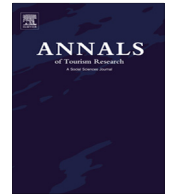




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## Archaeological tourism: A creative approach

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## ABSTRACT

This theoretical paper conceptualises the role of tourism providers in facilitating creative tourism experiences by focusing on their ingenious enterprise, which we argue can help capture the tourism potential of intangible archaeological heritage. Intangible archaeological heritage can be understood as knowledge emanating from actors' own interpretation of archaeological sites that have either become physically inaccessible or been destroyed since initial exploration. Archaeological heritage is often equated with tangibility, which results in an omission of experiences that intangible archaeological heritage can offer. By proposing a rethinking of the archaeological tourism framework, we argue that the touristic value of both tangible and intangible archaeological heritage is better realised and can be further utilised to study the easily overlooked aspect of providers' ingenuity.

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## Introduction

This paper underlines how the commodification of archaeological sites and the use of particular cultural imageries can be attributed to the dynamism inherent in local enterprise. Further, since current frameworks of archaeological tourism are focused largely on tangible dimensions of archaeological heritage, they tend to bypass monuments and sites which have lost their materiality. Yet, these sites continue to attract tourist interest due to compelling story-telling and creative ingenuity of tourism providers. In this sense, a revised archaeological tourism framework that can account for different dimensions of archaeological heritage and how they are made saleable is called for. Thus on one hand, the discussion presented here accentuates the tourism potential of intangible aspects of archaeological heritage, and provides insights into how they play a significant role in delivering memorable tourism experiences. On the other hand, it is argued that engaging with tourism providers' creative skills and a constructivist approach to cultural heritage interpretation can facilitate a better understanding of their efforts at (re)creating site-specific meanings.

Broadly, archaeological tourism is defined by tourist visits and activities taking place at celebrated places (e.g. historic landmarks, monuments and excavation sites) and partaking in the experience their physicality engenders (Pacífico & Vogel, 2012; Ramsey & Everitt, 2008; Willems & Dunning, 2015). This definition underlines the archaeological site as a central piece in archaeological tourism and is sustained on the conventional classification of archaeological heritage as tangible (see UNESCO, 1972, 2003). However, this approach fails to capture fully both tourism potential and historical significance of archaeological sites that have lost their materiality. For instance, salvage interventions undertaken during an environmental impact assessment not only result in an appraisal of the physical loss of the original archaeological site, but also reveal the socio-cultural and historical value inherent therein (Holtorf & Kristensen, 2015; Willems, 2008). These interventions gener-

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ate significant knowledge about sites that have been rendered physically inaccessible, therefore intangible. For example, construction of large dams enables both the identification and an examination of the significance of ancient sites located along river basins before their submersion on completion of the dam (Adams, 2007; Brandt & Hassan, 2000; WCD., 2000). The intended development on such sites inevitably results in their physical loss and/or inaccessibility, but associated record-keeping helps in retaining their essence. In this paper we use the term *intangible archaeological heritage* to denote both inaccessible and immaterial forms of archaeological heritage that has lost its tangibility. We underline that this should not be confused with intangible cultural heritage which relates to traditions and *living expressions* (e.g. knowledge, skills and social practices) transmitted from one generation to the next (UNESCO, 2003).

It is common to find the loss of archaeological heritage portrayed in a negative light and affecting its touristic value adversely (e.g. Banks, Snortland, & Czaplicki, 2011; Garrett, 2010; Niknami, 2005; WCD, 2000). Although preservation of archaeological remains should be a priority, their destruction or physical inaccessibility as a consequence of the construction of development projects is not necessarily an entirely negative phenomenon. In fact, it can be argued that a sole focus on preserving material objects and monuments draws more attention to the physical properties of heritage rather than its incorporeal significance and subtle meanings it embodies (Holtorf, 2015). Further, an emphasis on the conservation of cultural heritage overlooks the fact that it is not static, but undergoes a continuous course of transformation and (re)creation in the meaning-making process.

