as cycling, walking, and boating along the waterways. However, the region is currently underdeveloped (Neuts et al., 2021) and is characterized by seemingly unfulfilled potential, considering the available natural and cultural heritage potential, mainly due to a lack of centre-periphery dispersion of tourism activities, which are primarily concentrated within the urban centres of Ghent, Antwerp, and Brussels, leaving the places in-between go largely unnoticed. For this reason, the region of Scheldeland was included as a Living Laboratory in the SmartCulTour project. The LL’s work is being developed by the regional destination management organization of Visit Flanders and the university of KU Leuven, combining industry and academia expertise.

Scheldeland LL aims to promote a broader view of culture and heritage in the context of this region to meet the interests of all involved stakeholders and combine industrial heritage with slow tourism and local gastronomy. This LL follows a human-centric setting, based on a bottom-up coordination approach, that facilitates the participants’ influence in innovation processes, providing space for empathy exercises in real-life scenarios (see Dell’Era et al., 2014, in Thees et al., 2020), to support policy development and sustainable practices in cultural tourism systems, bringing stakeholders with different interests together (Veeckman et al., 2015). The future aim is to involve the community (residents and local entrepreneurs) in the sense of a grassroots approach (De Jager et al., 2012), as well including travelers/visitors in this process. But considering the societal complexity (Brankaert & den Ouden, 2017) and practical implications of stakeholder mapping (Ostermann-Miyashita et al., 2021), this is still under development, being one of the tools suggested by the SmartCulTour manual to understand the actors’ role in the systems, as well to provide insights on the value networks (interdependencies) (Li, & Smit, 2021).

Stakeholders

Some of the challenges during the initial stage of the SmartCulTour project concern stakeholder identification and engagement. Therefore, the manual developed by the SmartCulTour project (Li & Smit, 2021) suggests using the stakeholder mapping tool to tackle these difficulties. This is to ensure that all groups and individuals affecting and affected by the cultural tourism sector are included, represented, and connected in a way that may enhance their collaboration. Table 1 summarizes the initial stakeholder identification in Scheldeland LL’s case.

Table 1: Stakeholder identification in Scheldeland's Living Laboratory

Key stakeholders	Description	Scope and geographical location
Toerisme Klein-Brabant - Scheldeland	Destination management organization (DMO)	<i>Local:</i> the two municipalities of Bornem and Puurs-Sint-Amands
Toerisme Scheldeland	DMO responsible for 29 municipalities	<i>Regional:</i> the tourist region of Scheldeland
Toerisme Oost-Vlaanderen	DMO	<i>Provincial:</i> East-Flanders
Toerisme Provincie Antwerpen	DMO	<i>Provincial:</i> Antwerp
Visit Flanders	DMO and Living Lab manager (main responsible organization in managing the lab)	<i>Regional:</i> Flanders
KU Leuven	University (department of Geography and Tourism) coordinating the SmartCulTour project, and supporting the lab	Leuven
Design agency Apollo18	Living Lab facilitator	Ghent

The stakeholders 'focus is on creating a 'flourishing destination,' placing the LL's activities at the core of the 'Tourism Transforms 2.0' - the strategic vision for the entire region of Flanders, which aims to make tourism more community-centric by leveraging tourism as a tool for community wellbeing, rather than an end-goal. For the time being, the multi-stakeholder processes carried out in this LL are focused on the first stage of design thinking: building empathy.

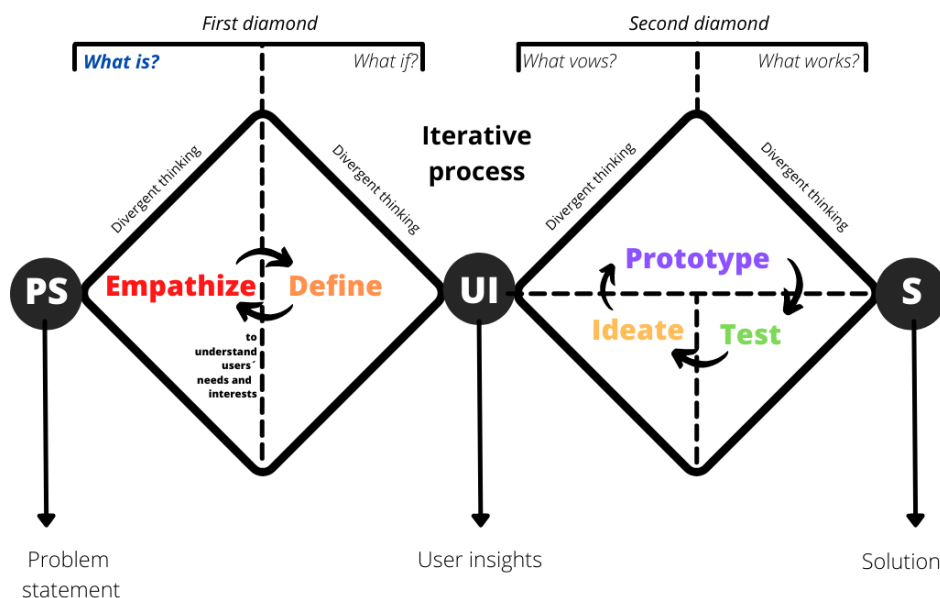
Systems and design thinking: building empathy

The systemic design framework is underpinned by systems thinking and design thinking, forming the theoretical approach taken in the SmartCulTour LLs, which focuses on an interdisciplinary praxis to examine the interrelations between the actors that comprise the whole cultural tourism system of each region. The systems thinking theory stresses the role and importance of context and environment and involves a network of interactions (Montuori, 2011). While performing a systems analysis of a problem or situation, system thinkers start from the problem to formulate their perception of the social reality and system they are analyzing (Laszlo and Krippner, 1998). Design thinking (DT) is used to address and redefine complex and wicked problems (Buchanan, 1992), reframing these in human-centric ways in developing products and services. The main purpose of DT is to match people's needs with what is technologically feasible and viable at the time a business strategy is being developed (Capdevila, 2019); hence the DT's end

goal is optimizing the commercialization of products and services (Bergvall-Kåreborn et al., 2009).

Moreover, DT is an iterative and non-linear process, which is composed of five stages —Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test. The design thinking strategy follows the Double Diamond Model created by Banathy (1996). She describes the dynamics of a design process that initiates from a stage of divergent thinking and then iterates to converge and refine toward a solution. This strategic model was later popularized by the British Design Council in 2005 and was suggested by the SmartCulTour researchers from the University of Lapland. Figure 1 presents the structure of the model.

Figure 1: Design Thinking Double Diamond Model



The first section of the diamond starts with the concept phase, and the first two steps (Empathize and Define) compose the problem space to “make the conceptual leap from what “is” to what “if” (see Boess, 2006, page 2, in Burns et al., 1994), while the second section and steps (Ideate, Prototype, and Test) represent the second stage – the solution space.

To build empathy is the first step of this design process and is used as a tool to design (Köppen & Meinel, 2014), as it ignites the process of mutual understanding, uncovering the latent needs and emotions of each participant, providing insights from users' needs, and informing the overall process (Brown, 2009). This is a key stage for group interactions and consensus building, especially among multiple stakeholders with different interests, boundaries, and agendas (Mburu et al., 2019; Veeckman et al., 2015), towards the development of bottom-up communication (Decety, 2010). Empathy in DT can be defined as the capacity to perceive, share,