Hence, we contend that once material ruins are lost, actors' creative imagination and ingenuity become key in developing intangible archaeological heritage, now encapsulated in historical knowledge and stories about the place. Thus the 'essence of place' is still retained and the historical meaning of archaeological heritage is not lost entirely even after the material remains have perished. They are reconfigured and animated with new connotations in accordance with "... the values, uses or interpretations of the past that each group of stakeholders associates with the site" (Woyнар, 2007, p. 38). Yet, conceptualisations of archaeological tourism built around the conventional definition of tangible archaeological heritage tend to sideline tourism experiences associated with archaeological heritage in its intangible form. Thus, we suggest that an experience-centred approach to archaeological tourism which draws upon creative tourism research that underlines the co-creative interface between tourists and providers may help resolve the dilemma posed by the lack of tangible archaeological remains.

Creative tourism is a growing subject of research that foregrounds tourists' creative expression in producing memorable experiences (Richards, 2011, 2014; Richards & Raymond, 2000). From the supply perspective, in a creative tourism framework the role of tourism providers becomes that of facilitators of memorable experiences rather than mere suppliers of services or goods (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009; Prentice & Andersen, 2007). It can be argued that growing interest in interactive and bespoke tourism experiences is linked to a fundamental shift in marketing towards a service-dominant logic that gives prominence to a proactive interaction between firms and consumers (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). From this perspective, consumers' prior knowledge, expectations and experience as well as providers' skills play an essential part in determining and co-creating the value of the product (Prahalaḍ & Ramaswamy, 2004).

In the context of archaeological tourism, a co-creation perspective entails the active participation of tourists, providers and archaeologists in the process of interpretation and making sense of the past (Minkiewicz, Evans, & Bridson, 2014; Moscardo, 1996). Each group of actors plays a vital role in creating the co-creative tourism experience. The premise is that through co-creation, actors' values, their unique interface with each other and with the essence of archaeological heritage, can help add value to the site and deliver cherished experiences irrespective of the presence or absence of archaeological remains (Woyнар, 2007). In other words, it is the cultural and historical values associated with heritage's essence that are used as a main resource for facilitating memorable experiences, not the monuments themselves. Moreover, by highlighting actors' personal experience rather than archaeological remains, a co-creative approach may help overcome the downsides of archaeological heritage loss that is inevitable in the face of infrastructure development.

However, there is significant lack of research concerning the role of tourism providers in devising creative tourism opportunities, especially regarding the skills applied when engaging with unconventional cultural resources such as intangible archaeological heritage. Archaeological tourism providers can be described as those actors who use archaeological heritage (including relics, historic remains and prevalent myths) as the main resource to develop tourism experiences. Thus these include tour guides who interweave anecdotal evidence with the scripted and rehearsed narratives about the site to bring it alive, tour operators offering cultural tourism holidays, and managers and marketers who oversee the interpretation and marketing of heritage. To date, most research concerning the role of these providers has been based on the assumption that archaeological heritage is a tangible resource (Mortensen, 2014; Pacifico & Vogel, 2012; Willems & Dunning, 2015). But one of the limitations with the conventional approach is that it does not examine providers' role in developing creative tourism experiences despite the absence of tangible archaeological remains. Given this scenario, key questions to consider are: how can tourism providers approach archaeological heritage when its main asset (tangibility) is unavailable? What are the differences (or similarities) between using tangible and intangible archaeological heritage to facilitate creative tourism experiences? Moreover, what type of skills do providers need in order to deliver creative archaeological experiences?

The aim of this paper is to address these questions theoretically by arguing in favour of reconsidering conceptual frameworks within which creative tourism has been examined so that it can accommodate different forms of archaeological heritage. We propose a creative tourism framework that highlights roles, relationships and processes between tourists, providers and archaeological heritage and explains how these differ when the focus is on either tangible or intangible forms of archaeological heritage. To develop our framework, we begin by critically reviewing research on creative tourism and its

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