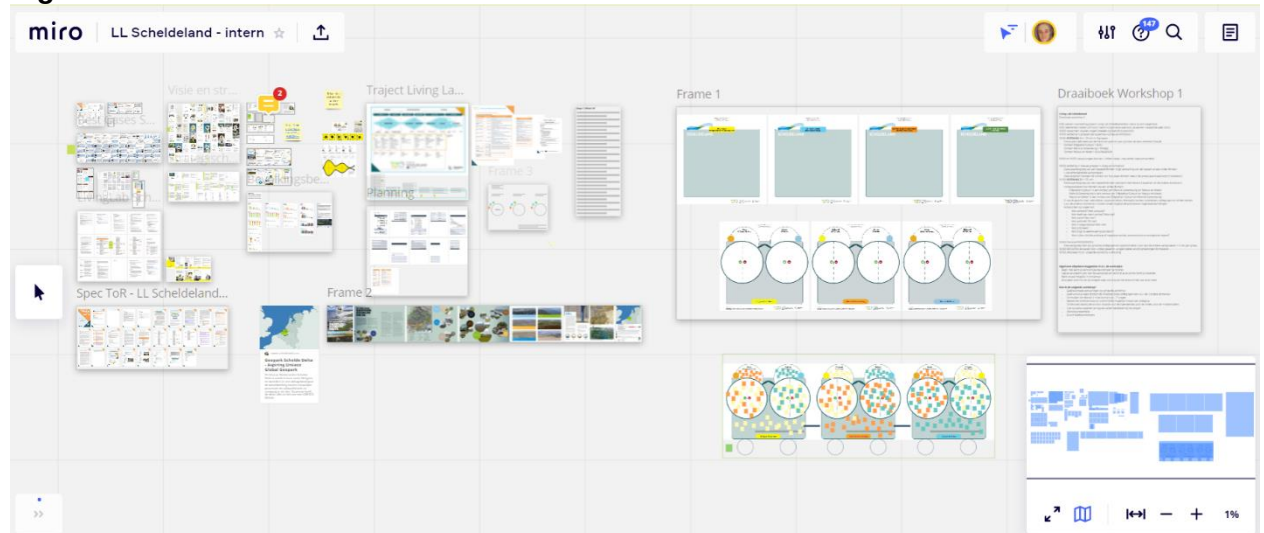
and mirror bodily experiences and emotions (Gasparini, 2014). According to simulation theories of empathy (Di Pellegrino et al., 1992; Iacoboni et al., 2005; Decety, 2010), human brains are wired for empathy, as they are enabled by a circuit system of “mirror neurons” that activate mental processes, forming the basis of social connection. This biological mechanism is based on the human ability for action-understanding, imitation-learning, and the simulation of other people's behaviour (Devecchi & Guerrini, 2017), which allow one to directly assimilate another person's actions and emotions considering their facial expressions and bodily gestures (Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, 2008). Given this, it would be more accurate to speak of empathy as a process, for it is a phenomenon that can spread over many exchanges of mimicking actions and emotions expressed directly (explicitly stated verbally) and/or indirectly (through non-verbal cues) (Lussier & Richard, 2007). In the complex networks of cultural tourism, empathic processes are of central importance to assist and scaffold the different participants in a system to reflect their own viewpoints, values, and behaviours on a better whole (Sustar & Mattelmäki, 2017), as well as to enhance the quality of the actors' interactions for the co-construction of solutions (Devecchi & Guerrini, 2017). Adding to this, the process of empathic bonding in DT needs to be systematically adjusted and fostered for specific environments, participants, and complexity (Mattelmäki et al., 2014). This iterative process is usually facilitated by a designer with a group of individuals. The facilitator's workshop sessions are based on the use of various service design tools, such as sorting games with sticky notes, Q-sort methodology, roadmaps, cultural probes, personas' development, systems and stakeholder maps, value networks, opportunity trees, and others (Li, & Smit, 2021). During these co-design sessions, several role-playing techniques are applied to simulate exemplification scenarios to facilitate the performance and role of participants in real-life settings within their systems (Devecchi & Guerrini, 2017). Therefore, role play is a simulation technique commonly used in service design that can help quickly elicit. The aim of using drama exercises in design workshops is to ignite the mirror neurons and render bodily understandings of users and their environments, to facilitate the perception of in-situ experiences and emotions of others, and how to relate with them (Boess, 2006; Riess, 2017).

Materials and methods

Scheldeland LL is presented as a case study for multi-stakeholders' empathy. The materials include secondary data collated to the MIRO online board seen in figure 2, combining text documents on the background and context of the SmarCulTour project, information on the implications of COVID-19 in tourism, UNESCO's capacity-building activities, as well as sets of figures on the vision and a strategic plan of Apollo 18 and Tourism Flanders, and the LL's timeline, requirements, terms of reference, and activities developed in the workshops. Firstly, desk research was conducted in Miro - a digital collaboration design tool based on an agile workflow, followed by content analysis of the Miro board. Secondly, participant observation was carried out during the inception meeting held online (dedicated to building on common objectives, capacity, desired outputs, and planning) to get the participants' feelings, needs, and interests about the project. Thirdly, non-participant observation was done in virtual LL workshops in MIRO to understand how the group's interactions were performed in practice but remotely due to the ongoing period of teleworking and physical distancing. During the workshop sessions, MIRO's design tools, such as sticky notes (figure 3) and opportunity trees

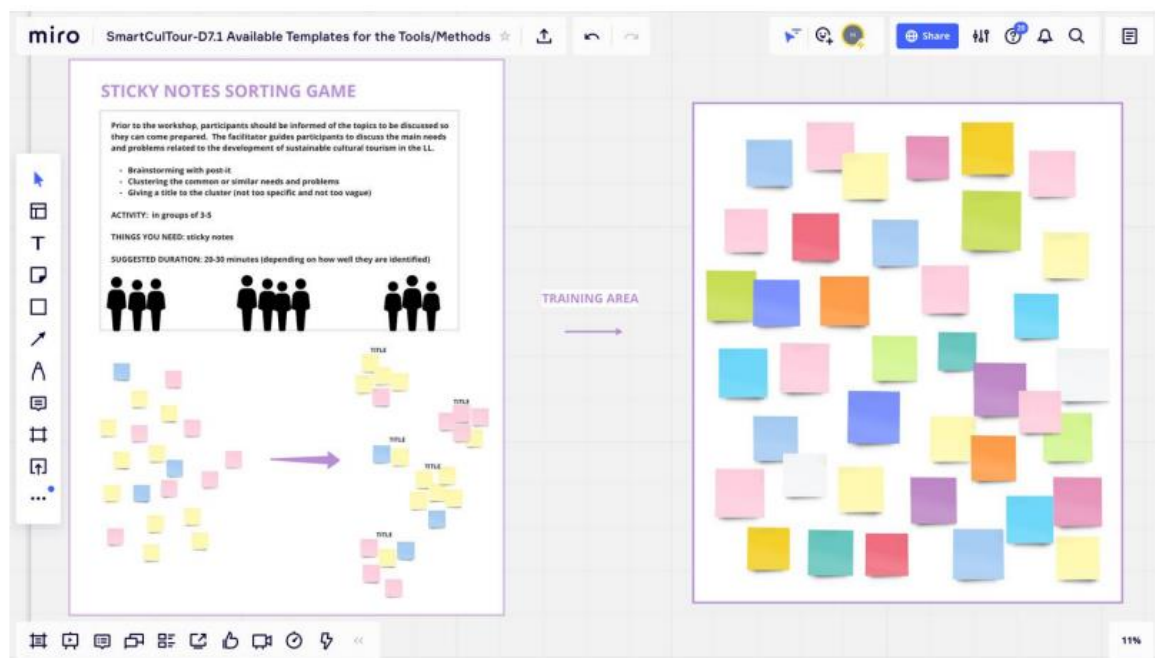
(figure 4), were used as artifacts for group visualization and interactivity, to facilitate workshop exercises, to map, describe, and organise with colour codes the information previously collected in the working groups of 1) Heritage & Culture (yellow); 2) People & Society (orange); and 3) Nature and Water (blue), to facilitate remote teamwork.

Figure 2: Scheldeland's Miro board



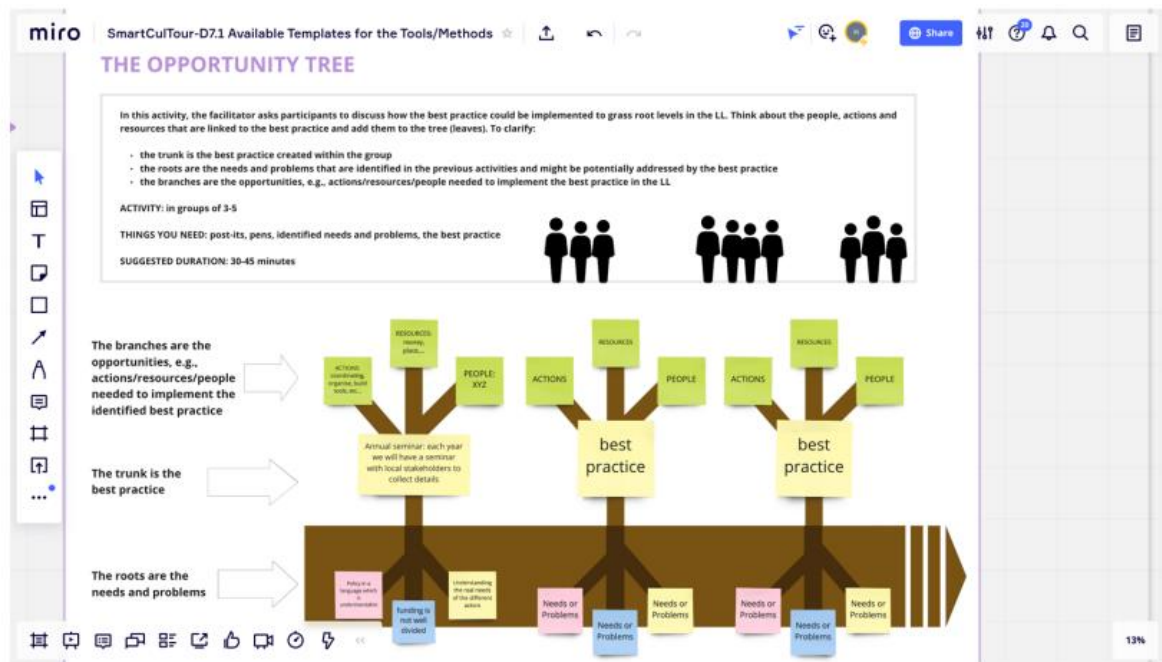
Source: Miro.com (Scheldeland's LL internal board).

Figure 3: Sticky notes sorting game



Source: Li, & Smit, 2021.

Figure 4: Opportunity tree



Source: Li, & Smit, 2021.

Results

The great value of using the MIRO board was to ascertain a broad and visual representation of knowledge in real-time by incorporating visual design tools into research thinking and ascertain a representation of research into visual thinking, with interactive visualization exercises that brought all participants' perspectives into the digital whiteboard. The contributors to the board were the LL's facilitator and designer from the Apollo18 Design agency, the quality coordinator of Visit Flanders and the living lab manager of Scheldeland region, along with the research experts from the Geography and Tourism department of KU Leuven, and the project coordinator of SmartCulTour, including myself. These collaborators used the MIRO board for remote project design and management, as each contributor and the group of stakeholders were geographically scattered and were physically restricted to meet due to the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The initial workshops served for process reasoning of the three working groups (Heritage & Culture; People & Society; and Nature & Water) using breakout rooms, in which two experts of each domain contextualized their topic and related it to the other, in discussion with note-taking, with the aims of finding common ground, opportunities, issues, and blind spots, followed by plenaries. Consensus building among stakeholders was done remotely on the infinite digital canvas, in which participants had limitless scrolling work potential, zooming in and out also to access everyone's work progress, and the multiple strategy and management exercises were done all in the same board, in real-time, while referring to the secondary data attached to it. However, during the online meetings and workshops, there were delays and noises affecting the tone and pitch of the voices and the communication flow. The participants manifested a common frustration of

“lack of connection,” “don’t knowing each other in person,” and wanting to “know more about each other’s places.” The emotion of energy draining of “being all the time looking at a screen” was generally expressed, and all participants at different times explicitly stated “the need for a physical encounter.” Therefore, a field trip was organised by the LL manager, so all the actors involved in the process could meet each other face-to-face to allow for a different understanding of each stakeholder and her/his context. In addition, the lack of physical interactions also hampered the happening of role-playing exercises, which were predicted to happen face-to-face, in parallel with the use of the service design tools. According to the LL’s facilitator, these are still considered a core part of the LLs approach and will soon be implemented in the LL when COVID-19 “allows for physical interaction.”

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically pushed organizations over technology, accelerating their organizational digitization (ManpowerGroup's 'Skills Revolution' study, 2021). The communication challenges caused by emergency response strategies such as physical interaction restrictions, self-isolation, physical distancing, use of masks and “lockdowns” of workplaces, forced new behaviours, and the use and adoption of new technologies to facilitate remote workflow and online collaboration. And while the frequent and collective use of technology as a support system is one of the important aspects of this upheaval, helping participants in their learning processes with digital tools and building empathy among different stakeholders are processes that take time (even before the Coronavirus crisis). Therefore, this paper contributes to the methodological understanding of practices taking place in a cultural tourism living lab in Belgium in the peculiar context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the systemic design thinking approach allied to the use of the design tools applied in the practice of Scheldeland’s LL encouraged the exploration of the multi-stakeholders’ inter-relationships and interdependencies, as well as prompting the will to connect and the curiosity about each other’s context. Given this, the article underlines the need for face-to-face interaction as a crucial component of human conversation while acknowledging the importance of using digital tools as an enhancer and facilitator of connection among participants at a distance. However, online interaction requires more energy than face-to-face, and non-verbal cues like facial expressions, the tone and pitch of the voice, and body language are harder to process, causing frustration among individuals. In conclusion, empathic processes require a certain degree of “mutuality” and “locality” (Ritchie et al., 2005) and are embedded in the stakeholders’ geographical locations, so participants can work in physical proximity to facilitate communication and knowledge sharing.

Future research should explore the potential of role plays and simulations, as these function as learning tools for teams and groups as they “play” face-to-face and online. By engaging in these, participants take on different roles, assuming different profiles than their own, and learn how to explore further different viewpoints of the character they are articulating in the environment. This is because role-playing exercises make the design process concrete through its physicality, and stakeholders are actively involved in both self and peer assessment, learning how to interact and participate in diverse and complex

environments. Therefore, if better explored, this experiential learning approach could serve to bridge the divide between theory and practice.

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What is ATLAS



The Association for Tourism and Leisure Education and Research (ATLAS) was established in 1991 to develop transnational educational initiatives in tourism and leisure.

ATLAS provides a forum to promote staff and student exchange, transnational research and to facilitate curriculum and professional development. It currently has 161 members in 56 countries worldwide.

What are the objectives of ATLAS?

- To promote the teaching of tourism, leisure and related subjects.
- To encourage academic exchange between member institutions.
- To promote links between professional bodies in tourism, leisure and associated subjects and to liaise on educational issues, curriculum development and professional recognition of courses.
- To promote transnational research which helps to underpin the development of appropriate curricula for transnational education.

What does ATLAS do?

ATLAS promotes links between member institutions through regular meetings, publications and information exchange. The main activities of ATLAS currently are:

- Organising conferences on issues in tourism and leisure education and research. International conferences have been held in Canterbury, UK (September 2016), in Viana do Castelo, Portugal (2017), Copenhagen, Denmark (2018) and Girona, Spain (2019). Regional conferences are also held in Africa, Latin America and the Asia-Pacific region.
- Information services and publications, including the ATLAS website and members' portal, the annual ATLAS Reflections, Facebook and LinkedIn.
- Running international courses, such as the ATLAS Winter University in Europe and the Summer Course in Asia.
- Organisation of and participation in transnational research projects, for example on cultural tourism, sustainable tourism, and information technology. ATLAS is participating in two major European projects. The Next Tourism Generation Alliance (NTG) for implementing a new strategic blueprint approach to sectoral cooperation on skills and the INCOME Tourism project to develop soft skills into higher education curricula and to strongly cooperate with businesses.
- Research publications and reports.

What are the benefits of the ATLAS membership?

- Regular mailings of information, updates on ATLAS conferences, meetings, projects, publications and other activities.
- Access to the members' portal on Internet with exclusive access code.
- Participation in the ATLAS information lists for everyone within ATLAS member institutions, as well as for the different Special Interest Groups.
- The annual ATLAS international conference, which provides an opportunity to network with other members.
- Conferences organised by regional sections.
- ATLAS members can participate in a wide range of projects run by ATLAS in the areas of tourism and leisure education and research.
- Members have access to research information gathered through ATLAS International projects.
- ATLAS members are listed on the ATLAS website, giving teachers and students easy access to information about member institutions via Internet.
- Distribution of information about member events, programmes, projects and products via the ATLAS mailing list and ATLAS website.
- ATLAS members are entitled to substantial discounts on ATLAS conference fees and selected ATLAS publications.
- Contacts and lobbying through ATLAS links with other international organisations.
- Opportunity for students to take part in an established academic and research network.

ATLAS Special Interest Groups

Members of ATLAS can form and join Special Interest Groups related to specific education and research topics or for specific geographical areas. Special Interest Groups run research programmes and can organise special events and publications related to their area of interest. The current Special Interest Groups are:

- Cultural Tourism
- Gastronomy and Tourism
- Business Tourism
- Events
- Volunteer Tourism
- Heritage Tourism and Education
- Space, Place, Mobilities in Tourism
- Urban Tourism
- Visual Tourism
- Climate Change and Tourism
- Tourism Education
- Circular Economy
- Artificial Intelligence and Tourism
- Animals in Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure
- Dark Tourism
- Systems Thinking in Tourism

ATLAS Regional Sections

ATLAS is also represented at regional and local level by sections such as ATLAS Europe, ATLAS Asia-Pacific, ATLAS Africa and ATLAS Latin Americas. The regional sections of ATLAS have developed their own programme of activities and publications to respond more closely to the specific needs of members located in these regions and those with related research interests. Membership of ATLAS regional sections and Special Interest Groups of ATLAS is open to all ATLAS members at no extra costs.

The ATLAS publication series

As a networking organisation, one of the main tasks of ATLAS is to disseminate information on developments in tourism and leisure as widely as possible. The ATLAS publication series contains volumes of selected papers from ATLAS conferences and reports from ATLAS research projects. The ATLAS Tourism and Leisure Review gives ATLAS members and participants of the ATLAS conferences and meetings a platform to publish the papers they have presented. The editing will be carried out by an editorial board / field editors. All publications can be found and ordered in the online ATLAS bookshop at: shop.atlas-euro.org.

Join ATLAS

ATLAS membership is open to bona-fide educational institutions and professional bodies with educational, research or professional interests in tourism, leisure and related areas. If your institution is interested, complete the application form on the ATLAS homepage at www.atlas-euro.org.

How much does the ATLAS membership cost?

The annual institutional membership fee for ATLAS is € 325. For organisations located in countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America the fee is € 200 per year.

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Well-Being and Quality of Life in Tourism

ATLAS Review Volume 2017 – 2
ATLAS Africa, conference proceedings 2015

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